

The European Union's Policy Toward North Korea: Abandoning Engagement

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This article helps understand the change in the European Union (EU)'s policy toward North Korea. In the first phase of their relationship, the EU actively participated in the security dialogue on the Korean Peninsula and engaged North Korea through economic and humanitarian assistance. Since 2003, Europe abandoned the conciliatory approach and repeatedly condemned Pyongyang's nuclear and missile tests, while disengaging from regional security initiatives. This change was a byproduct of the consolidation of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Two of its main features restricted the range of diplomatic options available to the EU in dealings with North Korea. The first was the designation of a possible Weapons of Mass Destruction arms race in the Middle East as an issue of highest security concern for Europe. The second was a firm commitment to the relationship with the United States in addressing security threats. In order to maintain the consistency of its foreign strategy, the EU stopped tolerating activities related to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Moreover, its policies became consistent with Washington's line of action, which required terminating economic support and discontinuing independent diplomatic engagement with the "rogue" state.

Keywords: European Union, North Korea, nuclear nonproliferation, national security, foreign policy

* Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank Hyeok Yong Kwon, Dong Sun Lee, Yong Wook Lee, and anonymous reviewers for many helpful comments and suggestions. The research originated from the author's MA thesis, submitted to Korea University, 2009.

I. Introduction

The European Union (EU)'s policy toward North Korea went through a significant evolution. From 1994 to 2003, the EU pursued a course of unconditional engagement toward Pyongyang.¹ European organizations started a series of projects aimed at alleviating the humanitarian situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). EU Member States provided economic and technological assistance to help develop North Korea's economy and build the necessary infrastructure for future growth. Vibrant political dialogue resulted in the establishment of diplomatic relations and the emergence of a certain level of trust between the two parties.² The European Commission prepared a Country Strategy Paper for the DPRK, focusing on long-term priorities and planning to expand cooperation.³ The Swedish presidency from January to June 2001 was remembered with a proposal for EU mediation in the dialogue between South and North Korea.⁴ The engagement policy was praised for bringing progress on the issue of human rights in the DPRK. After 2003, however, the EU abruptly disengaged from North Korea. Trade ties rapidly dissipated. The rare official diplomatic exchanges that took place barely transcended diplomatic formality. The Country Strategy Paper expired in 2004 and was never renewed. A

1. Engagement is defined here as unconditional in the sense that the policy is pursued "without the explicit expectation that a reciprocal act will follow." This may involve expanding economic ties, providing humanitarian aid, and increasing contacts. Richard N. Haass and Meghan L. O'Sullivan, "Terms of Engagement: Alternative to Punitive Policies," *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Summer 2000), p. 2; Sung Chull Kim and David C. Kang, eds., *Engagement with North Korea: A Viable Alternative* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), pp. 5-6.

2. Ruediger Frank, "EU – North Korean Relations: No Effort Without Reason," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2002), pp. 87-119; Axel Berkofsky, "EU's Policy Towards the DPRK – Engagement or Standstill?," (Briefing Paper, European Institute for Asian Studies Brussels, 2003).

3. European Commission, *The EC – Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Country Strategy Paper 2001-2004* (Brussels: European Commission, 2002).

4. "Kim Turns on the Charm for EU Team," *The Guardian*, May 3, 2003, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/may/04/eu.northkorea>> (date accessed June 17, 2019).

few non-governmental humanitarian organizations acted in the country on an ad hoc basis, without a plan for sustainable assistance. Since 2006, intensifying restrictive measures have become Europe's main policy tool in dealing with Pyongyang. The change of course is puzzling, because the EU has significant potential to assist the peace process on the Korean Peninsula and could expect to benefit from being included in regional matters in the long-run. Many experts wonder why one of the global major powers is still "punching below its weight" in the current round of diplomatic engagement with North Korea.⁵

Discussing this question is of practical importance, because the EU is a natural ally for the Republic of Korea (ROK) in engaging the DPRK as they share the same main strategic interest—stability on the Korean Peninsula. Europe has the potential to contribute a lot to the pursuit of security in the region. Some Member States are old Soviet-era friends of North Korea that the leadership in Pyongyang knows and trusts. If maintained and expanded, Europe's first and second track diplomatic channels could become the key to a sustained security dialogue between the two Koreas.⁶ The EU's experience with nuclear negotiations

5. Young-Kwan Yoon and Ramon Pacheco Pardo, "Commentary: Europe's North Korea Moment," Reuters, October 18, 2018, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-youngkwan-korea-commentary/commentary-europes-north-korea-moment-idUSKCN1MR32T>> (date accessed April 25, 2019).

6. Nicola Casarini, "How Can Europe Contribute to Northeast Asia's Security," *The Diplomat*, September 21, 2017, <<https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/how-can-europe-contribute-to-northeast-asias-security>> (date accessed June 17, 2019); Ramon Pacheco Pardo, "The EU Is Irrelevant in the Korean Peninsula, Right? Wrong," *Euractiv*, February 1, 2018, <<https://www.euractiv.com/section/european-external-action-service/opinion/thurs-the-eu-is-irrelevant-in-the-korean-peninsula-right-wrong>> (date accessed April 30, 2019); Yoon and Pardo, "Commentary: Europe's North Korea Moment"; Mario Esteban, "The EU's Role in Stabilizing the Korean Peninsula," (Working Paper 01/2019, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, 2019), <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/wp1-2018-esteban-eu-role-stabilising-korean-peninsula> (date accessed June 17, 2019); Ramon Pacheco Pardo, "North Korea's Denuclearization: Is There a Role for Europe?," *38 North*, March 26, 2019, <<https://www.38north.org/2019/03/rpachecopardo032619>> (date accessed April 26, 2019).

