

ベチェルニ・リスト紙による嘉治大使へのインタビュー（英訳）
（令和2年5月23日（土）掲載、インタビュアー：Dino Brumec 記者）

1. Recently, Japan's government had to postpone the Olympic Games for 2021. What kind of feelings are currently in Japan regarding postponement?

Prime Minister Abe Shinzo has expressed his determination to host the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in the complete form in the summer of 2021 as a testament to humanity's victory over the COVID-19 pandemic. People, not only in Japan, but also from around the world, are hoping to swiftly overcome the pandemic and get together for the Games of peace.

2. How much will postponement complicate organization of games in 2021?

The Government of Japan will continue to proceed with the preparation for the Olympics and Paralympics, working closely with the IOC, TOCOG (The Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games) and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Host towns such as Tokamachi city, also the host town for Croatia in the World Cup 2002, and Marugame city, the host town for athletics are still waiting for the Croatian athletes.

3. How is the postponement going to change your work at the embassy?

My Embassy has closely worked together with the Croatian Olympic Committee, the Croatian Paralympic Committee, as well as their members and partners, towards the 2020 Games. The good spirit of collaboration has never ceased even after the announcement of postponement of the Games. Toyota, our Olympic and Paralympic partner, engaged with the Croatian Red Cross and provided support for Zagreb citizens to overcome the pandemic in the aftermath of the earthquake. Croatian tennis star Iva Majoli successfully engaged UNIQLO to take part in the supporting actions. President Yamashita Yasuhiro of the Japanese Judo Federation sent a condolence message to the family and friends of the young Judoka for their loss on March 22.

4. When we are asking these questions, Japan is not among countries heavily hit from coronavirus. What did Japan do well regarding fight against the virus? Please describe us how it looks currently in Japan regarding the measures of social distancing and/or quarantine. These measures are specific in every country.

Japan's approach is somewhat similar to that taken by Croatia trying to put importance on both reducing the number of infected people and maintaining the medical system as well as social function.

Prime Minister Abe declared a state of emergency on April 7. Based on experts' estimation, GOJ set a target of reducing people-to-people contact at least by 70 percent, ideally 80 percent. Mindful of this target, people have made considerable efforts in restricting movements, spending their time at home as much as possible. As a result, the number of cases, which at one time increased to almost 700 a day, has recently fallen to roughly 100 per day. Prime Minister, announcing the decision to lift the state of emergency for 39 prefectures (out of 47), thanked people on May 14 for their efforts. As of May 19, the number of infection is 16,365 (death toll amounts to 763), and its population ratio is 1.293 over 10 thousand; ranking 36th and 131th respectively in the world. People in Japan are still encouraged by the government and the governors to keep being prudent.

Japan also acknowledges the importance of early development of the therapeutic drug to fight against COVID-19. Though its effectiveness has not been established, high interest has been shown by many countries towards Avigan as a medication to prevent the spread of the virus. From a humanitarian perspective, the Government of Japan decided to provide a total of \$1 million in emergency grand aid in order to supply Avigan free of charge to requested countries, including Croatia. The recipient countries are expected to be fully aware of side effects, and make use for advancement of clinical research on the medication.

5. How do you view the fight against coronavirus in Croatia?

I would like to pay tribute to Croatia for successfully containing the pandemic through making use of its scientific and administrative expertise, effectively communicating to the public. I also appreciate Croatia in successfully hosting electronically the Zagreb Summit on May 6, where the EU declared to have mobilized a package of over EUR 3.3 billion to the Western Balkan partners to fight against the pandemic.

While it is vital for each country to contain the virus and protect its citizens, in case of pandemics, by nature, nobody is safe until everybody is safe in all parts of the globe. On May 4, the EU and Japan, together with other partners, co-convened the Coronavirus Global Response pledging event to ensure development of diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, and successfully registered EUR 7.4 billion. Croatia played its part not only as the EU presidency but also by making its own pledge.

6. There is currently a lot of talk about Japan's economy. GDP has already shrunk at the end of 2019. Now Japan is looking to stimulate the economy, but that will add to the public debt which is already the biggest in the world. Japan seems to be in a very tough position when thinking about the forthcoming recession?

A rapidly aging population, as well as the repeated countermeasures to boost the economy after the global financial crisis in 2008 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, induced enhanced public expenditure. This led to a total outstanding government debt of Japan exceeding 200% of its GDP.

Moreover, as in the case of the rest of the world, the COVID-19 casts a pall over the Japanese economy; crippling company activities, threatening jobs and denting consumption. According to the IMF's latest estimation, the Japanese economy is projected to contract by 5.2 percent in 2020. To counter this unrepresented trend, the Japanese government has adopted its largest-ever emergency economic package worth ¥117 trillion (about €1 trillion), equivalent to more than 20 percent of its GDP.

Japan will continue mobilizing full range of policy measures, fiscal, financial and tax systems working out for overcoming the pandemic and revitalizing the economy.

7. Japan is known for the higher percentage of older population which is a challenge for both the economy and a fight against coronavirus. What are some measures that government is implementing to help the elderly?

