

Austria National Day Special

A year of unity, inclusion and hope

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Like shortly after my arrival in Japan one year ago, I again use the occasion of Austria's National Day as a moment of reflection: How has the last year been? Where do we stand now?

What will the future

bring? Of course we still don't have all the answers, but one thing is certain: We have an exceptional and exciting year behind us that confirmed we can achieve a lot if we stand together.

Japan was an excellent host to the Olympic and Paralympic Games under unprecedented circumstances. It is thanks to the outstanding commitment and tremendous effort made by all parts of Japanese society that this celebration of courage, excellence and life could take place. For the first time in 20 months, the whole world came together to build on a

long tradition of peaceful competition.

On behalf of the Austrian government and the Austrian people, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Japan for hosting sustainable, diverse and inclusive Olympic and Paralympic Games that gave people all over the world hope for a better future.

For Austria, this year's Olympics marked the most successful Summer Games since 2004, with seven medals in total. Seventy-five Austrian athletes came to Japan for the Olympic Games, with 39 women and 36 men competing in red-white-red this year, a beautiful sign of how far we have come in terms of gender equality. The last time Tokyo hosted the Summer Olympics, in 1964, Austria was represented by only 11 female athletes out of 56.

The delegation for this year's Paralympic Games was much smaller with 18 men and six women, but they won even more medals: nine in total — one gold, five silver and three bronze. We were particularly thrilled to share their excitement and be witness to the remarkable achievements of all sports-women and sportsmen in the Paralympic Games.

I would like to thank all host towns across Japan for their wonderful support and the encouragement they provided for our athletes. Azumino, Nagano Prefecture; Fuchu, Tokyo; Hanamaki and Yahaba, Iwate Prefecture; Kameoka, Kyoto Prefecture; Nasushiobara, Tochigi Prefecture; and Saijo, Ehime Prefecture, went to great lengths to build on existing, long-standing partnerships and find new and exhilarating ways to rejoice and cheer. Food, music, culture, youth and educational projects and programs were all part of what the host towns prepared to strengthen people-to-people contacts and relations between our nations.

The Austrian Cultural Forum on behalf of EUNIC Japan (European Union National Institutes for Culture Japan) and in cooperation with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government organized a Paralympics photo exhibition in Tokyo including contributions from 16 European countries and Japan this summer. The exhibition held at Tosei Gallery at the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly Building under the title "Spirit in Motion" — the official motto of the Paralympic Games — was a successful way to highlight the impor-



Front row, left to right: Austrian Paralympic medal winners Florian Brungraber (triathlon, silver), Walter Ablinger (cycling, gold, bronze), Alexander Gritsch (cycling, double silver), Thomas Fruewirth (cycling, double silver). Back row, left to right: Maria Rauch-Kallat (Austrian Paralympic Committee president), Pepo Puch (equestrian, double silver) and Petra Huber (Austrian Paralympic Committee secretary-general) OPC / GEPA PICTURES

tance of disability inclusion and celebrate the unique determination and capabilities of all athletes.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo this year were a source of pride and joy for all of us. They provided us with much-needed distraction and relief during a difficult period of time. It is in this spirit that we look ahead to a bright future — with the confidence that we can achieve a lot together.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.

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Greetings on the Austrian National Day

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