

## **EU Involvement in the Korean Question: Background and Implications**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Since last year, in the wake of the establishment of diplomatic ties between European nations and North Korea, the interest, both at home and abroad, is focused on three levels.

First is interest in the motive for change in the reclusive communist state. Ever since the end of the Cold War, the “North Korea factor” has borne substantial weight regarding Korean peninsula issues and we have become accustomed to contemplating the motive whenever a new development occurs. In particular, the unexpected positive gestures the North has shown while working to improve relations with European countries, along with the so-called “new thinking” stressed in the country’s New Year’s address raise hopes for change in North Korea yet, at the same time, prompt speculations as to what the country’s real motives are.

Second is the possible expanding role of Europe in what is termed, “the Korean question.” Recently, the hard-won opportunity gained from the engagement policy has been jeopardized by the U.S.’ realist approach toward the North, after the inauguration of a

new government under President George W. Bush earlier this year. Consequently, inter-Korean dialogues are also at a standstill. Speculations about Europe's possible increasing role in issues related to the two Koreas, especially Europe's new relations with Pyongyang, became more apparent in the context of the chill between Pyongyang, Washington and Seoul. The local and foreign press are coming up with all sorts of ideas on how improved relations between the North and Europe will affect the Bush administration's review of North Korea policy and future relations between the two Koreas. On one hand, it is anticipated that Europe's involvement will help ease tension on the Korean peninsula while on the other, concerns are focused on possible friction between Europe and the U.S. over policies regarding the North.<sup>1)</sup> Whatever the outcome, Europe's interest in the North is gaining wide support as the necessary momentum for change in the stagnant inter-Korean relations.

The third view considers improved relations between North Korea and Europe as the globalization of issues concerning the two Koreas. It reasons that, given the strong wave of globalization in the 21st century, European interest in North Korea indicates that the Korean peninsula issue has grown beyond Northeast Asia and is now a link in the chain of international politics. In other words, improved North Korea-Europe relations are not simply a transitional occurrence amid suspended talks between the North and U.S.—the elements that lie beneath are Europe's increased influence on the Korean peninsula and the potential for Korean issues to become a

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1) In particular, in relation to the latter position, some U.S. press agencies responded very sensitively, speculating that the Korean government disappointed in the Bush administration's strong stance, was trying to get Europe involved and possibly the U.S. and European countries could be at odds over North Korea policies. Ref. "EU Seeks To Fill U.S. Role in Korea: Envoys Will Attempt to Ease Missile Risk, Build Reconciliation," *The Washington Post* March 25, 2001; "Storm Clouds Over U.S.-Europe Relations," *The New York Times*, March 26, 2001.

focus of global politics.

The purpose of this article is to review the background and motives behind improved relations between North Korea and the European Union to generate some logical answers to the questions raised above.

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPE-NORTH KOREA RELATIONS**

North Korea first looked to initiate relations with Western Europe in 1955 as part of its policy to move away from bloc-diplomacy and to diversify its diplomatic ties, but only insofar as it enabled private-level trade and exchange. Under the framework of the Cold War, North Korea's basic position toward Western Europe, part of the "imperialist bloc," was that of confrontation, and likewise, Western European countries had no political aims to form diplomatic ties with a socialist country in East Asia.

Diplomatic relations between North Korea and West Europe started making some progress around 1970. This was partly enabled by *det ente*, but a more fundamental cause was North Korea's active, even aggressive, efforts to build relations with European countries. The North had two significant motives for strengthening its efforts. The first was economic. North Korea, which had concentrated all its efforts on building an independent national economy based on the principle of self-rejuvenation, hit a wall while carrying out its first seven-year (1961-1967) development plan. To overcome this barrier, North Korea began searching for necessary capital and technology in the global market, and this search resulted in loans as well as massive amounts of industrial machinery from Japan and Western European countries. As a result, trade between North Korea and Western European countries suddenly increased in the early 1970s.

