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## **JAPAN AMBASSADOR: ARMENIA HAS TRULY UNIQUE POSITON IN THE WORLD TRADE SYSTEM**

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An interview with Japans Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Armenia Jun Yamada to Armenian News-NEWS.am.

What was a trade turnover between Armenia and Japan last year? How do you assess the trend as compared with the previous years?

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Finance of Japan, the trade turnover between Japan and Armenia in 2017 was USD 29,843,000, while the figure was USD 31,812,000 in 2016 Both import and export turnover remain stable for the last several years. On the other hand, according to National Statistics Committee of Armenia, the Trade turnover between Japan and Armenia in 2018 was USD 91,568,600, while the figure was USD 81,387,300 in 2017 This means a growth of 12.5 percent mainly due to the growth of import from Japan. This is a quite substantial increase, especially in comparison with the figure in 2016 (USD 52,040,700). The past record was in 2014 with USD 113,817,800.

Which Armenian products are interesting for the Japanese and vice versa? Which goods are mainly imported and exported?

The export from Japan to Armenia generally consists of vehicles, machinery, rubber products, electric appliance and so on. The main import from Armenia consists of textiles, non-ferrous metal, tobacco, beverages, etc. Personally, I find many more products in Armenia which could be competitive in the Japanese market, such as wine, organic fruit products, honey etc., which are still kind of rarity in Japan. Japan wishes to promote export of these Armenian products. Currently such support is conducted within the framework of JICA and JETRO. Similarly, Japan can offer many more products to the Armenian people, including various types of Sake and now world-famous Whisky.

Are there any joint ventures?

We have yet to know any substantial JVs between our countries so far. I really look forward to seeing their creation more often, especially after the coming into force of Japan- Armenia Investment protection Agreement in the near future.

MINISO, famous Japanese brand, appeared in the Armenian market. What other companies are

expressing willingness to enter the Armenian market?

As far as I understand, MINISO is not quite a Japanese company. Possibly, it is modeled after DAISO which is very famous in Japan and abroad. In Armenia several Japanese companies, including JTI (Japan Tobacco International) ARMENIA, exist and are actively operating. In view of the huge untapped potential of this country, especially its very talented human resources in the area of advanced technology, I hope there should be more Japanese companies or joint ventures operating here in the future.

In fact, Japanese companies are gradually more interested in Armenia. The conclusion of Japan-Armenia Investment Agreement is also a reflection of such a trend. When it becomes effective, it will ensure free and stable corporate activities of respective enterprises operating in the others territory, thus contributing to further development of bilateral economic relations between our two countries. Recently I learnt about new project between Japanese human resource company and Russian-Armenian University to invite young Armenian IT specialists to Japan. This is another example of new ideas which will enhance and promote our cooperation in IT business into the future.

How do you assess development of tourism? Is there exact data on the number of Japanese tourists visiting Armenia last year? How many Armenians visited Japan?

I am glad to testify that tourism between Japan and Armenia has been developing year by year. According to the State Tourism Committee of the Ministry of Economic Development and Investments of Armenia, we see such increase in the number of tourists from Japan to Armenia. In 2017, 3026 Japanese tourists visited Armenia in total, while in 2018 this figure went up 3,974 (30.4 % increase). Among them, 2,566 tourists visited Armenia by land.

Japanese Foreign Minister Mr. Taro Kono made a historic visit to Armenia last year. During his visit, Minister Kono reaffirmed Japans commitment to contributing to further development of Armenia, announcing a brand new initiative aiming for human resources, infrastructure and business environment development. Further simplification of visa requirements for Armenian citizens was one of the measures in this framework. Concretely, beginning from October 1 2018, Armenian citizens visiting Japan for the purpose of tourism and seeing their relatives and acquaintances could be granted multiple entry visas. The numbers of Armenian people visiting Japan has substantially grown since last year even prior to this new measure. I am convinced that the introduction of the new visa regime will further promote people-to-people exchange between our countries to a new level. On my part, I will do my best to bring more Japanese tourists, students, businessmen, etc. to Armenia which is so unique and rich in history, culture, incredibly beautiful landscape and very talented and friendly people.

Which projects involving Japan are being implemented in Armenia? Are there any figures presenting the assistance provided to Armenia by Japan?

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, Japan has implemented many projects in Armenia mostly through ODA (official development assistance), which includes loans, grant aid, and technical assistance. As of FY 2016, Japan provided 436.76 million USD in total through these schemes. One such example is the Yerevan Combined Co-Generation Power Plant which was financed by Japans loan. As you know, this power plant is now a very essential part of national economy, greatly contributing to the energy security of Armenia.

We also support the development of local production and promote such local brands for Armenian small and medium sized companies. This has been two conducted through technical assistance (the Project for Development of Local Production and Promotion of Local Brands Phase 2, or so called OVOP - One Village One Product), implemented by JICA. Important pillar of our cooperation is disaster prevention. Both countries have periodically suffered from natural disasters and we have very close cooperation with the Ministry of Emergency Situation of Armenia.

We provided 28 fire-engines for Yerevan City in 2008, and another 39 fire fire-engines will be provided to Lori, Shirak and Syunik regions this year. Another project to improve Crisis Communication and Public Awareness will be implemented this year. On December 7th last year I visited Spitak to participate the commemorative ceremony dedicated to the victims of 1988 Spitak earthquake. We are so deeply touched and grateful for the warm support from Armenian people during the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011 The Spitak branch staff of MES, who visited Japan for JICAs training in the past, took initiative and built a beautiful Khachkar dedicated to the victims in Japan, side by side with the monument in the memory of victims of Spitak earthquake.

Can we say there is a Japanese community in Armenia?

As of now, the Japanese community in Armenia is rather small and we sincerely look forward to its rapid increase in the near future.

Is Japan interested in Working with the Eurasian Economic Union with the help of Armenia?

The answer is Yes and wed like to welcome the Armenias presidency of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) this year. Not only as an EAEU member state, but also as a gateway country to have GSP plus trade regime with the EU, Armenia has a truly unique positon (and accordingly potential) in the world trade system. Your active cooperation with immediate neighbor countries, i.e. Iran and Georgia, should be another plus for potential cooperation with Japanese business.

Have you managed to tour Armenian provinces?

Although I have been here for only 9 months, I managed to visit various provinces, including Gyumri, Spitak, Stepanavan, Vanazor, Ijevan, Goris, etc. I have been totally overwhelmed by the beauty of nature and richness of cultural heritages. More than anything else, the warmth of the peoples heart is truly extraordinary. Together with absolutely tasty food and now world-class wine, all the provinces are quite capable to enchant visitors from every corner of the world instantly. Id like to wish all of them a great success in the foreseeable future!

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