EURAXESS Members in Focus: Slovakia ......................... 2
Slovakia and its Research, Development & Innovation System .......... 2
Research Excellence in Slovakia .................................. 2
Recruitment Opportunities ............................................. 3
Funding Opportunities .................................................. 3
Cooperation in science, research, development and innovation between Slovakia and Japan ........................................ 4
Important information for incoming researchers ........................ 4

Hot topic: The JEUPISTE project, Empowering EU-Japan STI cooperation through H2020 .................................... 5

Support to Policy Dialogues ............................................. 6

Informing about Horizon 2020 in Japan, and Japanese programmes in Europe .......................................................... 6

Building partnership ....................................................... 7
Help desk and training of experts ........................................ 7
Impact and perspective ................................................... 8

Meet Michiru Nagatsu, researcher at TINT Finland ................. 9

EURAXESS Japan activities ............................................. 12

Call for abstracts: European Research Day 2016 ....................... 12
EU and EURAXESS at Science Agora 2016! ........................ 13
EURAXESS Members in Focus: Slovakia

Slovakia is a young and dynamic country offering an increasing number of opportunities to carry out excellent research and to turn it to practical application or business ideas. Slovakia has a strong ambition to take another step forward, to become the hub of innovations and encourage more Slovak companies to follow the examples of ARDACO, c2i, ESET, Ecocapsule, GA Drilling and several others that are among the innovation leaders in their fields. Research and development should be in the heart of this exciting transformation.

Slovakia and its Research, Development & Innovation System

R&D in the Slovak Republic is carried out particularly at public sector institutions, including 23 public and state universities, 57 institutes of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and specialised research institutes established by state administration central bodies. The private sector currently lags behind in R&D activities but several targeted policies and funding programmes should help to increase the number of researchers in private companies in the near future.

The share of researchers in the working population is slightly under the EU average. However, foreign researchers only represented 2.44% of researchers employed in Slovakia in 2014. Increasing the number of international researchers is therefore one of the main challenges for Slovakia.

R&D expenditure in Slovakia was of 0.89% of the GDP in 2014, but plans are to reach up to 1.2% by 2020. During the last decade brand new research infrastructures have been established or upgraded in all key research institutions and many research institutions now have an infrastructure comparable to that of the best R&D institutions in Europe, thanks to the Structural and Investment Funds of the European Union. Further upgrades are expected by 2020: indeed the Slovak Republic became together with Portugal the most successful country in the first Teaming for Excellence Call (Horizon 2020) with a gain of four projects which should result in the creation of international centres of excellence.

Research Excellence in Slovakia

The areas with the largest potential to contribute to the excellent, cutting edge research on the international scale were defined in the Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation which outlines the R&D priorities to be funded in the forthcoming years via national funding schemes but also via EU structural funds. These areas reflect both the scientific and research capacities available and the economic specialisation of Slovakia. The R&D priorities include materials & nanotechnology, ICT, biomedicine & biotechnology. Technology priorities include industrial research, environmental & agricultural research and research on environmentally friendly and sustainable energy. The role of social sciences in tackling the global and local societal challenges is also stressed in the Strategy.

The majority of institutions producing excellent and innovative research are located in Bratislava, one of the most innovative regions in the new EU member states according to the EU Innovation Scoreboard. But research excellence and strong innovation potential can also be found elsewhere. The region of Košice is

Several new Science Parks were established since 2007. Comenius University Science Park in Bratislava (in the picture above) should provide the space for collaborative interdisciplinary research in the fields of biomedicine, biotechnologies, environmental medicine and related societal challenges. (Photo: Vladimir Kuric)
building its reputation of the Slovak “Silicon Valley” with a high concentration of ICT firms and related R&D activities. “IT Valley” cluster was one of the first industrial clusters in the region of Central and Eastern Europe awarded with the Gold Label of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative. The region of Žilina is becoming a home of top quality research on intelligent transport systems not only because of the presence of the numerous companies related to the car and transport industry but also due to the ERA Chair grant awarded to the University of Žilina.

