

What Can the EU Contribute to Peace on the Korean Peninsula?

Tereza Novotna discusses the European Union's policies toward North Korea.

By **Ankit Panda**
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Since the end of 2017, high tensions on the Korean Peninsula have given way to a remarkable and historic bout of diplomacy. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has met with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and, in a historic first, held multiple leader-level summit meetings with U.S. President Donald J. Trump. While diplomatic interactions have been ongoing, the status quo on the Korean Peninsula with regard to the international sanctions regime on North Korea and the status of Pyongyang's weapons of mass destruction remains unchanged. While the role of South Korea, the United States, China, and even Japan and Russia has been apparent throughout the last 18 months, the role of the European Union, a major supranational institution, on the Korean Peninsula is less understood.

To explore the EU's role in North Korea, *The Diplomat's* senior editor, Ankit Panda, spoke to Tereza Novotna, a senior associate research fellow at EUROPEUM Prague and a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at Free University Berlin. Dr. Novotna is an expert on the European Union's policies towards North Korea.

***The Diplomat:* What are the primary ways in which the European Union might contribute to the ongoing process underway on the Korean Peninsula?**

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Tereza Novotna: To encourage the processes on the Korean Peninsula, the EU might be able to contribute in two main ways: diplomatic and economic.

Firstly, the EU can provide its diplomatic expertise. The EU has served as a successful facilitator and mediator for a number of talks, often among multiple parties, from negotiating the EU's own enlargement (and now the United Kingdom's exit) through the Iran deal up to brokering peace accords in areas remote from Europe, such as between the FARC rebels and Colombian authorities. On the Korean issue, EU member states, such as Sweden, have already been providing venues for 1.5 track dialogues. In the future, it could however be Brussels that could be the location for a fourth Trump-Kim meeting and/or for an international conference on reconstruction of the DPRK – as the EU did for Afghanistan and Syria. Most importantly, the EU negotiates on a daily basis among its various institutions and member states. Trump

and Kim better make the most out of such a skilled diplomat: Lufthansa could provide a plane and TGV a train to bring the North Korean leader to the next summit in a Brussels palace!

Secondly, the EU has been known for its economic clout, in Asia through its free trade agreements in particular. On the DPRK, the EU, in consultation with the United States, has been the key force in mobilizing the international community to impose and enforce the UN sanctions. The EU also has its own set of restrictive measures, which are the toughest ones on any country as the EU proudly claims. If the U.S. ends up offering sanctions easing, even from the chronological perspective, it would be logical that these EU autonomous sanctions, which are aimed at going farther than UN sanctions and making up for any loopholes in them, are lifted first. This could be done in coordination with the United States (and South Korean) government and be offered as a part of the package to the DPRK. Moreover, if there is any infrastructure fund set up as a trade-off for North Korea's nuclear weapons, the EU is likely to be asked to chip in – and would be willing to do so. Yet the EU would want to avoid a KEDO-like situation when the EU put cash in under the Agreed Framework but had no influence. [*Editor's Note: KEDO was the international consortium set up to provide North Korea with proliferation-resistant reactors under the 1994 Agreed Framework.*] No taxation without representation will be the EU's slogan and, going back to my first point, it would be a good idea for everyone to invite Brussels to the negotiating table early on, not least as it will be needed anyway.

Several EU member states (though not all) have a robust diplomatic presence in Pyongyang, but the EU itself doesn't have a delegation there. Is this something the EU might consider in due time and what would the costs and benefits of such a step be?

Indeed, seven EU member states (the U.K., Germany, Sweden, Poland, Czechia, Romania, and Bulgaria) have a full-fledged embassy, while France has a cultural cooperation office in Pyongyang. Having a Pyongyang EU Delegation would boost the EU's presence and its single voice on the ground – as it happened in other capitals where EU Delegations have been put in charge. At the moment, the EU coordinates in Pyongyang through its local rotating presidency, i.e. one of the seven countries holds an EU chairmanship every six months, which is an outdated system that is confusing to the host and third countries and has been done away with elsewhere. Opening an EU embassy to North Korea would also be a symbolic gesture that the EU is ready to be a serious player.

