

Exploring a European Role in the Search for Peace on the Korean Peninsula

Robin Marsh
April 19, 2024
Secretary General, UPF-United Kingdom



Summary:



Universal Peace Federation (UPF) United Kingdom in conjunction with UPF Europe and Middle East held a webinar on 19th April, 2024, on the theme “Exploring a European Role in the Search for Peace on the Korean Peninsula”. The webinar was ably moderated by the well-known author, commentator and former BBC Correspondent, **Mr. Humphrey Hawksley**.

Introductory remarks were given by both **Dr. Charles Yang**, Chairman of UPF International, who stressed the urgency of peace on the Korean peninsula, citing its historical context and global implications. He likened the Korean conflict to broader ideological struggles and called for its resolution as a model for global harmony. Highlighting South Korea's progress contrasted with North Korea's challenges, he emphasized the potential for learning from reunification models like Germany's; and by **Dr. Katsumi Otsuka**, Chairman of UPF Europe and Middle East, who noted a historic shift in North Korea's stance, affecting sentiments for reunification. He emphasized the significance of discussing Europe's role in promoting peace.



Afterwards, 3 experts gave their insight on this important topic. **Professor Kevin Gray**, Head of Department for International Relations at Sussex University in the UK, discussed Europe's potential contributions to Korean conflict resolution, including behind-the-scenes negotiations and humanitarian aid. He critiqued the EU's past approach and stressed the need for nuanced strategies, considering the complex geopolitical landscape. **Dr. Moon, Byeong Cheol**, Senior Research Fellow at UPF Korea, analysed North Korea's evolving narrative and its impact on peace efforts. He emphasized the need for diplomatic engagement, with European support, to overcome cultural and nuclear obstacles. **Dr. Niklas Swanström**, Director of the Institute for Security and Development Policy in Sweden, explored Europe's capacity for engagement with North Korea amid competing global priorities. He proposed tailored approaches, like academic exchanges, to address regional complexities and emphasized Europe's potential role in bridging divides.



In the question-and-answer session, Mr. Humphrey Hawksley and the panelists discussed past engagements with North Korea and Europe's potential contributions to conflict resolution. They highlighted the need for sustained dialogue and understanding of North Korea's perspectives. In his concluding remarks, **Mr. Jacques Marion** highlighted Europe's historical cooperation in Northeast Asia and proposed avenues for dialogue with North Korea, despite its repressive regime. He underscored the importance of peace initiatives despite current tensions.

Opening Remarks:

[Dr. Changshik Yang, Chairman, Universal Peace Federation International](#)



Dr. Yang emphasised the importance of addressing peace on the Korean peninsula. He outlined the historical context of Korea's division after World War II and the subsequent Korean War, highlighting the global involvement and casualties. Drawing on philosophical roots, he framed the Korean conflict as emblematic of broader ideological confrontations seen throughout history, linking it to contemporary global conflicts like the one between Russia and Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas conflict. He called for a search for permanent peace, suggesting that resolving the Korean conflict could serve as a model for global harmony.

Furthermore, he underscored South Korea's achievements in global competitiveness and military power, juxtaposing them with North Korea's impoverished situation. He emphasised the potential for learning from successful reunification models like Germany's, positioning the unification of the Korean Peninsula as crucial not only for the region, but also as a global issue symbolizing the convergence of democratic and communist worlds and the pathway to a lasting peace.

[Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, Chairman of Universal Peace Federation Europe and the Middle East](#)



Dr. Katsumi Otsuka,
Chair, UPF Europe &
Middle East

In his introductory remarks, Dr. Otsuka affirmed that, undoubtedly, future historians and experts on the Korean Peninsula will record 2023 and 2024 as a historic turning point of the Korean Peninsula issue, because the North Korea supreme leader made it clear at the end of the year 2023 that South Korea was a hostile state, and he abandoned his pursuit of peaceful unification. Even in South Korea, the enthusiasm for the re-unification has sharply weakened. It feels as if the division of the Korean Peninsula is becoming increasingly solidified. In this context, it is very meaningful for us to discuss the European role for peace and the re-unification of the Korean Peninsula.



Panel:

[Professor Kevin Gray, Head of International Relations, School of Global Studies, Sussex University, United Kingdom](#)



Professor Kevin Gray:
Head of Department for
International Relations,
Sussex University

Professor Kevin Gray discussed Europe's potential role in addressing the Korean conflict and the North Korean nuclear issue. While acknowledging the challenges and uncertainties, he suggested that Europe can contribute to behind-the-scenes negotiations and humanitarian aid efforts. Gray noted the unprecedented tensions between North and South Korea, as well as between North Korea and the United States, against the backdrop of the "New Cold War" and renewed DPRK-Russia relations.