Recruitment Opportunities

Public Sector Recruitment Opportunities
Most researchers in Slovakia are employed in public sector institutions, with universities being the most important employers of research staff. All positions open at the Slovak universities are published on the webpage of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of SR. Similarly, the Slovak Academy of Sciences announces all vacancies via its public website. Experienced scientists from abroad who are interested in working at the institutes of the Slovak Academy of Sciences can also apply for a fellowship within the SASPRO programme, co-funded under FP7. The programme allows applications for a fellowship from 12 to 36 months, while the field of science within which it is possible to submit applications is not limited. PhD candidates are considered to be regular students in Slovakia and receive a monthly scholarship if enrolled as full time students. Selected PhD programmes offered in English language can be found in the overview prepared by SAIA.

Slovak researchers working abroad who consider returning to Slovakia might be interested in the reintegration programme “Návraty” introduced last year. The programme enables research institutions from the public sector to open the positions for highly qualified Slovaks living abroad and receive the extra funding from the state that would enable them to provide competitive salaries and other conditions to the returnees.

Private Sector Recruitment Opportunities
Recently introduced innovation policies (support to clusters, innovation vouchers, tax reliefs) and funding programmes provide incentives to the development of stronger research potential in the business sector. The creation of new technological start-ups is also strongly supported without limitation to Slovak citizens only. The Concept Paper on Start-up support in Slovakia adopted in 2015 foresees various advantages for international researchers who decide to start their innovative business in Slovakia. These include start-up visa, grants and more. With its population of around 5 million Slovakia might be too small to be the final market for start-ups but it is ideal for testing new ideas.

Funding Opportunities
The competitive funding for R&D and innovation projects is provided by several public agencies. The major R&D grant agency in Slovakia is the Slovak Research and Development Agency (SRDA) offering funding for research project in both basic and applied research and across all scientific areas. Employees of universities and the Slovak Academy of Sciences can also apply for smaller grants supporting basic research (VEGA grants) and use of its outcomes in the educational process (KEGA grants). Larger infrastructural project and collaborations between the academia and industry are mostly supported by the Structural and Investment Funds of the European Union. More than 2.2 billion euro is allocated in the Operational
Programme Research and Innovation for the period 2014 - 2020. Two agencies are involved in the distribution of funding from this Programme: the Research Agency and the Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency.

Cooperation in science, research, development and innovation between Slovakia and Japan

The basis for scientific and technical cooperation between Slovakia and Japan is an agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (1978) at the time of Czechoslovakia. After consultations on scientific and technological cooperation between Slovak Government and Government of Japan the two countries established cooperation the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS) and the Japanese Agency for Science and Technology (JST) followed by Slovak participation at the “Science and Technology Ministers' Roundtable Meeting” within the Forum for Science and Technology in Society (STS) in 2012.

In 2013, at the summit of Prime Ministers of the countries of the Visegrad Four - Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary - and Japan, the Year of exchanges between the V4 countries and Japan was established, leading also to various forms of exchanges in field of science and technology.

In 2014, during the Presidency of Slovakia in V4, a new form of cooperation on excellent scientific and technology institutions was established combining relevant agencies of each V4 country with the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), which have agreed to work together with the projects in the field of advanced materials and nanotechnology and signed a Memorandum of Cooperation which SAS is responsible of implementing.

The SAS launched in 2015 the first call for projects under the joint research program "V4 - Japan on Advanced Materials". As one of the results the Joint Visegrad 4 - Japan Seminar on Technology Transfer: "Nanomaterials for Industrial Use" took place in June 2016 in Tokyo.

Important information for incoming researchers

The instrument of hosting agreement was introduced to simplify the relocation of third country researchers to Slovakia. Researchers who signed a hosting agreement with a research institution or a university can apply for a temporary residence for the purpose of research and development. This type of residence requires fewer administrative duties and allows faster decision-making procedure. In this case, a researcher does not need a work permit or a confirmation of a possibility to fill a vacant position.
Hot topic: The JEUPISTE project, Empowering EU-Japan STI cooperation through H2020

JEUPISTE (Japan-EU Partnership in Innovation, Science and Technology, FP7 grant agreement no 609585) is an EU funded project for the promotion, enhancement and development of Europe-Japan cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI). It was started in September 2013 and will finish in February 2017. This project supports the EU-Japan STI policy dialogues and organises workshops and information days to promote cooperation programmes such as Horizon 2020 and facilitates partnership building. It also addresses the individual needs of researchers and research organisations by implementing training seminars on Horizon 2020 project management and operates a help desk where any kind of inquiry related to EU-Japan STI cooperation can be addressed, in cooperation with the National Contact Point for Horizon 2020 in Japan. More than 1000 inquiries have been responded up to September 2016! The project is active both in Europe and Japan. Even though most of the project partners are located in Europe, the bulk of the events and activities are taking place in Japan.

