

FRS - KF KOREA PROGRAM ON SECURITY AND DIPLOMACY

“France has been and will be considered as one of the most important countries in realizing Korea's policy toward Europe”

A conversation with H.E. Choi Jong-moon April 2019



H.E. Choi Jong-moon is the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to France since 2018. A graduate from Yonsei University, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1983. He served at the Korean Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations in New York, and at Korean Embassies in Thailand, the United States of America and Myanmar. An ambassador to Sri Lanka (2011-2014), he was Special Advisor to the Minister as well as Sherpa for the Nuclear Security Summit in 2015 before being appointed Deputy Minister for multilateral and global affairs (2016-2018).

Q1: While the Hanoi summit failed to further implement the commitments made by President Trump and Chairman Kim at the Singapore summit, relations between the U.S. and the DPRK could deteriorate. On March 4, during a National Security Council meeting, President Moon stated South Korea should seek to ways to narrow the differences in their positions and help them resume working-level talks. What can Seoul do to maintain a positive momentum between Washington and Pyongyang and avoid a dangerous backtracking?

First, regarding the Hanoi Summit, even though no agreement was reached, neither Leader walked out in the middle of the talks nor did either make any negative comments about each other following the summit. On the contrary, the two Leaders reaffirmed their will for dialogue. Bearing in mind the common objective of denuclearization of the North Korean nuclear program, what we saw at Hanoi was a reality check by both sides on their respective positions, which seems to be a step that needs to be taken to reach the goal.

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Since Hanoi, the Government of the Republic of Korea, as a key party in the process of achieving denuclearization and bringing peace on the Korean Peninsula, has been striving for an early resumption of dialogue and such efforts have borne fruit with the recent agreement on the holding of a summit on 11th of April between President Moon and President Trump.

In the past negotiations over the North Korean nuclear program, the Republic of Korea has always played a role of facilitating dialogues and this time is no exception. With the strong alliance with the United States and together with the development of inter-Korean relations, the Republic of Korea will continue to play a valuable role, seeking ways for dialogue and negotiations on denuclearization. This time, in particular, with the inter-Korean trust built through the PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games and the three consecutive inter-Korean Summits in 2018, the role of Korea was critical in making possible the summit in Singapore and Hanoi.

The trust and understanding between the two Koreas that was fostered through progress in various inter-Korean dialogues and exchanges can be beneficial for the denuclearization process on the Korean Peninsula.

The two are engaged in a perpetuating virtuous circle, one helping the other. With that in mind, the Government of the Republic of Korea has been and will continue to be committed to the faithful implementation of the inter-Korean agreements, which may also generate fresh impetus for dialogue on denuclearization.

Q2: 2018 was an unprecedented year in terms of inter-Korean relations with three summits, two major declarations in Panmunjom and Pyeongyang, and the participation of a North Korean delegation to the PyeongChang Winter Olympics. What were the most significant commitments and progress made by the two leaders? How to sustain the current positive dynamic and further deepen inter-Korean cooperation, especially if there is no lifting, even partial, of international sanctions, multilateral or unilateral?

President Moon Jae-in has emphasized that 2018 was a year of great change when the inter-Korean relations turned from confrontation into those of peace and cooperation. We had advances with the PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games and three inter-Korean summits in 2018.

Facilitating the dialogue between North Korea and the United States and at the same time developing inter-Korean relations which are within the framework of the current sanctions regime will remain our policy direction.

First, through the Panmunjom Declaration in April and the Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018, the two Leaders reaffirmed the will for denuclearization as well as a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. Through the Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain, the two sides declared the will to terminate the military hostilities and to realize the common vision of a Korean Peninsula free of war. The measures undertaken since include a cessation of hostilities in the air, in the sea, on the land, demilitarization measures in the JSA, and the withdrawal of some border Guard Posts. These measures have consolidated the de-escalation of tensions on the peninsula.

Second, the opening of the liaison office in Kaesong last September made possible permanent and regular communication between North and South. In the past, inter-Korean projects have been agreed upon, then later abandoned or suspended. This time, the Korean government is seeking to upgrade and firmly establish the inter-Korean relations to a point where they cannot be reversed. Various forms of and constant contact and exchanges will bring us much closer to that goal.

Projects such as Initiation ceremony for the connection of railways and roads along the East and West coasts of the peninsula vertically, reunion of separated families, joint concerts, jointly participation in international sports events, forestry cooperation, have all been successfully implemented last year.

