

UPF Vienna, Austria's webinar on Europe's potential role in Korean reunification

Peter Haider
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Vienna, Austria -- An audience of 150 attended a UPF webinar on Europe's potential role in Korean reunification.

The online conference "Lessons Learned from Dismantling the Iron Curtain -- How Europe Can Contribute to Korean Unification" was held on February 26, 2021, by UPF of Europe and the Middle East.



In his welcoming statement, Peter Haider, the president of UPF-Austria, reminded the audience that the Korean War, which started over 70 years ago, concluded not with a peace treaty but with an armistice. This left the Korean Peninsula divided, despite being populated by a people with a common history, culture, and language.

Korea deserves the firm support of the international community so that it can come together and be united again, Mr. Haider said. In many ways it was the international community that inflicted the painful division on this innocent country during the last days of World War II.

Europeans experienced the division of their continent after the Second World War. Unification happened at a point when many did not believe in it anymore or put it into the distant future. Europe carries a valuable experience of rapprochement of a divided continent, tearing down an Iron Curtain and growing

together again within the European Union, Mr. Haider said. This process and experience might contain some helpful lessons for Korea, he said.

Serving as the moderator of the conference, Dr. Werner Fasslabend, the president of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES) and a former Austrian minister of defense, pointed out that South Korea is a country with a very high level of technology, with companies like Hyundai and Samsung that are well known in Europe. North Korea is known mainly through the persons of the Kim family. In the media we hear stories of military parades and sometimes famines, but do we have the right picture of this country? If you want to unify these two parts, you have to understand clearly the economic, political and social situations, Dr. Fasslabend said.

Situated between China and Japan, Korea served for hundreds of years as a transmitter between these two countries, Dr. Fasslabend said. Korea developed its own letters, literature and culture.

Hon. Lukas Mandl, a member of the European Parliament and the head of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Korean Peninsula, explained that the European Parliament is the only institution of the European Union with formal contacts to North Korea.

We can learn from the unification of East and West Germany and remain visionary, Hon. Mandl said. We have to focus on daily politics and also on the differences. Koreans were one people for hundreds of years until 70 years ago. Their destiny is to be together.

The difference between the divided Koreas is bigger than that of the former East and West Germany, he said. They are still in a kind of war. The South is a democratic state with rule of law, and the North is an autocratic dictatorship. First we need a formal end of the war and a normalization process in the relationship. South Korea is a strong and reliable partner of the EU, while North Korea is considered more like a security threat and not yet a partner in any regard.

Commenting on the fall of the Iron Curtain, Hon. Mandl called it a blessing for Europe. It can breathe again with both lungs, as Pope John Paul II claimed. It was a major achievement: extra jobs, exchange of people in different fields like academia, culture and sports. He explained that the unification of East and West Germany was good for the whole of Europe, not only for Germany. Therefore the unification of North and South Korea would be good not only for Korea but for all Eastern Asian nations as well.

Dr. Fasslabend asked: Why is Korea divided? It was occupied by the Japanese and freed by the Russians in the North and the United States in the South.

This brought the split into the country, not a self-imposed separation but brought from outside. In Germany it was Chancellor Willy Brandt who started the Eastern initiative. It took 20 years until the Berlin Wall was gone. Chancellor Helmut Kohl was greeted by the people in East Germany who shouted, "We are the people." Korea is in this point different. The unification of Korea will depend also on the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

Professor Brian Myers from the United States, a professor of international studies at Dongseo University in Busan, South Korea, made a point that the developments in divided Europe and Germany before unification were not really comparable to Korea and that we have to see the differences. The frontline in Korea is between modern and radical nationalism, he said. South Korea is a representative democracy with a moderate nationalist outlook.

Koreans discuss unification among themselves differently from the way they discuss it with foreigners in English, Dr. Myers said. The model talked among Koreans is confederation. It was first proposed by Kim Il Sung in 1960 with unfriendly rhetoric toward the South. It was picked up by the South in the late 1970s, and the right-wing ruling party called loudest for it in the late 1980s, but the North Koreans were not interested as they were then in the weaker position.

During the June 15, 2000 summit the leaders of the two Koreas reached an agreement on this. In the June 15th North-South Declaration they pledged to "find common ground between the North and South Korean models." While the outside world did not pay much attention to it, this played a major role in the relationship between the divided country, Dr. Myers said.

