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Full Commitment or Indifference?

Moosung Lee, Myongji University

Moosung Lee

Associate Professor

Department of Political Science and Diplomacy

Myongji University.

I.   Introduction

The history of relations between the European Union (EU) and Asia took off in the early 1990s. This can, in part, be attributed to a policy paper entitled "Towards a new Asia Strategy", which was issued in 1994 and pointed to the EU's ambition to play a greater political role in the region (Commission, 1994). The EU's adamant determination to strengthen its presence within Asia has grown more salient over time. To date, some glaring examples can be identified, such as the EU's commitments to the Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) in 1996, ASEAN regional forum (ARF) and the EU-ASEAN partnership. Of particular interest at this juncture is that these diverse forms of regional cooperation/integration possess the potential to make their own contributions not only to the economic prosperity of nations in the regions, but also to enhance security in a region that is otherwise often embroiled in regional conflicts. Just as Diez and Tocci argue in other cases (2009), the construction of institutionalized channels via cooperation among Asian nations, as well as via Asia-Europe interactions, may also contribute to enhanced peace and security across the region, given the latter's success stories.

Yet doubts overshadow the genuine effectiveness of such an approach. The constant dialogues and communications regional cooperation/integration employs for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and constructing co-prosperity are not necessarily conducive to enhancing peace in Asia. To this end, skepticism over the effectiveness of the political role of regional cooperation/integration as a means of dealing with regional conflicts is difficult to overlook. Regional cooperation indeed has no way to punish members who choose not to comply with subsequent norms and rules, and issues of regional conflicts have, in practice, been managed outside regional forums (Haacke and Morada, 2011: 227). More importantly, the EU's contribution remains unclear, given its implicit and explicit preference for "a more interest-based and pragmatic policy path"(Jokela and Gaens 2012: 145).

Against such an equivocal backdrop, this paper asks to what extent and under which conditions regional cooperation in Asia can contribute to the positive transformation of regional conflicts, as well as the role the EU sees itself playing in the process. In order to evaluate the impact of regional cooperation, this paper concentrates its preliminary analysis on the evolution of regional conflicts and extant positions of regional cooperation towards them. In so doing, this study sheds light on the conditions and hidden assumptions that that would more often than not manifest themselves either as possibilities or limits of regional cooperation, which would then serve as benchmarks for actual evaluation later on.

II.   Asia, Regionalism and the EU

Asia's attempts to proceed with regional cooperation/integration similar to that of the EU have been traced back to the onset of the ASEAN in the late 1960s. The inauguration of the ASEAN is undoubtedly a manifestation of Southeast Asian countries' aspiration to secure economic prosperity and regional security. This initial move toward Asian regional cooperation/integration has also spread to the Northern part of Asia, drawing the attention of China, Japan and South Korea. Whether the main catalysts for cooperation are the rise of production networks, a sense of urgency given regionalism in Europe, the loss of momentum in the WTO, the 1997 Asian financial crisis, or the resurgence of China (Frost, 2008: 111-114), regional cooperation observed in Asia will surely have significant implications for economic growth, political cooperation and security assurance: the stabilization of political and security settings that would facilitate economic development is an undeniable rationale behind regional cooperation.

The wide-spread phenomenon of regional cooperation, however, is not homogenous in terms of features. What is observed in Asia can be seen both as regionalization and regionalism. Both phenomena occur simultaneously, but they are different in terms of their evolutionary processes, as well as with respect to the main actors behind them. Regionalism can be defined as 'the political process in which states drive co-operative initiatives', whereas regionalization refers to 'the process of economic integration which is essentially uncoordinated consequences of private sector activities' although it is also influenced by state policies (Beeson, 1995: 971). The former involves top-down, governmental driven and formally institutionalized connections, whereas the latter is

regarded as largely bottom-up, corporate or society driven action (Murray, 2008: 9). By examining different types of regional cooperation/integration, this paper can now pay more attention to the questions of why the current for regional approaches to cope with regional conflicts have tended toward a specific form of regional cooperation, i.e., regionalism, and why alternative forms of regional cooperation built on regionalization have been relatively down played.

Although the dynamics of all these groupings has significant implications, there are also complex sets of conditions and assumptions that have to be sorted out. Are the aforementioned regional entities the same kind of forums? There are similarities and differences. As a matter of fact, some forms of regional cooperation are formulated by reflecting, to a larger extent, the dynamics of sub-national actors, while others are rather an aggregation of nation states, in which a top-down demarche is at the heart of its governance. However, it is still commonly accepted that Asian regionalism has been much more circumscribed in the direction of a superstate (McDougall, 2008: 43). Instead, Asian regionalism has remained as rather intergovernmental negotiations or at best integrated associated that are featured as intergovernmental in nature.