Professor Gray criticized the EU's historical approach of "critical engagement" toward North Korea, highlighting its alignment with the US and reliance on sanctions, which have had limited success. He drew parallels with the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) with Iran but underscored the complexities of negotiating with a DPRK possessing nuclear warheads. Professor Gray emphasized the necessity of lifting sanctions as part of any potential deal, noting the EU's comparatively lesser sanctions and the need for US involvement in

crafting agreements.

Furthermore, Professor Gray underscored Europe's potential role in humanitarian assistance, particularly considering the presence of European NGOs on the ground in North Korea. He anticipated challenges in reestablishing humanitarian operations, including negotiations with the DPRK and competition for donor attention amidst crises in other regions like Gaza and Ukraine. Despite recognizing Europe's experience

and potential contributions, Gray emphasized the significant challenges ahead.

[Dr. Moon, Byeong Cheol, Senior Research Fellow, UPF Korea](#)[Senior Research Fellow, UPF Korea](#)



[Dr. Moon, Byeong Cheol,](#)
[Senior Research Fellow,](#)
[UPF Korea](#)

Dr. Moon Byeong Cheol addressed three key questions concerning the Korean peninsula. Firstly, he discussed North Korea's recent policy shift from a "one Korea" to a "two states" narrative, indicating a departure from its previous stance on unification. This shift raises concerns among South Koreans who aspire for reunification and prompts reflections on US administration policies and North Korea's motivations, including its growing relationship with Russia. Despite the challenges posed by the current situation, the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) remains committed to peacebuilding and eventual reunification, urging both North and South Korea to reconsider their rigid positions and advocating for diplomatic engagement.

Regarding the prospect of a peace treaty, Dr. Moon highlighted the cultural and nuclear obstacles hindering its realization. He emphasized South Korea's direct involvement in negotiations, alongside the United States, and the importance of European nations' diplomatic support.

Drawing parallels with European involvement in nuclear negotiations with Iran, Dr. Moon suggested that European nations could serve as honest brokers in facilitating dialogue between North and South Korea. He stressed the need for increased official development assistance to address humanitarian concerns in North Korea, alongside diplomatic efforts, underscoring the importance of European nations' active engagement in promoting peace and denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.

[Dr. Niklas Swanström, Director, Institute for Security & Development Policy, Sweden](#)[Director, Institute for Security & Development Policy, Sweden](#)



[Dr. Niklas Swanström,](#)
[Executive Director,](#)
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[Development Policy,](#)
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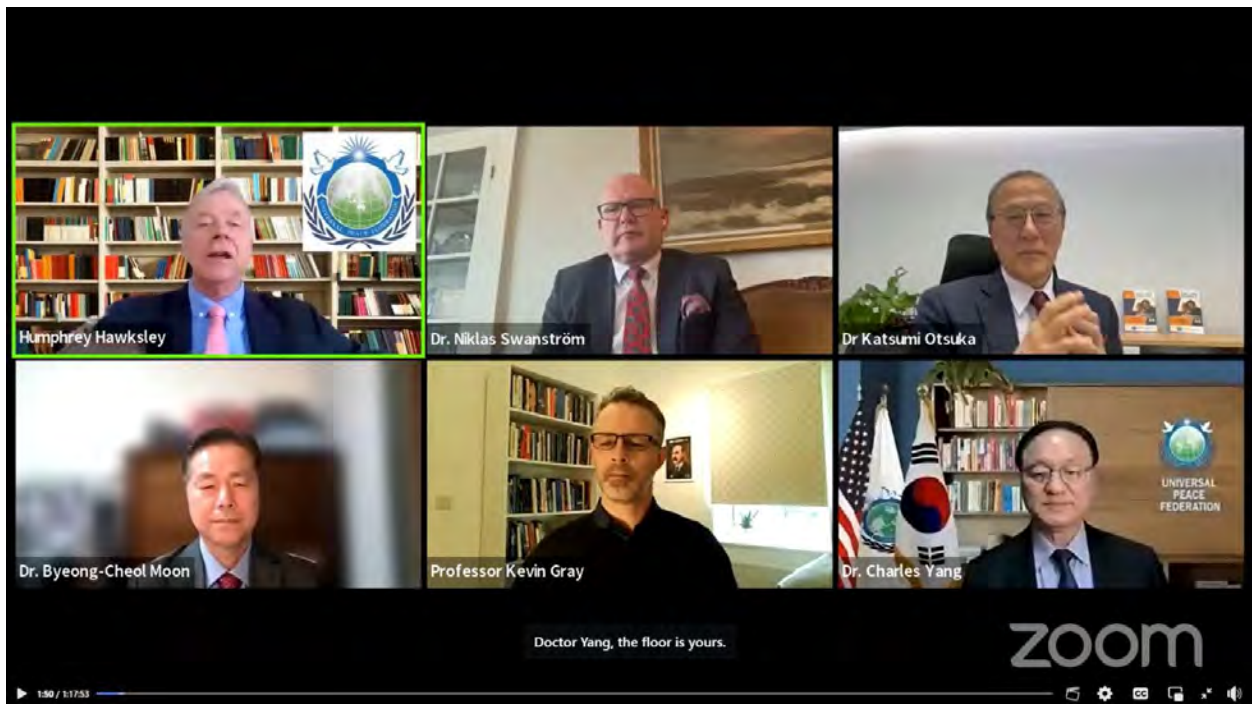
Dr. Niklas Swanstrom discussed Europe's potential role in engaging with North Korea amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics. He noted North Korea's outreach to Europe despite its reliance on Russia and China, indicating a recognition of the limitations of its current alliances. However, Dr. Swanstrom questioned Europe's capacity to play a significant role, especially in light of its focus on other global priorities such as the conflict in Ukraine and the Middle East, as well as resource constraints, particularly in countries like Sweden.

