

Based on Their Vital Alliance in the Korean War: Pres. Roh's Visit to Further Cement Bilateral Cooperative Ties With Turkey

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun appealed for the Turkish government's continued support for South Korea's pursuit of peace and prosperity policy toward North Korea. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan renewed Turkey's active support for South Korea's policy. He also added that Turkey regards its ties with South Korea, a hub nation in Northeast Asia, as very significant.

"President Roh expressed hope that his visit will further cement bilateral cooperative ties which have developed in the past based on their vital alliance since Turkey took part in the Korean War. Prime Minister Erdogan said that Turkey would provide the needed assistance to South Korean troops deployed in nearby Iraq in case of an emergency," said Chung Woo-sung, presidential secretary on foreign policy, during a media briefing on the outcome of the summit talks.

President Roh Moo-Hyun arrived in Turkey on April 14, 2005, for a landmark three-day visit aimed at developing ties between the two countries. Roh was marked as the first South Korean head of state to visit Turkey since the two nations set up diplomatic relations in 1957.

In their summit meeting in Ankara on April 15, the two leaders agreed to strengthen cooperation in information and technology (IT), automobile and other economic areas. The two leaders shared the notion that the bilateral exchanges have remained relatively sluggish despite the traditionally friendly relations between the two nations.

As part of efforts to promote bilateral economic cooperation, Roh pledged to dispatch a massive trade mission to Turkey later this year. He also revealed expectation that the two nations will see further trade and investment relations and exchanges in culture and tourism.

Roh and Erdogan also had talks on a cruise ship operating in the Bosphorus Strait separating Asia from Europe. The meeting, which had not been in Roh's official itinerary, took place at the request of the Turkish premier who cited the need to talk more with Roh on pending issues. The meeting also proceeded in a very casual, friendly manner for about one and a half hour as part of fostering good relations between the two leaders.

During the cruise talks, Erdogan, hailing from Istanbul, spoke of the palaces, museums and other relics of the city, describing it as the place where he had spent his childhood. In response, Roh said he was also born in a sea village. "This is as beautiful as the southern coast of South Korea. It is the best place I have ever visited since I assumed presidency," said Roh, who is from Kimhae in South Gyongsang Province.

Before meeting with Erdogan, President Roh also met his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Necdet Sezer to discuss issues of mutual interest, including security and economy. "Despite the long

distance, the two nations have maintained close ever relations in historic and cultural aspects," Sezer said. President Sezer stressed close relationship between South Korea and Turkey, describing it as a sort of brethren relation, according to the spokesman.

Ahead of the summit meeting, Roh offered wreaths at a war memorial tower and met some 50 Turkish veterans of the Korean War at the Korean Park in downtown Istanbul. In a speech, Roh said, "The braveness of Turkish soldiers lives on in the hearts of Korean people like legends and they will never forget the troops' sacrifice." Turkey has been South Korea's ally since it dispatched 15,000 troops to the Korean peninsula for the 1950-53 Korean war, the third largest contingent after the United States and Britain. A total of 3,216 Turkish soldiers lost lives and were wounded.

Some of the veterans, mostly in their 70s, wiped tears from their eyes. They appeared emotionally overwhelmed when Roh invited them to a photo session and shook their hands. "It was a very moving moment. Although a little belated, President Roh's visit to Turkey was a good decision," said Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Ban Ki-moon.

The two countries claim friendly ties since Turkey dispatched some 4,500 soldiers to the Peninsula under the United Nations flag during the 1950-1953 Korean War. A total of 721 Turkish soldiers were killed in combat during the war and 175 were reported missing in action.

During his stay in Turkey, President Roh visited Hyundai Motor Company's Turkish plant on April 17, at his last stop on his nine-day tour of Germany and Turkey, to offer support its employees. The factory, with an annual production capacity of 60,000 units, has manufactured the Verna compact, Starex and Grace vans since 1997.

It was the first time for a Korean head of state to visit a Korean company in Turkey since the nations established diplomatic ties in 1957. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan had also visited the automaker's Ulsan plant during his trip to Korea in February, as Hyundai plays an important role in the growth of Turkey's automobile industry.

The Turkish production arm of Hyundai Motors expects to rank third in the country by reaching sales of 92,000 units this year - 68,000 in Turkey and 24,000 in exports. In response to Roh's question about future plans, Hyundai Motor Chairman Chung Mong-koo, who accompanied the president on his tour of the plant, replied that his firm plans to double the production capacity of its Turkish facilities.

Currently, 1,745 employees, including those from Korea, work at the Turkish unit, which exports to 35 nations in Europe and the Middle East.