The UN sanctions regime against North Korea is in response to the North's nuclear program, and Korea, as a responsible member of the international community, has been abiding by these and will continue to be committed to the implementation of the sanctions. In pursuing various inter-Korean projects, we checked very carefully every possible element in the UN sanctions regime and always implemented projects within the framework permitted by the regime. Our commitment in that respect is solid.

At the same time, as I referred to earlier, inter-Korean relations can have a positive impact on the process leading to denuclearization. Therefore, facilitating the dialogue between North Korea and the United States and at the same time developing inter-Korean relations which are within the framework of the current sanctions regime will remain our policy direction.

Q3: « Peace, a new start » was the official slogan of the Panmunjom summit. During his speech marking the 100th March First Independence Movement Day, President Moon announced his intention to establish a new Korean Peninsula regime. Does it simply mean signing a peace treaty to replace the 1953 armistice, or is it a much more comprehensive regime?

The new Korean Peninsula regime is an order of peace and cooperation for the next century on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia, which has overcome the hostile relations of confrontation and conflict for the past 100 years.

It means to build a community of peaceful cooperation in the Korean peninsula through its complete denuclearization and settlement of the permanent peace and on this basis, to construct a new peaceful security order in Northeast Asia. The Korean government will make continuous efforts to accomplish this vision of the new Korean Peninsula regime.

Q4: Whether for the denuclearization of North Korea or the establishment of a new peace regime, what can be the role of the European Union and its

Member States? Last year, President Moon drew a parallel between the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) created in 1951 and his initiative of an "East Asian Railway Community". Is Europe a model among others or a key partner to the peninsula?

North Korea feels more at ease with European countries - truly the European Union and its member states have always helped in fostering a favorable environment where North Korea can continue to engage in dialogue with the international community and remain on the path to denuclearization.

As European states have extensive experience in the non-proliferation process, they can assist in the future process of verification and dismantlement of the North Korean nuclear programs. Also, as they continue to play an important role in improvements in the North Korean human rights situation and in the field of humanitarian aid, they can participate in realizing the so-called Bright Future for North Korea, once such a project eventually takes concrete shape.

President Moon Jae-in, in his remarks on National Liberation Day last year, on August 15th, recalled that the six European states created the ECSC and the latter was a kind of predecessor of the current European Union. His initiative of the East Asian Railroad Community is benchmarked on the ECSC, in the recognition that the ECSC didn't remain simply as an organ for economic rehabilitation but indeed successfully led to political reconciliation and permanent peace in Europe. The Korean Government will make efforts to implement the Initiative with the strategy that we aim to overcome tension and confrontation and build a permanent peace regime in the region one day.

Q5: More broadly, President Moon highlighted the need for diplomatic diversification to expand the ties of cooperation. Yet, Europe is part of neither Seoul's New Northern policy nor New Southern policy. What are the top priorities of Korea's foreign policy towards Europe?

Due to the structural constraints of the division of the Korean Peninsula, Korea's diplomacy has centered on allies and neighboring countries. As its economy as well as its role and status in the international community have grown, Korea has gradually expanded its diplomatic horizons.

The partnership with Europe is characterized by a long-standing friendship, by participation of European states during the Korean War, and in line with the cooperation and assistance of Europe during Korea's process of rapid economic growth in the 70-80s. In the international arena, the two sides have developed a close collaboration, with their shared values as a firm basis.

Currently, Korea's policy toward Europe consists of three pillars: (1) promotion of high-level exchanges to consolidate these deep-rooted ties of friendship, (2) strategic cooperation on Korean Peninsula issues, and (3) cooperation on maintaining the norms-based international order and on joint-responses to global challenges.

Since Europe has diplomatic assets in and with North Korea, such as permanent missions and long established channels of communication with North Korea, the Republic of Korea hopes to strengthen strategic cooperation with Europe. We hope Europe will play a role of emphasizing the need for practical measures for denuclearization and the importance of confidence-building to the North Korea.

Moreover, in the face of global challenges such as climate change, cyber security and ODA, Korea hopes to continue to cooperate closely with European countries which are forerunners, in respect of the multilateral order based on international norms and joint responses to those challenges.

Q6: Germany is often presented as Korea's top European partner, economically but also politically due to the unique precedent of German unification. Yet, France and Korea deepened their relationships over the last few years, culminating with President Moon's state visit to Paris last October. What is France's specific place in your foreign policy but also European policy? As an Ambassador, what are your top priorities for deepening the bilateral relationship?