The second was political. The *det ente* and improved relations between the U.S. and China created a favorable environment, prompting dialogue on the Korean peninsula that resulted in the July

4, 1972 South-North Joint Communiqué. North Korea, taking advantage of the amicable atmosphere created on the Korean peninsula and beyond in the international arena, tried to raise its international status. The first goal was to induce Western European countries to develop and maintain the same level of diplomatic relations that they had established with the South. Those aggressive attempts were partly successful, prompting five Northern European countries—Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland—to acknowledge both Koreas and to form diplomatic ties. They simply could not surmount the towering wall of confrontation between the West and East, however. Although at times they allowed private trade agreements to be set up, most Western European countries which put relations with South Korea first, were very reluctant to improve relations with the North.

Moreover, even the partly successful strategy toward Western Europe was faced with a critical challenge in the mid-1970s. Hit by the economic crisis that spread throughout the world following the oil shock, and plagued by a lack of competitiveness in its products, the national plan to stimulate the economy through exports to failed miserably. And with trade deficits mounting since the early 1970s, North Korea finally fell into a default situation. Consequently, relations between North Korea and Western Europe stagnated, both economically and politically.

Then in around 1990, when North Korea witnessed the fall of the communist bloc, it once again felt a desperate need to resume ties with Western Europe. As the region had no immediate interests in the Korean peninsula, it was viewed as the optimal candidate to bring the North out of isolation and into the international arena, and to help compensate for the loss of support it previously enjoyed from the communist bloc.

Hoping to gain leverage from the amicable post-Cold War atmosphere and rejuvenate relations with Western European countries, North Korea often dispatched deputy-minister level officials in Foreign Trade and Foreign Affairs to the region. In effect,

economic ties gradually improved up to the mid-1990s, but diplomatic relations remained at a standstill. More than anything, tensions over North Korea's suspected development of nuclear weapons made European countries extremely cautious about dealing with the North. However, attitudes began changing in the mid-1990s, and Western European countries became politically more interested in the Korean peninsula. Following Germany's lead in 1995, Western European countries and the European Community began providing humanitarian aid to the North. Another example was the European Union's participation in the founding of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) as an Executive Board Member to help pay for light water reactors to be built in North Korea.

The political involvement of EU nations in issues concerning the two Koreas gained momentum after President Kim Dae-jung took office in 1993 and his government proposed an engagement policy toward the North. Encouraged by the Korean government, which professed full support of North Korea's entry into the international arena, EU countries have consistently carried out talks and cooperation, both at political and economic levels, since the first dialogue between North Korea and the European Community was held in December 1998. In particular, once mounting tensions on the Korean peninsula were quelled with the successful conclusion of U.S.-North Korean Berlin missile talks in September 1999, EU member countries began negotiations with the North on possible diplomatic ties.

Formal announcements of the establishment of diplomatic ties between North Korea and European countries began to emerge after the 3rd Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) hosted in Seoul last October. As of early May 2001, all EU countries except France and Ireland have formal diplomatic ties with North Korea, and even the European Union is considering establishment of formal relations.<sup>2)</sup> Against this backdrop, the latest May 2001 visit to Pyongyang by a high-powered delegation attracted attention. It was led by Swedish

Prime Minister Goran Persson, who holds the EU's rotating presidency, and included Chris Patten, EU Commissioner of External Relations, and Javier Solana, High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The delegation, by discussing a wide range of issues with the North, including inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation, North Korea's human rights and missile program, economic cooperation, not only helped ease tensions on the Korean peninsula but also opened the doors for the EU to become more actively involved in matters concerning North Korea as well as the two Koreas.

#### NORTH KOREA'S MOTIVES AND OBJECTIVES

Since North Korea has consistently sought to improve relations with Western European nations since the 1970s, it is hard to say that recent developments are the result of a change in foreign policy. Rather, three factors concomitantly provided the momentum: South Korea's engagement policy, EU nations' changed North Korea policies, and the inauguration of the new U.S. administration.

