

ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, KOSOVO and MONTENEGRO

Country-focus training course on disaster prevention and mitigation based on Eco-DRR held in Japan

From 7 to 18 October 2024, 20 representatives of counterpart organizations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro in „Project on capacity building for disaster risk reduction through national forest fire information system (NFFIS) and ecosystem disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR)“ attended the Country-focus training course on disaster prevention and mitigation in Japan. The training course was a part of the Project, which aims at contributing to the reduced disaster risks in the future that have been accelerated by fire, human-induced land use and climate change. The project will help build a mechanism of risk assesment for forest fires and information system for its prevention and early warning.



Voice of the participants

Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Participants from BiH during the site visit

We are very happy that we had the opportunity to participate in lectures in several important institutions in the field of forest protection, fire and other disaster management and to visit the areas where certain soil remediation and erosion control measures have been carried out. It means a lot to us that we were able to exchange opinions and experiences with lecturers from Japan as well as with colleagues, training participants from other countries, and participate in simulations of the most common accidents. We have gained certain knowledge that we will be happy to pass on to other participants in the field of protection and rescue and get acquainted with activities that can be applied in our country.

Representatives of counterpart institutions from Montenegro (The Directorate for Protection and Rescue and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy)

This training course enabled the exchange of experience, knowledge and modalities of good practices from the aspect of science and profession on the topic of Eco-solutions and solutions based on nature, which are a relatively new approach to the prevention and mitigation of disasters in the world. These measures and solutions are also the focus of international funding sources, and projects and programs on these topics will be a follow up in the coming period. The results of this visit will certainly be the creation of concrete solutions to reduce the risk of disasters in Montenegro.



Participants from Montenegro at the Certificate awarding ceremony

Representatives of counterpart institutions from Kosovo



Participants from Kosovo in the field

The visit had a study and practical character with theoretical and practical presentations, field expeditions, visits to various Agencies and Institutions such as Japan Forestry Agency, Fire and Disaster Management Agency, Management of the

flow of the river "Sakawa" (Kanagawa prefecture), Anti-Erosion Dam and Cascade Anti-Erosion Dam System, Department of Disaster Prevention, Meteorological and Hydrological, National Research and Development Agency - National Research

Institute for Science and Technology for Disaster Prevention, Disaster Prevention Center – Tochigi. From this training, we will try to apply the experience, techniques and methodologies applied in Japan, in concrete fields, to our institutions.

JICA awarded by Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) for longstanding cooperation

On September 19, on the 25th anniversary of its foundation, Radio Television of Kosovo has gratefully honored its partner JICA, for its continuous contribution since 1999. This recognition was received by the Charge d'affaires at the Japanese embassy, Mr. Keisuke Yamanaka. "Your remarkable dedication and generosity have been pivotal in shaping RTK into the esteemed institution it is today. We extend our deepest gratitude for your exceptional partnership and continued commitment to excellence," the award reads. Ambassador Yamanaka himself has said that every time he has visited RTK, he had found the workers' gratitude for Japanese investments. "We are proud to have influenced the development of



Awarding ceremony at RTK Kosovo

RTK and are determined to continue supporting institutional growth. The opening of regional offices in Mitro-

vica, Prizren, and in the future in Peja, are evidence of our continued dedication", Yamanaka said.

JCC for Solid Waste Management Project held in Prishtina

On June 24, the final Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) was held at the Ministry of Environment, Special Planning and Infrastructure (MESPI), Prishtina. Since the start of the Project in July 2021, the JICA expert team has reviewed and analyzed the current situation and challenges of waste management including fee collection mechanisms in the four target municipalities. As a result of three years of activities, the pilot projects have evolved into daily operations and are being imple-

mented continuously. In addition, based on the result of the pilot projects, the four target municipalities have analyzed their respective Waste Management Plans and have explored ways to reflect the outcomes, remaining issues, and lessons learned, and have considered necessary initiatives for further improvement in each municipality. The four target municipalities are thus well-placed to introduce a circular economy, which is the goal of the Kosovo government.



Members of JCC for Solid Waste Management Project

Eco-DRR Project promoted planting of trees in the city of Istog

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Promotion of planting trees in the center of Istog

SERBIA

NINJA 2.0 has been launched!

