



# Slovakia and the democracies of Northeast Asia

Partnerships rooted in values

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The paper benefited from research assistance by Dominika Remžová and Eunika Rejtová to whom the authors would like to express their gratitude.



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## Recommendations

- The Government of the Slovak Republic should identify key issues for cooperation with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan and focus on their development in the long term. It should do so through specific projects, whether it is R&D in three key industries (automotive, engineering, electric engineering), the development of transport infrastructure, or (green) energy cooperation. Drafting an Asia-Pacific strategy would be a helpful tool to achieve this.
- The importance of Northeast Asian companies, especially those from South Korea, operating in Slovakia needs to become a subject of public discussion. Increased recognition of these benefits by the public can help to further improve the public perception of Northeast Asian countries and act as a driver for engaging in new cooperation projects.
- Slovak companies have so far not been very active in the region of Northeast Asia. The Slovak government could organize visits of political representatives accompanied by representatives of different Slovak companies. There are cooperation opportunities in ICT, blockchain technologies, cybersecurity, waste management and recycling, green energy, transportation, and the automotive industry.
- Slovakia's export to South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan remains rather low. A sudden increase in exports to South Korea in 2019 suggests that an increased number of political visits, which were accompanied by Slovak business representatives has a positive impact on Slovakia's trade balance. This is a trend that the Slovak government should continue.
- Slovakia's public diplomacy in Northeast Asia should be strengthened. Various cultural events like festivals and movie screenings have proven to be a useful tool in improving Slovakia's recognition among the Northeast Asian public. When it comes to the



country's presentation, not only traditional aspects of Slovak culture should be presented. Emphasis should be given also to presenting Slovakia as a country of talents and innovation. At the same time, it must be added that this must be accompanied by our own efforts to achieve such a state.

- Cooperation between the private and academic sectors between countries needs to be intensified. In this way, it will be possible to identify areas or specific projects with the potential to develop not only political or interpersonal but especially economic relations.
- Slovakia needs to develop domestic expertise in Northeast Asian affairs, which it is currently lacking. Local experts should be trained not only in language but also in the political and economic affairs of the region.
- Although Slovakia is following the "One China Policy" and does not have official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, it should continue supporting Taiwan's meaningful participation in multilateral fora, especially where Taiwan's participation is important to the Slovak, EU, and global interests.
- Slovakia thus should come up with its own clear definition of what it considers as suitable and unsuitable actions under the "One China Policy".
- The Slovak government should actively participate in policymaking on the EU level regarding Northeast Asia. EU is an important tool for Slovakia to mitigate the negatives of power asymmetry Slovakia faces in Northeast Asia.



## 1 Introduction

The year 2020 has been largely defined by the COVID-19 pandemic. While global travel has been halted and East Asia may seem to be a faraway place, the year's events have shown that the opposite is true. In a globalized world, the physical distance has only limited influence on the relations of states. Throughout the year, we have observed both the beneficial and adverse effects of globalized supply chains, in which both Slovakia and countries of East Asia are entangled.

The very spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes the COVID-19 disease, from Wuhan (China) to the rest of the world, and the subsequent disruption of the supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) like face masks, rubber gloves, or hazmat suits, are just one example of such effects. However, it would be wrong to assume that only relations with China were influenced by the pandemic. In 2020, Slovakia and Japan are celebrating the centennial of their mutual relations, which was supposed to be accompanied by numerous cultural and other events; these were largely put on hold due to the pandemic. Taiwan has provided Slovaks with several donations of PPE to overcome the disrupted supplies of these critical products. South Korea has proven to be a reliable source supplying Slovakia with antigen test kits which help with identifying people infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus and thus slow down its spread.

Furthermore, throughout the year we have seen increasingly vocal calls to re-evaluate ties with China from the U.S., but also from within the EU. At the same time, there is a growing demand to engage more intensely with other countries of East Asia, especially the three Northeast Asian democracies: South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.

While the relations with China and with other East Asian countries are not mutually exclusive (even though in the case of Taiwan there are certain complications due to the opaque nature of the "One China principle"). Nevertheless, when it came to Slovak foreign policy and both expert and



media discourse about it, China has so far received the bulk of the attention towards the region.

Nevertheless, as we will show in this paper, relations with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan provide Slovakia with more economic benefits compared to China, despite the relatively low attention paid to them.

In this paper, we aim to evaluate the current state of play of Slovakia's relations with the three Northeast Asian democracies. To this end, each country-specific chapter focuses on three distinct aspects of mutual relations – political, economic, and people-to-people relations. While the analysis of relations focuses especially on the past decade (2010-2020), it goes even beyond that when necessary. Based on the evaluation of the past relations, we offer several recommendations for policymakers both in Slovakia, as well as in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, which aim at moving the relations to a new level of mutually beneficial cooperation.

## 1.1 China and the rest?

While the primary goal of this paper is to discuss Slovakia's relations with the three Northeast Asian democracies, at least a cursory analysis needs to be dedicated to China as well. Assessing the relative importance of individual Northeast Asian countries, China included, for Slovakia, allows for a better understanding of the regional context and the role each country plays in the Slovak economy.

As was already hinted at, the bulk of attention in Slovakia is given to China, while other East Asian countries are relegated to a place of lesser importance in the public discourse. Media coverage of Slovakia's relations with South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and China demonstrates this trend.

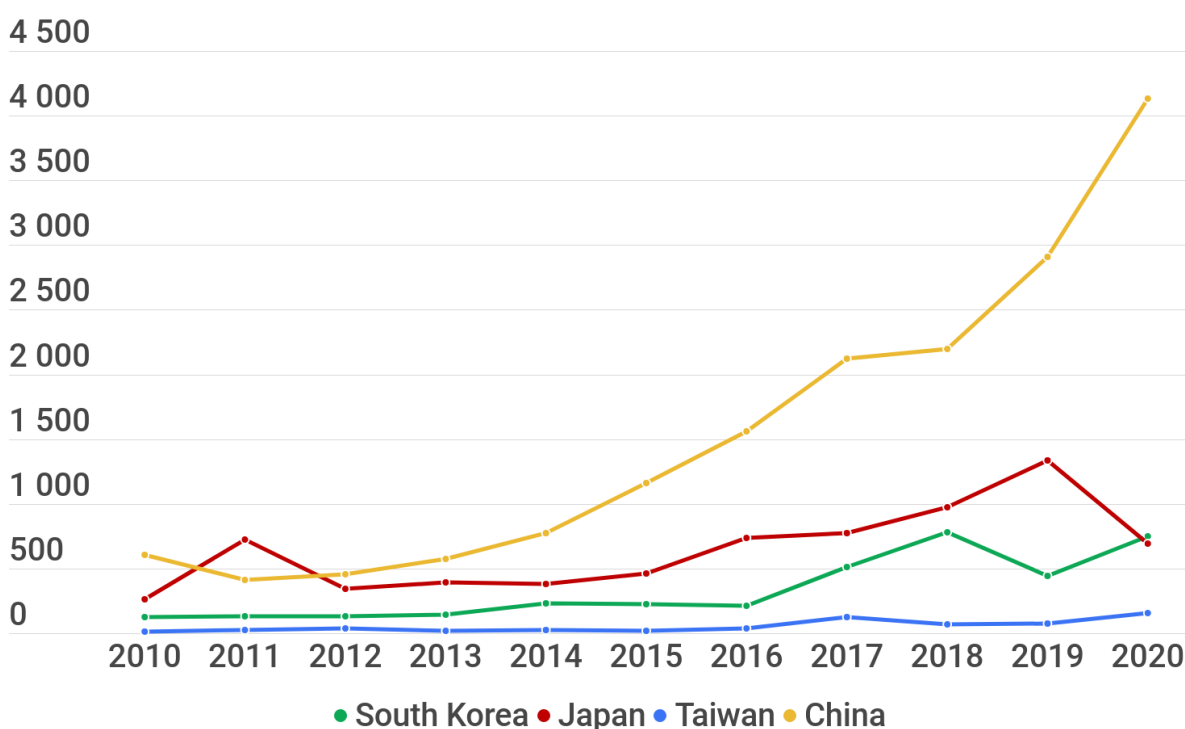
A search of various forms of media outputs, which mention Slovakia and one of the Northeast Asian countries within ten-word proximity shows a rising number of articles. The coverage of individual countries has increased by a multifold (ranging from five-fold to twelve-fold increase). This shows that as such, there is an increasing interest in the matters



concerning Northeast Asia by Slovak media audiences. Nevertheless, coverage of China surpasses the remaining three countries by a landslide.

Annually, since 2013, China has been covered more by the media than the remaining three countries combined.

**Figure 1:** Coverage of Northeast Asian countries by Slovak media (2010-2020); data source: Newton Media database



This is understandable to a certain degree. Unlike the remaining three countries, China is a global power, whose actions have a bigger influence on global affairs. As China is a communist totalitarian state, it can also serve as the eponymous “other” and thus can be seen as a more “attractive” subject for coverage compared to the remaining three countries.

Nevertheless, the relatively low coverage of South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan by the Slovak media is not representative of their relative importance for the Slovak economy, nor their public perception.