(in Libya and Iran), as well as its history of reconciling states from both sides of the Iron curtain, and promoting sustainable growth in former communist economies is an added advantage. On the academic side, this research illuminates the significance of institutional development on EU's foreign policy. It thus refines conventional explanations stating that Pyongyang's nuclear and missile program determines Brussels' position toward North Korea.⁷

This study aims to shed light on Brussels' considerations in formulating a policy toward the DPRK. The argument made here is that the EU changed its course to maintain consistency in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of 2003. The new foreign strategy prescribed disengagement from North Korea for two reasons. The first was the commitment to oppose the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) on a global scale. The second was the priority assigned to maintaining a common course with the United States (U.S.) in pursuit of that aim. Contrary to common interpretations, the nuclear issue did not gain primary importance as a defining element of EU's policy because North Korea intensified its nuclear weapons program. Pyongyang had previously declared its intention to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1993—a year before Europe first initiated its engagement efforts. North Korea tested the long-range Taepodong-1 missile in 1998 and announced the renewal of its nuclear program in 2002.⁸ On both occasions, the EU continued to provide assistance and hold talks with the DPRK. Many European leaders were firm believers in the benefits of positive engagement and thought that the security crisis can be ended through negotiations and by providing security guarantees to Pyongyang.⁹ The EU changed its

7. Esteban, "The EU's Role in Stabilizing the Korean Peninsula."

8. Joseph Bermudez, "A History of Ballistic Missile Development in the DPRK," (Occasional Paper No.2, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey, 1999); David Sanger, "North Korea Says It Has a Program on Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, October 17, 2002, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/17/world/north-korea-says-it-has-a-program-on-nuclear-arms.html>> (date accessed June 17, 2019).

9. Berkofsky, "EU's Policy Towards the DPRK," p. 4; Soyoung Kwon and Glyn Ford, "The EU Stretches Its Foreign Policy Wings over Korea," PFO

policy to build credibility as a global power by demonstrating that it can act as a unitary actor following a common foreign policy course.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, I describe the phases of the EU's North Korea policy and their outcomes. I then turn to explaining the timing of the change and the considerations behind it. The concluding section offers a brief summary of the argument and some implications of Europe's engagement in the security dialogue on the Korean Peninsula.

II. The EU's Policy Toward North Korea

Since the establishment of official relations, the EU's approach to North Korea has gone through two main phases. During the first period between 1994 and 2003, European states actively engaged in humanitarian and developmental assistance, trade, and political dialogue with the DPRK. The policy helped build trust and contributed to the peace process on the Korean Peninsula. After 2003, the EU terminated its independent engagement policy. Its involvement in the security process of the region also diminished in significance. As North Korea's nuclear program advanced, Brussels became firmly committed to supporting the international sanctions regime, spearheaded by the U.S.

1. Policy of Engagement from 1994 to 2003

The EU's presence in North Korea started to grow after 1994 as part of a New Asia Strategy. With the strengthening of Europe's international position, Brussels began to formulate a coherent approach towards Asia and to prepare to defend its (primarily economic) interests in the region. The Strategy Paper, published in July the same year, defined the Asian region as one of the top priorities for the EU and provided guidelines for intensifying political dialogue and expanding trade relations

05-31A, Nautilus Institute, April 12, 2005, <https://nautilus.org/fora/security/05301Kwon_Ford.html> (date accessed April 1, 2018).

with key partners in the area. Recognizing that the economic significance of Asia would inevitably give the region much more political weight, the document stated that to maintain its international position, “the Union should seek to make a positive contribution to regional security dialogues,” including on the Korean Peninsula.¹⁰

A major part of the EU’s engagement with the DPRK was humanitarian assistance. The European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) opened a branch in Pyongyang in 1996 and started providing relief for people affected by food shortages and natural disasters.¹¹ While its missions covered healthcare and nutritional programs, ECHO also aimed at addressing the structural causes of the humanitarian crisis, rather than limiting its involvement to short-term material assistance.¹² The organization continued its activities despite difficulties with the monitoring of aid projects in many restricted areas inside the DPRK.¹³ Official mechanisms for facilitating access to aid recipients became necessary when the amount of EU aid substantially increased after drought and typhoons swept through North Korea in the summer of 2000. This led to high level negotiations, resulting in agreement to sign Letters of Understanding regarding respect for humanitarian principles for projects funded by ECHO.¹⁴ The EU was committed to the idea that humanitarian assistance should be viewed separately from North Korea’s nuclear issue.¹⁵ Its policy contrasted with the stick-based approach of the U.S., which made aid contingent on progress in security talks.¹⁶ The total

10. European Commission, “Towards a New Asian Strategy – Communication from the Commission to the Council,” July 13, 1994. COM (94) 314 final.

