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More Than a Trading Power. Europe's Political Added Value for Security and Trust Building in Northeast Asia

by Nicola Casarini

ABSTRACT

Northeast Asia is today one of the world's most dynamic economic areas, contributing almost half of global growth. The region has reached a level of economic interdependence similar, if not superior, to that of Europe. However, the worsening political climate in China, Japan and South Korea continues to hinder deeper cooperation and the elimination of the root causes of conflict. Moreover, North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes represent a threat to regional peace, while China's rise takes place outside – and in potential opposition to – the US system of alliances that has thus far been a factor of stability. There is therefore a need to devise an effective regional, multilateral security framework that could also facilitate the resumption of talks on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The new US administration of Donald Trump is showing contempt for multilateralism and institutions, preferring bilateral bargaining and power relations. This leaves the European Union as the only global actor that continues to support initiatives towards regional cooperation and trust building. Europe does not have binding military alliances in the area, and is a neutral actor vis-à-vis the region's outstanding territorial and maritime disputes. New capabilities have been added to the EU's foreign-policy toolbox in recent years, making it possible for Brussels to engage with Northeast Asian nations across the board, including the resumption of talks on North Korea's nuclear dossier. The EU thus has political "added value", which Northeast Asia's policymakers should seize upon in order to manage current tensions and avoid conflict.

European Union | Conflict mediation | Northeast Asia | China | Japan | South Korea | North Korea | Nuclear | Non-proliferation | Arms control

keywords

More Than a Trading Power. Europe's Political Added Value for Security and Trust Building in Northeast Asia

by Nicola Casarini*

Introduction

Northeast Asia is today one of the world's most dynamic economic areas, contributing almost half of all global growth. Yet, relations between China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) have been strained due to a variety of issues, ranging from World War II apologies and the interpretation of history to territorial disputes between the three nations.¹ Moreover, North Korea's (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK's) nuclear programme continues to be a threat to regional peace, while China's rise takes place outside – and in potential opposition to – the US system of alliances. The latter, centred on US defence agreements with Japan and South Korea, has been a factor for stability in the region over the last few decades.²

The Asia "pivot" devised by the Obama Administration (2009-2016) was intended to strengthen Washington's alliances in Asia, support the emergence of multilateral security frameworks and keep China in check. The new US administration of Donald Trump is showing contempt for multilateralism and institutions, preferring instead bilateral bargaining and power relations. This leaves the European Union (EU) as the only global actor that continues to support regional integration and trust building in Northeast Asia – an area still beset by competing nationalisms.

¹ For more details see: Elena Atanassova-Cornelis, "Northeast Asia's Evolving Security Order: Power Politics, Trust Building and the Role of the EU", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|04 (January 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7225>.

² Victor D. Cha, *Powerplay. The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2016.

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The region has reached a level of economic interdependence similar – if not superior – to that of Europe. It is the political climate between the countries – which has worsened in recent years due to historical, as well as territorial and maritime, disputes – that hinders deeper cooperation and the elimination of the root causes of conflict. This is the so-called “Asian paradox” – dubbed thus by former ROK President Park Geun-hye.

Furthermore, the region's security environment has worsened since March 2017. In a single day, Pyongyang fired four ballistic missiles as a drill, targeting US bases in Japan,³ while Washington began deploying the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) platform in South Korea. The latter is intended to defend against an eventual North Korean attack but its roll-out angered Beijing, which perceives the THAAD as a US attempt to enhance radar monitoring of China's missile systems.⁴ It is a situation that borders on war – and which calls for innovative ideas and initiatives to integrate regional economic interdependence with political cooperation so as to avoid the escalation of tensions.

This paper aims to shed light on some of the initiatives being developed in Northeast Asia to promote regional cooperation and trust building. It also examines the distinctive role that Europe has been playing in supporting some of these plans, including discussion of why – and to what extent – the EU's approach to Northeast Asia differs from that of the United States.

