

SIGA-HUFS JMCE MONTHLY BULLETIN

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INTRODUCTION

This newsletter series provide a comprehensive overview of Korea's evolving role in international affairs. Published on a monthly basis, it offers timely analysis of South Korea's foreign policy initiatives, regional security dynamics, and key developments in the global political landscape. In addition, it covers economic trends, technological innovation, and industrial transformation, highlighting Korea's growing influence in these areas.

It explores cultural diplomacy, media, education, and broader societal changes, aiming to present a well-rounded perspective. Prepared with academic rigor, it seeks to serve as a reliable and accessible resource for researchers, students, and anyone interested in Korea-related developments.

We bring together the most notable developments and insights to guide you through Korea's current trajectory.

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Interview Series with Ambassadors to the Republic of Korea: The Netherlands & Greece¹



Ambassador Peter van der Vliet serves as the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Republic of Korea. A career diplomat, he joined the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1990 and has extensive experience in multilateral diplomacy, humanitarian affairs, and human rights. He has served at the Netherlands Embassies in India and Jordan, as well as at the Permanent Mission of the Netherlands to the United Nations, where he held senior positions covering development, humanitarian affairs, and human rights. He later served as Director of the Multilateral Organizations and Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Could you briefly introduce yourself and the Netherlands to our readers? Since arriving in the Republic of Korea as Ambassador, what experience or aspect of Korean society has been particularly memorable to you?

My name is Peter van der Vliet. I am the ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Republic of Korea. My wife and I moved here in August 2023 from Japan. We have three children, who live abroad.

I think the fact that Korea is going through a period of unprecedented worldwide popularity of its K-food, K-pop, K-drama, K-cosmetics as well as a semiconductor super cycle is quite memorable to me. It's a happening place!

The partnership between the Republic of Korea and the European Union has continued to deepen across a wide range of fields. In your view, what achievement best represents the current Korea-EU relationship, and in which areas should the partnership develop further?

The EU and the Republic of Korea are like-minded partners sharing similar values and common interests. 2010 in particular was a milestone year in EU-ROK relations, when the Strategic Partnership, EU-ROK Framework Agreement and the EU-ROK Free Trade Agreement were signed. This connected our countries and people like never before, marking a substantial deepening of relations across the board.

The EU-Korea relationship has thrived with a significant increase in bilateral trade thanks to our FTA and Korea becoming the first Asian Associated partner country in Horizon Europe in 2025, clearing the way for deeper R&D collaboration.

¹ Interviews conducted via email by Hayann Lee (Deputy Director, HUFS Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence)

More recently, the adoption of a Security and Defense Partnership in November 2024 was an important next step, opening up avenues for closer coordination in areas such as crisis management, maritime security, and addressing hybrid and cyber threats.

In January 2026, the EU and the ROK held the first Strategic Dialogue, which led the way to the 11th Leader Summit with President Lee Jae Myung visiting Brussels in early June. During this Summit a landmark Digital Trade Agreement was signed, further cementing the close trade relationship between the EU and Korea.

More than ever, the EU and ROK taking our Strategic Partnership to the next level by enhancing cooperation and coordination on key foreign policy issues, including in security and defense as well as trade.

At a time of increasing uncertainty in the international order, what roles can the Republic of Korea and European countries play together in promoting peace, security, democracy, and a rules-based international order?

The world around us is changing rapidly. The rise of autocrats around the world means that, increasingly, pure power politics is gaining the upper hand. The role of rules and law is under pressure.

Like-minded countries will need to be more united in seeking to strengthen democratic forces, protect the open world economy and promote the international legal order. We need to stand up for our interests worldwide. We will do so on the basis of our values – democracy, the rule of law and individual freedoms.

In this changing world, we ought to take more responsibility for our own defence. That is a challenge that European countries and the Republic of Korea share, making it crucial to deepen our cooperation.

The military cooperation between North Korea and Russia in the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine illustrates how the security between Europe, and the Korean peninsula is deeply interconnected. Continuing our support to Ukraine and pursuing accountability for Russia's war crimes is essential for deterring future aggression elsewhere, including in the Indo-Pacific region. We must work together to promote stability and security in the world.

Similarly, the conflicts in Iran and the Middle East also affect our security and prosperity. Supply chain disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea demonstrate the need to reduce our dependencies and bolster our economic security. This also necessitates coordination and collective action on maritime deployments to safeguarding freedom of navigation in crucial sea lanes and protecting commercial shipping.

What role can exchanges among universities, research institutions, students, and younger generations play in strengthening the long-term foundations of relations between the Republic of Korea and European countries?

We notice that such ongoing exchanges create a lot of mutual learning and mutual understanding.

What message would you like to share with young people and readers in the Republic of Korea regarding Europe and the changing international environment?

I hope young people will see what an interesting continent Europe is.

The Republic of Korea and the Netherlands have strengthened their Strategic Partnership while also sharing a historical bond through the Netherlands' contribution during the Korean War. What should be the next major goal of the bilateral relationship?

As geopolitical strategic partners, the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea are strengthening and expanding their economic cooperation to contribute to global peace, prosperity and security as well.

We are natural partners in economic security, in part due to our unique roles in the global semiconductor supply chain. We are working closely together to reduce our strategic dependencies while boosting our technological competitiveness and leadership. Another area with great opportunities is defense industry cooperation. European investment in greater autonomy in security and defense is a natural fit with South Korea's excellent defense industry. Like I said, military cooperation between Russia and North Korea makes it crucial for us to work more closely together as trusted partners.

Semiconductor cooperation has become a defining feature of relations between the two countries. How can the emerging semiconductor alliance support joint research, workforce development, supply-chain resilience, and long-term cooperation between companies and universities?