11. European Community Humanitarian Office, *Annual Review 1997* (Brussels: European Commission, 1997).

12. European Community Humanitarian Office, *Annual Review 1998* (Brussels: European Commission, 1998).

13. European Community Humanitarian Office, *Annual Review 1999* (Brussels: European Commission, 1999).

14. European Community Humanitarian Office, *Annual Review 2000* (Brussels: European Commission, 2000).

15. Berkofsky, “EU’s Policy Towards the DPRK,” pp. 27, 30.

16. “Washington Urges Caution in Helping N. Korea,” Reuters, April 11, 1997, <<https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-peoples-republic-korea/>

amount of help provided bilaterally, via the World Food Program and European non-governmental organizations, reached about EUR 244 million by 2001.¹⁷ When in 2002 the DPRK announced that it already had acquired weapons-grade uranium, many states halted aid for the country. The EU raised the budget for the DPRK to EUR 21 million and continued supplying basic health and nutrition products.¹⁸ ECHO turned out to be North Korea's most persistent donor, continuing its activities in North Korea after most of other organizations had officially withdrawn. By 2003, ECHO was the last remaining organization to finance health, water, and sanitation in the DPRK.¹⁹ Until 2003 and even for some time after that, the European Union was the last to provide support unconditionally and with consideration only for the affected population.

The EU was eager to contribute to regional stability through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). In 1997, the European Atomic Energy Community joined Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. as an executive board member of KEDO with a stake in the mission of curtailing North Korea's nuclear program. The EU agreed to donate EUR 15 million per year (not counting bilateral donations made by several Member States).²⁰ In 2001, its share increased to EUR 20 million.²¹ The total financial support provided by the EU from 1995 to 2003 reached more than EUR 120 million.²² Throughout this period, the Union assigned equal priority to both aims of the organization—

washington-urges-caution-helping-nkorea> (date accessed June 17, 2019).

17. Frank, "EU – North Korean Relations."

18. European Community Humanitarian Office, *Annual Review 2002* (Brussels: European Commission, 2002).

19. European Community Humanitarian Office, *Annual Review 2003* (Brussels: European Commission, 2003); European Commission, "Annex to the ECHO Annual Report 2004," July 25, 2005. COM(2005) 580 final, p. 47.

20. European Commission, *The EC - Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Country Strategy Paper 2001-2004*.

21. Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, *Annual Report 2001* (New York: KEDO, 2001), p. 11.

22. Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, *Annual Report 2003* (New York: KEDO, 2003), p.15.

stopping nuclear proliferation and solving the problem of chronic energy deficiency in the country—while the U.S. and Japan focused primarily on the first of these tasks. As a result, the EU defended KEDO with enthusiasm matched only by South Korea. When the U.S. expressed concerns that the DPRK's military could use the new light-water reactors (LWR) provided by the organization to produce weapons-grade uranium, European experts mocked the idea and insisted that North Korea did not have the resources needed to exploit the reactors to produce nuclear weapons.²³ The EU expressed continued belief in KEDO's potential to enhance peace and security on the peninsula throughout the period of increased tensions after North Korea renewed its nuclear program.²⁴ In 2003, the Executive Board of the organization announced its suspension of the LWR project for a one-year period without consulting the EU.²⁵ Delegates of the European Parliament in Seoul criticized the move and stated that the EU will continue to provide aid to North Korea “come what may” (meaning, regardless of how the situation develops) and expressed readiness to send a delegation to Pyongyang to defuse tensions, as well as a wish to continue to fund KEDO.²⁶ In response to U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's announcement that using nuclear weapons against North Korea was an option, the EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana said that increasing tension on the Korean Peninsula was not going to have a positive outcome, and that the continued construction of LWRs would be a better course of action.²⁷

23. Berkofsky, “EU's Policy Towards the DPRK,” p. 6.

24. “European Parliament Resolution on the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO),” *Official Journal of the European Union*, vol. 47, January 22, 2004, C 16 E, pp. 96-98.

25. Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, *Annual Report 2003*, p.1; Ramon Pacheco Pardo, “EU Support for North Korean Denuclearization: Brussels May Help Pay for Implementation If It Can Play,” *38 North*, April 17, 2019, <https://www.38north.org/2019/04/rpachecopardo_041719> (date accessed April 25, 2019).

26. European Parliament, Delegation for Relations with the Korean Peninsula, “7th EP/Korea Interparliamentary Meeting,” April 22-25, 2003. CR\506613EN.

27. Jeong-won Yoon, “Bukan Haengmunje Gwallyeon Gyeonggwailji (1956.3~2003.3)” [Chronology of NK Nuclear Issues (1956.3~2003.3)], *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (March, 2009), pp. 163-198.

Added to its multilateral engagement, Europe actively pursued independent political dialogue with North Korea. High level talks between the EU and North Korea started in December 1998 with a visit of a delegation of the European Parliament to Pyongyang. A total of four rounds of dialogue at the level of senior officials were held by 2002. Bilateral consultations soon resulted in normalization of diplomatic relations between the DPRK and most EU Member States.²⁸ European officials met with Kim Jong Il, and a visit of North Korean delegates to learn about the functioning of a market economy was planned for the following year. For the first time, the DPRK expressed preparedness to participate in a meeting concerning the human rights situation in the country. European diplomats estimated that the most important step for continuing the dialogue was to build up trust as the authorities in Pyongyang felt encircled by hostile states and feared the demise of the regime. The only meaningful efforts with regard to North Korea were considered to be those of engagement.²⁹ At the height of the crisis, sparked by the DPRK's nuclear activities in the beginning of 2003, Javier Solana once again confirmed the EU's readiness to diplomatically intervene to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula.³⁰ This position was not just rhetoric—a high-level European delegation was sent to Pyongyang in hopes that it could contribute to a peaceful resolution of the issue.³¹

The EU sought access to Pyongyang also through trade. Some European states have had trade relations with North Korea for a long

28. European Parliament, "Resolution on Relations Between the European Union and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," January 9, 2001. B5-0037/200.