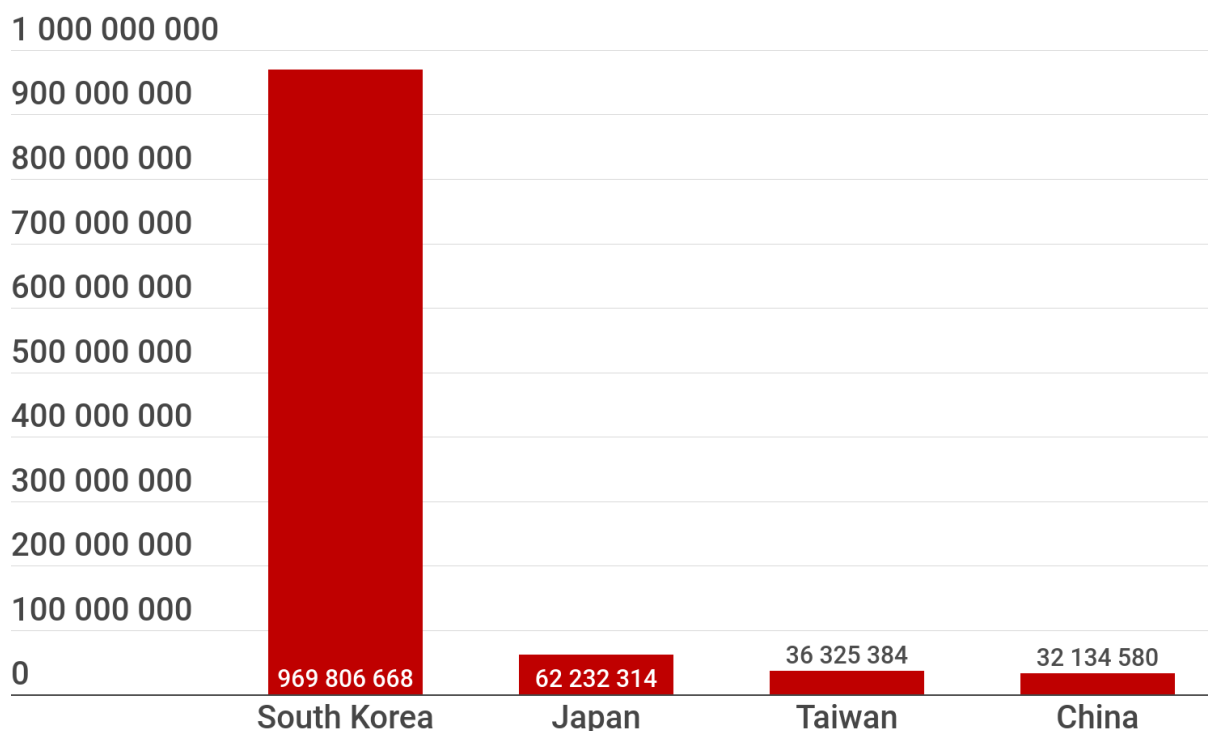
Over the years, Slovakia has seen an inflow of various forms of investment from all of the examined countries, as well as from China. Different sources measuring the volume of investment in Slovakia from the four countries vary to such a high degree that it is impossible to verify the actual amount that companies from each country have invested in Slovakia. To overcome this shortcoming as to evaluate the benefits Slovakia derives from these investments, two proxy measures provide substantial insights – the size of the workforce employed by the companies which invested in Slovakia, and the amount of income tax paid by them.

These two measures reveal almost opposite results than the media coverage would suggest. South Korean companies by a wide margin employ the most people and pay the most income tax in Slovakia, while South Korea receives the third-lowest media coverage from among the four countries. Similarly, Japan, whose companies provide a larger contribution to the overall Slovak wellbeing, is covered comparatively less than China. Taiwanese companies pay more taxes than the Chinese ones (albeit they employ fewer people), yet media coverage of Taiwan is only a fraction of what China receives.

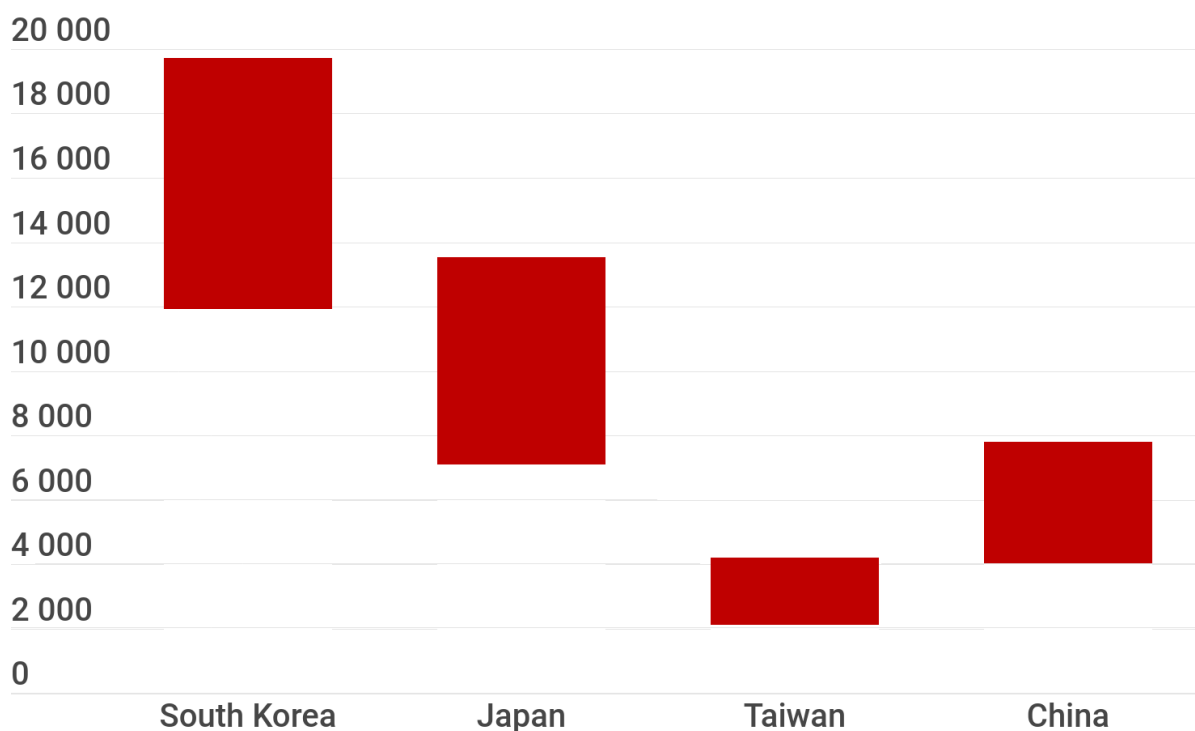
Compared to China, the democracies of Northeast Asia enjoy a better public image in Slovakia as well. Recent polling of public opinion by the Sinophone Borderlands project at Palacký University in Olomouc offers a glimpse into how individual countries of Northeast Asia stand in the public opinion. The polling, which focused on the perception of 13 countries (including China, Japan, and Taiwan; South Korea was not included among the polled countries) among Slovaks shows Japan as one of the most favorably viewed countries – almost 50% see Japan either positively or very positively. Both Taiwan and China are seen less favorably compared to Japan (27% and 28% favorability respectively), while Taiwan attracts a smaller share of negative views than China (36% and 42% respectively).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 2:** Cumulative tax payments by investors from Northeast Asia in Slovakia (2010-2019); data source: CEIAS & FinStat



**Figure 3:** Number of employees (intervals) employed by Northeast Asian investors in Slovakia as of 2020; data source: CEIAS & FinStat





## 2 South Korea

When looking at the bilateral relations between Slovakia and South Korea the economy is the most significant and most developed area of cooperation. South Korea is the most important non-European investor in Slovakia with its investment worth 2.9 billion EUR. Currently, there are about 100 South Korean companies operating in Slovakia most of them linked to the 2 major investors: Kia Motors and Samsung.

Even if economic cooperation is the most significant and most discussed, there has been an increase in intensity in political and people-to-people relations in the last 10 years. New areas of potential cooperation are regularly discussed by the representatives of both countries – mainly innovations, and research and development (R&D). In addition, the global COVID-19 pandemic opened another area of possible cooperation in health care, which was partially foreseen in the past. When it comes to people-to-people relations the cultural exchanges are growing with different cultural events focused on representing traditions, folk music, and dance by both partners. Naturally, in the case of South Korea, contemporary pop culture is reaching also Slovakia.

Overall, relations between Slovakia and South Korea are conducted mainly on two levels. First is bilateral, based on intergovernmental agreements, regular visits of political representatives, and regular meetings of joint commissions and committees. The second is the multilateral level, represented mainly by two institutions/platforms: V4 and EU. As South Korea is a NATO Partner country, this represents another channel of contact, albeit a less developed one.

Among the areas of future cooperation, R&D and innovations are important for Slovakia's further economic development. Technology transfers are thus a new and budding area where Slovak and Korean entities can maintain mutually beneficial cooperation. Recent push to limit the role of Chinese technologies in critical infrastructure (especially 5G networks) elevates this area of cooperation to a new level. This opens ways for South Korean



companies with their own indigenous 5G technology to be an important supplier of components for the Slovak 5G networks.

Despite the importance of South Korean companies for the Slovak economy (in terms of employment and taxation), there is a rather low media presence of South Korea in Slovakia. That leads to limited knowledge about South Korea among the Slovak population. Big Korean brands (e.g. LG, Samsung) are present in Slovakia but it is hard to say if people do associate them with South Korea. The recent Sinophone Borderlands opinion poll results suggest that Slovaks are not in favor of having South Korean companies involved in 5G network infrastructure construction.<sup>2</sup> It is not clear if the perception is negative towards South Korea or people do not associate telecommunication companies such as LG with the country. Therefore, there is another area in which both countries need to increase their activities, and that is public diplomacy especially directed to Slovak, but also broader European, population.

## 2.1 Political relations

Slovakia and South Korea established diplomatic relations in 1993 after the division of Czechoslovakia. The bilateral relations evolved at a steady pace over the 1990s, however, the political and economic situation in Slovakia prevented further development of relations and negatively influenced the interest of Samsung to invest in Slovakia already in this period. The situation has changed only after 1998 when Slovakia adopted economic reforms and set a course for integration which was an important signal of guarantees of stability for possible future investors.