The Netherlands excels in upstream R&D and foundational precision engineering—anchored by global leaders like ASML in advanced lithography, ASM in atomic layer deposition, and BEI in advanced packaging. Conversely, South Korea leads the world in downstream high-volume manufacturing, advanced memory, and leading-edge logic process nodes.

This creates a highly synergistic and complementary dynamic between our two ecosystems. Indeed, semiconductors already constitute the vast majority of our bilateral trade. Beyond commercial ties, our two nations are aligning policies ever more closely to navigate today's shifting geopolitical landscape.

Future semiconductor cooperation between Korea and the Netherlands is poised to broaden significantly, particularly in photonics, advanced packaging, and metrology.

As the AI boom demands lower power consumption, better thermal management, and higher chip density, technologies like optical chip-to-chip interconnects and advanced multi-chip integration (chiplet) are becoming critical. The Netherlands holds deep core competencies in these domains. In particular, leveraging the advanced precision technology of ASML's Tier-1 supply chain will greatly benefit Korea's semiconductor production capabilities. Given the long R&D lead times required before commercialization, deep collaboration between our universities and research institutes is vital. We are already building momentum through joint programs like the semiconductor summer school with TU Eindhoven, while exploring dedicated bilateral cooperation alongside multilateral platforms like Horizon Europe.

Our Embassy will continue to actively facilitate and support these joint technological endeavors.

The Netherlands has globally recognized expertise in water management, offshore wind, sustainable agriculture, and smart farming. Which practical projects could combine these strengths with South Korean technology and industrial capacity?

For sustainable agriculture, South Korea is shifting from a productivity-oriented model to a sustainable one, becoming a like-minded partner for the Netherlands. Several cooperation projects between the two countries are currently underway or in the planning stages: for instance, the recycling of food waste for insect protein production; R&D for cultivated meat; the development of

sustainable energies for agriculture, such as waste heat and aquathermal energy; and the introduction of animal welfare facilities for pigs and chickens.

As for smart farming, the Netherlands is already contributing significantly to high-tech horticulture through climate control, energy, water and nutrition management, and biological control. It also contributes to the smart livestock sector via climate control, milking robots, feeding systems, and health-check systems. Recently, South Korea has been making national efforts toward AI transformation in these areas by developing relevant technologies. Both countries can learn from each other to create synergy in this development.

In water management, the Netherlands and Korea could strengthen collaboration by pairing the Dutch 'Room for the River' concept, which gives rivers more space through floodplain restoration and dike relocation, with Korea's digital twin and AI platforms that enable real-time monitoring, flood forecasting and optimized dam operations. Dutch know-how in nature-based, multi-benefit river planning can guide physical interventions, while Korean smart water systems provide the digital backbone to simulate scenarios, test designs and support rapid decision-making during extreme events.

Offshore wind has become a strong area of cooperation, supported by complementary strengths across the supply chain. Korea excels in substructures, towers and subsea cables, while the Netherlands brings extensive experience in engineering, installation and operations. This alignment has enabled efficient and mutually beneficial collaboration. As offshore wind takes on a larger role in Korea's renewable energy transition, Dutch expertise can help accelerate offshore wind development in Korea. The partnership also could create opportunities to expand jointly into European and other global markets.

South Korea and the Netherlands have both contributed to international discussions on responsible artificial intelligence, including its use in the military domain. How can the two countries continue to shape global norms for trustworthy AI, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies?

Over the past years the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea have cooperated closely on the topic of the responsible Artificial Intelligence in the military domain. First through the co-hosting of the REAIM Summits and later on also by introducing the Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain (AIMD) resolutions at the United Nations. Through these processes and resolutions the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea ensured greater international attention for this pressing topic, while ensuring maximum international and multi-stakeholder buy-in.

Furthermore, these initiatives have laid the groundwork for further action through the most recent outcome document 'Pathways to Action' and the Global Commission REAIM report 'Responsible by Design'. Contained in these documents are concrete steps that the international community can take in ensuring that AI is used responsibly within the military domain. Additionally, the processes themselves have also garnered greater international attention and cooperation on this particular topic. This outcome will prove vital in the years ahead to build greater confidence amongst stakeholders and through it move towards a more internationally accepted approaches to responsible AI in the military domain.

Taking into account the uninterrupted and rapid pace of technological developments, it will remain imperative that like-minded middle powers like the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea continue to collaborate on new and emerging technologies. Only through a collaborative and inclusive approach can we guarantee that new technologies – like for instance AI and quantum computing –

are used responsibly and to the benefit of the international community. The REAIM process provides an excellent example of how to realize such cooperation.

Dutch museums, design, architecture, and contemporary creative industries are highly regarded in South Korea. What cultural partnerships, artist exchanges, or youth mobility initiatives could create more reciprocal and long-term engagement between the two societies?

From the Dutch perspective, the most promising way to deepen cultural relations with South Korea is to combine public presentations with sustained opportunities for artists and institutions to work together. Exhibitions, performances and showcases remain important because they introduce audiences to new work and often provide the first point of contact. At the same time, our priority is increasingly to create the conditions where Dutch and Korean artists and cultural organizations can build relationships, develop projects together and sustain those relationships over time. The Dutch International Cultural Policy places particular importance on reciprocity. Cooperation should respond to the local context, take place on an equal footing and allow different perspectives to contribute to the development of knowledge and artistic practice.

Meaningful reciprocity begins with recognizing the intrinsic value of culture and respecting artistic autonomy. Cultural partnerships should not be assessed only in terms of immediate visibility, economic benefit or diplomatic value. Artists and creative professionals should be able to identify the questions they wish to explore and to shape their own forms of collaboration. We therefore find it important to also support initiatives whose results may not be immediately visible, by making room for research and development and by opening up opportunities for emerging artists and cultural organizations, alongside established, high-profile artists and institutions.