After a one-year hiatus and discussions with stakeholders, JICA has resumed the NINJA (Next Innovation with Japan) program in Serbia to support the growth of potential startups, particularly for their expansion into the Asian market. This iteration, in collaboration with the Digital Serbia Initiative and ICT Hub from Serbia, as well as ABeam Consulting and Turea from Japan, introduces a new program that combines an acceleration component with visits to Japan and a third country. In alignment with the Serbian government's policies and strategies, JICA is committed to enhancing the startup ecosystem in Serbia. For more detailed information, please visit the website.

<https://www.dsi.rs/ninja/>



Meeting with the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation

ALBANIA

The Project on Capacity Building for National Forest Fire Information System (NFFIS) and Nature-based solutions for Disaster Risk Reduction (NbS-DRR) kicks-off in Tirana



Kick off meeting

On June 24 to 27, the JICA Project Team (JPT) of the Project on Capacity Building for National Forest Fire Information System (NFFIS) and Nature-based solutions for Disaster Risk Reduction (NbS-DRR), headed by Chief Technical Advisor Mr. Morikawa,

held a series of meetings in Tirana, which also marked the official kick-off of the Project. This 5-year Project will support Albania to create an integrated emergency management system in the country and develop the capacities of government agen-

cies for early warning for forest fires and other natural disasters. Through Project activities, JICA will introduce nature-based solutions through piloting in Bovilla water catchment area, water storage for the capital Tirana. Aiming disaster risk reduction, a stabilization of soil runoff and sedimentation in the basin would be targeted. NFFIS is expected to be developed, tested, and operationalized to monitor forest fires. Institutionalization of NFFIS and NbS DRR and civil protection in Albania is expected to contribute to regional and global frameworks such as Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative, EU Civil Protection Mechanism, and Forest Europe process.

Awarding Ceremony and Reception on recognition of Mr. Sokol KONOMI, JICA Technical Coordinator in Albania



Attendees at the Award ceremony (Mr. Konomi, first row, third from the left)

On July 18, the Ambassador of Japan H.E. KATO Kikuko held an Awarding Ceremony and Reception on recognition of Mr. Sokol KONOMI, JICA Technical Coordinator in Albania. This prestigious award is given to individuals and organizations that have contributed to strengthening relations between Japan and Albania. H.E. Ambassador Kato handed Mr. Konomi the Certificate of appreciation for the contribution to the strengthening and development of relations between the two countries, Japan and Albania in the last 15 years. The ceremony was attended by the family, friends, colleagues, representatives of Albanian Government as well as associates and partners of Mr. Konomi.

NORTH MACEDONIA

Dispatch of SDG Global leader candidate to the Nagoya University of Commerce and Business

Written by Ms. Verda Fazliova, SDG Global Leader candidate and student of Nagoya University of Commerce and Business from September 2024

"Frontier Spirit" - is the motto of the Nagoya University of Commerce and Business (NUCB), where I am currently pursuing my MBA and the spirit which characterizes the people of Japan. It describes the spirit of a person who never gives up, who has a bold attitude in the face of difficult or uncertain circumstances, who acts in original manner, pushes boundaries and by their actions seeks to benefit humanity, society, and the nation. Japanese educational system invests highly in the use of human intellect and intelligence for the benefit of both - the individual and the collective. Continuous effort to elevate manners and education, steering toward a perfection of collective harmony.

So, why should Balkan students come to NUCB? Because at NUCB, you don't conform. You challenge. You're taught to speak your truth, not to just join the noise. The Case Method demands that you bring your own ideas, defend them, and - if proven wrong - learn and come back stronger. It's

the kind of place where your voice isn't just another in the crowd, but one that stands on its own. In Japan, I learned something that goes deeper than academics - it's the power of trust. I came here, a stranger, but never once felt alone. The people here have a way of making you feel like you belong from the moment you set foot in the country. They teach you to rely on them, to trust that they've got your back, no matter how far from home you are. It's not just about fitting in; it's about knowing that you're not an outsider - you're a part of their world. This country, its people, and its spirit - it's not just a place to study, it's a place to grow as a human being. Japan reminds you that no matter how far you go, what matters are the connections you make along the way. Those are what carry you through, not just professionally, but personally.