When looking at the last 10 years in political relations, the importance of bilateral relations is expressed in rather stable numbers of visits of political representatives from both countries.

In December 2015, Prime Minister Robert Fico met that time South Korean President Park Geun-hye in Prague on the side-line of the V4 + South Korea meeting. The Slovak Prime Minister encouraged investment of South Korean companies into, at that time ongoing, reconstruction of Bratislava



airport. In addition, cooperation in nuclear energy was discussed, together with the creation of the Joint economic committee.<sup>3</sup>

In 2018, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, an important milestone in bilateral relations was achieved. The first-ever summit between presidents of both countries took place in April. On this occasion, Slovak President Andrej Kiska traveled to South Korea with a delegation of several Slovak companies. The presidents discussed the importance of economic relations between both countries. Additionally, the Slovak president supported President Moon's North Korea policy and emphasized the need for a peaceful denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.<sup>4</sup>

Looking at ministerial visits and exchanges, in 2013, Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák traveled to Seoul. In 2018, the Minister of Education signed a Memorandum of Understanding with her counterpart in Seoul. In terms of visits on the level of ministers, the year 2019 was significant when two Slovak ministers, of finance and economy, traveled to South Korea, to discuss further strengthening and deepening of the economic cooperation. The same year South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Kyung-wha, visited Slovakia for the first time, to meet with her counterpart and deliver a keynote speech at the GLOBSEC Forum 2019.

In the past five years, Slovak and South Korean relations have been developed on the parliamentary level more intensively. Then Chairman of the National Council Peter Pellegrini (and later Prime Minister) traveled to Seoul in 2015, after 19 years since the last visit of this type took place.<sup>5</sup> During the visit, the strengthening of parliamentary cooperation was discussed with the South Korean counterpart as well as cooperation in digital education with representatives of the South Korean Ministry of Education. In 2017, Chairman of the National Council, Andrej Danko visited South Korea as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of parliamentary chairpersons of the Eurasian countries. On the side of the conference, he has met with his South Korean counterpart and representatives of Kia and Samsung, the two largest South Korean investors in Slovakia.<sup>6</sup>



Speakers of the National Assembly of South Korea visited Slovakia in 2017 and 2019. Speaker Chung Sye-Kyun met with Slovak President Andrej Kiska and the chairman of the parliament in 2017. He also visited the premises of the Kia Motors plant near Žilina and praised the positive image of South Korea built through the company policies and production of cars in Europe.<sup>7</sup> In 2019, Speaker Moon Hee-sang visited Slovakia and participated at the V4 + South Korea meeting in Budapest.<sup>8</sup>

Besides high-level political relations, Joint Slovak – South Korean committees and commissions have been formed over the last 10 years. Currently, 3 such meeting platforms exist:

- Joint Commission on culture and education (2 meetings – 2014 in Bratislava, 2019 in Seoul),
- Joint Economic Committee (1 meeting – 2018 in Seoul, a planned 2020 meeting in Bratislava was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic),
- Joint Committee on Science and Technology (launched in 2016).

## 2.2 Economic Relations – trade and investment

Economic relations represent the most significant area of bilateral relations and can be divided into two specific features: bilateral trade relations and South Korean investment in Slovakia. Overall, the investments of South Korean companies are worth 2.9 billion EUR, which counts for 82% of non-European investments in the country.<sup>9</sup>

South Korean companies were showing interest to invest in Slovakia already in the 1990s. However, the most significant investments came only in the early 2000s. In 2002, Samsung Electronics announced a plan to build a production factory for screens and monitors in Galanta, western Slovakia. Since then the production line has been modernized several times and became one of the biggest production facilities of Samsung in Europe. Another production plant was open Voderady, also in western Slovakia.



In 2004, South Korean automotive conglomerate Hyundai Motor Group announced its intention to build a production plant in the north-western part of Slovakia. The production line of Kia Motors Slovakia was opened in 2007 near Žilina and became the most significant investment for the next 11 years. Since then Kia Motors Slovakia has modernized the production line, and just recently announced its plan to invest another 70 million EUR, which would allow the company to produce new-generation electric engines.<sup>10</sup>

Together with Kia, other South Korean companies started to invest in Slovakia. Currently, there are about 100 companies with South Korean capital operating in the country. Most of them are part of supply chains for Kia or Samsung. The more significant are scattered in the western part of Slovakia, to name just a few of them: Mobis, Yura Corporation, Hannon Systems, Sungwoon Hitech, Donghee, etc.

South Korean companies belong to significant employers, especially in western regions of Slovakia. Three of them have more than 1000 employees; Kia Motors is the biggest one, with around 3800 employees. Mobis belongs to the category of 2000 – 2900 employees and Yura Corporation is in the category of 1000 – 1900 employees.<sup>11</sup> South Korean companies are the greatest taxpayers in Slovakia when compared to other Asian countries, with 103,21 million EUR paid in 2018. More than half of the sum was paid by Kia Motors, with 16,7 million EUR paid by Samsung in second place and 12,4 million EUR paid by Mobis in third.<sup>12</sup>

The growing amount of South Korean investments and companies operating in Slovakia was reflected also in the banking sector when in 2013 KDB Bank Europe opened its branch in Bratislava as part of its expansion plan in Europe. Furthermore, KOTRA (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency) has opened its representation in Bratislava in 2015.<sup>13</sup>

In summer 2019, South Korean companies entered another area of investment in Slovakia. The AIP Asset Management entered Slovak real estate market, together with its London based partner, it bought Twin City Tower, an office building in the new economic and business center of Bratislava.<sup>14</sup> The interest of South Korean companies to invest in real estate has been growing, however, it is yet too early to assess how the COVID-19



pandemic will impact the real estate market, especially the office spaces rental sector.

When it comes to mutual trade, South Korea is Slovakia's second most important trading partner from Asia, after China and ahead of Japan. From the South Korean perspective, Slovakia is the 4<sup>th</sup> most important trading partner from Europe. The overall trade exchange between both countries regularly exceeds 4 billion EUR, occasionally jumping over 5 billion EUR. From Slovakia's perspective, the trade balance with South Korea is negative. The export from Slovakia to South Korea remains low, even though in 2019 it was worth 354.8 million EUR, which was a jump when compared to 99.8 million EUR a year before.<sup>15</sup>

Items that are exported from Slovakia are machines and mechanical equipment (36.1%), products made of plastic and rubber (23.6%), automobiles and spare parts (6.1%), electronics (10.9%). Slovakia imports the following items from South Korea: electronics and mechanical equipment (55.9%), automobiles and spare parts (23.1%), and optical and medical machines and their parts (5.4%).<sup>16</sup>

To summarize, the trade relations are focused on machinery, automotive, or electronics and are strongly connected to the activities of South Korean investors in Slovakia. When future development of mutual relations is concerned these topics are often emphasized by political representatives.

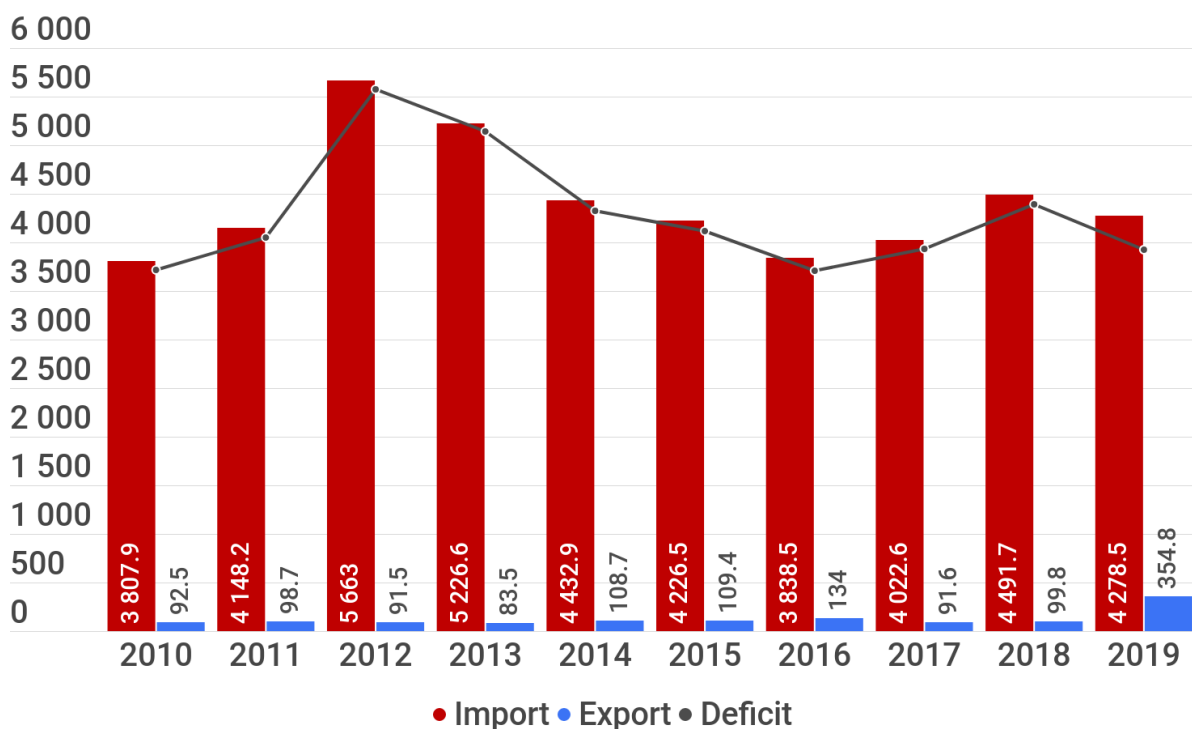
As South Korea is one of the countries that invest significantly into R&D and one of the technically most developed countries, Slovakia is interested to participate in this development and its representatives are inviting new investments into these areas. First and foremost, the legislation was already adopted to provide tax relief for existing companies if they decide to invest in innovation and R&D. These topics are often discussed during the visits and meetings of governmental representatives, especially when Slovak politicians visit headquarters of either Hyundai Motors, or Samsung. The second possibility for cooperation is the innovations in green technologies. This is valid especially for existing automotive companies operating in Slovakia. The recent announcement of Kia's investment into a new production line is its first materialization in reality.





