

Austria national day

Working to build ever stronger bonds of friendship and respect

Bernhard Zimburg
AMBASSADOR OF AUSTRIA

On the occasion of the Austrian National Day, I wish to extend, in my capacity as the ambassador of Austria in Japan, my warmest greetings to the readers of The Japan Times.



Austria is a rich and stable country in the heart of Europe. Beautiful nature and a rich cultural heritage are Austria's trademarks. With the lowest unemployment rate in the European Union, Austria has successfully weathered the economic crisis in Europe.

Austria is not often featured in the news headlines in Japan. Although news about Austrian-Japanese cooperation does not figure prominently in the Japanese media, the scope and intensity of bilateral relations are quite impressive. The level of bilateral trade is significant. Cultural exchange and people-to-people contacts are sizable. This is demonstrated by a long list of twin-city partnerships and the manifold activities of friendship societies. Japan is considered an important and reliable partner by Austria.

Economic perspectives

As a member of the EU, it is not only bilateral relations with Japan that matter to Austria but also relations between Japan and the EU in a broader context. In this regard, recent developments, in particular the beginning of negotiations for an ambitious free-trade agreement between Japan and the EU, have been very encouraging. The EU and Japan together account for more than a third of the world's GDP. Impact assessments carried out in Europe estimate that a comprehensive EU-Japan FTA could help create some 400,000 new jobs. Both sides would vastly benefit from a further deepening of their economic partnership resulting from the successful conclusion of an FTA.

For Austria, Japan is one of its most important trading partners and the second most important market for Austrian companies in Asia. In 2012, Austrian exports to Japan have further increased, reaching a level beyond 1.3 billion euros. Austrian enterprises have extended their presence in Japan over the past few years. Some 900 Austrian companies



City of music: The prestigious Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra is based at the Musikverein in Vienna. TERRY LINKE

maintain business relations with Japan. Almost 90 Austrian companies have subsidiaries in Japan.

A stronger EU-Japan economic partnership would certainly also open windows of opportunity to trigger bilateral economic cooperation. I strongly believe that there are many areas where

Austrian and Japanese interests allow for closer collaboration and interaction. One such area is clearly the energy sector. In Austria, 70 percent of domestic energy needs are covered by renewable energy resources. It is evident that Japan for its part, is set to take important measures to further develop its capacities

in the area of renewable energy in the years to come. Given Austria's extensive know-how and experience, a new Japanese focus on renewable energy may provide more opportunities for enhanced bilateral cooperation.

Forestry and forest management are other areas where Japan and Austria have taken

steps to extend bilateral cooperation. A joint bilateral "Committee for Issues of the Future" has identified forestry-related topics as priority issues for its deliberations. And in late August an Austrian showcase on forest technology was held in Nagano exploring ways and possibilities to foster bilateral cooperation.

Cultural bonds

When you ask the Japanese, Austria is considered a country of culture. And as a matter of fact, cultural relations between Japan and Austria are genuinely rich, and provide very fertile ground for cooperation, exchange and people-to-people contacts.

Not surprisingly, classical music plays a very prominent role. Austria, especially Vienna, is still considered the Mecca of classical music by many Japanese. This image is corroborated by generations of Japanese music students who refined their techniques in Vienna and who, in most cases, developed a lifelong affection for Austrian art and culture.

From an Austrian perspective the cultural highlight of this autumn will be the Japan tour of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in early November with an extensive program of all Beethoven symphonies and piano concertos. The Vienna Philharmonic often refers to Japan as "our home in Asia." This alludes to the special relationship that the orchestra has developed with Japan and Suntory Hall in particular. In 2012 the Vienna Philharmonic and Suntory Hall jointly set up a 2 million euro "Wiener Philharmoniker and Suntory Music Aid Fund" designed to offer continuous support to the Tohoku region in the form of projects related to music and music education.

I also wish to refer to this year's Japanese focus at the

Salzburg Festival with concerts by the NHK Symphony Orchestra as well as performances of shomyo chants, introducing audiences not only to ancient Japanese court music but also to meditation music inspired by Zen Buddhism. By the way, only a few days ago, Kawasaki, a twin city of Salzburg for over 20 years, successfully organized public viewings of the Salzburg Festival's "Don Carlo" opera production.

In the area of architecture, another exciting project is generating a very exceptional cultural momentum between Japan and Austria. Ten renowned Japanese architects have agreed to design small experimental structures for the Austrian town of Raiding. The first building, planned by Terunobu Fujimori, was inaugurated in October 2012 and is called Storkhouse. Other buildings, 10 in total, will follow in the coming years, turning the city of Raiding, the birthplace of composer Franz Liszt, into a showcase of modern Japanese architecture in Austria.

Japanese architecture was also recently highlighted by the exhibition "Eastern Promises" in the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna. And another Viennese museum, the museum of ethnology or the "Weltmuseum," plans to showcase the model of a typical daimyo residence as

a centerpiece of its permanent exhibition. The model was part of the Japanese Pavilion at the World Exhibition in Vienna in 1873 and was rediscovered only very recently. It is presently being restored with technical advice from Japan.

The signing of a cooperation agreement between Hitotsubashi University and the University of Vienna this July has been the most recent of many scientific activities between our two countries.

These are just a few snapshots, but I think they exemplify the richness of the cultural exchanges between Japan and Austria. I also try to actively contribute to this dynamic by opening the Austrian Residence to Japanese and Austrian artists. Currently, artworks by the Japanese artist Seiichiro Miida are being exhibited at the residence.

Additionally, culture is a powerful engine for tourism. Every year some 200,000 Japanese tourists travel to Austria, very often also motivated by the wish to visit Austria's major cultural sites and attractions.

I hope that you, dear reader, will have the chance to visit or revisit Austria in the near future, and thereby contribute to further strengthening the bonds of friendship and mutual respect that exist between our countries and people.


Greetings on the Austrian National Day


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