Foreword

What have the geographically and culturally so distant Italy and Japan in common as regards respective politics and political culture, economic structures and international relations? As it turns out and as the authors of this edited volume explain, quite a bit. The editors Silvio Beretta, Axel Berkofsky and Fabio Rugge have invited a group of well-known European, American and Japanese scholars to examine how and to what extent post war and present Italian and Japanese politics, economic and foreign and security policies are comparable and indeed similar.

Post war foreign policies and both countries' international relations in the post war world dominated by the East–West confrontation in particular come to mind when thinking of similarities between and parallel developments in Italy and Japan. Both Rome and Tokyo became staunch US allies after World War II and Washington's influence on domestic politics in both Italy and Japan was over the decades profound indeed. While Tokyo became Washington's 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' and ally supporting US security and military strategies to keep Communism from spreading in East and Southeast Asia, Italy was firmly embedded into the US-led Western alliance in Europe. After the end of the Cold War, both countries were charged with the task of readjusting their respective regional and global foreign and security policies. While Italy—above all through its NATO and EU memberships—found it easier to adapt itself to a world without a potential threat posed by the Soviet Union, Tokyo came close to having an 'identity crisis' after the end of the Cold War as Yuichi Hosoya explains in this book.

Italian and Japanese domestic politics and political cultures too are comparable and indeed similar as both countries were essentially ruled by one political party throughout the Cold War up until the early 1990s: by the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) in Italy and by the Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan. This political setup came to an end in both countries in the early 1990s when Italy's DC and Japan's LDP were voted out of power. However, while the DC's collapse turned out to be permanent, the LDP returned to power in Japan after only 11 months out of power. Indeed, what looked like fundamental changes to Japanese political culture and structures turned out to be a partial readjustment with domestic politics returning back to 'normal' in less than one year. These days, both Italy and Japan, as we can read in this book, are burdened by high public debt, the consequences of

ageing societies and structural impediments continuing to stand in the way of sustainable and solid economic growth.

All of this and (much) more is analysed in this book and the scholars writing on Italian and Japanese politics and both countries' past and present economic and foreign policies make sure that this edited volume is a very good and indeed fascinating read.

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