However, when looking at the future development of bilateral relations, Slovakia as any other developed country is facing challenges of an aging population and a decreasing number of qualified workforces. Slovakia needs to prepare a plan for the transformation of its economy from production and export-oriented into an economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this regard, a new area of cooperation is opening as South Korea is already far in the process of a similar transformation. Therefore, there is a possibility for exchange of experiences, sharing of knowledge, and cooperation also in this area.

**Figure 4:** Slovak-South Korean trade (millions of EUR)  
data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic





## 2.3 People-to-people relations

In the last 10 years, bilateral relations between Slovakia and South Korea recorded a significant development in other than economic areas as well. In October 2007, an Agreement in the area of culture, education, and tourism was signed in Seoul. Based on this document, cooperation in multiple areas between different cultural institutions is planned to be expanded, examples are folk-dance and opera performances. In addition, seminars were planned to be organized by embassies on each other's culture. Cooperation was established between radio and TV stations, theatres, etc. In the area of education, this agreement stipulates mutual support for cooperation, exchange of research results, students, and academics. The document also mentions, although briefly, tourism where both parties agreed to support cooperation in this area.<sup>17</sup>

When looking at how the agreement was translated into practice, different folklore groups (Gymnik, Borievka, Vršatec), theatre troupes, and Slovak musicals performed in South Korea. Slovak Chamber Orchestra and Slovak Philharmonic found their audience in South Korea. In 2014, the Slovak Film festival took place in Busan.<sup>18</sup>

Steady development in terms of tourism exchange could be seen, especially in the numbers of South Korean tourists coming to Slovakia. Tourists from South Korea are in second place from all Asian countries (after China and well ahead of Japan). The number of tourists is around 20 000 a year.<sup>19</sup>

Another important area of cooperation is the education and research sector. In 2018, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministries of Education of both countries, with the aim to strengthen cooperation in academic exchange. This goal should be achieved via a scholarship schema provided by the Korean government as well as the Slovak government. Korean government provides scholarships that cover expenses for the complete duration of bachelor's, master's, or doctoral study programs. In addition, students can apply via the Slovak Academic Information Agency (SAIA) for scholarships to cover their study exchange at South Korean universities. Moreover, scholars and academics are eligible to participate in generous fellowship programs offered by the Korean



Foundation. When we look at the general amount of exchange students the numbers are steady, however, remain rather low. Slovak students in general focus on possibilities for study in Europe when choosing universities. The geographical distance is often named as the main reason why not to study in South Korea.

Regarding R&D the meeting of the Joint Commission for research and development in 2018 was assessing possible areas of cooperation and announced a joint call for projects. Scientific cooperation is strengthened through MoUs which the Slovak Academy of Science signed with different Korean institutions', such as The Korea Institute of Materials Science. Additionally, there is scientific cooperation established within the V4 + South Korea platform. In 2015, MoU on V4 – Korea Joint Research program on Scientific and Technological Cooperation was signed. The first call for projects was organized in the program of chemistry and chemical engineering. There is also a knowledge-sharing program, aimed at cooperation in innovations.

For further development in bilateral relations further mutual understanding is necessary for both countries. Therefore, political representatives have agreed on several occasions about the importance of study programs focusing on respective languages and societies. In Slovakia, there is a possibility to study Korean studies, as a full-time study program at the Department of East Asian Studies of Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. The program primarily focuses on the modern Korean language, however, it also provides courses on Korean culture and society, and partially on politics. Through the cooperation with Korean Foundation, the Korean language is taught, within the program. Students of Korean studies have a chance to take a semester in South Korea. Some of the graduates of this program work for South Korean companies operating in Slovakia.

Recently, King Sejong Institute was established in Bratislava in July 2020, based on the cooperation of the South Korean Embassy and Faculty of Arts of Comenius University. The institute's role is educational, it focuses on language courses but also the presentation of Korean culture.



When it comes to the possibility to study a Slovak language in Korea, Hankuk University offers a program of Czech and Slovak language together with classes on culture and society. Interestingly, within this program language and culture classes were offered to employees of Samsung before they were posted in Slovakia.<sup>20</sup>



### 3 Japan

As in the case of relations with any other Asian country, relations between Slovakia and Japan are based primarily on economic cooperation. Japan is the second most important Asian investor in the country.

Over the last 10 years, dialogue between countries has intensified, even at the highest level. At the same time, due to the strengthening cooperation between the EU and Japan, there is room for another, qualitative shift in Slovak-Japanese relations. Japan is also very active in presenting culture and rich traditions, which leads to generally positive sentiment among Slovaks. Exchange and study stays are also popular in Slovakia, although due to the size of Slovakia, the number of participating students is low.

Bilateral relations between Slovakia and Japan are being developed against the background of multilateral cooperation, especially the EU and the V4+Japan format. Intergovernmental agreements signed during the period under review, such as the working holiday program, are largely part of a wider Japanese initiative in the region.

As in the case of South Korea, Japan is relatively little visible in the media despite its importance to the Slovak economy. In recent years, Japan has been talked about mainly in connection with the new emperor or problematic relations with South Korea. The decision of former Prime Minister Abe to resign has also received some response. The overall low awareness of what is happening in Japan thus leads to the creation of an image of an exotic country, full of traditions. This helps Japanese PR, but on the other hand limits the potential to present Japan as a major global player, a modern, highly developed society, and an important partner for Slovakia.

Despite this, as a recent CEIAS survey shows, Japan is highly positively perceived by Slovaks. Even more positive than, for example, Germany or Russia. The confidence of Slovaks is also evidenced by the fact that almost 45% are convinced that Japan is the second most suitable partner, after the



EU, for the construction of 5G networks. These results open up potential areas for the future development of bilateral relations based on R&D and the development of sophisticated technologies. The areas of nuclear energy and coping with an aging population also show a certain potential for cooperation. In both cases, it is possible to exchange know-how or cooperate on joint projects.

### 3.1 Political relations

Diplomatic relations were established between the Slovak Republic and Japan in February 1993. However, both countries refer to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and Japan in 1920. The level of Japanese-Slovak relations in the period after 1993 was stable, but until changes in the country after 1998, it was not possible to speak of a fundamental development in the field of the economy.

Bilateral relations have been stable over the last 10 years in terms of the frequency of visits and meetings at the ministerial or highest level. In this respect, the year 2019 was exceptional when the Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo visited Slovakia<sup>21</sup> and President Zuzana Čaputová took part in the enthronement ceremony of the Japanese Emperor Naruhito.<sup>22</sup> The year 2020, in which the two countries commemorate 100 diplomatic relations, was marked by a global pandemic. Many of the planned events have been cancelled or postponed. In the context of Japanese-Slovak relations, the participation of the political representation of Slovakia at the highest level was expected at the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo.

The last 10 years of bilateral relations are marked by a visit to Japan by President Ivan Gašparovič and his wife in 2012.<sup>23</sup> In addition to meeting with the Imperial couple, the President also held talks with the then Prime Minister Noda<sup>24</sup>. The main topic of discussion was the development of relations between states, cooperation on projects, and between universities. Gašparovič also promised to support the Japanese goal at the UN, to become a permanent member of the Security Council. The President and his wife also visited areas affected by the 2011 earthquake.



In the same year, the ministers of foreign affairs also met, while the content of the meeting was almost identical to the content of the meeting between Prime Minister Noda and President Gašparovič.<sup>25</sup> In 2012, the Minister of Economy and Minister of Finance also travelled to Japan.

In 2013, the historic first summit of the V4 + Japan format took place.<sup>26</sup> The peak of the meeting of the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries with Abe Shinzo was a meeting of about 70 minutes. In addition to highlighting ongoing economic cooperation, the forthcoming EPA between Japan and the EU was also discussed. That year, Slovakia was visited by the brother of the current emperor, Prince Fumihito, and his wife.<sup>27</sup>

The meetings of foreign ministers, which took place in 2015 and 2016, need to be seen not only in the terms of developing bilateral relations but also in the context of Miroslav Lajčák's candidacy for the post of UN Secretary-General.

The character of Miroslav Lajčák plays an important role in building Slovak-Japanese relations. As the second ambassador of an independent Slovakia to Japan, from 1994 to 1998, he has a positive attitude towards Japan. At the same time, his activities related to the candidacy for the UN Secretary-General, or his role as President of the UN General Assembly in 2017, contributed to increasing the intensity of bilateral meetings between states. In 2017, the then Secretary of State Ivan Korčok, who de facto served as Minister of Foreign Affairs, also traveled to Japan.<sup>28</sup>

In October 2018,<sup>29</sup> another summit was held in the V4 + Japan format, in addition to the Asia-Europe Meeting in Brussels. The prime ministers discussed the need to intensify cooperation between the V4 and Japan. They also discussed ongoing Brexit and the abduction issue between Japan and North Korea. Abe Shinzo asked them for support in this regard. The leaders of Central European countries proposed strengthening cooperation in the Western Balkans region, in the fields of science and technology, and the economy.

The already mentioned the year 2019 was characterized by extremely intensive communication between Slovakia and Japan. In addition to the



V4 + Japan summit in Bratislava,<sup>30</sup> and the visit of Japan by President Čaputová, there were also two meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs or a meeting between Prime Minister Pellegrini and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Kono.

