

# sustainable japan

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Ermal Muca sees parallels in ideals of hospitality, duty and harmony

## Albanian ambassador finds familiar values in Japan

**Name:** Ermal Muca  
**Title:** Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to Japan  
**URL:** <https://ambasadat.gov.al/japan/>  
**Hometown:** Tirana, Albania  
**Years in Japan:** 2

### Leaders & Readers

LOUISE GEORGE KITAKA  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Stepping into the Embassy of Albania in Tokyo feels almost like being welcomed into a family home. The atmosphere is warm and friendly, reflecting the close-knit nature of a mission staffed by a handful of people, including Ambassador Ermal Muca and Deputy Head of Mission Ilir Qorri.

Bordered by Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Greece, Albania has a rich history shaped by the Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman civilizations. The embassy walls feature colorful photographs showcasing various aspects of this culture and heritage.

Japan and Albania may seem to be a world away on the surface. However, since arriving in Tokyo to take up his position in July 2024, Muca has observed shared values that have shaped relationships and fostered social harmony for generations.

"In Albania, hospitality is a defining element of our identity, expressed in the saying: 'The house of the Albanian belongs to God and the guest,'" Muca explained. He sees parallels in Japan's concept of *omotenashi*, with its emphasis on anticipating and thoughtfully responding to the needs of others.

Another example is the importance placed on loyalty and honor. In Albania, these values are reflected in *besa*, a core principle rooted in trust and moral commitment, under which a promise must always be kept. It resonates closely with traditional Japanese concepts of duty and harmony, which typically place the group ahead of individual desires.

### Bridging countries, cultures

"Diplomacy, at its core, is about building bridges and connecting nations, cultures and people through dialogue and mutual understanding," Muca said. "What I find most rewarding is the ability to help shape relationships that endure over time and which deliver meaningful, tangible outcomes."

Muca's interest in diplomacy began in high school. He was initially drawn to both law and international relations but, coming from a family of lawyers, the road less traveled ultimately proved more appealing.

After graduating from Istanbul University in 2002, he joined the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2009, he was delighted to return to Istanbul as Albanian consul general, with a chance to give back to the city that had welcomed him as a student.

More recently, he served as Albania's ambassador to Canada for eight years — a remarkably long posting in the diplomatic world. During his tenure in Ottawa, Muca was also appointed dean of the diplomatic corps in 2023, a role typically held by the longest-serving ambassador in a host country.

"Of course, that means you have more to do not only for your own bilateral agenda, but also because you have to serve as dean," he noted. "While it's like having two jobs, it's

also a great honor."

### Bilateral momentum

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama paid an official visit to Japan in May. His meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi remains a crucial milestone in Albania-Japan relations, opening a new chapter in the partnership. "Albania is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by structural reforms, infrastructure development and sustained economic growth," Muca pointed out. "Economic cooperation is emerging as one of the most dynamic pillars of the Japan-Albania relationship."

Recent examples of this growing momentum were the JETRO business mission to Albania last November and the Albania-Japan Business Forum held in February. Organized by the Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA) in cooperation with the Japan Overseas Investment Institute and the Albanian Embassy, the event brought together entrepreneurs, business leaders and government representatives from both countries while helping connect Japanese investors with opportunities in Albania.

Parliamentary diplomacy is another major element in the bilateral cooperation, notably through the Japan-Albania Parliamentary Friendship League in the Diet. It is currently led by Minoru Kiuchi, minister for Japan's growth strategy, who was awarded Albania's Grand Star of the Benemerenti Medal during the recent visit of Rama.

On the global level, Albania is advancing steadily toward European Union membership and Muca is looking forward to the opportunities this is expected to bring. "We're



HARUO MOTOHASHI

### Dean of the diplomatic corps

Born in Diber, Albania, Ermal Muca joined the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania in 2002, holding different positions. At the Headquarters, he has also been serving as Director of State Protocol.

His subsequent overseas assignments have included postings in Ankara and Istanbul as well as eight years in Ottawa, where he was honored to serve as dean of the diplomatic corps during 2023 and 2024. That same year, he received the Ambassador of the Year award (Eastern European Region) from the Professional Development Institute at the University of Ottawa.

He took on his current role in Japan in 2024. In his free time, he enjoys running, hiking and exploring Japanese culture with his wife, Alma, their children, and family friends.

*shōchū*. It can be made from grapes, plums and mulberries, among other fruits.

The menus for embassy events are typically curated by the wives of Muca and his colleague Qorri. Whether entertaining guests for an intimate dinner party or representing their country in Japanese society, he says they play a vital role in supporting the diplomatic mission. "Spouses are a very important part of our job. I really owe them a big thank you!"

Muca also appreciates the chance to learn about Japanese culture firsthand through his family and Japanese friends. He and his wife, Alma, are the parents of three children, two of whom have accompanied them to Tokyo. While their teenager attends an international school, the couple decided to make the most of the opportunity by sending their youngest child to a local elementary school.

"We've been enjoying many events hosted by the school and ceremonies where the children have been performing — including my son," he said proudly.



aiming to conclude the negotiations by 2027 and achieve accession as soon as possible — hopefully by 2030. Albania offers stability, strategic positioning and access to a broader regional and European market," he said.

