

## **North Macedonia and Free and Open Indo-Pacific**

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### **Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative-Japan's strong commitment**

Japan is a strong and strategic partner for the EU. Japan and the EU share common values such as freedom, democracy, rule of law and human rights and promote a free and open, rules-based international order to contribute to peace and prosperity of the international community. Japan supports a united Europe and believes strong unity of Europe is significant for the future of the international community.

In this context, Japan is strongly committed to supporting Western Balkan countries including North Macedonia under the Western Balkans Cooperation initiatives, launched by then Prime Minister ABE Shinzo in 2018 to support those countries to achieve stability and sustainable development which are essential for them to be fully integrated into the EU.

Under this framework, Japan intends to promote high level political dialogue and consultation with North Macedonia, as well as to support the country's socio-economic development through economic cooperation, human resource development and capacity building, etc. The Japanese government encourages private sectors to promote more active private investment and trade in the country, while strengthening mutual understanding through cultural, sports and human exchanges.

### **Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)-International public goods**

The Indo-Pacific region, home to the world's three biggest economies- the US, China and Japan, is considered a focal point in the global economics, diplomacy and security. The region is facing various challenges such as piracy,

terrorism, proliferation of WMD, natural disasters and attempts to change the status quo.

Under such circumstances, Japan aims to promote peace, stability and prosperity across the region to make the Indo Pacific free and open as “**international public goods**”, through ensuring rules-based international order including the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful settlement of disputes, and promotion of free trade.

Dynamism created by the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Ocean can be an engine of the economic growth of the entire world. The international community as a whole will benefit from establishing in the region an order based on the rule of law, rather than force or coercion.

### **Japan’s efforts on the achievement of FOIP**

The concept of FOIP does not intend to create a new institution nor compete with existing institutions. Japan cooperates with any partner which shares the vision of FOIP, strategically promoting efforts to achieve FOIP such as:

- promoting public diplomacy on maritime order based on the rule of law
- rule-making to expand a free and fair economic order
- securing connectivity across the Indian Ocean and the Pacific
- enhancing governance through capacity building, and
- ensuring maritime security and safety

In collaboration with FOIP related activities of partners, Japan promotes the vision of FOIP by evoking a sense of ownership in Europe, Quad (Japan, Australia, India and the U.S.), ASEAN, Africa, Canada, Pacific Island countries, New Zealand, etc, based on each vision, with shared values and principles such as the rule of law.

The EU and the Indo-Pacific are natural partner regions and the latter is increasingly becoming strategically important and highly interconnected to the EU. The Indo-Pacific and Europe hold over 70% of the global trade in goods and services as well as over 60% of foreign direct investment flows.

### **Connectivity -key factor in pursuing economic prosperity**

The EU has been providing its pre-accession assistance (IPA) to the Western Balkans, attaching a great importance to the **connectivity** of the region with robust infrastructures such as roads, railways, energy, digitalization and ICT.

To pursue the economic prosperity, it is important to enhance physical connectivity including quality infrastructure development, energy and ICT. It is also important to develop people-to-people connectivity (education, training, capacity building) and institutional connectivity to strengthen economic partnership and improve business environment. Japan shares the importance of the connectivity within the Western Balkans to make a stronger unity of Europe.

### **Japan and North Macedonia**

North Macedonia is the only country to become independent from the former Yugoslavia without any conflict among different ethnic groups. This is the reason why the country is called a model of multiethnic coexistence. After the independence, the country has also overcome enormous challenges making difficult decisions to change both the national flag and the name of the country. In this sense, North Macedonia can be a good model for peace and stability in the region. Japan has various approaches to support North Macedonia to achieve economic prosperity.

Our important approach among others is GGP (Grant assistance for Grassroots human security Projects) to support local communities' socio-economic development by responding to the basic human needs and human security such as education, health and environment, which are essential to economic prosperity and very important to the European integration. Since 1996 Japan has implemented 158 GGP projects with a total amount of € 7, 8 million around the country.

The multipurpose dam construction in Zletovica implemented by JICA,

Japan International Cooperation Agency, enabled local communities such as Stip, Probistip,,etc. to have access to clean and filtrated water for their citizens and local industry.

Human resources development and capacity building are another important approach of Japan, examples of which are capacity building for small and medium enterprises in partnership with Bulgaria, Disaster Risk Reduction management project in partnership with Crisis Management Center, etc.

Mutual understanding through culture, arts and sports can also contribute to the nation's reconciliation, peace and stability. Donation of musical instruments, sound and lighting equipment to the National Opera and Ballet is one of the good examples of cultural exchanges to promote mutual understanding.

Sports evoke an emotion of nations and its people. North Macedonia was successful in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, where a Taekwondo player gained an Olympic medal, the first ever silver medal for the country, for the first time in 20 years. Chigasaki city played an important role for the successful hosting of the Macedonian athletes and promotion of North Macedonia in Japan by introducing its history, culture, arts, nature, food and wine, etc. 2 years ago, no one in Chigasaki knew where North Macedonia was, but now every citizen is a fan of North Macedonia.

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