Roh's visit to the factory emphasized the goal of his trip - strengthening the cooperative relationship between the two countries in business and diplomacy, according to Hyundai Motor in a statement.

Hyundai has made constant efforts to elevate its corporate image by participating in the rescue and rebuilding operations after a 1999 earthquake in Turkey, offering discounts to veterans of the Korean War and sponsoring the war-bereaved families' visits to Korea.

Among other things, we have a "customs union" with the European Union. The customs union is a type of economic relationship beyond a free trade agreement," said Turkish Ambassador to Seoul Selim Kunalp. Under the customs union, Turkey has the same external trade policy with other members of the EU while maintaining the same tariffs to a third country. The trade between member countries of the customs union is made without tariffs.

In his message to welcome the South Korean President's visit to Ankara to a Korean daily, Amb. Kunalp said, "Turkey has had a "customs union" with the EU since 1995. Any product manufactured in Turkey can be export-ed to Europe without tariffs and govern-ment restrictions like quotas. So, it is quite an advantage for Korean investors to do business in Turkey."

As the Turkish domestic market is large and rapidly expanding, it is also a very attractive market for Korean businessmen, according to the amba-ssador. "We have a large local market of 70 million people, which is increasing very fast in terms of potential," he said. "That is why we have been importing so much from Korea for the last two or three years."

"Korea exported products worth US\$2.3 billion to Turkey last year, which is equal to 1% of Korea's total exports to the world," said Kunalp. Turkey has a large trade deficit with South Korea; in 2003, Turkish exports to the Asian country stood at just US\$57 million, while imports were at US\$1.3 billion.

He selected Hyundai Motors as a good example of fully taking advantage of this by running car factories in Turkey to export cars to European countries. Korean business leaders accompanying Roh will definitely find those incentives for them to invest in Turkey through a series of meetings with Turkish business people and government officials.

As for tourism, Amb. Kunalp expressed that it would be a very positive prospect as the number of Koreans who visit Ankara is increasing. Last year, 6,000 Koreans visited Turkey, a 20% increase from a year ago. "Korean tourists who visit Turkey increase by 20 or 30% every year. I am glad to see the trend," said Amb. Kunalp.

Turkey has a long history with many civilizations, one succeeding the other for 2,500 years, he said while explaining the reason why his country is filled with well-preserved tourist destinations.

"Most importantly, Korean tourists who go to Turkey will feel very much at home because of the very close relationship between the two countries. Since the 1950-53 Korean War, the Turkish public is positively oriented toward Koreans in general," the Turkish career diplomat said.

Turkey, geographically equidis-tant from Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and on friendly terms with the newly independent Central Asian nations, is emerging as a strategic point for South Korean businesses to advance into countries in those regions. Negotiation for Turkey's accession to the European Union is set to start in October this year, which many experts predict will further promote the country's economy.

Meanwhile, Korean Ambassador to Ankara Kwon Young-jae said, "The President's visit to Turkey offers Seoul and Ankara an invaluable opportunity to improve their half-century-old relations to the level of real brother-hood." Kwon, 59, a former three-star Army general, unveiled his deep feelings for the nation, which sent thousands of soldiers to help South Koreans defend their nation during the 1950-53 Korean War.

"Concrete measures to develop bilateral ties prevailed in the summit talks," Amb. Kwon said in a recent interview with a local paper. "Promotion of trade and investment as well as cooperation in information technology and defense industries were also closely discussed."

"Sharing the same language roots under the Ural-Altai language family and the legacy of Mongolian spots, the

Turks have such good feelings for our country that they even call South Korea a 'brother country,'" he said.

Having had hundreds of young men die and several thousand more go missing in action, Turkey has traditionally been on friendly terms with South Korea since establishing formal diplomatic relations in 1957.

When he first came to Turkey as a military attache to the Korean Embassy in the late 1980s, Kwon recalled that South Korea was not so well known in the country, and the bilateral trade relations amounted to less than \$100 million.

"After we Koreans collected contributions in voluntary fundraisers to help Turkish people hit by a huge earthquake in 1999, they started thinking about us differently," he said. "And the love we showed the Turks in the 2002 World Cup soccer finals in Korea utterly moved them."

As of late 2004, the bilateral trade volume exceeded US\$2.3 billion (₩2.3 trillion) and South Korea's investment in Turkey neared US\$300 million (₩303 billion). "Bilateral ties have been drawing an ever-rising curve," he extolled. Kwon also stressed the need to increase cultural exchanges between the two countries in the coming years, as the 50th anniversary of establishing formal

relationships will be held in 2007. "I believe there is a close bond between the two peoples, which enables better understanding of each other's culture," he said.