While acknowledging North Korea's reluctance to engage in immediate denuclearization talks, Swanstrom suggested avenues for constructive engagement, such as academic exchanges and 1.5 track diplomacy. He cautioned against expecting quick solutions and emphasized the need for a nuanced understanding of North Korea's perspectives and interests, proposing a Helsinki-like process tailored to address regional complexities and tangible issues like humanitarian assistance and environmental concerns.

Swanstrom also reflected on North Korea's characterization of South Korea as a hostile state, attributing it to North Korea's recognition of South Korea's growing strength and the challenges of potential unification. Despite scepticism regarding immediate unification prospects, he sees a potential role for Europe in bridging divides between North and South Korea, particularly in addressing practical challenges related to the differences between the two states.

In response to questions from Humphrey Hawksley, Dr. Niklas Swanstrom discussed the importance of consistent engagement with North Korea, emphasizing the need for both short-term and long-term strategies involving various stakeholders, including the younger generation and current decision-makers. Dr. Swanstrom highlighted divisions within North Korea's leadership and the opportunity for engagement despite differing priorities among DPRK government departments. The various stakeholders in the DPRK government stress the necessity for sustained commitment from institutions and governments in Europe to foster constructive dialogue with North Korea, acknowledging the challenges posed by political cycles and the need for long-term consistency in engagement efforts. Regarding the potential impact of President Trump's re-election, Dr. Swanstrom suggested that while it may change dynamics, there are uncertainties about whether it would lead to positive or negative outcomes given past experiences and high expectations from North Korea.

Question & answer session.



Humphrey Hawksley and the panel explored various facets of the Korean issue, from the impact of past administrations like Obama's or Trump's engagement with North Korea to the potential role of European countries in addressing the conflict. They discussed the complexities of negotiating with North Korea and the challenges posed by unrealistic expectations and geopolitical dynamics involving Russia, China, and the US. Despite limited European attention to the Korean Peninsula, the panel suggested avenues for engagement, such as track 1.5 diplomacy and sustained dialogue, emphasizing the need for consistent efforts to understand North Korea's perspectives and interests. Regarding the possibility of Japan or South Korea going nuclear, the panel acknowledged the potential for increased crisis but questions whether it would be enough to spur significant European involvement in the issue. Ultimately, they highlight the importance of addressing underlying geopolitical tensions and fostering meaningful dialogue to advance peace and stability in the region.

Closing remarks



[Mr. Jacques Marion, Co-Chair, Universal Peace Federation Europe and the Middle East](#)

In his closing remarks, Mr. Jacques Marion, Co-Chair of the Universal Peace Federation in Europe and the Middle East, reflected on Europe's potential role in fostering peace on the Korean peninsula amidst the current geopolitical tensions. He highlighted Europe's historical focus on cooperation in Northeast Asia and questioned how it can mediate between the conflicting camps in the region. Marion drew attention to the importance of trust-building, citing the example of former MEP Glyn Ford's long-standing engagement with North Korea and the establishment of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with the Korean Peninsula. He suggested that despite North Korea's repressive regime, engagement and cooperation offer avenues for dialogue and potential peace.



[Mr. Jacques Marion, Co-chair, UPF Europe & Middle East, France](#)

Mr. Marion emphasized the need for Europe to engage North Korea and offer alternatives that address its needs, potentially defusing tensions in areas like agriculture and health. He acknowledged the challenges but believes in Europe's resources and North Korea's potential expectations from European nations. Mr. Marion concluded by reaffirming the Universal Peace Federation's commitment to initiatives promoting unity and peace on the Korean peninsula, citing potential economic projects such as a Japan-Korea tunnel, as well as regular awareness-raising conferences, as important factors despite the prevailing tensions.

