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Yim decorated with Hungarian order

The Hungarian government last week bestowed the Officer's Cross Order of Merit to the former president of the Korea Foundation for his work in improving cultural and educational ties between the two countries.

Yim Sung-joon "was there from the beginning when we established diplomatic relations," said Hungarian Ambassador Miklos Lengyel to The Korea Herald.

Diplomatic relations between South Korea and Hungary were established in 1989, making Hungary the first country from the former socialist bloc to forge ties with the nation.

"He helped us set up ties, he was involved and he was part of the historical moments in different positions," he said.

One important moment was being part of the first presidential visit by a South Korean leader when former President Roh Tae-woo visited Budapest in 1989.

Yim said that he always professed a strong love for Hungary.

"The establishment of Korea-Hungary relations were exemplified as a historical moment in international diplomacy where two nations, divided by the Iron Curtain, came together to forge a strong partnership," said Yim.



Hungarian Ambassador Miklos Lengyel decorates Hankuk University of Foreign Studies professor and former president of the Korea Foundation Yim Sung-joon with the Officer's Cross, Order of Merit. (Yoav Cerralbo/The Korea Herald)

Before heading the mission in Seoul, Lengyel, during his parliamentary hearings, explained that he wanted to improve cultural, educational and public diplomacy as well as increase commercial trade between the two nations.

“So this is where the role of Mr. Yim is very important,” said Lengyel.

As an organization, the Korea Foundation assists foreign missions in Seoul organize cultural events.

Sometimes this means finding an appropriate concert hall for visiting musicians, other times it means finding the funds to assist in bringing these cultural troupes to Korea and other times it means sharing their experience and expertise in organizing such events.

“When I became the president of the Korea Foundation in 2007, I worked vigorously to enhance stronger cultural, academic and intellectual ties between our two countries,” said Yim.

One of the first things on his agenda was to dispatch a local professor in Korean studies to the Elte University in Budapest in 2008 to assist in the promotion of Korean studies.

He also worked to strengthen bilateral exchanges via the invitation of many important Hungarian figures to Korea.

“Among them was Professor Szego, a former professor of sociology, whose love for Korea was so strong,” he said. “However she felt guilty that she wasn’t able to speak Korean. Understanding this, I made arrangements for her to commence Korean language training in a local university.

“After completing a one-year course, Szego, now a competent Korean language speaker, is working to erect a sculpture of Ahn Eak-tai in Hungary,” said Yim.

Ahn conducted numerous major orchestras across Europe, including the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the Rome Philharmonic Orchestra but is most well-known for composing the national anthem of Korea.

While Yim’s term as president of the Korea Foundation ended this past summer, he has taken up a role as professor in the graduate school of international and area studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

The Officer’s Order of Merit is a state decoration bestowed to civilians from Hungary and foreign countries.

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