When the Inter-Korean Liaison Office was opened in 2018, it was declared the first step in the confederation process. Its destruction in 2020 was a message that the relationship between North and South Korea should never be better than the relationship of the North to the United States, which deteriorated after the Hanoi summit in 2019.

But the South Korean government is laying the foundation domestically by promoting confederation, Dr. Myers said. The model is the European Union, an economic community but also a confederal system with federal elements. The question that here arises is if the European Union is a realistic model for a

confederation between a democracy and a dictatorship. It would be good if this issue were exposed to international critical discussion, Dr. Myers said.

Hon. Lukas Mandl said that the relationship of EU countries with South Korea is a remarkable success story. The rule of law is a core part what the EU is, he said. The EU can be a strong partner of the Korean Peninsula as a whole, once unification is in place. Today the EU is a huge development aid partner of North Korea; critical engagement is the policy approach. The EU would be ready to act as a facilitator and an honest broker, if asked to do so also as "parliamentary diplomacy," Hon. Mandl said. Denuclearization is the first goal of critical engagement in North Korea. He said he believes that economic exchange helps and is not part of the problem.



Then Dr. Myers spoke about the dangers and challenges of a confederation, as the two Koreas have diverging expectations and interests relating to it. He suggested that it should be monitored by the United States.

He explained how the divided Germanies and Koreas were or are so different. The two Germanies criticized each other on humanitarian grounds, while the two Koreas do it on nationalist grounds. He wished that the EU and the Europeans would make their opinion better known in South Korea when it comes to limiting human rights issues, like we see in the leaflet law.

The South Koreans believe that a confederation would relax the North Koreans. This is very much the assumption the ruling camp is making. The South Koreans believe that confederation should happen before denuclearization, in order to make it more likely. Dr. Myers said he does not believe that commerce between the Koreas will make friends out of enemies, as the case of the Kaesong Industrial Zone shows.

Answering a question from the audience, Dr. Myers stated that he believes, as an American whose country is threatened by nuclear bombs, that sanctions should be loosened if North Korea makes substantial concessions. The sanction politics should be reviewed, he said.

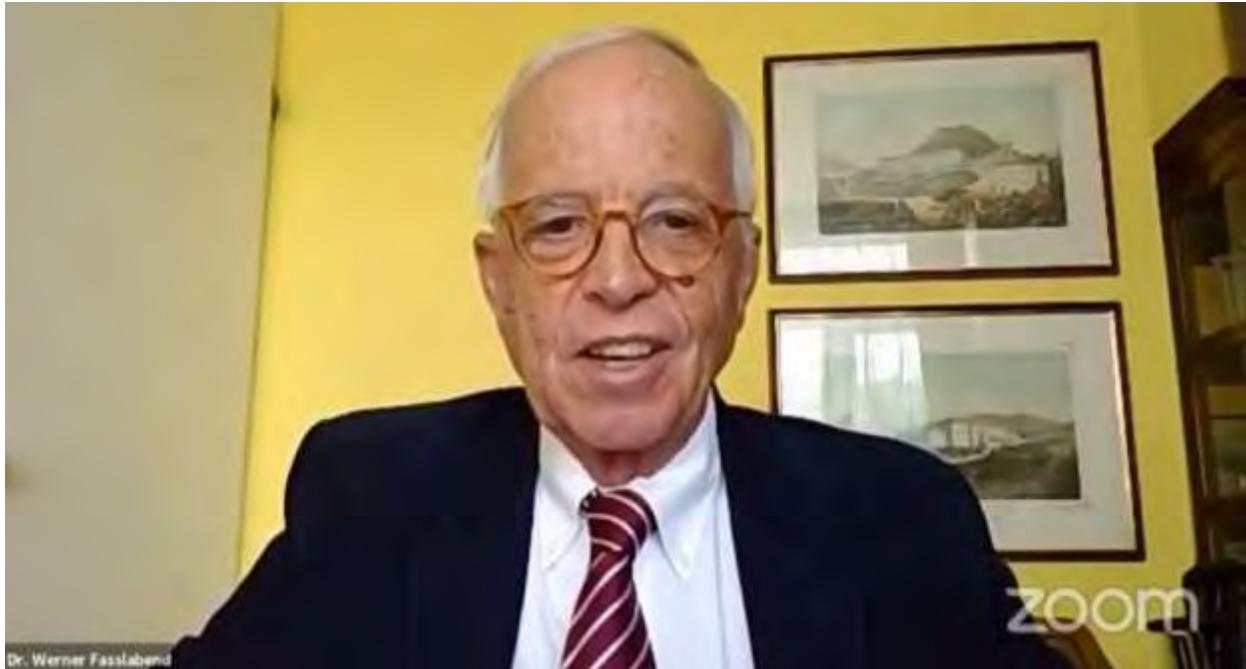
Dr. Myers said he thinks the Biden administration will make a small deal with the North Koreans at some point. The South Koreans would like to have the security benefits being in the US corner and the economic benefits being in China's corner. Because of the trade war between the US and China, the South Koreans will have to make a choice, and he thinks that they are likely to choose China.