This study begins by presenting the alternative visions of regional security and trust building put forward by the leaderships of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea in the last few years. Subsequent parts focus on the distinctive role played by the EU in supporting some of these initiatives as well as the determinants that have led the Union, since the mid-1990s, to make the linkage between its own prosperity with the development of peaceful and cooperative relations among Northeast Asia's major powers. In the final section, the paper outlines some ideas regarding how the EU could step up its involvement in Northeast Asia's security, including discussion of a possible role for the Union in helping to resume talks on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. It is argued here that the EU has a political “added value”, which Northeast Asia's policymakers should seize upon in order to manage current tensions and avoid conflict.

³ “Pyongyang Claims Its Missiles Were Part of a Drill to Hit US Bases”, in *Deutsche Welle*, 7 March 2013, <http://dw.com/p/2YkBu>.

⁴ Bryan Harris, Demetri Sevastopulo and Charles Clover, “US Missile Shield Drives Wedge between South Korea and China”, in *Financial Times*, 8 March 2017.

1. Alternative visions of Northeast Asia

The question of how to integrate regional economic interdependence with political cooperation has received a fair amount of attention from scholars and practitioners alike. A growing body of work maintains that peace and security are inextricably interlinked with the deepening of regional cooperation and trust building. The latter two qualities not only have the potential to contribute to economic development but are also a prerequisite for attaining – and depend upon the existence of – peace and security.⁵ Regional integration can be defined as the process whereby “the governments of nation-states decide to hand over some decision-making capacity” in order to establish a “degree of supranational authority beyond the nation-state within a particular geographical region”.⁶ Regional cooperation, on the other hand, is a multidimensional and complex practice involving “a rich variety of state and non-state actors, which often come together in informal networks and multi-actor coalitions operating at different levels of the world system”.⁷ Moreover, the concept of trust – applied in the context of Northeast Asia – has been defined as the “power to force an agent taking part in diplomatic relations to choose institutionalized relations to seek out more benefits”.⁸ Accordingly, “trust” becomes an “indispensable asset that is required to foster cooperation [and is] essential for a community to prosper by elevating the level of efficiency of various forms of transactions that take place within [that] community”.⁹ The concept of trust is thus at the centre of the positive relations that are needed in order to build cooperation and integration. While the European Union is undoubtedly the most advanced experiment in regional integration and trust building thus far, Northeast Asia stands at the opposite end of the spectrum when it comes to the institutionalization of these concepts.

⁵ See Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum, “Regional Cooperation: A Tool for Addressing Regional and Global Challenges”, in Secretariat of the International Task Force on Global Public Goods, *Expert Paper Series Seven: Cross-Cutting Issues*, Stockholm, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006, p. 179-244, <http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/f58a06403d3945f6b056da1b34087e73/global-public-goods-cross-cutting-issues>; Ellen L. Frost, *Asia's New Regionalism*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2008; Ali M. El-Agraa, “Economic Rights and Regional Integration: Considering the EU and ASEAN Charters within the Perspective of Global Regional Integration”, in *Journal of Economic Integration*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 2009), p. 634-660, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11130/jei.2009.24.4.634>.

⁶ Thomas Diez, Ingvild Bode and Aleksandra Fernandes da Costa, *Key Concepts in International Relations*, London, SAGE, 2011, p. 187. See also Antje Wiener and Thomas Diez (eds.), *European Integration Theory*, 2nd ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009; Thomas Diez and Nathalie Tocci (eds.), *The EU, Promoting Regional Integration, and Conflict Resolution*, Houndmills, Palgrave, 2017.

⁷ Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum, “Regional Cooperation”, cit., p. 183.

⁸ Ihn-hwi Park, “Northeast Asia and the Trust-building Process: Neighboring States' Policy Coordination”, in *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (December 2013), p. 4.

⁹ Yun Byung-se, “Park Geun-hye's Trustpolitik: A New Framework for South Korea's Foreign Policy”, in *Global Asia*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Fall 2013), p. 10-11, <https://www.globalasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/462.pdf>.

