

【Visit Plovdiv City in Republic of Bulgaria, Sister City of Okayama City】

Hello, I am Mayor, OMORI Masao.

I was staying in Plovdiv City in Republic of Bulgaria, sister city of Okayama City, from 14<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> of November. Since European Capital of Culture 2019 has been being held in the city, I visited there as a leader of Okayama Citizens' Cultural Delegation which consists of 34 people in total.

Actually, the mayoral inauguration of Plovdiv Municipality was just four days before our visit. For the new mayor, Mr. Dimitrov, our delegation was the first overseas visitors. He gave a remark, "Your visit will certainly bring a luck to us. Please make yourself at home." Indeed, other municipal officials warmly welcomed us, and that made me so moved.

Our performer group part of our delegation made a performance at some events in European Capital of Culture 2019. The music of stringed instruments (*Koto*), bamboo flutes (*Shakubachi*), and drums (*Tsudumi*) was highly appraised. Especially, when they played Bulgarian folk music which is known as a winter tune in Japan, the audiences looked so happy.

In addition, our dancers showed *Uraja* dance which is one of the representative dances in Okayama. At the very end of the performance, the dancers invited the citizens to join in the all-in dance. That was impressive that citizens in Plovdiv and ones from Okayama danced altogether holding hands one another. Beyond the language barriers, we were definitely communicated.

After staying in Plovdiv, I also visited Sophia City, the capital of the country. For having meetings with sports related committees and federations about preparation training camp for Tokyo Olympic & Paralympic 2020. When I visited Minister Mr. Krlev of Ministry of Youth and Sports, he gave a commemorative gift to thank our city to the support for Bulgarian athletes since Okayama City agreed to host preparation training camp for Badminton Federation and Women's Wrestling Federation of Bulgaria. I met other sports committees such as Track and Field and Paralympic, and discussed the possibilities to host further camps in Okayama.

Reflecting the delegation this time, the bonds between the twin cities will be more strengthened. I hope that more Bulgarian athletes will join the preparation training camps in Okayama City towards the Olympic and Paralympic game in next summer.