

South Korea's international integration

South Korea is a dynamic participant in the activities of well-established regional organisations and fora in the Asia-Pacific region. The most relevant of these is the ASEAN Plus Three, with a project for a comprehensive economic partnership which could lead to the creation of a trading bloc encompassing half of the global market. The country's economic success is also fuelled by its popular culture spreading widely across Asia – a phenomenon known as the 'Korean wave'.

ASEAN Plus Three

South Korea, officially 'the Republic of Korea' (ROK), is not a member of **ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)**, established in 1967. However, since its establishment as a full-fledged democracy at the end of the 1980s, South Korea has participated alongside China and Japan in the **ASEAN Plus Three (APT)** cooperation process, launched with a first summit in 1997. In the domains of politics and security, South Korea strongly supports ASEAN's commitment to a nuclear weapons-free zone in Southeast Asia, and cooperates with the organisation in the fight against terrorism and transnational crime. In the realm of economic cooperation, the **ROK-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**, which entered fully into force – including a strand on services and investment – in 2009, has resulted in an 80% increase in bilateral trade volume in 2009-13. Moreover, today ASEAN is South Korea's second largest trading partner after China, while South Korea represents ASEAN's third investment destination. APT's most significant achievement to date is the Chiang Mai initiative, a multilateral mechanism for providing liquidity to member countries in the event of a financial crisis, drawing from a common fund to which South Korea was the third biggest contributor (US\$19.2 billion) when the scheme was created in 2010.

South Korea is also involved in the ASEAN-led project for a **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**, aimed at creating the world's largest trading bloc in terms of population, which would cover more than half of the global market and generate about a third of economic output worldwide. Negotiations on the RCEP began in early 2013 and are expected to finish by the end of 2015, covering a vast agenda of subjects such as trade in goods and services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, and dispute settlement. Some estimates rank South Korea third among ASEAN Plus Three countries in terms of the income gains to be derived from the implementation of the RCEP, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

Moreover, South Korea contributes on a regular basis to a range of initiatives to reduce the development gap experienced by less developed ASEAN members, and has pledged to double its ODA (official development assistance) to ASEAN by 2015.

In 2009, South Korea established the ASEAN-Korea Centre, whose objectives cover economic aspects, but also the enhancement of tourism and cultural exchange. Efforts in this regard build on the hallyu ('Korean wave'), the enthusiasm for South Korean popular culture which has swept across Asia since the early 2000s and helping the country establish its soft power in the region. Beyond cultural influence, however, the phenomenon has also helped boost foreign investment and tourist inflows to the country.

APEC

South Korea has been a member of the **APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation)** forum on regional economic integration since it was established in 1989 as an informal ministerial level dialogue, evolving subsequently into an annual economic meeting of the leaders of most ASEAN states and of the Pacific Rim countries (including big players like the US, China and Russia). In 1994, APEC members committed themselves to pursuing a series of targets – the 'Bogor goals' – to liberalise trade in goods, services and investment. At the time, South Korea volunteered to participate in the 2010-deadline assessment process of

these objectives for industrialised economies, despite its status of a 'developing economy'. As for the current 2020 deadline set for developed member countries, APEC's latest [evaluation report](#) on South Korea indicates moderate progress concerning tariff reduction, in particular for agricultural products, but highlights the results achieved in services and public procurement liberalisation, alignment to international standards and rule simplification. Moreover, it underlines the government's efforts to create a fairer competition climate between the *chaebol* (family-controlled [conglomerates](#) which are a specific feature of the South Korean economy) and SMEs.

ASEM

The [ASEM](#) (**Asia-Europe Meeting**), established in 1996, is a forum for dialogue and cooperation between European and Asian countries, working essentially as an [informal process](#). It gathers for biennial meetings alternately in Asia and Europe, the latest, tenth, having taken place in Milan in October 2014. South Korea, which has been taking part in ASEM activities since the beginning, hosted the third [ASEM Summit](#) in October 2000, which was a significant breakthrough in political dialogue, since it took place a few months after the historic [first ever summit](#) of the leaders of the two Koreas in June in Pyongyang. Acknowledging the great importance of the event, ASEM leaders issued a separate [declaration](#) stressing that peace and stability on the Korean peninsula are closely linked to that of the Asia-Pacific region and affirming their willingness to contribute to trust-building measures between North and South Korea. In recent years, cooperation between ASEM and South Korea has focussed on increasing direct connectivity among the research and education poles within Asia and between Asia and Europe through the **Trans-Eurasia Information Network (TEIN)**. Now connecting 20 countries in Asia and 34 in Europe, this high-speed network launched in 2000 is managed by the [TEIN Cooperation Centre](#) in Seoul, as ASEM granted South Korea the right to operate the project's fourth phase. In Milan, ASEM leaders [reiterated](#) their support for TEIN and insisted on exploiting e-infrastructure developed within the TEIN framework for new Asia-Europe projects in areas such as e-learning, e-science, e-health and e-government.

Reinforcing Asia-Europe connections is also at the core of South Korean President Park Geun-hye's [Eurasia initiative](#), calling for the establishment of a huge network encompassing rail and road transport, trade and energy infrastructure, and stretching across Russia, China and Central Asia to Europe ('from Busan to London'). This [new Silk Road](#) project could also induce North Korea to open up, allowing South Korea's rail network to connect to Russia's Trans-Siberian railway, with the long-run strategic aim of reuniting the two Koreas. In her bid to gain [support](#) for this ambitious plan, Park presented it to her country's partners at the Milan Summit and got reassurance that organising a [conference](#) in South Korea on an effective Eurasian inter-modal transport and logistics network was on ASEM's agenda for the future.

Other regional fora and institutions

South Korea has been taking part in [ARF](#) (**ASEAN Regional Forum**) since its creation in 1994. Initiated by ASEAN with a wider membership including the EU, the US, China and Australia, among others, ARF is a multilateral forum for dialogue on security and defence issues focussing on disaster relief, maritime security, peace-keeping, non-proliferation and disarmament, counter-terrorism and transnational crime. South Korea currently holds the [co-chairmanship](#) of the Inter-sessional meeting on Maritime Security.

South Korea is among the founding members of the [ACD](#) (**Asia Cooperation Dialogue**) forum, which was inaugurated in 2002 encompassing countries from the Far East, South and Southeast Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. Today ACD comprises 32 members and operates in two dimensions: dialogue and projects. The dialogue dimension aims at consolidating Asian unity and strengthening the 'voice of Asia' in the international arena. The project dimension involves different member countries promoting cooperation in areas such as energy, agriculture, biotechnology, poverty alleviation, IT development and e-education. Since 2002, South Korea has been in charge of developing an array of [IT cooperative projects](#) designed to bridge the digital divide among the ACD states.

Finally, South Korea has been a member of [ADB](#) (**Asian Development Bank**) since its creation in 1966. ADB is dedicated to alleviating poverty in the Asia-Pacific region through inclusive economic growth and regional integration with instruments such as loans, grants and technical assistance. Since 1966, South Korea has [contributed](#) a total of over US\$609 billion to ADB's special funds, as well as to other funds designed to reduce the digital divide and foster information sharing and knowledge in developing countries.