An example is the Netherlands - Korea documentary co-production fund, established by the Embassy together with the DMZ International Documentary Film Festival last year and now in its second year. The Netherlands has a strong international documentary ecosystem, including International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, and a strong tradition of participating in international co-productions. Korea has a wealth of talented filmmakers who use cinema to engage with important social issues and create compelling forms of storytelling. There are also many Korean visual artists and filmmakers based in the Netherlands who have built strong networks. The fund builds on these complementary strengths. Its value lies not only in the completed films, but also in enabling Dutch and Korean creative professionals to develop shared concerns, exchange perspectives and help one another connect to broader international target. Film production often takes several years and requires considerable investment. Projects may change direction or not be realized exactly as initially envisioned. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to accept a degree of uncertainty and create a platform where genuine co-creation can develop, eventually contributing to the cultural industries of both countries.

We have also seen similar long-term effects in artist-in-residency programs and institutional partnerships, such as the MMCA Changdong Residency - Mondriaan Fund fellowship and Arts Council Korea's partnerships with the Rijksakademie and the Jan van Eyck Academie. These sustained relationships have enabled artists and cultural professionals to understand one another's working environments and build networks that can lead organically to further collaborative initiatives. Our cultural strategy for Korea has therefore consistently identified residencies, research and institution-to-institution exchanges as important foundations for sustainable cooperation.



Ambassador Loukas Tsokos serves as the Ambassador of Greece to the Republic of Korea. He holds a degree in Law from the University of Aix-en-Provence and a Master's degree in Public International Law from the University of Paris I. Since joining the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1998, he has served in various key directorates at headquarters and held diplomatic postings in Morocco, Canada, Australia, and Hungary. Most recently, he served as Consul General of Greece in Tampa, Florida, from 2021 to 2024, before assuming his current role as Ambassador to the Republic of Korea in 2025.

Could you briefly introduce yourself and Greece to our readers? Since arriving in the Republic of Korea as Ambassador, what experience or aspect of Korean society has been particularly memorable to you?

Throughout my diplomatic career, I have had the privilege of representing Greece abroad, and it is a great honor for me to serve as Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to the Republic of Korea. I consider my current posting especially meaningful, as Greece and South Korea are two countries that, despite their geographical distance, share a deep bond forged by the Korean War and nowadays based on democratic values and the commitment to international peace and stability.

Greece is often described as the cradle of democracy, philosophy, and the Olympic Games. Nevertheless Greece is a modern European country with a dynamic economy, a strong maritime tradition, world-class tourism, and an increasingly vibrant ecosystem in technology, research, and the creative industries. As a member of the EU, Greece is committed to promoting international cooperation, peace, and dialogue, values that also underpin our excellent bilateral relationship with the Republic of Korea.

Since my arrival in Korea, I have been deeply impressed by the country's remarkable ability to combine cutting-edge technological innovation with a profound respect for its cultural heritage. Equally memorable has been the warmth, courtesy, and sense of community shown by the Korean people. I have also been struck by the strong emphasis placed on education and the genuine curiosity many Koreans have about Greece. These qualities have made my experience here both professionally rewarding and personally enriching, and they continue to inspire our efforts to further strengthen the friendship between our two countries.

What role can exchanges among universities, research institutions, students, and younger generations play in strengthening the long-term foundations of relations between the Republic of Korea and European countries?

Greece attaches great importance to educational and scientific cooperation. Greek universities, such as the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and National Technical University of Athens, are active participants in European research networks and the Erasmus+ programme, collaborating with institutions across Europe and increasingly beyond. We see significant opportunities to expand these networks to include more Korean partners through joint research projects, student mobility, dual-degree programmes, and faculty exchanges.

It is important to remember that, the students who study together today will become tomorrow's diplomats, scientists, entrepreneurs, and leaders. By investing in educational and research cooperation, we are not only strengthening Greece–Korea relations but also contributing to a more

connected, innovative, and resilient partnership between the Republic of Korea and Europe as a whole.

Greece's participation in the Korean War created a lasting historical bond with the Republic of Korea. How can this foundation of solidarity be connected more effectively to contemporary cooperation in diplomacy, security, trade, and people-to-people relations?

Greece's participation in the Korean War is the cornerstone of the friendship between our two nations. More than 10,000 Greek soldiers and airmen served under the United Nations Command in defense of the Republic of Korea, forging a bond based on freedom, peace, and shared values.

This legacy remains alive through places of remembrance such as the Greek Monument at the War Memorial of Korea, the Monument for the Fallen Greek Soldiers in Yeosu, and the Korean War Memorial in the cities of Athens (Papagos-Cholargos) and Thessaloniki. These memorials remind us that our friendship was forged through sacrifice and must be carried forward by future generations. The recent twinning between the cities of Yeosu and Papagos-Holargos is an excellent example of how this shared history can inspire new partnerships at the local level.

Our historical ties also create opportunities to deepen cooperation in areas of growing strategic importance, including maritime security, defense industries, advanced technologies, energy, and resilient supply chains. As leading maritime nations, Greece and Korea possess highly complementary expertise in shipping, shipbuilding, and green maritime technologies, offering significant potential for mutually beneficial partnerships.

Equally important are people-to-people connections. Preserving the memory of the Korean War through cooperation on veterans' affairs, educational programmes, museums, and youth exchanges ensures that future generations understand the origins of our friendship. At the same time, expanding academic, cultural, and business exchanges will enable that friendship to evolve and flourish.

In diplomacy, history gives us credibility; in education, culture, and trade, it gives us momentum. Our shared past is therefore not only a source of pride but also a platform for building an even stronger, more dynamic partnership between Greece and the Republic of Korea in the decades to come.

Greece is one of the world's leading maritime nations, while South Korea is a major shipbuilding and marine technology center. What opportunities do you see for deeper cooperation in shipbuilding, smart vessels, maritime safety, green fuels, and the decarbonization of shipping?