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In recent years, however – and amid growing political tensions – the leaderships of China, Japan and the ROK have outlined their visions of regional security and trust building. China's plan was announced by President Xi Jinping at the meeting of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building measures in Asia (CICA) in Shanghai on 21 May 2014. According to the Chinese President, CICA – whose 24 members include all the Central Asian nations plus countries like Russia, the ROK, Thailand, Iran and Turkey (but not the US) – should become a "security dialogue and cooperation platform" and "establish a defense consultation mechanism", including the creation of a security response centre for major emergencies.¹⁰ President Xi's vision of a new, multilateral security mechanism for Asia would thus pass through CICA, of which Japan is not a member but just an observer.¹¹

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has outlined his own vision for Asia in a number of speeches – in particular, one delivered at the 13th Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on 30 May 2014.¹² Abe envisions an Asian security framework centred on the US system of alliances, in which Japan plays a key role. The main difference between China's and Japan's plans rests, unsurprisingly, on the role of the United States. While President Xi's vision emphasizes the uniquely – and exclusively – "Asian" nature of his security concept, Prime Minister Abe sees the US as having a central role to play.¹³

South Korea's vision lies somewhere in between. After becoming ROK president, Park Geun-hye unveiled her security concept – the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) – in a speech to a dedicated joint session of the US Congress on 7 May 2013. Her proposal called for Northeast Asian nations to enhance cooperation, first on "soft" security issues (such as climate change, terrorism prevention, cyber technology and nuclear safety) before expanding the trust-building process to more sensitive areas.¹⁴ NAPCI can be considered as an expanded version of Park Geun-hye's "Korean Peninsula trust process" – or *Trustpolitik*, as it is commonly referred to. By trying to establish "mutually binding

¹⁰ Xi Jinping, *New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation*, Remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, Shanghai, 21 May 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml. See also Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The 4th Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) Summit Held in Shanghai...*, 21 May 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/yzhxzyxrshydscfh/t1162057.shtml.

¹¹ For more details on China's approach to regional security see Silvia Menegazzi, "China's Foreign Policy in Northeast Asia: Implications for the Korean Peninsula", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|03 (January 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7223>.

¹² Shinzo Abe, *Peace and Prosperity in Asia, Forevermore*, Keynote address at the 13th IISS Asian Security Summit "Shangri-La Dialogue", Singapore, 30 May 2014, http://www.mofa.go.jp/np/page4e_000086.html.

¹³ On Japan's concept of regional security see Axel Berkofsky, "Japan's Approach to Northeast Asian Security: Between Nationalism and (Reluctant) Multilateralism", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|07 (January 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7249>.

¹⁴ See Si Hong Kim, "NAPCI and Trilateral Cooperation: Prospects for South Korea-EU Relations", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|08 (February 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7355>.

expectations based on global norms",¹⁵ *Trustpolitik* would aim to promote greater exchanges and cooperation between the two Koreas with a view to building confidence and reducing tensions in the area.¹⁶

While recognizing the distinctive characteristics of Northeast Asia, NAPCI takes inspiration from Europe's experience. Park Geun-hye has made explicit reference to the history of European integration and Franco-German reconciliation on various occasions. On 26 March 2014, for instance, at a summit in Berlin, President Park and Chancellor Angela Merkel discussed the history of Franco-German rapprochement as well as Germany's reunification and their possible relevance, respectively, for Northeast Asia in general and the Korean Peninsula in particular. Two days later, in Dresden, the ROK President gave a speech entitled "An Initiative for Peaceful Unification on the Korean Peninsula", in which she proposed to the DPRK that "we jointly establish an 'inter-Korean exchange and cooperation office'" tasked to advance reunification.¹⁷ In the same speech, President Park explicitly linked the trust-building process on the Korean Peninsula to NAPCI by saying, "We could also build on the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative to address North Korea's security concerns through a multilateral peace and security system in Northeast Asia."

NAPCI would thus aim at achieving two objectives: i) the easing of tensions between the two Koreas; and ii) the creation of the conditions for a "grand reconciliation" between China, Japan and South Korea, which might pave the way for a vast free-trade zone among the three powers as a step towards overcoming the so-called "Asian paradox" and addressing North Korea's nuclear threat. In this plan, the US would maintain the role of an external security balancer.