29. Borje Ljunggren, "The Korean Peninsula – Recent Developments from an EU perspective," in *North Korea in the World Economy*, eds. E. Kwan Choi, E. Han Kim and Yesook Merrill (London: RoutledgeCurzon), pp. 9-15.

30. European Parliament, "Report of Proceedings," January 29, 2003. P5_CRE (2003), pp.01-29.

31. European Parliament, "Declaration by the Presidency on Behalf of the European Union, Following the IAEA Resolution of 12 February 2003 on North Korea," January 31, 2003. PE 327.466, p. 58; "The DPRK Briefing Book: EU Troika Visit to Pyongyang and Seoul," *Nautilus Institute*, <<https://nautilus.org/publications/books/dprkbb/europeanunion/dprk-briefing-book-eu-troika-visit-to-pyongyang-seoul>> (date accessed April 26, 2019).

time. The Union exported agricultural and chemical products, machinery, cars, steel, electronic and measuring devices, and medical supplies and imported mostly textiles, but also transportation materials, electronic and plastic products, and salt. Since foreign direct investment in the DPRK remained problematic, the EU sought to expand economic cooperation by offering preferential market access via relaxation of regulations for certain products. Non-textile products were not subject to any restrictions and the quota for textile imports was raised by 60 percent in 2001.³² The DPRK's merchandise trade balance with the EU remained positive in the period between 1993 and 2002, while growing increasingly negative with the rest of the world. Europe created demand for North Korean exports, providing a way to obtain a hard currency alternative to the sales of missile technology. The EU became the DPRK's third largest trading partner with Germany holding the greatest share of mutual trade, and France, Spain, and the United Kingdom as runner-ups.³³ The EU could have expected to benefit from the opening of North Korea's market as it has significant growth potential. Nevertheless, initial efforts were aimed mainly at assisting the revival of the North Korean economy; returns could be expected only in the very long-run.³⁴

The EU and South Korea agreed on their preferred approach toward the North.³⁵ The Sunshine policy, initiated by the ROK in 1998, naturally appealed to Europe as it also concentrated primarily on seeking rapprochement through investment and communication with the DPRK's leadership. Europe embraced South Korea's vision and was committed to expanding trade relations, while contributing to the modernization of industrial facilities in the DPRK. The EU offered much needed diplomatic support and encouragement to the ROK in

32. European Parliament, "Note on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Its Relations with the European Union," October 10, 2006. DGExPo/B/PolDep/Note/2006_165.

33. European Commission, "North Korea," October, 2003. DG Trade A2/CG/SG/WB.

34. Frank, "EU – North Korean Relations."

35. European Commission, "EU Republic of Korea Relations," March 30, 2001. MEMO/01/111.

its pursuit of the Sunshine policy.³⁶ At the same time, the Union's approach was at odds with Washington's policy, which created tensions in the transatlantic relationship.³⁷

Overall, during this early period, the EU was set to assist economic development in North Korea and open diplomatic dialogue on issues not directly related to the security of the regime in Pyongyang. The Country Strategy Paper defined developmental assistance as a top priority of relations. This included strengthening key institutions and fostering the human resources necessary for the implementation of reform policies, as well as support in the development of North Korea's natural resources and transport infrastructure. The EU intended to help improve the economic situation by providing training in trade and finance for workers in key ministries in Pyongyang to facilitate integration of the country into the world economy. The European Commission stated that it had the resources and the resolve to help the DPRK through the initial stages of its growth.³⁸

The policy of engagement was possible because of the specific history of the relationship between EU states and the DPRK. The EU never invaded or threatened North Korea or showed ambition to establish a permanent presence on the Korean Peninsula. Despite supporting the eventual unification of the two Koreas, it never mentioned use of force as a possible means to that end. Several Eastern European countries (Eastern Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary) had assisted the DPRK economically after the Korean War, and some never severed diplomatic relations even after the disintegration of the Soviet bloc.³⁹ North Korean state media published pro-EU articles, praising the Union's independence of U.S. policy and portraying it as the "only

36. European Parliament, "Resolution on Relations Between the European Union and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea."

37. Berkofsky, "EU's Policy Towards the DPRK," p. 19; Frank, "EU – North Korean Relations."

38. European Commission, *The EC - Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Country Strategy Paper 2001-2004*.

39. Frank, "EU – North Korean Relations."

superpower that can check and balance U.S. hegemony.”⁴⁰ Thus relations were not obstructed by the perception of threat, animosity, and distrust that plague North Korea’s dialogue with its other interlocutors.

EU’s early policy had positive consequences. It achieved the opening-up of political dialogue, including unprecedented talks on human rights. Enhanced economic exchange led to some improvements in the infrastructure of the DPRK. The danger of North Korea selling arms to obtain foreign currency was reduced. Humanitarian support alleviated the effects of the famine and improved health care and sanitation in the country. The positive perception of the EU in the DPRK increased the prospects for sustained dialogue, that could possibly come to include issues related to regional security.

2. *Disengagement after 2003*

The year 2003 became a turning point in the EU’s approach to North Korea. All dialogue with the DPRK was suspended, economic assistance was cut, and humanitarian aid was significantly reduced. The EU took on a new course of non-involvement in the politics of the Korean Peninsula. There would be no attempts to engage North Korea through diplomacy and no help would be provided for the development of the country’s economy for more than a decade.

