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César Ross, “Chile and South Korea, 1990-2014: Historical Analysis and Challenges”

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On September 1, 2015, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies hosted a roundtable with Dr. César Ross, Professor of the Institute for Advanced Studies and Director of the Chile-Korea Study Center Program (ChKSCP) at the Universidad de Santiago de Chile (USATA). Dr. Ross’ main research interests are economic history and historical international relations, and under his leadership, the ChKSCP focuses on promoting issues related to Korea in Chile and South America. In a talk entitled, “Chile and South Korea, 1990-2014: Historical Analysis and Challenges,” Dr. Ross discussed various aspects of the Chile-South Korea relationship since 1990.

Dr. Ross' talk contextualized the significance of the Chile-South Korea relationship amidst a rearticulation of power in Asia and analyzed the impact of Korea-Chile Free Trade Agreement over the past decade. He points out that the "Asian economic crisis of 1997 became a critical moment that described the acceleration of a double movement: the decline of Japan and rise of China in world trade," stating that such a shift in power had "an effect very visible in the matrix for world trade for Latin America and the Caribbean." Hence, the change in distribution of power has had significant economic and political effects not only on intra-Asian relations but also affecting relations between Asia and the World. Nonetheless, Asia is an increasingly important trade region for Chile.

As Dr. Ross points out, Asia represents 40% of exports for Chile, and South Korea is Chile's 5th largest trading partner. The main Chilean exports to South Korea in 2013 include fruit (\$155 million USD), salmon (\$40 million USD), and wine (\$34 million USD). During 2003-2013, 370 Chilean companies began exporting to South Korea and 248 new products representing 15% of total Chilean exports to South Korea were added. Reports have indicated a 16% annual growth in trade volume during this same decade, but Dr. Ross indicates that this trade relationship is still underdeveloped as it is limited "at the state-level [with insufficient] private sector exchanges." To improve the ability of bilateral relations to weather economic or business cycles, it will be necessary to strengthen political ties as well.

In conclusion, Dr. Ross surmises that it will be challenging but very important to reinforce the Chile-South Korea bilateral agenda, especially aspects connected with development. Although trade is a dynamic factor influencing the relationship, it is not enough to move beyond commerce to transform political ties. Thus, "a more intensive bilateral cooperation is the key to transform [the status of] our current relations and to face a new stage."

Professor Eduardo Devés of Universidad de Santiago de Chile (USATA), Chilean Ambassador to Korea Hernán Brantes, Minister Counsellor Roberto Alvarez from the Embassy of Chile, and Charge d'Affaires Jairo Lopez of Costa Rica also attended the roundtable.

Date/Time: Tuesday, September 1, 2015 / 13:30 – 15:30

Place: Conference Room (3F), The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Reported by: Rachel Leng

