

Moungkyu Park, Bernhard Seliger, Sung-Jo Park (Eds.)

Europe — North Korea

Between Humanitarianism and Business?



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Introduction

Myoung-Kyu Park, Sung-Jo Park and Bernhard Seliger

To write a book about the relations of Europe and North Korea requires some explanation. Europe is not a member of the six-party-talks and it has no intention to be one. Also, its trade with North Korea is negligible by European standards. No wonder then, that, while North Korea figures prominently mainly due to the nuclear crisis in European media, European relations with North Korea are rarely mentioned, if not at all. However, there is an imbalance in this view: while being not involved in official political talks about denuclearisation, Europe has been an important partner for North Korea in terms of humanitarian assistance, as well as capacity-building and cultural exchanges. According to the OECD development assistance database (www.oecd.org/dac/stats/idsonline) the European Union (EU) and some of its member states, notably Sweden and Germany, have been together one of the most important donors of aid to North Korea, on par or exceeding that of the US (depending on the year and that means on the state of political relations of North Korea and the US), and surpassed only, though strongly, by South Korea (before 2008) and China.¹ However, the political role of Europe seems to be underexposed. This role has been described as that of an “honest advisor”, based on the particular European and German experiences of division, by Hartmut Koschyk, Chairman of the German-Korean Parliamentary Group in the German Parliament and one of the most active contributors to European-North Korean political exchanges.

Given the imbalance of relatively dense relations (by North Korean standards for relations with the Western world) and relative underexposure of these relations in the media and in academic discussions the aim of this book, to review the many facets of European – North Korean relations, becomes more understandable. And indeed, the relations between Europe and North Korea have many facets. From a macro-perspective, though the relations have a

1 For an overview of the last years see Nanto/ Chanlett-Avery (2009), p. 41.

short history, there can be seen ups and downs. Starting with the influx of European NGOs, when North Korea opened up to humanitarian assistance in the midst of the catastrophic famine of the 1990s, relations had a first peak with the establishment of diplomatic relations with the EU and most member states in 2001. However, this honeymoon phase ended relatively soon, with the revelation of the continuation of North Korea's nuclear programme. The freezing of the planned comprehensive technical assistance programme on the EU level was a logical consequence. Relations had a clear down with the threat to expel all NGOs of the EU in 2005 and the subsequent trimming and reorganisation of European NGOs in so-called "European Union Project Support" units or EUPS. Afterwards, relations were growing again from this much lower level. However, the two nuclear tests of 2006 and 2009 precluded any substantial increase of assistance to North Korea. Looking more closely into the different phases of relations, it is interesting to see that sometimes they are in unison with North Korea's relations to the other members of the six-party-talks, but sometimes they seem to be "counter-cyclical", with European involvement relatively stronger, when relations to the US and to South Korea were on a freeze.

Looking at the multifaceted European – North Korean relations means first of all, to review different fields of interaction, in particular political, humanitarian and business interaction, as well as cultural interaction. Also, it means looking at different actor perspectives, with political actors, NGOs and business actors as well as academic and cultural actors. This perspective is obviously closely intertwined, though not necessarily congruent with the aforementioned perspective. Besides active involvement in relations with North Korea, Europe also serves as a blueprint. Here, in particular the German experience with division and unification has to be mentioned. This also means that the European relations with North Korea never can be seen isolated from those with South Korea. South Korea is a much stronger partner for relations with European countries in terms of the density of political, economic, and cultural exchanges. It has a strong interest in analyzing potential developments in North Korea based on European experiences of transformation and unification. Last, but not least it should be mentioned that European – North Korean relations are not limited to the European Union, but that among the few outsiders of the EU in Europe there are two relatively active in relations to North Korea, namely Norway and, in particular, Switzerland.

This book looks into various perspectives mentioned above, though, given the quite varied experiences in Europe, it cannot be a really exhaustive guide to European – North Korean relations. The experience of NGOs and businesses as well as the comparative analysis of North Korean development perspectives based on the experience of Europe, and in particular Germany, with division, transformation and unification, take precedence in this book. The book is the outcome of multi-annual research cooperation between Hanns Seidel Foundation in Korea and the Institute of Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University. In particular, papers of a conference in SNU on European – North Korean relations in June 2007 have been included in the book. The coordinating activities of Prof. Sung-Jo Park,

Prof. Emeritus of Free University Berlin, have been pivotal for the publication of this volume. The particular German-Korean connection in this research project is also reflected in the authorship of many, though not all, articles in this volume.

