

## THIERRY MARIANI

French Member of Parliament for French Citizens Abroad (Asia, Russia and Oceania)

**Choi Young-Jin, Professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies, former Ambassador to the US, former Head of the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire**

“Thank you Mr. Ju for sharing with us Korea's policy and prospective regarding North East Asia and North Korea. Our next speaker is Thierry Mariani of France. He is now Member of the French Parliament for French citizens abroad and co-President of the French-Russian dialogue. He previously served as Secretary of State and then Minister for Transport as well as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan of President Sarkozy. Monsieur Mariani, vous avez la parole.”

### **Thierry Mariani, French Member of Parliament for French Citizens Abroad (Asia, Russia and Oceania)**

As I've said, during my trips, I've witnessed an amazing energy that has allowed these countries to achieve the level of development they have reached today and become, as you said, a key region in the world. The economic dynamism of Northeast Asia, except, of course, North Korea, has enabled them to carry weight on the international stage. South Korea is an example. In the past 20 years or so, it has become an economic powerhouse and a major trading partner of the European Union. Last Friday, the Franco-Korean chamber of commerce held its dinner in Seoul, and the president reminded me that if France's trade with Korea were put into proportion with its population, it is much higher than with Japan, for example.

This performance stems from a number of economic choices and societal realities, including massive investment in education, an open, export-driven economy and a high level of savings and, therefore, investment. South Korea's economic dynamism, integration into the international trading system and high standard of living mean it is no longer overlooked by European companies.

Nevertheless, South Korea also faces the risks of integration into a globalised system, in other words, slowing growth due to the 2009 economic crisis. The downturn has hit China, South Korea and Japan, all three of which are exporting countries. One challenge facing this interdependent area in the coming years will be to ensure its stability despite strong persistent tension. Of course, we know what those tensions are. Korean geopolitics is at the core of Northeast Asia's challenges. The Korean peninsula has been divided for 60 years. It is tense and focuses the attention not only of its neighbours, but also of the entire world, as we saw recently. For example, the absence of Kim Jong-il last September and the flurry of speculation, including by the European democracies, it caused about the North Korean regime's stability show that the Korean peninsula's future represents challenges well beyond Northeast Asia. In recent years, the Northeast Asian countries' policies have more or less expressed an inclination to see the reunification of North and South Korea, although, of course, that has not materialised. President Kim Dae-jung's engagement policy from 1998 to 2003 can be recalled in this regard. The policy, which aimed to avoid North Korea's economic collapse and reintegrate it into the international community, could have helped to ease regional geopolitical strains, strengthening regional security. The beginning of cooperation even pointed to the possible start of a reunification process in the late 1990s, but of course things did not work out that way.

Lee Myung-bak, who was elected in 2008, ended that policy. Yet the return to a policy of confrontation has brought North Korea no closer to denuclearisation. Today, relations between North and South go up and down. On October 6, 2014, a delegation from Pyongyang attended the Asian Games' closing ceremony in Incheon, which could be analysed as a sign of a thaw. The visit raised hopes that the two Koreas would resume bilateral dialogue. The first meeting



since 2007 of senior North and South Korean military officials on 15 October 2014 can also be mentioned. But at the same time, certain facts recall that strains persist. The thaw did not occur and the North Korean question remains unresolved. Despite warnings, the international community also seems unable to ease tensions.

Meanwhile, North Korea has shown an ability to resist. Nobody knows the extent of the people's real backing for the North Korean regime, but the traumatism of a fratricidal war and the memories of a decades-long division against the backdrop of the Cold War mean that some people have gradually come to see the split as normal.

Of course, disagreements in Northeast Asia, including territorial and historical disputes, must be managed and settled peacefully. Attempts at dialogue and negotiation exist. After the crisis in October 2002, when a nuclear weapons programme was discovered, six-party talks between the two Koreas, the United States, Japan, China and Russia were launched in 2003. They aimed to find a peaceful outcome to the security problem raised by North Korea's nuclear programme. The discussions failed because North Korea continued developing atomic weapons.

Today, various hypotheses for dismantling North Korea's nuclear programme can be considered. Chaesung Chun, who teaches international relations at Seoul National University, has ranked them into three groups. The first involves resuming talks in order to identify ways of dismantling North Korea's nuclear facilities and requiring Pyongyang to declare all its nuclear programmes. The second is based on the idea that North Korea will not give up its nuclear ambitions. The third minimises reciprocal actions with North Korea and awaits a positive response to finally begin productive talks.

At this point, I'd like to quickly discuss the hypothesis of talks resuming. It seems to me that despite the difficulties of the first attempts, the six-party talks and multilateral negotiations remain indispensable. Even if the negotiations did not achieve the expected result—they have been deadlocked since North Korea pulled out in April 2009—they have allowed a pragmatic approach.

If talks start up again, the countries at the bargaining table will not only have to set up a denuclearisation process, but also diversify the talking points. As the previous speaker said, the framework of six-party talks can be an opportunity to launch new negotiations on other regional questions, such as maritime issues, environmental protection or economic integration. In other words, even if the talks fail to dissuade North Korea to stop testing nuclear weapons, they can serve as a lever to foster dialogue and strengthen diplomatic, economic or military cooperation. That is one of the strategies the United Nations Secretary General mentioned at the East Asia summit on November 13, 2014. He recalled the need for Asian countries to widen their coordination and consider setting up a new security framework for closer regional cooperation, especially in Northeast Asia. A resumption of talks is plausible. On November 25, 2014, the North Korean leader's special envoy and Russia's President Vladimir Putin agreed to speed up efforts to start six-party talks on Pyongyang's nuclear programme. Last week, Seoul's representative at these discussions was in Russia to discuss the region's security situation with his Russian counterpart. Chinese officials are also very interested in these talks.

In conclusion, North Korea's transformation and integration into the international community, if it comes about, will obviously be gradual. Chung In Moon, who teaches at the University of Yonsei, says it should be encouraged. Economic ties are one way to do that. Take China and Japan, for example. They have their differences, but economic pragmatism wins out. Despite political tension, trade between them has increased. Of course, economic ties will not force them to make their political views converge, but they can be a way to approach the countries of Northeast Asia, especially North Korea, which today does not take part in the global system we know, although China's economic ties with North Korea have grown stronger since the early 2000s. Trade between the Koreas has also grown, to \$1.8 billion in 2008, making North Korea South Korea's second-leading trading partner after China.

The Korean peninsula remains an issue for Northeast Asia's future. Various scenarios still envision the prospect of Korean reunification, no matter far-off that may seem. Having discussed the issue with Korean parliamentarians, I must say that willingness or enthusiasm does not always seem to be in evidence. Of course, everybody wants détente and peaceful relations between the two countries, but both sides seem worried about reunification: German reunification took a while, despite the fact that the economic gap was much narrower than it is between North and South Korea. The return of a Cold War climate would not be helpful to bringing North and South closer together. The



North Korean regime's ability to survive must not be underestimated. Waiting for it to collapse and giving up on dialogue with North Korea would inevitably lead to confrontation, whereas the prospects for dialogue remain open. Thank you.

**Choi Young-Jin, Professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies, former Ambassador to the US, former Head of the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire**

Merci Monsieur Mariani pour votre exposé. On retient deux points de votre présentation : premièrement, Asie du Nord-Est est une région cle dans le monde, et deuxièmement, la division de la Corée, qui ne montre pas des signes de rapprochement tangibles significatifs avec Pyongyang et maintient toujours le programme d'armement nucléaire, reste l'enjeu important de l'Asie de l'Est et au-delà.