

Colombia, Korea boost cooperation for FTA

By Joel Lee

The Colombian Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism visited Korea last week to gain assistance from Korean agencies to boost the competitiveness of Colombian industries before a free trade agreement comes into effect, likely this year.

Minister Cecilia Alvarez-Correa signed, an offset agreement with Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Korea International Cooperation Agency and Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, which would provide technical assistance to Colombia's automotive and electricity sectors.

An offset agreement is an ancillary deal between a government and agency or company to enhance collaboration under a negotiated contract. Companies usually provide assistance to boost their chance in government contracts, particularly in developing countries.

Korean agencies agreed to share knowledge in technological innovation, research and development, and human resource management, Alvarez said.

"As Colombia's first FTA with an Asian economy, the agreement will open the door to the Asia-Pacific region for our people and business," Alvarez told The Korea Herald on April 1. "Colombia wants to learn from Korea's rapid development experience and capitalize on our complementary trade structure."

The FTA with Korea was ap-

proved by the Colombian Congress in December and is currently undergoing a Constitutional Review.

Colombia recorded one of the highest economic growth rates in Latin America, with an average 4 percent growth rate for the last 10 years. The volume of foreign direct investment rose from \$6.8 billion in 2010 to \$15.5 billion in 2014.

Meanwhile, Korea is the 29th-largest FDI contributor to Colombia and the second-largest investor country from Asia. Bilateral trade volume increased from \$730 million in 2005 to \$2 billion in 2014.

Colombia has accumulated a \$7.7 billion trade deficit with Korea for the last 10 years, which the country aims to reduce through free trade. It wants investment in the automobile, transportation and energy sectors, and plans to increase the exports of coffee, meat, fruit and flowers, as well as cosmetics, garments and coal to Korea, the minister said.

Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy and Korea International Cooperation Agency are working with several Colombian industries to increase productivity and competitiveness, ProColombia said.

Alvarez, one of seven female ministers in the Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos' government, highlighted Korean President Park Geun-hye's planned visit to Colombia in mid-April, which will be accompanied by a trade delegation of 100 companies.

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Colombian Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism Cecilia Alvarez-Correa (center) poses with Ministerial Counselor for Government and Private Sector Maria Lorena Gutierrez (right) and Ambassador Tito Saul Pinilla at the Shilla Hotel in Seoul last Wednesday. Joel Lee/The Korea Herald

Envoys' wives to hold charity bazaar for disabled

By Joel Lee

The Planting Love Charity organization will hold a bazaar Wednesday to mark its 25th anniversary and raise funds for people with disabilities.

The event will be held at the Grand Hyatt Regency Room in Seoul from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and funds will be used to lease a facility for vocational training and psychological treatment for disabled people in Korea.

Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill and members of the Ambassador Spouses' Association of Seoul will participate, selling the country's traditional drinks, food and goods. Personal items donated by Korean celebrities, including Kim Tae-hee, Noh Young-sim, Bada, Ahn Sung-ki, Insooni and the late Andre Kim will be sold.

Swarovski Korea, Solid Homme, Escada Korea, Publica Atelier, Elle Golf, Minetani, Le Creuset, Burt's Bees and other companies will also sell jewelry, accessories, cosmetics, clothes and home appliances to help provide funding.

"My husband and I do important work for our country and world every day, but there are times

when you feel unfulfilled spiritually," Marina Nobre Quinteiro, wife of Portuguese Ambassador Antonio Quinteiro Nobre, told The Korea Herald at the Portuguese Embassy Residence in Seoul last Wednesday.

"Little things like this make me feel more fulfilled than the big diplomatic missions, in a different way. Ambassadors' wives also bond, despite our different nationalities, religions and cultural beliefs."

As a mother of four children, Nobre Quinteiro said she has always been attached to charity causes for the disabled. She was introduced to the Planting Love Charity by Anne Wightman, the wife of previous British Ambassador, Scott Wightman.

The Planting Love Charity was established in 1990 with the joint support of ambassadors' wives and members of the Korean community to raise funds and awareness about children with disabilities.

The organization has supported various disabled groups by providing education and job training, spaces for activities, physiotherapy and baking equipment for businesses.

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Romanian Ambassador Fabian Calin (center) speaks at the "Pocket Revolutions: Romanian Contemporary Art" exhibition at the Korea Foundation Gallery in Seoul on Thursday. From left to right: Korea Foundation executive vice president Zeon Nam-jin, event curator Simona Nastac, Calin, poet Florin Dan Prodan and filmmaker Matei Bejenaru. Joel Lee/The Korea Herald

Romanian exhibition illuminates communist life

By Joel Lee

A group of Romanian artists is displaying work that delves into life during and after communism, revealing a complex world of creativity and resistance.

The "Pocket Revolutions: Romanian Contemporary Art" exhibition at the Korea Foundation Gallery from April 3-18 in Seoul celebrates the silver jubilee of relations this year and pays tribute to the communist legacies of Romania.

Photographs, films, sculptures, books and paintings by eight artists reveal a complex reality of the country's turbulent and disjointed epochs — communist rule from the 1947 and 1989 revolution; the dawn of democracy and capitalism; and the 21st-century postindustrial world.

The exhibition includes the documentary "Battling Inertia" (2010) by Matei Bejenaru, photography professor at George Enescu Arts University in Iasi, Romania, which portrays a poetry club in an industrial factory in Iasi.

"Battling Inertia" is the title of a famous 20th-century national poem, which became the club's name and my work," Bejenaru told The Korea Herald. "The idea was to hear people's voices through poems about love, philosophy, passing time and the human relationship with nature."

Featuring a unique combination of machines and poems, the 84-year-old former employee Alex-

andru Tacu narrates how workers "battled the inertia" of their lives through literature.