[Click here for Mr. Jacques Marion's full speech](#)

19th of April 2024
1:00 pm BST
2:00 pm CET

Exploring a European Role in the Search for Peace on the Korean Peninsula

Speakers:
Jacques Marion
Co-Chairman UPF Europe and Middle East
Dr. Moon, Byeong Cheol
Senior Research Fellow, UPF Korea
Professor Kevin Gray
*Head of International Relations
School of Global Studies, Sussex University*
Dr. Niklas Swanström
Director, Institute for Security & Development Policy, Sweden

Opening Remarks:
Dr Chang Shik Yang
Chairman UPF international
Dr. Katsumi Otsuka
Co-Chairman UPF Europe & Middle East

MC:
Humphrey Hawksley
Author, Commentator and former BBC Correspondent

Online Webinar

00:00 1:17:22



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Closing remarks of Mr. Jacques Marion in the Webinar on Korea 19 April 2024

Written by: UPF Europe and Middle East

23 April 2024

Closing remarks of Mr. Jacques Marion, Co-Chairman UPF Europe and Middle East, in the Webinar "Exploring a European Role in the Search for Peace on the Korean Peninsula on Korea 19 April 2024."



Respected panelists

Thank you for your informative presentations and discussion. In closing, let me offer a few reflections, as a member of an NGO, the Universal Peace Federation, which has given high priority to peace on the Korean peninsula in the last 3 or 4 decades.

Unlike the United States, Europe's focus in Northeast Asia has been more on cooperation than on competition. But in today's context of two competing camps – China, Russia, North Korea on one side, versus the US, Japan and South Korea on the other side, how can Europe contribute to peaceful solutions to the conflict?

With the war in Ukraine, Europe is in direct confrontation with Russia. North Korea provides weapons to Russia, and South Korea provides weapons to European nations. Can Europe, in this context, play the role of a mediator in the conflict in Northeast Asia?

I'd like to draw your attention to the important question of trust-building in relation with North Korea and refer to the experience of a British scholar and politician, Glyn Ford, who as member of the European Parliament, was instrumental in developing the first large scale humanitarian aid from the EU to North Korea during the times of famine earlier this century. He visited North Korea 50 times and was able to build relationships of trust with North Korean leaders at the highest level. He is the one who initiated in 2004 the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with the Korean Peninsula, which is a significant tool for European diplomacy in the Far East.

He wrote several books on North Korea, including a recent one entitled "Picturing the DPRK", which offers a window into North Korean life. Ford acknowledges that North Korea is a flawed and repressive state, yet he sees that there is a way to engage North Korean leaders, part of whom are desperate to modernize and end their isolation.

This view resonates with us in UPF, because when the Berlin Wall collapsed and the Cold War came to an end, our Founder Dr Moon seized the opportunity and went to meet with Kim Il Sung, at the risk of his life, and was able to engage him in opening a dialogue with the United States in 1991 and the following years.

Today, with the radical shift of policy announced by Kim Jeong Un in regard to South Korea, breaking with the tradition of both his father Kim Jeong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung, who, although they did provoke many conflicts with the South, never ceased to proclaim the unity of the Korean people, and never considered the destruction of South Korea – when we see this radical declaration, we wonder whether it is still possible to talk anymore about peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Yet this position, as Ford suggests, is a position of weakness, whereby North Korea shows that it is weaker economically and militarily than South Korea. Kim Jeong Un needs to dehumanize South Koreans, because he only has nuclear power to rely on.

Whereas the US, Japan and South Korea are locked into a radical confrontation with North Korea, isn't Europe in the position to engage the North, and offer some alternatives that may satisfy their needs, gain their trust and defuse this tension, whether in the area of agriculture, or health, or through other ways of cooperation and assistance?

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I thought this question may sound utopian in current circumstances, but I am glad that our panelists concur with this idea. Indeed, Europe has such resources, and I believe North Korea does have such expectations from European nations.

In any case, we in UPF pursue the initiative that was stated in our Summit2022 Resolution in Korea as "Two states towards one nation: one peninsula, one people and one culture", considering that peace in Northeast Asia is essential to the world.

As you know, many projects have been envisioned by UPF Founders in support of this initiative, such as tunnel connections between Japan and Korea, or between the USA and the Eurasian continent at the Bering Strait. These large projects, along with many of the meetings we organize such as this one, are meant to support this initiative, and despite the current tension, we believe it is an endeavor worth fighting for.

Thank you very much.



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