

(This translation was made by the Embassy of Japan in Croatia)

Political magazine “Nacional”

15 March 2016, pgs. 26-29 (interviewer is Ms. Zrinka Vrabec Mojzeš)

Interview with Keiji Ide, Ambassador of Japan

“Japanese Investors Want to be Treated in the Same Way as European”

In an interview on the occasion of Japanese culture week, Japanese Ambassador reveals that he is connected with General Ante Gotovina because of tuna business; he talks about how Japanese assess business opportunities in Croatia, what do their children learn about fascism and what is Japan’s position on armament, China and North Korea

Japanese Ambassador Keiji Ide assumed his duty in the Republic of Croatia in the beginning of 2014, which was his first arrival to Zagreb. In his rich diplomatic carrier, which began in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan in 1980, he worked in the Embassies of Japan in Tokyo, Moscow, Beijing and Paris. He is very engaged in promoting better cultural and economic ties between Croatia and Japan, and he has one slogan which, according to him, contributes to our good relations. It says: Tuna connects people! In our case, the trustworthiness of this information can be confirmed by the trade exchange in 2012, when Croatia had a significant trade surplus. Our export to Japan amounted 7.3 billion yen, while the import amounted 2.5 billion. However, these figures could be modified, because, according to Ambassador Ide, import of technical goods and technological gadgets which have Japanese origin are usually being registered as import from EU countries, in which the Japanese own factories are actually located and which are producing those goods. Ambassador Ide gave an interview for Nacional prior to the opening ceremony of the Japanese Culture Week.

NACIONAL: Can you make some parallels of Croatian political scene in regard to formation of coalition governments with Japan? What do you expect from the new Croatian government? Do you think it will expand its foreign policy activity and economic diplomacy to countries outside the European Union?

As a diplomat I cannot comment the internal politics of the country. Each country has its own procedures. Can I compare it with Japan? Well, we used to have similar situations with large coalitions. We had such an experience. Our parties also needed a lot of effort to form the government. As for the expectations of your new government-my job is, of course, to promote our relations. Last year, former Prime Minister Milanović visited Japan and it was a very successful, lively and dynamic visit, I accompanied him on that trip. Sadakazu

Tanigaki, then Justice Minister, visited Croatia two years ago. I expect the new government to continue to develop the good relations that we have.

NACIONAL: You have arrived to Zagreb after Croatia's accession to the European Union. Has this fact positively influenced the perception of Croatia in Japan? In what way has this reflected on our economic relations?

Yes, for many Japanese business people that membership means safe framework and known conditions for doing business in Croatia. But, there is room to improve your system. I recently discovered that the conditions for business people coming from outside the EU are not the same as for those coming from the Member States. Of course, the European Union is a customs union and Japan is now negotiating on the free trade agreement. I hope that we will soon reach an agreement about this. For now, our goods are subject to customs. But, if you really want to attract Japanese investment, I think it would be wise to treat the European and Japanese business people in the same way. Because, if they want to start a small business and get a work permit, they first have to employ a certain number of Croatian citizens. And if this businessman wants to hire one more person from Japan, again he must employ your workers. This is a obligation that hampers investment to Croatia and because of this, investors are not coming. Of course, for investors coming from the EU such rules do not apply. I understand that you have to protect your citizens, especially against the crime. But I believe that you can adjust your system in order to simultaneously achieve both objectives: solid Japanese investments and secured employment of Croatian citizens, as well as security.

NACIONAL: In what areas would the Japanese investors like to invest, i.e. in what fields can we cooperate better?

As you know, we are the biggest importers of tuna-we import around 2,000 tons per year. Last year, the Japanese company J-Trading bought Croatian company Kali Tuna which deals with tuna farming. J-Trading has invested about 40 million US dollars in this investment. This is not a small amount. In this case, the most important was trade. And since you have a high-quality tuna, this investment has been realized. The investment comes in that order. So- trade is very important.

NACIONAL: Do Japanese companies do business with General Gotovina? Have you met him?

Oh yes, there are 4 tuna farms with which Japanese companies do business and one of them is General Gotovina's farm. I met him and regularly communicate with him and we discuss tuna business. I think he visited Japan too.

NACIONAL: Japan was interested in the construction of the power plant Plomin C. What is going on with this project?