The EU reconsidered its humanitarian assistance to North Korea after several critical developments. First, Pyongyang requested that all aid be terminated in response to the EU’s signing of a United Nations resolution condemning the human rights situation in the DPRK. Many projects were suspended and could be resumed only after involved non-governmental organizations were reorganized and agreed not to use any symbols that could identify their sponsors while at work.⁴¹ Second, the security issue resulted in international sanctions, which affected ECHO’s ability to manage ongoing projects.⁴² Third, the scarcity

40. Kwon and Ford, “The EU Stretches Its Foreign Policy Wings over Korea.”

41. European Parliament, “Note on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” p. 13.

42. ECHO was renamed Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) in 2004.

of donors made long-term development projects impossible to manage by the few expert teams remaining inside the country.⁴³ By 2007, the organization was implementing an exit strategy, despite the continuing humanitarian crisis.⁴⁴ Since 2008, the EU has provided assistance only through EuropeAid and the World Food Program.⁴⁵

The EU's participation in the multilateral security dialogue in Northeast Asia ended with the demise of KEDO in 2006. The Union did not completely lose interest in playing a role in the process that could lead to a resolution of the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. In 2005, the European Parliament issued a resolution advising for the EU to be included in the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program.⁴⁶ Member States, however, "agreed that the EU, while ready to join if asked, should not push to be invited to join the security talks."⁴⁷

Bilateral dialogue between the EU and North Korea also stalled. One ad hoc delegation travelled to Pyongyang in 2004 to assess the changes in the country since the last European visit in 2000.⁴⁸ The only noteworthy activity since has been the exchange of delegations between the European Parliament and the DPRK. The EU abstained from political engagement on the Korean Peninsula. It issued a series of resolutions echoing the positions of Seoul and Washington, but

43. European Commission, "Evaluation of ECHO's Actions in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (2004-2007)," 2008. Contract ECHO/ADM/BUD/2007/01213, p. 27.

44. European Commission, "Annex to the Report from the Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid – ECHO Annual Report 2007," July 9, 2008. COM(2008) 449.

45. Stephen Castle, "European Union to Send Food Aid to North Korea," *The New York Times*, July 3, 2011, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/05/world/europe/05union.html>> (date accessed June 17, 2019).

46. "EU Parliament Calls for Entry to North Korea Talks," BBC Monitoring: Asia Pacific, March 10, 2005, p. 1.

47. European Parliament, "Note on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," p. 6.

48. European Parliament, Delegation for Relations with the Korean Peninsula, "Press Release of Ad Hoc Delegation visit to North Korea 21-24 February 2004," <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/dkor20050426_003/dkor20050426_003en.pdf> (date accessed April 30, 2019).

made no effort to further engage the DPRK.

Engagement through trade became infeasible. Economic exchange between the EU and the DPRK has turned on a downward trend.⁴⁹ In October 2007, after six rounds of six-party talks resulted in North Korea halting its nuclear activities, the political climate allowed for a bilateral economic seminar to be held in Pyongyang. The two sides disagreed on the immediate policy priorities—the DPRK was interested in direct investment, while EU representatives insisted on structural changes in the North Korean economy and a firm commitment to denuclearization as prerequisites for future assistance.⁵⁰ Trade was also increasingly formally restricted by international sanctions.⁵¹

After North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006, the EU routinized the adoption of restrictive measures against the DPRK as its default policy response to developments in North Korea's nuclear and missile program. Brussels transposed all relevant United Nations (UN) sanctions, which included an arms embargo, freezing of assets and a travel ban on persons related to the nuclear program, and a continuously expanding ban on a range of imports and exports. Member States agreed to uphold the Proliferation Security Initiative and inspect cargoes going to and from the DPRK that could contain items prohibited by the UN. The EU demonstrated its commitment to nonproliferation efforts by reinforcing the UN sanctions regime with a number of autonomous measures such as banning the exports of additional items or freezing the assets of persons suspected of contributing to the nuclear-related program.⁵²

49. Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, "2008 Nyeondo Bukan Daeoegyeongje Jeonmang" [North Korea's Foreign Economic Outlook], *World Economy Update*, vol. 8, no. 8 (February, 2008), p. 4.

50. European Parliament, Delegation for Relations with the Korean Peninsula, "Report on Working Group Visit to Pyongyang and Seoul 22 October – 1 November 2007." CR\699297EN.

51. "Council Common Position 2006/795/CFSP of 20 November 2006 Concerning Restrictive Measures Against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," *Official Journal of the European Union*, vol. 49, November 22, 2006, L 322, p. 32.

52. European Council, "EU Restrictive Measures Against North Korea," <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/history-north-korea/>> (date accessed May 28, 2019).

In sum, since 2003, Europe's engagement with North Korea came to what has been aptly described as a "standstill."⁵³ The policy later received an official name—"critical engagement"—but the initial shift from a carrots-based approach to a mixture of sticks and carrots (the effectiveness of which is greatly reduced due to general disengagement and a lack of substantial leverage) occurred more than fifteen years ago.

The new approach prevented the EU from playing a constructive role on the Korean Peninsula. Most diplomatic progress achieved before the shift was gradually lost. Both South and North Korean officials have expressed hope that the EU could assist the peace process.⁵⁴ Some Member States are known to use their unofficial channels of communication with both parties to facilitate negotiations. And yet, the EU appears unwilling (or unable) to use its full potential as an actor with significant stakes in the region.

III. Explaining the Change in Policy

Europe's changed approach toward North Korea was a byproduct of its new foreign policy. Two of its main features restricted the range of diplomatic options available to the EU in dealings with North Korea. The first was the designation of a possible WMD arms race in the Middle East as an issue of highest security concern for Europe. The second was a firm commitment to the relationship with the U.S. in addressing security threats.

