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The annual Korea Europe Peace Platform
—Berlin Forum—"Korean Peninsula in the
New Cold War Era: Korean and European
Perspectives on Cooperation Measures and
Establishment of Peace"

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The annual Korea Europe Peace Platform—Berlin Forum— "Korean Peninsula in the New Cold War Era: Korean and European Perspectives on Cooperation Measures and Establishment of Peace"

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Korea Focus–Briefing is a series of short articles that review key events organised by the KDI School-FU Korea-Europe Program. This issue is based on the event „Korea Europe Peace Platform—Berlin Forum—“Korean Peninsula in the New Cold War Era: Korean and European Perspectives on Cooperation Measures and Establishment of Peace“.

Introduction

In July 2024, officials from Gyeonggi Province—representing the northernmost region of South Korea and also the region sharing the longest border with North Korea—prepared to travel to Berlin for the annual Korea-Europe Peace Platform conference. This collaborative event, funded by the Gyeonggi provincial government and the Korea Development Institute (KDI) and organized by the Institute of Korean Studies and Seoul National University, alternates between Berlin and South Korea in the form of the DMZ EcoPeace Forum. The officials' mission took on heightened significance amidst escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula, spurred by North Korea's provocative actions. Beginning in May 2024, North Korea launched balloons filled with garbage—including old batteries and manure—which landed in South Korea in a deliberate act of provocation. These trash-laden balloons were the latest in a series of hostile exchanges between the two Koreas, ranging from minor nuisances to overtly offensive acts. Pyongyang claimed these provocations were retaliatory, responding to South Korean civilian campaigns of sending balloons across the border carrying anti-North Korean propaganda, USB drives loaded with K-pop songs, and messages critical of the regime. These events underscore inter-Korean relations' fraught and fragile nature, providing a stark backdrop for the conference's focus on peacebuilding and dialogue.

The conference in 2024 was organized under the title "Korean Peninsula in the New Cold War Era: Korean and European Perspectives on Cooperation Measures and Establishment of Peace". Thirty experts from the United States, South Korea, and Europe—representing a diverse range of fields including academia, politics, diplomacy, foundations, and practical peacebuilding—gathered over the course of three days from July 10–12, 2024, in Berlin. Their discussions focused on the escalating tensions of the new Cold War on a global scale. The imperative of establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula has now transcended the confines of the North-South Korean divide, emerging as a pressing diplomatic and security concern at the forefront of international affairs.

Addressing the complexities of this issue demands not only bilateral efforts between North and South Korea but also robust international cooperation in crisis management on a global scale. Europe stands out as a region boasting both theoretical expertise and empirical experience in conflict resolution and crisis management. With a rich history of leading discussions in war studies, conflict resolution, and peace studies, Europe has demonstrated its ability to navigate not only traditional diplomatic and security threats but also emerging and non-traditional security challenges. Drawing from Europe's historical insights, valuable lessons can be gleaned to facilitate the resolution of the Korean Peninsula conflict and pave the way for lasting peace. Given North Korea's susceptibility to an array of non-traditional threats spanning economics, climate, cybersecurity, healthcare, and more, the ongoing academic and policy dialogues in Europe hold significant relevance for addressing present and future challenges facing North Korea and the wider Korean Peninsula.

The conference consisted of five panels focusing on different topics over two days, including presentations and discussions from participants and invited visitors.

Panel 1: Clouds of Peace Launched by Local Governments—Peace Initiatives by West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt and Gyeonggi Province's Policies for Greater Peace and Ecological Harmony

This panel examined the pivotal role that local governments played in fostering peace within the international community, particularly during times of heightened tensions and conflicts. Local governments were highlighted as key agents in implementing innovative and practical solutions to promote *détente*, build trust, and establish peaceful coexistence.

The discussion focused on the significant contributions of Willy Brandt, the mayor of West Berlin, during the early 1960s, a period marked by acute Cold War tensions. Brandt's leadership provided a powerful empirical example of how a local government actively influenced global *détente* through diplomatic efforts and local policy initiatives. His actions during that era not only de-escalated tensions in one of the Cold War's most critical flashpoints but also set a precedent for how local leadership could inspire broader peacebuilding efforts.

Building on this historical example, the panel explored Gyeonggi Province's policies, which extended the discourse on peace to include ecological harmony. These policies focused on the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea, transforming a historically contentious region into a symbol of ecological sustainability and peace. The province's initiatives aligned with the spirit of Brandt's efforts, demonstrating how local governance could spearhead impactful contributions to international peacebuilding.

Through an engaging discussion, this session highlighted the parallels between historical and contemporary examples, showcasing the enduring relevance of local government action in promoting peace. By reflecting on these case studies, participants gained valuable insights into how local leadership influenced and complemented broader national and international peace efforts.

Panel 2: The Role of Middle Powers during the New Cold War

This panel addressed the diplomatic and security policies that middle powers, such as South Korea and Germany, adopted in the context of escalating new Cold War tensions. The discussions emphasized how these nations, leveraging their geopolitical positioning and diplomatic strategies, contributed to peacebuilding in the international community. The panel explored how middle powers utilized their influence to navigate the complexities of global tensions, fostering dialogue and cooperation between greater powers. Special attention was given to the unique roles of South Korea and Germany, each drawing from their distinct historical and political contexts to promote stability and peace.

In addition, the panel delved into the policies necessary for establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula, particularly amid ongoing conflicts and uncertainties. Strategies discussed included fostering regional cooperation, promoting disarmament, and creating frameworks for dialogue between conflicting parties. The insights offered by the panel underscored the proactive and stabilizing influence of middle powers in mitigating tensions and advancing global peace efforts. This session provided valuable takeaways on how countries like South Korea and Germany could continue to play crucial roles in shaping a more peaceful and secure international landscape.