When regional settings that address regional conflicts are mature, the EU's engagements or inputs as a model seem to be meaningful. Yet, we must still be cautious in defining the EU's influence, given that its ulterior motives for engagement can be two-dimensional. When the EU's growth is contingent on Asia's prosperity, the EU's engagement policy in Asia can be viewed as a rational choice, aiming at maximizing its economic and political benefits. Thus, the EU's ambition to exert its political presence often contradicts with the very nature of economic rationality. This is all the more so when considered that the EU's Asian policy also plays a part in its so-called Common Foreign and Security Policy, where it is difficult to muster coordinated support from member states in high politics (Ginsber, 1989).

Contrary to the rationalist account, however, normativist positions also have their own explanatory power. That is, the EU's role can be construed differently if it is part of the development of a broader EU collective understanding of its appropriate role in the world (Smith and Vichitsorasatra, 2007: 114). As a result, the EU's endeavor to promote peace and security in Asia should be viewed as the manifestation of a common identity based on an inter-subjective understanding among member states. This view stresses the

logic that highlights the importance of communication, social learning and understanding within a framework of norms and values, which may be expressed in institutions (Wendt, 1999: 7). Leadership in cooperation and integration can be defined to project its presence globally and regionally while differentiating itself from others. This leadership could function as a 'classic norm entrepreneur', given its normative preference for such soft measures (Manners, 2002). Then, it is necessary to discuss whether EU's experiences, i.e., open discussion, constant dialogue and frequent communication, are prerequisites for peaceful existence among peoples, despite some skepticism that similar habits of dialogue and communication do not necessarily lead to similar results in foreign policy (Portela, 2010:158).

There is no doubt that the EU is described as an important economic partner and stakeholder in regional affairs in Asia, but it is not seriously accepted and treated as a partner in security affairs (Hofmann, 2007: 190). In addition, regional and global actors that directly and indirectly engage in regional-cooperative process do not always appreciate the growing role of the EU. China resists efforts by the EU to intervene directly in political and security issues in Asia (宿亮 2011, 42-50), while the US wants the EU to play a complementary role, *when* it is requested to do so. With respect to Asians, it is hard to streamline their divided interests, which has often stymied the uptake of offers made by the EU. Some of them would call on the EU to speak out more forcefully at higher levels regarding the peaceful settlement of regional conflicts, while others would prefer more careful steps.

Against this backdrop, it seems imperative to review how regional integration demonstrated across Asia would affect the transformation of regional conflicts. To be sure, some critiques enthusiastically suggest that Asian regional forums and cooperation frameworks lack any tangible and actual instruments to incentivize and impose sanctions if any contingencies occur. Even so, this attempt is worthwhile, given that regional cooperation and integration processes themselves would, to some extent, provide an alternative to the rather realist proposition that conflicts can only be managed through self-help.

III. Regional Conflicts, Regional Cooperation and the EU

Of the many sources of conflict in East Asia, North Korean nuclear issues and territorial disputes in the South China Sea seem most prominent. The unreasonable North Korean regime has allegedly developed nuclear weapons to ensure its survival, but these reckless decisions have become a key source of threats, while also serving to increase the potential for conflicts. The rise of China is also a grave concern, since it leads China to assert its territorial sovereignty: this assertive foreign policy line has been manifested in territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Thus, disclosing the evolution of these events is in order not only to show what these are in terms of their nature, but also to provide benchmarks which can be used to investigate and assess how the EU-assisted and engaged integration processes in Asia contribute to easing and, eventually, addressing these saber-rattling activities.

1. South China Sea

1-1. Issues at Stake

The South China Sea is an area comprising over 200 islands, rocks, and reefs, including the Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Pratas Islands, Macclesfield Bank, and Scarborough Shoal. With a large number of states bordering each other within this area, it seems inevitable that littoral countries being embroiled in territorial disputes. Territorial spats over the waters and islands of the South China Sea have thus far occurred among China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. As Asia's most potentially dangerous point of conflict (Wu and Zou 2009, 3), the South China Sea has turned into a flashpoint since the early 1990s with China's intensifying claims to maritime territories in the area.

There have often been head-on confrontations between claimant countries and China. Some of the most contentious cases were Chinese engagement with the Philippines by way of assertive "fishing boat" diplomacy and its territorial disputes with Vietnam over the Spratlys and the Paracels. The renewed Chinese assertiveness has in effect disquieted all the neighboring countries by sparking fears that the projection of Chinese military power into the South China Sea would imperil free access to vital shipping lanes, while disrupting the balance of power in the region (Hund, 2012: 188).

