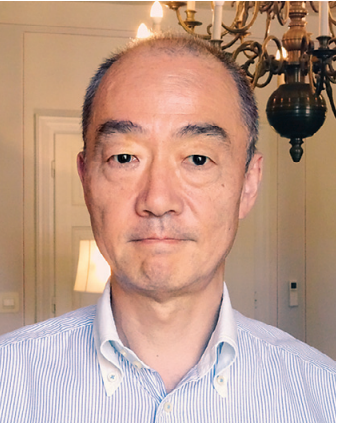




JAPAN AND SLOVAKIA REAFFIRM CONFIDENCE IN COMMON FUTURE



Japanese Ambassador to Slovakia Jun Shimmi



Former JETRO Vienna General Director Satoshi Abe



Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Peter Mihok



SARIO CEO Robert Simoncic



Traversing the Danube, the Bridge of the Slovak National Uprising in the capital Bratislava is among Slovakia's most iconic structures. Called the UFO Bridge by locals, it is the world's longest bridge with one pylon and one cable-stayed plane.

Four years after the 1989 Velvet Revolution that ended one-party communist rule in the former Czechoslovakia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic formalized the dissolution on Jan. 1, 1993, the culmination of a difficult, but peaceful, process dubbed the Velvet Divorce. Twenty-six years after attaining independence, the landlocked country has evolved from a manufacturer mostly of cars, textiles and machinery into a high-tech, value-added economy.

With a population of only around 5.5 million, Slovakia does not have a global profile as visible as its neighbors such as Austria, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine and the Czech Republic. However, the country knew it needed to capitalize on its central location and integrate itself more closely to Europe if it were to develop its economy. Slovakia joined the European Union in 2004 and adopted the euro as its currency in 2009.

To become a high-income economy, Slovakia laid out a competitive, business-friendly tax regime and nurtured an educated, highly skilled workforce, which is among the EU's most cost-effective and most productive. As such, many companies view the country as the ideal launch pad into Central and Eastern Europe.

When Shinzo Abe became the first Japanese prime minister to visit Slovakia in April, he met with his counterpart Peter Pellegrini. The two leaders affirmed their commitment to strengthen cooperation between their two countries ahead of the centennial of Japan-Slovakia relations in 2020.

During the visit, Abe promised to promote Japanese investment to Slovakia and announced plans to send a trade delegation, supported by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), to Slovakia's largest business-to-business matchmaking fair to be held in Bratislava on Oct. 24. He also stressed that Slovakia's economy will benefit greatly from the Japan-EU economic partnership agreement.

"JETRO signed a memorandum of understanding in 2012 with its Slovakian counterpart, the

Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency (SARIO), to organize several events that will promote ties between Japan and Slovakia. In 2016, we organized a new event, what we called a matchmaking fair, wherein Japanese companies could build relationships with potential Slovakian suppliers," former JETRO Vienna Executive Director Satoshi Abe said.

Abe official also said Slovakia, with its long tradition of car manufacturing, could be an ideal partner for Japanese carmakers and auto parts manufacturers. The country hosts some of the world's largest automotive companies, including Volkswagen, Land Rover and Kia.

As the political capital, Bratislava is the most important city of Slovakia. However, the second-largest city, Kosice is assuming a larger role in the country's economy. As the traditional center of education and home to the most prestigious universities, Kosice is unsurprisingly emerging as the heart of the country's information technology sector as several companies choose to locate themselves closer to the country's top talent.

"Once a Japanese company settles in Slovakia, we know that it will be for years. They focus on long-term growth and bring in new technology. Though business decisions may take longer, we know it's very stable. Japan, for us, is very important not only because of that aspect, but also because of the advances in technology and industrial automation it brings," SARIO CEO Robert Simoncic said.

"We want to grow and strengthen the Japanese presence in Slovakia. Many Japanese companies visit Slovakia with very little knowledge of the country and what we have to offer, but we easily convince them that Slovakia is the right decision for them," said Simoncic. "We have had instances wherein a Japanese company came to visit, met with several universities and investors in the country, and decided to invest larger and bring in their research and development team given the kind of talent that is coming out of our universities."

KVANT: GROWING WITH LASER-LIGHT PRECISION

Founded in 1995, **Kvant** produces customized laser systems for advertising, art and entertainment purposes. Having built a strong reputation over nearly 25 years, the Slovakian company exports its products to 60 countries, including the United States and Japan.

"Before, there was a misconception about the quality of products coming from Eastern Europe and customers preferred products from Germany. However, Kvant was able to remove this stigma and find success by producing high-quality



Kvant has become first choice for laser light solutions among small club owners and big budget show producers.

products," **CEO and co-founder Pavol Kubosek** said.

