(Sponsored content)

Tuesday. September 24, 2019 | The Japan Times | 5



oduced by: GLOBAL MEDIA POST

JAPAN AND SLOVAKIA REAFFIRM CONFIDENCE IN COMMON FUTURE





Former JETRO Vienna General Japanese Ambassador to Slovakia Jun Shimmi **Director Satoshi Abe**

Slovak Chamber of Commerce and **Industry President Peter Mihok**

our years after the 1989 Velvet Revolution that ended one-party communist rule in the for-• mer 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. Twentysix 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 costeffective 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

SARIO CEO Robert Simoncic

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 secondlargest 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."



"People in Slovakia share many things in common with the Japanese. We are more on the modest side, not too assertive. We would rather do something right than talk about it. This makes it easy for Japanese companies to settle in the country. They find that Slovakians easily accept their system of management and systematic work style." he said.

Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Peter Mihok agreed: "Slovaks are able to adapt to any culture in a short amount of time. This could be the result of the long history of Slovaks needing to adapt to ever-changing environments. Whether working for foreign firms abroad or right here, they are able to accept the philosophy of each company. This is one of the things that sets us apart as a nation."

Meanwhile, Japanese Ambassador to Slovakia Jun Shimmi has highlighted two other important ways that Japan and Slovakia are building closer ties.

"Inbound tourism from Japan to Slovakia is very important. Vienna International Airport has two direct flights to and from Narita Airport daily and is less than 30 minutes away from Slovakia, which has a very beautiful UNESCO World Heritage site, the High Tatras," Shimmi said.

"Japan also started a working holiday program with Slovakia two years ago to enhance friendship and understanding between both countries. Both Japanese and Slovak nationals, aged between 18 and 30, can stay up to a year working in each other's countries without needing a work visa," he added.

For Slovakia to continue its success and stand out on the global stage, it must create even more opportunities for international investors. Judging by the current trends, the country has indeed seen a consistent rise in foreign companies setting up shop.

"People are welcome here. Come to Slovakia. We will show you around and you will surely be impressed," Simoncic said.

KVANT: GROWING WITH LASER-I

Founded in 1995, **Kvant** produces customized laser systems for advertising, art and entertainment purposes. Having built a strong

Pavol Kubosek said. quality of its products, Kvant in-

products," **CEO and co-founder** to continue growing the company,

while maintaining the quality of Committed to maintaining the our products. We want to prepare new products that will be very inreputation over nearly 25 years, corporates components made in novative and competitive," said the Slovakian company exports its Japan and the U.S. to design the Kubosek, a physicist by profession. Having developed a diverse

Among the objectives of the company founders is to introduce science and physics in an interactive and entertaining way. In line with this vision, Kvant is planning to open the world's first museum of n the Czech Republic in 2019

"We are very happy with our

experience with Japanese compo-

nents. We'd be open to collaborate

with Japanese companies for spe-

cial development of new products

and cooperate with them for the

museum," said Kubosek. 🔳

 \rightarrow www.kvant.com

GGT: THE BEST WAY TO SELL IN SLOVAKIA



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

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.

range of products, Kvant has been in the laser show production business for over 15 years. Since then, it has won several prestigious awards from the International Laser Display

Association for its laser displays, 3D video and laser mapping, holographic fireworks and water shows. "With 130 employees, we want



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

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 among the country's top three. 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

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 mem-

bers of Kosice IT Vallev. 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.

lt was also a sought-after Alliance.

partner of international net-Because of the various achievements and contributions of UPJS works and consortiums such as EuroBiolmagine (for imaging meth-Kosice has consolidated its status ods), XFEL (extremely intense X-ray as a one of Europe's emerging cenflashes), ECRIN/SLOVACRIN (for reters of education, science, technolsearch in biomedicine and clinical ogy, culture and sport. trials), and the European Battery \rightarrow www.upjs.sk/en/



Pavol Jozef Safarik University in Kosice

fter 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 obacco 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 ex-

panded 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 t has clear dominance in Slovakia and can steer the market in its avor

"As we reorganize our company, ve are also introducing new technologies to make ordering easy for our networks and new services to **GGT General Director Lubomir Baca**

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

\rightarrow www.ggtabak.sk/en

said. 🗖