France has been considered and will be considered one of the most important countries in realizing Korea's policy toward Europe. The diplomatic relations with a history of more than 130 years, France's participation in the Korean War, the import of TGV for the high-speed Korean trains - the KTX - are all testament that Korea-France relations have played a pivotal role in leading

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Korea-Europe relations. In the future, we will continue to promote high-level exchanges to deepen the bilateral cooperation, to strengthen the strategic cooperation in the peace process on the Korean Peninsula, and to jointly respond to global challenges with respect to the norms-based international order.

In October last year, President Moon Jae-in visited France and with President Emmanuel Macron, the two Leaders adopted a joint declaration on expanding and deepening bilateral cooperation in a wide range of fields. President Moon invited President Macron to Korea. If the trip takes place, it will set an exemplary precedent for the two heads of states to exchange bilateral visits early in their terms. In terms of ministerial exchanges, there have already been bilateral talks between Minister Kang and Minister Le Drian twice in the first half of this year alone, demonstrating the thriving exchanges and contacts between high-level officials of the two countries.

It is undeniable that France, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a nuclear power and a key member of the EU, is a vital partner for Korea on the issues of peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. Especially at a truly critical juncture such as now, the coordination and cooperation with the international community is imperative, calling for closer cooperation between the two countries.

Moreover, in the above-mentioned joint declaration last year, the two countries reached more concrete agreement in various fields, including aerospace, start-ups and the digital economy. As a result, the Korea-France forums on start-ups and on the digital economy were held in Seoul last February, and the Korea-France aviation negotiations took place in Paris last March. The space forum is also scheduled for the first half of this year.

The two countries pledged to work together closely on environment and climate change issues. Korea will collaborate with France on global climate actions such as participation in the UN Climate Change Summit 2019 as well as in France's initiatives such as CREWS, the Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems.

Q7: Security and defense cooperation between France and the Republic of Korea is as old as the Korean war during which France, under the United Nations Command, provided over 3,400 troops, of whom 270 were killed in action. Yet, over the last few years, cooperation between France and Asian partners mostly deepened with India, Australia and

Japan. What are the main areas of future cooperation between Paris and Seoul in the field of security and defense?

In 1950 when the Korean War broke out, France dispatched 3,400 troops and fought successfully in various battles the most remarkable of which was the Battle of Jipyeong-ri. Their shared history during the Korean War between the two countries has been a solid foundation for our ties of friendship and cooperation. Recently, an excavation of Korean War remains began in the southern part of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and we look forward to discovering seven remains of French soldiers missing in the engagement area.

France's national defense budget amounts to more than 34 billion euros, accounting for 1.8% of its GDP. Throughout the world, almost 30,000 soldiers are dispatched to various missions. On the other hand, Korea has reinforced its engagement in UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) activities and participated in the anti-piracy operations. In UNIFIL, the PKOs forces of the two countries have cooperated closely within the framework of the UN. Now, there is a need to give thought to fostering closer bilateral cooperation in the field of defense and security.

In the same context, during President Moon's visit to France last October, the two Leaders agreed to deepen the cooperation in the security and defense fields. To be precise: the strengthening of regular governmental consultations at all levels, the promotion of exchanges of high-level officials in the field, increasing cooperation on military logistics, and more coordination as well as collaboration regarding activities such as PKOs, maritime security, and anti-piracy. With the agreement reached at the Summit, it is hoped that more substantial projects can be developed soon.

Q8: In the 1970s, Korea became the first Asian country to order planes from Airbus, laying the groundwork for its aviation industry. Today, our two countries are committed to cooperate in future industries to prepare for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. What are the top priorities in terms of bilateral economic cooperation? Is there any special focus on artificial intelligence?

The bilateral trade between Korea and France is steadily increasing, having reached \$9.4 billion in 2018. In the trade between them the range of products has also broadened from mostly manufactured products

such as automobiles, aircraft parts and cosmetics to bio-pharmaceuticals, chemical fuels, and agricultural products. On the investment front, the total volume was around 10.3 billion US dollars in 2017 which is also an increasing trend for both countries.

Nonetheless, considering the economic scale of Korea and France (France ranks 6th and Korea 11th in the world), the current trade volume does not fully meet expectations. Its diversification so that it is more balanced and greater in scale is an urgent task. As the Fourth Industrial Revolution is taking the center stage in the global economy, and new markets have therefore been rapidly emerging, it is generating impetus for opportunities for the two countries to remarkably expand the bilateral economic cooperation.

