

30 years have passed

Prologue

One generation has passed. 30 years has passed since Korea and Russia restored its diplomatic relations. In September 1990 at New York, just two years after the historic 1988 Summer Olympics held in Seoul quite successfully and only one year after the solemn declaration of the two top world leaders in Malta, stating that ‘the Cold War is over,’ two Foreign Ministers of both countries signed a joint statement of establishing the diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and the Soviet Union at that time. It is always noted with great pleasure that our two countries have continued to make efforts to develop and promote bilateral relations of friendship and cooperation since its inception.

Among many things happened during the last 30 years, one of the remarkable and noticeable establishment to deepen, widen and consolidate bilateral relations of amity and cooperation between Korea and Russia is the foundation of the Korea-Russia Dialogue (KRD). KRD has set sailed 10 years ago. It is my great honor and pleasure with deep pride to declare that KRD has continued to make good contributions to betterment of mutually beneficial bilateral relations since 2010.

Two Heads of States agreed, in the Joint Statement after the Summit meeting in 2008, to set up a Dialogue for helping bilateral relations to grow in a comprehensive manner and for making people of both countries get friendlier and more mutually understood. KRD started its official mission two years later with organizing the 1st KRD Forum in Saint Petersburg where two Heads of States attended at the closing session to get reports of the KRD committees and to deliver a remark of acknowledgement encouraging hundreds of the participants of both countries.

I’ve worked at the Korean Embassy in Moscow from April 2007 to February 2010. Afterwards, I renewed my deep special relations with Russia by assuming an honorable duty of Coordinator of KRD since November 2013 when President Putin paid a brisk official visit to Seoul, who attended the 3rd KRD Forum.

My 3 years’ stay in Moscow serving as Ambassador was so nice and pleasant to become one of the most precious rewarding moments out of my almost 40 year-long diplomat’s life. During those days, I had very unique and valued experiences. I enjoyed meetings with lots of people in various backgrounds. Though poor in Russian, I liked to make my words spoken in beautiful Russian language. Many remote places I traveled still remains in my good memory: Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Blagaveshensk, Havarovsk, Bladivostok, Yuzhno- Sakhalinsk, Rostovnadanu and Sochi. Among them, vivid well is that ‘Don’t say it’s cold unless it hits — 40 degrees Celsius in Yakutia.’ The more I’ve got to know Russians and the more time I spent with them, the more I felt that I have made good friends with them.

Review

It started at mid-17th century when the Korean peninsula had contact with Russia. In 1654 and 1658, Chosun Kingdom of Korea was asked by Qing Dynasty of China respectively to send a rifle squadron, who later got contact with Russian alongside Heirong river [Amour River] in north China. It was the first time in history that Korean met with Russian. Since then, however, no substantive engagement was made until the Friendship and Trade Treaty between Chosun and Russia was signed in 1884.

After the 2nd World War, Korea and then-Soviet Union could be regarded as most influenced and victimized nations by ideological conflict and confrontation. However, as the Seoul Summer Olympics in 1988 helped bring thawing breeze to the world, which eventually led to the end of Cold War, Korea and Soviet Union normalized diplomatic relations in 1990 marking an end to the 80 year-long diplomatic shutdown.

Now 30 years has passed since normalization of relations between Korea and Russia. 900 millions US dollar amount of trade in 1990 increased \$25 billions last year. The Visa abolishment agreement in 2014 enabled both countries to expand peoples' mutual visit to the level of 500 thousand each per year. Korean companies including Lotte, Samsung, LG and Hyundai/Kia automobiles have continued to increase investment fairly in Russia.

Of course, there were several unfortunate engagements such as reciprocal expulsion of diplomats in mid-90s and a failed joint venture project of Kamchatka continental shelf oil exploration in 2008. But as were seen in the success of the first Korean astronaut project and the 2013 launch of Naro communication satellite, a long term contract of purchasing 1.5 million tons of LNG from Sakhalin annually, fishery cooperation in Kamchatka, Russian military defense equipment purchase program and establishment of KRD, we have continued to indulge in expanding a variety of practical cooperation.

I have sincere expectation that the Russian government emphasizing Look East Policy and the Korean government declaring expansion of cooperation with Eurasia as one of its priority national agenda can take firm measures for upgrading the relations. It is also expected that such upgraded ties enables private companies to bring about more substantive cooperative results. And moreover, it is hoped that trilateral projects among Russia and both Koreas in the area of rail- way connection, electricity supply and gas cooperation could be well addressed and materialized sooner or later.

Russia, needless to say again, has played a very important role in keeping peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. In particular, he did his part solidly as member of the 6 Party Talks designed for solving North Korea's nuclear problem peacefully. We are all aware with appreciation that Russia has been instrumental in adopting resolutions in the UN Security Council condemning North Korea's nuclear tests and its violations of international law.

Basically, Korea and Russia have cooperated well in international arena such as G20, APEC, ASEM, EAS and etc, and shared common understanding in many global issues, of which, however, official position is not always same. I am not of the view that we could avoid differences in some international issues. But it is noted with pleasure that we have handled those differences with care and wisdom not to cause any big hindrance to development of bilateral relations. And I like to expect that we can continue to do so in the future.

Tasks

What would be most effective ways and means to accumulate bigger fruits of cooperation in our bilateral relations? What kind of efforts to be more efficient and what measures to be taken first? For this, I better recall the last 30 year's accomplishment we've made as well as my personal experiences earned through 3 year diplomatic service in Moscow. Mindful of our unique political, economic and cultural backgrounds, I like to suggest the followings.

