

## **New Year's greeting from Ambassador**

A Happy New Year!

I am sending you my New Year's greetings and wishing you all the success this year.

Last year we, the Japanese people, were struck a terrible disaster that will never be forgotten. Almost 19,400 people lost their precious lives or are still missing in the Great East Japan Earthquake which struck Japan on the 11th of March last year. At a time when the whole country was filled with grief, we received support from the people and government of Estonia in various ways. For this I would like to express my sincerest gratitude. It is my heartfelt wish that the disaster area will be restored quickly and that those who suffered in the catastrophe will get well soon.

On the other side, the year 2011 was one of the most remarkable years for the Japan-Estonia relationship. The year 2011 marked the 90th Anniversary of the De Jure Recognition of the Republic of Estonia by Japan, Belgian, France, Italy and the United Kingdom, it also marked the 20th Anniversary of establishment of our new diplomatic relationship. Several high level visits like the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Yutaka Banno, and Her Excellency Ms. Ene Ergma, and members of Foreign Affairs Committee of Riigikogu were realized.

Throughout the year, we organized many cultural events and activities. One of the highlights was the Japanese traditional puppet theater performance „Hachioji Kuruma Ningyo“. In August the 13th International Conference of The European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJIS) was held in Estonia, Japanologists from all over Europe gathered and many research presentations were held. The former rector of the Tallinn University Prof. Rein Raud, succeeded to the position of the chairman of the EAJIS, was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star for his long term achievements in Japan studies and teaching Japanese culture in Estonia. It is also a symbol of the deepening of the relationship between Japan and Estonia.

Economic relationships were much strengthened last year. In particular, the decision to bring electric vehicles to Estonia by the Estonian Government had a great significance for the combat against global warming. This year we will see the electric vehicles produced in Japan widely used in Estonia.

This year the friendship towns of Estonian Saku municipality and the Japanese Saku city in Nagano prefecture will reach the 5th anniversary of friendship agreement. The number of Japanese tourists visiting Estonia has been growing year by year. I hope the exchanges on local and grass-root level will be further promoted and they will help the spur of mutual understanding between our two countries. Japanese sumo has gotten a fresh start and two new Japanese *ozekis* were appointed. Together with other fans, I am also looking forward to the Estonian *Ozeki* Baruto-zeki's new feats to come.

I sincerely hope this year of Dragon will be a year of progress for all of you and also in the relations between Estonia and Japan.

January 2012

Hideaki HOSHI

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Republic of Estonia