Greece and the Republic of Korea are natural maritime partners. Greece is the world's leading shipowning nation, while Korea is a global leader in shipbuilding, marine engineering, and maritime innovation. As the maritime sector undergoes its green and digital transition, Greece and Korea have much to gain by working together, not only through commercial partnerships, but also through joint research, technological innovation, investment, and exchanges between universities, research institutes, and industry. By combining Greek maritime expertise with Korean technological excellence, we can contribute to making global shipping safer, smarter, and more sustainable for future generations.

This was reaffirmed during the recent official visit of the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Republic of Korea, where both sides highlighted the importance of expanding cooperation in shipping, shipbuilding, green maritime technologies, maritime security, and resilient supply chains. We also recognized the growing potential for collaboration in smart vessels, digitalization,

autonomous shipping, alternative marine fuels, and the decarbonization of the global shipping industry.

Greece is developing its role as a transport, port, and energy hub linking Europe, the Mediterranean, and neighboring regions. How can South Korea and Greece cooperate in port logistics, infrastructure, renewable energy, and regional connectivity?

There is significant potential for Korean investment and technological cooperation in Greek ports, logistics centers, rail connections, and smart infrastructure. Greek ports can also provide Korean companies with efficient access to European and neighboring markets, while cooperation in digitalized port operations and resilient supply chains could strengthen connectivity between Asia and Europe.

Energy is another promising field. Greece is expanding renewable energy production, electricity interconnections, and infrastructure for LNG, hydrogen, and other low-carbon fuels. By combining Greece's geographical advantages and growing energy network with Korea's technological and industrial capabilities, our countries can develop projects that support both energy security and the green transition.

Such cooperation would benefit not only Greece and Korea, but also wider regional connectivity and more sustainable trade between Europe and Asia.

Greece and South Korea have strong academic interests in archaeology, history, classics, maritime studies, and contemporary regional affairs. What measures could expand joint research, student exchanges, field programs, and institutional partnerships in these areas?

Greece and the Republic of Korea possess exceptional academic strengths that are highly complementary. Greece offers unique opportunities in archaeology, classical studies, maritime history, and cultural heritage, while Korea excels in cutting-edge research, technology, maritime studies, and regional affairs. By bringing these strengths together, we can create partnerships that are both academically enriching and strategically valuable.

A practical way forward is to expand university-to-university agreements, promote greater participation in exchange programmes such as Erasmus+, and encourage joint research projects and co-supervised doctoral programmes. Summer schools, archaeological fieldwork in Greece, maritime research initiatives, and faculty exchanges would also provide students and researchers with invaluable international experience.

We are particularly encouraged by the growing interest in Greek language and classical studies at Korean universities, including Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and Seoul National University. This year marked another important milestone in our educational and cultural cooperation, as the first Greek Language Certificate Examinations were successfully held in Seoul in May, attracting an encouraging number of candidates. Likewise, we are seeing all the more Greek students and researchers studying Korean language and history.

Academic cooperation is one of the strongest pillars of our bilateral relationship. The partnerships we build today between our universities and research institutions will help educate the next generation of scholars, innovators, and leaders, ensuring that Greece-Korea relations continue to deepen for decades to come.



Greece is well known in South Korea for its ancient heritage and island tourism. What cultural diplomacy initiatives could introduce Korean audiences to a broader image of contemporary Greece, including its literature, music, cinema, gastronomy, and creative industries?

While Greece's ancient civilization and beautiful islands are rightly admired in Korea, contemporary Greece has an equally compelling story to tell. Cultural diplomacy today should present Greece as a modern, creative, and innovative European country.

One important initiative is to expand cooperation in cinema. The Embassy is already working to promote Greek films in Korea, including through European film festivals, while also encouraging collaboration between the Greek and Korean film industries and institutions.

Literature is another promising area. Supporting translations of both classical and contemporary Greek authors into Korean, encouraging participation in international book fairs, and organizing exchanges between Greek and Korean writers would help introduce Korean audiences to Greece's vibrant literary tradition.

Greek gastronomy festivals could also introduce Korean audiences not only to our Mediterranean cuisine but also to Greece's exceptional wines, produced from indigenous grape varieties such as Assyrtiko from Santorini, Xinomavro from Naoussa, and Agiorgitiko from Nemea, which are increasingly gaining international recognition.

Ultimately, the goal of cultural diplomacy is to demonstrate that Greece is not only the birthplace of European civilization but also a dynamic, outward-looking country that continues to create, innovate, and contribute to Europe's contemporary cultural landscape.

U.S.–DPRK Dialogue: Prospects, Challenges, and South Korea’s Role

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Introduction

The prospects for renewed U.S.–North Korea dialogue appear to be growing, given President Donald Trump’s expressed interest in dialogue and South Korea’s efforts to create favorable conditions for a potential meeting. The Lee government has strongly supported renewed dialogue, emphasizing that South Korea should help facilitate contacts between Washington and Pyongyang rather than remain a passive observer. This approach is closely connected to a phased strategy toward denuclearization: halting further advances in North Korea’s nuclear and missile capabilities in the short term, progressively reducing its existing capabilities in the medium term, and ultimately working toward a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.

This emphasis on dialogue reflects a broader approach to peace on the Korean Peninsula. Rather than treating complete denuclearization as an immediate precondition for engagement, the Lee government places greater emphasis on reducing tensions, restoring channels of communication, and creating conditions under which more substantive negotiations can gradually take place. Renewed U.S.–DPRK dialogue could therefore serve not only as a means of addressing the nuclear issue but also as an initial step toward rebuilding political trust, improving inter-Korean relations, and eventually establishing a more durable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

The history of U.S.–DPRK and inter-Korean relations, however, provides reasons for caution. Since the 1990s, periods of diplomatic engagement have repeatedly produced important agreements and temporary improvements in relations, only to be followed by renewed confrontation, mutual distrust, and further advances in North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs. The question faced by the South Korean government at the moment is therefore not simply whether dialogue can be resumed, but whether renewed engagement can be translated into a more stable and sustainable political relationship.

