

# Austria National Day

## Austria and Japan enjoy longstanding friendship

Bernhard Zimburg  
AMBASSADOR OF AUSTRIA

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Austrian National Day, I would like to send my sincere regards to the readers of The Japan Times. This solemn day rests upon Austria's Declaration of Neutrality in 1955 after the last foreign soldier of the Allied forces left Austrian territory and Austria regained its full sovereignty. Sixty years later, this legacy drives my country to engage in activities such as international peace-keeping or efforts for disarmament and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons.



### International institutions

This is also one of the reasons why Austria's capital Vienna is proud of being one of the four official headquarters of the U.N. and other international organizations such as the OPEC. Vienna became a hub for the promotion of peace, security, sustainable development, disarmament and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, as well as for the fight against crime, drug abuse and terrorism.

Already during the Cold War Austria served as platform for international dialogue due to its geopolitical position and its neutral status. The opening of the Vienna International Centre (VIC) in 1979 has strengthened this position. Since then Vienna is a seat of the U.N. along with New York, Geneva and Nairobi.

Among others, the VIC currently houses the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whose current Director-General is Japan's Yukiya Amano, and which has shifted its emphasis from the promotion of atomic energy to nuclear safety and the prevention of the improper use of fissile material. This year Vienna had the honor to host international negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program. Thirteen years after the issue came up for the first time a Joint Comprehension Plan of Action was finally signed in Vienna.

Another Vienna-based organization is the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), which is the only organization within the U.N. system to provide support for industrialization in Third World countries. Additionally, in autumn 2002 the Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was set up in Vienna.

### Home of culture

Besides political reasons international organisations also choose Vienna as a place for their headquarters because of the high quality of life it has to offer. During recent years Vienna has been ranked in international studies among the best 3 cities in the world to live in. In this regard, Austria's rich cultural heritage and traditions are very important. We have a wide cultural spectrum, which ranges from classical music to contemporary art and architecture. The use of the latest

technology ensures a high level of energy efficiency as well as an overwhelming use of renewable energies.

Austria and Japan have established diplomatic relations in 1869. Cultural exchange has been the cornerstone for our excellent ties ever since. Japan has become a second home for many Austrian artists and musical orchestras. This year not only saw the world-famous Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and the Vienna Boys' Choir on tour in

Japan, but also many other artists visited and performed concerts, dance performances, exhibitions, as well as presenting Austrian films. Numerous workshops in Japanese schools and universities strengthened relations on both ends.

### Home of skiing

Austria's location within the European Alps and its beautiful landscapes of mountains not only inspired artists but also was at the origin of the Austrian

passion for winter sports and skiing in particular. Ski slopes are easy to reach and the well-developed winter sports infrastructure and tourism services ensure relaxation and fun. For many of my fellow citizens skiing is a pastime, others however train from their teenage years in special winter sports' high schools to become professional athletes. This determinedness paired with the passion often guarantees top scores for our ski teams in international competitions. In 2016, after a ten-year break, Japan will again host a FIS Alpine Ski World cup race and Austrian athletes can

showcase their skills to the Japanese public.

Skiing also constitutes one of the many connectors between our countries. It was Maj. Theodor von Lerch, who, enthused by the Japanese mountains, first introduced skiing to Japan in the early 20th century. Since then many Austrian skiing instructors and athletes followed his example to promote this wonderful sport.

### High-level visits

As a final note it is my great pleasure to announce that we are expecting the visits of two Austrian federal ministers. At the begin-

ning of November, Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management Andr  Ruppelcher, and a few weeks later Federal Minister of Family and Youth Sophie Karmasin will come to Japan. Since Austria and Japan are sharing common interests, such as the promotion of forestry and renewable energies, but also facing a number of common challenges such as an aging society and low birth rates, these visits will be an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences and unite efforts for more sustainable development in both our countries.



UNO-City is the international center in Vienna.

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## Greetings on the Austrian National Day

  
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