

# Czech Republic Backed Korea's Independence

By Kang Hyun-kyung  
Staff Reporter

Czech Republic Ambassador to Korea Jaroslav Olsa said Friday that a century-old friendship between two independent fighters of Korea and his country has paved the way for current extensive Korea-Czech relations.

The ambassador shared the unknown story with The Korea Times ahead of Korea's commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the March 1st Independence Movement Sunday.

The envoy said Yeo Un-hyeong (1886-1947), a key organizer of the peaceful anti-Japanese demonstrations in 1919, had sympathetic contact with Czech military leader Radola Gajda.

Back in 1919, when the two leaders got together for the first time, in Vladivostok, the situations facing the two countries were identical — they were striving for independence.

"Yeo, who was then based in Shanghai, traveled all the way to the Russian city solely to meet the Czech military leader who was six years younger than him," said the ambassador.

Gajda was the supreme commander of the biggest armed force in Czechoslovakia based in Vladivostok.

Charles Crane, then-U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's trusted advisor, was a close friend of Yeo and encouraged the Korean activist to meet Gajda in order to gain



Czech Republic Ambassador to Korea Jaroslav Olsa

wisdom from his efforts.

Crane was a supporter of independence movements all over the world.

"The Czech military leader welcomed the Korean activist. Yet his motives for treating him so nicely were little known. But we can only guess that Gajda had some personal sympathy toward Yeo who, like himself, was eager to make his country independent," said the ambassador.

Yeo was originally an educator, then an independence fighter, and became a politician after Korea was subjugated by Japan in 1909.

After majoring in English literature at a university in Nanjing, China, Yeo created a communist party there in

1918 to launch an effective independence campaign with other fighters.

One year later, Yeo became deeply involved in peaceful demonstrations against Japanese rule, in which some two million Koreans marched for independence.

The movement, led by 33 civic activists and Christians, including Yeo, triggered brutal repression by Japan.

A right-wing activist assassinated Yeo in 1947.

"After the first meeting, Gajda sent a Czech soldier named Josef Hanc with Yeo so that the Korean could travel back safely to Shanghai. He worried about Yeo's safety," said Ambassador Olsa.

Gajda's sympathetic attitude toward Korea and his Korean friend became even more evident, especially after the participants of the Peace Conference in Paris were not supportive of Korea's quest for independence.

After the first meeting, Olsa said not less than 16 Koreans were working with the armored train headquarters of the Czech generals' chief of staff.

"One of them was Han Chang-gol, who was a commander of the machine gun division of Gajda's train. This offers a clue showing their friendship," the ambassador said.

The friendship continued after their first meeting. A few months later, General Gajda dropped by Shanghai on his way back to Czechoslovakia after completing a mission in Vladivostok to meet Yeo and other independence fighters.

hkang@koreatimes.co.kr