Ombudsman’s Office

FIAC Meeting Draws Out Issues and Commitments for Resolution

Foreign investors shared their grievances and the government gave updates on efforts to improve Korea’s regulatory environment at last month’s FIAC meeting.

Last month, I had the pleasure of hosting my first Foreign Investment Advisory Council (FIAC) meeting, which is held twice a year by my office, the Office of the Foreign Investment Ombudsman. Designed to give foreign-invested companies in Korea a forum to voice their grievances and to help resolve them, the meeting was attended by 50 people, including the CEOs of foreign-invested companies here, leaders of foreign chambers of commerce and government officials.

I started the meeting with a briefing on the achievements of my office for the first half of the year. FIAC members were also updated on how the government is following up on issues raised at the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Regulatory Reforms held in May and chaired by Korean President Park Geun-hye. These issues included the creation of an online regulatory portal in which opinions can be shared and 41 regulations that need to be eased or eliminated. I informed FIAC members that the government is reviewing details for this portal and will announce an action plan in the near future. We also presented information on measures the government will take to improve the 41 regulations. In light of the recent Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak in Korea, my office passed out material on how the government is responding to the situation.

A focus of the meeting was the new designation of 21 government officials from central administrative organizations in charge of matters related to foreign direct investment (FDI), called FDI Coordinators. They will facilitate the smooth handling of civil petitions filed by foreign-invested companies and liaise between them and relevant ministries to help ensure that issues are addressed as quickly as possible. They will also serve as a grievance-resolution channel by listening to the opinions of foreign-invested companies on matters related to regulation enactment and amendment and conveying them to appropriate ministries. The goal is to improve communication between foreign-invested companies and the government.

Leaders of companies and organizations including BMW Korea, Solvay Korea and the Seoul Japan Club raised 17 suggestions. Eight were addressed as having been taken care of, three involved misconceptions that were immediately corrected at the meeting, one was a straightforward question that was answered and the remaining five were concluded to require further consideration or be difficult to resolve. The FDI Coordinators and I pledged to cooperate to address matters in the long-term.

I closed by acknowledging the gray areas, the ones in which regulations can be unclear or inconsistent and cause difficulties for foreign investors. Though slowly, the government is making progress in this regard and sparing no efforts to improve regulations and the investment environment. I pledge to you, as I did to the FIAC members, that we will strive to produce tangible results for the issues raised during the meeting.

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