In 2003, the EU published a new common security strategy. The document became Europe's first agreed definition on its "role and purpose in the world."⁵⁵ It was built upon the European Political Cooperation—

53. Berkofsky, "EU's Policy Towards the DPRK."

54. European Parliament, Delegation for Relations with the Korean Peninsula, "Minutes of Meeting with Mr. Pak Hyon-Bo, Ambassador of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," January 18, 2005. PE/DKOR-17/PV/01-05.

55. Klaus Becher, "Has-been, Wannabe, or Leader: Europe's Role in the World After the 2003 European Security Strategy," *European Security*, vol. 13, no. 4

an informal consultative process, which for decades had failed to produce a common European position on foreign policy matters—and the European Security and Defense Policy, which created some cohesion with regard to the Balkans, but failed to reconcile the differences between major states ahead of the Iraq war.⁵⁶ Developing a CFSP had been the greatest challenge of European integration, as Member States with diverse security concerns would rarely agree on a common stance across different issue areas. Once in place, it had special significance as one of the three pillars constituting the EU.

The CFSP identified the proliferation of WMD as “the greatest threat” to European security. The main source of concern was the spread of nuclear and missile technology and “the possibility of a WMD arms race, especially in the Middle East.”⁵⁷ The threat had a concrete form, as Iran had recently officially announced the progress of its nuclear program.⁵⁸ EU officials discussed this development during the drafting phase of the CFSP, concluding that “the nature of some aspects of Iran’s programme raises serious concerns.”⁵⁹ The European Council issued a separate document, dealing specifically with the threat of proliferation, where it stated that “[t]he EU must act with resolve, using all instruments and policies at its disposal... to prevent, deter, halt, and, where possible, eliminate proliferation programmes of concern worldwide.”⁶⁰

The CFSP emphasized the importance of acting together with the

(January, 2004), p. 346.

56. Yasuji Ishigaki, “Iraq War – A First Major Test of the CFSP of the European Union and Japan’s Strategic Choice” (paper presented at the 3rd Conference of European Union Studies Association - Asia Pacific (EUSA-AP), Keio University, Tokyo, December 8-10, 2005).

57. European Council, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: The European Security Strategy* (Brussels: European Council, 2003), p. 3.

58. Lynne Dryburgh, “The EU as a Global Actor? EU Policy Towards Iran,” *European Security*, vol. 17, no. 2 (June-September 2008), pp. 253-271.

59. European Council, “Press Release on 2518th Council Meeting on External Relations,” June 16, 2003. 10369/03 Presse 166, p. 24.

60. European Council, “EU Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction,” December 10, 2003. 15708/03, p. 2.

U.S. to deal with security threats. It pledged Europe's commitment to international cooperation and defined the transatlantic partnership as "irreplaceable."⁶¹ The strategy to counter the threat of proliferation iterated the resolution to act in unison with Washington.⁶² In fact, one of the primary objectives of the CFSP was to keep the U.S. in Europe. Leaders aimed to develop the necessary capability to contribute to joint military operations, thus reducing Washington's concerns about bearing an unfair share of costs for the defense of the Old Continent (and its incentive to retreat).⁶³

The Union needed a functioning foreign policy to be recognized as a unitary actor in the international system. Without it, the EU was an international organization, incapable of external action independent of the interests of separate states.⁶⁴ In addition, for a long time it was unclear who represents Europe with regard to foreign policy issues as the Presidency, the European Commission, the Foreign Ministries of Member States, the Secretary General of the Council, and individuals delegated with specific tasks were all allowed a say in policy-making. This often made it difficult to determine the EU's position on foreign policy matters. A complicated decision-making procedure with multiple veto points gave some states disproportional influence. As a result, Europe developed a reputation for lack of consistency and slow response in foreign relations. The EU came to be perceived as a source of funds, but not as a global player capable of participating in high politics on an international scale.⁶⁵ A case in point is its involvement in KEDO, where reportedly "the U.S., Japan, and South Korea repeatedly asked

61. European Council, *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, pp. 9, 13.

62. European Council, "EU Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction," p. 5.

63. Robert J. Art, "Europe Hedges Its Security Bets," in *Balance of Power*, eds. T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michael Frotmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 185.

64. Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor* (Routledge, 2005), pp. 29-30.

65. Fraser Cameron, "Building a Common Foreign Policy: Do Institutions Matter?," in *A Common Policy for Europe?*, ed. J. Peterson and H. Sjursen (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 59-76.

for European funding without allowing the EU any real role in the decision-making process.”⁶⁶ For this reason, when a common security strategy was finally formulated, it was essential to ensure that it was functional. If inconsistency and lack of coordination between national and supranational policies continued to be the norm, Europe would not be able to “make an impact on a global scale.”⁶⁷ Under these circumstances, EU’s policies toward individual states (including North Korea) needed to be consistent with the objectives of the CFSP.