It turns out that the V4 + Japan format is a key tool for the development of bilateral relations between Japan and the Slovak Republic. Regular meetings of foreign ministers or prime ministers on the fringes of the V4 + Japan format represent a unique opportunity to establish contact between countries, whose relations are not as economically or politically important as in the case of relations between Slovakia and South Korea. Regular dialogue can lead to the strengthening of economic cooperation, but also strengthen people-to-people cooperation. There is also a need to develop bilateral relations in the context of the EU-Japan strategic and economic partnership. It is these "extra" meetings that will allow us to articulate our position on particular EU-related issues to Japanese partners. Given the current negative reputation of the V4 Group in the European Union, it is necessary to oppose the negative steps made by the governments of Hungary and Poland. However, completely abandoning the V4 format would be a hasty decision. In relation to Japan, the V4+ platform provides another channel of communication.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.2 Economic Relations – trade and investment

As in the case of South Korea, economic cooperation plays a dominant role in relations with Japan. However, this relationship is highly unbalanced, whether it is an FDI flow or a trade exchange. Slovakia's trade balance with Japan is significantly negative and the FDI ratio is equally unbalanced.

Slovak investments in Japan are negligible. The only major investment is from the ESET company.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Japan is the second most important Asian investor in Slovakia in terms of FDI volume but lags significantly behind South Korea. According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, the total volume of Japanese FDI in Slovakia by 2019 is 104 million EUR.<sup>33</sup> However, it should be noted that the contribution of Japanese companies to





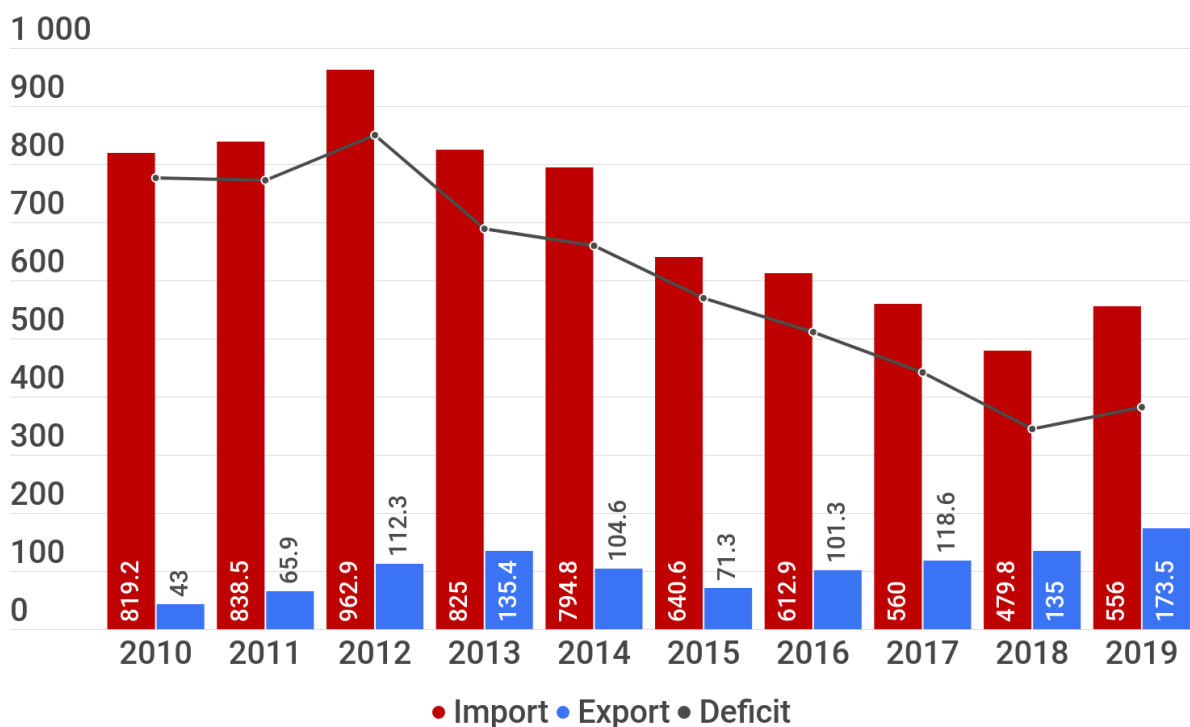
employment in Slovakia is approximately 13,000 jobs. According to CEIAS research, 60 Japanese companies operating in Slovakia pay more than 10.5 million EUR in taxes.<sup>34</sup>

Among the most important Japanese companies in Slovakia, in terms of taxes paid are Marelli Kechnec Slovakia, Plzeňský Prazdroj (Asahi Breweries), or Trim Leader. The largest employers (from 1,000 to 1999 employees) are YAZAKI Wiring Technologies Slovakia, Panasonic Industrial Devices Slovakia, and U-Shin Slovakia.

When it comes to mutual trade, imbalances and negligibility are the characteristic features. The Slovak Republic has been importing from Japan at around 700 million EUR, which represents about 1% of all Slovak imports. In the case of exports, Slovakia exports goods to Japan with an average annual value of 105 million EUR, which represents approximately 1.5% of all exports. In terms of trade, Japan is the fourth most important trading partner among Asian countries after China, South Korea, and Vietnam. It is a question to what extent the increase in exports was a result of the EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement. Given the structure of the Slovak economy, which is focused on the automotive industry, it is possible to assume that the growth of exports is related to the abolished trade barriers.



**Figure 5:** Slovak-Japanese trade (millions of EUR)  
data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic



In terms of the structure of trade, the focus is on the automotive industry. Almost 50% of exports are cars or car components, followed by the products of other engineering industries (23%) and the electrical engineering industry (9.5%). Imports from Japan are divided relatively evenly between electrical engineering (27%), engineering (26%), and automotive industries (26%). For a long time, the products of the electronics industry, especially batteries, dominated.<sup>35</sup>

In general, Slovak-Japanese trade is concentrated in three key sectors: automotive, electrical, and mechanical engineering. On the one hand, these sectors pose a risk to Slovakia and its future economic development due to the unilateral focus of the economy. In addition, the automotive sector is one of the most affected by automation, therefore 35% of jobs are directly endangered.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, they provide the potential for further developing cooperation with Japan. In particular, development in the field of R&D would provide the necessary added value to the Slovak industry. When the Minebea company opened in Košice in 2018,<sup>37</sup> the construction



of a research and development center was emphasized. It was the proximity of the Technical University in Košice that laid the foundation for a sufficient number of qualified experts for such a center. Here, Slovakia is probably hitting its limits. It is the low quality of education that probably hinders the more intensive development of cooperation between Japan and Slovakia in the field of R&D.

Other potential areas of cooperation certainly include the transport sector, in which Japan is one of the world leaders. The purchase of technology, the sharing of know-how, or even the construction of transport infrastructure could be the basis for the development of cooperation in this area. In this context, it is necessary to mention Japan's efforts to compete with China in the construction of transport infrastructure. Although their rivalry has so far focused on Southeast and South Asia, it may spread to Europe. The energy sector, in particular nuclear energy, could be the subject of cooperation between Japan and Slovakia. Slovakia, like Japan, is dependent on stable production of affordable electricity, with an emphasis on sustainability and environmental friendliness. In this respect, cooperation in the field of nuclear energy seems natural. In the long run, it is, therefore, necessary to consider the possibilities of cooperation on specific projects. The potential of such cooperation is also evidenced by the fact that President Čaputová met with representatives of the TEPCO energy giant during her visit to Japan. The subject of the negotiations was energy and environmental protection. We could also consider cooperating on research in the field of health care or social care.

The potential for cooperation is also provided by the penetration of interests in the Western Balkans region. The European-Japanese connectivity partnership is a great basis for developing cooperation between Slovakia and Japan in a region in which we have long-term interests and sufficient expertise. This necessitates the possibility of joint investment projects of Slovak and Japanese subjects.



### 3.3 People-to-people relations

Relations at the people-to-people level can generally be considered very good. Cooperation in the field of culture is exceptionally stable, while an interesting specificity is an interest in cooperation with the Slovak Chamber Orchestra and the State Opera of Banská Bystrica. In the field of culture and promotion of Japan, RTVS is significantly active, which regularly includes documentary series about Japan in television broadcasting. Support for the influx of tourists, which is one of the long-term goals in Japan, was provided by the activities of the embassy, but also at the intergovernmental level. An example was the signing of the Agreement on Social Security in 2017,<sup>38</sup> or launching a Working Holiday Program for people aged 18 to 30 in 2016.<sup>39</sup>

We see considerable reserves in the issue of Japanese tourists in Slovakia, even though the trends are positive. In 2019, 9 691 Japanese visited Slovakia, which represents a year-on-year increase of 24%.<sup>40</sup> The current pandemic situation has harmed the tourism sector, with a reported decrease in the number of visitors to Slovakia by almost 80% compared to the first half of 2019.<sup>41</sup>

Education and research represent an important area of cooperation with the potential for further development. As of 2016, 32 agreements on cooperation were signed between state and private universities, colleges, and other institutions. At the same time, cooperation in this area is influenced by a relatively wide range of grant schemes and scholarships for research and study in Japan. These operate mostly on an annual basis. Interesting is the short-term MIRAI exchange program, through which students of selected study programs get to know Japan from various aspects. Regarding the study of disciplines related to Japan, the only Slovak university that provides the opportunity to study Japanese Studies, a full-time study program, is Comenius University in Bratislava. Japanese can also be studied at various levels through private language school courses. However, their offer is limited and uneven within Slovakia.