Committed to maintaining the quality of its products, Kvant incorporates components made in Japan and the U.S. to design the highly tailored laser light solutions demanded by its diverse clientele — from small dance club owners to producers of high-budget shows.

Kvant also recently moved into its new headquarters in the capital Bratislava in a space that allows it to double production capacity.

"With 130 employees, we want



With 15 years of experience, Kvant customizes laser displays for any type of venue or event and has won several awards in the process.

UPJS: AT THE HEART OF KOSICE'S HISTORY AND PROGRESS

Slovakia's second-largest city with over 240,000 inhabitants, Kosice has been the country's traditional center of education and innovation. With origins going back to the establishment of the Universitas Cassoviensis more than 350 years ago, the **Pavol Jozef Safarik University (UPJS) in Kosice** exemplifies excellent higher education and pioneering research in the country.

Composed of five faculties (medicine, science, law, public administration and the arts), UPJS also embodies the multiculturalism that Slovakia values deeply. Of its 7,000 students, around 20 percent are from more than 50 countries across the globe, including Japan.

Among the benefits of studying at UPJS is the possibility of obtaining a double degree with some of UPJS's more than 200 partner universities around the world. This extensive network of partners has helped raise the global profile of the university, which is ranked

among the country's top three.

UPJS also takes pride in the strength of its interdisciplinary research and transfer of technology that results from that research, apart from the intellectual property protection in which its Faculty of Law excels.

In collaboration with private industries, the university set up science parks for biomedical research (MediPark), information technology (Technicom), the Research Centre for Advanced Materials and Technologies (Promatech) and the Technology and Innovation Park. It is also one of the founding members of Kosice IT Valley.

The university also has an established support system for startup and spin-off companies, thanks to the rapid growth of those sectors in Kosice and the surrounding region. Among its partners in this endeavor are U.S. Steel, T-Systems, Global Logic, Deloitte, Ness Slovakia, AT&T, ESET and IBM, among many others.



Pavol Jozef Safarik University in Kosice

GGT: THE BEST WAY TO SELL IN SLOVAKIA



After more than 20 years, **GGT** has become one of the leading trading companies in Slovakia. GGT has more than 10,000 square meters of warehouse space and more than 10,000 types of products. It is also the largest exclusive distributor of many of the world's best-selling tobacco and supplementary products, including those of Japan Tobacco Inc.

Aside from tobacco products and complementary smoking products, GGT also sells food and nonfood products, office supplies, medical aids, gifts and decorative articles through a network of more than 640 company-operated convenience stores and kiosks, 14 regional partners and supermarket chains such as Tesco and Billa.

"Every day, we have around 300 vehicles on the road distributing products to nearly 7,000 sales points nationwide. We are also an importer for multinational companies that import products to Slovakia. Some of them only have administrative operations, so all of their logistics are handled by us," **GGT General Director Lubomir Baca** said.

In the last five years, GGT has expanded not only its product range, but also its activities and business network. It merged with Valmont and JAS (now GGT CZ, a.s.) in the Czech Republic, where it is now the second-largest distribution firm and sales network.

It gradually expanded its activities by operating an extensive business-to-consumer (B2C) online shop, Fuego, supported by its own mail-order company DEPO with numerous conveniently located delivery points. For its B2C business, the company is well established in the field of selling tickets for various events through the Ticketmedia network.

GGT attributes its success to its commitment fair play even while it has clear dominance in Slovakia and can steer the market in its favor.

"As we reorganize our company, we are also introducing new technologies to make ordering easy for our networks and new services to



The largest trading company in Slovakia, GGT operates more than 640 convenience stores and kiosks across the country and works with major supermarket chains Tesco Stores, Billa Slovakia, LIDL, Kaufland, COOP Jednota.

our clients, like logistics capabilities for our online shops," Baca said.

"Following Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's recent visit to Slovakia and the implementation of the new free trade agreement between Japan and the EU, we have become the best partner in this part of the world to sell and distribute tobacco products," he said.

→ www.ggtabak.sk/en



GGT General Director Lubomir Baca

“As we reorganize our company, we are also introducing new technologies to make ordering easy for our networks and new services to our clients, like logistics capabilities for our online shops.”

Reliable Trustworthy Partner

For your business, distribution and logistics.

We merchandise with 9500 kinds of goods

We have 9800 m² of available warehouse space

We operate 642 points of sale in Slovak Republic

www.ggtabak.sk/en