"The workers, instead of going home after work to drink beers, read and listened to poetry," said Bejenaru. "Can you imagine this in a capitalist society, with all its technology and fashion?"

When Bejenaru reentered a factory library where club members gathered nearly 20 years after it was locked up in 1991, "All scientific books and manuals were frozen in time," he said. As factories went bankrupt in the early 1990s and technology evolved, the knowledge became obsolete.

Communist states around the world channeled national resources to develop heavy industries to "catch up" with the advanced West. However, Romania lost an edge in a technology-driven world economy, Bejenaru said.

"This idea of making progress was doomed from the start because our talent was pressed into an ideological cage of communism," he added. "As much as the regime tried to enforce its vision, there was resistance."

Adapting to life under capitalism has been equally arduous, he stressed. Unemployment and emigration have increased in Romania since the 2008 global financial crisis, despite joining the European Union in 2007.

Iasi is now a university town of 80,000 students. There are voluntary poetry associations, although

not as many or as vigorous as its heyday.

"Who cares about poetry these days?" Bejenaru asked. "People have to be pragmatic to make money. Poetry is contemplating about life, thinking differently from what's normal."

Florin Dan Prodan's "Six Portraits and a Pullover" (2015) is an anthology of poems dedicated to casualties of Romanian gulags. The Ceausescu regime imprisoned and killed over 1 million liberal politicians, intellectuals, students, artists, priests and peasants during its 24-year reign of terror.

"My work is a homage to core members of the Romanian Kingdom (1881-1947), which was a European and democratic nation before communism," Prodan said. "Many Romanians didn't know political prisons existed, and it is a sensitive issue, even today. We have a responsibility to remember their sacrifices."

"Auditions for a Revolution" (2006) by Irina Botea includes television footage during the revolution which is played alongside recordings of Botea's students from the University of Chicago, where she has taught video art, role-playing these moments. Other works by Radu Cioca, Stefan Constantinescu, Dana Popa, Serban Savu, Anca Benera and Arnold Estefan are also on display at the exhibition.

Event curator Simona Nastac said some Romanians have nostal-

gia about what they lost: exuberance and innocence for youngsters, power and privilege for elites and a sense of security for people.

"But we clearly understand that what we gained in 1989 is far more important than what we lost. Communism was a failed project," she said.

Romanians hated leader Nicolae Ceausescu, Nastac stressed, adding that what people see from outside is different from what occurs inside.

Ceausescu took power in 1965 with popular support, but over the years, the economy crumbled and people became impoverished. His cult personality and secret police created fear, preventing honest discussions among family members and pitting everyone against each other, according to Nastac.

"People knew it was all lies and propaganda," she said. "I suspect in North Korea, too, fearing secret police, it would be very difficult to start a coherent movement of resistance."

Art scenes in Romania and Eastern Europe are now dynamic and vibrant, due to support by American philanthropist George Soros from 1992, which was followed by the Erste Bank-Transit of Austria from 2002, noted Nastac.

Nastac is a curator of the "Kingston Welcomes Korea Festival 2015," to be held in London from July 30 to Aug. 8, which will feature visual arts, music and drama. (joel@heraldcorp.com)

German firms glitter at Seoul Motor Show

By Joel Lee

The German Association of Automotive Industry (VDA) has showcased the latest technology and opened the doors for medium-sized suppliers at a pavilion at the 2015 Seoul Motor Show.

With the import of foreign cars steadily rising in Korea, German cars, known for their world-class performance, design and safety, increased sales by 28 percent in 2014 with 143,300 vehicles.

Imported car sales overall increased 14 percent in 2014. One in 7 cars sold in Korea last year were imported, with German brands making up three-quarters.

"The Korean market has developed to a great success for German manufacturers. We are here to support our supplier companies by collaborating with Korean partners," Klaus Brauning, managing director of VDA, told The Korea Herald last Thursday during the motor show, which was held at the Korea International Exhibition Center from April 3-12.

"Collaboration between medium-sized firms helps not only the automotive sector, but the entire industry by spurring innovative partnerships."

A noticeable trend in Korea's import car market is the dominance of premium vehicles, taking up over 70 percent of the market share. A total of 86 percent of all imported German cars to Korea belong in this category.

Newly registered cars with diesel engines, known for power and fuel efficiency, also increased from 25 percent in 2012 to 33 percent in 2014. Two-thirds of German cars sold in Korea in 2012 had diesel



The German Embassy's Head of Mission Theodor Schuster (center) speaks beside German Association of Automotive Industry managing director Klaus Brauning (left) and head of press Eckehart Rotter at the Seoul Motor Show 2015 at KINTEX on Thursday. Joel Lee/The Korea Herald

engines, with the figure rising to 80 percent in 2014.

German exports to Korea rose sharply after the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement came into effect in 2011. The growing popularity of premium cars, the preference for diesel engines, successful marketing, low interest rate and the favorable euro-won exchange rate contributed to the sales, explained Brauning.

Theodor Schuster, head of mission at the German Embassy, said German manufacturers buy parts

worth billions of dollars from Korean suppliers each year, which are not reflected in Korea's deficit trade balance of 3.6 billion euros with the European Union.

"It is important to take note of positive effects that German manufacturers bring to Korea, including creating high-quality jobs for the 'creative economy.'"

VDA head of press Eckehart Rotter said, "The old mentality of buying domestic brands as 'patriotic consumers' is waning. Greater op-

portunities offered by globalization are more and more appreciated by Korean consumers."

German representatives said the "elaborate" certification required on imported motor-vehicle parts, introduced after the conclusion of FTA, should be redressed as it complicates packaging process.

The 66th International Motor Show will take place in Frankfurt am Main from Sept. 17-27 under the slogan "mobility connects." (joel@heraldcorp.com)



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