

Austria national day

Important partners through cultural bonds, trade ties

Bernhard Zimburg
AMBASSADOR OF AUSTRIA

On the occasion of the national day of Austria, as ambassador of the Republic of Austria in Tokyo, I would like to extend my sincere greetings to the readers of The Japan Times. Since my appointment in July, my family and I have had the possibility to get a glimpse into the fascinating city of Tokyo and its people, and I am truly grateful for the warm and hospitable welcome we have received.



Austria and Japan have many ties, based on tradition and great mutual esteem. This can be seen in the many Austria-Japan societies and the numerous towns fostering a twin relationship, like the one between Kawasaki and Salzburg. St. Anton/Arilberg and Nozawa Onsen are celebrating their 20th anniversary in 2012. This friendship and cooperation demonstrate the long-standing diplomatic relations between our countries and the values that connect us.

One year after

After Japan was struck by one of the worst natural disasters in its long history we were witness to a wave of solidarity from all over the world. The Austrian Federal Government dedicated €1 million (approximately ¥100 million) as immediate humanitarian aid. Countless donation appeals were launched by various Austrian humanitarian institutions. The Austrian people looked with deep respect upon the Japanese people and how you demonstrated such dignity and poise in this extremely hard situation.

Now, over more than a year and a half after the incident, there are still tens of thousands of Japanese people who have to live in emergency accommodations — 37,000 homes were destroyed which still have to be rebuilt. The reconstruction work will consume a lot of resources and time, but I am confident, that the Japanese people will, with endurance and strength, build a strong base for a new future.

Trade and energy

Appreciating Japan as an economic partner, Austria as a member of the European Union would welcome negotiations over a free trade agreement be-

tween the EU and Japan. This would definitely deepen the economic relations between our countries and be of benefit for both sides. Also, we look forward to the results of the annual conference of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which took place in Tokyo this year. A strong Austrian delegation participated at this international meeting.

Japan is one of the most important overseas trading partners for Austria and the second most important market for Austrian companies in Asia. Last year our exports to Japan reached a record value of €1.3 billion (approximately ¥130 billion) with cars, wood products and machines for the railway sector just to mention a few of the most important export goods.

Austria, and especially its capital Vienna, is also a very profitable location for Japanese companies. Its position in the heart of Europe ensures ideal conditions for conducting business in central and southeastern Europe.

Japan was forced to become relatively dependent on imports because of its limited domestic supply of energy sources. Nevertheless, refusing to fully rely on external supply, Japan developed a widespread network of nuclear plants to meet the high energy demand. And now, after the disaster of 2011, another rethinking might have to take place, leading away from fossil fuels and nuclear energy to renewable



Gustav Klimt: Judith I, 1901
BELVEDERE, WIEN

sources. In Austria, 70 percent of its domestic energy needs are covered by renewable resources. I am positive that, in the course of the next few years, Japan, too, will make important steps toward a more independent supply.

There is a good example for self-sufficiency and the effective use of renewable energies in Austria. Güssing — a township in the southeast of our country — in the early 1990s decided on a policy to completely abandon the use of fossil fuels for energy.



Cultural diversity: A vineyard is set against a backdrop of the Vienna skyline. Right: A presentation of "The Magic Flute" for children will be performed by the Vienna State Opera for the first time in Japan on Oct. 26. WIEN/TOURISMUS/LOIS LAMMERHUBER; VIENNA STATE OPERA/MICHAEL POEHN

The objective was to supply, as a first step, the town of Güssing and subsequently the whole district with regionally available renewable energy sources. Research and development followed and today Güssing owns a number of innovative technologies, solutions and patents.

Cultural bonds

Classical music has always been a vibrant link between Austria and Japan. The Vienna Boys' Choir and the Vienna Philharmonic orchestra not only attract Japanese visitors to Vienna, but in the last 50 years have also found their second home in Japan. In April and May the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan hosted the Vi-

enna State Opera Ballet, which gave eight performances in the course of the Wiener Gala. The performances included extracts from classical and neo-classical pieces. Moreover the Vienna Boys' Choir had the possibility to visit Japan for a two-month tour. In Tokyo they performed with the Fukushima Girls' Choir — a wonderful gesture underlining our mutual friendship.

For the Austrian Embassy and me, it is a particular pleasure that through November the Vienna State Opera — under the leadership of Dominique Meyer and the musical direction of Franz Welser-Möst — will tour through Japan for the eighth time, bringing four top-class pro-



ductions to Japan. This tradition, which recurs every four years, has already established itself in the opera's calendar and has become an eagerly awaited event for the opera ensemble and for Japanese audiences. Through these guest performances, the Vienna State Opera has built very close bonds with Japan. Maestro Seiji Ozawa, as former musical director of the Vienna State Opera, hugely contributed to this outstanding relationship.

This year is a very special year for art lovers — in July we celebrated the 150th anniversary of Gustav Klimt's birth. For this occasion, numerous special exhibitions in Vienna displayed not only the artist's best-known mas-

terpieces, but also innumerable drawings, sketches and prints. I am glad and proud that Klimt's anniversary is also commemorated in Japan. Toward the end of the year a major exhibition in the Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art in Nagoya will be dedicated to Klimt. The exhibition includes artworks from various Austrian museums. It will open shortly before Christmas and will also be presented in Nagasaki and Tsunomiya, Tochigi Prefecture,

in 2013. I would like to invite you, dear readers, to visit Austria and to experience the fascination that has long attracted people to my homeland. Knowing how inspiring it is to get to know another culture, I sincerely hope that you will have a chance to explore Austria, and thereby contribute to further strengthening the bonds of friendship and sympathy between our countries and our people.

Greetings on the Austrian National Day


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