Not only is the South China Sea at the center of territorial disputes, but its strategic significance would also add fuel to the flames of regional conflicts. It is the shortest route connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and serves as a corridor that holds tremendous maritime strategic value (Phan, 2010: 428). So, the South China Sea territorial disputes could easily be escalated into a regional arena for power-jockeying between global actors, such as the US and China, as the United States attempts to wield its hegemonic power in East Asia: the South China Sea is located in a strategic seaway where the American US 7th fleet passes by (Buszynski 2012, 139).

Apart from the geo-strategic implications and questions of national sovereignty, China's claims in the South China Sea have posed substantial threats to the economic interests of virtually all littoral countries. This is largely because the area is supposed to hold huge oil and gas reserves beneath its seabed, although it is hard to produce specific data that quantifies the value of such reserves (Valencia, Dyke, and Ludwig 1999, 9). According to a US Energy Information Administration report, this area is estimated to hold oil reserves of around 11 billion barrels and natural gas deposits of around 190 trillion cubic feet (Lin and Wang 2013). The governments of claimant countries have thus competed to monopolize suspected oil and gas deposits below the ocean floor. This constitutes another important part of maritime border disputes surrounding the South China Sea which would otherwise be obscure (Frost, 2008: 194).

1-2.   The EU concerns and positions

Current approaches to deal with the South China Sea are diverse. Above all, China has generally insisted on bilateral diplomacy in handling disputants. At the heart of this insistence is Chinese nationalism. China does not regard territorial disputes in its adjacent sea as a source for regional conflicts. It would rather see them as national sovereignty issues in which third parties should not meddle (赵锐玲 2002: 110-113; 刘志鹏 2004: 52-57).

The South China Sea is a strategic sea lane in which the US has to consider its national interests. US interests in the issue have become acute, particular for the reason that the US responded with a policy of re-engagement to Asia, encapsulated in the notion of the US 'pivot' pronounced by Barack Obama. This announcement echoed US Secretary of

State Hillary Clinton's speech. In 2010, Clinton stressed that "the United States has a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea" (Clinton, 2011). In its aftermath, the US has reinforced military bases near the ocean around China, and the tussle between the two superpowers for regional leadership has firmly set in (Yahuda, 2012).

China has also maintained obstinate positions, but it seems that it has outwardly been cautious in dealing with the issue: it has struggled to take a more defensive approach in order to dispel the perception of a Chinese threat. So, it has endeavored to release the tension, and advocated the preference of setting aside disputes and joint development for dealing with territorial disputes (Song, 2013: 473-474). In spite of China's moderate policy, there is growing tension between China and its maritime neighbors, because it has publicly recognized that the South China Sea is a disputed and pending issue. In particular, since 2010, China has adopted a more assertive stance regarding territorial and maritime disputes (Casarini, 2013: 194), and it remains to be seen whether and to what extent the hitherto moderate policy proves effective.

The EU recognized the rise of Asia as likely to change the world balance of economic power dramatically, and began to show interest with the onset of the 1990s. Since then, given that the economic and political importance of Asia has grown and Europe's growth is becoming more contingent on Asia's prosperity, ensuring unrestricted navigation in Asia's waterways is of the utmost strategic interest to the EU. Moreover, Asia's geopolitical hotspots will increasingly revolve around maritime zones, and the EU sees it as virtually inevitable to begin engaging in the issue of maritime security in order to prevent growing instabilities in an increasingly integrated Asia. So, the EU has committed itself to enhancing regional security with regard to the aforementioned cases of regional security issues, such as the security of sea lanes surrounding Spratlys (Commission, 1994: 9).

This position is reflected in its official documents. Since the EU announced its renewed commitments to Asian affairs, it has continuously expressed concerns by indicating the South China Sea issue is "one of several longstanding sources of tension or conflict" (Commission, 2001: 6). Up to now, the EU has maintained its basic position and re-called attention to the recent escalation of tensions in the South China Sea that "could have important implications for security and stability in the region, including more broadly for

the freedom of navigation and commerce" (Council, 2012; 19). Thus, it wants to "continue to encourage the parties concerned to resolve disputes through peaceful and cooperative solutions and in accordance with international law (in particular UNCLOS), while encouraging all parties to clarify the basis for their claims" (Council, 2012: 20).

1-3.   Evolution of Regional Cooperation

Individual approaches to the South China Sea issue may vary, as mentioned above. So, it may be alternatively suggested that such issues can be effectively addressed using frameworks of regional cooperation or integration. In this context, the ARF can above all be seen as an ideal venue, where regional conflicts can be discussed, largely because it is the only security-related organization in Asia, which brings together all the countries with a direct interest, including the EU.