Prospects for Renewed Dialogue

Efforts to promote U.S.–DPRK dialogue are by no means new. During the Moon Jae-in administration, the two sides held historic summit meetings in Singapore in 2018 and Hanoi in 2019, with the South Korean government actively facilitating dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang. Although these meetings generated considerable expectations, particularly following the Singapore summit, they ultimately failed to establish a sustainable process of denuclearization and normalization. The breakdown of the Hanoi summit was followed by a gradual deterioration in U.S.–DPRK and inter-Korean relations.

Nevertheless, expectations surrounding summit diplomacy have never entirely disappeared. They have again gained prominence as the Lee government has emphasized dialogue and engagement as important instruments for managing relations with North Korea. Underlying this position is a broader liberal expectation that sustained interaction can contribute to peace and stability. Dialogue is important not only because it provides an opportunity to negotiate immediate security issues but also because repeated interaction may reduce uncertainty, generate common interests, and establish expectations of continued cooperation.

Functionalist and neo-functionalist approaches offer valuable insights for this expectation and have indeed underpinned the so-called Sunshine Policy. Functionalism, above all, suggests that practical cooperation over specific functional needs can gradually weaken political divisions by demonstrating the benefits of cooperation. Neo-functionalism further develops this logic through the concept of spillover, whereby cooperation initially established in one sector may create incentives and pressures for cooperation in related areas. Applied to the Korean Peninsula, cooperation in relatively less politically sensitive areas—including humanitarian assistance, family reunions, tourism, sports, and economic exchanges—could potentially generate interests and routines that facilitate cooperation in more politically sensitive areas.

Constructivism offers a related but distinctive argument. Cooperation can change not only the material interests of states but also how they understand one another and themselves. From this perspective, sustained interaction may gradually transform a relationship in which the other is regarded as an enemy into one in which it is regarded as a rival or potentially even a partner. Dialogue and engagement can therefore be understood as social processes through which adversarial identities and expectations may change over time.

Such expectations have informed successive South Korean governments' efforts to engage North Korea through summit diplomacy, economic cooperation, and the like. The United States has likewise periodically pursued direct negotiations with Pyongyang. Yet these efforts raise a fundamental question. Despite the expectation that interaction may reduce hostility and gradually transform adversarial relations, the past history of engagement marked by renewed confrontation now prompts us to question whether the quantity of interaction itself matters, or if not, what kinds of political and institutional conditions should guide the interaction of parties concerned.

Systemic Compatibility and Ontological Security

The experience of the Korean Peninsula demonstrates that interaction does not automatically produce convergence, and understanding this outcome requires closer attention to the relationship between systemic compatibility and ontological security. Above all, systemic compatibility, which refers to the degree to which interacting states share or can mutually accommodate fundamental political, economic, and social principles, can be an important prerequisite for interaction to produce positive results. The European experience in this regard illustrates the significance of this condition. Early European integration developed among states that, despite substantial national differences, increasingly shared broadly compatible commitments to representative democracy, market-oriented economies, and the rule of law.

The point is not that cooperation requires identical political systems, but that a sufficient degree of compatibility makes sustained interaction less threatening to the political identity and legitimacy of participating states. Cooperation can then become routinized, generating what may be described as basic trust and increasingly stable expectations concerning the behavior of the other. It is here that systemic compatibility becomes closely connected to ontological security. States seek not only

physical survival and material interests but also continuity in their understandings of who they are. Where systemic compatibility is relatively high, interaction can be incorporated into existing self-narratives without fundamentally challenging identity continuity. Cooperation can consequently become routinized and gradually reinforce expectations of peaceful interaction.

Where systemic compatibility is low, however, interaction may produce the opposite effect. Encounters with a fundamentally different political and social order can make differences between Self and Other more visible and challenge established understandings of political legitimacy and identity. Instead of transforming identities through interaction, cooperation may encourage actors to reaffirm precisely those identities that distinguish them from one another.

This mechanism is particularly relevant to the Korean Peninsula. North and South Korea share a common historical and national background but have developed profoundly different political, economic, and social systems. South Korea's political identity has increasingly become associated with liberal democracy, a market economy, and pluralistic civil society, whereas North Korea has maintained an authoritarian socialist order centered on regime sovereignty, self-reliance, and military strength. Moreover, the legitimacy of each Korean state has historically developed partly in opposition to that of the other. Interaction consequently takes place not simply between two states with different interests but between political systems whose identities and claims to legitimacy have long been mutually implicated.

Increased contact may therefore expose systemic differences rather than automatically overcome them. North Korea may respond to greater interaction by reaffirming narratives of strong and prosperous nuclear state, while South Korea may similarly reinforce its liberal-democratic identity. Under these conditions, systemic incompatibility can generate an ontological security dilemma. When one side responds to identity uncertainty by strengthening its own self-narrative, the other may perceive those practices as a challenge to its own identity and legitimacy and respond by reaffirming its own identity. Each side's attempt to restore ontological security can thereby increase the ontological insecurity of the other.

South Korea's Role

Renewed U.S.-DPRK dialogue may have important political and security implications for South Korea's role. If the primary problem were simply insufficient interaction, Seoul's principal task would be to facilitate as much dialogue and cooperation as possible. Yet if the durability of engagement depends on systemic compatibility and ontological security, South Korea's role must extend beyond that of a simple intermediary between Washington and Pyongyang, and there are a number of ways in which South Korea can make its own contributions.