## 4 Taiwan

In a world, where the majority of countries recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the only representation of the entire Chinese population, the foreign policy-making of Taiwan / Republic of China (ROC) is rather limited. The EU does not recognize Taiwan as a country but promotes trade and economic relationship with Taiwan. Slovakia, in line with the EU's common foreign policy, maintains with Taiwan only non-official relations (Taiwan maintains official diplomatic relations with only 15 countries, with the Holy See being the only European entity).

However, this does not mean Taiwan's foreign policy is without resources. "If formal relationships are not possible, 'informal', 'substantive' or 'virtual' ties serve as an excellent substitute".<sup>42</sup> To advance its political and diplomatic interests, Taiwan can rely on several alternative foreign policy methods. One of these is the so-called 'economic diplomacy' that can be defined as influence attempts of a state that rely essentially on "resources which have a reasonable semblance of a market price in terms of money".<sup>43</sup> Economic diplomacy was adopted by Taiwan in Central Europe for the first time in the 1990s.

Taiwan targeted Central European post-communist countries with promises of investments, humanitarian relief, grants, and loans, which were warmly welcomed in the region. By 1991, however, Taiwan gave up on its effort to gain Central Europe's diplomatic recognition and focused on fostering substantive relations instead. The three countries, stimulated by the prospects of economic help, agreed to consolidate their friendship with Taiwan by opening representative offices – as a result, Hungary opened its ROC's representative office in 1990, followed by Czechoslovakia in 1991 and Poland in 1992.<sup>44</sup>

While Hungary, Poland, and Czechia could rely on rather favorable economic conditions, good legal framework, and business infrastructure, then-Prime Minister Mečiar led by personal interests implemented several measures that contributed to continuing economic distress in Slovakia. This



discouraged international investors who were looking for a stable and safe business environment.<sup>45</sup> And so Slovakia's economic interactions with Taiwan in the 1990s were minimal compared to the neighboring countries. After the split of Czechoslovakia, Czechia continued developing cordial relations and President Havel even repeatedly expressed support for Taiwan joining the UN, while the Slovak government decided to pursue political dialogue with China, and Slovak-Taiwan relations were for some time left to non-governmental trade bodies – in 1998, the Taiwanese National Association of Industry and Commerce and the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry signed a cooperative agreement.<sup>46</sup>

What then brought a change to this approach and prompted closer relations between Taiwan and Slovakia? The following pages will give an overview of the relationship between Taiwan and Slovakia – in terms of politics, trade, and investment, academic exchanges, tourism, and culture. This is no easy task given the very often secretive nature of many of the dealings between the two countries, especially from the Slovak side.

#### 4.1 The birth of the Slovak-Taiwanese Relations

In 1991, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office was established in Prague, and two years later its counterpart office opened in Taipei. After the partition of Czechoslovakia, this office was renamed the Czech Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei, and Slovakia took another 10 years to open an office in Taiwan.

An obvious change in communication between Taiwan and Slovakia can be observed after the 1998 government elections that brought a democratic and pro-EU orientation in Slovakia's foreign policy. It is evident that after the government transition, not only Taiwan has finally found its way to Slovakia, but Slovakia's overall development underwent a complex change. Slovakia was eager to attract foreign investors and further catch up with its neighbors and other Western countries, which led Slovakia to consider an economic partnership with Taiwan.



The Taipei Representative Office in Bratislava (TROB) was opened in August 2003 after three years of negotiations. Its role is to support all aspects of bilateral relations between Slovakia and Taiwan including trade, investment, education, science, and culture. The Slovak Economic and Cultural Office Taipei (SECO) was established in November 2003. This event was followed in 2004 by the first Slovak MP visiting Taipei, and a year later Taiwan's Minister of Economic Affairs led a delegation to Slovakia. Slovakia, with the opening of its own representative office in Taiwan, became the 19th European country to do so. Both offices operate as embassies, however, the accreditation level of their heads of mission differ from other ambassadors.

To borrow an apt term from Tubilewicz – the institutionalization of the Slovak-Taiwanese relations eventually resulted from a “convergence of economic interests”<sup>47</sup>. The positive development after the 1998 power transition in Slovakia has been encouraging for Slovak-Taiwanese relations and the opening of the representative offices only supports this argument. Conversely, it seems plausible to argue that if these conditions had been feasible in the early stage of the 1990s, the Slovak-Taiwanese relations might have followed the pattern of other Central European countries and opened the mutual representative offices after the independence of Slovakia.

Nevertheless, some agreements date back from before the establishment of official missions in the respective countries. Slovakia signed its very first agreement with Taiwan in 1996 – an Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation and Research between the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the National Science Council (which later in 2014 became the Ministry of Science and Technology).<sup>48</sup> A significant step was the first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Customs Cooperation in 1998. That same year also Slovakia and Taiwan signed the Cooperation Agreement between the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chinese National Association of Industry and Trade Association, which created a systemic framework for mutual economic cooperation.

After establishing official missions, many more agreements followed. Also, Slovakia was the first country in the Schengen area to support the



introduction of visa-free travel to Taiwan. The visa-free contact with Taiwan includes the entire EU and is valid since 2011. In 2011, also an MoU on cooperation between national associations of small and medium-sized enterprises was concluded; moreover, the Slovak-Taiwan Friendship Group and the Science and Technology Park in Hsinchu declared willingness to cooperate; and most importantly, the Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and Income Tax Evasion has been signed that year. In 2012, Taiwan and Slovakia agreed to cooperate in the field of eGovernment, agreed to recognize each other's drivers' licenses, and signed an MoU between the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia and the Institute of Foreign Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROC. More recently, Slovakia was one of the first EU countries to include Taiwan on its list of countries considered safe during the COVID-19 pandemic (meaning that there is no quarantine required after arriving from Taiwan to Slovakia) due to Taiwan's success in disease prevention.

Also, there have been a few parliamentary delegations that have been invited by MOFA to Taiwan. The agenda usually includes a meeting with the President of the Legislative Yuan (parliament), Deputy Minister of Economy and Finance. Occasionally, the program includes a visit of the cabinet of small and large enterprises of the Ministry of Economy, the Office for Mainland Affairs or the government information office or the Ministry of Health. MEPs also meet with representatives of SECO, the European Economic and Trade Bureau, as well as representatives of the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA). They usually visit the science park in Hsinchu (and other technology parks) and Taiwan's hi-tech companies. There are also trips to cultural and tourist sites within the capital and outside.

In the last ten years, several Slovak MPs visited Taiwan. In 2011, they even met with President Ma Ying-jeou.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in 2012, former Prime Minister Iveta Radičová (SDKÚ) held a speech at the World Women Journalist and Writers Meeting and was also received by Ma Ying-jeou. She went again to Taiwan in 2016 as part of a delegation of envoys from the Holy See and 17 other European countries for the inauguration of President Tsai Ing-wen.<sup>50</sup> Peter Osuský (SaS), an MP and Chairman of the Slovak-Taiwan





Parliamentary Group led several parliamentary delegations to Taiwan over the past few years.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Ivan Štefanec (SDKÚ) visited Taiwan several times, whether as an MP or later MEP. Other MEPs and MPs, such as Eduard Kukan (SDKÚ) or Ján Budaj (OĽaNO) also visited Taiwan. In summer 2020, MEP Miriam Lexmann (KDH) and her colleagues Eugen Jurzyca (SaS), Ivan Štefanec (KDH), and Vladimír Bilčík (SPOLU-OD) expressed solidarity with the Speaker of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic Miloš Vystrčil in connection with his visit to Taiwan. Their statement was also supported by several MPs.<sup>52</sup>

Although without full diplomatic recognition, the relationship is quite vibrant and does not stop at signing treaties and inviting dignitaries to Taiwan. Taiwan is an important Asian investor in Slovakia, and academic, cultural, and other exchanges are also not negligible. The following sections will outline each area separately.

## 4.2 Economic relations – trade and investment

Having SECO in Taiwan is beneficial in establishing economic cooperation – the office organizes investment seminars and facilitates the participation of Slovak companies in various major Taiwanese and Asian fairs taking place in Taiwan. Also, the Slovak Agency for Investment and Trade Development SARIO gives presentations in Taiwan about the business and investment environment of Slovakia. Then there is also the Slovak-Taiwan Chamber of Commerce which promotes trade between the two countries.

To help make concrete economic projects and investments easier a memorandum on economic cooperation was signed in April 2019. The main aim is to launch a full-fledged economic dialogue, establish a regular consultation mechanism on topics of mutual interest – trade development, investment, high-end technology, innovation, e-government, and tourism.

