

# Slovakia constitution day

## A modern, dynamic, democratic country

Michal Kottman  
AMBASSADOR OF SLOVAKIA

Today, Slovakia is celebrating its National Day to commemorate Sept. 1, 1992, when the Slovak Republic Constitution was passed by the Slovak National Council. This strong manifestation of the representative body of the Slovak people, reflecting the longstanding desire of the Slovaks for their own statehood, paved the way for the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic on Jan. 1, 1993, after the peaceful division of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. On this solemn occasion, I feel honored and privileged to extend the deepest respect and most heartfelt greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, to the government and the friendly people of Japan.



Although it has a relatively short history, the independent Slovak Republic has undoubtedly written a success story. Slovakia has become a modern, democratic and dynamic country, trustworthy partner and respected member of international community. Ten years ago Slovakia integrated into the European Union and

the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and it has been a member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development since 2000. The country has been intensively developing comprehensive regional cooperation with the neighboring countries of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland as a part of — and currently holding the Presidency of — the Visegrad Four group. Slovakia maintains strong partnerships with like-minded countries around the globe, including Japan.

Close bilateral relations between Slovakia and Japan are based on sharing common values and principles. Slovakia, as an active member of the European Union, fully supports and contributes to extending strategic partnerships and deepening cooperation between the EU and Japan. Another dimension of our mutual collaboration is the Visegrad Four plus Japan format that has steadily evolved to a widening scope of interaction. The “2014: V4 and Japan Exchange Year” initiative serves as yet another illustration of the interest to further expand this fruitful cooperation.

Last year, Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino visited Slovakia to mark the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the Slovak Republic and Japan, following

the state visit of the president of the Slovak Republic to Japan in 2012. These high-level exchanges demonstrate the will on both sides to foster ever closer Slovak-Japan ties.

Economic relations between Slovakia and Japan have been positively developing. Bilateral trade has been growing, Japan is third-largest trading partner of Slovakia in Asia and there is a vast and unexploited potential for further increase. The central location of Slovakia in Europe, its stability, sound economic performance and favorable investment environment, as well as high labor productivity, motivation and the high degree of professional skills of Slovak workers attracted a number of Japanese companies to do business in my country, especially in the leading industries of the Slovak economy, automotive and electronics. We believe their smart choice will encourage more investors from Japan to follow, while hoping for a shift from manufactured products to research and development investments. Mutually beneficial and enriching collaboration in research and educational exchanges are becoming an increasingly important area of our bilateral relations.

Vivid cultural exchanges are a vital part of our ties, contributing to better mutual understanding between the two

nations. The soloists of the State Opera Banska Bystrica have toured Japan twice already this year. The Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra is scheduled to perform in Japan in November and December and exhibitions of winning works of the Bratislava Biennale of children books illustrations are taking place in various cities around Japan every year. The designation of Kosice as the capital of European Culture in 2013 provided an opportunity, both in Slovakia and in Japan, for numerous cultural and people-to-people encounters that continue to develop.

Slovakia, with its historical and cultural richness and natural wonders, is attracting growing interest of visitors from Japan. Eight exceptional Slovak treasures, such as the beautiful historic towns of Bardejov, Levoca and Banska Stiavnica; well-preserved example of countryside architecture in the village of Vlkolinec; or wooden sacral buildings, have a privileged place among the world cultural and natural heritage sites designated by UNESCO. A piece of Slovakia's unique folk culture, represented by the fujara wooden flute included on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list can be enjoyed by visitors at many folk festivals around Slovakia. I hope that these attractions, together



History fans will surely be impressed by the majestic Spis Castle, which is one of the largest castle complexes in Europe, covering over four hectares. It is included on the list UNESCO World Heritage sites. SLOVAK TOURIST BOARD

er with fascinating nature, traditional cuisine and hospitality could become an inspiration for more Japanese travelers to visit Slovakia and spend unforgettable time in my country.

In conclusion, I would like to express my high appreciation and sincere gratitude to numerous Japanese institutions, agencies and individuals, including several Japan-Slovakia friendship associations in

Japan, for their engagement with Slovakia and enthusiastic support of bilateral exchanges and cooperation. Using this opportunity, I am also sending my warmest greetings to all Slovak nationals living or temporarily

residing in Japan, who valuably contribute to making the bonds between our two countries even stronger. I sincerely wish readers of The Japan Times and all the people of Japan happiness and prosperity.



Winemaking has a long tradition in Slovakia, with modern wines enjoying great success at the 2013 Concours Mondial du Bruxelles competition, garnering three Grand Golden Medals, 19 golden and 38 silver medals. SLOVAK TOURIST BOARD

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