



CSDP's new partners: East Asia

by Pierre Minard and Eva Pejsova

“A political and security relationship is not only about comparing notes; it is also about taking action”, stated HR/VP Catherine Ashton when formalising cooperation between the EU and the Republic of Korea (ROK) on crisis management.

The Framework Participation Agreement (FPA), signed in May 2014 in Seoul, facilitates the involvement of South Korea in CSDP missions and operations. Aimed at improving effectiveness and flexibility in crisis response, the FPA addresses practical issues like financing, conditions of deployment, and the chain of command. Behind its technical façade, the document also has major symbolic value for EU-ROK bilateral relations, as well as for the EU's security policy in East Asia.

The Agreement constitutes the third ‘pillar’ of the EU-ROK Strategic Partnership, adding a security dimension to the general political framework and the Free Trade Agreement, already agreed in 2010. Once the ratification process is complete, South Korea will become the first East Asian country to step up security cooperation with the Union.

The EU, which announced its own ‘pivot to Asia’ in 2012, has been trying to demonstrate its added value for regional stability. An agreement on security cooperation with an important regional party strengthens the Union's image as a global security actor and enhances trust with other East Asian countries. It also has the potential to deepen the scope of existing Strategic Partnerships in the region.

Mutual benefits

The EU and South Korea share a number of common security objectives, as well as similar visions on how to achieve them. Given their relatively limited capabilities, both partners share a belief in multilateralism and the rule of law, and a comprehensive approach to security matters. While already acknowledged for their economic strength, they are also both seeking international recognition as reliable security players.

Peace on the Korean peninsula and maintaining stability in North-East Asia represent, of course, the greatest security interests for Seoul. The increased willingness to enhance bilateral security cooperation with Europeans is set against the backdrop of mounting tensions in the region. Wedged between China and Japan, South Korea has tried to establish itself as the region's ‘middle power’, forging ties with as many external partners as possible – including the EU.

Reciprocally, having an East Asian actor on board has several advantages for Europe. Participation Agreements with non-EU countries can offset internal capabilities shortfalls, particularly personnel and equipment. In times of budgetary constraints, partners also contribute to cost- and burden-sharing in global security initiatives. While the Framework does not allow Europeans to take part in Korea-led missions, it lays down the foundations for deeper security cooperation in the future,



thus setting an example other regional countries may follow.

Possible avenues

The ability to jointly address global security challenges is the overarching rationale for the use of FPAs. With the ratification process ongoing, both parties still need to identify potential areas of cooperation. Given their current capabilities and mutual interests, several potential avenues spring to mind: notably in counter-piracy operations and in the EU's various civilian and combined civil-military missions.

With Brussels and Seoul highly dependent on maritime trade and heavily involved in counter-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean, the protection of Sea Lines of Communication and safeguarding the freedom of navigation are the most likely priorities for both parties in the short term. South Korea has taken the command of a multinational Combined Maritime Task Force three times since 2010, and there is no doubt its navy could bring valuable experience and reinforce the presence and operational capacity of EU naval forces deployed in the Gulf of Aden.

Since the mid-1990s, Seoul has been extensively involved in multinational security missions, mostly under the UN umbrella, but also within the framework of its alliance with the US. Over 600 Korean troops – infantry, as well as and medical and engineering units – are currently deployed as part of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the UN Mission to South Sudan (UNMISS). South Korea has also taken part in the US-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan, building and then running a hospital and a police training centre until June 2014. The nation's experience and capabilities could therefore be of concrete use for the EU civilian-military mission EUCAP Nestor in the Horn of Africa, or act as a compliment the EU police training mission (EUPOL) in Afghanistan.

While the FPAs focus on CSDP missions only, enhancing interoperability and building habits of cooperation in security matters can also improve efficiency in other areas, such as Search and Rescue (SAR) and Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR). The Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) has been very active in emergency relief efforts in the wake of natural disasters, such as typhoons, earthquakes and floods, as well as in providing assistance to refugees in conflict areas. Disaster management could become a promising area for cooperation for the EU also within the ASEAN Regional Forum,

Asia's sole multilateral body dealing with security to which the Union is party.

Regional implications

As tensions in North-East Asia continue to rise due to sovereignty disputes, both China and Japan have begun to reach out to external actors in search of a greater audience and international support for their respective positions. As both Beijing and Tokyo are EU Strategic Partners, crisis management could constitute a neutral common ground for cooperation, deepening security ties and, hopefully, building trust between all actors involved.

With the potential of an FPA in mind, the EU has already approached Japan, one of the world's biggest providers of development assistance and an active participant in UN missions. Yet although Japanese Prime Minister Abe's new security strategy of 'proactive pacifism' explicitly aims at playing a more active role in global collective security efforts, it primarily focuses on deployments within its strategic alliance with the US (as it did, *inter alia*, in Iraq).

China, paradoxically, could be a more interested partner. Trying to prove its role as a responsible international player, Beijing has also actively contributed to UN peacekeeping efforts, as well as to counter-piracy operations and missions. Always eager to deepen bilateral ties with Brussels, the announcement of the new EU FPA with Seoul surely did not go unnoticed in Beijing.

Building consensus and trust in the region has been at the centre of South Korean President Park's North East Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI), which relies on accumulating experiences and habits of cooperation in soft security areas – such as disaster management or energy security. As the Initiative is partially inspired by the Cold War Helsinki process, the EU has subsequently become a natural partner for exchanges on principles and practices of cooperative security and regional integration.

While the signature of an FPA is, of course, a step forward in terms of bilateral cooperation, the true success ultimately lies in the symbolism of identifying an East Asian partner willing to officially cooperate with the EU on security matters. Such developments underline the kind of constructive role the Union can play in the region – perhaps even engaging with North Korea.

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