

Interview with H.E. Mr Ivan Lancaric Ambassador of Slovak Republic to India

“Slovakia offers favourable conditions for foreign investors”

How do you look at India-Slovakia relations?

I believe there is a great potential to upgrade our bilateral relationship from friendship to partnership. Traditionally, our relations are friendly and constructive. I very much hope that Honourable President of India Ram Nath Kovind will pay an official visit to Slovakia next year. We want to build a true partnership based on highest level political dialogue and deeper and broader cooperation in economic field where our countries have so much more to offer to each other.

I also want to believe that we will jointly achieve a progress in EU-India negotiations on BTIA. We believe that free trade agreement is of mutual interest, thanks to which we will significantly increase our bilateral trade, namely in automotive sector, which is the key interest of Slovakia as we are the biggest car producer in the world per capita. We can boast that next year our production capacity will grow even further to as many as 1,3 million vehicles. In this regard I am proud to mention the Jaguar Land Rover investment in Slovakia, which became the biggest JLR investment in continental Europe. We believe that it will be a catalyst of further investments by Indian companies with added value in Slovakia. Beside this investment there are also other companies with Indian capital operating in Slovakia.

Slovakia and India are traditional trade partners, however we can not be satisfied with the current trade balance. In this respect, we want to focus our future cooperation on renewable energy, environment, water management, agriculture, forestry and food industry sectors. We will also seek to encourage further cooperation in traditional sectors like defence, machinery as well as in the field of R&D where both Slovakia and India have a considerable know-how and qualified resources.

You mentioned JLR investment in Slovakia. Why do you think they decided to establish their factory in Slovakia?

There are several advantages that Slovakia has to offer. First of all we have very open, stable and export oriented economy. Every investor that established its plant on our territory has immediate access to entire Schengen area and thanks to our strategic position in the middle of Europe they very convenient access to more than 300 million clients in radius of 1 000km. Secondly Slovakia business friendly oriented country. According to annual ratings of World Bank Slovakia is ranked 42nd among 190 economies in the ease of doing business (for comparison India is ranked



77th). We have also very skilled and well educated labour force. More than 85% of Slovak population speaks at least one foreign language (mostly English and German). And in terms of labour productivity Slovakia is ranked 1st in Central and Eastern European region.

Our country offers favourable conditions for foreign investors thus creating excellent conditions for enhanced cooperation especially in the sectors with added value and there are many other reasons why entrepreneurs are seeking Slovakia as their investment destination.

Now we understand what Slovakia offers to business but what about individuals that want to visit Slovakia?

In terms of tourism there is so much that can be offered to potential visitors even by such a picturesque country. For instance, on our territory you can find 120 historical castles, of which many are fully renovated. Not speaking about other historical buildings, cathedrals and historical city centers. Furthermore, you can find there nine wonderful national parks and beneath Slovakia is hidden more than 7 000 natural caves. However, unfortunately, mostly due to safety reasons are for public available only eighteen of them. And



finally, we can boast that we have in total 30 records in list of world heritage of UNESCO. These were just the places you can visit, but Slovakia is famous for its spa and mineral-healing springs as well. Slovakia is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of freshwater resources, that is proven by 1 600. We can't forget that our country is also famous due to our wines that already won at many competitions around the world. Currently there are registered 146 wineries, mostly from the Small Carpathian region. And last but not least, you will be astonished by Slovak culture, art and folk that we are still maintaining.

Slovakia seems to be interesting destination. How many Indian visitors do you record?

Even though Indian tourists “discovered” Slovakia just recently, there are thousands of Indian visitors every year that we register, but we know that there are many more. We can boast that since the beginning of this year we have recorded 65% growth of visits from India and even 96% growth of overnight stays of Indian tourists. We believe that it is thanks to our activities that we launched this year in order to attract more Indian tourists and in this regard we are also preparing an event “1 lakh reasons to visit Slovakia”, that will be launched this December.

We are already in negotiations with few companies in order to enhance the promotion of Slovakia as attractive

tourist destination. We know that it all starts with visa applications, therefore we have taken concrete steps to facilitate and speed up the process, such as launching 3 new Visa Centres in India and doubling the capacity of our Consular department. Cooperation with VFS Global also means that the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in New Delhi can process more national D visas for Indian students or future employees of Slovak companies.

And what are your other plans and activities in India?

In coming months we expect several business missions to Slovakia as well as from Slovakia. We will also take part on RE-INVEST, IE29BF and Smart Cities Expo... And we hope that we will be able to take part on Vibrant Gujarat as well. In February of this year we also had 10th session of Slovakia-India Joint Economic Committee that took place here in New Delhi and next year we are planning to continue in the tradition and organize 11th session of JEC in our capital—Bratislava.