Since 2003, the EU has consistently acted according to its common foreign strategy on matters related to the proliferation of WMD. If it was unsuccessful in halting Iran’s nuclear program, it was not for lack of effort—the EU negotiated with Tehran, solicited support from Russia and China, made promises of rewards in exchange for cooperation, and issued threats in case of non-compliance.⁶⁸ Member States also jointly provided support to the International Atomic Energy Agency through funding and by actively promoting stricter monitoring of nuclear material.⁶⁹ In 2005, the European Council issued a common position on the NPT, setting before the EU the objective “to strengthen the international nuclear non-proliferation regime” and “stressing the need to strengthen the role of the UN Security Council, as final arbiter, in order that it can take appropriate action in the event of non-compliance with NPT obligations.”⁷⁰ These are no minor achievements, considering

66. Ramon Pacheco Pardo, “EU Support for North Korean Denuclearization.”

67. European Council, *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, p. 14.

68. “Iran Rejects European Offer to End Its Nuclear Impasse,” *The New York Times*, August 7, 2005, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/07/world/middleeast/iran-rejects-offer-to-end-its-nuclear-impasse.html>> (date accessed June 17, 2019); Tom Sauer, “Struggling on the World Scene: An Over-ambitious EU versus a Committed Iran,” *European Security*, vol. 17, no. 2-3 (June, 2008), pp. 273-293.

69. Christian Mölling, “The Grand Bargain in the NPT: Challenges for the EU beyond 2010,” in *Nuclear Weapons after the 2010 NPT Review Conference*, ed. J. P. Zanders (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2010), p. 59; Megan Dee, “The EU’s Multilateralist Combat Against the Proliferation of WMD in the NPT: Mirroring the Great Bargain,” *European Security*, vol. 24, no. 1 (March, 2015), pp. 7-9.

70. “Council Common Position 2005/329/PESC of 25 April 2005 Relating to the

that the Union consists of countries with fundamentally different positions on nuclear weapons and varying levels of trade dependence with potential proliferators, including Iran.

Europe was also committed to maintaining a common course with the U.S. When transatlantic relations came under strain over the war in Iraq, European leaders and experts warned against the dangers of adopting a rival agenda with the U.S. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair warned that “[i]f Europe and America split apart from each other... [i]t will be far harder to make the international order stable and secure,” because “on every single issue that comes out, there will be rival poles of power to which people can gravitate.”⁷¹ Even French president Jacques Chirac, who had threatened to veto a United Nations resolution on use of force in Iraq, had admitted that “[r]elations between Europe and the United States are not only a very old, not only essential to the world equilibrium, but... in reality, becoming more and more important.”⁷² He told U.S. President George W. Bush that he only opposed using force before attempting a diplomatic solution, and “France would not stand in the way of a second resolution authorizing military action.”⁷³ In the following years, France and all other Member States demonstrated support for U.S. policy towards Iran and also sent troops to Afghanistan. Javier Solana insisted that differences between Brussels and Washington were exaggerated and that the two shared both threats and objectives.⁷⁴

The consolidation of Europe’s foreign strategy affected policy

2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, vol. 48, April 27, 2005, L 106, p. 32.

71. Christina M. Schweiss, “Sharing Hegemony: The Future of Transatlantic Security,” *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 38, no. 3 (September, 2003), pp. 211-234; “US and EU ‘Must Not Be Rivals,’” BBC, March 25, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/2885169.stm> (date accessed April 28, 2009).

72. “Bush Holds Talks with Chirac,” CNN, May 26, 2002, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/05/26/france.bush/index.html>> (date accessed June 7, 2009).

73. Stefano Recchia, “Did Chirac Say ‘Non’? Revisiting UN Diplomacy on Iraq, 2002-03,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 130, no. 4 (December, 2015), p. 635.

74. Javier Solana, “Europe and America: Partners of Choice,” (speech, annual dinner of the Foreign Policy Association, New York, May 7, 2003).

toward North Korea in two main ways. First, the EU could not tolerate activities that could lead to proliferation of nuclear weapons (particularly in the Middle East, or, more specifically, Iran). North Korea's multiple nuclear and missile tests during this period required a "firm and clear" response in the form of economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation.⁷⁵ Second, EU policies had to be consistent with Washington's approach. The EU needed to terminate economic and technological support for the DPRK to avoid strengthening the regime. This was in line with Washington's general aversion to the use of incentives and opposed to South Korea's relatively more conciliatory policies.

North Korea provided an opportunity for Brussels to demonstrate that the CFSP was operational. By maintaining a course true to the common security strategy, Member States could improve the credibility of the EU as a unitary actor. Contrary to what some experts feared, the DPRK was an easy test.⁷⁶ The Korean Peninsula was sufficiently important to Europe to justify the efforts devoted to addressing the security issues in the area. Unlike Iran (or Iraq), however, North Korea provoked few conflicts of interest between separate states with regard to the appropriate response to provocations (for example, regarding the severity of sanctions). No country had to sacrifice its vital interests in the name of the common good.

In sum, before 2003, the EU did not have a common position on nuclear weapons, nor an agreement to unanimously condemn nuclear research. North Korea was not considered a direct threat to Europe's vital interests. Its weapons development program was a matter of general concern, but it did not target Europe. This allowed individual European institutions more freedom in their approach to the DPRK. Member States could implement their own policies without being accused of inconsistency. Economic engagement and diplomatic dialogue with Pyongyang did not contradict Europe's foreign strategy objectives. The

75. European Council, "Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP Condemns Nuclear Test by North Korea," October 9, 2006. S280/06; European Council, "Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP Condemns Nuclear Test by North Korea," May 25, 2009. S136/09.