On the negative side, establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea, which the EU currently does not have, and opening an EU representation could be seen as a reward for a good behavior – the main argument against it by more skeptical EU member states, such as France (this is partly so because Paris, together with Tallinn, doesn't have diplomatic relations with Pyongyang either). Yet if the EU is willing to have delegations in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Cuba – hardly exemplary states upholding human rights and the rule-based order – why not in the DPRK? Moreover, if Washington is willing to discuss having a liaison office in Pyongyang, it would be counterproductive for the EU to stay behind. With Brexit looming, it could go hand in hand with allowing the North Koreans to move their EU representation from London to Brussels. It is not sustainable to have DPRK diplomats to the EU working from outside of EU borders and if Brussels is not an option, the North Koreans should get accredited from their embassy in Berlin, or even Paris – making the French feel the ownership of the process and perhaps more amenable to greater engagement with the DPRK.

EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, speaking at this year's Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, talked about how the EU “can help shape” a “strong

monitoring and verification” system in North Korea. Do you share that assessment and how might the EU cooperate with other partners?

The participation of HRVP Mogherini in the Shangri-La Dialogue was remarkable primarily because she was on the panel on Korean security, with two defense ministers, from South Korea and Japan – showing the EU’s, as well as her personal, interest in the topic. Since 2016 and the publication of EU Global Strategy, partly as a reaction to Donald Trump, the EU has been moving quickly forward with deepening of integration in EU security and defense. In that sense, the EU is no longer only a “soft power,” but is gradually becoming a “hard power.” Mogherini has therefore suggested that the EU has an ambition to be a “global security provider,” or “security partner,” to Asia and beyond. The EU can do so at the diplomatic level, but also at the technical level – which is where her proposal about a “strong monitoring and verification system” comes from. Should this happen, it would be primarily up to France (and the U.K., if it keeps working with the EU after Brexit) to take part albeit in collaboration with the others. President Macron has already promised “technical and operational” assistance to President Moon during his state visit to Paris in October 2018. A European (and EU-funded) monitoring and verification mission could be a good compromise between American inspectors and those from other third states, such as the Chinese or the Russians, screening the nuclear facilities inside the DPRK. This offer should surely be kept in mind by the nominee for next EU high representative, Josep Borrell.

The EU played a critical role in the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran in 2015. How might the lessons of the EU’s involvement in the JCPOA process apply to possible denuclearization diplomacy with North Korea?

As I argued elsewhere, even if there is in the end a bilateral agreement on denuclearization between the United States and the DPRK, for any bilateral agreement to stick in the long-run, it will have to be anchored in a multilateral arrangement. After all, how can Kim Jong Un be sure that Donald Trump, or his successor in the White House, be that a Republican or a Democrat, won’t change his/her mind and pull out of any deal? Even though the JCPOA is on life-support, it has so far survived the U.S.’s withdrawal a year ago mainly thanks to the EU’s efforts to save it. (A similar point could be made about the Paris climate accord.) And as discussed above, it was the EU which chaired the “seven-party talks” leading up to the Iran deal, a good lesson for diplomacy with North Korea.

On the practical front, to salvage the JCPOA, the EU-3 has set up INSTEX which is basically a clearing house for financial transactions in euros so that European businesses can continue trade with Iran despite the U.S. secondary sanctions. INSTEX has recently become operational and there are other EU member states, as well as third states, who are interested in joining. For the DPRK, INSTEX could serve as an inspiration not for circumventing the sanctions, but as a mechanism to be used for humanitarian NGOs and legitimate businesses who have faced difficulties to make any transactions when simply the words “North Korea” are mentioned in their projects.

One word of caution for anyone looking for parallels between the Iran and a North Korea deal: there was no partial easing of sanctions; they were all lifted once Iran agreed to limits on its nuclear program.

Will the EU’s role in humanitarian assistance to North Korea increase? What factors might lead to such a shift?

Apart from numerous European NGOs (and some governments) providing the support to

North Korea, the EU has been its largest donor. However, the EU's humanitarian assistance is fragmented. Because the EU doesn't have diplomatic relations with the DPRK, the European Commission cannot have a direct country-based funding for North Korea, but its aid must be taken out of the EU's general budget envelopes, such as "food security." This situation could be streamlined if an EU Delegation in Pyongyang is established, which would replace the EU's current Food Security Office and could employ the Commission's experts rather than consultants.

In terms of increasing the amount of aid, the EU (and individual member states) are definitely looking at various options, since augmenting humanitarian assistance is more palatable to most of them than lifting sanctions. The EU is also considering other 'soft' policies, such as people-to-people contacts. As an academic, I would be very happy if North Korean students and professors could be brought in within the EU's Erasmus university exchange program, or even through EU-funded research projects. These frameworks are there, but they must be put in practice – by host universities and member state governments who should support such activities instead of making them impossible by, for instance, denying visas to the North Korean applicants.

This interview has been lightly edited.
