

Speech by Mr. Takao MAKINO
Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan
At the Croatia Forum, Dubrovnik, Croatia
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Mr. Chairman and distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel greatly honored to be invited to the Croatia Forum. This forum has been playing an important role in promoting regional cooperation in Southeast Europe. First of all, I would like to express my deepest respect to the Government of the Republic of Croatia for its leadership in this hosting an important conference.

I understand that the EU integration process in Southeast the Europe is the main theme of this conference. Japan believes that the aspiration and efforts on the part of the Southeast European countries toward the EU integration will lead to and assure the stability and prosperity of the entire region as well as the international community, so we strongly support their efforts.

Japan also has the highest regard for the Government of Croatia, which has already joined the EU, for supporting the efforts of other countries in the region toward the EU integration.

Before moving on to the main topics of my speech, allow me to use this opportunity to express my heartfelt sympathy for the people affected by the flood that hit eastern Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in May.

Immediately after the flood occurred, the Government of Japan sent emergency relief goods, such as electric generators, tents and sleeping pads, to these countries. Japanese companies and citizens also made donations to help the suffered people.

I hope these support from Japan be of help to the victims of the flood.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, Japan received warmest encouragement, sympathy and great support from the governments and people of the Southeast European countries. Returning the favor, the Japanese people are keen to extend solidarity and offer help to the Southeast European countries when they are in difficulties.

Even though Japan and Southeast Europe are far apart geographically, they are firmly linked by

mutual sympathy and warmest feeling for each other.

Historically, Southeast Europe served as a bridge between the Western and Oriental worlds. I learned that Marco Polo was born on the Croatian island of Korcula near Dubrovnik. As you may know, Marco Polo was a Venetian merchant who introduced Japan to the Western world in the 13th century as “Zipangu, the Land of Gold” in his book, “*The Travels of Marco Polo*”.

Japan and Southeast Europe started on the path of modernization at almost the same time in the 19th century. And that was exactly the time when exchanges between us began.

The exchange between Japan and Serbia, for example, started in 1882, when the king of Serbia sent a letter to Japan’s Emperor Meiji to announce his ascension to the throne, followed by a letter of reply from the Emperor Meiji to the Serbian king.

In 1869, Japan established diplomatic relations with the Austro-Hungarian Empire by concluding a treaty of friendship, trade and sailing. When Mr. Huttelot, who was the first honorary consul appointed by Japan in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, visited Japan in 1884, he brought a plant called pyrethrum that is native to the Adriatic coast Dalmatia region. In Japan, an anti-mosquito coil using this plant as a raw material was developed. The anti-mosquito coil is now used around the world.

Despite their geographic distance, Japan and Southeast Europe have a long history of unique exchange and cooperation.

Globalization has reduced the significance of physical distance. In today’s situation, Japan feels strongly that the Southeast European countries are important partners with which Japan shares values, including freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and with which Japan cooperates in pursuing peace and prosperity based on those values. Historically, Southeast Europe has repeatedly been shaken by upheavals: it was shaken a century ago, 60 years ago and again 20 years ago. Now, all countries in the region are cooperating with each other toward peace and prosperity as well as toward the European integration. The Southeast European countries are trying to peacefully solve disputes between themselves based on international law, relying on the International Court of Justice and international dispute settlements mechanism, which shows excellent example for all of us. Japan will continue to strongly support such efforts by the Southeast European countries.

Now, I would like to stress three pillars of measures, with which we can open up a bright future for Japan and the Southeast European countries.

The first pillar is to strengthen our mutual understanding and to activate contacts between Japan and the Southeast European countries. We must further invigorate exchanges of people. In recent years, for example, tens of thousands of Japanese tourists are visiting Croatia annually. It is very good that Japanese tourists are becoming more familiar with the Southeast Europe through their trips to Croatia and neighboring countries.

For its part, Japan is increasing efforts to welcome foreign tourists in preparation for the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in 2020.

Since the inauguration of the current Japanese Government under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in December 2012, the Japanese currency yen has depreciated by around 20% against the euro due to the effects of the Abenomics policy, which means that sight-seeing in Japan has become more affordable than before for European tourists.

Japan welcomes tourists from the Southeast European countries, and we are very much glad if they become more familiar with our country.

Not only intergovernmental dialogue involving senior government officials, but also cultural exchanges, sports exchanges and academic exchanges should be further promoted.

In the field of sports, there are vigorous exchanges between us in many ways, including tennis, handball, wrestling and skiing.

Among people from Southeast Europe with links to Japan in the field of sports are Mr. Ivica Osim, who comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina and who previously served as the coach of Japan's national soccer team, and Dragan Stojković, whose achievements as a member of the Serbian national soccer team are well-known and who also played in the Japanese soccer league. Sports have provided opportunities for many young people in Japan to become fascinated by Southeast Europe.

I am most pleased to note that intergovernmental dialogue has been recently becoming increasingly active. In the past few months, Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi visited Japan in April, followed by Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski's trip to Japan in June.

The second pillar is our cooperation for establishing lasting peace in Southeast Europe.

Since the end of the conflict in the region, Japan has provided bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) totaling around 2.2 billion US dollars to this region. In addition, Japan has been involved in the peace implementation process, as a member of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementing Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When Japan provides bilateral ODA, Japan places emphasis not only on postwar reconstruction and improvement of people's life standard, but also on advancement of human security and facilitation of reconciliation among various ethnic groups.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, Japan has been providing support in ways that encourage cooperation among different ethnic groups when helping to demine in a region straddling the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska.

In 2008, Japan helped to organize a youth workshop on ethnic reconciliation targeted at younger generations in Southeast Europe who do not have first-hand knowledge of the war in the region. In this workshop, we obtained strong cooperation from the leaders of the Southeast European countries. The leaders of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro participated in the closing ceremony of the workshop. We intend to further continue such cooperation with our friends in the region.

The third pillar is our cooperation for further promoting prosperity in Southeast Europe. One way

of doing that is to strengthen the economic relationship between Japan and the region.

Many Japanese companies have already advanced into the Southeast European countries and have achieved successful results. However, there is still more room for strengthening the economic relationship between Japan and Southeast Europe.

For the Southeast European countries to become more attractive for Japanese companies as a place for business, it is important for them to improve the business and investment environment while fully complying to the EU rules and regulations.

I am very happy to note, that here in Croatia which joined the EU one year ago, Japanese companies seriously intend to participate in an energy project.

I strongly hope that this energy project will make good progress with the participation and investment of Japanese business, contribute to strengthening of the energy security of Croatia and Southeast Europe and mark the first epoch making step toward significantly developing the economic relationship between Japan and Croatia and Southeast Europe, as a whole.

I am confident that Japan and Southeast European countries will continue to be global partners that cooperate in resolving not only regional, but also global issues and challenges in such fields as the environment, economy, human rights and security. I wish to conclude my speech by affirming Japan's strong commitment to further deepening our friendly relationships and cooperation with countries in the region and to further working for peace and stability together regionally and globally.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

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