

Slovenia national day

A young nation comes of age

In the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, many nations have been providing assistance in various ways. Slovenia is donating two small houses to the disaster-devastated cities of Minamisanriku and Higashimatsushima in Miyagi Prefecture.

"It is the second round of our donations," said Slovenian Ambassador Helena Drnovsek Zorko in a recent interview with The Japan Times.

For the first round of assistance, Slovenia offered €150,000 through the European Union channel.

"These small houses will be for community use and symbols of our bilateral friendship," said Drnovsek Zorko, who has visited the affected areas. The embassy found the sites with the help of a Japanese volunteer whose husband is Slovenian.

"Slovenia is a small country. It's not a donation on a big scale, but we tried to show somehow the support from our people," the ambassador said.

According to Drnovsek Zorko, Slovenia is also prone to earthquakes, "so Japanese technologies, which are sensitive and aware of quakes and have a good protection system, are really welcome."

Located in southeastern Europe, touching the Alps and bordering the Mediterranean with a small portion of coastline along the Adriatic Sea, Slovenia covers an area of around 20,000 sq. km and has a population of around 2 million.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's independence from Yugoslavia. Since 1991, Slovenia has successfully walked the path from gaining international recognition to forming partnerships with the international community.

Slovenia became a member of the United Nations in 1992 and joined the European Union and NATO in 2004. It became the 13th member of the euro zone in 2007, the first new country to join the currency bloc since its inception.

"Now we are quite active on the multilateral field. We are active in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Two years ago, we held the chairmanship of the Council of Europe. Now we are competing for a nonpermanent seat on the U.N. Security Council," Drnovsek Zorko said.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, Slovenia and Japan have steadily developed bilateral

friendship in various fields.

"We have very similar views with Japan on a lot of issues, not just in the political situations, but also in human security, environmental and water policy and green diplomacy. We do have a lot in common with Japan and Japanese policy," she said.

As for trade between the two countries, exports from Slovenia to Japan were worth €16 million and imports from Japan were worth about €51 million in 2010. Trade is mainly in the tradition-

al sectors, such as chemicals and vehicles.

"But now the presence of Slovenian information technology companies has become more recognized in Japan," Drnovsek Zorko said. "We have some investments in Slovenia by Japanese companies, but there are many more opportunities, like tourism, logistics, green energy, information and communications technology, and more."

Besides economic relations,



Tourist attractions: Slovenia offers a variety of natural settings from the Julian Alps and Karst Plateau, which has more than 10,000 caves, to the Mediterranean Sea. The glacial Lake Bled (left) and massive Postojna Cave (right) are major travel destinations.

SLOVENIAN TOURIST BOARD / J. SKOK / MIHA KRIVIC

there are contacts between some cities. Slovenj Gradec in northern Slovenia and Myoko in Niigata Prefecture celebrate 10 years as sister cities. There is also the connection through the knowledge and experience of mercury between the Slovenian city of Idrija and Minamata, Kumamoto Prefecture, which gives its name to a mercury poisoning disease.

Idrija for centuries had the second-biggest mercury mine in Europe, which is now closed. Both cities have developed into environmentally friendly cities.

"You have to be aware of both sides of industrial or economic success. What is especially valu-

able for Slovenia and the rest of the world is that Minamata keeps alive these memories and stories about pollution. This is an important message," said Drnovsek Zorko, who visited Minamata in May.

Tourism is an important part of the Slovenian economy and also an important link with Japan. There are a growing number of Japanese tourists traveling to exciting places in Slovenia like Lake Bled — often named the Jewel of the Alps — Postojna Cave and Slovenia's capital Ljubljana.

Wine growing and wine drinking have a long tradition in Slovenia. The world's oldest vine

is actually in Slovenia. Even the Slovenian national anthem is a toast to friendship and good relations with neighbors.

Tourism demand has led to

the establishment of numerous direct charter flights to Ljubljana airport every year and of the Slovenian Tourist Board office at the Slovenian Embassy in Tokyo.

Congratulations on the 20th Anniversary of the Republic of Slovenia.

With deep respect for Slovenian nature and culture,
have common ideals and truly believe
that our friendly relationship will last forever.



Lumiere Honorary Chairman Toshihiko Tsukamoto and has had ties to Slovenian wine since 1983. He was awarded a "z REDOM ZA ZASLUGE" for his achievement by President.



Reiko Tsukamoto imports high-quality salt from the saltpan of the Bay of Piran. She meets Janez Bratovz at his restaurant JB in Ljubljana. She introduces Japanese and Slovenian food in a cultural exchange that strengthens ties between the two countries.

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