Park's initiative would therefore be a virtual compromise between Xi's and Abe's visions, as it included elements considered essential by both. By proposing deeper economic integration between Northeast Asia's main powers as a preliminary step towards political integration, NAPCI would address China's desire to maintain an Asian focus on any process leading to a possible multilateral security framework. However, by keeping the US involved as an external security balancer, NAPCI would also take into consideration Japanese concerns over a rising China, making sure that US military forces continued to guarantee regional security.

¹⁵ Park Geun-hye, "A New Kind of Korea", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 5 (September/October 2011), p. 14, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/northeast-asia/2011-09-01/new-kind-korea>.

¹⁶ For more details on South Korea's trustpolitik see Antonio Fiori, "Wither the Inter-Korean Dialogue? An Assessment of President Park's Trustpolitik", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|13 (March 2017), forthcoming.

¹⁷ Park Geun-hye, *An Initiative for Peaceful Unification on the Korean Peninsula*, Dresden, 28 March 2014, <http://www.korea.net/Government/Briefing-Room/Presidential-Speeches/view?articleId=118517>.

After South Korea's Constitutional Court ruled to formally end impeached President Park Geun-hye's office on 10 March 2017, the future of NAPCI has been thrown into question. ROK Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn has led the government as acting leader since Park's impeachment in December 2016, and he will continue to do so until the ROK elects a new president. We should expect NAPCI to be rebranded in order to suit the new political landscape. However, the concepts of reconciliation, regional cooperation and trust building are likely to continue to guide Seoul's foreign policy. In the last two decades, in fact, South Korea has been at the forefront of regional initiatives and mediation efforts regardless of which president was in power.

2. Europe's support for South Korea's stance

The Obama Administration gave lukewarm support to NAPCI. Washington continues to rely on its military alliances with Japan and South Korea, while seeking to keep China in check. This position has been reinforced by the incoming Trump Administration. The new US President has made clear his preference for bilateral relations, as well as his distrust for multilateralism and regional integration.

The European Union, on the other hand, has come to bolster South Korea's NAPCI unwaveringly. Not only is the EU untrammelled by binding military alliances in the region but the drive for integration and reconciliation is also very much part of its "DNA", while also being one of its foreign-policy objectives.¹⁸ As stated in the joint declaration in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the European Union and the Republic of Korea, issued on 8 November 2013, "The EU supports the ROK's Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula and welcomes the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative [...] as a way of building dialogue and trust in the region."¹⁹

The EU has chosen – and rightly so – to support South Korea's initiative, which it considers more comprehensive and forward-looking than the proposals put forward by China – whose plan shows a tendency to dominate the region – or by Japan – whose insistence on its military alliance with the US makes it difficult to achieve the process of reconciliation and trust building.

Seoul's efforts at regional mediation are not new. In fact, NAPCI builds on the process of trilateral cooperation, which is based on the annual Trilateral Summit of the heads of state and government of China, Japan and South Korea. The Trilateral

¹⁸ For more details on NAPCI and the EU see Michael Reiterer, "Supporting NAPCI and Trilateral Cooperation: Prospects for Korea-EU Relations", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|01 (January 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7217>.

¹⁹ Joint Declaration in Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between the European Union and the Republic of Korea (15875/13), Brussels, 8 November 2013, p. 2, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/139428.pdf.

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Summit was first proposed by the ROK in 2004, as a meeting outside the framework of the ASEAN + 3 – itself a by-product of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) – with the three major economies of Northeast Asia having a separate forum to themselves. The first summit took place in Fukuoka (Japan) in December 2008 when the three countries met to discuss regional cooperation, the global economy and disaster relief. Since then, they have established more than 60 trilateral consultative mechanisms, including almost 20 ministerial meetings and over 100 cooperative projects.²⁰ In September 2011, the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) was launched: based in Seoul, the TCS is an international organization whose goal is to promote peace and prosperity between China, Japan and South Korea. On the basis of equal participation, each government covers one third of the overall operational budget.

