

EU-ROK RELATIONS

PUTTING THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO WORK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EU and the Republic of Korea (ROK) are strong, like-minded partners. They upgraded their relationship to a strategic partnership in 2010. This made the ROK one of only ten strategic partners of the EU. The EU and the ROK have signed a Framework Agreement, a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and a Crisis Management Participation Agreement (CMPA) covering the three pillars of politics, economics and security. The ROK is the only country with which the EU has agreements covering these three areas already in force. The EU is the ROK's third largest trading partner, while the ROK is the EU's eighth largest. Their FTA was the first for the EU in Asia.

The strength of the bilateral relationship between the EU and the ROK has a material and ideological basis. Both partners have the necessary economic and human resources to put their agreements into practice. They can cooperate at the bilateral level and also within multilateral governance structures. Furthermore, both partners share the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. They also share a belief in the market economy. In other words, the relationship between the EU and the ROK goes beyond economic and political interests and is also built on common values.

The FTA was signed in 2010, entered into force in 2011 and was formally ratified in 2015. It provides the economic pillar for the EU-ROK relationship and has helped to boost the value of bilateral trade in goods from 66 billion EUR in 2010 to 94 billion EUR in 2017. Five years after the FTA entered into force, 98.7 per cent of duties in terms of trade had been eliminated. Trade in both goods and services has increased since the FTA entered into force, with the relative importance of the EU and the ROK as import and export markets growing throughout this period. In particular, the ROK has become a more important destination of EU exports compared to the years before the FTA entered into force. As of 2017, the EU has a small deficit in its trade balance with the ROK. But the current deficit is significantly smaller than the deficit it had prior to the FTA entering into force.

A series of bilateral bodies were set up with the FTA to ensure smooth adjustments and to make improvements to the text as needs arise. The ministerial-level Trade Committee meets annually to discuss and review the overall implementation of the agreement. In addition, six specialised committees (focusing on trade in goods; sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS); customs; services, establishment and electronic commerce; trade and sustainable development; and outward processing zones on the Korean Peninsula), seven working groups (focusing on motor vehicles and parts; pharmaceutical products and medical devices; chemicals; trade remedy cooperation; mutual recognition agreements for services; government procurement; and geographical indicators), three dialogues (focusing on intellectual property; cultural cooperation; and electric and electronic products) and a civil society forum were set up to address issues within their respective fields of responsibility.

The Framework Agreement was signed in 2010 and entered into force in 2014. As per its name, the agreement provides the overarching framework for the political pillar of the EU-ROK relationship. The agreement formulates a number of areas in which the EU and the ROK want to cooperate more closely. Many of them fall under the canvas of economic relations, which underscores that this is an agreement laying the foundations of the EU-ROK relationship more broadly. But most areas covered by the Framework Agreement are political in nature. The specific areas in which EU-ROK cooperation is most developed include human rights; counter-terrorism; the fight against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; environmental protection and combating climate change; cooperation in regional and international organisations; development assistance; combating cybercrime; education and, science & technology.

Beyond the Framework Agreement, the backbone of EU-ROK political cooperation are the various forms of summits, political dialogues, and regular high-level meetings in which all aspects of the strategic partnership are discussed. They enable regular exchanges between EU and ROK representatives on a personal level. Some of these exchanges, for example summits, touch upon virtually all dimensions of the strategic partnership, while others have a very defined scope on, for example, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity or human rights. They include four summits since the Framework agreement was signed, with a fifth summit scheduled for 19 October 2018. As of 2018, there are 40 different official exchanges in place.

The CMPA was signed in 2014 and has been in effect since 2016. The agreement is the security pillar of the EU-ROK relationship. In particular, it states that the ROK may, upon invitation by the EU, choose to participate in EU international peace-keeping missions. The CMPA is a sign of particular close cooperation between the EU and the ROK. It is often mentioned as a symbol of the close EU-ROK partnership. As of 2018, there is one EU military operation in which the ROK has provided support: the Atalanta Operation or European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia, a counter-piracy operation that protects vessels and monitors fishing activities off the coast of Somalia.

The strategic partnership between the EU and the ROK is therefore strong and solid. It is yet to reach its full potential though. This is understandable, considering that relations were only upgraded to a fully-fledged strategic partnership in 2010 and that the agreements covering the political and security pillars only entered into force in 2014 and 2016, respectively. In this report we identify, however, nine areas in which cooperation between the ROK and the EU could and, we believe, should be strengthened in the near future to help safeguard both parties' interests at the global level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Holding of Head of government summits on an annual basis;
- Creation by the European Parliament of a separate Delegation for Relations with the ROK;
- Accelerating the re-negotiation of the bilateral FTA;
- Strengthening implementation and universalisation of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction regulatory frameworks;
- Strengthening cybersecurity cooperation and best practice sharing;
- Incorporating ROK peace-keepers into EU peace-keeping operations;
- Strengthening sustainable development cooperation;
- Supporting their own sustainable development;
- Supporting Eurasian connectivity.