### The strength of soft diplomacy

Last year, an event was held at the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) headquarters in Tokyo to mark the 20th anniversary of the Albanian Embassy. Attendees had the opportunity to sample Albanian dishes and wines while learning more about the country through promotional videos and cultural presentations.

"I was really happy to hear from many of them in the room that they are considering visiting Albania after having that experience," Muca said. He believes this kind of grassroots diplomacy is very valuable for fostering greater interest in Albania through avenues such as travel and appreciation of food culture.

Albanian wine is one example of a product that is making new inroads into Japan, being offered at a small but growing number of shops and restaurants, as well as online. Guests who dine at the embassy, however, are just as likely to enjoy raki, a traditional fruit brandy with similarities to Japanese

## GLIN Impact Capital seeks to build virtuous economic cycles

### Sustainable Japan Award: ESG Excellence Award

EMI MAEDA  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Over the past century, the global economy has grown dramatically. Rapid expansion in world GDP has lifted living standards and improved the lives of millions of people around the globe. Yet that same growth has come at a cost.

Atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations have risen in tandem with economic output, fueling an increasingly severe climate crisis. The Gini coefficient — a widely used measure of income inequality — has also trended upward, a reminder that the fruits of prosperity have not been shared equally.

GLIN Impact Capital is one impact investment firm that supports businesses tackling social and environmental challenges, with the goal of aligning economic growth with positive societal impact. Founded in 2020, the firm builds the conditions for impact-driven businesses to grow, connecting them with the talent, capital and networks they need. Its mission is "to build a more sustainable capitalism" — a society in which economic growth and the resolution of social challenges reinforce each other.

Co-founder and general partner Masahiro Hata said: "The concept of using 'impact' to describe measurable social and environmental progress in Japan is still relatively recent. In the impact finance space, Japan was often said to be lagging behind global trends, but companies here have long pursued business models that create value for sellers, buyers and society alike — they just hadn't framed it that way. If businesses that create positive impact can learn to articulate it, they can earn broader support, attract more resources and grow. We want to help build an environment where that kind of virtuous cycle can hold."

The company was an early mover in Japan's impact investing market, building its activities around three pillars: investment, consulting and ecosystem development. Beyond supporting individual companies tackling environmental and social challenges, it has contributed to the

development of national guidelines and helped shape the broader market infrastructure for impact investing in Japan. Those efforts earned it the ESG Excellence Award at The Japan Times' Sustainable Japan Award 2025. Its work has also attracted international recognition, with its approach featured at the world's largest impact investing forums and adopted as a case study at Harvard Business School.

The first pillar, investment, raises capital from institutional investors and deploys it into mid- to late-stage companies tackling challenges in three domains: climate change, healthcare and inclusivity. Beyond capital, the firm provides hands-on support across three stages: helping portfolio companies measure, manage and disclose their impact; scaling their operations; and expanding internationally.

The second pillar, consulting, helps companies identify and articulate the social and environmental value they create through their operations, and incorporate that impact into their broader management strategy. This includes translating that impact into clear, structured disclosure. The goal is not simply to disclose, but to help clients build new customer relationships, strengthen talent acquisition and deepen dialogue with investors.

The third pillar, ecosystem development, reflects the reality that impact finance remains in its infancy. Without agreed-upon rules and standards, even well-intentioned actors struggle to get started. "When there are no guidelines or procedures to follow, it's hard for anyone to take the first step," Hata noted. To address this, GLIN has also served in advisory roles for impact-related initiatives supported by the Financial Services Agency, the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, contributing its expertise to the development of guidelines on what impact means and how to measure it. The firm also plays a key role in growing the community of practitioners: It co-chairs the venture capital working group of the Japan Impact-driven Financing Initiative, a network of over 80 financial institutions committed to expanding impact finance in Japan, and serves as a gateway connecting Japanese players with global investors.

As interest in impact investing continues



Masato Nakamura (left) and Masahiro Hata, founding partners of GLIN IMPACT CAPITAL

to grow, the market may be approaching a historic turning point. The Government Pension Investment Fund (GPIF) — the world's largest pension fund — has included "exploring impact-conscious investment" in its medium-term management plan for 2025 to 2029.

The precedent set by ESG investing offers a compelling analogy. When GPIF signed the U.N.'s Principles for Responsible Investment in 2015, it sparked a wave of interest among Japanese institutional investors. By 2017, the fund had begun actively investing along ESG lines, and the ripple effect on the broader market was enormous — Japan's sustainable investment assets expanded rapidly in the years that followed. "GPIF putting impact investing on the agenda is a powerful signal," Hata said. "It tells the market that impact is no longer a niche conversation."

Looking ahead, Hata sees "systems investing" as the next frontier. As climate change, poverty and resource scarcity continue to worsen, investing at the level of individual companies may not be enough to drive the structural change these challenges demand. The emerging approach seeks to catalyze change across entire social and economic systems, with multiple players joining forces around shared goals. Questions remain — including who should play the coordinating role. But the underlying goal is clear: to deploy limited capital more effectively, and to help build a society in which future generations can thrive in harmony with the natural world. It is a frontier GLIN intends to help shape.