This isn't just a personal opportunity, it's a chance to change the future - for yourself, for your country, and for everyone who comes after you. So don't waste it. Don't



Ms. Verda Fazliova at the NUCB

let fear hold you back. This is your shot to make something real, something lasting. And trust me, it's worth it.

Dispatch of SDG-s Global Leader candidate to the University of Tokyo

On October 1, the participant from Albania, accepted for JICA Long Term Training related to SDG Global-Leaders, Mr. Arend RADA, commenced his studies at the Graduate School of Public Policy (GraSPP), at the University of Tokyo. Mr. Rada, 35, serving as of Head of Section at the National Fund Directorate of the Ministry of Finance of Albania, was accepted to this JICA Long-term Training in May of this year. Mr. Rada arrived in Tokyo in September and describes his first impressions about studying in Japan and about

the SDG GL program as follows: "Ever since coming to the University of Tokyo, everything feels surreal. Sometimes I just stop, look around and smile being overwhelmed by a warm feeling, the one that means "I made it". The school staff is always supportive, the Japanese people are kind and helpful and I haven't noticed much of a cultural clash, not saying it can't happen, just as a personal case this wasn't an issue. Now I'm focused on my studies, looking forward to exploring Japan more and continuing

these great adventures."

*Through the SDGs Global Leader program in target countries, including Balkan Region, JICA aims to foster junior and mid-level government officials, academicians and leading human resources in various fields who are capable of influencing policymaking in their countries or contributing to socioeconomic development in the near future, by providing a Master's or Doctoral program in universities in Japan.

NORTH MACEDONIA

Final workshop and completion of FU One village-One product

From September 2023 to July 2024, a Project manager from National Federation of Farmers of North Macedonia (NFF) implemented a Follow-up project after attending KCCP „Local Industry Development in Agricultural Regions by Strengthening the Capacity for Management and Marketing“. The project aimed at setting up a model for one village-one product (OVOP) in the village of Timjanik, Negotino, by promoting the principles and the operations of work of OVOP through one selected product- madzun (natural grape sweetener). With the assistance for formulating the Strategy for OVOP, developing Business plan for promotion and marketing of the product and registration of bar-code, the Women association of madzun producers „Shira“ from Negotino will be able to standardize and brand their product and set up the promotion on the scale of the whole village and further gain the recognition of Negotino as the madzun area.

On June 13, National Workshop for promotion of the results of the project



National Workshop for promotion of project results in Negotino

implementation was held in the Municipality Hall of Negotino. It was an occasion to gather all the stakeholders, Mayor of Negotino, Ambassador of Japan in North Macedonia, NFF representatives, representatives of Women

Association „Shira“ as well as all the experts who worked on the Strategy and Business plan for promotion of the OVOP principle. It is expected for this pilot project to serve as a good example of OVOP and to be replicated for other products in different regions across North Macedonia.

ALUMNI

Announcement of results for Small-scale Follow-up Project in JFY2024

Since 2019, JICA Balkan Office has been announcing annual competition for Small-scale Follow-up (SFU) Projects for the Alumni Associations. This year the competition was announced in June, when the ex-participants of JICA KCCPs in Japan and

the members of Alumni Associations were invited to submit their SFU project proposals planned for implementation between September 2024 and February 2025. The project, which was selected for implementation this year, is a joint cooperation be-

tween Alumni Associations of Kosovo and Albania in the sector of nature conservation of National Parks with the title „Ecosystem Based Management Approach in the Protected Areas: Sharing JICA Experience from Albania to Kosovo“.

SERBIA

JOCV for Kendo and Judo at JAPANISH



Demonstration of Kendo

On October 10, two JOCVs, Kogawa and Miyoshi, performed and demonstrated martial arts, Judo and Kendo, respectively, at Nis university library, within the event “Japanese days” that celebrates Japanese culture through various activities. Among others, the event features traditional music, dance performance, martial arts demonstrations, workshop on origami and calligraphy and presentations of Japanese customs. Participants learned about Judo from presentation of Kogawa, who demonstrated techniques and sparing with Djordje, competitor from Judo club Kinezis from Nis. Wearing black uniform, that symbolizes the tradition and discipline of Kendo, Miyoshi and competitor Rastko, from Mori dojo club, demonstrated Kendo through some Kendo basic sessions and sword techniques.

