



Swiss expert calls for more green innovation

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A visiting Swiss expert has said that Korea could gain an advantage over neighboring countries in the long-run by promoting green growth now.

Swiss Cleantech CEO Nick Beglinger said both Switzerland and Korea should use green innovation to gain a competitive edge while here for a symposium at Sungkyunkwan University.

"Korea's case may be similar to Switzerland, which is a market with very high prices," he said in an interview with The Korea Herald. "We can never beat some of our surrounding markets, or the U.S., the Chinas and the Indias of the world in terms of volume of products. In order to be successful we need to differentiate on quality and innovation and one of the most active areas of innovation and quality is cleantech.

A shortened form of "clean technologies," cleantech is the practice of seeking profit from environmentally friendly business.

Beglinger is lobbying for governments to apply regulatory frameworks to motivate such green innovation across all industries, and for international organizations to promote the same on a global scale.

"For us, cleantech is a quality factor of being resource efficient and producing low emissions in business," he said. "Cleantech is a huge opportunity for Switzerland and if you compare that with Korea, Korea will not win the volume market against China. Korea has to differentiate from many of the emerging markets around it which will have low prices. I think that Cleantech there could come in very handy for Korea as well."

Free Trade Agreements taking environmental concerns into account were a good way for countries such as Korea and Switzerland to work together on such issues.

But while Beglinger said exchanges of best practice between countries' universities, companies and governments were essential, he added: "There are bilateral ways for sure, but ultimately we will need a global deal on many of these things but the strong ones have to lead the way."



Nick Beglinger,
Präsident von
swisscleantech,
setzt sich für eine
noch saubere
Schweiz ein.

Swiss Cleantech CEO Nick Beglinger

Differences in the pace of countries' adoption of environmental incentives and regulations meant an uneven playing field for companies aspiring to adopt cleantech strategies.

But in some areas, Korea is already doing quite well.

"There are certain technologies where Korea is very far ahead. Korea has a bit of a disadvantage in that it has a lot of heavy industry. But I also think could be a huge opportunity in getting heavy industry to be more cleantech," he said

While unwilling to position himself as an expert on Korean business, Beglinger said that Korean conglomerates could run the risk of being less agile than smaller companies on green innovation, and warned of entrenched interests.

"It may be a problem rather than an opportunity but if you manage to get one or two conglomerates to make the switch, and Samsung seems to be pretty close from my limited

know-how of looking at them in the recent past, then you could have a major force in the country that pulls you in this direction," he said.

While he thought Korea had set encouraging goals and general strategies, tougher targets for CO2 emissions were needed, as well as more consideration of the risks of nuclear power.

Beglinger said the energy source did not sit well in the cleantech philosophy because the true costs of insuring against a disaster had not been counted.

"The problem with nuclear is that if you calculate the true costs you really get to the conclusion that nuclear is not the right way to go," he said. "There is not one single country on this planet where nuclear is not operated without heavy subsidies by the government."

The Swiss government has pledged to phase out nuclear power, and has adopted a cleantech master plan similar to Korea's green growth framework.

And Swiss Ambassador Thomas Kupfer said that the two countries were well placed to work together on green growth.

"Both Korea and Switzerland are very active players in the field of green innovation and share the common interest, to find viable solutions for environmental challenges through international cooperation," he said. "By working together closely not only in the academic field but also in economy and development, our countries have the possibility to combine their innovative capacities and thus jointly approach the solution of environmental challenges."

He said that the Swiss Embassy was promoting environmentally friendly technology through events such as the SKKU-Zurich University of Applied Sciences symposium at which Beglinger spoke as part of the Swiss Weeks in Seoul.

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