

**ADDRESS BY THE AMBASSADOR OF BULGARIA  
AT THE HOST TOWN SEMINAR, TOKYO, 22 FEBRUARY 2020**

**We are on the eve of Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the world has set its eyes on Tokyo, eagerly waiting to see the next Japanese technological miracle unfold during the Olympics.**

**I am proud to emphasize that Bulgaria was the first country to sign an agreement under the Host Town Initiative – it was the agreement between the Bulgarian Rhythmic Gymnastics Federation and Murayama City, Yamagata Prefecture.**

**It was followed by agreements between the city of Okayama and the Bulgarian Badminton, Wrestling and Volleyball Federations, and between the city of Munakata, Fukuoka Prefecture, and the Bulgarian Judo Federation.**

**Today Bulgaria has 6 Japanese cities as Host Towns: Murayama, Okayama, Munakata, Ichikawa (Chiba Prefecture), Sakuragawa (Ibaraki Prefecture), and Hodogaya Ward of Yokohama.**

**The Host Town agreements have been highly beneficial for the Bulgarian national teams, which have been holding regularly training camps in the respective cities. During those camps a series of other events have also been organised, such as performances by the Bulgarian gymnasts, visits to schools, seminars etc., drawing large audiences.**

**The training camps held by the various Bulgarian National teams, have firmly placed the respective Japanese Host Towns on the map of Bulgaria-Japan friendship and cooperation, and have made these cities highly popular in Bulgaria.**

**The Host Town activities in the past couple of years coincided with important developments in Bulgaria and in Bulgaria-Japan relations:**

**During the first six months of 2018 Bulgaria held its first Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which contributed to the EU–Japan dialogue and cooperation. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid a highly successful visit to Bulgaria in January 2018, which opened up a new chapter in our friendly and cooperative relationship.**

**In 2019 Bulgaria and Japan celebrated, under a joint logo, the Triple Anniversary of the bilateral relations: 110 years since the first bilateral contacts, 80 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations and 60 years since the resumption of the diplomatic relations. A number of political, economic, academic and cultural events were held in Bulgaria and in Japan, in commemoration of the Triple Anniversary.**

**President of Bulgaria, Mr. Rumen Radev, visited Japan in October 2019 on the auspicious occasion of the Enthronement of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito, and had a fruitful bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.**

**Visits of the Foreign Ministers of Bulgaria and Japan, Mrs. Ekaterina Zaharieva and Mr. Taro Kono, were exchanged in 2019, in March and in August respectively.**

**These high-profile events were duly reflected, one way or another, in the Host Town programmes and activities, which provided a significant input in the overall upward development of Bulgaria-Japan relationship.**

**With Tokyo 2020 Olympics fast approaching, I would like to look back in history and to note that Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games were successful for Bulgaria, when my country increased significantly its Olympic medals tally.**

**It is also an interesting fact that Tokyo 1964 was the venue for the first ever Olympic wedding, when two Bulgarian athletes “tied the knot” and the then IOC President was their “Best Man”.**

**I do hope and wish that Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will also be successful for the Bulgarian athletes.**

**I would like hereby to thank the six Host Towns of the Bulgarian teams for providing excellent environment and perfect conditions to Bulgarian athletes and gymnasts to prepare well for the challenges at the Olympics.**

**It is heartening to know that a Bulgarian Host Town House may be opened during the Olympics, and that Host Towns' residents have been preparing to support Bulgarian teams and athletes during the Olympic competition.**

**We are of the view that the strong bonds of friendship and cooperation, established with Japanese cities and municipalities under the Host Town Initiative, should be extended beyond Tokyo 2020 Olympics, and should encompass wider areas of interaction – culture, education, trade and economy, people-to-people contacts. This will strengthen and expand the framework of Bulgaria-Japan relations for the benefit of both countries. We will be working to achieve this goal.**

**I extend my best wishes for a very successful Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020.**