

Toward a Peace Process on the Korean Peninsula: Feasible Next Steps

Tuesday 4 June 2019, Berlin

On 4 June 2019, the KF-VUB Korea Chair organised a breakfast meeting by invitation only ‘A Strategy Beyond Sanctions: Evaluating the Role of and Possible Initiatives by the EU in Solving the Nuclear Crisis on the Korean Peninsula’ in cooperation with Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) and a public event on ‘Toward a Peace Process on the Korean Peninsula: Feasible Next Steps’ in cooperation with the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) in Berlin.

The public event consisted of discussion among four experts, Dr. Myong-Hyun Go (Research Fellow at Asan Institute for Policy Studies), Dr. Jina Kim (Associate Research Fellow at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses), Dr. Reinhold Brender (Head of Division Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand and Pacific at the European External Action Service) and Dr. Ramon Pacheco Pardo (KF-VUB Korea Chair at the Institute for European Studies), on how to resume diplomatic rapprochement after the no deal Hanoi Summit in February 2019. They also discussed which role the EU could play to facilitate this. The panel was chaired by Dr. Bernt Berger (Head of Asia programme at DGAP). The event was attended by approximately 50 attendees from the diplomatic community, think tanks and academic organisations, among others.

EU’s North Korea policy has not changed since July 2017, at which time it acknowledged South Korea’s involvement as essential in providing a solution on the Korean Peninsula. As a steadfast supporter of the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime, the EU denounces DPRK’s actions which undermine it. Some ask why the EU does not go further in its NK policy, however, any kind of “ambitious” EU policy requires the consensus from 28 member states. Initiatives by individual EU MS, including some sanctions, can instead make a strong statement.

The EU’s current approach to North Korea is one of critical engagement, i.e. it implements UNSC resolutions in addition to its own autonomous sanctions which targets individuals and entities linked to the development of the ballistic missiles programme. This approach is supported by a broad consensus among EU member states (MS) that sanctions are an important tool and that North Korea needs to change to stabilise the security of the Korean Peninsula. However, EU MS also agree that the sanctions regime needs to be supported by increased diplomacy. EU sees a peaceful solution as the only option and encourages inter-Korean dialogue, which should give impetus and work in tandem with US-North Korea talks. If these two-tracks dialogues are moving ahead steadily, a multilateral dialogue could be sustained as well.

At the Shangri-La Dialogue on 1st June 2019, High-Representative Mogherini affirmed South Korean President Moon’s call for a new regional security architecture in which regional stakeholders can engage in the dialogue. EU hopes that the two-track dialogues can be imbedded in a multilateral forum and move ahead with increased support. However, the US and DPRK are in general less interested in global institutions and multilateralism, which poses a challenge for regional stakeholders.

Dr. Myong-hyun Go pointed out that after the no deal Hanoi Summit, there is much uncertainty in South Korea and globally about North Korea’s next actions and possible return to provocations. In this view, talks need to resume as early as possible regardless of whether it’s in a bilateral or multilateral format. Still, the multilateral approach might reduce Kim Jong-un’s prestige in meeting bilaterally with many world leaders, as has been happening, and thus be recommended.

Dr. Jina Kim outlined misalignment issues between the US and North Korea which have caused a stall in denuclearisation talks; these are (1) different definitions of denuclearisation and the range of dismantlement, (2) different views on the trade-offs, (3) differing sensitivity about the cost of a no deal outcome. For the US, while there could be a political cost, it is not that concerned as long as there is no ICBM test. Thus, the cost of a no deal outcome needs to be increased on both sides. Furthermore, the US needs to bring its message to the working-level technocrats and nuclear experts to discuss a roadmap. In this, EU can offer its expertise in dismantlement of nuclear facilities, as it has done with the former Soviet Union, i.e. transforming nuclear facilities into civilian facilities, personnel management for those involved in the nuclear programme, building bridges with North Korean scientists through lab-to-lab cooperation, etc.

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