

Japan - Romania Strategic Partnership: Together we build bridges and defend our values

Op-Ed by the Ambassador of Japan to Romania, Hiroshi Ueda

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In Tokyo, President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis has just signed the bilateral Strategic Partnership Statement together with Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Fumio Kishida. This is a historic milestone in the relations between our countries. Last year President Iohannis eloquently said that „it is not the geographical distance that matters, but the proximity of values and the ability to act in mutual support when needed.” During my mandate in Romania, I have found that, while we might be geographically far apart, the closeness between our peoples is genuine, because we share the same values: freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. Russia's aggression against Ukraine and other global challenges are putting our values under pressure, and we have to defend them together.

I arrived in Bucharest on a snowy December day in 2020. The Christmas lights were already on, but people did not look too cheerful - we were in the middle of a Covid 19 pandemic. I was very curious about a country with a vibrant and fast-growing economy that joined NATO and the EU. From the very first meetings, I was amazed by my interlocutors' passion for Japan and by their hospitality. In a way, I felt at home: In all the countries I have ever visited, I have never heard the word "konnichiwa" (Buna ziua!) as often as in Romania. Not only my counterparts but also young people impressed me with how open they are, how many languages they speak, and how interested they are in broadening their horizons and getting out of their comfort zones. These encounters made me convinced that Romania has a very bright future.

Romania is a young democracy, an important member of the EU and NATO, and shares the same values with Japan. Since signing the "Joint Statement on the Renewed Partnership between Japan and Romania" in 2013, the relations between our two countries have been moving forward at an accelerated pace. The year 2021 marked the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The year 2023 marks the fulfillment of a promise to bring bilateral relations to the level of a strategic partnership, which the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe discussed

with President Klaus Iohannis during his visit to Romania in 2018 as Japan's first Prime Minister.

The objective of the Strategic Partnership is to create a framework for facilitating increased political and security dialogue; economic and development cooperation; as well as culture, science and technology, research and development, innovation, and people-to-people contacts. We hope this will serve as a catalyst to boost trade and business between our countries, Japanese investment in Romania, and people-to-people exchanges.

Japanese companies are already here. More than 110 Japanese companies are operating in Romania, creating more than 40,000 jobs. In addition, we are involved in many of Romania's flagship projects, such as the Braila Bridge, the largest suspension bridge in Romania and the third longest in the EU, which is being built by a partnership that includes the Japanese company IHI. Another prime example of our cooperation is the access railway to Bucharest International Airport, the so-called M6 metro line, which will be built with Japanese funding.

In the fields of culture, arts, and sports, the popularity of Japan is remarkable, including the Japanese language, literature, martial arts, tea ceremony, pop culture, anime, and manga. The respect for each other's culture is mutual. The participation of Japanese theatre artists in the Sibiu International Theatre Festival has become a regular spectacle every June.

In the new international context, marked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the signing of the Strategic Partnership takes on even greater significance. Like-minded nations need to unite with each other. The invasion is absolutely unacceptable and shakes the very foundations of the international order based on the rule of law. Japan has swiftly implemented sanctions against Russia and pledged a total of USD 7.1 billion in aid to Ukraine, Romania, the Republic of Moldova, and other neighbouring countries. We continue to stand with you. We reject any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion in any region.

Romania, as a key member of NATO's Eastern Flank and the Bucharest 9 format has responded admirably, providing assistance to refugees, supporting Ukrainian grain shipments, setting up the humanitarian hub in Suceava, providing energy and financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova, and many more. In particular, we have witnessed the warm welcome given to Ukrainian refugees by

the Romanian people. This reminds me of how, immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, our Romanian friends invited the children of Fukushima to Romania to alleviate their suffering.

Long before the invasion began, on an August afternoon in 2021, with the Danube river breezing gently, we celebrated together with our Romanian friends, both the 100th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two countries and the inauguration of the main construction of the Braila Bridge, not far from the Ukrainian border. At that moment, the wind rustled on the river and the flags of Japan and Romania were raised high above the bridge. Today, with the signing of our strategic partnership, we are building another robust bridge together.