True, when the previous government designated modernization of thermal power plant Plomin as a strategic investment project, the Japanese company Marubeni expressed its interest to participate in the project. They gave their offer and held numerous meetings with HEP Company. And they began consultations with the Competition Directorate of the European Commission. They already spent a lot of time and money on that. I understand that the new government is now carefully studying this project, it's normal, but I hope that after establishing the facts, the agreement on the project will be reached. From ecological point of view – there are a lot of misunderstanding. This is a much better project and more eco-friendly than Plomin 1. It is four times bigger, but the emissions of SO_x and NO_x would be significantly reduced. I met with the local community and I think that these people are aware of the economic importance of this project, which is worth 1.3 billion Euros. And the Japanese companies, banks and financial institutions, not only from Japan but also from EU countries would gladly engage in its realization. The fact is that you cannot meet all your electricity needs through renewable sources only. You have a lot of hydro power plants, as well as solar power and wind power, but you cannot depend only on them. I do not know what will you do when Krško1 (nuclear power plant) closes. You need additional resources. In the city of Hekinan in Japan there is such coal-fired plant and no exhaust gases, nor any harmful impact on the environment. There's a lot of misunderstanding about this. We are also interested in the LNG terminal on the island of Krk. Japanese companies are leading in the construction of LNG tankers – out of as much as 400, 1/3 is in the ownership of Japan, and ¼ is produced in Japan. As far as floating LNG terminals are concerned, we are very experienced and successful in their construction too.

NACIONAL: Last year, there was an incident regarding the import of Mitsubishi vehicles in Croatia, when you sent a letter to Prime Minister Milanović over the unlawful impact on the public procurement processes to the detriment of the Mitsubishi importer in Croatia through a regulation. Then, you've called this affair 'Lex Mitsubishi'. Were there any reactions or changes to the regulation in the meantime?

Croatian importer of Mitsubishi Motors in Republic of Croatia (LMG Autokuća) won the public tender of cars for the Ministry of Interior in 2014. In 2015, the Finance Ministry made new ordinance related to the Special Tax on Motor Vehicles. The Customs Administration, retroactively applying this Ordinance, decided to impose additional tax and enormous punishment charges on LMG Autokuća. Croatian Competition Agency and many business organizations (HUP, Chamber of Economy, AmCham) see problems in this ordinance. The CEO of Mitsubishi Motors Mr. Osamu Masuko asked then Finance Minister Mr. Lalovac to reconsider the decision made by the Customs Administration. Mitsubishi is

very important business group and Mr. Masuko is very influential business person in Japan, so the Croatian side should have taken his request seriously. Japanese Embassy raised this issue to the representatives of the Croatian Government. We are waiting for positive response from the new government on this issue, so that normal trade of this company would not be disturbed by inappropriate measures by the Customs Administration. While there are such problems in trade relations, foreign investors will not come to Croatia.

NACIONAL: It is no secret that relations between Japan and China are very complex; from the economic point of view you cooperate very well, exchange of goods in 2014 amounted 340 billion dollars, but on the political level, they are quite tense. How do you assess these relations?

I worked in China as a spokesperson of the Japanese Embassy in China from 2004 to 2007. It was a very interesting job which I really enjoyed. Chinese journalists are very active and love to have contact with our Embassy. In that period I was very busy and I have never refused to communicate with the press. I still have a lot of friends among them. In general, the attitude of Chinese people toward Japan is positive. When they have the opportunity to visit us, they always convince themselves that Japan is a beautiful country and the Japanese are very kind to them. If they have a wrong perception of Japan, they always change it after the visit. Our economic relations are excellent too. I would like to substantiate this with an example. In 2005, in Beijing and other cities in China large anti-Japanese demonstrations were held. At that time, political relations were really tense. And then Chinese Trade Minister addressed the public and said: Listen, dear fellow citizens, in China, Japanese companies employ 9 million Chinese workers, directly or indirectly. With this message he made it clear that our interrelations are so close and deeply intertwined that it is in the interest of both countries to maintain and develop good relations. Maybe sometimes we have different views on different things, but it is our common interest to develop cooperation. Many Chinese leaders in history understood this - Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, as well as new political leaders.

NACIONAL: According to some analysts, a real armament race is taking place in your part of the world. Your government approved a record military budget for the purchase of US military aircraft, as well as additional funds for US military troops stationed in Japan. Why is this happening?