JEUPISTE communicates to its stakeholders through newsletters, e-alerts and social media. Its stakeholder database includes more than 2000 active contacts in the EU-Japan STI community.

JEUPISTE is supported through MoUs by a number of organisations with complementary expertise:

- EU Institutes in Japan, Kansai & Kyushu; The Engineering Academy of Japan; RIKEN; the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS); Research University 11 consortium (RU11); the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST). Through letters of support: The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI; Japan); The Ministry of Human Resources (Hungary); The Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (Spain); NL Agency (The Netherlands); Le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS; France) and the EUJO-LIMMS project (FP7 INCOLAB; GA 295089).

At the occasion of the third anniversary of the JEUPISTE project (and given it will end in six months), we would like to provide an overview of the project’s activities in the past few years. The idea behind the JEUPISTE project is that Europe and Japan are facing similar societal challenges while sharing common values, which implies great potential for further cooperation. The project believes that the level of cooperation can be enhanced through a series of analytical, promotional and supporting actions. In order to focus these activities, a number of key enabling technologies and societal challenges were selected through which the activities were structured: ICT, advanced materials, biotechnology, and innovation in SMEs have been selected as key enabling technologies. Health, demographic change and well-being; Secure, clean and efficient energy; and Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies were selected as societal challenges. These areas follow specific parts inside the Horizon 2020 programme.

### Activities organised by the JEUPISTE project (until September 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Policy related events</strong></th>
<th>5 activities in Tokyo, Brussels (twice), Budapest and Izmir</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities showcasing Horizon 2020 in Japan and Japanese programmes in Europe</strong></td>
<td>25 activities all over Japan and Europe. In addition, 22 presentations were given at events from 3rd parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnership building activities</strong></td>
<td>7 activities in Tokyo, Kobe, Brussels, Turin, Barcelona (and surroundings) and Thessaloniki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training seminars on WEU</strong></td>
<td>5 activities in Tokyo (twice), Osaka, Brussels and Londen.</td>
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Support to Policy Dialogues

With the aim of providing an overview of bilateral STI programmes between the EU and Member States/Associated Countries to Horizon 2020 and Japan, research has been carried out to get a better picture on Japan-Europe STI cooperation schemes, especially bilateral and multilateral cooperation. With those analyses, the project has contributed, among others, to policy making process. The main reports have been about EU-Japan joint STI policy priorities and cooperation (D2.1); the analysis of the state of the cooperation and level of Japanese participation in FP7/Horizon2020 (D2.2 and D2.8); bibliometric analyses of EU-Japan academic co-publications (D2.3), an inventory of bilateral, multilateral and unilateral cooperation programmes and the potential use of Japanese programmes in combination with Horizon 2020 (D2.6) and ideas to set up a liaison office in Japan for European research organisations (D2.7).

A European Interest Group (EIG), targeting Japan, which potentially develops new activities and sustains the ongoing cooperation between Europe and Japan has been established in December 2014. This group is continuing under the name of EIG CONCERT-Japan, inheriting the name of the former ERA Net project for Europe-Japan STI cooperation which was started in 2011. This EIG is currently further strengthened with support of the JEUPISTE project with a final meeting in 2017 in Bonn.