Panel 3: Prospects for Inter-Korean Relations, North Korea-US Relations, and the Role of Europe

This panel examined the potential changes in North Korea-US relations following the 2024 fall elections in the United States, particularly in the context of escalating US-China tensions. The discussion focused on how a potential shift in US leadership could reshape the dynamics of these relations, with implications for the Korean Peninsula and broader regional stability. Participants analyzed the prospects for renewed dialogue or escalated confrontations between North Korea and the US, considering both nations' strategic interests and policy approaches. The impact of US-China tensions on these relations was also a central theme, highlighting the interconnected nature of global partnerships and conflicts.

Additionally, the panel explored Europe's willingness and capacity to demonstrate leadership for peace amid these shifting global partnerships. European contributions to fostering dialogue, supporting peace initiatives, and acting as a mediator were discussed as crucial elements in navigating the evolving geopolitical landscape. This session provided a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities in inter-Korean and North Korea-US relations, as well as the critical role Europe could play in supporting peacebuilding efforts in a rapidly changing world.

Panel 4: European Experience of Building a Regional Security Community and Peace on the Korean Peninsula

This panel highlighted the possibilities for achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula and in East Asia by reflecting on Europe's historical experience in building a peaceful regional security community during the Cold War. Participants drew parallels between Europe's successful strategies for reducing tensions and fostering cooperation amidst acute confrontations and the challenges faced in East Asia today. The discussion focused on how Europe's approach to creating institutions, promoting dialogue, and ensuring mutual security could serve as a model for peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula. Key strategies included fostering trust among regional players, establishing mechanisms for conflict resolution, and pursuing multilateral initiatives to address security concerns.

Recognizing the Korean Peninsula's current trajectory toward escalating tensions and confrontational dynamics, the panel emphasized the urgent need to implement security measures that could mitigate conflict and promote stability. Lessons from Europe's experience highlighted the importance of sustained diplomatic efforts, economic integration, and cultural exchange in overcoming deeply rooted hostilities. This session provided actionable insights into how Europe's historical experiences could inform strategies for peace in East Asia, offering a hopeful perspective on the potential for regional cooperation and security.

Panel 5: The Nexus of Sustainable Ecological Peace – The Declaration of East Berlin Intellectuals for "Peace without Weapons"

This panel discussed the profound significance of the declaration for "peace without weapons" issued by East German intellectuals during the Cold War, a time marked by an escalating arms race between the US and the USSR. This declaration played a key role in reshaping the discourse on peace, and a few years later, the threat of nuclear conflict in Europe began to dissipate. The panel revisited this historical milestone to draw lessons relevant to contemporary peace efforts.

The session examined the challenges of maintaining even minimal levels of peace without war, highlighting how ecological and humanitarian considerations intersect with traditional security concerns. Panellists emphasized the critical importance of envisioning and building a sustainable future where peace is achieved not only through the absence of conflict but also through proactive measures to protect the environment and promote human well-being.

By linking the historical example of Cold War peace initiatives with the modern imperative for ecological sustainability, the panel underscored the relevance of collective action in addressing global challenges. This discussion inspired participants to reimagine peacebuilding as a holistic process, integrating ecological harmony and shared responsibility to secure a peaceful future for all.

On the last day, a session with the title *Peace in Northeast Asia Viewed Through the "Korean Peninsula Peace Index"* and an open, ending discussion were held under the chair of Prof. Lee Eun-jeung (Freie Universität Berlin), Prof. Kim Bumsoo (Seoul National University) and Dr. Yoon Deokryong (CEO of Gyeonggi Job Foundation).

This session provided a comprehensive analysis of peace in Northeast Asia using the "Korean Peninsula Peace Index" as a tool to assess progress, challenges, and opportunities for peacebuilding in the region. The index offers a data-driven perspective on key factors influencing peace, including political stability, economic collaboration, and social integration across the region. The discussion further emphasized the need to identify actionable strategies to address persistent tensions and conflicts while fostering greater cooperation among regional players. Insights from this session highlighted the potential of such analytical tools to inform policy and encourage collaboration, underscoring the importance of measurable progress in peacebuilding initiatives.

The open discussion session focused on consolidating insights and recommendations from the panels into the Korea-Europe Peace Platform Berlin Forum Report. Participants engaged in collaborative dialogue to ensure that the report accurately reflected the key themes, ideas, and actionable outcomes of the conference. This session provided an opportunity for diverse voices to contribute to a unified vision for peacebuilding, drawing from the rich discussions held over the course of the conference.

The final report aims to serve as a guiding document for future initiatives, fostering stronger ties and shared strategies between Korea and Europe in their pursuit of peace and stability. The combined goal of the Korea-Europe Peace Platform and the DMZ EcoPeace Forum is to establish a vital and recurring knowledge-sharing platform between Korea and Europe. This initiative assumes paramount importance as it fosters enhanced security cooperation and contributes to peace on the Korean Peninsula. The forum's primary objective is to encourage dialogue and collaboration between South Korea and Europe, two like-minded partners, amidst the prevailing uncertainties of our time. Through this platform, we aim to explore diplomatic strategies for conflict mediation, crisis management, and promoting sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula. The DMZ EcoPeace Forum took place from November 4-6 of the same year in the Aegibong Peace Ecopark in Gimpo and Goyang, South Korea and concluded this collaboration for 2024.

