

Deputy Prime Minister Predoiu, Minister Bucura-Oprescu, Minister Ivan, Minister Oprea, Honorable Members of Parliament, State Secretaries, Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen,

Good evening, bună seara! Thank you very much for taking time to join us this evening. It is a great pleasure to see you all here today, including those who have traveled from faraway cities such as Cluj and Iași, to celebrate the His Majesty Emperor's birthday as we do every year.

The day after tomorrow, on February 23rd, His Majesty the Emperor will turn 65 years old. At the Annual Imperial New Year's Poetry Reading “Utakai Hajime” held at the Imperial Palace in January, His Majesty recited the poem 旅先に出会ひし子らは語りたる目(ま)見(み)輝かせ未来の夢を “The children I met on my journeys talked with sparkling eyes of their dreams for the future”. This poem reflects His Majesty’s impressions of the children His Majesty met during visits to the disaster-affected areas, expressing His Majesty’s joy in seeing the children’s eyes spark as they shared vividly their dreams for the future.

Now, speaking of the “dreams for the future”, this year

marks the Osaka-Kansai Expo 2025, held under the theme “Designing Future Society for Our Lives.” This signifies thinking about the way that everyone wants to live his or her life and reach full potential, as well as to promote the co-creation of a sustainable society that supports this way of living in the international community. Geopolitical challenges to the existing international order such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine are threatening to divide the world. Japan believes that the Expo can serve as a platform to foster unity, fulfilling our international responsibility to bring people together in an increasingly “dividing world”.

The Expo also aims to contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The overarching objective of these Goals, which is to create one united world, is closely aligns with the theme of the Expo, “Designing Future Society for Our Lives,” which envisions a future society where everyone in the world considers the happiness of others. The year 2025 is just five years prior to the SDGs target year of 2030, and the Expo will provide a valuable forum for people from all over the world to gather, exchange ideas and make tangible progress toward achieving these goals.

Here at the reception, we have a booth dedicated to the Osaka-Kansai Expo. The Expo will not only feature the “pavilions” of countries and companies from around the world but also host “Theme Weeks” that are in line with the main theme. Furthermore, all participating countries will celebrate their national days. Romania will celebrate it on June 26th, known as the National Flag Day. Please explore the events, and, of course, visit Japan.

Moreover, the World Expo offers a great opportunity for Romania to promote itself to the Japanese audience, as well as global community. I always feel that Romania's rich culture, history and economic potential still need to be better appreciated in Japan and beyond. I hope that Romania will make most of the Romanian Pavilion and the official delegations visit to showcase Romania's unique strengths.

And, as stated in the joint statement signed by the leaders of Japan and Romania in March 2023, I would like to work with all of you here this evening to further strengthen our Strategic partnership for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Looking back over the past year, our Strategic Partnership has made remarkable progress across various fields. In politics, diplomacy, and defense, the Romanian Minister of Justice visited Japan in February 2024, followed by a high-level telephone dialogue between our Foreign Ministers in March. In June the Romania-Japan Parliamentary Friendship League visited Japan, and a delegation led by Vice-President of the House of Councillors Nagahama Hiroyuki made an official visit to Romania in September, the first such visit in 22 years, and the delegation met with then Senate President Nicolae Ciucă, and Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu, and also visited the construction site of the M6 metro project. At the meetings, based on our Strategic Partnership, they exchanged views on deepening relations in the areas of inter-parliamentary exchange and the economy.

From an economic perspective, the 2nd “Japan-Romania Innovation Forum” took place in Tokyo in June. In November, the 1st “Japan-Romania Energy Forum” was organized by Energy Minister Sebastian Burduja in Bucharest. On this occasion, Vice-Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Takeuchi Shinji, led a delegation of 20

Japanese energy companies and government organizations visited Romania. Thus, we expect that the two countries will further deepen our energy cooperation.

Cultural and academic collaboration has also flourished. Music, theater, anime and manga are becoming increasingly vibrant and brought our people closer together through numerous events. The Transylvania Film Festival in Cluj presented 16 16 Japanese-themed films, while Japanese companies performed enthusiastically at the Theater Festival in Sibiu and the Shakespeare Festival in Craiova, and the list goes on. A major milestone was the opening of the long-awaited Oriental Art Gallery at the National Museum of Art of Romania in November, and the establishment of the Tokyo branch of the Romanian Cultural Institute.

Academic exchange is also advancing particularly through the construction of the High-Power Optics Center, part of the Extreme Light Infrastructure Nuclear Physics project in partnership with Osaka University. We have high hopes that such initiatives will consolidate mutual understanding and cooperation between us.

In the coming year, we will build upon these achievements and pursue new avenues to expand our bilateral relations even more. From the diplomatic and defense perspective, we will continue high-level dialogue and international cooperation efforts. In particular, as the Russia's aggression of Ukraine enters its fourth-year next week, the security in the Indo-Pacific is increasingly indivisible from that of in the Euro-Atlantic, for example, when we consider the dispatch of North Korean soldiers. Japan remains committed to working with Romania to uphold a free and open international order, based on the rule of law so that Ukraine can achieve a just and lasting peace.

On the economic front, we would like to support Japanese businesses, utilizing the Osaka-Kansai Expo as a launchpad for new business collaborations which benefit both the companies and the local economy, and we will engage in organizing various bilateral business events. We will continue to support major infrastructure projects like the Braila Bridge and M6 metro line, as well as new initiatives in energy and innovation.

Cultural exchange will remain a key area with various events planned throughout this year to introduce the Japanese culture to as many Romanians as possible. On the other hand, I look forward to actively participating in cultural activities initiated by Romanian.

Earlier this evening, the Madrigal Choir beautifully performed national anthems and other songs from both countries. One of the highlights of the Osaka Expo will be their graceful performance on the global stage. Additionally, 11 Japan-related companies and organizations operating in Romania set up exhibition booths. Japan is home to leading motorcycle and automobile manufacturers competing globally in technology; Thanks to Honda, Suzuki, Toyota-Lexus and Yamaha, we are able to display motorcycles in the foyer on this floor, while automobiles can be viewed on the ground floor and outside the hotel. We hope you will take the opportunity to experience Japanese engineering excellence.

At the food and beverage corner, my chef is demonstrating sushi-making and EDO SUSHI is offering sushi rolls. Our Embassy and JETRO also prepared Japanese sake, whiskey, and plum liquor while Asahi Beer Ursus is waiting for you with draft beer.

As you know, Japanese cuisine, with sushi as its symbol, was registered as a UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013. Additionally, last December, the "traditional sake brewing" technique that has been passed down for over 500 years in Japan was also recognized as the Intangible Heritage. Please enjoy those culinary delights tonight to your heart's content.

Before concluding, I would like to recognize Mr. Kitagawa Tatsuo, our Deputy Head of Mission, who has supported me since I arrived here. He will soon complete his term in Romania and return to Japan, and I sincerely thank him for his contributions. His successor, Mr. Kudo Hiroshi, will take over this role. Mr. Kudo is a Romania expert, and this is his third time serving in Romania. Please extend your support to him as well.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that our Embassy's top priority is to support Japanese nationals and Japanese companies in Romania. We deeply appreciate the Romanian government, local authorities, and all those who have supported them, and ask for your continued assistance. With that, I conclude my speech by reaffirming that our Embassy will do its utmost to solidify the Strategic Partnership with Romania in the future, with the support of everyone present here. Thank you for your attention.