Informing about Horizon 2020 in Japan, and Japanese programmes in Europe

JEUPISTE is engaged in synergistic dissemination activities, both in Japan (on Horizon 2020 and European Member States’ funding schemes), building on what was achieved by projects such as

Top: Horizon 2020 info day 2015 in Tokyo (14 October 2015)
Bottom: Presentation by Mr. Maeomichi (NTT) at Smart City Expo World in Barcelona (19 November 2015)
J-BILAT, EURAXESS Japan and CONCERT-Japan, as well as in Europe (on Japanese funding programmes for R&D, mobility and staff exchange as well as coordinated funds). 11 events have been organised in Japan gathering 1000 participants, 6 activities in Europe attracting 800 participants and invited talks were delivered at 22 events all over Japan to promote Horizon 2020 and EU-Japan STI cooperation. In addition, the project participated, in cooperation with other projects, with a booth to 7 major trade fairs and exhibitions in Japan, in order to directly connect to innovation actors, companies and researchers. For example, the project participated to the Kyoto Smart City Expo in 2015 and 2016 in order connect Japanese smart city stakeholders to Horizon 2020 projects.

Building partnership

A series of “Innovation Workshops” has been launched as part of the project activities, aiming at active partnership building through a broad, overarching theme of “Smart Communities”. In total, three workshops were held in Europe in 2014 and 2015, bringing together more than 150 participants from academic institutions, research centres, incubators, investors and top-corporations. For academic partnership building, a workshop on white biotechnology was organised in combination with a bigger expert symposium “the 6th International Symposium of Innovative BioProduction Kobe” in February 2015. A 2nd workshop in July 2016 was held in Thessaloniki (Greece) on the topic of nanomaterials and bionanoscience at the side-lines of Nanotechnology 2016.

The project furthermore organised a two-day symposium on Power Electronics together with Osaka University, hosted by the Delegation of the European Union to Japan in Tokyo, on 15 and 16 December 2015 in Tokyo. This symposium aimed at supporting EU-Japan cooperation on power electronics and gave attention to the EU-Japan cooperation potential in the context of Horizon 2020. It attracted 130 participants, of which 27 came from Europe. It brought together stakeholders from government, research institutions and leading companies in power electronics.

Through follow up of the participants to these workshops, it was found that 8 partnerships have materialised with many more being formed.

Help desk and training of experts

JEUPISTE is offering help desk services that have been extensively used by researchers, research managers, policy makers, funding organisations, and others both from Europe and Japan. On average, 25 inquiries have been received every month. In Japan, this help desk has been run since April 2014 together with the National Contact Point for Horizon 2020 in Japan, located at the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation, the establishment of which was one of the initial major goals of the JEUPISTE project. The services offered ranged from basic information on Horizon 2020, assistance in applying for
projects, partner search, information on funding opportunities in Europe and Japan, among others.

In total 5 designated training courses have been organised, each with around 20 to 40 people, consisting mainly of research administrators and researchers. These sessions were structured around Horizon 2020 project management and how to integrate European and Japanese partners in a research project.

Impact and perspective

The project has contributed to the EU-Japan STI policy dialogues and the definition and implementation of joint strategic agendas for research, development and innovation through the provision of analytical reports. In addition, it has offered better visibility and access to Horizon 2020 to the Japanese STI community and vice versa access to Japanese programmes for Europeans through its many seminars and events. Furthermore, it has familiarised research organisations in Japan and the EU with the most effective strategies and available tools through its training seminars. Above all, the help desk has provided active support to researchers and organisations that are implementing joint research projects on the ground, assisting with the administrative procedure, language issues and advice on topic selection in Horizon 2020, among various many other aspects.

The JEUPISTE Consortium is:

- **Japan**: Institute for Int. Studies and Training (EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation; Coordinator) and Kobe University
- **Italy**: Agency for the Promotion of European Research (APRE) and the International Network for SMEs (INSME)
- **Germany**: German Aerospace Center (DLR)
- **Greece**: Foundation for Research and Technology Hellas (FORTH)
- **Hungary**: Regional Centre for Information and Scientific Development (RCISD)
- **Turkey**: The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK)
- **Spain**: Agency for Management of Universities and Research Grants (AGAUR)
- **Austria**: Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI).

More information: [http://www.jeupiste.eu](http://www.jeupiste.eu)
Meet Michiru Nagatsu, researcher at TINT Finland

- Michiru, you’re now a researcher at TINT, and you have a very long history of mobility outside of Japan and in Europe. Can you tell us a bit about your professional choices, and what particular circumstances led to your current employment?

