

Italy national day

Embassy seeks to cheer up Japan

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STAFF WRITER

Italian Ambassador Vincenzo Petrone remembers being stuck in traffic on his way back to the embassy in Tokyo when the March 11 disaster occurred.

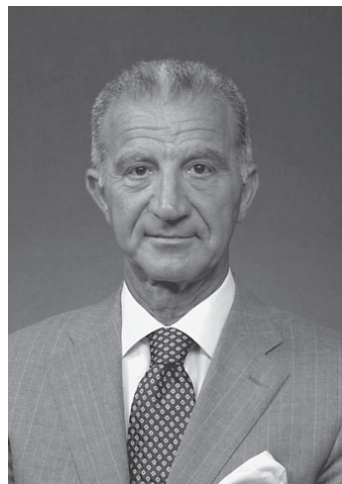
"I was astonished by the immediate response of the authorities. The police were at the intersections regulating traffic and people were walking on the sidewalks without any panic," Petrone said in a recent interview with The Japan Times. "I found it really exceptional."

Embassy's reaction

Activating its emergency plan in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, the embassy made it a priority to check the safety and whereabouts of Italian citizens in Japan. The embassy also gathered information about the disaster and passed that on to the government and people in Italy.

"We started monitoring all the TV channels and talked with other European embassies to find out the next step," Petrone said.

The embassy sent 12 staff members to the consulate in



Vincenzo Petrone, ambassador of Italy to Japan

Osaka to support operations there as Alitalia flights normally departing from Narita were leaving from Osaka instead.

"The embassy in Tokyo did not close and kept functioning," Petrone said.

According to Petrone, some Italian families with small children temporarily moved to Osaka, Kyoto or Shizuoka, but very few of them left Japan. In about two weeks after the disaster, probably 90 percent of the Italian community was back in To-

kyo, Petrone said.

The embassy asked the Italian government to organize solidarity meetings and one of them was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome on April 5. The meeting helped mobilize relief efforts from major Italian companies. Many companies are now providing help in the affected areas.

"Some of the companies are scheduled to auction expensive cars and luxury items at the embassy so that the revenue can be used to help relief efforts," Petrone said. "Also, we encouraged the general public to make contributions. The Japanese Embassy in Rome opened an account in order to receive donations."

Petrone added, "We decided to respond in perfect accordance with the Japanese government and to wait to see what precisely was needed. I went to visit a hospital in Ishinomaki city in Miyagi Prefecture to allow some Italian companies to rehabilitate it."

In the meantime, the Italian community in Tokyo delivers relief supplies and Italian food to Rikuzentakata city in Iwate Prefecture once every two weeks.

"This will continue," Petrone said.

As for trade and business between Italy and Japan, the figures for March and April were much affected by the disaster, as was expected.

"The main problem has been the supply of sensitive electronic components, mainly for the

automotive industry of Italy," Petrone said. "Japan is the supply center of essential components in many areas. I think the Japanese government and institutions themselves have realized how important Japan is for the rest of the world. Fortunately, the Japanese manufacturing system is already recovering very quickly."

Italian nuclear policy

Following the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986, a referendum took place in Italy in 1987 that resulted in a government decision not to count on nuclear power and the shutting down of the country's four nuclear power plants by 1990.

Last year, the government submitted legislation to return to nuclear power. However, after the Fukushima nuclear accident in March, the government of Italy decided to freeze the plans momentarily. Other governments globally are reviewing their atomic plans.

"The Italian government has decided to take a one-year suspension as a way to assess how risky nuclear plants in Italy may be," Petrone said. "So we decided to wait one year to study the situation and take advantage of the lessons learned in Japan and then decide whether we want to go ahead with nuclear energy."

Italy is also prone to earthquakes, just like Japan. In 1908, a tremendous earthquake that claimed more than 100,000 lives occurred in Messina, Sicily, and most recently, there was a series of earthquakes in L'Aquila, cen-

tral Italy, in 2009. So the point that particularly interests the Italian technological researchers will be what effects the earthquake had on the Fukushima plant.