76. Berkofsky, "EU's Policy Towards the DPRK," p. 10.

need to alleviate the humanitarian situation in North Korea faced no competitors for the top position in Brussels' list of priorities. The EU was criticized for its lack of reaction to the proliferation crisis—a failing attributed to “the absence of a pre-agreed agenda.”⁷⁷ Since 2003, however, the policy of unconditional engagement did not correspond to the new defense strategy of the Union. North Korea's nuclear issue gained salience by being directly related to proliferation in the Middle East. Threats aside, the CFSP required unambiguous commitment and thus superseded the varying preferences of Member States and individual organizations and institutions representing the Union. A soft or inconsistent approach to the DPRK could cause a crack in the freshly-cast second pillar of the EU. Therefore, as North Korea's nuclear program advanced, Brussels' resolve became more pronounced. By responding to each provocation with a new set of restrictive measures, the EU consistently demonstrated that it was dedicated to addressing the threat of proliferation and to cooperating with the U.S. in the process.

Many other factors have influenced Europe's policies toward North Korea in varying degrees. The EU's obligations to upholding the UN's sanctions regime have limited its freedom of action to a great extent, particularly with regard to trade and investment with a suspected proliferator. Other states and the diplomatic processes they initiated have often created opportunities and incentives for the EU to engage in the Korean Peninsula.⁷⁸ At the same time, the often diverging courses taken by Seoul and Washington have presented Brussels with a choice—to side with the ROK in its focus on economic engagement, or to support the U.S. approach of intensifying pressure.⁷⁹ Lastly, the interests of Member States have naturally influenced the EU's agendas

77. Clara Portela, “The Role of the EU in the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: The Way to Thessaloniki and Beyond,” (Report No. 65, Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt, Frankfurt/Main, 2003), p. 19.

78. Esteban, “The EU's Role in Stabilizing the Korean Peninsula.”

79. On cleavages among major actors concerning the approach to North Korea, see John S. Park and Dong Sun Lee, “North Korea: Existential Deterrence and Diplomatic Leverage,” in *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 283-285.

and the preferred level of involvement with Pyongyang.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, when consolidating the various influences, EU policymakers relied on the CFSP as a reference point. This allowed them to reconcile pressures often pulling the Union in opposite directions. The consolidation of a common foreign policy stance explains both the timing of the shift in direction and the EU's choice to side with the U.S. and support its punitive efforts, while refraining from autonomous engagement with North Korea or clear support for the more conciliatory South Korea and China.

IV. Conclusion

This article discussed the change of the EU's policy toward the DPRK. During the first phase, from the mid-1990s to 2003, Brussels pursued a course of unconditional engagement. This was a reflection of Europe's preference to resolve conflicts through dialogue, while avoiding issues that could potentially lead to confrontation. The main objective was to help Pyongyang develop a healthy economy, thus ending the humanitarian crisis and establishing a basis for sustainable growth. For this end, Member States opened their markets for North Korean exports and provided knowhow, expert guidance, and technical assistance to the isolated state. Expectations were high—the DPRK would begin to integrate into the world economy, while developing a modern infrastructure and fostering skilled human resources. Improvement of the human rights conditions in the country would naturally follow. Reducing the gap in the levels of economic development between the two Koreas could become the first step to the future unification of the Korean Peninsula. European diplomats intentionally avoided discussions of security matters that could potentially derail cooperative arrangements. The policy achieved an immediate alleviation of the food and health crisis after the economic and environmental shocks in North Korea in

80. Santu Ko, "Vanguard of European Politics: The Role of Member States in the EU's Foreign Policy toward North Korea," *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2008), pp. 47-59.

the end of the 1990s, an establishment of trade and diplomatic relations between most European states and the DPRK, an opening of dialogue on human rights, and a generally enhanced mutual trust and understanding.

From 2003 onward, the EU adopted what can best be described as a policy of non-engagement. The reason the EU had to abandon the conciliatory efforts was the concretization of the CFSP. By developing a common stance with regard to the proliferation of nuclear technology, Brussels pledged to give a firm response to any potential proliferators. Moreover, regardless of the individual preferences of Member States, the Union was committed to support the U.S. in addressing security matters on a global scale. Over time, with the intensification of North Korea's nuclear activities, the EU more actively condemned Pyongyang's provocations, while continuing to abstain from independent efforts to alleviate the security crisis.

The European approach to world politics is to serve as a model for integration and cooperation that could be applied in other regions in the world.⁸¹ Many experts believe that the EU can bring a lot to the security dialogue on the Korean Peninsula. The preceding discussion, however, highlights the reasons why it may not be easy for the EU to play a more constructive role in the near future. There are three possible policy courses that Europe can pursue and none of them are ideal. First, it could accept that North Korea is a nuclear state and proceed to treat it as any other emerging market in need of developmental assistance—a path likely to be chosen by Russia. This could undermine EU's credibility as a global actor, confirm speculations that it cannot yield real power as a unitary actor, and encourage Iran to finish building its own nuclear deterrent. Second, Europe could side with South Korea in its efforts to negotiate denuclearization. The problem with this approach is that neither the ROK, nor the EU can give the DPRK security assurances in exchange for its nuclear weapons. All efforts will be futile, if none of the powers capable of providing credible security guarantees (the U.S., China, and/or Russia) agree to participate. Third, the EU could continue to follow Washington's lead in sanctioning Pyongyang and condemning

81. European Commission, *The EU in the World – The Foreign Policy of the European Union* (Luxembourg: European Commission, 2007).

its nuclear activities. This last option does not give Brussels a voice in regional matters and does not allow it to build any diplomatic or economic leverage vis-à-vis North Korea. Yet it might be the only feasible choice available to Europe at this time.

■ Article Received: 5/1 ■ Reviewed: 5/23 ■ Accepted: 5/23

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