I would like to explain the basic policy of our defense. After World War II, Japanese citizens and the Japanese government decided that we do not want to become again a military superpower. Military force does not bring peace and happiness to people. As you know, during World War II and after it, no one was happy. We understood this and therefore decided that we will not in any way threaten the neighbors. Our policy is that we will not possess or produce nuclear weapons. Nor will we allow someone else to bring nuclear

weapons into Japanese territory. Also, we do not have long-range missiles. We have only short-range missiles, in order to defend ourselves. We do not have aircraft carriers, which are able to attack someone. So, this is our policy. Only in the function of our defense we develop and buy weapons. And for this purpose US aircrafts will be purchased. The data shows that our budget for armaments was constantly decreasing. Although after the end of the Cold War, we believed that we will no longer have to spend money on defense, to my great regret, the situation is not so simple. Over last several years, the military budget has grown, but still amounts to about 1%, while in NATO member countries 2% is prescribed.

NACIONAL: Do you feel threatened by North Korea?

What North Korea and its young leader are doing these days certainly worries. He is obviously determined to have the ability to attack other countries with nuclear weapons. This is evident from the nuclear testing, missile tests and similar. We need to be adequately prepared for a possible attack.

NACIONAL: Japan narrowly escaped nuclear catastrophe, when the tsunami in 2011 destroyed a nuclear power plant in Fukushima. Your former Prime Minister Naoto Kan acknowledged for the Daily Mirror that the cataclysm could have been worse. Croatian people sympathized with your people and sent assistance. Do you still feel the consequences of this tragedy? Was the safety of power plants increased since then?

We are very grateful to Croatian citizens for the expressed solidarity. In fact, we just observed the fifth anniversary of the tragedy, on 11 of March. But the Japanese are aware of the constant threat of earthquakes in our country and we have the accumulated knowledge about how to prepare for them. And so, when major earthquake hit the country five years ago - we endured this well, our buildings withstood, as well as nuclear power plants in the region. But when tsunami came, preparations were insufficient. We should have kept in mind the tsunami that occurred 200 years ago, but we somehow forgotten it. We didn't prepare well, same as the Fukushima nuclear power plant has not been well designed to withstand such a strike. Of course, now, there are heated debates in Japan about the nuclear power plants. I think we've learned our lesson, how to protect them better. However, Government's policy is that we will not stop using nuclear energy because we need to optimize distributed power generation, including renewables, coal, gas and nuclear power.

NACIONAL: Japan has provided large donations as an assistance to Croatia for the reconstruction after the Homeland war, for demining, but also after the catastrophic floods. What motivates you to help others?

In Japan there is a strong consensus that after World War II, we have to be a peaceful nation that should not repeat its mistakes. Therefore, when people suffer in another part of the world, we need to help! We are happy because we have developed our economy in the circumstances of peace. And so we have opportunities to help others. Our citizens support this policy. As you know, many Japanese volunteers came to Croatia to help Croatian citizens, renovate schools and similar. For us it is a great honor and pleasure to help others.

NACIONAL: Speaking of the Second World War, you are probably aware of the fact that all over Europe, but also in Croatia neo-fascism is growing, and there are attempts to revise history. How is it in Japan? Are there such attempts in Japan as well, and are there penalties for the glorification of Nazism and Fascism?

First, as I said, in Japan there is a general consensus that the Japanese army and navy colonized neighboring countries, and that many people have suffered because of the Japanese attacks. We must never repeat this again. We have repented and we really regret it. We apologized to our neighbors. This is what all Japanese citizens think and feel. This is how we educate our children and young people. So, in our history books we educate new generations about all what Japan has done. After the war, Japan began paying reparations to its neighbors and to those who have suffered because of us. But, of course, each person can have his own interpretations of history and explanations of why things happened the way they did. There is a certain spectra of interpretation and understanding of history. But, I think that the positive thing is that we built a new Japan based on the consensus that we need to work to make people happy. Besides, we encourage ordinary citizens and historians to meet with neighbors - Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos and others to socialize and discuss what really happened in the past. This is good, because every country has its own perspective. The government of Japan even has a specific budget for such gatherings. We encourage historians to exchange materials and sometimes they even publish a joint book.

NACIONAL: It is known that the Japanese love to travel and that there are Japanese tourists all around the world. What should Croatia do to attract them more?

