J e a n - D a n i e l T o r d j m a n has been an Honorary Ambassador of Foreign Investment for Korea since 2011. The France native is also the former chairman of the Korean Investors Club and an Ambassador-at-Large, Special Representative of France for International Investment. Also the CEO of Astarte International, Mr. Tordjman boasts a distinguished career in government and business. We talked with him about his work as an ambassador for business in Korea.

How has the ambassador experience been thus far?
Very well indeed, it is a great honor for me having been appointed Honorary Ambassador since 2011. The official visit of Korean President Park Geun-hye in France was a major moment. I work in close relation with the Paris Korea Business Center (KBC) and its Director General M. Choe Kihyung. Creating the new function of Honorary Ambassadors is a remarkable idea of Korea to promote from inside the Korean investment environment, and my contacts are happily surprised to see that a French ambassador can be in such a position. It shows the creativity and the openness of Korean minds.

How did you first start becoming interested in Korea and business in Korea?
I have a very international career being the first French Ambassador-at-Large for International Investment and then in charge of French Clusters. I visited Korea on an official mission for the first time in 1992 and since then, I have had many opportunities to appreciate the dynamism, the creativity and the energy of Korean companies and Korean citizens where I have several good personal friends. When I was invited by the Korean Foundation to visit Korea, I asked to understand more the roots of its culture and civilization.

What is Korea’s greatest advantage as an investment destination, and what would be the best way to promote it to French investors?
The world is changing. And fast. Korea is an innovative country, fast moving and open to the world with many assets: its people, their talents, their dedication to work, the location in Northeast Asia and its capacity to transform scientific innovations into business realities.

In order to promote more efficiently Korea, the Honorary Ambassador needs to better understand the economic and industrial strategy of the main Korean chaebols in order to organize more high-level meetings between the decision makers of the two countries. We need to have, at least once or twice a year, real strategic meetings with interested Korean chaebols and certain officials to put them then in contact with French decision makers. I am convinced that strategic partnerships and alliances could be started this way with investments in Korea, in France or elsewhere in the world, in Africa or in the Middle East, for example.

According to the Bloomberg Innovation Index 2014, Korea is the most innovative country in the world. How does Korea appeal to French investors as a base of innovation?
I agree. Korea is a very innovative country and this plays a role in attracting FDI in high-tech fields. Moreover, the French high-tech sector is interested in Korea as a platform to attack Northeast Asia, including China, since Korea is building an FTA network and has IP laws. As a Senior International Advisor at the CEA Tech, I am convinced that is a field of mutual interest and convergence.

What sector or industry in your country is most likely to invest in Korea, and why?
France is a very strong country in different fields: sustainable development (water management, PPP, waste management, renewable energy, etc...), infrastructures, urban development, agro-business industries, luxury goods, fashion, tourism and cultural industries. All these sectors are likely to invest in Korea if we develop the right connections, trust and confidence among business leaders. I know personally most French business leaders, but I don’t know enough their Korean counterparts. If we want to be more efficient, we need to create a real high-level network.

What can Korea improve to bring in more investment?
My vision is that the driving force is the big corporations. Korea should be more focused on B2B meetings between major French and Korean companies. We could use more cultural events to help organize these business meetings. Korea could rely on an existing network to arrange such meetings, but we need to have more Korean decision makers coming to France and vice versa.

Korea should use more the Honorary Ambassadors to help define the best strategy for each country. In fact, Honorary Ambassadors could help set up a strategic plan with local KBCs defining priorities, actions and the budget to attract more FDI in Korea.

How do you envision Korea in the next five years?
Very positively. Korea will continue to develop, surfing on its dynamism and innovation capacities. Korea has challenges to face but I am very optimistic about Korea’ future. Korea has always found ways to overcome its difficulties and integrate itself in globalization. In five years’ time, I would not be surprised if Korea figures among the top 10 nations in the world.

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