About the role of the sister of Kim Jong-Un, Professor Myers said that North Korea is a family-owned state, not a one-party government state, even though the North wants to present itself like this. Party procedures are never really taken seriously. During negotiations Kim Yo-Jong had to play the role of the hawk who is on a slightly lower level than her brother, who represents the doves.

On the question about his book *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters*, Dr. Myers said that South Korea no longer is opposed to racial intermixing and slowly is becoming a multiethnic society. But the South Koreans share the view that Korea is a uniquely pure and moral race that has been victimized by the rest of the world for hundreds of years. This is a bond, and there is a lot of nationalist symbolism at these summits, like at Paektu Mountain, where the two presidents met at the last summit. North Koreans want a real unification, but the South Koreans want to enter into a symbolic unification like a loose confederation and keep that going on for decades.

As a final statement Hon. Mandl expressed his appreciation for Dr. Myers' elaborations beyond the daily political talk. He said that the EU has to stay engaged, even if it is geographically remote. The world needs reliable facilitators, and the EU sees itself as being one. He said the EU always looks for reliable partners with which to find solutions for ongoing problems as well as achieving visionary goals such as Korean unification.

As a final word Dr. Fasslabend made the audience aware that in history an unexpected surprise may come, as when in Europe the political scenery changed completely. The only person who believed that Germany would reunite was Otto von Habsburg, the son of the last Austrian emperor. Let us be careful and prepared, even if the situation does not seem to be ripe for a Korean unification, Dr. Fasslabend said.



In conclusion, Jacques Marion, co-chair of UPF for Europe and the Middle East, explained the motivations of UPF efforts toward Korean reunification, which was prompted by the historic visit in December 1991 of UPF founders Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and his wife to Pyongyang to meet with President Kim Il Sung.

At that time Reverend Moon was considered an enemy of Kim Il Sung's because of his clear stand against worldwide communism and the Juche ideology. That meeting was very fruitful and concluded with an agreement covering points that later have been the framework for North Korean diplomatic policy: the reunification of families, the welcoming of investments by overseas Koreans, and the economic development of the Mount Kumgang Touristic Region. In 1998, they initiated the first car factory ever to be developed in North Korea, called Pyeonghwa ("Peace") Motors. When he died in 2012, Reverend Moon was awarded by the North Korean government the highest honor of the country, the National Reunification Award.

It is the same philosophy that prompts his wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, to launch a worldwide initiative this year, as we commemorate the 30-year anniversary of their meeting with Kim Il Sung. She has a standing invitation from North Korea, and she wants to offer all the resources of our worldwide organization to support reconciliation on the peninsula.

Mr. Marion said that UPF plans to convene a summit in the capital of North or South Korea, as well as fact-finding tours in the region by journalists and other leaders. UPF is inviting leaders from various fields to support constructive dialogue on the peninsula by forming what UPF calls Think Tank 2022, a worldwide group of experts -- including heads of state, parliamentarians, religious leaders, academics, business leaders and media experts -- who can contribute their knowledge and experience to the ultimate goal of Korean reunification.

Koreans have a burning passion for their country, and a strong sense of destiny. Mr. Marion said he believes that when they see opportunities arise on the path toward reunification, the dormant fire can be revived, even among this young generation. He said that UPF wants to bring a broad network of leaders and experts, from East to West and North to South, that can contribute to dialogue and mutual understanding. This network would include Europe and the Korean Peninsula, as well as other stakeholder nations in the region, and thus create the conditions for gradually dismantling one of the last remaining walls of the Cold War, a wall that has many dimensions, not least in the minds of the people.

Link to a recording of the webinar: www.facebook.com/upf.europe/videos/826680731584039