

UPF Biel/Bienne, Switzerland webinar: Incentives for a Rapprochement in Korea

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Biel/Bienne, Switzerland -- UPF held a webinar on the theme of "Incentives for a Rapprochement on the Korean Peninsula."

The webinar, held on November 27, 2020, was part of a series of programs initiated by UPF of Europe and the Middle East to mark the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War. In the last two years the Korean Peninsula again has become the center of the world's attention. Is it possible to reconsider a rapprochement between North and South, 70 years after the start of the Korean War? Could this lead to reunification? In the past we have seen flickers of hope, yet every time the situation quickly reverted to a deadlock.

The peace process on the Korean Peninsula depends in large part on its powerful neighbors: China, Russia, Japan, and the United States. Without their support, reunification will be hamstrung. However, the key stakeholders are the Korean people. Divided for seven decades by ideology and a widening socio-economic gap, can North Koreans and South Koreans envision a common destiny? What incentives could help overcome the past of distrust and conflict, and open a path to mutual prosperity? Can lessons be learned from the German experience of reunification? How can Europe contribute to a rapprochement on the Korean Peninsula, and what benefits would it gain from it?

The program started with a video focusing on the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War. The video contained excerpts from the third online Rally of Hope, which was organized by UPF on November 22 to promote the peaceful reunification of Korea and to honor Korean War veterans.

Panelists

Ambassador Marc Vogelaar from the Netherlands, a former director for external and public affairs at the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization

Professor Glyn Ford from the United Kingdom, an academic, a Labour Party politician, and a former member of the European Parliament

Dr. Claude Béglé from Switzerland, an entrepreneur and the founder and president of the investment company Symbioswiss

Yoshihiro Yamazaki from Japan, the liaison director of the Institute for Peace Policies for Europe and the Middle East

The moderator was Chantal Chételat Komagata from Switzerland, the coordinator of UPF for Europe.

Each panelist gave a seven-minute presentation. The presentations were followed by a question-and-answer session.

Dr. Marc Vogelaar said he favors pragmatic solutions to the crisis on the Korean Peninsula which has lasted for more than two generations. Every nation has the right to defend itself, he said. North Korea does not want to give up its nuclear weapons, while the international community wants North Korea to rejoin the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

A broad deal is needed that reconciles the international community's legitimate aim of nuclear non-

proliferation with North Korea's security concerns and economic needs.

A peace treaty should officially end the Korean War and recognize the integrity of North Korea's territory, Dr. Vogelaar said. Massive and unrestricted economic assistance needs to be offered.

The North Korean crisis is, above all, a problem of the North Korean population, which suffers under repression and international sanctions. Steps should be taken by the major stakeholders, especially China and Russia. Down the road, contributions from South Korea, Japan and the European Union would be indispensable to corroborate the peace process. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un should be offered a package in the spirit of the co-founders of UPF, who went to North Korea some 30 years ago to engage Kim's grandfather, former North Korean leader Kim Il Sung.

Professor Glyn Ford has visited North Korea about 50 times since 1997 as a politician and activist. The nuclear problem needs to be solved, he said. Even though North Korea spends 25 percent of its GDP on armament, it cannot compete with South Korea, Japan or the United States and therefore would prefer not to give up its nuclear weapons, which are meant to be a deterrent.

As North Korea has a serious shortage of energy, during the 1990s it was very interested in building two light-water reactors to supply energy. The country is also short of labor, because hundreds of thousands of men serve in the armed forces. Nuclear weapons would allow thousands of them to be moved from the armed forces into industry.

North Korea does not expect that the United States will ease its sanctions, because of Congress and its emphasis on human rights, but it hopes the United Nations will do so. The country also needs multilateral security guarantees from the nations in the region in the first place. The DPRK is more interested in a comprehensive plan of action comparable to the one developed for Iran. The permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, the South Koreans, possibly also Japan, and maybe the European Union should be involved, Professor Ford said.

North Korea also will want compensation for its investment in the nuclear program. Peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula is a long-term program, as mutual trust needs to be built.

We should not go for a regime change, Professor Ford said, but rather we should encourage North Korea to change its regime.

Dr. Claude Béglé, using a PowerPoint presentation, gave a perspective of North Korea that differs from the general opinion.

