

News

INTERVIEW: AMBASSADOR OF JAPAN IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA MAKOTO ITO

13.04.2022 13:08



SARAJEVO, APRIL 13 (ONASA) – In an interview with ONASA, Japanese Ambassador to BiH Makoto Ito spoke about, among other things, economic, political and cultural cooperation between BiH and Japan, as well as the Japanese Fundamental Grant Assistance Program for Human Security Projects (GAGP).

Interviewer: Ajsela Mekić

ONASA: Considering that you took over the function of Ambassador to BiH for a little over a year, what were and will be priorities in your work?

ITO: My priorities, within my responsibilities here as Ambassador, are to further develop existing friendly relations between the two countries, deepen the understanding on my country, make many friends of Japan here in BiH, and to continuously support stable social and economic development of BiH.

ONASA: How do you assess the bilateral cooperation between BiH and Japan at the economic and political level?

ITO: In regards to relations at the political level, in 2021 we have celebrated the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and BiH. On that occasion, we had an official visit of Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs to BiH, which was very successful. Our two countries have succeeded in establishing continuous cooperation within the international community.

On the other hand, we still need to make more efforts to strengthen economic and business ties. I would like to put more emphasis on increasing the trade relations and bringing Japanese private sector investments to BiH.

ONASA: Funds have been donated to a number of cities in BiH under the Japanese Grant Assistance For Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP). Will you continue with these types of assistance?

ITO: Japanese Grant Assistance For Grassroots Human Security Projects (GAGP) is one of the main pillars of Japanese Government cooperation here in BiH. We are ready to continue to provide support through this project in sectors of environmental protection, medical care and education. Since the end of the conflict in 1995, Japan's support to BiH has amounted to 1 billion KM.

ONASA: In the context of investing in BiH, taking into account the Federation of BiH and RS, what does Japan plan to invest the most in?

ITO: Our economic assistance, mentioned previously, has been implemented in both entities and Brčko District, depending on their needs. Valuable projects that we provide reflect the real needs of the society. When it comes to investments from Japan's private sector, each company makes a decision on the place of investment, depending on their type of business, or their needs, so ultimately, they decide on their own.

ONASA: BiH records an increase in number of departures of highly educated young people from the country. What are your recommendations to stop this trend?

ITO: It is important to ensure an environment where young, talented people can work and have appropriate jobs. In addition to the global companies, smaller, and medium-sized companies are required to create more jobs.

ONASA: How dynamically is the path of BiH towards the EU and NATO membership developing and how important is that path for BiH?

ITO: I understand that BiH, as a country of the Western Balkans, is strongly committed to the EU and NATO integrations for political, economic and security reasons.

Japan, as a developed democratic country in Asia, shares the same values with the EU, such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, freedom of speech and market economy, and my Government continues to support BiH's efforts to make various internal reforms required to join the EU.

ONASA: In mid-February, you said that the Government of Japan expects peaceful, free, transparent and democratic general elections to be held in October, which will reflect the will of the citizens of BiH. Can you comment on the current political situation in BiH?

ITO: General election is fundamental and one of the most important means for people in democratic countries to express their free will, and get it properly reflected.

I think it is important that free, fair and democratic elections are conducted. If different opinions exist, political leaders must continue to discuss this issue in order to reach an agreement towards the elections.

ONASA: To what extent is Japanese culture present in BiH?

ITO: Unfortunately, due to coronavirus pandemic, our cultural activities have been rather limited in recent years. Nevertheless, after the improvement of situation with the pandemic, I would like to find many opportunities to present Japanese culture, both traditional and present one, to people in BiH.

ONASA: What do you think about the role and importance of independent journalism in BiH and how important is it for the development of a democratic society?

ITO: In democratic countries, it is essential to ensure the independence of journalism and mass media. It is also important that the media provide readers and public in general, with precise and unbiased information. The media have huge responsibility on creation of public opinion due to their great influence.

Also, each press has its own opinion and expresses its own voice, but it must be based on ethical principles.