

Austria national day

Varied exchanges lead to strong support for Japan

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AMBASSADOR OF AUSTRIA

After Japan was affected this spring by one of the worst natural disasters in its long history, Austria and the world looked with deep respect and admiration at the composure, calmness and discipline of the Japanese people in coping with the tremendous challenges.

In my capacity as the ambassador of the Republic of Austria to Japan, I would like, on the occasion of the National Day of Austria, to express my sincerest condolences to the Japanese people and in particular to those readers of The Japan Times who have lost loved ones in the disaster.

I am convinced that Japan and the Japanese people will once again overcome the challenges before them and will emerge from the strokes of fate strengthened and invigorated.

Support from Austria

The relations between Austria and Japan are based on deep mutual esteem and the Japan-Austria Year in which we celebrated 140 years of bilateral diplomatic relations was only commemorated in 2009. The Austrian federal president and the federal government expressed their solidarity with the Japanese people and immediately after the fateful events of March 11, the Austrian foreign minister dedicated the amount of €1 million (approximately ¥100 million) as immediate humanitarian aid and as a fast and unbureaucratic support for the victims of the disaster.

In August, a group of 21 Japanese youths between the ages of 15 and 18 from the most affected regions in Fukushima Prefecture was welcomed to Austria upon the invitation of the private youth service of Rotary Austria and under the auspices of the Japanese and Austrian ministers for foreign affairs. During their three weeks in Austria, the young people could relax in a beautiful landscape and experience traditional cultural highlights.

In addition to the official measures of support in the wake of the disaster, numerous donation appeals were launched by Austrian humanitarian institutions. The Austrian people, in showing solidarity with and support of Japan and the Japanese people, donated very generously to these private humanitarian appeals.

Art and classical music have long since been one of the strongest bonds of friendship and sympathy between Austria and Japan. Musicians and artists of the celebrated cultural institutions in Vienna and all of Austria spontaneously came together for charity concerts in support of Japan.

Among the many events and concerts that took place in Austria in the last months, let me highlight the charity concert A Bridge to Japan given by the Vienna Boys' Choir on April 14 in the Vienna City Hall and the performances of the Vienna Phil-

harmonic Orchestra on March 19 and 20 in the Golden Hall in Vienna.

For the Vienna Boys' Choir and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Japan has for more than 50 years become a second home. With their charity events both institutions tried to support Japan and the victims of the disaster and strengthen their special relationship with an audience to whom they owe so much.

The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, which was recently touring Japan, donated €1 million into the Vienna Philharmonic and Suntory Music Aid Fund that will finance music education for students from the Tohoku area.

Bilateral relations

To represent Austria in Japan as an ambassador has for me always been an enormously rewarding experience as the relations between our countries are devoid of problems and are based on mutual esteem and sympathy in which the people of Japan and Austria hold each other.

Though Austria is only a medium-size European country, its image as the country of classical music and art endowed with a beautiful landscape and impressive alpine mountains resonates strongly with many Japanese. Despite the events of March, visits by Japanese tourists continued to grow in the first half of this year and a growth in the number of Japanese visiting Austria is to be expected also for the whole of 2011. The most popular destinations for Japanese tourists visiting Austria continue to be the capital Vienna and the city of Salzburg, the birthplace of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Further proofs of this lively people-to-people exchange between our two countries are the numerous Japanese-Austrian Friendship Societies throughout Japan and the great number of partnerships between Japanese and Austrian towns and cities. Many of these partnerships exist between cities in the alpine regions of Austria and the mountainous regions of Japan, where winter sports and particularly skiing do have a long tradition.



Cultural scenes: "The Kiss," perhaps the most popular painting by Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), hangs in the Belvedere Palace in Vienna; the Vienna State Opera House (top right), in the center of the capital, is one of the most renowned centers of music in the world; at right, a "heuriger" wine tavern may offer guests live music over drinks and traditional food. OSTERREICH WERBUNG/ BARTL

Skiing was introduced to Japan by Maj. Theodor von Lerch, an officer in the old Austrian Imperial Army, in 1911 — exactly 100 years ago — and during last winter a number of events were held in the north of Japan celebrating this jubilee.

Common global interests

Cooperation on peace and security, the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law has traditionally been a guiding principle of the foreign policy of Austria, and our two countries share many common values and interests in these fields. In addition, Austria and Japan do have a similar outlook on many global issues and challenges, such as the environment and climate change or nuclear disarmament

and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Austria is traditionally in favor of strengthening the international multilateral system and in particular the United Nations. As host country of one of the headquarters of the United Nations and seat of important international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is currently headed by a Japanese national, Austria is an active member of the United Nations.

I was particularly pleased that our common term as non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council in 2009 and 2010 gave Japan and Austria opportunities to work closely together on global issues and to try to project our common values



and goals within the international community.

Key trading partners

Japan is one of the most important overseas trading partners of Austria and it is the second most important market for Austrian companies in Asia. The economic and financial crisis that had affected our bilateral trade relationship in 2009 has been overcome, and in 2010 and during the first half of 2011 we saw again a healthy double-digit growth in our trade relations.

Due to its favorable geographical location in the heart of Eu-

rope, Austria, and in particular its capital Vienna, is an ideal hub for Japanese companies conducting business in Central and Southeastern Europe. Austrian banks and financial institutions are well-positioned in these markets and Japanese businesses can rely on their efficient services.

I do sincerely hope that many readers of The Japan Times will have the opportunity to visit Austria and thereby contribute to further strengthen the bonds of friendship and sympathy between our countries and our people.

Greetings on the Austrian National Day

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