

# Italians' rejection of nuclear power expected to have repercussions in Japan

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Italian voters adamantly said “no” to nuclear power generation in a referendum on June 12 and 13, a move likely to have repercussions in Japan, which is the centerpiece of the ongoing nuclear crisis that has added to the anti-nuclear power momentum in Europe.

In Japan, a referendum is to be called over constitutional amendments but cannot be held over issues like whether to resume operations of nuclear power plants, as seen in Italy. A senior official in the electric utility industry stresses that the situation in Italy is different from that in Japan, saying, "Italy had already pulled out of nuclear power generation, so the circumstances are different from those in Japan, where nuclear power generation accounts for about 30 percent of total power output."

By saying this, the official implied that the outcome would not be the same even if a similar referendum was called in Japan. Prime Minister Naoto Kan has also indicated that the operation of nuclear plants apart from Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant — which was suspended following a government request — can be restarted once their safety is guaranteed.

However, public trust in the central government and utility companies, which have long propagated the myth of nuclear power plant safety, was undermined from its very foundations among residents in areas hosting such facilities in the wake of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Governors of prefectures that are home to nuclear power plants have also expressed their distrust. "Safety comes first before power supply for the moment," said Saga Gov. Yasushi Furukawa, while Aomori Gov. Shingo Mimura said, "While the government maintains that there are no safety concerns for resuming the operation of nuclear power plants, it has urged the Hamaoka power plant to suspend operations. It is hard to figure out what aspects of safety the government looked at and how it assessed them in making its decision."

For nuclear power plants under suspension for regular inspections and other reasons to restart their operations, they will need approval from the governors of prefectures hosting those facilities. The prevalence of the anti-nuclear power movement in Europe could likely raise further concerns over nuclear plants in Japan and affect governors' decisions.

Junko Edahiro, director of the Institute for the Study of Happiness, Economy, and Society, believes Italy's referendum results would affect the public in Japan.

"The move in Italy follows that of Germany and other countries in their serious attempts to break away with nuclear power generation. The referendum results in Italy could prompt Japanese to wonder if they have seriously thought about nuclear power generation and acted appropriately," Edahiro said. "The referendum has also indicated the possibility of a political system through which voters can directly question crucial policy measures," she said, adding, "We in Japan would also be able to change the electric policy if we form and voice our own opinions about energy issues."

### **Mainichi Shimbun**

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\* Mainichi Shimbun, June 14, 2011

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