The ARF has continuously covered the South China Sea issue in its ministerial meetings since 1994. One of the notable achievements was the signing of the 2002 Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) between ASEAN Member States and China (ASEAN secretariat, 2002). Based on this declaration, it has embodied their collective commitments to promoting peace, stability and mutual trust, and to ensuring the peaceful resolution of disputes in the area. As a method to deal with the issue, it has suggested the continued exercise of self-restraint and the non-use of force by all parties concerned, respect for the universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, and the promotion of confidence-building in this area (ARF, 2012). Notwithstanding such efforts, the ARF roles are limited, as it is not designed to "resolve disputes" (Pham, 2010: 429). Instead, the ARF has sought to promote lasting peace by utilizing confidence-building mechanisms to create trust among its members. In addition, ASEAN countries have avoided taking any steps that would undermine the 'ASEAN' way, which stresses the treaty principle of 'amity and cooperation'. Besides, more importantly, China has resisted external interference in its domestic affairs to a large extent (Weber, 2013: 347).

As member of the ARF, the EU has endorsed a peaceful resolution of the territorial disputes through co-operation in multilateral forums. Specifically, it has "strongly" encouraged full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the

South China Sea adopted in November 2002 (ARF, 2005: 38). When the EU's external representation has been consolidated with the appointment of High Representative after the Lisbon treaty, it has further increased its engagement in ARF discussions on maritime security. A case in point was the organization of an ARF Seminar on Measures to Enhance Maritime Security: Legal and Practical Aspects which were held in Brussels on 19-20 November 2009. The Seminar acknowledged existing efforts in enhancing maritime security, and identified numbers of challenges which should be addressed in order to strengthen maritime security (ARF, 2010: 37).

Southeast Asians appreciate Europe's 'soft power' and civilian dominated approach to its peace keeping missions in Asia. The Asian members of the ARF are particularly pleased with the most recent participation of the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy' in the annual ARF meetings; it is seen as a great leap forward compared to the former representation by local EU member-state ambassadors. (Hofmann, 2007: 189).

The EU has also made a contribution by acceding to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. To meet the demands for more effective regional institutions and to respond to new security challenges, the EU also looks to the ARF to undertake practical steps regarding significant preventive diplomacy tools, particularly making reference to the experience of other regional organizations, such as the OSCE.

However, it is still important to be aware of the fact that the EU's contribution to the ARF has been rather modest. According to several Southeast Asian members, Europe should first of all resolve its own foreign policy commitment and leadership questions if it wants to be an effective and active partner of the ARF. The division between member states over the Union policy towards China is hard to resolve. Further, the EU cannot disregard Chinese warnings against any internationalization of the South China Sea issue. It follows from this that the EU has conspicuously been mute on territorial disputes in the region. Moreover, the very underlying principle of the ARF cannot be seen as helpful. That is, the norm of non-interference, the consensus principle, and the lack of measures to compel others to engage in certain types of behavior would not only constrain policy options, but, for the most part, leave undesirable behavior by a member unpunished (Weber, 2013: 352).

Alongside the aforementioned points, the ASEAN makes its own contributions. Since its

establishment in the late 1960s, one of the concerns of ASEAN has been how to cope with an increasingly powerful China. When China has emerged as a regional hegemon in the early 1990 and beefed up its claims over maritime territories in the South China Sea, the ASEAN was faced with a fundamental shake-up of the regional environment and has therefore been forced to deal with it. In engaging in the South China Sea issue, ASEAN members are divided as to the question of how to balance their interests and strategies, against a backdrop in which China promises to be an invaluable partner for their economic growth, but at the same time, poses a security threat (Pham, 2010: 430-432).

In these circumstances, the South China Sea disputes have created a fissure in ASEAN's unity. Some ASEAN members, such as Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia, have sought to further internationalize the South China Sea issue. When the Philippines and Vietnam were exposed to incidences of Chinese covetousness during the second half of the 1990s, the former solicited collective support from fellow ASEAN members, as did the latter regarding its claims to the Spratlys and the Paracels (Hund, 2012: 189). But non-disputants are reluctant to push China to multilateralize talks regarding the South China Sea, given their preference, among others, to keep the environment peaceful and stable to allow continued economic development. Notwithstanding internal schisms in terms of views and responses, it is still worthwhile to acknowledge that ASEAN has continuously strived to come up with a breakthrough to the dialogue stalemates, e.g., Track II diplomacy that has become an integral part of ASEAN documents since 1994.