Many Europeans find it difficult to believe that North Korea is more normal than the media want to them to believe.

It obviously is a dictatorship, where no dissent is allowed and human rights are trampled. North Korea has the fourth biggest army in the world. Initially it was needed for self-defense, but now it is used for provocation. Kim Jong Un is very much aware of the necessity to change the country and to join the international community. The question is how North Korea, being a buffer between the United States and its allies on one side, and China and Russia on the other side, can do this.

The country is not on its knees. Twenty million people live in poverty, while probably 5 million belong to the lower and middle class and live a relatively "normal" life.

It is interesting to see that the shops are not empty. Because of the Juche ideology and many decades of embargoes, the North Koreans have invented ways to produce by themselves.

Much attention is given to education, with a priority to science and technology. Both in North and South Korea people are hardworking and wish to build a learned economy and society. Military industry is giving way to light industry and investment in the field of (international) tourism.

The last speaker was **Yoshihiro Yamazaki**. Since World War II, he said, West European nations have managed to overcome a painful past. Moreover, they have consolidated their bonds under the European Union's noble values, which the former communist nations of Eastern Europe have sought to join.

Modern Europe could benefit from the shared values established through centuries of religious, national and ideological struggles. However, Japan and Korea do not share such a heritage of values that can overcome their national sentiments and interests.

South Korea, Japan and Taiwan need to collaborate for a union of freedom-loving nations in East Asia and beyond. Here European encouragement, if not engagement, is vital. Lessons can be learned from Germany's reunification. Russia, a natural meeting point for European and Oriental values, would be able

to deploy its development plans, which include a railway system, gas pipelines and an electricity grid, once there is peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Although UPF's founders, Dr. and Mrs. Moon, are religiously committed anti-communists, nonetheless they were cordially invited by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 and by North Korea's Kim Il Sung the next year. They advocate and practice true love and living for the sake of others as the solution to all conflict. Their example has guided UPF since its establishment in 2005 to foster trust among different peoples, faiths and nations, calling for interdependence, co-prosperity and universal values.



Question-and-answer session

The first question, to Dr. Béglé, was about the present North Korean economic situation being comparable to that of China in the 1970s and whether North Korea should go the same way as China. Dr. Béglé said North Korea already does. China is helping North Korea a lot, but not openly so as to not offend the United States. Both the economic and political links between the two countries are very strong. North Korea is very much looking at China and Vietnam, which have not given up their communist ideology but have opened their economies to the world at different levels.

The next question, to Dr. Vogelaar, was whether a Joseph Biden administration would be different from Donald Trump's. He said that question was difficult to answer, as the outcome of the U.S. presidential election had not been confirmed by the day of the webinar. Moreover, the next president would not develop a policy for North Korea from day one, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges, unless there were a military provocation from the Korean side.

The third question, for Professor Ford, was about which incentives would lead to a rapprochement between North and South Korea. He answered that the Korean Peninsula is probably one of the most dangerous places in the world. If there were a conflict, we would all suffer somehow in this globalized world. The consequences for our economies would be enormous. The next U.S. administration should not move away from the Trump policy of engagement and strategic patience. The danger is that North Korea may well do things that look like provocations, such as testing its missiles, but the rest of the world should tread carefully to allow a peaceful transition from where we are now to where we want to be.

The next question, to Dr. Béglé, was about how North Korea can have so many goods in its markets without having a market economy and private initiative. Actually, a process of decentralization has seen the daylight, he said. Military industry and heavy industry are centralized, while light industry and consumer goods are decentralized and customer-oriented. Unlike in China in the 1970s, in North Korea fashion from the West is closely followed. Large numbers of products smuggled from China are available in the shops.

The last question, to Professor Ford, came from Russia: The aggressive approach by Western nations does not allow them to trust the proposal for North Korea to disarm. Will Korea one day reunite thanks to the natural historical process, rather than by political efforts which hamper reunification? Professor Ford answered that the North Koreans do not believe there will be reunification in the foreseeable future, due to the hostile policy of the United States. In the meantime, North Korea's economy would be able to catch up with that of South Korea, which would allow the North to at least relate to its neighbor in terms of economy, without the fear of being assimilated by the South.