

Report: “International Cooperation for the Unification of the Korean Peninsula”

This report is written by Veronika Kurbelova, Researcher at Hanns Siedel Foundation Korea

The Conference “International Cooperation for the Unification of the Korean Peninsula” took place on Thursday, August 28th, 2014 at the Korea Press Center International Conference Hall. This event was co-hosted by The Institute for National Security Strategy (INSS) and The Korean Association of International Studies (KAIS). INSS is a governmental institute that uses security analysis and consideration of various policy strategies in the national decision making process. KAIS is a non-governmental academic association that focuses on the promotion of international relations in the context of the Republic of Korea. Its main purpose is the development of ideas in the field of education and research.

The conference aimed to raise international support in the unification process of the Korean Peninsula in order to bring peace and prosperity to the Asian region. It emphasized that this issue should be of concern to not only South Korea and North Korea, but also to the whole international community. To prove this point, experts on this topic were invited from USA, Russia, Japan and Germany.

The international conference started by opening remarks and the program itself was structured into three sessions. The official opening ceremony included speeches by Yoo, Seong Ok, President of the INSS, Namkoong, Young President of the KAIS and Keynote Address Yun, Byung Se, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The President of INNS welcomed participants and stated that it was an honor for both institutions to host such an event and participate in the long term goal of a potentially unified Korean Peninsula. He stated that the fact that Korea is divided is the biggest obstacle to reducing tension in East Asian region. The President of KAIS then built on the previous message of Seong Ok Yoo. He thanked all participants for attending as their presence demonstrates that they are willing to tackle the situation in Northeast Asia.

Finally, the Minister of Foreign Affairs talked about the importance of building the trust between two Koreas in order to overcome seemingly endless disputes. He emphasized this importance of the building of trust several times during his speech. He suggested the German unification model as a way to achieve this goal. *“The peaceful occupation of communist East Germany by its more prosperous western counterpart ended successfully and we can nowadays refer to Germany as a leading country in the European Union.”*

Session I

The first session started by the presentation of Park Se Il, Standing Advisor of the Hansun Foundation and Member of Unification Committee, who introduced two approaches that could be applied in the unification process. First, he suggested the enforcement of pressure towards Democratic People's Republic of Korea. However, he noted that this may result in further isolation of North Korea as their leadership may insist on a more stringent maintenance of the communist regime. Second, he suggested the building up of a trust linkage based on mutual cooperation and commitment. He concluded that either of these applications do not signify an absolute guarantee for success.

Afterwards, Yoo Kun Il, Former Editor-in-Chief of The Chosunilbo (Daily), introduced a critical view on the South Korean approach in his presentation: *“Our country failed in the*

unification process.” He argued that due to the threat coming from the North Korean regime, an international community focuses more on the preservation of peace rather than the effort for change. He indicated that the opportunity for DPRK to manipulate the rest of the world has been created by our actions. *“Receiving humanitarian aid and financial support is for North Koreans a lucrative deal that they can abuse for their own purposes.”* Moreover, instead of the progressive integration into a global system that these efforts should bring, DPRK remains isolated and inaccessible.

Chun Yung Woo, Former Senior Secretary to the President for Foreign Affairs and National Security and Chairman of the Korean Peninsula Future Forum, also underlined the fact that humanitarian assistance must be satisfactorily monitored to ensure help is reaching the most needy and vulnerable. At the end of the first session, Kim Sung Han, Former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Professor (Korea Univ.) outlined that *“our knowledge about North Korea is very fragmented”* and that we have just been trying to put together different pieces of information collected by NGOs and governmental institutions. He asserted that the power of information is crucial here and should not be underestimated.

The leading outcome from the ensuing discussion was very practical. The vast majority of speakers agreed that the best scenario would be to persuade leadership of Democratic People's Republic of Korea to adopt changes and to give up their controversial nuclear program because it would ultimately bring advantages to both sides.

Session II

In the second session, the role of United States and China in the unification process of Korean peninsula was discussed. Presenters Thomas Fingar, Distinguished Fellow from Stanford University, and Wang Jun Sheng, Associate Professor from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, were invited to talk about the topic.

Thomas Fingar began by underlining the deep and extensive cooperation between the United States and South Korea in the economic and security fields. A south part of Korean Peninsula has changed dramatically in last 50 years and considerable progress has been made due to its participation in the global international system. He appreciates how the Republic of Korea took advantage of the opportunity to participate in this system and as a result, it is currently the third strongest economy in Asia. He expressed his strong belief that this example can work in North Korea's case as well, as long as the whole international community cooperates. Here, he pointed to China with its noticeable influence in DPRK that might be utilized to help implement a transformation of system.

Wang Jun Sheng advocated China's position and took a stance on this issue. He argued that *“due to China has developed paralleled relations with both Koreas, it is impossible to receive a deep trust from both countries.”* However, he did state that China is in the best position to open a direct dialogue between DPRK and the Republic of Korea, and that they are willing to open this communication. Related to these arguments is the following critique that was raised on China's attitude: some participants stressed that the pressure exerted by China on the communist bureau in North Korea is not sufficient enough.

At the conclusion of the second session of this conference, both the United States and China expressed a strong desire for Korean unification but at the same time said that the crucial aspiration needs to come from South Korea itself.

Session III

The third Session dealt with the role of Japan, Russia and Germany in the unification process of the Korean Peninsula. Nishino Junya, Professor from Keio University, represented Japan in this discussion. He presented his speech in Korean which was met with a positive reaction from the floor. He pointed out that Japan plays an indirect support role in the unification but due to generally known historical disputes it is difficult for the Japanese to communicate their point of view to Korean authorities. Japan keeps vigorous ties with the US in a security field with the aim *“to offer a more reliable solution”*.

In the name of Russia, Alexander Fedorovskiy, Head of Section for Pacific Studies was advocating his statements. He noted that the situation in Northeast Asia is paradoxical: *“Economic cooperation is increasing but security is not satisfying enough - it is even dangerous.”* Russia has expressed a strong desire to contribute to the peaceful resolution of these disputes. However, Mr. Fedorovskiy also admitted that this goes hand in hand with the state interests as Russia sees the unification of the Korean peninsula as an opportunity to take part in a modernization process of the North Korean economy. In other words, a view of a new market area is a key motivation for the Russian Federation.

Finally, Professor Ralf Havertz introduced seemingly obvious similarities between the two Koreas and the two Germanys, and also described the significant differences that provide a warning as to what can possibly happen during the potential unification process in Korea. Firstly, it needs to be taken in to account that a democracy was established in West Germany immediately after Second World War. However, in South Korea this was long term process accompanied by lot of turbulences. Secondly, the example of peaceful occupation does not necessarily apply on the Korean Peninsula. *“The nuclear tension here is so intense that nobody can predict possible consequences.”* And thirdly, DPRK holds a more authoritarian regime compared to one in East Germany, which could mean a more difficult integration procedure.

Other potential obstacles were also mentioned. For example, in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1990s, there was economic instability that was caused by unequal economic development of each part, as well as environmental problems that originated from mass consumption and insufficient technological equipment. In a unified Korea, these factors would have to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, a new currency would likely have to be created and there would be a massive movement of people from the North to the South in hopes of attaining better living conditions.

In the final discussion, the moderator Moderator Chun Yung Woo, Former Senior Secretary to the President for Foreign Affairs and Nation, presented a very last conclusion on the analyzed issue: he stated *“The benefit of unification is greater than the loss it brings”*, and he encouraged stronger cooperation in the whole international community in order to achieve this goal.