In addition, claimant countries, such as Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia, have also appealed to the European Union to lend its support. They called on the EU to speak out more forcefully at higher levels for the peaceful settlement of the issue, freedom of navigation and the rule of law (Asia-Europe Project 2013). At first glance, China is one of the EU's most important trade partners in Asia and imprudence in dealing with China seems unacceptable. A rational choice prioritizing material interests appears to be tactical, considering Chinese insistence that the South China Sea issue is partly a domestic issue. Even so, the EU has adhered to its basic position towards the issue that territorial disputes should be addressed in a peaceful manner. More importantly, it has spoken to the importance of ASEAN as a regional organization contributing to 'a more orderly world' (Council, 2003: 9). This is in line with the EU's basic foreign policy stance, which favors multilateralism in the event of regional conflict. To this end, the EU, in its recent ministerial meeting with the ASEAN, exchanged views on maritime security, while

stressing the importance of promoting cooperation in accordance with international law and UNCLOS 1982 (ASEAN, 2012).

Last but not least, since the inaugural summit meeting in Bangkok in March 1996, the ASEM has acted as an informal meeting that creates an environment for cooperation between members. Its priorities have identified concerted and supportive action in three areas, namely, political dialogue, economic cooperation and social and cultural cooperation. Based on these notions, East Asian countries have been encouraged to address root causes of conflict in a peaceful way, given their shared identity as a community (Hwee, 2007: 187). Yet the South China Sea has not been placed on the official agenda because of Chinese resistance, although members such as the Philippines have continuously insisted on its inclusion (Hernandez et al., 2006). Even so, one of the achievements is the 2012 adoption of "Vientiane Declaration on Strengthening Partnership for Peace and Development". Due to the failure to include such specific words as the South China Sea in the declaration, however, it generally stipulated to 'refrain from the act of threat or the use of forces ...against the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of any state" (ASEM, 2012: 3). Nevertheless, the Philippines attached importance to this Declaration. Manila regards it as an achievement, because it is a positive reflection of what its President underscored at the fourth session of the 9th ASEM in Vientiane, Laos: the territorial dispute in the South China Sea should be among the priorities of the international community and not just of the claimant countries, and any measures taken are thereby significant (KBK, 2012).

Meanwhile, in spite of concerns over the South China Sea Issue that have been raised in other regional forums, such as the ARF, the EU could not mention the issue directly. Even so, it has kept its basic position of peaceful resolutions, as the European Council, President Herman Van Rompuy, recently reaffirmed the Union's full support to the peaceful resolution of disputes in the West Philippine Sea in the ASEM plenary session on regional issues, although the official wording of the issue was 'maritime security in Asia' (Commission, 2012).

2. North Korean nuclear issues

2-1. Issues at stake

North Korea is virtually the only country that is entirely closed to the outside world on the planet. To ensure the survival of its regime, North Korea has stuck to its nuclear weapons development programs. With the end of the Cold War, in particular, the security dynamics rapidly turned worse for Korea due to the collapse of Communist bloc that resulted in the demise of the Soviet Union, as well as to Beijing's wavering commitment (Maass, 2012: 306).

A number of nuclear and missile tests carried out by North Korea have posed serious security threats to North East Asia, led to grave concern for regional conflicts. After a number of failed attempts, North Korea declared in 2009 that it had developed a nuclear weapon. North Korea's success in developing nuclear weapons has immense security threats, but this source of insecurity dates back to the early 2000s. In spite of the rapprochement mood between the two Koreas, the 2002 State of Union Address of US President George W. Bush, which dubbed North Korea an axis of evil, resulted in the 1994 framework of denuclearization collapsing. In 2003, a nuclear crisis occurred when North Korea made an announcement that it would withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). To justify its action, Pyongyang cited the failure of the US to fulfill its end of the Agreement Framework singed in 1994: the treaty prompted North Korea to halt its nuclear program in return for energy aid. North Korea began reprocessing the 8,000 spent fuel rods that had been placed in storage pursuant to the Agreed Framework, soon after the IAEA adopted a resolution in January 2003, condemning North Korea's violations of the NPT (Oh and Hassig, 2004: 27)

In its wake, the Six Party talks were launched to address North Korea's nuclear issue, but its regime security fears were heightened by the invasion of Iraq. As Pyongyang viewed US financial sanctions as a breach of the denuclearization pact that was singed in September 2005, it conducted its nuclear test in October 2006 (Hecker, 2010: 50). Finally, in April 2009, North Korea, under the guise of a satellite, launched a long range missile. Due to the international criticism, Pyongyang announced that it would leave the Six-Party talks and expelled the remaining IAEA inspectors. It finally announced that it became a fully-fledged nuclear power. Most recently, North Korea conducted the third underground nuclear test in February 2013, shortly after the inauguration of Kim Jung-Un regime. This can be viewed as an attempt to stabilize the newly inaugurated regime.