WESTERN BALKAN

Dispatch of an Expert for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Western Balkans

Message from Mr. FURIHATA Kakeru, Expert for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Western Balkans



Mr. FURIHATA Kakeru

“I am Kakeru Furihata, newly assigned expert in the tourism sector to support the development of sustainable tourism in the Western Balkan countries, from the end of October 2024 for the next 2 years. Since this is my first experience working in the Western Balkan area, I am overwhelmed by the beauty and the historical atmosphere of the city every day. One of my main roles as an expert here is to share the knowledge and the experience on sustainable tourism through introducing the international standard and the guideline to

strengthen the capacity of stakeholders and develop sustainable tourism destinations in Western Balkan countries. Before this position, I was engaged in the marketing strategy making of the tourism sector and enhancing the regional cooperation programme in the Middle East countries as an expert for more than 3 years. I believe that the potential of tourism in each Western Balkan country is high, so the regional cooperation of Western Balkan area will contribute to creating a world competitive tourism destination.”

Regional Conference on “A Sustainable Future: Cooperation, Communication and Connectivity in the Western Balkans’ Rural and Adventure Tourism” organized by GIZ and RCC

On October 24 to 25, the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) organized the regional Conference “A Sustainable Future: Cooperation, Communication and Connectivity in the Western Balkans’ Rural and Adventure Tourism” in Bar, Montenegro. The event gathered all key stakeholders from the tourism-related ministries and organizations, associations and regional organizations, private sector representatives, and international organizations. Main aim of the event was enhancement of communication and connectivity within tourism sector, in order to explore potentials of the Western Balkans as a resilient, innovative and sustainable destination. This occasion was used for the exchange of the latest updates in tourism sector in 6WB economies, with the special focus on rural and adventure tourism development of the Western Balkans. Empowering women’s role in tourism, destination management system approach, securing skilled workforce, continuous development of knowledge and skills were just some of the topics in the focus of the



Panelists at the Conference

panelists and participants. Mr. FURIHATA Kakeru, JICA Individual Expert on Sustainable Tourism Development in the Western Balkans, who had just ar-

rived in the region, had a chance to attend this event just at the commencement of his assignment to the Western Balkans.

ALBANIA

Japanese Ambassador’s Cup held in Tirana

On November 3, the Japanese Ambassador’s Cup (Karate and Judo) took place at Tirana Olympic Park with the aim of promoting Japanese martial arts and cultural exchange. Through competitions, demonstrations and workshops, led by experienced instructors, once again, Karate and Judo tournament promoted Japanese martial arts, the values of respect, discipline, and dedication. JOCV, Mr. Kogawa Shotaro participated in this year’s Ambassador’s Cup in Tirana, showing his skills in Judo. His performance at the event was folowed with great attention by both small and big judokas. The Japanese Ambassador’s Cup in Tirana, Albania, is known for its rich tradition and diverse content. It has been organized the third year in a row. It is an event that typically promotes cultural exchange between Japan and Albania and serves to celebrate Japanese culture and strengthen diplomatic ties between the two countries.



H.E. Ambassador Kato and Kogawa JOCV with Judo competitors from Albania

Gakushuin students visit JICA Balkan Office



Gakushuin students visiting JICA Balkan Office

On August 29, students from Gakushuin Women's University visited JICA Balkan Office. On the day of the event, the office staff gave an overview of JICA and introduced JICA's initiatives in the Western Balkans, especially Serbia. The participating

students asked a variety of questions, including the activities of the JICA Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) and the status of Serbia's accession to the EU. After that, we visited Living Together, an NGO that supports people with disabilities, to

which the JOCV was assigned, and heard from the staff of the facility about the situation surrounding people with disabilities in Serbia and the specific efforts of the organization.