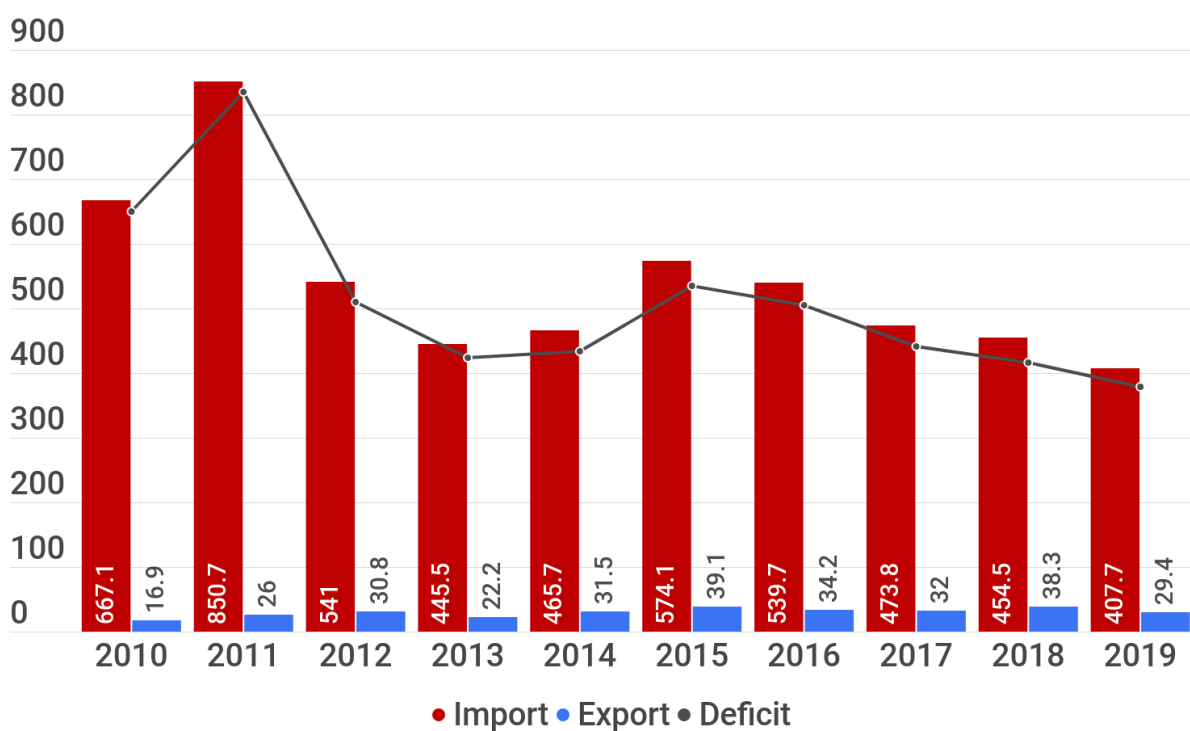
Taiwan's initial economic interest in Central Europe was limited to exports (computers, bicycles, textiles, machinery, and consumer goods). Today, cooperation between Taiwan and Slovakia is mostly in the electrotechnical and automotive industries, but new collaboration is being formed also in IT



and blockchain technologies. The most famous Taiwanese brands imported to Slovakia are HTC, Asus, Acer, D-link, Giant, or Merida.

Recently, the first Slovak company opened its doors in Taiwan focusing on Advanced Blockchain Ecosystem and there are opportunities for more cooperation in this area. Another sector open for cooperation is the waste management and automotive industry.

**Figure 6:** Slovak-Taiwanese trade (millions of EUR)  
data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic



Taiwan is playing an important role regarding direct investment, being the third-largest East Asian investor in Slovakia with a total of 450 million EUR invested and 2500 workplaces.<sup>53</sup> The three largest Taiwanese investors are AU Optronics in Trenčín, Foxconn in Nitra, and Delta Electronics in Dubnica nad Váhom. There is also Eltek in Liptovský Hrádok and Darwin Precisions in Trenčín.



AU Optronics is an LCD module producer, operating in Slovakia since 2011. The 200,000-square-meter plant in Slovakia was the company's second European production base. It plays a key role in the manufacturing, assembly, and selling of large-sized LCD modules to TV set makers.

Similarly, Foxconn – Taiwan's largest privately-owned manufacturer – produces in Slovakia televisions and related technology. It is one of the largest suppliers in terms of volume in Europe. Its predecessor was Sony Slovakia, which since 1996 operated in Trnava and then from 2007 in Nitra. In 2010, Sony formed a strategic alliance with Taiwan's electro-technical giant Hon Hai Precision Industry Co. Ltd. (under the trade name Foxconn) and sold its majority stake in the Nitra plant. Since 2016, Hon Hai Precision Industry is a sole shareholder. The company is one of the biggest Asian employers in Slovakia with more than 1000 employees.

Delta Electronics opened its production factory in 2007, although it has been present in Slovakia since 1994 when it established a sales office in Bratislava and started production cooperation with a local partner in Nová Dubnica. The company produces power supplies used in telecommunications, IT, industrial automation, and medical equipment. In 2015, Delta acquired Eltek, a provider in telecom power, industrial, and data center power solutions.

Darwin Precisions is the smallest of these five companies with its 80 employees. It is part of the automobile parts manufacturing industry.

On the EU level, there is no bilateral investment agreement between the EU and Taiwan, although several EU countries, including Slovakia, have some sort of agreements (whether on avoiding double-taxation or economic cooperation). Taiwan is the EU's 15th trading partner and the EU is Taiwan's 5th trading partner, which is both quite significant. In terms of the size of exports and imports, office telecommunications equipment, machinery, transport equipment, and chemicals are by far the most traded commodities between the EU and Taiwan. Over the past years, the EU has been the major source of FDI in Taiwan. On the other hand, Taiwanese investments in the EU represent only some 2% of Taiwan's global FDI stocks. A comprehensive investment agreement between the EU and Taiwan would



allow both sides to benefit from global economic changes and the rearranging of supply chains in a post-pandemic world. The first-ever EU-Taiwan Investment Forum was held in Taiwan in September 2020 and signals warmer ties and the possibility of negotiating an investment deal.

### 4.3 Academic cooperation

One of the main components of Taiwan's efforts in terms of academic cooperation is the Taiwan Scholarship program. It is an important part of Taiwan's public diplomacy and boosts Taiwan's image internationally and promotes its higher education among the allies and partners. In 1991, the Ministry of Education launched the program under the name Independent National Association and Eastern European Countries Studying in Taiwan and 2001 included also students from Slovakia. The Ministry of Education annually provided full scholarships to one or two Slovaks to study the Chinese language in Taiwan.<sup>54</sup> In 2005, this program was expanded to language and degree study – giving every year several Slovak students the opportunity to study in Taiwan.<sup>55</sup>

Over the years, there have been many bilateral MoU between various Slovak and Taiwanese universities. In 2009, for example, the Slovak Technical University concluded an agreement with the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology in Taipei, the National Taipei University of Technology, and the Sun Yat-Sen National University in Kaohsiung. A year later, the Slovak Academy of Science agreed with the National Science Council (which later in 2014 became the Ministry of Science and Technology) on an exchange program of scientists working on a joint project. In the later years, we have seen MoUs between the Technical University of Košice and Chung Hua University (2018); the Comenius University and Soochow University (2019); or the Pan-European University and the University of Taipei (2019), to mention a few.

Moreover, in Slovakia, TROB regularly supports and co-organizes conferences and seminars together with local universities and think tanks. Worth mentioning is for example the annual conference on international relations organized together with the Faculty of International Relations of



the University of Economics in Bratislava. The Institute for Public Affairs (IVO) and the Slovak Foreign Policy Association also often cooperate on conferences focusing on issues related to Taiwan's democratization, civil society, or the country's position in world politics. The book, published in 2013 by IVO President Grigorij Mesežnikov, entitled "Democratization and Civil Society Development in Taiwan: Some Lessons for Central Europe", published as a result of his research project sponsored by the Taiwan Fellowship Program, is also part of academic collaboration efforts.

The above-mentioned program, the Taiwan Fellowship, is another program that serves to promote academic exchanges – researchers and scholars interested in social sciences and humanities related to Taiwan or Chinese studies can apply and conduct research on Taiwanese academic institutions. Although this program does not allocate any quota for each country such as the Taiwan Scholarship, there have been Slovak academics participating in it – in recent years about one or two per year (in 2020 there was none, and in 2021 there is one that has been granted the fellowship).

This year in November, the Taiwan-Slovakia Exchange Association has been established in Taiwan and will facilitate educational and cultural exchanges. It is affiliated to the Central and Eastern European Center at the Soochow University, which also provides Slovak classes as an electoral course for Taiwanese students studying in the center.

#### 4.4 Cooperation in tourism

Already in 2007, both countries concluded an Air Services Cooperation Agreement. Despite the agreement, there have not been any direct air services between Taiwan and Slovakia to this day. The most plausible explanation for this is the international airport in Vienna that is in very close proximity to Bratislava and serves as a hub for China Airlines, Taiwan's national carrier, in the region.

One of the ways how to spread awareness and to promote Slovakia in Taiwan is attending the annual Taipei International Travel Fair. It is attended by SECO and tour providers. To inform about Slovakia with an emphasis on



tourism, SECO also organizes promotional seminars for travel agencies and journalists focused on tourism. During these seminars, there is usually a Slovak cuisine and wine tasting – beverages produced by Chateau Topoľčianky or Včelovina, both brands that have been operating on the Taiwanese market for several years now.

Other kinds of cooperation include for example the 2018 Agreement on cooperation between the Montenegrin Historical Railway and the Forestry Office of Taiwan focused on the area of historic railways and tourism promotion in Pohronie and Alishan.

The working holiday scheme – in place since 2014 – allows Slovaks to travel to Taiwan with a one-year visa and conversely, Taiwanese to Slovakia. Since the program was launched, Taiwan has signed working holiday agreements with 17 countries. Although this scheme is not that very well known, more and more people are coming each year, both to Taiwan and to Slovakia. Since Slovakia is in the EU, some Taiwanese use this scheme to get into other more popular European countries. During the pandemic, this program has been temporarily halted.

Also, Taiwan organizes various kinds of tours for journalists, academics, and diplomats to promote the island. However, as these trips represent a certain financial burden, the quota is quite limited. As for journalists, it is usually one or two per year, sometimes one in two years. Last year, it was a reporter from Denník N who visited Taiwan – he spent a week on an organized tour with reporters from other countries visiting sights all over the island and meeting government officials, even meeting Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. There are similar trips for academics and diplomats, in the latter case to come to study Chinese (one-on-one classes) in Taipei.

Slovakia organizes similar trips for Taiwanese stakeholders. In 2018, Taiwanese journalists and bloggers were invited to promote the beauties of eastern Slovakia. SECO provided them with tickets from Turkish Airlines, flying a convenient route Taipei-Istanbul and Istanbul-Košice (this line has now been suspended, officially because of the pandemic).



