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Thank you very much. I am from Russia, which is both European and Asian. We call ourselves a Eurasian nation. I want to say a few words about the issue that has attracted a lot of attention in recent days. I have followed the situation in Korea for almost 40 years. I spent my young years as a junior diplomat in the Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang. Since then, I have visited North Korea many times. The last time I visited was just over a year ago when I participated in the festivities that occasioned the 100th anniversary of the Great Leader Kim Il-sung. But even I will not dare to say that I know what is going on in North Korea.

Korea is a very old problem for the international community in general and for Asia in particular. It is a problem which is still very much alive and lately it has been producing some big surprises, from the so-called Hermit Kingdom in the northern part of the peninsula. As you may know, Korea was called the Hermit Kingdom in the Middle Ages and up to the second part of the 19th century, and North Korea is still the Hermit Kingdom. It is the most closed country in the world. In recent days we were shocked by the news that Kim Jong-un's uncle, Jang Song-thaek, who had been a very strong supporter and mentor of the young leader, was tortured and executed along with many of his subordinates in the party system and the military. Jang Song-thaek was married to Kim Jong-un's aunt, the beloved sister of Kim Il-sung. Both of them played a very important role in Korea over the last 20 years or more.

The elimination of Jang Song-thaek and his supporters therefore might have great consequences. Kim Jong-un shows how cruel and unpredictable he is. His aggressive posture in 2013 and his use of psychological warfare aimed at the West to solidify his power and force concessions from the United States causes great concern. It was initially hoped that the young, western-educated (if we take two years in Swiss school for western education) leader might change the course of his country to a more pragmatic one. He gave rise to such hopes thanks to PR actions aimed at increasing his popularity with the somewhat sceptical population of North Korea. However, the initial push for changes had stalled by the end of 2012 and the question of possible changes in North Korea remains an open one.

In 2013, hard line policies dominated both in terms of internal policies, where repressions were increased, and external policies, where aggressive rhetoric and provocations abounded. Can Kim Jong-un leave things as the old part of the leadership wants? North Korea's political situation with regard to South Korea's continuing strategic goal to absorb North Korea and China's wish to control the North Korean regime does not allow experiments which endanger the security of the regime. Their goals are to preserve the leadership and re-innovate the totalitarian monarchical political system. However, the penetration of information from outside North Korea and the development of market relations have made this increasingly difficult. The population has long lost faith in the regime's ideals and now perceives propaganda as white noise. They have learned how to overcome prohibitions through the use of bribe or interclan relationship.

The regime has so far maintained its stability because for the first time the authorities have, for the most part, left the population alone to pursue their economic interests and personal lives, as opposed to participation in collective efforts, as long as the system is not challenged. The most vivid example of this is the emergence of a middle class, initially in Pyongyang, which is embracing new consumer goods and services. The authorities are trying to ignore this phenomenon rather than regulating it. It is possible that the younger part of the leadership sees this emerging middle class as a new base for the regime whose loyalty is to be cultivated. Hence they are not dealing with this new middle class in a repressive way. This could be a reasonable point of view as this new class has something to lose in the case of a calamity and they are afraid of losing their social status in the event of regime change or reunification. They fear that any unrest could result in South Korea, which is seen as hostile, conquering their country. This does not encourage demands for change.

At the same time, any criticism of the authorities is still not tolerated. The people, despite being given some breathing space, are still afraid to challenge the current state of affairs as the repressive system of North Korea has the harsh systems of feudalism and colonialism as its direct predecessors and the population is simply not aware of any other



form of government. However, to maintain the North Korean state as an independent state the elite has to offer a new national idea, and it should not just be survival by means of strengthening military capabilities. It is relatively easy to reject the imported ideas of communism. The word disappeared from North Korea's constitution in 2009 and the last portraits of Marx and Lenin have been removed from Pyongyang. I witnessed that myself a year ago.

Kim Il-sung-ism and Kim Jong-un-ism more and more resembles religious teachings. Remember that Confucius was a real person. There may be different interpretations of heritage. For a long time the economic reality of North Korea has not been Stalinism, as has often been presumed to be the case. The public sector exists alongside a quasi-market sector with the participation of economic entities belonging to the administrative regional party boards, the security services and the military. There are also joint ventures and free economic zones, which have received new developments in the last year.

For Russia, preventing a conflict on its eastern borders, which could lead to tectonic changes in the geopolitical situation, is of the utmost priority in its Korean policy. Unfortunately, it is questionable whether the goal of the denuclearisation of North Korea is attainable for the moment. Any diplomatic process is therefore only a tool to hedge risks by stopping North Korea from improving its nuclear arsenal and preventing nuclear proliferation. The basic underlying theory of the Russian policy of maintenance is the need for peaceful coexistence in the Korean Peninsula. Russia's relations with North Korea and South Korea are not equidistant. There are divisions on the Korean issue within Russia's elites between liberals, communists and nationalists. The policy is formed by the moderates and guided by Russia's long history of analysis of the situation dating back to the 19th Century and 70-odd years of interaction with North Korean communists.

In principle, in the long run a unified Korean state that is friendly and free of foreign dominance, sandwiched between China and Japan, could be a powerful balance for Russia in the crucial northeast Asian region. It could also be of great benefit in advancing Russia's economic interests in Asia and it could make Russia a significant player in the spheres of energy and logistics as well as in the reconstruction of North Korea. Russia therefore supports both inter-Korea reconciliation and eventual unification, but of course peaceful unification is the only path Russia supports. Forceful absorption of North Korea by South Korea could be harmful to both of the Korean nations and to regional security.

However, the collapse or soft landing of North Korea is not imminent as the third generation's power transfer is going smoothly. Based on that, Russia cannot afford to quarrel with its neighbour, let alone press for its downfall, regardless of how Russia feels towards the brutal North Korean regime. Russia stresses the need to engage Pyongyang not because of warm feelings in Moscow towards the regime or because Russia wants to advance its interests, but simply because this is essential for maintaining security on its borders. The agenda of the diplomatic process should be comprehensive rather than concentrated solely on North Korea's nuclear programme. All issues should be addressed, including the normalisation of relations between North Korea and its neighbours and the global community, including Japan and the United States. Russia calls for a multilateral approach to the Korean issue.

The most longstanding issue on the agenda is to create a new peace and security management system in and around the Korean Peninsula. What might such a system look like? It is obvious that strictly bilateral security agreements with North Korea simply do not work. Examples of this include the agreements made between South Korea and North Korea in summit declarations in 1992, 2000 and 2007, the agreed framework between the United States and North Korea in 1994 and declarations between Japan and North Korea. Thus a durable peace accord should be a multilateral construction which includes the chief actors involved in the situation, namely both Koreas, China, the United States, Japan and Russia. The UN should also act as a supervisor and work on the proposed package deal that could lead to a peace agreement.