Petrone added, "Currently, we import almost 20 percent of our electricity from abroad while producing power mainly from natural gas. Italian electricity is extremely expensive because of that."

Thanks to past investments, Italy has established a network of pipelines that allow permanent connections with Algeria, Libya and Russia, and is constructing a new pipeline with Central Asia. So in terms of flexibility of gas supply, Italy is well-placed. The problem is the fluctuating gas market.

"In any case, we need to improve the economics of our energy production capacity," Petrone said.

Cultural events in Japan

The Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino music festival, which was on its Japan tour when the March 11 disaster occurred, was forced to shorten its schedule.

"But so far, there are no other cancellations for our cultural events," Petrone said.

From September to November, the embassy, in collaboration with other Italian institutions, is planning a substantial number of events as part of "Italy in Japan 2011," taking place throughout Japan.

"This year, we want these autumn events to be particularly cheerful. We want to participate



Setting of hope: The village of Pacentro near L'Aquila in Abruzzo, which was struck by a devastating earthquake in 2009, was a location for the film "The American" (starring George Clooney and opening July 2 in Japan), which aims to help the region recover. FOTOTECA ENIT

in the efforts taking place in Tokyo to cheer people up," Petrone said. "In November, we are planning a major wine event, in which more than 100 Italian wine producers are coming to Tokyo and offering their products. Several thousand people will be saying 'kanpai' for Japan's recovery."

Toward Japan's recovery

"I believe that solidarity with Japan should be shown in facts," Petrone said.

Italy is not creating obstacles to the import of Japanese products because of the fear of radioactivity. Fortunately, except for one single case toward Japanese towels, there has been no Japanese merchandise, whether industrial or agricultural, that has been stopped at the Italian bor-

der.

Also, the embassy will keep going on as usual with Italian events in Japan.

"And then we have to explore how to negotiate with Japan on trade. This is perhaps going to be an occasion just like the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to open up Japan," Petrone said.

According to Petrone, Japan can export and import twice as much as it currently is doing. Japanese consumers are extremely well-protected by Japanese authorities, but so are Italian consumers, so Petrone thinks Japanese institutions should be more open to accepting other countries' ways of certifying the safety of various products.

"And this is where this crisis will help," he said. "When the

European Union started in the late 1950s, some of the largest Italian companies were much against the EU as they were afraid that the Italian market would be flooded by German or French competitors. This was nonsense. The opposite happened. Our cars, wines, fashion and furniture flooded Europe."

Similarly, "Japanese food is the best in the world," Petrone said. "By modernizing agriculture, you can export huge amounts of high-quality items that could be welcome everywhere, including Europe."

"This crisis has shown that Japan will recover much more rapidly and vigorously if Japan opens up," Petrone said. "This is the time for the friends of Japan to speak honestly and openly to Japan in this respect."



Two Venetian Ladies: "Due dame Veneziane," a painting made around 1495 by Vittore Carpaccio, will be on display at the Edo-Tokyo Museum during the exhibition "Portrait of Venice — A Thousand Years of History," from Sept. 23 to Dec. 11. FONDAZIONE MUSEI CIVICI DI VENEZIA

Events for 'Italy in Japan 2011' span a wide range of interests

Since it was launched in 2007, the "Italy in Japan" program has been held every other year as a series of events aiming to promote Italian culture in Japan. Following a very successful program in 2009, the Italian Embassy, the Italian Trade Commission, the Italian Institute of Culture, the Tourism Promotion Board, the Bank of Italy and the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan are organizing a new collection of events for this year's "Italy in Japan," which has a very special meaning after what Japan has experienced so far in 2011.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy and the country is delivering on its commitments to the program, confirming the events — cultural, artistic, economic, scientific and technological — planned for Japan.

The organizing committee of "Italy in Japan 2011" wants to

show Japanese friends that Italy is always on their side, committed to strengthening friendly and cooperative relations, sharing experiences with Japan on the path toward normalcy.

The following are some of the major events:

Art Exhibitions

"Portrait of Venice — A Thousand Years of History" starts at the Edo-Tokyo Museum (Sept. 23 to Dec. 11) before visiting other cities in Japan.