## 4.5 Culture and social events

Given the EU's common foreign and security policy, according to which the Slovak Republic adheres to the "One China Policy" and thus does not have official diplomatic relations, support at the social, media, or academic level becomes very important for Taiwan. In this regard, TROB strives to develop and deepen friendly relations with the Slovak society also through annual receptions, whether on the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of China on 10 October (organized since 2003) or Christmas (organized since 2010). Supporters of Taiwan – ministerial staff, representatives of various educational, cultural institutions, or organizations with which TROB is in contact – are all invited. Important guests are also members of the Slovak-Taiwanese parliamentary group, which was founded in 2006 by MP Ivan Štefanec (now MEP) and is currently chaired by Peter Osuský (SaS).

Another social event organized by TROB is a reception for members of the Taiwan Alumni Association in Slovakia, which was founded in 2013 and brings together people who have the experience of having studied or worked in Taiwan. TROB is also in contact with Taiwanese citizens living in Slovakia. They meet regularly to celebrate Lunar New Year or other Taiwanese holidays.

Besides that, cultural events are equally important. One of the successful Taiwanese cultural events in Slovakia is the Taiwan Film Festival. It started in 2010, and Taiwanese movies were screened at the cinema Mladost' in Bratislava. In 2012, the festival was connected with the occasion of the inauguration of President Ma Ying-jeou for a second term to office. In 2016, the festival moved to the University Pavla Jozefa Šafárika in Košice and the University of Economics in Bratislava.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, in 2018, there was a movie festival at the cinema Lumiere in cooperation with the Slovak Film Institute, the Taiwanese Film Institute, the Taiwanese Ministry of Culture, and the program called Taiwan Cinema Toolkit.<sup>57</sup>

The Slovak public can also get to know Taiwanese culture through cultural performances, such as the opera performance of the Taiwanese ensemble Guoguang King of Monkeys, which took place on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of TROB in 2013 in Hlohovec and Košice.



On the occasion of 100 years since the establishment of the ROC, in 2011, TROB organized a photo exhibition at the Devín-Bratislava National Run event. One of the sponsors of the event was Foxconn, which donated two LCD TVs for the winners. That year, TROB also participated in the music festival Pohoda. The office opened its stand at the Pohoda festival for the first time and as the first foreign participant. This idea arose from the arrival of a new Taiwanese investor to Trenčín, AU Optronics, who was one of the festival's sponsors.

Taiwan also uses financial subsidies or other forms of humanitarian aid and gifts supported through the National Development Fund to gain friends around the world. In Slovakia, TROB regularly donates computers, interactive whiteboards, projectors, notebooks, and Wi-Fi connections to primary and secondary schools around the country, as well as teaching aids for kindergartens. It also gives sponsorship gifts to hospitals – electrocoagulators, sterilizers, X-rays, and other medical equipment. The office also awards a financial subsidy or donates rehabilitation equipment to retirement homes in various cities in Slovakia. In cooperation with MP Štefanec, TROB provided free Wifi connection in Bratislava on both sides of the Danube and the Old Town; later, also around Petržalka's lake Draždiak. In 2017, it sponsored the reparation of the library of Cvernovka, and there are many other similar projects. More recently, Taiwan has donated on several occasions face masks to help cope with COVID-19 as well as laptops to aid in distance learning of students during the pandemic.

Slovakia also organizes and participates through SECO in various events in Taiwan intending to promote the country and its culture. In 2018, the annual International Festival of Children's Folklore and Folklore Games in Yilan had a special exhibition about Slovakia. Along with 12 traditional Slovak folk costumes, folk furniture, and handicrafts, replicas of popular bronze statues from Bratislava's Old Town were also exhibited. The exhibition seems to have been the largest of its kind in Taiwan and East Asia.<sup>58</sup> In 2019, there was another exhibition of Slovak folk art, this time in Taipei – twelve traditional embroidered folk costumes from Slovakia were exhibited, a selected number of weaving works, and also the music instrument fujara. At the opening, there were present some officials from Slovakia, such as





Dušan Matulay from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and others.<sup>59</sup> SECO also organizes exhibitions where the artists themselves are present. Worth mentioning are exhibitions of contemporary Slovak artists Petr Uchnár, Miroslav Cipár, and Ladislav Gulík.

Slovakia also presents its culture through Slovak movies (with Chinese subtitles) in the European Film Festival and the V4 Film Festival in various cities across Taiwan. SECO also participates in various book exhibitions, including the International Book Fair in Taipei TIBE, which is the largest of its kind in Asia. In recent years, it has presented Slovak children's books translated into Chinese. There are nine Taiwanese children's books translated to Slovak, and eight Slovak children's books translated to traditional Chinese, with more in the pipeline.



## 5 Conclusion

Slovakia's relations with the three democracies of Northeast Asia – South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan – are quite vibrant, with interactions happening across political, economic, as well as on people-to-people levels.

Bilateral interactions are often supplemented by interactions via multilateral forums, such as the V4+ format, or under the auspices of the EU. Both formats help level Slovakia's playing field vis-à-vis the three Northeast Asian countries and mitigate the negatives of the power asymmetry Slovakia faces in the region. Thus, Slovak government should actively participate in policymaking on the EU level regarding Northeast Asia. EU is an important tool for Slovakia to mitigate the negatives of power asymmetry Slovakia faces in Northeast Asia.

Already, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan have made substantial investments in Slovakia, thanks to which Slovak people can reap substantial benefits. These are often of larger importance compared to benefits derived from Chinese investment. Investors from South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan pay annually more in income tax than Chinese investors. Furthermore, South Korean and Japanese companies employ a greater number of people in Slovakia than the Chinese ones. Despite that, in the past, the Slovak government tended to focus on attracting more investment from China rather than cultivating ties with South Korea, Japan, or Taiwan.

Due to the already quite high economic contributions to Slovakia in terms of employment and income tax, as well as a relatively positive image (compared to China), a suitable foundation for further development of relations with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan exists. This is further reinforced by the shared values of democracy and respect for human rights, which should make mutual interaction much easier compared to relations with China.

To achieve this, the Slovak government should identify key issues for cooperation with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan and focus on their



development in the long term. Drafting an Asia-Pacific strategy would be a helpful tool to achieve this. Any strategy towards the region needs to specify clear targets and key performance indicators against which the success of implementing the strategy will be evaluated.

Slovakia needs to develop domestic expertise in Northeast Asian affairs, which it is currently lacking. Local experts should be trained not only in language but also in the political and economic affairs of the region. Fostering domestic expertise is necessary as Northeast Asia is playing an increasingly important role in global affairs, which is accompanied by the shift in the geopolitical and geo-economic centres of gravity towards the Indo-Pacific region.

The importance of Northeast Asian companies, especially those from South Korea, operating in Slovakia needs to become a subject of public discussion. Increased recognition of these benefits by the public can help to further improve the public perception of Northeast Asian countries and act as a driver for engaging in new cooperation projects.

Slovak companies have so far not been very active in the region of Northeast Asia. The Slovak government could organize visits of political representatives accompanied by representatives of different Slovak companies. There are cooperation opportunities in ICT, blockchain technologies, cybersecurity, waste management and recycling, green energy, transportation, and the automotive industry.

As Slovakia's export to South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan remains rather low. A sudden increase in exports to South Korea in 2019 suggests that an increased number of political visits, which were accompanied by Slovak business representatives has a positive impact on Slovakia's trade balance. In other words, economic interactions cannot be delinked from fostering political relations.

However, fostering political ties does not have to always rely on traditional methods of diplomatic interactions. Innovative forms of interactions, like mixed policy dialogues (1.5 track dialogues) can both supplement the existing interactions, as well as generate new ideas for cooperation projects



thanks to the inclusion of non-governmental stakeholders (e.g. scholars, think-tankers, and representatives of business) in the discussions. In case of Taiwan, this may be help to engage politically with the island without

As for Slovakia's public diplomacy in Northeast Asia, it should be strengthened. Various cultural events like festivals and movie screenings have proven to be a useful tool in improving Slovakia's recognition among the Northeast Asian public. When it comes to the country's presentation, not only traditional aspects of Slovak culture should be presented. Emphasis should be given also to presenting Slovakia as a country of talents and innovation. At the same time, it must be added that this must be accompanied by our own efforts to achieve such a state.

Cooperation between the private and academic sectors between countries needs to be intensified. In this way, it will be possible to identify areas or specific projects with the potential to develop not only political or interpersonal but especially economic relations.

Unlike South Korea and Japan, political relations with Taiwan are somewhat constrained by its adherence to the "One China Policy". Slovak government needs to avoid accepting China's interpretation of this policy, which would prevent Slovakia from developing future meaningful cooperation with Taiwan. Slovakia thus should come up with its own clear definition of what it considers as suitable and unsuitable actions under the "One China Policy". Having a clearly defined stance on the international position of Taiwan would help prevent self-censorship among various ministries and government agencies, which often do not know what is the red line for their activities. Furthermore, a clearly defined policy would make Slovakia a better predictable actor in Chinese eyes and could serve to mitigate potential downfall in relations with China due to engaging with Taiwan. Slovakia should also support Taiwan's meaningful participation in multilateral fora, especially where Taiwan's participation is important to the Slovak, EU, and global interests.



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## Slovakia and the democracies of Northeast Asia: Partnerships rooted in values

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**Layout and cover design:** Aneta Rothová

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### Published by:

Central European Institute of Asian Studies  
Murgašova 2, 811 04 Bratislava, Slovakia  
www.ceias.eu  
office@ceias.eu

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ISBN: 978-80-973816-7-7

Carried out with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovak Republic within the grant program on international relations and Slovak foreign policy.

Realizované s finančnou podporou Ministerstva zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí Slovenskej republiky v rámci dotačného programu medzinárodné vzťahy a zahraničná politika SR.





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ISBN 978-80-973816-7-7