

EIAS Briefing Seminar on the Korean Peninsula

Event Report

6 April, 2023

EIAS, Brussels

On 6 April 2023, the European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS) hosted a briefing seminar discussing prevailing questions on the Korean peninsula. The seminar was chaired by Lin Goethals, EIAS Director. The speaker for the occasion was H.E. Liu Xiaoming, Special Representative of the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the Korean peninsula, who has formerly served as Ambassador of the PRC to North Korea and the United Kingdom. During his speech he first introduced the Chinese perspective on the ongoing conflict on the Korean peninsula. This was followed by a series of questions addressed to him by the chair, after which the floor was opened to questions from the audience.

In his introductory speech H.E. Liu Xiaoming laid out his vision of the delicate security situation on the Korean peninsula, as well as the steps to follow for its possible resolution with peace talks being in a deadlock. He emphasised the need for greater cooperation between the EU and China, urging to put aside potential Cold War mindsets that prevent beneficial agreements to emerge and consensus to be reached between all stakeholders involved in the conflict.

H.E. Liu Xiaoming highlighted the Global Security Initiative (GSI) proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in April 2022. He underlined the great importance of the Korean peninsula in terms of security in East Asia, pointing to the stagnant peace talks and the growing division and hostility between the opposing parties. H.E. Mr Liu asserted that the inter-Korean conflict cannot be solved without addressing the roots of the problem. While old confrontations and wounds have not yet healed he objected to certain countries reinforcing escalations in military deployment, double standards and hindering understandings between the parties.

He presented the GSI as a framework enabling states to adapt to global circumstances and strive for a win-win approach to security. Recognizing the central role of the United Nations,

he asserted the GSI to make a firm commitment to dialogue for resolving conflicts and obtaining lasting and stable peace, respect, and cooperation. Mr. Liu cited the improvement of bilateral relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia as a successful example of the Chinese GSI in appeasing old enmities.

Using the GSI as the fundamental cornerstone, Mr. Liu listed six principles and conditions which, from a Chinese perspective, are essential to be followed for a resolution of the inter-Korean conflict which can satisfy all parties and reduce ongoing tensions in the region. First, national sovereignty and the territorial integrity of states are unquestionable principles that must be respected and form the basis of modern international relations. The indivisibility of security constitutes the second principle, referring to both traditional and non-traditional security issues. Mr. Liu asserted that one country's security cannot be pursued at the expense of another country's security.

The third point insisted on the need for dialogue and consultations to achieve more favourable scenarios with a view to a de-escalation that leads to the improvement of relations and trust between the parties. Mr. Liu Xiaoming called on the parties not to repeat past mistakes, adding that coercion and pressure will only further mistrust and raise tensions.

The centrality of the principles of the UN Charter and multilateralism are the main foundations sustained in the fourth point. Practising genuine multilateralism is seen by China as a vital necessity, setting aside Cold War mentalities to build a better security architecture.

The fifth point focused on the roots of the inter-Korean conflict not yet having been dealt with. With mutual mistrust and coercion considered as two obstacles to be avoided, he insisted on the utmost importance of replacing the current armistice in force since the end of the Korean War in 1953 with an authentic peace agreement. He criticised the counterproductiveness of imposed sanctions, which are not promoting a more conducive environment in the region.

Finally, H.E. Liu Xiaoming added that coordination between the parties, as well as transparency, cooperation and the rule of law, must prevail in resolving the conflict, like in any other. China sees dialogue, understanding and rejection of confrontation and Cold War mentalities as necessary ingredients to achieve peace and satisfactory agreements. Emphasising the inevitable interdependence of states on core issues like security, China is calling for other nations to join its GSI.

He concluded by stating that China continues to bet on the Six-Party Talks as the most ideal format for resolving the conflict, which has been stagnant for seven decades. He asserted that Europe has the capacity to play a fundamentally important role in the resolution of the conflict and in China's shared objective of creating peace and stability frameworks where conflicts exist.

After H. E. Liu Xiaoming's introductory speech, a first round of questions was asked by the moderator, which was then followed by a series of questions raised by the audience. The variety of questions included the current and future role of the UN and the Six-Party Talks in the inter-Korean conflict, as well as the balance of relations between Beijing on the one hand and Pyongyang and Seoul on the other hand. Questions also included the possible intensification of sanctions against North Korea, and the Chinese perspective on the increase in Pyongyang's development of its nuclear capabilities. The power of the EU towards achieving peace and stability on the Korean peninsula was also a topic of discussion, along with the Chinese expectations of it.