



Address at a ceremony of planting a Japanese cherry blossom tree in front of the Museum of Yugoslavia:

"Your Excellency Ambassador Maruyama,
Mr. Nishiura,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

A new tree is always of multiple significance, reflecting the power of symbolism, longevity, life force and vitality.

However, today's ceremony of planting the first out of thirty Japanese cherry blossom trees in the area in front of the Museum of Yugoslavia is of additional importance. It is taking place in the year which is extremely important for relations between the Republic of Serbia and Japan, a year which commenced in the best possible way by the historic visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the Republic of Serbia. The visit has given a strong impetus and created new opportunities for the further enhancement of cooperation between the two countries in political, economic, cultural and other areas.

Also of great significance is the fact that an important joint decision was made this spring by Serbia and Japan to establish 1882 – the year of first diplomatic correspondence between Prince Milan Obrenović and Japanese Emperor Meiji – as the "Year of Friendship between Serbia and Japan".

This year, based on the idea of Prime Minister Abe, the "Initiative for cooperation between Japan and the Western Balkans region" was also launched, within which initial steps have been taken, and to which Serbia attaches great importance.

As a result of the visit to Serbia by the Japanese Prime Minister, whose delegation comprised 16 most senior officials of leading Japanese companies, Serbia and Japan achieved very important results in the area of economic cooperation. The interest of Japanese companies to appear on the Serbian market is growing, important new business contacts have been established, while some Japanese companies have made fresh initiatives on our market.

Japanese companies and investors, known for their diligence, commitment and high professionalism, are welcome in Serbia, and we stand ready to provide our assistance in their new business undertakings.

I particularly wish to underline that, despite their geographical remoteness, the Serbs and the Japanese nurture their high respect for each other, sympathies and an interest to learn about their respective cultural heritage and tradition. These special ties bring our two peoples closer together, opening the avenues to the strengthening of their overall cooperation.

Serbian and Japanese peoples were side by side at difficult junctures. I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude for Japan's exceptional solidarity and assistance to the people of Serbia in the past two decades. Serbian people will not forget that.

I hope that this Japanese cherry blossom tree will grow and spread its branches along with the strengthening of Serbia - Japan friendship and cooperation. I trust and believe that, in the period ahead, there will be many more important top-level visits, even more intensive cooperation in all areas, along with the political dialogue, characterized by understanding, solidarity and mutual respect. Serbia will be truly committed to these goals in the future.

Thank you."