Press Release

Today, the Ambassador of Japan to Albania H.E. Mr. Mitsuyuki TAKADA and the Executive Director of the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) Mr. Gjergj MURRA signed a cooperation agreement of the project named “FIRE - Promote culture of tolerance and mutual respect within two regions”. This project aims to counter hate speech and defamation which are serious obstacles to promote regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and Visegrad regions.

Japan will provide €30.000 to support the Western Balkans Fund to organize a conference that will address ways to mobilize the stakeholders of the two regions to combat offensive language targeting ethnic, religious, sexual minorities, immigrants and negatively influence the regional stability.

Japan’s support comes from the framework of the Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative, launched by then Prime Minister of Japan, Abe Shinzo, in January 2018. This initiative aims to support the socio-economic reforms of the Western Balkans towards the EU accession and to facilitate ethnic reconciliation by promoting cooperation in the Western Balkans. In this context Japan attaches great importance to the cooperation with the Western Balkan’s Fund, as an organization that shares our common goal of strengthening cooperation and advancing the integration of the region into the European Union.Japan has provided support twice to theWestern Balkan’s Fund so far, with the latest example being in January 2021, when the Embassy donated €44.000 to support a project assessing the impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability of Civil Society Organizations operating in the Western Balkan region.

This time, the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) has agreed to join efforts in this project, bringing forth the experiences and challenges of the region. At the 7th “V4 plus Japan” Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, which was held during the visit of then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Mr. Motegi Toshimitsu to Poland on May 7, the ministers confirmed the recent major achievements of “V4 plus Japan” cooperation, including assistance for the Western Balkans. They agreed to engage in close communication among their embassies in the Western Balkans towards the formulation of new cooperation projects. In this context, this project is an excellent example of Japan’s and V4 cooperation in the Western Balkans.

At the meeting held before the signing ceremony, Ambassador Takada and Mr. Murra spoke about the situation in the Western Balkans region, with the Ambassador confirming the commitment of the Government of Japan to further support the region and finding new concrete possibilities for cooperation both with the Western Balkans and with the Visegrad region.