

Italy National Day

After 150 years, friendly relationship remains as strong as ever

Domenico Giorgi
AMBASSADOR OF ITALY

Today Italy celebrates its 70th anniversary as a Republic. Moreover, this year we also celebrate the 150th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Italy and Japan. In May, Prince Akishino and his spouse, Princess Kiko, paid an official visit to Italy to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between our countries. During the eight-day trip, the couple paid a courtesy call on President Sergio Mattarella and Prime Minister Matteo Renzi in Rome and then visited Milan, Bologna and Florence. This visit underlines the excellent relations between Italy and Japan.

On Aug. 25, 1866, the representatives of the Kingdom of Italy and the Empire of Japan signed in Edo the "Treaty of Amity and Commerce," establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. Since then, bilateral ties have greatly expanded and today, as Renzi said to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his visit to Florence in May, "The friendship between Italy and Japan is a source of pride and joy." The G-7 summit has just taken place and several Italian ministers came to Japan for meetings with their G-7 colleagues. Following Japan, Italy

will assume the G-7 Presidency in 2017.

Italy-Japan relations are deeply rooted and vital, as we are like-minded countries on many global issues, sharing common values such as the promotion of democracy, peace, fundamental freedoms, human rights and the rule of law and we are proud of our traditions and culture. Furthermore, Italy and Japan face many common challenges such as the exposure to natural disasters, the necessity of meeting the needs of an aging population, the quest for secure, efficient and clean energy as both countries are characterized by shortage of domestic natural resources and their energy supplies heavily depend on imports. As far as these challenges are concerned, further cooperation between our countries in the fields of research and development, innovation, high technology and education could be very useful in providing effective answers.

Italy and Japan have a very strong industrial vocation and a solid manufacturing base that results in approximately 20 percent of their respective gross national products. Moreover, small and medium enterprises are the vast majority of businesses active in the Italian, as well as in the Japanese, economy, with many of them competing in global markets.

Economic relations between the countries are very positive. Italian exports, both in traditional and innovative sectors such as automotive and machinery are performing well. Alongside

the so-called traditional sectors, notably fashion, design and food, Italy is a global player with outstanding expertise also in high technology, aerospace and renewable energy. The bilateral flow of investments has been increasing in the last few years. However, there is still great-unexploited potential. We believe that the economic recovery of both Italy and Japan and a stronger economic interconnection will ensure new opportunities in the coming years. The conclusion of economic partnership agreements and free trade agreements between Japan and EU countries will provide important opportunities to further strengthen economic ties.

As high-tech countries, our respective economies are increasingly oriented toward new sectors such as biotechnologies, nanotechnologies, robotics, aerospace, energy and environmental technologies. This emerging trend can result in very useful cooperation opportunities in these sectors, among others. Moreover, high-technology products have high R&D intensity, making it very important to ensure funding for research initiatives and fostering international collaborations with universities, private and public institutions and research facilities.

Simultaneously, Italy and Japan pay great attention to culture and traditions. The importance of culture and fine arts has been evident since our first contacts. A testimony of these first contacts is the portrait of Ito Mansho, leader of the mission sent to Rome in 1582, painted by the Jesuit missionary Alessandro Valignano, recently rediscovered in a private Italian collection. The portrait painted by Domenico Tintoretto in Venice, together with the painting of the samurai Hasekura Tsunenaga, are important cultural and historical icons of the first relations between Japan and our country and for the first time they are displayed to the Japanese public at the Tokyo National Museum in Ueno. The exhibition, which began on May 17, runs through July 10. It will then move to the Nagasaki Museum of History

and Culture (July 22 to Aug. 31) and the Miyazaki Prefectural Art Museum (Sep. 9 to Oct. 16).

In the early stages of the Meiji Era and immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, many Italian artists came to Japan, upon invitation of the Japanese government. Among them, the painter Fontanesi, the sculptor Ragusa, the architect Cappelletti and the engraver and painter Chiossone greatly contributed to the modernization of the artistic tradition of the country. Therefore, since the beginning of our relationship, culture has played an important role. This is clearly shown by the reports of the famous Iwakura Mission, which visited Italy in 1873, describing Italy as the cradle of Western civilization and culture.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, both governments are committed to the organization of a series of events throughout the year, in venues in Tokyo and other cities across Japan. These events will all provide an opportunity to foster and deepen our reciprocal knowledge.

Concerning events organized in Japan, important exhibitions dedicated to Botticelli, Leonardo Da Vinci and Morandi have been successfully held, while others are underway, namely celebrating Caravaggio at the National Museum of Western Art, Pompei at the Mori Art Center Gallery, the Jewellery of Medici at the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum, Ito Mansho (as mentioned above) and Michelangelo at the Yamanashi Prefectural Museum of Art. Furthermore, in July we will open the exhibition dedicated to the Academy of Venice. In the spring, Maestro Muti conducted the "150th anniversary orchestra," comprised of young Italian and Japanese musicians; Maestro Pollini gave successful concerts at the Myuzo Kawasaki Symphony Hall and Suntory Hall; and Bocelli performed wonderfully at the Tokyo International Forum. The Ballet Company of the Teatro alla Scala of Milan will return to Japan in September and Japan Orfeo — an original combination of the

most ancient Italian Opera and the traditional Japanese theatre — will be performed at the Tsuruoka Hachimangu Shrine and the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre.

There will also be important sporting events related to cycling, football, horseracing and a car cavalcade organized by Ferrari in Kyoto and Mille Miglia Japan.

There are many other events related to the Italian lifestyle and things made in Italy. Last week, the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan organized a large two-day event at Roppongi Hills, showcasing Italian luxury fashion brands, cars and bicycles, presenting UNESCO World Heritage sites and serving Italian delicacies, regional food and excellent wine. There were also entertainment such as live music performances by the famous Italian singer Zucchero and other prominent musicians. Furthermore, the Italian Film Festival



Prince Akishino (second from left) and his wife Princess Kiko (left) are welcomed by Italian President Sergio Mattarella (third from left) at the presidential palace in Rome in May. KYODO

— a favorite of Italian film lovers during Golden Week — ended successfully in May, having screened some of the best contemporary Italian films.

Many other initiatives are on the program for the 150th anniversary celebrations, including conferences and events related

to science and technology and design and architecture. More information is available on the website www.italyinjapan.com and the social networks of the embassy (www.facebook.com/ambasciataitaliatokyo or twitter.com/ItalyinJPN).

The breadth and the excep-

tional level of the events taking place this year are the best evidence of the strength and depth of our friendship; a friendship whose foundation is rooted in the past and with a natural empathy that will accompany us in the years to come.



Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi arrives at Chubu Centrair International Airport in Aichi Prefecture on May 26 for the G-7 Ise-Shima summit. MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF JAPAN/REUTERS

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