In the meantime, North Korea also conducted several missile tests to demonstrate its delivery system. The missile tests have not only heightened tension in North East Asia, but also drawn keener attention from those outside of the region. As of 2005, North Korea was allegedly equipped with "No Dong" missile, whose target range is 1,400 km. Afterwards, it also developed "Taepodong-1" and "Tagpodong-2" missiles, aiming to extend their target ranges. Finally, Pyongyang confirmed on January 2007 that it had nuclear weapons and, most recently, has also succeeded in launching "Unha" space booster, which could pose security threats not only to Asia, but even to the US.

2-2. The EU's concerns compared to other actors

Facing North Korea's growing security threats, not only neighboring countries but global actors have begun to pay close attention. As a result, the two Koreas, the US, China, Japan and Russia agreed to have individually approached the issue and collectively dealt with it through Six-Party Talks. While these four countries are the main players, the EU should not necessarily be excluded entirely, as it has its own role as a civilian power and North Korea also seems to accept the EU's role as an alternative exit to its stalemate with the US.

Even so, when it comes to North Korea's nuclear issue, it appears that the most influential actors are undoubtedly the US and China. While the former is alleged to have caused the current nuclear crisis in North Korea, according to Pyongyang, the latter seems to be the only ally that appears to persuade the North. Above all, the US, according to North Korea, is the main reason why North Korea could not but help developing nukes in pursuit of its own regime survival. In spite of Pyongyang's accusation that it only holds the key to the solution of the current crisis, however, the US's position on this issue has been quite adamant. Washington basically seeks denuclearization on the Korean peninsula, as well as nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, first if North Korea asks for anything in return (Rozman, 2011: 27-35).

China has a different position from the US, as it has both established a rather firm relationship with both with North and South Korea. As regards North Korea's nuclear aspirations, China basically prefers to maintain the Six-Party Talks in which it has taken

the initiative. Often siding with international stance of resolving the North's nuclear issue through economic sanctions, China has still made very cautious strides. In fact, its primary diplomatic goal has been to create an international environment favorable to its rise in its peripheral regions, such as the Korean peninsula. It primarily prefers to maintain the status quo, i.e., preventing North Korea's nuclear weapon development but not to push it to the brink of collapse due to the nuclear issue (Lee, 2010). As a result, it can be assumed that China still has difficulty in dealing with successive North Korean regimes although it has both political and economic leverage when it comes to its nuclear issue. It is thus open for further debates to define to what extent China could cooperate with US, as well as in what ways it could come to terms with its long-time ally, North Korea. Even so, it seems vital for the role of China in resolving North Korea's nuclear debacles at the moment.

Compared to two major (indeed, global) powers, the EU's position could easily be belittled. However, it is one of the alternative actors that could provide a leeway to break through the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. Not a traditional sense of state, the EU could have easily been excluded as a partner for negotiations, but it has still expressed its strong commitment for engagement. Executive member of the KEDO is a case in point (김학노, 2006: 4). As such, the EU's interests in North Korea's nuclear issue dates back to the early 1990s. When the EU published "Towards a New Asia Strategy", it drew attention to North Korea's nuclear issue by mentioning that "the international tension brought about by North Korea's attitude on nuclear inspections underlines the need to reinforce the efficiency and maintain the credibility of the IAEA's safeguards system"(Commission, 1994: 11). Since then, the EU has sought for both bilateral and multilateral relations to deal with the issue. In particular, a series of political dialogues between the EU and North Korea have served to discuss the issue of nonproliferation, along with other agenda (Lee, 2012: 49). However, as nuclear crises actually occurred since 2003, the EU has begun to acknowledge the direct need of tacking the nuclear issue(박채복, 2003). Therefore, it has started to highlight the North's aspiration to develop nuclear weapons as a serious source of regional conflict, and called it a threat to 'regional stability' (Council, 2003: 4).

The EU's perception of North Korea's nuclear issue can be summarized as two-dimensional. On the one hand, a way of addressing it is to play a constructive role in the promotion of effective multilateralism (Council, 2007: 3; 박채복, 2003: 175). The EU seeks

to address North Korea's nuclear issue by supporting the existing framework dominated by, e.g., the Six party talks, in spite of its critiques of "quite diplomacy" (Berkofsky, 2003: 4). Whenever a nuclear crisis has occurred, the EU stresses that North Korea should reengage constructively with the international community and in particular with member of the Six-Party Talks (Council, 2013). As a result, a multilateral approach within the context of regional cooperation and integration has also become attractive, given that it has already participated in a number of regional forums that directly and indirectly dealt with the North Korean issue.