Japan is the world's fastest aging society, with more than 35 million people over the age of 65, accounting for 28.4% of the total population as of 2019. At the same time, the number of healthy elderly people has increased along with improving healthy life expectancy and physical capabilities. Over 80% of our working elderly people over 60 years old want to continue working beyond 70. Japan has entered into a new era of "100-year life society".

Japan aims to build a society in which all citizens, young and old, enjoy "multistage lives". The government has promoted social reforms to create an environment where people can learn and work regardless of one's age. The number of employed persons has increased by around 5 million in the past seven years as a result of promoting participation of women and the elderly in the labour market.

8. 2019 was a good year for the relations between Croatia and Japan. Croatian parliament speaker Gordan Jandrokovic went to visit Japan and he met with the then new emperor

Naruhito. Croatian ex minister of foreign affairs Marija Pejcinovic-Buric was in Japan, and so was the ex-Japanese foreign minister Taro Kono in Croatia. What are biggest recent accomplishments in upgrading the relations between the two countries?

High level visits and exchanges symbolize and further promote the friendship between the two nations. In the same year, Croatia was represented by Deputy Speaker Željko Reiner at the Ceremony of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor in Tokyo in October. On the occasion of presidential inauguration in February 2020, a congratulatory message was sent to President Zoran Milanovic from His Majesty the Emperor and Prime Minister Abe. We have also witnessed solid legal bases for the advancement of the relationship between the two states in 2019. The Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) took effect in February creating one of the largest free and advanced economic zones with approximately 30% of the world GDP and 40% of the world trade. Croatian Parliament ratified the Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) on the last day of session in 2019. IRMO (Institute for Development and International Relations) in November hosted a conference with the participation of eminent Japanese scholars and diplomat to discuss how to reap the fruits of these Agreements. As for bilateral agreements, the Agreement for elimination of double taxation took effect in September, and Air Service Agreement, which paves the way to direct flights, is under negotiation.

The annual Japan Day at the Mimara Museum in November 2019, the Emperor's Birthday celebration in February and the Japan week in February-March 2020 at the Westin hotel were participated by full of enthusiastic Croatian nationals and international guests, versed in Japanese culture; Ikebana, tea ceremony, Sake, whiskey, Igo, Origami, Japanese language, calligraphy, bonsai, haiku, hanga, tuna, sushi, wagashi, kamishibai, architecture, photos with Kimonos, in addition to Judo, Karate, Kendo, Aikido, Nabudo, Kyudo, Kenjutsu, Ninjutsu, on top of the Olympic and Paralympic champions.

Now that the process of deepening our bilateral relationship is on track, while perusing further, the two countries sharing the same values can also work together for our common cause. For example, Japan for one, believes that the accession of the western Balkan states to the EU is a completion phase of European integration, an objective of vital importance to peace and prosperity of the world. Japan undertook to promote cooperation among these states through such projects as enhancing their disaster resilience and inviting hopeful youth to Japan. Japan wishes to seek collaboration with Croatia in supporting these states.

9. Recently there was a season of cherry blossoming and Japan but there were a lot less parties and almost no tourists. How different was it this year?

Cherry blossoms, Sakura, is the symbol flower of Japan and in the spring time, people often have parties under the blossoming cherry trees, while tourists flock to take photos to grasp their ephemeral beauty. Under the COVID-19 restrictions, those who miss Sakura, use its photos as background on video-chats. Early March this year, I had the honour of planting cherry trees in Bundek park together with Mayor Bandic. They will be blooming next year again, waiting for visits by Croatian citizens and tourists from Japan and around the world.

10. What do you like the most about working in Croatia? And what is the biggest challenge?

Blue Adriatic Sea simmering in the sun, orange rooftops buried in green, seven UNESCO heritages, kind climate, safe streets, and freedom in academy, art, music and sports, friendly people, tuna fit for sashimi... Among all the things I like about working in Croatia, what I like most is to discover a commonality in the approach by Croatia and Japan to deal with challenges the nation faces. Combatting the pandemic while respecting individual freedom, trying to come to terms with the past of wars while bridging diversified opinion, and upholding multilateralism in dealing with global issues are cases in point.

Relief and reconstruction after the earthquake of the largest scale in 140 years is a challenge for Croatia. Letters of sympathy from Japan by the Speaker of the Parliament, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and the Defence Minister were received by their Croatian counterparts. Along with the letters of sympathy, donations are arriving from the Japan-Croatia friendship league of the Japanese parliament. And, in spite of being in gravest economic difficulties caused by the pandemic, they are also arriving from the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Croatia to Okinawa, the governors of host towns, the International Ladies Benevolent Society Japan, Japan-Croatia Friendship Society of Nagasaki as well as from such Japanese enterprises as: Chiyoda Technol, Yazaki Co, NYK Line, Daikin, with experiences of decades of collaboration with Croatian scientific institutes and businesses; Itochu Co, Japan Airport Terminal Co, with aspiration for collaboration with Croatian businesses for decades to come. In support for fight against COVID-19, Honda Ruting is preparing donation of a ventilator. My biggest challenge now is how to convey more of such goodwill from Japan to support Croatia, when cross boarder travelling and economic and cultural events are under restriction. We shall overcome somehow.

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