Moreover, when establishing formal ties with Germany Pyongyang was surprisingly open to Germany's demands<sup>3)</sup> and during Prime Minister Persson's visit, it even agreed to human rights

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2) Formal diplomatic ties established between North Korea and EU nations, as of early May 2001, in chronological order: Denmark (May 21, 1973), Sweden (May 25, 1973), Finland (June 1, 1973), Austria (December 17, 1974), Portugal (April 15, 1975), Italy (January 4, 2000), United Kingdom (December 12, 2000), Netherlands (January 15, 2001), Belgium (January 24, 2001), Spain (February 7, 2001), Germany (March 1, 2001), Luxemburg (March 5, 2001), Greece (March 8, 2001). Reportedly, France and Ireland are currently negotiating with North Korea. The EU Commission, having notified its member nations, on April 2, 2001, of its intent to form ties with North Korea, is currently gathering feedback based on the Common Foreign Security Policy, and is expected to soon establish formal diplomatic ties with North Korea.

issues with the EU. Three motives could be behind North Korea's changed attitude: first, its intention to open its doors and allow reform; second, using the European Union to counter the Bush administration's strong position on the North; and third, its desperate need for assistance to overcome economic difficulties.

Considering North Korea's domestic policies since the early 1990s, the first is highly unlikely. Indeed, it cannot be denied that the country has changed from the Cold War days, but the level of change is far too meager to inspire confidence that the North will adopt an open-door policy and pursue economic reforms. This is one of the reasons, that the Bush administration doubts that North Korea can be trusted. A more concrete reason for doubting the North comes from its recent attitude in inter-Korean relations. If the North had any intention of adopting an open-door policy and seek economic reform, it would actively carry out joint projects with South Korea for economic cooperation, as agreed during the Inter-Korean Summit, regardless of the Bush administration's tough stance against the North. But it is using Washington's review of North Korean policy as an excuse to tie up progress between the two Koreas, at the same time it is concentrating all its energy on improving relations with European nations.

Therefore, most view that the motive behind North Korea's recent EU policy is the second one—part of its diplomatic strategy. The recalcitrant country's recent gesture is a carefully calculated tactic aimed at using recent developments in the international

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- 3) Before establishing formal diplomatic ties on March 1, 2001, Germany proposed four conditions and North Korea accepted: (1) No restriction on the activities of German diplomatic and relief organizations working in North Korea, (2) No restriction on relief organizations to directly monitor progress of relief activities, (3) Accommodation for German reporters in North Korea and in principle, allowing entry of German reporters, (4) Discussion on all issues related to armaments including human rights, regional security, arms reduction, weapons of mass destruction, missile program and non-proliferation.

environment to maximum its advantage and maintain its regime. Pyongyang probably has two political motives: first, to soften down U.S.' stubborn stance against the North, the EU is a useful tool considering its ever-increasing international influence.<sup>4)</sup> In particular, Pyongyang also considers that the EU is potentially at odds with Washington over the missile defense (MD) program and the formation of an independent rapid-action European force. By appearing open in discussion with EU on issues such as weapons of massive destruction (WMD) and human rights, it hopes to create positive support in the international community as well as in the U.S. that will, in effect, influence Washington's review of its North Korea policy. In a sense, Pyongyang's ultimate goal is to show that the Bush administration's hard-line stance against the North is unjustified.