As I already mentioned, India and Slovakia used to be traditional partners and our goal is to revive this tradition. We believe that this can be done by mutual understanding, active searching for new opportunities of collaboration and deepening of friendly relations between our countries. As I also mentioned there are already success stories that we can boast with and soon there will be many more. □

LAND OF OPPORTUNITIES

While Slovakia will never excel for its size (49,036 km²) or its population (5,435,000, on 114th place in the world), this picturesque country in heart of Europe stands out in much more important ways. What is in the secret of Slovakia's incomparable charm? Enchanting nature, fascinating history, refined culture, modern convenience and good-hearted people.

Slovakia is a country that boasts with natural diversity and up to 9 national parks located on a relatively small area. The High Tatras region is located in the protected Tatra National Park. Tatra National Park has been named by the biosphere reserve, which protects, develops and promotes ecosystem and landscape diversity...

Stays in the Tatras are particularly sought-after for their healing effects. People can enjoy here also skiing and most demanding skiers may try the highest and steepest slope starting at Lomnický štít (2,190 meters above sea level). Highest peak in the High Tatras is Gerlachovský štít 2,655 meters above sea

level. To one of the youngest national parks belongs The Slovak Paradise National Park, situated in eastern part of Slovakia. The most eastern part of the Poloniny National Park houses the expected Carpathian beech forests listed in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

On our territory you can find 1,110 caves, chasms and other karst formations, as well as many thermal and mineral springs. There are more than 1650 of them, including the unique Herľany Geyser, which has been shooting jets of water to heights of up to 20 meters every 32-36 hours for over 140 years. You would have to travel to Iceland to see a similar geyser. One of the largest ice caves in Europe is Dobšinská Ice Cave. Of the total length of 1,483 m, only 475 m of cave are now available for the public. Domica Cave is the most known and longest cave of the Slovak Karst National Park. Except for important geomorphological features, it is interesting by precious archaeological findings, occurrence of flowstone shields and drums, as well as numerous bat species presence. The cave belongs in the world heritage site "The

Caves of Slovak and Aggtelek Karst".

Another noteworthy fact is that Slovakia has 220 castles and castle ruins and 425 manor houses. The whole world knows the story of the bloodthirsty Lady of Čachtice Elizabeth Bathory, but more humble buildings also have their secret. The largest Slovakian castle (41,000 m²) Spiš Castle, dominant of the Spiš region, is listed in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Works on the castle began at the beginning of the 12th century. In the 13th century the castle featured an acropolis protecting the stone fortification designed to defend the castle against the Tatar invasion of 1241. One of the oldest castles in Slovakia was built in the 9th century and is located in the capital city of Slovakia. Specific samples of sacred architecture in Slovakia are the wooden churches. They serve as examples of folk architecture and the mixing of two distinct cultures – Byzantine and Latin. Their folk builders expressed the perfect harmony of the human soul with nature and the effort to disengage from earthly worries. Among the oldest are the Gothic wooden churches (for example Hervartov, Tvrdošín).

Fujara is the most typical Slovak musical instrument. It was included by UNESCO in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Fujara is an overtone fipple flute that can be up to 1.8 m long. It is usually made from elder tree and has a characteristic meditation tone. The longest instrument is the Fujara Trombita, up to 6 m long that was used for signalling and for communication among shepherds on their pastures because of its magnificent and strong tone. It is made from pine wood.

Second on the UNESCO intangible heritage list is the Music of Terchová – the "heavenly" archaic folk music char-





SLOVAKIA AT GLANCE

State formation date:

1 January 1993

Area: 49,035 km²

Capital city: Bratislava
(population 465,327 as of 1/6/2012)

Population: 5,412,008 (as at 30/6/2013)

Population density: 110/km²

Official language: Slovak

Currency: Euro (from 1/1/2009)

State System: Republic, Parliamentary Democracy

President: Zuzana Čaputová (since 15. 06. 2019)

Prime Minister: Peter Pellegrini (since 2018)

State Symbols: national coat of arms/emblem, national flag, state seal and national anthem "Nad Tatrou sa blýska"

Membership in International Organisations: EU, NATO, UN, UNESCO, OECD, OBSE, CERN, WHO, INTERPOL, etc.

International Codes: SK, SVK, bar code 858



acteristic of Terchová and neighbouring villages, typified by multi-voice singing. The Music of Terchova is closely connected with dancing, hence its temperamental music style. We don't know the exact origins of this folklore, because naturally it has passed from one generation to the next only in spoken form. It was included in the UNESCO list in 2013.

Slovakia is noted for its many different kinds and varieties of folk craft, lace and embroidery. Surprisingly for a small country each region, and sometimes even each village, has created its own decorations, lace, embroidery and traditional folk costumes. The houses decoration in the village Čičmany, inspired by rich traditions of local embroidery that were freehand painted by the inhabitants. In Olympic games were inspiration for the official kits worn by the Slovak teams.