On the other hand, although the EU exhibits incentives of dialogues when addressing North Korea's nuclear issue, it is also confronted with the dilemma of constructive engagements. The EU wants to show its determination to North Korea that if it would not comply with international 'norms', it would also pursue more rigorous sanctions, in conjunction with the international community. These forms of warnings, in spite of the critiques, have also been seen as an important option in taming the wayward Pyongyang regime. Even so, it is important to note that all the methods, albeit seemingly dissimilar, highlight the very nature of the EU's position vis-à-vis North Korea's nuclear issue. Peaceful engagement is the only possible option available. This tendency, which would work within the regional cooperation process, deserves further investigation.

2-3. Evolution of regional Cooperation/Integration

The nuclear issue imposed by North Korea's aspiration for its regime security is a grave concern that requires regional cooperation in order to be resolved. There are different types of regional cooperation in Asia, depending on purposes and degrees of integration. From loosely institutionalized forms to much more advanced forms, regional cooperation plays its own role and possesses its own implications. Of many, the ASEAN regional forum, ASEM and ASEAN+3 are chosen to assess the extent to which regional cooperation can contribute to the transformation of regional conflicts, given that all of them have actually mentioned North Korea's nuclear issue officially and at least one party of the conflicts are involved as members, thereby permitting the EU's influence to also be measured.

It appears that ARF can play a pivotal role in addressing North Korea's nuclear issue, in

that both North and South Korea are members of the forum and that it is the very venue where formal and sincere discussion about regional security issues are permissible.[1] Thus, ARF has sufficient reasons to engage in North Korea's nuclear issue, as it is of serious concern for regional insecurity. Based on ASEAN-style diplomacy, it stresses non-interference in internal affairs, non-use of force and peaceful settlement of disputes. Instead of settling disputes, it seeks to promote lasting peace by utilizing confidence-building mechanisms to create trust among its members (Weber, 2013: 346). Moreover, since its inauguration in 1994, the ARF considers a nuclear weapons-free zone an essential component that could significantly contribute to regional peace and stability, by way of promoting such confidence-building measures. Under these circumstances, North Korea's nuclear issue has become one of the ARF's main topics since their ARF Ministerial Meeting in 1996 and has remained in the limelight afterwards.

The ARF basically supports multilateral forums through which confidence can be built among parties concerned: the KEDO framework, along with the Six-Party Talks, was at first emphasized as an important mechanism for conflict resolution (ARF, 1995; 2004). So has the EU's position towards North Korea's nuclear issue, whether it is viewed as a part of the forums or not. That is, the EU basically supports dialogue by supporting the inter-Korean reconciliation process, which deals exclusively with such issues of non-proliferation (Commission, 2001: 24). Moreover, both Asian members and the EU want to 'promote an enhanced sharing of experience between Europe and Asia concerning longer-term confidence-building measures (Commission, 2001: 15-16). It is hoped that, by doing so, peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region will be promoted.

Although the ARF sets a condition that North Korea's nuclear issue should be addressed in a peaceful way, its lack of enforcement mechanisms or sanctions should not go unnoticed. In the case of North Korea, for instance, ARF members have so far done no more than express their concern over the DPRK's failure to meet the requirements for a declaration of its nuclear programs and have repeatedly called for progress in the Six-Party talks (Weber, 2013: 353). As a result, the nuclear crises caused by North Korea

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[1] In particular, since 2000 when North Korea was admitted as the forum member, most existing members hope that North Korea's accession was an essential step to achieve both inclusiveness and a deepening of the regional security dialogue (Boyd and Dosch, 2011: 214).

appear to be in practice managed outside of the Forum, in spite of its contribution as an important regional agenda setter (Haacke and Morada, 2011: 227).

Compared to the ARF, the ASEM does not include both of the two Koreas as participants and negotiating partners, nor is it the only place for discussion of security issues. Still, ASEM has served to provide an invaluable platform where East Asian countries are encouraged to resolve conflicts through dialogue and not by force (Hwee, 2007: 187). Not only has it been a venue where countries of the East Asia region can get together, but it has also been a channel where the EU can find the leeway to exert its own views and influence, largely because the Union views ASEM as a forum to gain a stronger foothold in East Asia (Wiessala, 2002: 77).

Thus, the EU could jointly engage in regional security issues through strategic partnerships with key states by way of ASEM, which has provided the Union with a testing ground to support its 'European' values and principles, including the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights' (Jokela and Gaens, 2012). In disseminating its values, the Union has also had recourse regarding its "multilateral and civilian power initiatives" (Casarini, 2013: 188). At the same time, this basic inclination of the Union has also been identified in a manner in which the ASEM achieves its basic objectives: strengthening political and existing dialogues to deal with general security issues (ASEM, 1996). In this regard, issues ranging from conventional security issues, such as nuclear issues in North Korea, to unconventional ones, such as human security, have been addressed by way of dialogues and engagements.

