

Interview with Mr. Lee Yong-il, Counsellor and Consul General of the South Korean Embassy in Bucharest (1)

KoreaFilm: Could you give us an insight into your diplomatic background? Lee Yong-il: My name is Lee Yong-il and I am currently the deputy chief of the Korean Embassy in Bucharest. Before this, I worked at our embassy in Bangkok, Thailand. Before that, I worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a director that handled international treaties and agreements. Before joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I studied Law, so my background is as a lawyer. With this expertise, I contribute to our diplomacy. At this Embassy, I am in charge of political and cultural affairs, which is why I am meeting you now. KF: Which was the most exciting moment in your diplomatic career? LYI: When I was promoted as a director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of South Korea, and also when I was transferred to Romania, this beautiful land. KF: How have you decided to come to Romania? LYI: As you know, diplomats come and go. I am now in Romania. The headquarters ordered me to change my location to Romania, even though in Thailand I had already served full three years. Then HQ told me that it was time to change the country, asking me: How about going to Romania? I thought about what was for me Romania: the country of Ilie Nastase, Nadia Comaneci and Steaua. It is also the only Latin country in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe. So, without hesitation, I said yes! I would go with my family there. This is how I arrived in Romania in August 2009, together with my wife and my son. Now I am enjoying living in Romania. KF: What else did you know about Romania when you first arrived in Bucharest and what have you discovered here? LYI: As far as I am concerned, I love Latin cultures. At the end of the Roman Empire the Italian Peninsula was conquered by barbarians, such as the Goths. However, here, Dacia managed to remain an independent colony of the Roman Empire. The rudimentary civilization here of the Roman Empire had survived the barbarians' invasions. The Dacian elements are as important for the Romanian culture as the Greek and Roman cultures and civilizations. I understand the Romanian historical and philosophical background, and this is why I love so much Romania.



Photo:

Alisa Tarciniu KF: What have you discovered here about Romania? LYI: I have discovered the people and the potential. I may talk more about the people a bit later. Romania has some tremendous natural beauties, like the Carpathian Mountains. I believe very much in the potential that Romania has, together with its people. The people love art and they are cheerful. This is what I discovered since I arrived here. KF: What are some of the most interesting experiences you have had in Romania so far? LYI: Travels to some Romanian territories. For example, I went to Suceava by train, with my family during the Easter holydays, and I have very good memories. I enjoyed staying there, watching some old monasteries, painted in beautiful colours, such as the famous cobalt blue of Voronet, one symbolic colour for Romanians. I also went to the Carpathians, I stayed for one night in Poiana Brasov. The mountain area is also wonderful, with beautiful sceneries, animals, bears, deer, etc. These were very good memories. And my family also enjoyed this experience a lot. I travelled to many other places: Cluj, Craiova, Timisoara, Mamaia, Constanta, and even Histria, a former Greek colony. I travelled a lot, I find the country very attractive and I like the people. KF: Have you talked to many Romanian citizens? How do you perceive our people? LYI: As a diplomat, I am somehow isolated from the outside, so it is not easy for me to meet ordinary people. But sometimes I meet people in the park or other cities. I have noticed that Romanians are very kind, good looking, lovely and cheerful. Even though you undergo some crisis, I think people are very optimistic and they are enjoying their life. These are my impressions about the Romanian people. KF: Which are the main similarities and differences between South Korea and Romania, in your view? LYI: There are some similarities that come from their historical experience. The Korean Peninsula and Romania are almost the same size. Both Romania and Korea have similar fates in history, in the sense that strong powers surround them and they are relatively small countries. You had hard times due to the big powers. The same way, Korea was surrounded by the big powers like China, USSR, Japan. Korea was under Japanese occupation. We Koreans have something we can call "pathos", passion, we're very passionate, and I think we share this mental attitude with Romanians. Regarding the main differences between two people, I see Romanians, because of their Greek-Roman traditions, as being more prone to logos, to reason, to realism... while we Koreans tend to be more romantic and emotional. Sometimes we cannot control our emotions... Romanians enjoy living their lives and remain cool, calm about life. This is a difference between our two peoples.



Photo: Alisa Tarciniu