President Moon Jae-in, during his State visit to France in October last year, agreed with President Macron to strengthen the cooperation on new technologies related to the digital economy as well on the socio-economic impacts which it may have. Currently, the two countries are cooperating in six fields; autonomous vehicles, Nano electronics, digital healthcare, e-learning, ICT convergence and energy. So far, KRW 30 billion has been invested in 13 projects and the results have begun to be felt. The Traffic Jam Assist System for EVs was developed jointly by Renault in France and LG Electronics in Korea and the Big Data Platform for Remote Dementia has already been developed into forms of business. In the future, the two countries plan to expand the scope of cooperation mainly through the French-Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FKCCI), and hydrogen cars, AR / VR, and AI are expected to become new areas for cooperation.

Artificial Intelligence is the core infrastructure of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. So far, the private sector has led the bilateral cooperation in the field; Samsung Electronics established an AI research institute in Paris and has developed it into a global research and development hub; NAVER, the Korean research engine like Google, has also taken over the Xerox Research Center in Grenoble and has been focusing on AI research. Korean companies' demand for excellent human resources in the AI research area in France will continue to grow.

Cooperation at the government level is also expected to be more concrete in the future. The French government announced in March 2018 its investment plan of 1.5 billion euros in the field by 2022 and the

Korean government also announced plans in May 2018 to invest 2.2 trillion won (about 1.6 billion euros) in the field by 2022. As the French-Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FKCCI) discussed the need for cooperation in the AI field last February, it is expected that the two countries may further the cooperation in this field of common interest soon.

Q9: As Deputy Minister, you oversaw multilateral and global affairs. Korea is often presented as a case study for middle-power diplomacy. President Lee insisted on "Global Korea" while President Park initiated the informal partnership called MIKTA along with Mexico, Indonesia, Turkey and Australia. Would you say President Moon is pursuing a middle-power diplomacy and how to characterize it?

MIKTA is an informal as well as non-exclusive consultative body of five middle power countries -- Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia. It was inaugurated in September 2013 on the margins of the UN General Assembly and its purpose is to increase the role the five countries play in addressing the core issues facing the international community. Over the past five years, in the face of various global challenges, MIKTA has worked very successfully in agenda-setting, narrowing the gaps between states, playing a bridging role, and establishing an international order based on rules and agreements.

The government of President MOON Jae-in will continue its engagement with MIKTA. By assuming the chairmanship of MIKTA in 2020, Korea will focus on five major areas- startups, PKO, infectious diseases, maternal and child health, and the energy transformation - and will make efforts to yield concrete outcomes.

Moreover, the government, since its inauguration, has cultivated the initiative for middle-power cooperation in East Asia. Through the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative, the New Southern Policy, and the New Northern Policy, the government seeks to foster a good habit of dialogue and exchanges among the relevant countries in the region in the belief that these practices will eventually lead to their institutionalization. The axis of Peace in Northeast Asia and the axis of Prosperity beyond Northeast Asia will help to create a responsible community in the region.

Q10: Korea is now very active in Africa. In 2018, a Korea-Africa Foundation was launched and a

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Seoul dialogue on Africa was organized. What are Korea's key partners and areas of cooperation in Africa? Last November, the 7th consultation between the Republic of Korea and France on African policy was held in Paris. How do you assess the potential for bilateral cooperation with France in the continent?

The Korean map entitled Gangnido which was produced in 1402 is the world's oldest map. It reflects the African continent in a relatively accurate manner. The map was made 100 years prior to 1497 when Vasco da Gama discovered the Cape of Good Hope. This shows that Korea recognized the existence of the African continent more than 600 years ago, and it is one of the strong demonstrations of the long history between Korea and the continent.

Both Korea and Africa experienced civil wars, underwent authoritarian regimes, and were one of the least developed countries. Korea, which is now the world's 11th largest economy, is unique in the sense that, emerging from the ashes of the Korean War which ended in 1953, it achieved remarkably rapid economic growth and in tandem with this succeeded in realizing democracy. We are carrying out development cooperation projects (ODAs) in Africa worth 500 million US dollars for its sustainable social and economic development and for sharing the experience that we went through. In particular, the Korean Government does not see Africa as the recipient of developmental aid and has underlined the bilateral partnership to their mutual benefit.