First, South Korea can serve as a facilitator of U.S.-DPRK dialogue. Given the present difficulty of restoring direct inter-Korean dialogue, renewed communication between Washington and Pyongyang may offer an opportunity to resume broader negotiations down the road. Seoul can help narrow differences over the conditions and sequencing of negotiations and prevent misunderstandings from closing diplomatic opportunities before substantive talks begin. Its role in this sense is not to determine the outcome of U.S.-DPRK negotiations but to help maintain the political space that allows negotiations to continue.

Second, South Korea can help promote a phased and reciprocal process of tension reduction. The history of negotiations with North Korea suggests the difficulty of resolving the nuclear question through an all-or-nothing approach. An initial halt to further nuclear and missile development, followed by gradual reductions and eventually denuclearization, can provide a longer time horizon within which reciprocal actions and verification mechanisms can develop. The significance of such



an approach lies not only in its immediate security effects but also in its potential to create repeated and predictable interactions. Small but implemented agreements may be more useful for rebuilding confidence than ambitious agreements that subsequently collapse.

Last but not least, it is necessary to recognize the ontological dimension of engagement. Cooperation is unlikely to become sustainable if either side understands it as threatening its effort to preserve its identity. Seoul therefore needs to distinguish between seeking behavioral change and appearing to seek transformation of the North Korean regime itself. This does not require South Korea to abandon its own political values. On the contrary, it requires recognition that sustainable cooperation is more likely when engagement does not immediately create existential uncertainty concerning the biographical narratives of the other side, let alone physical survival. Reducing such existential anxiety can help prevent political and economic interactions from being interpreted solely through an exclusively zero-sum framework and becoming trapped by the ontological security dilemma.

From friendship to strategic partnership: The significance of President Lee Jae-myung's state visit to France

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Introduction: Beyond the Celebration of 140 Years

President Lee Jae-myung's visit to France from September 6 to 9, 2026 came at an ideal moment to take stock of relations between France and South Korea. The two countries are celebrating 140 years of diplomatic relations, but the visit was interesting for another reason: it showed just how much the relationship has changed. As a French language educator who has lived and worked in South Korea for more than two decades, I approach this relationship less from the perspective of a geopolitical specialist than as a long-term observer of the exchanges between the two countries.

France and South Korea have long enjoyed good relations, particularly in trade, education and culture. Yet they have rarely been among each other's most obvious strategic partners. France naturally looks first towards Europe, while South Korea's main diplomatic and security concerns are concentrated on Northeast Asia and its alliance with the United States.

The frequency of recent meetings between Presidents Emmanuel Macron and Lee Jae-myung therefore deserves attention. Macron made a state visit to Seoul in April, the two leaders met again at the G7 summit in Évian in June, and September brought another high-level meeting in Paris.

More importantly, the agenda has changed. Artificial intelligence, semiconductors, quantum technology, nuclear energy, aerospace and defense now feature alongside the more traditional cultural and economic relationship. Two geographically distant countries are finding more reasons to work together.

From Technology Transfer to a More Balanced Partnership

Looking back at the history of Franco-Korean relations helps to measure how much has changed.

One interesting comparison can be made with the early 1990s, when François Mitterrand travelled to South Korea as France was competing to supply the technology for the country's future high-speed railway. The eventual choice of French TGV technology involved extensive technology transfers and Korean participation in the construction of what would become the KTX network.

The episode also became connected with a much older and more sensitive issue: the Oegyujanggak royal manuscripts. They had been taken from Ganghwa Island by French forces during the 1866 military expedition launched in retaliation for the execution of French Catholic missionaries. During his 1993 visit, Mitterrand symbolically returned one manuscript. The 297 volumes eventually returned to Korea in 2011.

More than thirty years later, the contrast is striking. In the 1990s, France could still appear primarily as a provider of advanced technology to a rapidly developing South Korea. In 2026, the relationship

is far more balanced. South Korea is itself a major technological and industrial power, with leading companies in semiconductors, electronics, batteries and shipbuilding.

The results of Lee's visit reflect this transformation. Sixteen agreements and memoranda of understanding were announced, covering defense, aerospace, artificial intelligence, semiconductors and quantum technology, nuclear energy, industrial competitiveness, intellectual property, space and culture.

The story of Franco-Korean relations is therefore no longer mainly one of technology being transferred from France to Korea. It is increasingly one of two advanced economies bringing different strengths to the table.

Technology, Industry and Energy: A Practical Partnership

Technology was clearly one of the main priorities of the visit. Artificial intelligence, semiconductors and quantum technologies are no longer simply commercial matters. They are increasingly connected to national security, industrial competitiveness and the need to avoid excessive dependence on a limited number of suppliers.

One concrete example was the agreement between Samsung Electronics and the French artificial intelligence company Mistral AI, illustrating the potential complementarity between Korean industrial strength and France's developing AI sector.

Neither country can realistically expect to develop every important technology independently. Recent disruptions to global trade and supply chains have also demonstrated the risks of relying too heavily on a small number of countries or companies. Closer Franco-Korean cooperation therefore makes practical sense. It is not about turning away from existing partners, but about having more of them.

Energy follows a similar logic. Nuclear cooperation was included among the agreements reached during the visit, while a bilateral economic roundtable brought together around twenty French and Korean companies to discuss AI and quantum technology, the energy transition, health and decarbonization.

For both Paris and Seoul, diversification can reduce risks while maintaining an open international economy.

Security Cooperation, but Not a New Alliance

Defense and security were another important part of the visit. France and South Korea agreed to strengthen exchanges between their armed forces and defense industries, while cooperation on sensitive information, exercises and interoperability is also developing.

France's growing interest in the Indo-Pacific gives these developments additional importance. French military deployments such as the Pégase missions, including stopovers in South Korea, demonstrate that Paris increasingly considers the region part of its strategic environment.

