

## Where do we stand in inter-Korean relations and with North Korea?

Wednesday 23 January, Brussels

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On 23 January 2019, the KF-VUB Korea Chair organised a discussion on ‘Where do we stand in inter-Korean relations and with North Korea’ at the Press Club. Welcoming remarks given by Prof. Dr. Ramon Pacheco Pardo, KF-VUB Korea Chair at the Institute for European Studies (VUB), were followed by an introduction by Prof. Dr. Moon Chung-in, Special Advisor for Foreign Affairs and National Security to President Moon Jae-in and Distinguished Professor at Yonsei University, on the state of inter-Koreans relations and US-North Korea diplomacy.

One year after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s New Year’s speech where nuclear capability was announced, diplomatic talks have eased inter-Korean and US-North Korea relations. Regardless of the publicly shown support of Washington, Pyongyang and Seoul for continuing talks, negotiations have reached a stalemate since November 2018. To move talks forward, every country’s respective wish list needs to be molded into a workable roadmap. For this, Washington and Pyongyang need to agree on the first hurdle – the sequencing of the concessions.

Having uniquely attended the inter-Korean summits in 2000, 2007 and April 2018, Prof. Moon noted a positive development over the years, that is, North Korea’s expectations have become less idealistic and more practical. In contrast to his father and former North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un shows a willingness to give up nuclear capability if there is a mutual exchange with the other parties involved. South Korean President Moon Jae-in also believes that an incremental roadmap, which outlines step-by-step concessions from all parties, is the only way to keep talks going with North Korea. Seoul and Pyongyang are therefore adopting the same approach, that of peace first, denuclearisation later.

US President Donald Trump expects North Korea to show “positive evidence” of their intention to denuclearise before sanctions can be relaxed. North Korea could show this by inviting international inspectors to the Punggye-ri site, dismantling the Yongbyon facility, or by declaring their nuclear inventory upfront. In short, the US wants denuclearisation first, peace later. Another incongruence is found in US political system’s bottom-up approach. If Kim Jong-un is to move talks forward, he expects to work directly with the US President which is why a second Trump-Kim summit shows a lot of promise. Contrary to what has been assumed, North Korea’s exhibited pattern of consulting China before meeting the US does not cause tension in US-China relations. In fact, there is a convergence of interests between President Trump and President Xi Jinping regarding the need to denuclearise North Korea.

Despite US-ROK tension on the sequencing, the relationship is in good shape. President Moon Jae-in commits to show transparency towards US allies while, at the same time, attempts to keep its relation with North Korea disentangled from its US relation. By declaring that ROK-US relations are not of North Korea's concern, President Moon puts particularly thorny issues, such as the presence of American forces in South Korea, squarely outside the playing field.

The European Union should play a role in the rapprochement and denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and, thus, be consulted from the start. President Moon Jae-in used his visit, last November 2018, to appeal for EU's cooperation on this issue. While both Koreas aim towards de facto unification, it should be understood as integration under one nation, one state, two systems, and two local governments. It is therefore more alike to the European Union model instead of the unification model of former West and East Germany. President Moon enjoys the support of the majority of the South Korean people on taking steps towards peace by fostering free exchange of people and aiming for relaxation of sanctions. President Moon sees the de facto unification as a long-term benefit although polls suggest that the South Korean youth, in particular, may not be willing to support this final step.

The second US-North Korea summit is expected at the end of February and is likely to take place in Vietnam. Prof. Moon expects that the US, as well as South Korea, will emphasize the need for North Korea to show positive evidence. North Korea will continue to push for relaxation of UN sanctions. Recognizing that the denuclearisation process will not be a speedy one, Prof. Moon advises to have prudence, patience and a strong will.

今天有幸受邀参加与韩国总统特别顾问文正仁的小型讨论会。信息量很大。总结如下：第一，朝鲜对比金正日时期改变巨大，人民心向经济发展，支持去核化。第二，韩国和美国立场一致，希望朝鲜率先采取有效步骤去核，而不只是停留在口头表态上。第三，朝鲜确实是把中国当作后台，相信得到中国支持，会对其与美国谈判有利。第四，韩国设想的未来统一模式是复制欧盟的机制，实现两国机制上的一体化，人口和货物的自由流通。其实，说的更清楚一点，所谓统一并不是两个主权国家合二为一。第五，即便朝鲜战争所涉及的各个国家能够成功签署停战协定与和平协定，美国照样不会从朝鲜半岛撤军。第六，朝鲜的建设离不开中国，日本以及欧盟的帮助。

Thank you to Prof. Dr. Jing Men, Baillet Latour Chair of European Union-China Relations at the College of Europe, for providing an event summary in Chinese.