The traditional basic components of the Slovak cuisine have always been and still are milk, potatoes and cabbage. Tasty meals typical for Slovak cuisine such as cabbage dumplings can be prepared by combining these ingredients. The Slovak national meal is bryndzové halušky, which means for the Slovaks the same as sushi for the Japanese or pizza for the Italians. In low lying areas, you can taste more spicy food, cabbage specialties, goose, lokše (local fried flatbread which looks like a chapati) or trdelník (sweet pastry cylinders).

Although Slovakia has only around 5,5 million inhabitants, it gave birth to many great athletes still celebrated in the world of sport today. We get gold medal from the World championship of ice hockey. Slovak are still fond of the names like Stan Mikita, Peter Šťastný, Peter Bondra, Miroslav Šatan,

Zdeno Chára, Marian Hossa. Slovakia has also great footballers like Martin Škrteľ, Marek Hamšík, Milan Škriniar. As individual sports, history will remember athletes like Ondrej Nepela- figureice skating, Olympic winner from Sapporo 1972, 3x world champion), Anton Takáč- tracking cycling- 1976 Olympic winner, 3x world champion), Jozef Pribilinec – 20km race walking, Miloš Mečíř - former professional tennis player and olympic Winner- 1988), Michal Martikán- water slalom, olympion winner 1996, 2008. Nowadays Slovakian can boast with the cycling phenomenon called Peter Sagan, the triple world champion in road cycling. Petra Vlhová and Anastasia Kuzminova – biathlon Olympic winner from Vancouver 2010, Sochi 2014 and Pyeong Chang 2018, are dominating alpine disciplines.

Slovakia is experiencing an ongoing economic expansion, driven by continually increasing domestic demand, as well as booming investment- both local and foreign. Real GDP growth has more than doubled since 2013 and reached 4,1% in 2018. It's the most open economy in the European Union – 88,6%. 1st place in export of goods to GDP ratio, 4th in Europe in the export of goods and services to GDP: 96,3% and 12th out of 75 countries in the open market index by the International Chamber of Commerce. Consumer price inflation reached in 2019 - 2,4 %. We can also boast with 5,4% unemployment rate. Which are 10 best reasons to Invest in our country? Strategic location in Europe with great export potential, political and economic stability, euro currency as one of a few in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), CEE leader in labour

productivity, cost- effective, skilled and educated labour force (Slovak universities offer large variety of study fields enabling multidisciplinary skill-set for future graduates- 35 Universities, 151 316 students, 53 495 Graduates. Over 1 000 companies already cooperate with 19 universities across Slovakia), excellent multilingual skills (85% of Slovak population speaks at least one foreign language), one of the most open economies in the world, great potential for innovation, developments and steadily growing infrastructure network and attractive investment incentives.

National R&D Specialisation Strategy is focused on innovation support through cooperation between enterprises and research institutions in key sectors of the Slovak economy- material research and nanotechnology, biomedicine and biotechnology, ICT (incl. Electronics) with success stories like SPINEA-twin spin gearboxes, VRM- virtual reality simulators, CEIT-skull implants, AeroMobil- flying car, SAV- aluminium foam, CEIT-automatic logistic system. 30% of all outputs in international scientific journals on materials search originates from Slovakia. Slovakia is a global superpower in car manufacturing and leader in the number of cars produced per inhabitant. Manufacturing 180 cars per 1 000 inhabitants, it has occupied the top spot since 2013. Slovakia became the seat of the worlds famous automobile manufactures like Volkswagen, PSA Peugeot Citroen, Kia Motors, and most recently Jaguar Land Rover. Bratislava's Volkswagen plant is the only car manufacturing plant in the world that manufactures five vehicle brands under one roof (VW, Audi, Porsche, Škoda, SEAT). The

models from Bratislava's production are not produced anywhere else in the world, and more than 99% of the production is intended for export.

In this regard we would like to highlight the investment of Jaguar Land Rover, that is biggest investment of JLR in continental Europe. This factory is currently producing models like Land Rover Discovery and since 2020 it will be only JLR plant in the world that will produce new Land Rover Defender. We believe that this important relationship will be a catalyst for further investments by Indian companies with added value in Slovakia. And we already record few Indian companies that follow JLR example.

We can praise ourselves with skilful and resourceful people who have managed to succeed abroad, as well as with successful and innovative companies and projects, which are respected by demanding international community. We are represented in science, culture and sports. World-changing inventions are associated with the names of Joseph Maximilian Petzval (inventor of photographic objective lens), Jozef Murgaš (inventor of wireless telegraph), Jan Bahýľ (inventor of helicopter), Štefan Banič (inventor of a parachute), Aurel Stodola (founder of the theory of steam and gas turbines), Ivan Alexander Getting (inventor of GPS), and many others. On the other hand, in a field of culture, we are famous for the founder of pop art, Andy Warhol, well-known names and performances of tens of opera singers, painters, photographers and sportsmen. You can find successful Slovaks everywhere. □