However, it would be easy to read too much into this development. France is not becoming an alternative to the United States for South Korean security, and there is no Franco-Korean military alliance in the making. The alliance with the United States remains fundamental to South Korea's defense. France instead offers another significant partner and another channel for cooperation.

France's idea of "strategic autonomy" therefore requires some caution when applied to South Korea. The geopolitical situations of the two countries are simply too different. Nevertheless, both recognize

the usefulness of maintaining a range of partnerships and preserving room for maneuver. Strong alliances and diversified partnerships do not necessarily contradict each other.

Culture, Education and a Missed Opportunity

Culture was also an important part of President Lee's trip. On September 7, Lee and Macron co-chaired the Lumière Summit in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, with France and South Korea each announcing plans to mobilize €500 million over five years in support of their respective film and audiovisual sectors.

This cooperation makes sense. France has traditionally defended cultural diversity and supported its cinema industry, while South Korea has developed an extraordinarily successful cultural sector. Both countries also face similar challenges from streaming platforms, changing viewing habits and generative AI.

There is, however, another aspect of cultural relations that deserves attention: language.

Having taught French in Korea for more than twenty years, I have personally witnessed the gradual weakening of its position. In 2006, 7,449 candidates took French as part of the Korean College Scholastic Ability Test. By 2025, that number had fallen to 2,403 — a decline of almost 68 percent.²

French is certainly not alone in facing this problem, and Japanese and Chinese now dominate much of the second foreign language provision. French nevertheless retains a significant presence. French government estimates put the number of learners in Korea at around 43,500, including approximately 26,000 pupils in 90 high schools and 6,500 students in 54 university departments.³

The issue is therefore not the disappearance of French, but the erosion of a position that was considerably stronger twenty years ago. This is not a criticism of President Macron alone: the trend has developed under successive French governments. Nevertheless, a state visit celebrating 140 years of diplomatic relations could have given linguistic cooperation a more visible place.

There have been positive initiatives to encourage academic and scientific exchanges. But from a French perspective, I would have liked to see greater ambition for the promotion of French in Korea: more partnerships between universities, more twinning arrangements between secondary schools, joint student programs and stronger support for French-language education.

These initiatives may be less spectacular than cooperation in AI, energy or defense, but over the long term they matter. Diplomatic relations are maintained not only by governments and companies, but also by people who know the other country, understand its culture and, ideally, speak its language.

Promoting French culture while allowing the French language to lose ground would be a rather paradoxical form of cultural diplomacy.

² French in the Korean CSAT: 7,449 candidates took French in 2006, compared with 2,403 in 2025. The figures correspond to participation in the French I component of Korea's College Scholastic Ability Test.

³ French Ministry of Higher Education and Research, CurieXplore, Republic of Korea country profile: approximately 43,500 learners of French in Korea, including 26,000 pupils in 90 high schools, 6,500 students in 54 university departments and 11,000 learners in private language institutions.



From Symbolism to Substance

State visits inevitably contain a great deal of symbolism. Ceremonies, declarations and agreements are part of the exercise. The more important question is what remains once the visit is over.

The September meetings showed that France and South Korea now have more reasons to cooperate than they did even a decade ago. Technology, energy, defense and economic security have joined culture, education and trade as important parts of the relationship. Not every agreement will produce immediate results, and the real test will be implementation.

But there is also a more human dimension to this relationship. As a French citizen who has lived in South Korea for more than two decades, and as the father of a child who has grown up between both cultures, I cannot see closer relations between France and Korea only in terms of diplomacy, trade or strategic interests. They also represent something much simpler and, perhaps, more important.

The relationship between our two countries is a reminder that nations do not have to become alike in order to grow closer. France can remain France and Korea can remain Korea, each preserving its sovereignty, language, culture and identity, while learning from the other and building something together. The same is true of people. When cultures meet, they do not necessarily lose themselves; they can also enrich one another.

At a time when international relations are too often described through rivalry, division and confrontation, this may be the most optimistic lesson of the 140th anniversary. Cooperation between countries is ultimately also about people meeting, understanding each other, living together and sometimes building families that belong naturally to both worlds.

After 140 years of diplomatic relations, France and South Korea have plenty of shared history to celebrate. If the relationship continues to bring their people closer while allowing each country to remain fully itself, then its significance goes beyond the agreements signed during a state visit. It becomes, in its own modest way, an example of what international relations can achieve at their best.

Soft Power and Human Mobility between Korea and Thailand

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Introduction

Recent mobility between Korea and Thailand has rapidly expanded beyond short-term, tourism-oriented visits into a multi-layered pattern encompassing study, employment, long-term residence, and settlement. The resumption of cross-border movement following COVID-19 has further accelerated this transformation, suggesting that bilateral exchanges are entering a stage of structured and sustained connectivity rather than one-off interactions.

These changes cannot be fully explained by conventional theories of international migration, which emphasize economic and institutional factors such as wage differentials, labor market demand, and visa regimes. Instead, recent mobility patterns reflect a more complex phenomenon in which non-economic factors—such as cultural appeal, national image, and social perceptions—play an increasingly significant role.

Recent migration scholarship has moved beyond explaining mobility solely as a product of economic rationality. Instead, there is growing theoretical interest in understanding migration as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon driven by aspirations, imagination, cultural appeal, and socially constructed perceptions and values. Notably, Carling and Schewel propose a distinction between the “capability” to move and the “aspiration” to migrate. From this perspective, while structural constraints and institutional conditions define the feasibility of movement, the point of departure for migration can be found in the stage where expectations, symbolic images, and the social imaginary regarding a specific country are formed.

This paper draws on recent theoretical approaches that distinguish between “migration capability” and “migration aspiration,” focusing on the role of soft power as a key variable shaping aspirations in the pre-mobility stage. Focusing on Korea–Thailand relations, this paper examines how cultural content and national image shape individual migration pathways.