JOCV

Farewell Message of Arai JOCV

„I am ARAI Toshihide, JICA volunteer. For the last two years I was engaged in marketing support for activities of the people with disabilities, who are working at Decije Srce. I managed to fit in the community here and live a fulfilled life. Serbia has a very friendly culture, where people are close to each other regardless of age or gender. I thought this country was really safe and easy to live in for Japanese people. After 2 years in Serbia, I will return to my job in the automobile industry in Japan, and I would like to utilize the experience and knowledge I have cultivated here to utilize back in Japan. I will also keep supporting Decije Srce, where I worked, from Japan. I plan to sell products of Decije Srce in Japan and connect them with similar NGOs in Japan.“



Arai JOCV (first from the right) with his colleagues at Decije Srce

Introduction of Nakano JOCV

„Hello! My name is NAKANO Tsuyoshi. I'm 22 years old, and I've been playing baseball for 15 years. With my experience, I have a deep understanding of baseball techniques and training programs. I'm here to teach baseball skills and make sure everyone enjoys the game. One of my dreams is to see a baseball game between Japan and Serbia. I think it would be an exciting opportunity for players from different countries to showcase their skills and learn from each other. My goal is to help promote baseball internationally and bring the joy of this sport to more people around the world.“



Nakano JOCV at the baseball field

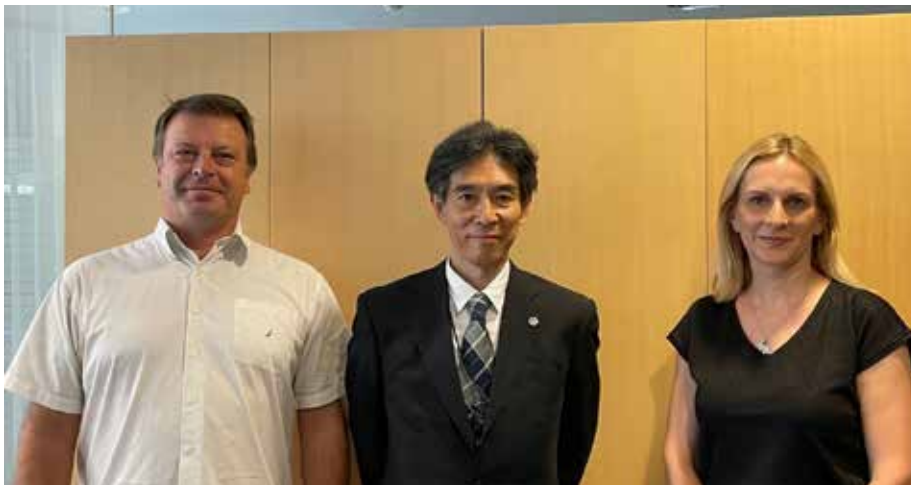
Welcoming of Ota and Yoshimura JOCVs

„Dobar dan! Drago mi je. Ja sam OTA Nao. I came to Serbia to support people with disabilities at NGO „Living Together“. In my hometown of Tottori Prefecture, I have been working in a special needs school for about 14 years, supporting and guiding children with intellectual disabilities. This is my first time living abroad, and I am spending every day fascinated by the city of Belgrade. The view of the Sava and Danube rivers from Kalemegdan is particularly spectacular. There is one thing that surprised me when I came

here. Tottori Prefecture has the smallest population in Japan, and I never expected to meet someone from Tottori Prefecture in Serbia so I feel some strange connection. When I visited my new post the other day, I was greeted with warm words by my counterparts, the staff at the facility, and the users. First of all, I will work to make life enjoyable with the people at the facility, and I will do my best to ensure that my experience will contribute as much as possible to improving support for the disabled in Serbia.“



Mr. Ota with his colleague



Mr. Yoshimura with his colleagues

„I am YOSHIMURA Yasushi. I come from Kyoto. I retired 2 years ago. The company that I worked for sells the manufacturing equipment for semiconductor and display, and I had an experience to establish a subsidiary in Taiwan. I also worked on internal audits and promotion of new businesses. As Volunteer in Serbia, I will be working in business management at Vojvodina Development Agency. I will live in Novi Sad. My hobby is playing the shamisen, Japanese traditional instrument. I would be happy if I had the opportunity to introduce Japanese culture to the people in Serbia. I would also like to help strengthen the bond between Japan and Serbia and promote mutual understanding.“

Farewell message from Mr. UEKI Masahiro, Former Chief Representative



Mr. UEKI Masahiro

Looking back to May 2022 when I was assigned as Chief Representative, our office was still under the influence of COVID-19 and our operation was largely affected. Two and half years have passed since then and we frequently go all around the Western Balkans to meet with our counterparts in person and to observe what is going on in the field. Now we are quite active more than pre-COVID time. Thanks to our counterparts in this region, we have been working with them under mutual trust, so that the project formulation and implementation are vitalized. I feel that we are now realizing our vision "Leading the World with Trust" in this region. I hope that Balkan Office will play more import-

ant role to build a stronger tie between Japan and Western Balkans.