The second North Korea's motive is that it is looking toward not only using relations with the EU to curb tensions with the U.S., but also at making an entry into the international community. Since the end of the Cold War, North Korea has concentrated most of its attention on improving relations with the U.S. for its survival, recognizing that the U.S. plays a dominant role in matters concerning the Korean peninsula. And this basically will not change as long as the North's diplomatic objective is keeping its regime intact. But with the new Bush administration and its strong position against the North, it has been faced with little to negotiate with, and hence, has urgently needed an alternative strategy. Under these circumstances, North Korea is seeking to make a modest entry into the international community through European countries that do not have direct interests in issues related to security on the Korean peninsula. The European Union would be especially attractive to North Korea as it

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4) North Korea's intention is reflected in a review on Prime Minister Persson's Pyongyang visit in the new bulletin of the Workers' Party, *Rodung Shinmun*, which praised the EU's multipolarization efforts and independence that defeats external influence and control. *Rodung Shinmun*, May 3, 2001.

tends to emphasize global cooperation and engagement in its foreign policies. Nonetheless, North Korea does not appear to regard the EU as a possible replacement for the U.S. In his meeting with Prime Minister Persson, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's remarks, such as "North Korea does not regard the United States as an enemy" or "test-firing of missiles will be postponed until 2003," were indicative of Pyongyang's unchanged focus on the U.S.

In a purely diplomatic-strategy perspective, North Korea's decision to establish formal ties with Germany and its changed posture in welcoming the Prime Minister Persson can be easily understood. And whether or not this view is valid will be clearly determined in the future depending on how committed North Korea actually is to keeping the promises that it made. But to better understand North Korea's actions in the post-Cold War era, we need to review the third motive—economic reasons.

The Bush administration clearly had no intention of removing North Korea from its list of "rogue states." And because of this, Pyongyang's entry into the international community, once very plausible in the former Clinton administration, has become extremely uncertain, leaving it to desperately search for a practical solution that will help boost its ever-staggering economy. Indeed, short term assistance is offered through economic cooperation with South Korea, but considering the South's limited economic power, its relations with the U.S., and the enormous ripple effect inter-Korean exchange and cooperation will cause throughout the reclusive state, North Korea will not try to find a fundamental solution to its problems through cooperation with the South. Against this backdrop, it is natural that the EU, following China, Japan and South Korea in trade volume, have emerged as an attractive alternative. Unlike surrounding countries, the EU is not linked to any sensitive political conditions, and thus would be considered the most suitable candidate to provide economic assistance and, in the mid- and long-term, help the North stimulate its economy without the threat of weakening its regime. And actually, in dealing with the

North, European countries focused primarily on providing economic support. Reportedly, economic support was discussed in depth during Prime Minister Persson's visit to Pyongyang. No doubt, North Korea is making an all-out effort to strengthen relations with European nations and to seize this golden opportunity.

In summary, North Korea has a basic strategic intent to use relations with European countries to maintain its regime. Nonetheless, instead of trying to keep its doors closed like it had in the past, it is seeking to break out by advancing into the global market and international community. And North Korea is more than aware that in the end, the key to achieving that goal lies in improving relations with the U.S. So, taking full advantage of the EU's rising status in the international arena, North Korea hopes to press its demands in soon-to-be-resumed dialogues with the U.S. However, in the event that relations with the U.S. do not pick up, it will have its resources in Europe to help it overcome economic difficulties.

#### **ROLE AND MOTIVES OF THE EU**

The European Union, on several occasions, has tried to explain the subtle discord between the U.S., South Korea and the EU which immediately followed the EU's decision last March to send a delegation to Pyongyang led by Prime Minister Persson. Before leaving for Pyongyang, the Prime Minister stated that his visit was prompted by President Kim Dae-jung's request last December to the EU to join the efforts to bring peace on the Korean peninsula, so the primary goal was to mediate the peace process. The Delegation of the European Commission in Washington, D.C. added that the EU was closely consulting with the Republic of Korea, the United States and Japan in dealing with North Korea, stressing that it was not trying to take over the role of the U.S.<sup>9</sup> Actually, around the time of Prime Minister Persson's Pyongyang visit, the EU not only pre-

planned the visit with the three countries, it also provided a briefing afterwards. Nonetheless, speculations still loom over EU member nations' and the European community's involvement in issues concerning the two Koreas.

