

Hungary national day

A successful year for Hungarian-Japanese relations

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Today, Oct. 23, we celebrate our youngest national memorial day, when we remember the starting date of the revolution against Soviet-installed communist tyranny in 1956. Although the revolution itself was suppressed and failed on the battlefield, the courageous fight bore fruit: On this day in 1956 the world had changed and would never be the same as before, the first crack on the wall of the Eastern bloc had been made as a result of the glorious uprising by our forefathers. The news of the brave fight of the Hungarians against an insurmountable enemy had spread around the world, drawing the attention and admiration of the free world, including Japan. There was an overflow of sympathy toward the Hungarian fighters and for the 200,000 refugees who were forced to leave their home country to avoid persecution. In November 1956, a civil association was formed in Japan with politicians, journalists, scholars and many other sympathizers.



A similar wave of wide-spreading sympathy was felt in Hungary this year after Japan had suffered one of the biggest disasters in history. Both the government and civilians rushed to collect donations and organized charity events. The most beautiful moment was when a group of high school students from Japan traveled to Hungary on the invitation of the city of Hodmezovasarhely. Besides sympathy, Hungarian people have been watching with great admiration how strongly, resiliently and bravely the Japanese people are trying to overcome the hardships they have had to face, which are incomprehensible to most of us.

This was not the only successful cooperation between Japan and Hungary this year. In 2011, Hungary was not only the presiding country of the council of the European Union, but also the co-chair of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) together with Japan. With mutual efforts the ASEM process can look back on a successful year. The highlight was the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in June held in the beautiful city of Godollo, where we had the honor to welcome then Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto. The other highlight of diplomacy was the Japan-Hungary summit meeting in May



Solidarity: Hungarian President Pal Schmitt welcomes students from Fukushima Prefecture at the presidential palace in Budapest in July. TAMAS GRIECHISCH

between then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and his counterpart, Viktor Orban.

Our friendly relations do not only cover politics and diplomacy, but range from culture to education at a much wider horizon. Moreover, it has always been the civic ties, the people-to-people connections that have been the real engine of Japanese-Hungarian relations and have kept our friendship alive and vi-

brant. Speaking of culture, I have to emphasize that 2011 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of one of the most famous Hungarian composers, Ferenc (Franz) Liszt. During the anniversary year, several musical events are being held in Japan. Liszt's name sounds familiar to many people in Japan; the music academy in Budapest bearing his name attracts a high number of young Japanese musicians who want

to refine their musical skills. Besides Liszt, I also have to mention Zoltan Kodaly, whose 130th anniversary will be celebrated next year, who is best known in Japan outside Hungary thanks to his famous music teaching method that is widely applied in Japan.

2011 was also a year of boom in the development in educational relationships between our countries. In this year a total of

16 Hungarian students were given the chance to study at Josai University and Josai International University. Besides the Monbusho (education ministry) and other governmental and private scholarship programs, this is an exceptional opportunity for young Hungarian students who are devoted to Japanese culture and wish to study in Japan.

As 2011 was a challenging year for Japan, it was also a challenge for Hungary as well, but from a different perspective. Hungary has been going through a difficult but successful financial stabilization process during which we have been able to radically reduce both the budget deficit and the size of the government debt. This is exceptional in the world. The Hungarian government took a very difficult way to improve both state finances and competitiveness, which involved reducing both government expenditures and the tax burdens impeding economic growth. That doesn't mean Hungary has the economic crisis behind it; even next year will be a difficult and challenging one. But with the improving competitiveness and business environment, we are waiting for further investments from Japanese companies, who are the most important investors from Asia.

With my closing words I greet all Hungarians living, studying and working here in Japan, who make an invisible but important

contribution to Hungarian-Japanese ties. The history of Japanese-Hungarian relations shows that the strongest foundation of our fruitful and friendly relations

is the ties between individuals and civic groups. On this occasion I am wishing them and all the readers of The Japan Times a very pleasant national day!

Congratulations on the Occasion of the National Day of the Republic of Hungary

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