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## **"The EU in the Eyes of Korea"**

*Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

**Keynote Speech at the Workshop to Mark the Launch of an ASEF Publication  
"The EU Through the Eyes of Asia: Media, Public and Elite Perceptions in  
China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand"**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Europeans and Asians are interacting with each other in an ever increasing range of fields – political dialogue channels between governments, via healthy trade and investment relations and increasingly through social and cultural channels. At the same time, I have the impression that in many ways Europeans and Asians continue to look over each other's shoulders. We do not yet really know each that well. The research in "The EU Through the Eyes of Asia" shows that this appears to be the case in regard to the Europeans and Koreans.

Politicians in both regions follow the key concerns of their voters and populations. If the public, elites and media in each country do not know each their counterparts in the other region or share an interest in those counterparts – initiatives to

deepen cooperation will inevitably lack political impetus. This goes against our interests. The size and inter-dependency of our economies and the nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges such as climate change means that we need substantive cooperation channels that have public and therefore political support.

It is for this reason that I place utmost importance on the work of social-cultural-intellectual strand of ASEM. The Asia Europe Foundation, the EU Centre and the EU Research Centre of Korea University play a vital role in building the understanding between Asians and Europeans. Understanding and interest that is necessary if we are to effectively tackle the challenges and opportunities of our time. "*The EU Through the Eyes of Asia*" serves as an excellent building block to look at how we can increase mutual understanding. I congratulate the authors on an extremely useful piece of research.

The chapter of the book dealing with Korea provides some interesting insights on the perceptions of the EU. In the last ten years, interaction and cooperation between the EU and Korea has grown and deepened significantly. Bilateral political meetings have provided the forum for exchanges of opinion on key security issues of the day including the DPRK, Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan. Bilateral trade and investment have grown. The EU is Korea's second largest export market and EU companies are the largest investors in Korea. Our economic relations will expand further if we successfully conclude the on-going FTA negotiations. Social and cultural interaction between the EU and Korea has also increased - Europe has become a key destination for Korean tourists notably university student backpackers. In sport, we see the ardent followers of *Park Jee-seon United*, ....I mean Manchester United. In Europe Korean films score well in our

top film festivals, while in Seoul one can enjoy the finest European classical music.

Despite, these links, as the research in the book shows, Europeans and Koreans do not yet really know or take much interest in each other. Indeed, it is interesting to compare the emotional reactions to the FTA with the United States, Korea's third largest trading partner and the relative lack of public interest in the FTA negotiations with the EU, Korea's second largest trading partner. Why is this?

Obviously, historical experiences play an important role in public awareness and interest in international issues. Korea avoided the colonial entanglement with Europe that other Asian countries experienced. Of course, this was in some ways fortunate, but it means that traditional linkages with Europe,

especially between elites that we see in some Southeast countries, are missing in the EU-Korea relationship.

The Second World War and the Korean War brought the dominance of the United States and English language into Korea. In political and security terms, the United States remains, at least in the medium term, the key player on the peninsula. The importance placed on English language by Koreans also has reverberations in regard to popular culture and, importantly, choices in overseas education, where we see the overriding preference for North American universities.

On top of this, the EU as it concentrated on its internal integration process and Korea as it focused on economic growth tended to be rather narrowly focused in terms of international relations in the period up to the 1980s and early 1990s.

However, we are now living in different times. The EU continues to build its external identity as a single actor on the world stage. The development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy continues to pick up pace. Moreover, in a globalized world almost all community policies - environment, transport, security and research depend upon external aspects. As the EU has built its external policy instruments, Korea has consolidated its position as a bastion of democracy in Asia and a major engine of the world economy. These developments have brought about an increasing number of common goals and shared values between the EU and Korea.

This has been recognized at the political level. The FTA currently being negotiated will provide a new base to increase competitiveness, jobs and growth in both regions. This year we also plan to launch negotiations for a new basic bilateral

agreement – the Framework Agreement. The new agreement will be designed to facilitate wider and deeper cooperation in range of areas stretching from non-proliferation and terrorism through to cutting edge scientific research and culture.

This brings us to a situation in which one can ask what comes first the chicken or the egg? Substantive cooperation elicits public interest, but cooperation is difficult to build without public interest and subsequent political impetus. The EU needs to work with Korea and other Asian countries in a wide range of areas if we are to effectively deal with the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. Once institutionalized cooperation begins, it will bring increased interaction and with greater public interest and support. But for the cooperation initiatives to enjoy genuine political support there needs to be some form of public interest to begin with.

For the most part the Korean public appears to view the EU positively. However, I cannot help thinking sometimes that we have a situation whereby the Korean and European publics are standing back-to-back, both looking at the US, China, Japan, Russia and the BRIC countries but not really at each other. For the cooperation initiatives foreseen in the Framework Agreement to have real effect, public diplomacy, especially by civil society organizations such as those represented here today will play an important role.

The "*EU Through the Eyes of Asia*" has provided an important starting bloc for us all to consider how we can best contribute to the process of building mutual awareness in Korea and the EU. The public is intelligent. Ultimately, it will only take interest in issues that matter to them. The issues in which the EU and Korea's interests overlap – climate change, economic

competitiveness, sustainable development – not to mention the pleasures we can take from our cultures do matter. I am confident therefore that by working together with organizations such as those represented here today we will succeed in gaining public support to draw the maximum potential from our relationship.

Thank you.