Relations between North Korea and European countries have actually been developing since the mid-1990s. Going mostly unnoticed, this relationship suddenly emerged as a central issue this year with the increased possibility of change in both international and local politics in Northeast Asia, following the inauguration of the Bush administration. In fact, with suspended talks between the U.S. and North Korea and the standstill in inter-Korean relations induced by the U.S. stance, we cannot ignore the possibility of renewed tension on the Korean peninsula, if even the North decides to take a firm stand. Therefore, the EU, which has steadily strengthened relations with North Korea, is making great efforts to pacify the instability surrounding the peninsula, clearly, to encourage peace in Korea and Northeast Asia. The question is the U.S. response to the EU's involvement in issues concerning the Korean peninsula.

The United States seems to hold two conflicting positions. On one hand, it welcomes EU involvement as it can prevent Pyongyang from taking any aggressive actions while Washington reviews its North Korea policy. But on the other hand, it is concerned that such involvement could later affect Washington's policy and actions toward the North. And the European Union's position favoring the engagement policy could potentially cause conflict between Europe and the U.S. over the methodology of North Korea policies.

Nonetheless, the two sides clearly share the same position that North Korea's development and export of weapons of mass destruction could threaten regional and global peace.<sup>5)</sup> Yet, since it is not part of Northeast Asia, the EU cannot directly control potential

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5) Yonhap News Agency, April 26, 2001.

security issues that could erupt on the Korean peninsula. Therefore, it does not have the power nor the intention to directly challenge the United States over North Korea. There is a possibility however, that the EU might indirectly question U.S. policy toward the North, and voice concern about the new administration's adoption of a self-serving policy, and its overconfident attitude as the global superpower. The fact that is European countries disapprove of Bush administration policies such as a new missile defense program and its intent to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol, both of which dampened efforts toward global governance and globalization that had steadily evolved since the end of the Cold War. This includes the U.S. response to North Korea's missile program. European countries are concerned about the U.S. using the country's missile development as an excuse to introduce the MD plan and expects the issue to be resolved in a cooperative manner through international policy networks. In this respect, the EU's recent attempt to improve relations with the North can be viewed as an expression of its discontent with Washington's attitude and an attempt to pressure the U.S. to facilitate talks with Pyongyang.

In any event, the European Union's basic position on the Korean peninsula is resolving issues through peaceful dialogue. Its short-term focus is to use all diplomatic and economic means to prevent any North Korean action that could threaten peace on the Korean peninsula, and in the long term, to encourage the North to become a responsible member of the international community by bringing it into the international arena. Clearly the success or failure of this policy will be affected by how the U.S. future policy toward North Korea unfolds.

Still, even if the U.S. enacts a strict policy toward North Korea as feared, it is unlikely that discord will mount between the U.S. and

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6) Clearly expressed in a press release on a EU foreign ministers meeting held in November 2000. "Korean Peninsula-European Union Lines of Action Towards North Korea," 2308th Council meeting (November 20, 2000)

the EU. As mentioned earlier, the EU will probably not directly interfere in Washington's policy on sensitive security issues. And actually the different methodologies of the two sides, unless North Korea-U.S. relations cave in, will complement one another. The EU's engagement policy, will open the door for the North and pave the way into the global market and the international community, and will provide a alternative policy option. And this is not necessarily a negative factor for the U.S. Considering the lack of mutual trust between North Korea and the U.S., this would prevent or at least lessen conflicts resulting from mutual misunderstandings.

#### *The Motive Behind EU's Involvement*

What is the European Union's motive for increased interest and involvement in easing tension on the Korean peninsula? This, no doubt, is a question to be raised in contemplation of the EU's future policy toward issues concerning the two Koreas. The EU's motives can be viewed from two directions. First, with the growing union of European nations, the EU wants to secure a role and position suitable to its status in the international arena in the 21st century. In that connection, it emphasizes contributing to global peace. The EU's decision to participate in KEDO as an Executive Board member, its great interest in North Korea's missile program, and its willingness to act as a mediator in peaceful dialogue between the two Koreas can all be viewed as part of a grand policy. In particular, the EU believes that North Korea's development and export of weapons of mass destruction not only threatens security in the Korean peninsula and Asia, but it poses a threat throughout the world.