Talking about JICA Balkan Office, I could really enjoy my duty thanks to the dedications of colleagues and was so excited with them every day during my tenure. Words cannot be enough to express my appreciation to them. And I must say that the life in Western Balkans was so comfortable to me and will never forget it.

Now I am assigned to JICA Yokohama Center that is in the best port city in Japan. If you have an opportunity to visit here, you will be fascinated with its beautiful waterfront.

Wishing you all the best.

Message of Mr. FUKUDA Hajime, New Chief Representative

I was assigned to JICA Balkan Office as Senior Representative in May 2021, and assumed the position of Chief Representative in September 2024.

My first connection with the Western Balkans was in 2000 in Belgrade, where I was involved in providing support to refugees (internally displaced persons) caused by conflict (I also visited Sarajevo and Skopje). At that time in Belgrade, the scars of air raids and economic sanctions forced the local people to live a difficult life, but what impressed me was that rather than a sense of despair, I felt a strong will to rebuild the society on the people's faces. About 20

years later, I returned to the Western Balkans as a member of the JICA Balkan Office, and witnessed the realization of the strong will of the people that I felt during my visit in 2000. I was amazed at the reconstruction and remarkable development that exceeded my imagination, and I feel happy to be able to work with the people of the Western Balkans to further socio-economic development. I am also grateful to have such wonderful colleagues in the Balkan office, including national staff, technical coordinators, experts and volunteers, and I look forward to continuing to work well with them.



Mr. FUKUDA Hajime

Introduction of Ms. NOBUTA Yumiko, Assistant Resident Representative (Accounting)

My name is NOBUTA Yumiko, and I was assigned to JICA Balkan Office as an accountant in September 2024. I am very pleased to be assigned to the JICA Balkan Office. Before coming to Serbia, I worked at JICA Headquarters for four and a half years, and before that, I was assigned to the Republic of Malawi in Africa for three years. There are many differences between Africa and Serbia. I was very surprised that I could walk

alone during the day and at night, and even take a bus. For now, the only Serbian word I've learned is "Hvala", but I think "thank you" is a word that makes everyone smile. I also like the fact that Serbian people greet me casually with "Ciao". I want to know more about Serbia and Serbian people. My life in Serbia is about to begin and I want to enjoy it.



Ms. NOBUTA Yumiko

Farewell message of Ms. IIDA Noriko, Assistant Resident Representative (Accounting)

First of all, I would like to say that I really enjoyed Balkan region and people's hospitality while I was working at JICA Balkan Office in Belgrade. From Belgrade, where I lived, I had a chance to visit Albania, Bosnia i Herzegovina, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, where our local technical coordinators work, several times during 3 years. Through my visit and work, I felt diversity and the beauty of each country and culture. My work at JICA Balkan was accounting and it is related to all the JICA's activities, so it was remarkably interesting to see each country's charm through my work. Now I am leaving, but I am looking forward to seeing future collaboration between Balkan region and Japan and JICA.



Ms. Iida's painting

Introduction of Mr. YAMASHITA Chigiru, Senior Representative



Mr. YAMASHITA Chigiru

Hello, my name is YAMASHITA Chigiru. I arrived in Belgrade on September 21 to commence duties as the Senior Representative of the JICA Balkan Office. I am enjoying my new life here with my family, thanks to the warm-hearted friendly people, delicious food, beautiful scenery and rich culture. I have worked for JICA for the past 20 years, mainly on projects in the areas of basic education, governance, and peacebuilding. I have experience working in JICA's overseas offices in Indonesia and Afghanistan. I have long been interested in the Western Balkans and have always wanted to work in

this region. Thus, I am very happy and excited that my wish has finally come true. I believe that my past experiences will help me in carrying out my duties here. I am looking forward to traveling around the region, meeting our partners in person, collaborate and co-create with our partners to contribute to the sustainable development of the West Balkans and the world, as well as to deepening of friendship and trust between the West Balkans and Japan.