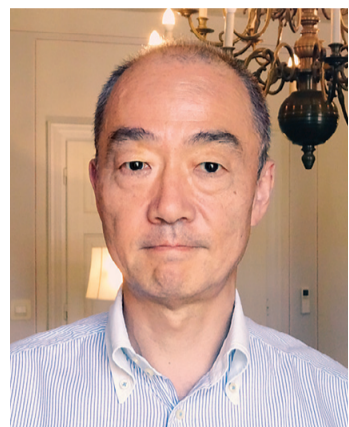




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# JAPAN AND SLOVAKIA REAFFIRM CONFIDENCE IN COMMON FUTURE



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."

"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 Slovaks 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-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

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

to continue growing the company, while maintaining the quality of our products. We want to prepare new products that will be very innovative and competitive," said Kubosek, a physicist by profession.

Having developed a diverse 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.

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 light in the Czech Republic in 2019.

"We are very happy with our experience with Japanese components. We'd be open to collaborate with Japanese companies for special development of new products and cooperate with them for the museum," said Kubosek. ■

→ [www.kvant.com](http://www.kvant.com)



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 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.

It was also a sought-after partner of international networks and consortiums such as EuroBiomagine (for imaging methods), XFEL (extremely intense X-ray flashes), ECRIN/SLOVACRIN (for research in biomedicine and clinical trials), and the European Battery Alliance.

Because of the various achievements and contributions of UPJS, Kosice has consolidated its status as one of Europe's emerging centers of education, science, technology, culture and sport. ■

→ [www.upjs.sk/en/](http://www.upjs.sk/en/)



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.

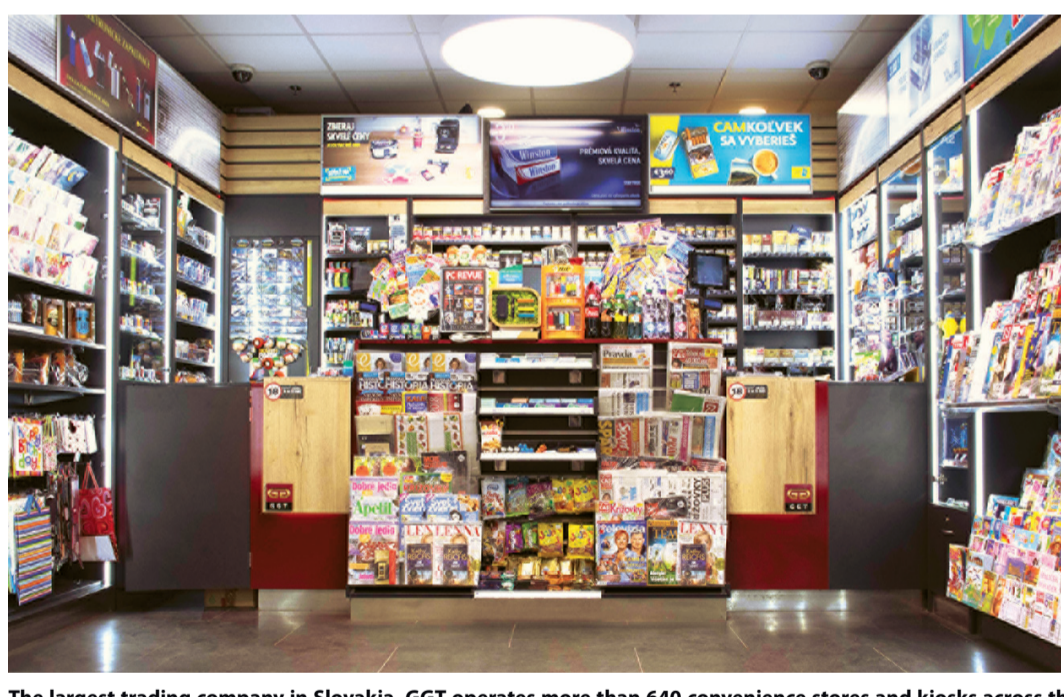
"Every day, we have around 300 vehicles on the road distributing products to nearly 7,000 sales points nationwide. We are also an importer for multinational companies that import products to Slovakia. Some of them only have administrative operations, so all of their logistics are handled by us," GGT 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](http://www.ggtabak.sk/en)

“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.”



GGT General Director Lubomir Baca

**Reliable Trustworthy Partner**

For your business, distribution and logistics.

- We merchandise with 9500 kinds of goods
- We have 9800 m<sup>2</sup> of available warehouse space
- We operate 642 points of sale in Slovak Republic

[www.ggtabak.sk/en](http://www.ggtabak.sk/en)