From 2012 to 2015, however, no Trilateral Summit took place due to separate disputes over historical grievances as well as maritime territorial claims. Nevertheless, the process has continued at the ministerial, business and civil-society levels, indicating that important sections of the three societies remain committed to regional cooperation and trust building.²¹ On 1 November 2015, the sixth (and so far the last) Trilateral Summit was held in Seoul, during which Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and ROK President Park Geun-hye agreed to meet annually in order to work towards deepening trade relations and to pursue the Six-Party Talks (SPT) over the DPRK's nuclear-weapons programme.²² Since then, however, no further summits have taken place owing to the aforementioned disputes.

Nonetheless, given the current geopolitical situation the need for regional cooperation and trust building in Northeast Asia has rarely been more pressing. Pyongyang has launched almost 30 missiles since 2015, while the Trump Administration has aired the idea of pre-emptive strikes against North Korea's military installations. Washington has also begun the deployment of the THAAD in South Korea, straining relations with China, which sees the missile shield as a game-changer for the region's strategic balance and its own military capabilities. With the new US Administration showing a preference for bilateral relations and a brazen distrust of multilateralism and institutions, the EU is today the only notable international actor that continues to support the drive towards regional cooperation and trust building. It is thus essential for the EU to step up its involvement in the region, in order to defend its values as well as its growing economic interests.

²⁰ For more details on the trilateral cooperation process see: Si Hong Kim, "NAPCI and Trilateral Cooperation", cit.

²¹ See Nam-Kook Kim, "Trust Building and Regional Identity in Northeast Asia", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|10 (March 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7416>.

²² See the website of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *The Sixth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit*, 2 November 2015, http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page3e_000409.html.

3. A concern for Northeast Asia's security

The EU has growing interests in Northeast Asia. It is today China's biggest trading partner, the third largest for Japan and the fourth most important export destination for the ROK. Almost a fifth of the EU's global external trade occurs with these countries, with which bilateral agreements have already been signed or are being negotiated. In 2010, Seoul and Brussels signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). In March 2013, the EU and Japan formally announced the launch of parallel negotiations on a Strategic Partnership Agreement and an FTA, which could be completed in 2017. In November 2013, Brussels and Beijing opened negotiations on a bilateral investment agreement that – if successful – could pave the way for an FTA. It is, therefore, in Europe's strategic interest to support cooperative and peaceful relations among Northeast Asian nations.

Since the mid-1990s, EU policymakers have made a clear linkage between a possible escalation of tensions in East Asia and Europe's own prosperity. Back in 2001, the European Commission argued that the EU's economic well-being could be jeopardized not only by market turbulences in the region – as during the financial crisis of 1997/98 – but also by political instability.²³ European concerns for Northeast Asia's security were included in the European Security Strategy adopted by the European Council in Brussels on 12 December 2003. The ESS stated that "problems such as those in [...] the Korean Peninsula impact on European interests directly and indirectly"²⁴ and that nuclear activities in North Korea are "of concern to Europe."²⁵ In a speech in July 2005, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, at that time the EU Commissioner for External Relations, stated that "security in the Far East is a topic of direct concern to European interests. It is part of the overall global responsibility for security and stability that lies at the heart of the EU's role in foreign policy."²⁶ The Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia, adopted by the Council of the EU in December 2007 (and updated in 2012), acknowledge the strategic interest of the Union in the preservation of peace and stability in the area.²⁷ More recently, Federica Mogherini, the high representative of the Union for foreign affairs and security policy, in her speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2015 (the 14th gathering of the Singapore-based, annual high-level conference on Asian security, organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies), declared that

²³ European Commission, *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships* (COM/2001/469), 4 September 2001, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52001DC0469>.

²⁴ European Council, *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy*, 12 December 2003, p. 11, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁶ Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Security in the Far East*, Speech at the European Parliament (SPEECH/05/421), Strasbourg, 6 July 2005, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-05-421_en.htm.