Korea now takes a great interest in the youth of Africa. Africa is a young continent in which more than half of its population is under 25 years of age. Promoting youth exchanges and expanding young Korean people's presence in Africa are important. The Korea-Africa Foundation has implemented various youth exchange projects and the Korea-Africa Youth Forum was held on the margins of the first Seoul Dialogue on Africa in December 2018.

France has rich experiences in working with Africa, based on its long relations and subsequent cultural and institutional sympathies. On the other hand, Korea is seen by Africa as a model for its political and economic development, based on the above-mentioned historical sympathies. There is tremendous scope for Korea and France to work together in a mutually complementary way.

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Development assistance (ODA) is one of the most promising area for the bilateral cooperation. France's ODA is mostly concentrated in West Africa, while that of Korea is largely in East Africa. The trilateral cooperation on ODA of Korea, France and Africa will greatly contribute to the African development.

Other notable aspects are activities regarding peace and security. France has contributed to the peace and security of the African continent and one of the leading countries in dealing with the global agenda on "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS). Korea also takes part in various international efforts to protect women and children in conflict situation, notably through the Peace Fund of the African Union. In the same vein, Korea launched the Action with Women and Peace initiative in June last year

Furthermore, we would like to encourage cultural and human exchanges. As an observer member state of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), the Korean government would like to work more closely with African countries in cooperation with France.

Finally, in the economic sector, Korea will promote its enterprises to invest more in Africa in a mutually beneficial manner so that the continent will be fast industrialized. In that process, the cooperation with French companies which have an extensive network and an in-depth know-how in Africa will be further explored.

Q11: While there are many studies on Chinese engagement in UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs), Korea has also been very active since the first deployment of the Sangnoksu Unit in Somalia, as part of the UNOSOM II, in 1993. What is the Korean policy toward PKOs and could you introduce us with the role of the Korea International Peace Operation Center?

Since 1993, Korea has actively participated in the UN peacekeeping operations, dispatching troops for various missions and increasing its financial contributions. Recently, the government has been exerting efforts to diversify its participation to encompass technical assistance, capacity-building, and partnerships with regional organizations such as the African Union (AU).

Korean troops have been sent to a total of seven missions so far including the engineering unit to

UNOSOM in Somalia in 1993. Currently, 644 soldiers are working in a total of six missions. In terms of budget contributions, Korea's share stands at 2.267 percent, making it the 10th largest financial contributor in the world.

In addition, since 2016, Korean experts have been participating in the UN Open GIS Initiative, which has been designed to build a mapping system that finds geographical information. In 2018, we supported to open the Level 2 mobile hospital in Mali in partnership with the AU, which is expected to increase access to medical care as well as to further upgrade the capabilities of peacekeeping operations.

The main activity of the Korea International Peace Operations Center (KIPOCENT) under the auspices of the National Defense University is to run special programs that are aimed at trainers in the peacekeeping operations and the program is run jointly with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). Korea's PKOs, due to its highly educated and well-trained troops who are also very well-equipped, acknowledged as exemplary, have accomplished their missions successfully and efficiently.

Q:12: Korea became an observer to the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) in 2016. Why was Korea willing to join the OIF and is there any plan to later become a full member?

The Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) aims to promote the French language and cultural diversity, to advocate the universal values of peace, democracy and human rights, and to contribute to sustainable development. Korea, sharing these common objectives, decided in November 2016 to participate in the Organization as an Observer, thus becoming the first country in Northeast Asia to be part of the OIF.

Korea takes great interest in the values that the OIF aims to achieve. By promoting exchanges and cooperation with Francophone countries that had great international influence in the cultural domain, Korea wants to share its socioeconomic development experience with aspects of its unique culture which has prospered over 5,000 years. By doing so, more positive contributions can be made to the international community based on values oriented by the OIF.

It might be too soon to predict the future for full membership after only two years of Observer, but, to

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express its interest to develop the cooperation with the Francophone countries, the Korean Government has appointed a Permanent Representative to the OIF, which is rare for an organization in which the country doesn't have full membership. And as the International Francophonie Day event which the Korean people were not very aware of, is held annually in Korea, we believe that Korean people's interest in the OIF and the French language has been increasing.

As we confirmed the common interests between Korea and Francophone countries in several fields such as youth exchanges, sustainable development and education & research, Korea is now focus on trying to shape concrete projects with Francophone countries.

This interview was conducted in April 2019 by Antoine Bondaz, Ph.D.

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