Changing Patterns of Korea–Thailand Mobility

The mobility of Koreans to Thailand has rapidly expanded beyond traditional retirement migration into lifestyle-oriented forms such as digital nomadism, remote work, and short-term residential stays, including “one-month living” arrangements. Cities such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai have consistently ranked among globally preferred destinations, leading Thailand to be perceived not merely as a tourist destination but as a viable place for everyday living. A key factor behind this shift lies in the institutional flexibility of the Thai government. Visa policies that facilitate long-term residence, combined with cultural openness, increase the feasibility and stability of longer stays for Koreans and help translate cultural attraction into actual mobility.

Conversely, Thai migration to Korea is also becoming more multi-layered and life-course oriented through diverse pathways, including international students, skilled workers, and marriage migrants. In particular, the positive image of Korea shaped by the Korean Wave (Hallyu) plays a crucial role in strengthening mobility pathways that extend from study to employment and ultimately to long-term settlement.

As a result, human mobility between the two countries is being restructured into a continuous trajectory from tourism to study, employment, and settlement, while also taking on a circular pattern that combines repeated visits with long-term stays. This transformation signifies not merely an increase in the volume of movement but a fundamental shift in mobility itself.

Soft power, unlike military or economic power, refers to the ability to shape the preferences of others through culture, values, and image. In the context of migration, it functions as a symbolic and cognitive resource through which individuals come to imagine a country as “a place to live.” In the case of Korea, the Korean Wave has evolved progressively—from its initial spread centered on television dramas, to global expansion through K-pop and digital platforms, and further into a broader lifestyle domain encompassing film, gaming, and food. With global successes such as BTS, the film *Parasite*, and the series *Squid Game*, Korea has emerged as a global cultural hub. Through this process, Korea has been reimagined not simply as a site of cultural consumption but as a place for education, career development, and self-realization.

Meanwhile, Thailand has actively leveraged soft power through state-led strategies. The so-called “5F strategy,” which centers on food, film, fashion, Muay Thai, and festivals, represents a notable case of integrating cultural resources with industrial and national branding strategies. Thai dramas and BL (Boys’ Love) content often emphasize inclusivity and emotional intimacy, contributing to an image of Thailand as an affectively attractive and socially open society. Ultimately, although Korea and Thailand have developed their soft power through different pathways, both function as key cultural resources that shape migration aspirations.

Soft Power and Migration Aspirations

The soft power of Korea and Thailand does not operate through a one-directional flow but is reinforced within a mutually circulating structure. For instance, the spread of the Korean Wave leads to an increase in Thai migration to Korea, which in turn contributes to the expansion of multicultural experiences within Korean society and the reproduction of cultural content. Conversely, growing interest in Thai culture encourages more Koreans to visit and reside in Thailand, and the sharing of these experiences further strengthens Thailand’s positive image.

Within this cyclical structure, soft power does not directly generate mobility; rather, it creates the conditions under which mobility becomes a feasible and legitimate choice. As a result, Korea is reimagined by many Thai individuals as a space of opportunity, self-development, and upward mobility, while Thailand is perceived by many Koreans as an alternative space in which work–life balance and a more relaxed lifestyle may be pursued.

However, such migration aspirations translate into actual movement only when they are combined with favorable institutional conditions. Visa policies, labor market structures, and the stability of legal residence function as “institutional filters” that shape both the scale and direction of mobility. Recent cases of visa rejection highlight the tension between cultural affinity and institutional realities, suggesting that soft power does not always operate in a uniformly positive manner.

Thai media outlets and online communities have repeatedly reported cases of C-3 and D-4 visa rejections despite applicants having prepared the required documentation. This rapid spread of

negative experiences underscores the gap between Hallyu-driven soft power and rigid institutional barriers. Ultimately, when soft power's mobility aspirations clash with strict controls, cultural affinity may give way to institutional distrust.

Ultimately, human mobility between Korea and Thailand should be understood as an interactive process driven by a combination of cultural appeal and emotional imagination—a phenomenon that cannot be explained solely by traditional economic variables such as wage differentials or labor demand. Soft power serves not only as a background condition that fosters aspirations in the pre-migration stage but also as a cyclical resource that is reproduced through post-migration experiences. In this regard, the bilateral relationship transcends simple cultural diffusion or demographic movement; rather, it can be interpreted as a cyclical structure of mutual influence within a “crossed soft power ecosystem.”

Conclusion

Human mobility between Korea and Thailand can no longer be explained solely by economic factors. Instead, it operates within a dual structure in which cultural attractiveness and national image shape migration aspirations, while institutional conditions—such as visa policies, labor market structures, and residence stability—filter and determine actual movement.

Several key implications emerge from this analysis. First, migration is not merely an economic decision, but a complex process shaped by cultural imagination and emotional motivations. Individuals choose destinations not only based on income or opportunities, but also on how they perceive and feel about a place as somewhere they would like to live. Second, mobility is not a one-time, linear event; rather, it follows a cyclical pattern in which aspirations lead to movement, and lived experiences are subsequently reproduced and shared, reinforcing further mobility. Third, while soft power plays a significant role in facilitating movement, the sustainability of such mobility ultimately depends on institutional trust and the broader policy environment.

Accordingly, future policy approaches should go beyond the mere promotion of cultural influence and adopt a more integrated framework. This includes enhancing the predictability of visa systems, ensuring the stability of residence, and strengthening social integration policies for migrants. Only when these elements are effectively combined can cultural attraction be translated into sustainable patterns of human mobility.

Ultimately, if soft power opens the door to mobility, institutions determine whether those who pass through that door can stay. The development of sustainable and meaningful human exchange between Korea and Thailand depends on the effective integration of these two dimensions.