²⁷ Council of the European Union, *Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia*, 15 June 2012, point 4, http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST_11492_2012_INIT.

there are more goods and services travelling between Europe and Asia than across the Atlantic. [...] We are one of the major investors in this continent, both in qualitative and quantitative terms, and the biggest development donor. But our engagement with Asia goes well beyond trade, investment, and aid. It's political. It's strategical. And it needs to develop more also in the security field.²⁸

Alongside Brussels, individual EU member states have also promoted initiatives and made explicit the linkage between Northeast Asia's security and their own well-being. In its 2013 White Paper on Defence and National Security, the French Government stated that "the combination of persistent sovereignty conflicts, the sharp increase in military expenditure and the rise of nationalism could pose a risk of instability in Asia", adding that "Like its European partners, France is not directly threatened by potential conflicts between Asian powers, but it is nevertheless very directly concerned, for several reasons."²⁹ But besides the rhetoric of declarations, what has Europe done, in practice, to contribute to security and trust building in Northeast Asia?

4. Focus on soft security

The EU's contribution to regional security has mainly taken the form of support for the relevant international multilateral fora. For instance, with the establishment of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1996, a "track-two" has been initiated that also includes a multilateral security dialogue on various levels between the EU and Asia. The ASEM countries have repeatedly vowed their commitment to work together on issues such as conflict prevention, arms control, disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). At the ASEM-3 in Seoul in 2000, both the EU and Asian nations stated their explicit concerns with regard to the security situation on the Korean Peninsula, issuing the Seoul Declaration for Peace on the Korean Peninsula in which they supported implementation of the South-North Joint Declaration, including humanitarian issues. Back in September 1997, the EU, through the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM), had become a member of the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO), created to implement the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Until 2006, the EU – through the European Commission – was a member of the Executive Board of KEDO, whose goal was to construct two light-water reactors to replace the North Korean graphite-moderated reactor and reprocessing plant at Yongbyon, which had been producing a large amount of plutonium. The aim of the KEDO project was clear: to deter further nuclear proliferation and to maintain peace and stability

²⁸ Federica Mogherini, *Speech at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2015*, Singapore, 31 May 2015, <http://europa.eu/!BT66hU>.

²⁹ French Government, *French White Paper on Defence and National Security*, July 2013, p. 35, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/portail-defense/issues2/defence-policy/le-livre-blanc-sur-la-defense-et-la-securite-nationale-2013/livre-blanc-2013>.

on the Korean Peninsula. From 1997 to 2006, the total amount invested by the EU in the KEDO project reached almost 120 million euros.³⁰

In May 2001, the EU established diplomatic relations with the North Korean regime. Today, most EU countries entertain official ties with the DPRK. Since 1995, over 366 million euros in aid has been provided in the form of food aid; medical, water and sanitation assistance; and agricultural support. In 2011, the EU provided 10 million euros in emergency aid following a severe food crisis in the North. Concurrently, the EU and its member states have adopted sanctions against Pyongyang following the country's 2003 decision to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the nuclear tests in 2006; 2009; and, more recently, in 2016.

Europe's engagement with Northeast Asia goes well beyond trade and development aid, to include high-tech, political, security and defence-related policy areas. New capabilities have been added to the EU's foreign-policy toolbox in recent years, making it possible for Brussels to engage Northeast Asian nations in a way that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago.

5. Europe's new capabilities

The creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) has fostered the political and security dimension of the Union's relations with Northeast Asia. Since 2010, an EU-China High Level Strategic Dialogue has been in place between the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) and the Chinese State Councillor responsible for foreign affairs. Since 2011, there has also been a regular dialogue between the Union's HR and the Chinese Defence Minister, paralleled by a dialogue on military affairs between the Chair of the EU Military Committee and his/her counterpart in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). In March 2013, the EU and Japan announced the launching of negotiations for a Strategic Partnership Agreement that would also upgrade political relations. Since 2011, an EU-Korea High-Level Political Dialogue has been in place between the EEAS Deputy Secretary-General and South Korea's Vice-Foreign Minister. The ROK is also the first EU partner to have signed agreements in the three key areas of political, trade and security cooperation in EU-led crisis-management operations.

The EU has also an annual political dialogue with Pyongyang. This is an integral part of the Union's policy of critical engagement towards the DPRK, through which it conveys all the issues of concern to the EU and the international community: non-proliferation of nuclear/WMD and ballistic missile programmes; regional stability and security; and respect for human rights.