In retrospect the most crucial professional choice was not to pursue a career in law and public policy, which I studied for six years in Tokyo. Instead of capitalising on that experience, I moved to London to study philosophy. The question of whether social science is a real science had been bothering me at that time, and the London School of Economics (LSE) was offering an MSc course for those with such interests. During my MSc, I met a person who was to become my PhD supervisor in Exeter. Studying with him and receiving his continuous support have been very important for my career. Right after my PhD I did a one-year postdoc at the University of Manchester, but then moved for private reasons to Estonia, where I eventually found a one-year research contract at Tallinn University of Technology. In 2013 TINT offered me a two-year postdoc position, which is actually only 80 km across a sea from Tallinn!

- Particularly, were there any grants or funding programmes you applied to at the different steps of your career? If yes, how difficult did you think they were, and what was their impact on your career?

I applied for a couple of Japanese grants to study abroad for my Master in London (from private foundations), but without success. I think part of the problem was that I couldn't really provide a convincing and coherent narrative as to the reasons of the radical change in my research direction --- I was 26 and already had an MA in public policy. To make ends meet I had to rely on odd jobs, working as a research assistant, and family support, for which I can't be more thankful. During my PhD in Exeter I received two mobility grants to study abroad, one from CIMO in Finland (for 4 months in Helsinki), and one from Archimedes in Estonia (for 10 months in Tartu) [see information on these schemes next page]. These stays not only gave me intellectual enlightenment, but also paved the network for my later career in these countries. I applied for Mobilitas (an EU-funded Estonian postdoc grant) for three times, and the confirmation for a 3-year position came only after I had accepted the offer from Helsinki. My contract with TINT got renewed twice, and this year [2016] I received a 5-year Research Fellowship from the Academy of Finland, which gives me the time to further develop my career.

- What can you say about the difference of research environment comparing the different countries you visited and Japan?

I can't make a fair comparison because I don't have extensive research experience in Japan. But I've heard some of my Japanese colleagues complain about too much administrative work and too little time for research.
International collaborations must also be difficult because of physical and linguistic distances from English-based research communities. In Finland and Estonia, in contrast, research environment is more international, partly because their linguistic communities and domestic markets are much smaller. The small sizes, however, mean fewer teaching positions, which make the career prospects of young researchers very uncertain. Like myself, many live on grants and fellowships, often well into their forties (I’m 38), without knowing whether and when they can get a tenured or tenure-track job. In contrast, Japan has a big market that provides more secure jobs, though many of them may not offer ideal international research environment.

- **What are the challenges of doing research in Europe as a Japanese national?**

One big challenge is to learn a new language as you move to another country within Europe. Even though many small European countries embrace English as the professional language, your life is both professionally and personally impoverished if you don’t understand the local language well.

- **What did/does this (continuing) mobility experience to Europe bring to you, in terms of skill or career development?**

Europeans are a diverse bunch of people who speak slightly strange English (including Britons). Through interacting with them and becoming one of them (not officially but emotionally at least), I have developed the kind of communication skills that I wouldn’t have gained had I stayed in Japan. When people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds have to work together, their communication tend to become simpler and more straightforward. So you become more effective in communicating what really matters, spending less time worrying about idiosyncratic social norms and customs. Of course this also means that I’m losing basic skills to navigate Japanese society, such as a skill to ‘read the air’! [Japanese colloquialism for ‘grasping the situation, or atmosphere’ - 空気を読む]

- **While being based in Europe, are you keeping ties with your former workplaces/labs/colleagues in Japan? If yes, how and to what end/objective?**

Not much, because I changed my field and don’t know many philosophers in Japan. But recently I started to develop new connections with a few Japanese researchers I met at conferences in Europe. They are mostly economists who share my interests in the history and methodology of contemporary economics. I’d like to visit those like-minded colleagues for a longer period, should I find a suitable funding scheme, and collaborate with them for projects that will be novel in Japan. [see info on MSCA RISE]

- **From your perspective, how can/should researchers mobility flows between Europe and Japan (both ways) be improved? Also, what would be the barriers for research cooperation?**

