

Hungary National Day

Continued strong ties in business, culture and education

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AMBASSADOR OF HUNGARY

Oct. 23 is a significant date not only in Hungarian, but also in world history.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was the first tear in the fabric of the Iron Curtain. Hungarians from all walks of life rose up against insurmountable odds to fight the brutal Soviet-installed communist regime. Thousands died fighting, others were tortured and executed and 200,000 people were forced to flee their homeland. Although the Hungarian uprising failed on the battlefield, it successfully won the sympathies of the free world, including Japan.

Decades later Hungary was among the first Eastern Bloc countries to abandon communist ideology and join the free, democratic world. The people of Japan could learn from an excellent NHK documentary about the Pan-European Picnic, when East Germans moved freely to the West across the Austro-Hungarian border in August 1989, and Hungary's role in the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Berlin wall and the reunification of Germany.

Hungary took a major role in bringing about a democratic transition in East and Central Europe, and the "wind of change" has gradually reached all nations in the region. It was exactly 11 years ago that 10 countries — including eight former communist states — joined the European Union in 2004.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire established diplomatic relations with Japan 146 years ago, and Hungary re-established them in 1959. In the long history of Hungarian-Japanese relations, we consider ourselves lucky for cultivating excellent bilateral ties in all fields, especially in politics, economics, culture, sports, higher education and technology. The past years have seen a significant strengthening of our partnership that we strive to expand further. Following the Visegrad Group (Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia), or V4, and Japan prime ministerial summit in June 2013, in Warsaw, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban paid an official working visit to Japan the following November. During his visit, as well as in the course of Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida's trip to Hungary in August 2014, and Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto's visit to Tokyo last year, a series of agreements were



Buda Castle, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and the Chain Bridge across the Danube are major tourist attractions in Budapest. EMBASSY OF HUNGARY

concluded. These agreements contributed substantially to the deepening of our cooperation and strengthened the friendship between Japan and Hungary. The foreign ministers signed a bilateral social security agreement that enables Japanese citizens residing in Hungary and Hungarian citizens residing in Japan to avoid paying health insurance and pension premiums concurrently in both countries.

The positive trend of recent years is also reflected in new Japanese investments to Hungary that were announced last year and are expected to create over 1,400 jobs. With over €3 billion in invested capital,

Japan has become one of the most important stakeholders in Hungary, bringing in not only a significant amount of direct investment, but also a highly developed corporate culture. Hungary holds Japanese investors in high regard and the government has signed strategic partnership agreements with four leading enterprises; Suzuki, Bridgestone, Denso and Takata.

Besides investment, the volume of trade between the two countries has also been increasing, especially in the area of Hungarian food exports to Japan. We proudly note that Japan is the biggest export market for Hungarian food

products in Asia. Hungarian meat products, including foie gras, salami, ham and premium goods made from the renowned Hungarian "Mangalica pig" have earned success in the Japanese market and already made their way to Tokyo's top restaurants.

Cultural exchanges between Hungary and Japan are thriving. Concerts by world famous artists, including Miklos Perenyi, Andras Schiff, Muzsikas, the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, Zoltan Kocsis and the Hungarian National Orchestra, reveal how much popularity Hungarian performers have gained in Japan. To our great pleasure, there is also a substantial interest in Hungary's traditional arts and crafts, especially folk dance and embroidery, in Japan.

Our two countries also cooperate within the framework of various scholarship agreements. Recognizing the long-term benefits of academic exchange, the Hungarian government introduced the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Programme, which offers 100 grants for Japanese students pursuing their education in Hungary. Students can enrol in fully funded B.Sc. and M.Sc. programs, as well as Ph.D. courses. Bright Japanese students, who gradu-

ated from Hungarian medical universities, successfully passed the Japanese national medical licensure examinations in 2015, earning recognition for our higher education system in Japan. Another fruitful example of our collaboration in the field of academic exchanges is the Mizuta scholarship program established in 2009 by the Josai University Educational Corporation and Josai's Chancellor Noriko Mizuta. During our prime minister's visit in November of 2013, the Josai University Educational Corporation announced the establishment of the Josai Institute of Central-European Studies, which will deepen the understanding between our two countries and also broaden the cooperation between the V4 and Japan.

Japanese-Hungarian exchanges are not confined to the bilateral level: the EU-Japan and the evolving V4-Japan cooperation add additional layers to our partnership. The V4 offers a platform for cooperation between the four Central-European EU members. It is a regional project in which Japan shows growing interest: our economies have survived last year's crisis comparatively unscathed and could become the driving force behind the economic recovery of Europe. We support the conclusion of important initiatives such as the EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and an eco-

nomic partnership agreement, and harbor close, longstanding ties with two other regions of interest to Japan: the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries.

To conclude, I would like to

take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt greetings to the readers of The Japan Times and all Hungarians residing in Japan. I believe that the friendship between our nations will continue to blossom.

Congratulations on the Occasion of the National Day of Hungary

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