³⁰ For more details on Europe's engagement towards the Korean Peninsula see Ramon Pacheco Pardo, "The EU and the Korean Peninsula: Diplomatic Support, Economic Aid and Security Cooperation", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|02 (January 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7221>.

Europe is mainly a civilian power in Northeast Asia. The EU does not have troops or military alliances there. However, some EU member states have retained a certain level of military involvement in the region. France, for instance, has an operational military presence in the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific, with troops that can be deployed in Asia at relatively short notice. Some EU member states collaborate with Japan and the ROK in the NATO framework – while France, Germany, Italy and Spain have developed bilateral security and military ties with China, including joint military exercises involving humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, search and rescue, and medical response. Moreover, the EU is developing space and satellite-navigation capabilities (mainly civilian) in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Union signed an agreement for the joint development of Galileo (the EU-led global navigation-satellite-system alternative to the GPS) with China in 2003 and with South Korea in 2006, while cooperation with Japan occurs mainly at the industrial level. Galileo became operational at the end of 2016. The satellite network's ground stations are currently being developed across the Asia-Pacific region in EU territories (mainly French Polynesia), while discussions are under way with the Asian partners in the Galileo project for building joint ground stations and receivers. Besides the commercial dimension, Galileo allows the EU to promote its own civilian-controlled satellite network that could continue to operate even if the American GPS (which is Pentagon-controlled) is switched off. This form of cooperation allows the Union to establish a foothold in the region's evolving space relations, with its related security implications.

Finally, the EU has acquired first-hand experience in dealing with Iran's nuclear dossier – something that could also be useful for dealing with North Korea. The successful framework agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue reached by the P5 + 1 – i.e. China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States plus Germany³¹ – with Teheran in July 2015, and the role played by the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the EEAS in the negotiations, have given Brussels the confidence and ability to effectively play a role in resuming talks on the North Korean nuclear dossier – if the concerned parties so wished.

6. A role for the EU in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula?

On the issue of the North Korean nuclear dossier, Europe is essentially a bystander. This has not, however, prevented the EU or its member states from imposing sanctions on Pyongyang following the country's 2003 decision to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as the nuclear tests in 2006, 2009 and 2016.³² The EU relies on the SPT to advance the non-proliferation dossier on the Korean

³¹ The P5 + 1 is often referred to as the E3 + 3 by European countries.

³² Mark Fitzpatrick, "North Korean Proliferation Challenges: The Role of the European Union", in *Non-Proliferation Papers*, No. 18 (June 2012), <https://www.sipri.org/node/3244>.

Peninsula; it comprises the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States. Their talks remain technically operational but, in practice, they have been dormant since 2009, after the DPRK's second underground nuclear test.³³ Consequently, the US-led international effort has resorted to UN Security Council sanctions, which have become increasingly comprehensive, having also been endorsed by China, North Korea's major ally. The harshest sanctions have, however, failed to halt or even reduce the pace of Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes.³⁴

China leads the SPT together with the US, and has a close relationship with the DPRK regime. Beijing has long played an important role as North Korea's benefactor, which it will be difficult to renege on. The 1961 Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty, promising Chinese military aid to North Korea in the event of an attack, is valid until 2021. China is also the North's largest trade partner – accounting for almost 60 percent of the DPRK's imports, more than 40 percent of its exports and the bulk of North Korean oil and gas supplies. While Beijing thus has leverage over Pyongyang, it remains to be seen whether – and to what extent – the Chinese Government is willing to push the Kim Jong-un regime to fundamentally change its behaviour. UN sanctions on North Korea have, indeed, no hope of achieving their intended aim without Beijing's full cooperation.³⁵

Since taking office in 2013, President Xi Jinping has firmly pushed for an adherence to the goal of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. An op-ed published in the *People's Daily* in mid-July 2015, after the P5 + 1 countries reached an agreement on the Iranian nuclear dossier, stated, "the facts show that dialogue and negotiation were the only correct and effective path to appropriately resolve the Iran nuclear issue",³⁶ pointing to the applicability of the positive outcome on Iran for the North Korean nuclear issue. Some Chinese experts in fact seem optimistic that the outcome of marathon negotiations on Iran have given a "signal of hope" for the potential success of similar tactics vis-à-vis the DPRK.³⁷ The P5 + 1 countries were also able to cooperate with Iran in limiting Tehran's ties to Pyongyang, thus reducing the number of nuclear allies available to the Hermit Kingdom.