How then has ASEM dealt with North Korea's nuclear issue? As the North Korea's nuclear program has been one of the key agenda items for the ASEM, it has specifically mentioned it, for example, at the tenth anniversary of ASEM inauguration. According to the Chairman's statement, leaders at the ASEM emphasized the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in order to maintain peace and stability, while urging North Korea to return immediately to the Six-Party Talks. In addition, ASEM lends its support to UN Security Council resolution as a way of its participation in the multi-lateral sanctions on North Korea when Pyongyang undertook nuclear tests (ASEM, 2006; 2010). As such, ASEM offers both incentives by emphasizing dialogues, expecting to transform mistrust and confrontation into dialogue and cooperation by returning to Six-Party Talks, and sanctions by supporting the UNSC resolutions. In the process, more notably, ASEM is

willing to reflect the European experiences of successfully transforming their mistrust and confrontation into dialogue and cooperation, and promote multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia (ASEM, 2006).

The ASEAN plus three (APT) also serves as an arena to deal with North Korean nuclear issue. Unlike the ASEM or ASEN, APT does not include the EU as a direct member of the regional cooperation. Yet it is a multilateral dialogue and cooperation process that is making fast headway in devising and announcing new cooperation initiatives, with its scope of membership and geographic extension being deliberately and exclusively East Asian (Hund, 2012: 52). Since the process began in 1997, South Korea and ASEAN member states have issued a joint statement and highlighted the importance of regional security on the Korean peninsula. As partner of the APT, Seoul has particularly described and stressed the ultimate purpose of the APT as providing peace and security in the region and wanted to bring forward the Nuke issue at the APT meetings.

In its wake, the denuclearization on the Korean peninsula, as well as a peaceful and comprehensive solution to North Korea's nuclear issue has continuously been discussed (APT, 2004). Specifically, APT suggests engaging in dialogue with the parties concerned in order to promote mutual confidence, as well as a peaceful and comprehensive solution to the issue. As a feasible solution, the AP has emphasized the importance of the Six-Party Talks that is believed to contribute to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (ASEAN+3, 2004), as well as to serve as a mechanism of cooperation, under the assumption that "regional peace and stability in East Asia is engineerable" (Hund, 2012: 59).

IV.   Conclusion: Implications for further empirical studies

This paper has examined the evolution of the regional cooperation and integration with a view to showing what their current forms signify and how their hitherto trajectory of engagements hold true. With this preliminary objective in mind, this paper has delved into the kinds of regional cooperation/integration that have emerged in Asia, and discussed how they are also affected by the EU that has been positioned as a direct partner in cooperation, as well as a successful precedent to emulate. By doing this, this paper attempts to elucidate the first assumption and related question. That is, is the

current process of regional cooperation/integration, materialized in the forms of ASEM, ASEAN and ARF, relevant in meeting the high demands associated with addressing regional conflicts in Asia? Of course, the positive answer to this question does not necessarily mean that they could effectively resolve or eradicate the potential causes of conflicts. Even so, it is still pertinent to ask once again whether they have provided alternative avenues and methods in coping with the conflicts. If their performance has fallen short of expectations, it is duly required to look into underlying reasons, which might constitute critical impediments. At the same time, it is also necessary to examine the complementary roles played by the sub-national forms of regional cooperation/integration, such as Track II approach, if intergovernmental forms of regional cooperation have not entirely succeeded in realizing their buffering function to ease regional conflicts. In the process, it seems worthwhile to examine the roles and contributions of the EU.

There are also subsequent tasks to be tackled in the wake of reviewing the current status of regional conflicts focusing on North Korea's nuclear aspiration and the South China Sea's territorial disputes, as well as the roles and responses of the aforementioned regional cooperation/cooperation, in which not only the contributions and commitments of Asian countries, but also those of the EU (vis-à-vis other global actors) are demonstrated. In introducing these events, this paper purports to demonstrate to what extent the approaches, which stress dialogue and engagement, have served as effective incentives and/or instruments for the gradual but peaceful settlement of disputes.

Even so, the overview of the approach that regional integration refers to leads us to ancillary questions. Why does regional cooperation/integration in Asia not produce results that are analogous to those which have been expected in the case of the EU? What are the impediments and explanations? To address these questions, the ensuing study is, above all else, required to assess the feasibility and the limits of current methods of engagement, which seem to be agreed upon by both the Asian countries and the EU. In addition, both internal and external politics that might affect the choice of current approaches also need to be studied. In the process, the dynamics of the relationships between these actors should be investigated, along with the impact of the individual actors on the governance of regional cooperation in terms of choice of the approach used to cope with regional conflicts. In the process of carrying out future research, studies based on this preliminary work can serve to determine whether the

current approaches are manifestations of indifference or inaptitude, or an alternative way of full commitment.

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