The exhibition presents the World Heritage site of Venice, showcasing its political institutions, international relations, industries, everyday life and art of the city that had been for centuries the leading power on the eastern Mediterranean Sea. On display are masterpieces by artist such as Vittore Carpaccio, Gentile Bellini, Cesare Vecellio, Pietro Longhi, Jacopo Tintoretto, Giambattista Tiepolo and



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Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal) among the many others. The exhibition will also provide an opportunity to learn about the contemporary conditions and the ongoing battle to preserve the city and its fragile environment.

"Giovanni Segantini: Light and Mountains" features the great Italian who depicted landscapes of the Alps. On display are 71 works ranging from his earlier days to the later works, selected from the collection of the Segantini Museum in Switzerland and other museums. The exhibition starts from the Sagawa Art Museum in Shiga Prefecture (July 16 to Aug. 21) and will tour several locations across Japan, including Tokyo.

"Leonardo and the Idea of Beauty" examines the thoughts of Leonardo da Vinci as he sought to create beauty in his masterpieces as well as around 70 works of his school and followers, including a variety of Mona Lisas. The exhibition

starts from the Shizuoka City Museum of Art (Nov. 3 to Dec. 25) and will visit Fukuoka and Tokyo.

The Uffizi Virtual Museum will take place at the Italian Cultural Institute (Nov. 21 to Dec. 8) in a joint effort to promote some of the most important and appreciated Italian cultural assets in a constructive combination with the most advanced developments in the field of modern technology for the fine arts, provided by the Digital Image System Project of Hitachi (Japan) and Centrica Srl. (Italy).

Musical Performances

Teatro Comunale di Bologna, directed by maestro Michele Mariotti, is coming back to Japan (Tokyo Bunka Kaikan and the Bivako Hall in Otsu, Shiga Prefecture). Performers include internationally renowned singers, such as Jonas Kaufmann, Desiree Rancatore and Juan Diego Florez.

Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia,

conducted by Antonio Pappano and in collaboration with pianist Boris Berezovsky, will perform a series of concerts with the lyrics from Verdi, Puccini, Liszt, Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, in Tokyo and other cities (Nagoya, Kyoto, Fukuji) starting from Oct. 1.

I Musici, a group of 12 talented Italian musicians who graduated from the National Academy of Santa Cecilia, celebrate their 60th anniversary with a lengthy tour in many cities in Japan, throughout the month of October.

International Meetings

The 23rd Edition of the Italy-Japan Business Group (IJBG) meeting will be held in Kyoto in October. The IJBG's action is aimed at promoting a reciprocal knowledge of Italy's and Japan's economic and financial systems to further strengthen the bilateral cooperation. The event will involve the most dynamic players of the Italian and Japanese economy, offering an extraordinary opportunity to develop entrepreneurial ties and business relationships.

The 24th World Congress of Architecture will be held in Tokyo (Sept. 25 to Oct. 1), with the Italian Embassy and the Italian Institute of Culture organizing seminars and events to highlight the role of Italy in architecture with the participation of some of

the most important Japanese and Italian experts and architects, among them the President of the Venice Biennale Paolo Baratta and renowned architect Kazuyo Sejima.

"Tradition and globalization: Christianity, Buddhism and the challenges of modernity" will take place at the Italian Institute of Culture in Tokyo and at Mount Koya in Wakayama Prefecture (Oct. 27 to Nov. 1). Organized by Communion and Liberation, a movement of the Italian Catholic Church, the meeting will have renowned experts and commentators from Italy and Japan discuss the impact of religion on today's society.

Food and Beverage

The first Italian Wine Week will be held in Tokyo (Nov. 21-28). The main Italian wine producers and distributors will gather in Tokyo for the most important initiative dedicated to the promotion of the "Italian wine brand" ever organized in Japan. It will be a special opportunity for an Italian "kanpai" to cheer up Japan and support its efforts toward a full recovery.

Italian Fairs dedicated to Italian food and products will be organized by the Italian Trade Commission in cooperation with major Japanese department stores and will be held throughout Japan.

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