One way to facilitate mobility from Japan to Europe is to give more support for those many Japanese postdocs who are already in Europe and want to remain
in European academia. They struggle in a competitive environment, where the government’s support can make a difference. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs finances the UN positions for Japanese nationals, so why can’t the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) do the same for Japanese researchers in European universities? Even if they don’t come back to Japan, those “remainers” can be utilized as a hub for the mobility of the next generations, as informants, mentors, employers, etc. Regarding the mobility from Europe to Japan, it is relatively easy to go to Japan for a short research visit using e.g. JSPS grants, but many grantees don’t seem to find Japan as a good place to settle in. This has to do with the differences in research culture and environment that I mentioned earlier, but I’m sure many adventurous Europeans are willing to stay, if there is more support such as jointly-funded tenure-track system for Europeans in Japan. Those remainers in Japan will generate a sustainable cycle of mobility. I hope such mobility programs with a longer-term perspective will eventually lead to substantial and interesting research cooperation between Europe and Japan.

- A final, more personal question: how do you envisage your career and where?

I often entertain the idea of running a cafe inspired by Japanese mountains and Nordic forests. Fantacies aside, I want to become a rounded university lecturer rather than a full-time researcher, since interactions with students give me immediate (mostly positive) interpersonal experiences that my anonymous referees cannot give.

During my last 12 years in Europe there was a time when I considered more seriously going back to Japan, but now that I have a family here with a wife and two young daughters, I wouldn’t consider moving to a country where women are disadvantaged and education is expensive. I guess I’m quite happy in the Nordic-Baltic regions (I just need a bit more sunshine in winter)!

Thank you very much Michiru, and all the best for your career!
EURAXESS Japan activities

Call for abstracts: European Research Day 2016

Dear European researchers in Japan, the second edition of the European Research Day (ERD) is there!

This event organised by EURAXESS Japan aims to bring together the European researchers community currently based in Japan.

It will be a one-day workshop featuring presentations by European researchers, discussion panels on issues of relevance for Japan-Europe mobility and research cooperation, and a networking reception.

Interested researchers can participate by submitting an abstract (resulting in a talk at the event if selected).

The abstract and resulting talks must cover 3 aspects: the researcher’s work, a feedback on his/her career evolution, and future plans (relation to Europe).

The call is open to:

- European researchers (see full list of 40+ nationalities eligible on our website);
- All career levels, from postdoctoral researchers to senior professors;
- Academia and non-academia;
- All disciplines, from social sciences and humanities to engineering, natural or formal sciences;
- Researchers currently based in Japan and able to participate in the event in Tokyo.

Deadline for abstract submission: 10 October 2016

Abstract template, full terms and conditions: EURAXESS Japan
EU and EURAXESS at Science Agora 2016!

EURAXESS Japan, in a joint effort with the JST and JASSO, will organise a science communication event within JST’s Science Agora 2016.

The event will allow European (EU-28 nationals) researchers and students to present their research projects, along with Japanese graduate students and high school students.

The 9 speakers total (3 researchers, 3 graduate students, 3 high school students) will each fit into one specific theme of the 2016 edition of the Science Agora: food & health; culture, arts & sports; and disaster mitigation/revitalization.

The event will not only feature presentations by the speakers but also in-depth dialogue sessions where both speakers and audience are expected to reflect on the concepts of open science (science for society, society for science), following these three main themes.

To allow an enhanced engagement with the public of the Agora, the whole event will take place in Japanese (without translation).

Event title: EU & Japan: let's broaden research horizons!

Date and time: Sunday 6 November, 12:30 - 15:00

Venue: JASSO TIEC Media Hall, Odaiba, Tokyo

Further information: EURAXESS Japan

For the second year running, the Delegation of the European Union to Japan, together with Member State embassies, European research institutions and Japanese partners will also put on a number of exciting activities showcasing Europe-Japan joint research projects and featuring talks by some of the foremost experts on topics related to the themes of this year's Science Agora. Among others, a series of exhibitions, workshops and seminars through a dedicated booths and special events are planned over the whole course of the Science Agora (Thursday 3 November to Sunday 6 November).

Please check the programme they propose here!