At the height of the negotiations on Iran's nuclear dossier, Pyongyang reached out to the EU. In January 2014, Hyun Hak-bong (ambassador of the DPRK to the United Kingdom) visited the EEAS headquarters in Brussels for informal talks on a wide range of issues, including the nuclear file. The North Korean regime had

³³ See Moosung Lee, "The EU and the Six-Party Talks", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|09 (March 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7415>.

³⁴ See Lorenzo Mariani, "Assessing North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Programmes: Implications for Seoul and Washington", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|11 (March 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7430>.

³⁵ Donald Kirk, "Stumbling Block?", in *South China Morning Post*, 3 December 2016, p. 14, available also online: <http://www.scmp.com/node/2050784>.

³⁶ "China's Top Paper Says Iran Deal Shows Talks, Not Sanctions, Work", in *Reuters*, 15 July 2015, <http://reut.rs/1IZkpwX>.

³⁷ Interviews, Beijing, April 2016.

been following closely the EU's role in coordinating the Iran talks, and the visit of the North Korean envoy to Brussels served to find out whether the Union would be able to play a role in defusing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Obviously – such was the response of the officials attending the meeting – any move by the EU in that direction could only happen if and when the DPRK made substantial progress on the issues of concern to the EU and the international community, including the acceptance by the North Korean regime that resuming talks would mean addressing the question of denuclearization.³⁸

Furthermore, any involvement of the Union in the North Korean nuclear dossier needs to be discussed with the concerned parties – in particular, China, which has traditionally been reluctant to have the Europeans play a larger role for fear of strengthening the position of the US. It is worth remembering that the administration of George W. Bush agreed initially to include the EU as part of the SPT, but that Beijing had reservations over the issue. Today, the circumstances are different. The successful framework agreement on the Iranian nuclear dossier reached by the P5 + 1 countries with Tehran, including the role played by the EU High Representative and the EEAS on the issue, have had a positive effect on Chinese policymakers. A possible role for the EU as facilitator of dialogue on the North Korean nuclear dossier is no longer excluded by the Chinese. Instead, this time, opposition to Europe's involvement in helping to resume talks on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula could come from the Trump Administration, which distrusts multilateral negotiations and institutions – and has shown contempt for the EU.

Although the Trump Administration could be the main stumbling block to resuming negotiations on the North Korean nuclear dossier, the EU and the other concerned parties should continue to explore such options in order to avoid the risk of conflict. The countries that are part of the SPT would gain from the soft-power approach of the EU. The Europeans could bring to the table their experience in negotiating with Iran and in convening the group of the P5 + 1 countries – a format that has many similarities with the Six-Party Talks. Moreover, the European Commission's previous involvement in the KEDO project – as well as Europe's experience of the joint, and safe, management of nuclear resources, as in the case of EURATOM – could also provide useful tools and resources.

Conclusion

The EU is today equipped to engage in political and security affairs with Northeast Asia. The Union does not have binding military alliances in the area, and is a neutral actor vis-a-vis the region's outstanding territorial and maritime disputes. It is largely perceived as a trading and civilian bloc endowed with a whole range of

³⁸ Personal consultation with members of the Ashton Cabinet, February 2014.

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soft-power capabilities. On the one hand, these elements make the EU ineffective at playing power politics in the region; on the other, these same elements make the Union a well-suited actor to promote regional security and trust building – through mediation, dialogue and capacity-building measures.

The EU represents a formidable example of political reconciliation between former foes. The Helsinki Final Act – signed in 1975, at the height of the Cold War – shows that cooperation is possible even with an enemy armed with nuclear weapons. Northeast Asia could benefit from a regional, multilateral security organization such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and/or the Western European Union (WEU) as a primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. All the above elements are part of Europe's foreign-policy toolbox. This represents the real – and distinctive – political added value of the EU for security and trust building in Northeast Asia.

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