First, a vital interest and leadership of highest political figures in strengthening bilateral ties are essential. Backed by staunch support of top leaders, we should exert efforts to diversify and solidify ways of dialogue and communication. These efforts are prerequisite for developing the strategic cooperative partnership more substantially and substantively. And considering our politico-cultural characteristics, I believe it imperative to maintain contact or meetings between the two top leaders wherever and whenever possible.

In addition, more candid and constructive dialogue in foreign and security affairs is absolutely requested. It is more or less understandable for Russia to view the Korean affairs in light of its global strategic viewpoints. However, the matter of peace, stability, reunification and prosperity of over 70 millions Koreans as a whole deserves to be fully and clearly addressed. I earnestly wish, therefore, that Russia could render, at a bilateral context, more understanding and firm support toward efforts and patience exercised by Koreans for lessening tension and promoting reconciliation on the Korean peninsula. And in particular, I like to earnestly ask Russia to understand and take seriously the necessity for 'Koreanization' of the Korean affairs.

In fact, whatsoever positive outcome is pursued, it needs efforts by parties concerned to strengthen level of mutual trust. For this, I expect more contact and dialogue both by central and by provincial government level. It is my desire that we should accumulate practical experience of cooperation through conducting exemplary cooperative project and exchange increase program.

Second, I believe it very important to build a win-win structure for securing success of economic cooperation. Investment needs mid- long term economic assessment rather than short term profit, so that it is essential to provide good environment for investment and for anticipating mid-long term profit. There are ample opportunity for cultivating, expanding and accelerating cooperation of mutual benefit in agriculture, fisheries, ship-building, maritime transportation, energy, science technology, military tech, space science, and arctic ocean development.

I also believe that dialogue and communication should be stimulated in business sector too. We cannot deny existence of differences in social custom and system between Korea and Russia who spends only 3 decades since economic transformation started. There would be a case, not because of wrong or bad attempt, but only due to misunderstanding and distrust arisen by differences in custom and system. This answers why we should expand ways of dialogue and communication to elevate the level of mutual trust.

Third, no matter how many resources listed in Mendeleev periodic table, we need to apply the principle of 'select and concentrate' for doing business more productively. It needs no reiteration that, under the spirit of mutual respect and mutually beneficial growth, the right understanding and recognition toward each other earned through increase of dialogue and communication serves the very basis for the desirable development of bilateral relations.

Bearing this in mind, it requires for Korea to understand clearly what Russia seeks to accomplish in global context and to recognize where it stands now in the international society. Korea should be aware of the will, capacity, strength and limits of the president Putin's government who declared to re-establish a strong Russia indeed. The long profound traditions, indomitable history and outstanding legacy of culture and arts together with its leadership governing such a vast land of Eurasia and its national pride and dignity are cores of its characteristics, which Russia has represented itself to the world. These facts we, Koreans have to keep in mind all the time. And now I like, for a moment, to remind myself of a part of Tucheв's well known poem, dictating that 'Russia can be understood not by head but by heart.'

By the same token, it needs clear recognition of and objective understanding on the part of Russia on a unique environment that Korea has faced with.

First, it has passed 75 years since the peninsula was divided. The North and the South have so far often engaged in fierce antagonism and confrontation although there were ups and downs in their relations. Russia is therefore requested to understand well the position of South Korea, who, keeping its security unchallenged, should ease tension on the peninsula and pursue reconciliation through dialogue, so as to accomplish its long aspiration of peaceful re-unification while trying hard to solve North Korea's nuclear problem.

Second, Koreans are long in pursuit of universal values of human-kind such as democracy, human rights and freedom of press. Its ardent endeavors and ceaseless dedication have realized its struggle for democracy and economic modernization simultaneously. In this context, Korea, in general, joins the Western world in preserving and developing the present order of international politics and economy. And I believe it has good reason to do so.

Third, however, Korea once called as a poorest, a developing country in 1950s and 60s has grown to a leading middle power with its 13th high in economic strength worldwide. Against this backdrop, Korea shares very instinctively appropriate expectation and demand of the emerging powers to bring change in the international order.

Any country wishes to make good friends with as many countries as possible. It never stops to promote mutually beneficial relationship in politico-economic fields while expanding exchanges in such areas as culture, arts, academia and sports for making peoples closer and deeper in understanding and friendship. Such endeavors should be based on mutuality and reciprocity not on unilateral demands. It pays a lot more to pave the long-term basis rather than short-term gains. It should be in line with a universal value of humankind not only with an exclusive national interest. These are genuine elements for an ever better state-to-state relations of common prosperity.

Closing

Korea and Russia are neighbors. And they are important to each other, good and mutually beneficial. Neighboring states of good relations, however, cannot always agree in everything. Rather, good neighbor should make it clear why it has different views, if any, while keeping its stance to understand and respect its partner's. Their ties are not like those of rich vs poor, nor strong against weak. But truly, they are based on principle and common sense prevailing and on mutual respect and common prosperity to be sought.

What we have to remember is that raindrops with a flow of spring water gather to form a little brook, which will turn into a river thus to reach the sea. We should never

spare our small but meaningful efforts for making some contribution to ever betterment of our mutually beneficial bilateral relations of friendship and cooperation. KRD will continue to do its humble but noble mission for upgrading the bilateral relations between Korea and Russia like raindrops making a river reach the sea of mutual respect and common prosperity.

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