

MAPPING OUT EU-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS: KEY MEMBER STATES' PERSPECTIVES

VOLUME II

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Korea is considered a 'like-minded partner' with which there are no political or economic problems, there is potential to develop mutually beneficial deeper links.

There seems to be a lack of extensive mutual knowledge that explains why relations are yet to fulfil their potential. In areas of mutual interest, cooperation is strong. Economic relations are a clear case in point. For some EU member states, addressing the COVID-19 pandemic also is. But in areas where mutual interest is not as obvious and clear-cut, cooperation can be strengthened. Security relations is an example. On both sides, understanding better the other side could help to understand in which areas cooperation is a low-hanging fruit ready to be taken.

This report suggests that stronger cooperation in recent years therefore flows from mutual interests rather than values. The latter matter insofar they smooth relations, prevent conflict and do not interfere in the existing willingness to work together. There is a question as to whether the EU member states covered in this report and South Korea want to have a value-driven approach to their relations, or whether they are content with an interest-only driven relationship. Either way, cooperation is likely to continue to grow for years to come.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOUTH KOREA

- Ensure a smooth transition across administrations when it comes to Europe policy, considering that Europe is increasingly important for Seoul and non-divisive.
- Appoint a MOFA special envoy for coordination with Europe sitting in Office of the President strategic meetings, with a remit including the EU, EU member states, NATO, the UN and other international organisations.
- Address the expertise deficit among policy-makers, especially, and civil society to enhance knowledge about EU member states, based on key indicators coming out of the Strategic Partnership.
- Proactively identify areas for cooperation with specific EU member states or groups of member states, without feeling constrained by the existing EU

dialogue and cooperation (or 'EU straightjacket').

- Proactively work together and liaise with the EU and its member states to come up with common positions in multilateral organisations.
- Enhance cooperation on social policy issues affecting both South Korea and EU member states, such as ageing, migration or healthcare.
- Discuss, learn from each other and coordinate post-COVID-19 pandemic economic growth based on green growth and the environment, as well as innovation and technology.
- Promote cooperation at the multilateral level to address and mitigate the effects of US-China rivalry, and to prevent Europe and South Korea potentially becoming theatres of competition.