

**Video Message from  
Mr. YAMADA Kenji, State Minister for Foreign Affairs  
on the occasion of Prespa Forum Dialogue 2023,  
15-16 June 2023, Struga, North Macedonia**

Your Excellency Dr. OSMANI,

Foreign Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia,

Distinguished guests,

I am YAMADA Kenji, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

On behalf of the Government of Japan, I would like to express our respect for the Government of North Macedonia for its proactive initiative in promoting dialogue on the European perspective of the Western Balkan region. Japan also commends North Macedonia's leading role as a facilitator of regional cooperation and reconciliation in the Western Balkans, including Foreign Minister Osmani's active efforts in his capacity as this year's OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

Achieving peace and stability in the Western Balkans is important for the lasting prosperity of Europe, and by extension of the international community as a whole, and Japan believes that EU integration of the Western Balkans will contribute to this goal. From this perspective, in 2018 Japan launched the "Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative", under which we have consistently supported the Western Balkan countries' socio-economic reforms toward a common European future.

At a time when we are at an unprecedented historical turning point, with Russia's aggression against Ukraine challenging the very foundations of the international order, the significance of EU integration of the Western Balkans is also growing. In this context, today's forum on the European perspective of the Western Balkans provides an excellent platform to deepen forward-looking discussions at all levels in the region and beyond.

Japan, as this year's G7 Chair, hosted the G7 Hiroshima Summit last month. The overall theme of the Summit was "toward an international community characterized by cooperation, not division and confrontation". This is also relevant in the context of the Western Balkans' path toward a common future as a European family.

In the Western Balkan region, with its complex history of conflict, it is not easy to achieve regional cooperation and good neighborly relations, overcoming existing differences and divisions as well as the conflicts of the past. However, the spirit of the “Prespa Dialogue”, derived from the historic “Prespa Agreement”, shows that it is possible.

Japan attaches great importance to the Western Balkans achieving stability and prosperity as members of a Europe united under shared fundamental values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Under the Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative, in cooperation with our Euro-Atlantic partners, Japan will continue to support the Western Balkan partners in their efforts towards EU integration.

Reaffirming our continued commitment to stand by the Western Balkans on their European path, I would like to conclude my speech by wishing you fruitful discussions and declaring my confidence in the great success of the Prespa Forum Dialogue!