Basically, the only way the EU can contribute to global peace is by preventing disputes through economic and diplomatic means. While it is part of NATO, and it can send troops through the UN peace-keeping mission, it does not have the military capacity to act as an international policeman like the U.S. In particular, there is no room for direct military involvement in matters outside Europe such

as North Korea's security threat. So, its key tools are enhancing talks with the North and expanding economic and humanitarian aid. During the last five years, the EU has provided a considerable amount, a total of 280 million euro in aid.<sup>7)</sup> Agricultural aid, which was initially provided in the form of simple food delivery, has evolved into a more fundamental solution that will help the North to improve agricultural production. And to allow more North Korean products to enter the European market, starting this year it has raised the import quota for different product categories by 50 to 60%. In addition, it dispatched an economic delegation to research the possibility of agriculture and energy sector cooperation and, as a result, some progress is already under way.<sup>8)</sup> Such support by the EU has brought forth some positive results. It opened the door for discussion with the North on its missile development program and human rights conditions, and secured Pyongyang's guarantee that EU diplomats and citizens can freely travel through North Korea.

Second, the EU aims to build a political and economic foundation that will enable it to actively create channels into the Asian market, including both Koreas. Although potential for disputes exist in the post-Cold War era, Asia is regarded to have the greatest potential for economic growth, so naturally, European countries are very interested in the market. Individual countries,

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7) In detail, a total of 38 million euro in humanitarian aid—medical supplies, drinking water, health facilities, winter coats, etc—and a total of 168 million euro in agricultural support and as an Executive Board Member of KEDO, a total of 75 million euro for construction of a nuclear plant. "EU policy on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Supporting international efforts to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula," MEMO/01/159, Brussels (April 30, 2001)

8) EU Commissioner of External Relations, Chris Patten, in his report of the visits to both South and North Korea at an unofficial EU foreign minister meeting held on May 5, stated that the EU will soon begin providing two types of economic technical support to North Korea—Training on global economics for North Korean government officials and restoration of the energy sector. Yonhap News Agency, May 7, 2001.

have been interested in entering Asia since the end of the Cold War.<sup>9)</sup> But alone, they could not easily access regions dominated by the U.S. and Japan. To effectively compete against such strong players, European nations needed to make a collective entry as the European Community. Now member countries are aligning their Asia policies under the basic framework of “the Common Foreign Security Policy” (CFSP) agreed upon at Maastricht in 1991. In turn, the implementation of CFSP toward Asia has helped with the establishment of the ASEM.

Consequently, investment in Korea by European countries skyrocketed after Korea’s economic restructuring following the financial crisis. In recent years, the region has increased trade with North Korea as well, with Germany now Pyongyang’s 4th trade partner.<sup>10)</sup> But it is not the current North Korean market which attracts the EU. Although trade is increasing, North Korea will only account for a minor portion of EU’s total trade, considering the country’s weak economy and infrastructure. What the EU is preparing for is the time when North Korea opens its doors and the two Koreas are finally reunited. In other words, the EU is looking to secure an early hold of the market to be in a better position in the

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9) For instance, Germany, in October 1993, announced its “Asia Policy Vision” to focus on responding to the Asia Pacific region’s economic challenges, guaranteeing peace and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and promoting values such as free economic exchange, environment preservation and human rights protection. In January 2001, it finalized a ten-article action plan, the essence of which is to contribute to Asia’s modernization and development, to expand economic cooperation and in particular, to develop a strong mutual relationship based on cultural diversities. “Dokumente zur deutschen Asien-Politik,” *Europa Archiv*, Folge 6 (1994), pp. D187-D208.