The first section of the book reviews human rights and humanitarian issues in European-North Korean relations from an NGO and legal perspective. The first chapter by Myoung-Kyu Park director of the Institute of Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University, co-editor of this volume, not only assesses the European experience of cooperation with North Korea, but also uses Europe's history of integration to analyse possible trajectories of Korea's future integration. The next two chapters discuss the NGO experiences in dealing with North Korea. Peter M. Beck, at the time of writing was working at the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, and Nicholas Reader, International Crisis Group, review the experience of European and other actors in training for economic reform. Sung-Jo Park of Free University Berlin (Germany) discusses instrumental rationality versus humanitarian considerations in the work of European NGOs in North Korea. The last paper of Part I, the paper of Dae-Soon Kim of Yonsei University (Korea) reviews the human rights crisis in North Korea from an international law perspective.

The second part includes three papers dealing with economic, political and ideological relations between East and West Germany and North Korea and their legacies. Kolja Naumann of the University of Muenster (Germany) compares the Korean and German case of reunification in a constitutional state. Bernhard Schaefer discusses differences in self-perception between East Germany and North Korea with regard to the concept of the nation. Soon-Hyung Yi of Seoul National University (Korea) takes up the topic of integration of North Korea defectors into the South Korean society and considers the German model of vocational training as a possible means for integration. This paper is written against the background of an unprecedented inflow of several thousand defectors each year in the last couple of years and the problems of these defectors to integrate into the South Korean society.

Part III looks at European development and capacity-building experiences in North Korea. Bernhard Seliger, resident representative of Hanns Seidel Foundation in Korea, reviews the experience of capacity-building for economic change in North Korea, in particular of the EU-DPRK Trade Capacity Project, one of the first capacity-building project carried out for the European Union as part of the Asia Invest II initiative from 2006-2009. Based on the German experience with the development of the inner-German border area, Peter Jurczek of Technical University Chemnitz (Germany) discusses the development perspectives of the Southern part of the inner-Korean border area, (South) Gangwon province. His research is part of a cooperation project of Hanns Seidel Foundation Korea and Gangwon province on sustainable development in the inner-Korean border area. Ralph M. Wrobel, Professor at the West Saxon University of Applied Sciences (Germany) reviews the lessons from new EU states in building foreign trade institutions from the scratch. Finally, Bernhard Seliger of

Hanns Seidel Foundation Korea reviews the problems of defaulted debt and the lack of access to the legitimate financial system of North Korea and the possibility to remedy these problems by the foundation of a Northeast Asian Development Bank, based on the experiences of similar development banks for Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Part IV deals with business activities and training for business for North Korea. Stanislas Roussin of SERIC COREE and César Ducruet, working at the time of writing at the University of Rotterdam, analyze the Nampo-Pyongyang economic corridor as a strategic area for European investment in DPRK. Paul Tjia, a Dutch business consultant with extensive experience in North Korea, views the North Korean IT sector as a “hidden diamond”. Sung-Jo Park of Free University Berlin (Germany) ponders the potential of North Korea to become a centre for software and animation production, based on the experience of two European companies active in North Korea. Finally, Hur-Joon Young of Free University Berlin (Germany) analyses the chances of converting communist cadres into capitalistic managers by newly emerging institutions in Pyongyang and Rajin-Sonbong (recently merged to Rason).

The two nuclear tests of 2006 and 2009 as well as the hardened North Korean stance throughout 2008 was not foreboding well for improved relations with Europe. However, the history of North Korea has been one where the invariable and the unpredictable always have been in a curious relationship. And this means also that relations between Europe and North Korea are less fixed than pessimists might think and that signs of opening, like those at the time of writing this introduction (February 2010), might lead to new life for European-North Korean relations.

This book would not have been possible without the work of a number of collaborators. First of all, this includes the contributors to the volume. The work would not have been possible without the encouragement from Dr. Hopf, publisher at the LIT Verlag. Also, staff at the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies of Seoul National University and staff at Hanns Seidel Foundation Seoul were important in the collaborative research project, in particular, Hyun-Woo Noh and Chris Antonette Pugay at HSS Korea as editorial assistants. Thanks go to Nari Kim, Seoul National University, for language checking. We hope, this volume can stimulate academic discussion but also exchange activities between Europe and North Korea and help to make relations, cumbersome as they are under the strains of North Korea's political and economic system and nuclear ambitions, a success story.

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