I have regular meetings with representatives of tourist agencies. And they have indicated that there is room for improvement of tourist offers. I hope to have the opportunity to meet with the new Minister of Tourism and transfer this to him. One of the main objections refers to tourist guides who speak Japanese. A tourist guide who speaks good Japanese is priceless! Namely - the Japanese often come in large groups, among them are often elderly people who do not speak English. In Croatia, there are very few guides who speak good Japanese. And so, it is my suggestion that the Japanese, who already live here, especially the women who were married here and speak excellent Croatian are allowed to take the exam for guides. This would make them very happy and they could help a lot. But - your law does not allow citizens outside the EU to take such an exam. It is forbidden! I wrote a letter to

former Minister of Tourism, who promised to prepare an amendment to this law. I hope that the new Minister will work on this. If you only opened the door, you could have a lot of benefits from Japanese citizens who already live in Croatia. That would be a win-win situation.

NACIONAL: Japanese Culture Week is being held in this moment in Zagreb. What is in the program, what do you offer to the visitors and why is the promotion of Japanese culture in other countries so important to you?

I think the mutual understanding of cultures is extremely important to start any business or economic cooperation. For Japanese, confidence is very important. Confidence in each other. Without that confidence, we cannot even work on investment. Investing is a long-lasting project. It is a certain kind of marriage - if you do not trust your partner, then there is no investment. There are numerous people who are well acquainted about Japan and admirers of Japanese culture in Croatia. One of them was Mr. Devide, who died in 2010. At this Week of Japanese Culture we would like to pay tribute to his work and that's why I contacted his wife, who is Japanese, and I asked her to let us expose his books as a testimony of his achievements. He did a lot to promote our culture and traditions. And besides, he was a great mathematician. There will be six events throughout the week, and every day workshops, exhibitions, meetings, lectures will be organized. Bonsai art and Japanese cuisine will also be presented, and on the 19th of March we will have a special charity concert performed by pianist Yoko Nishii, who published a CD which includes piano compositions of Croatian composer Dora Pejačević. The concert is dedicated to the Croatian Guide Dog and Mobility Association. Although I know that the people with guide dogs in Croatia are allowed to come to the concerts, I rarely see them. And that's why we invited them to this concert to definitely come with their guide dogs. Cultural differences are not a source of conflict, but can be the basis of mutual interest.

NACIONAL: Many Japanese choirs gladly sing the famous song from our national opera "Nikola Šubić Zrinski" - U boj, u boj! Where is the love for this song deriving from?

Yes, exactly, there is an interesting story about this. 102 years ago, during the First World War, soldiers from the Eastern European countries, who were sent to Siberia, ended up at for some time in Japan, from where they were returning home. They sang that song then. Japanese students, who knew English, took care of these soldiers and before they left, one soldier left them notes (of this song). Japanese liked the song, but they had no idea what it means. Later, choirs continued to sing it at Japanese universities. And then, during the former Yugoslavia, there was an international competition of choirs, at which our choir sang "U boj, u boj," and then from the audience raised a group of singers from the former Yugoslavia, i.e. from Croatia, who continued to sing together with them. Thus, the Japanese

found out the origin of the song. They previously thought it was a Czech song, as the soldiers came from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This song leaves a strong impression on us. We like it very much.

NACIONAL: What else do Japanese know about Croatia?

Well, when I was appointed as Ambassador to Zagreb, my compatriots told me –say hello to Cro-Cop. He is very popular in our country. And when I arrived, I had a chance to meet Mr. Mirko Filipović and convey the greetings of my Japanese friends. Two Cellos are also very famous in Japan. And we really like Lado. They were on tour in Japan two years ago and were very successful. In addition, there are several sister cities between Croatia and Japan - Zagreb and Kyoto, Kawasaki and Rijeka and Pula and Hekinan. I think Zadar could soon establish friendship with Shizuoka, because both cities have an excellent catch of tuna. It connects them. My slogan is: Tuna connects people! Tuna makes people happy! That is why, two years ago, when I first visited all major Croatian cities I initiated Tuna Sushi & Wine Festival, which was held last month for the second time in Zadar. When I met with representatives of local authorities, I told them it is not enough to just export tuna as a raw material. It needs an added value. I immediately suggested cooperation, especially in the winter time, when the tuna is being harvested. If you make a tuna festival, you can invite tourists during the winter and bring the Japanese chefs who will make a good sushi.

=End=