10) Trade between Germany and North Korea which totaled 56 million dollars in 1999, grew 38.5% to a total of 78 million dollars in 2000. North Korea, focused on importing German machinery, has recorded deficits since 1999. The big boost in trade followed the Der Ostasiatische Verein (OAV) set up in Pyongyang in 1996. Yonhap News Agency, April 27, 2001.

mid- and long-term. Whenever economic cooperation between the two Koreas booms, European firms hope to advance into the North Korean market jointly with South Korean companies. And looking further ahead, it is targeting the potentially reunified Korean market. Hence, the EU is showing more interest in the Korean peninsula's peace and stability and North Korea's democratization and liberalization.<sup>11)</sup>

As reviewed so far, judging from the position that the European Union has taken since the mid-1990s, it seems likely that its future North Korea policy, security-wise will not go against the policies of South Korea, the United States and Japan. More likely, while aligning its policy to that of the three countries, the EU will continue to increase its political and economic influence on the Korean peninsula by expanding humanitarian aid and encouraging the North to modernize and introduce an open-door policy.

### CONCLUSION

Lastly it would be meaningful to examine how recent improvements in North Korea-EU relations affect issues concerning the Korean peninsula, and then predict what change it will bring to the strategic framework surrounding the Korean peninsula.

The most direct and significant influence at least for now is the curbing of tensions that have loomed since the inauguration of the new U.S. administration. Europe's involvement prevented the worst scenario from unfolding: that Pyongyang would overreact to Washington's review of its North Korea policy, relations between the U.S. and North Korea would deteriorate and, as a result, tension would once again rise on the Korean peninsula. No doubt this is a

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11) The EU's requests in inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation is also clearly stated in the Framework Agreement on Trade and Cooperation, effective between the Republic of Korea and the European Union as of March 30, 2001.

blessing not only to South Korea, but also to the U.S., North Korea and other neighboring countries. In particular, the South Korean government sees EU involvement as a sign of support, and a reflection of its engagement policy toward the North.

As described above, strengthening relations between North Korea and the EU was a well-calculated mutually beneficial strategic decision made by both sides which also well suits the Korean government. Nonetheless, it appears unlikely that all parties will easily accomplish their ultimate goals. Sooner or later, when Washington concludes its review, talks between North Korea and the U.S. will resume, but it would be a stretch to expect that talks will pick up exactly where they left off during the Clinton administration. The Bush administration has already refused to remove North Korea from its list of rogue nations and has indirectly indicated that it would not tolerate North Korea's development of missiles and nuclear weapons, by proposing a 'strategic framework' including nonproliferation and counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and a missile defense program.

Judging from overall circumstances, it seems unlikely that improved North Korea-EU relations will dramatically change the strategic framework surrounding the Korean peninsula. Above all, currently the EU not does have sufficient capacity or the will to push forward a North Korea policy that goes against the U.S. The only thing the EU can, and is probably willing to do, is provide an alternative route to North Korea when North Korea-U.S. relations are turbulent. At the same time, it will try to induce change and increase its influence. And this limited role of the EU is something that North Korea is fully aware of.

Nonetheless, the possibility of EU involvement changing the strategic framework surrounding the Korean peninsula cannot be totally excluded. First, the EU could develop an advantage over North Korea, but this will not happen in the near future. In any case, for the engagement policy to produce any significant results, naturally requires a considerable amount of time. Second, the Bush

administration's tough stance against North Korea could face continued opposition from international heavyweights including the EU, thus changing the international power structure. In this event, U.S. influence in international politics will weaken and naturally the EU will have more clout in issues concerning the Korean peninsula.

Even without considering these possibilities, the EU's increased involvement in the Korean peninsula is a classic example illustrating that issues concerning the two Koreas will be influenced, not simply by inter-Korean relations and the dynamics in Northeast Asia, but by developments in international politics. Therefore, to bring lasting peace and reunification on the Korean peninsula, the Korean government must seek a solution by synchronizing inter-Korean relations, the situation in Northeast Asia and international politics.