MISSION REPORT

following the 5th EU-DPRK Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM), 28 October- 3 November 2018, Beijing/Pyongyang

Delegation for relations with the Korean Peninsula

Members of the mission:
Nirj Deva           (ECR) (Leader of the mission)
Bruno Gollnisch    (NI)
Michael Detjen      (S&D)
**Introduction**

The Delegation for relations with the Korean peninsula conducted a mission to Beijing and Pyongyang from 28 October until 3 November 2018.

The aim of the mission was to conduct the 5th Inter-parliamentary Meeting (IPM) between Members of the Supreme People’s Assembly and Members of the European Parliament, and to acquire first-hand information about the situation in the country and the status of EU political cooperation in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). The delegates also had meetings in Beijing both before and after the visit to DPRK, in order to collect first-hand information from Chinese experts and to debrief about the outcome of the visit to Pyongyang to both the EEAS, Chinese experts and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The visit was initially scheduled for 16-20 July 2018, but was cancelled following a last minute (July 9) DPRK decision to postpone it. This being the very first direct contact during this mandate between DKOR, or any other EP body, and the DPRK, the mission provided a much-needed opportunity to engage the EP in DPRK. It also contributed in shaping the EU’s profile in the country, currently quite low.

Meetings took place with the director of the key International Department of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea, the Vice-Minister of foreign affairs, the Vice-Minister of external economy, the Speaker of the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA), the formal IPM with the SPA Friendship Group, and others.

The final programme in North Korea, mostly disclosed upon arrival, focussed on four areas: meetings with DPRK authorities, visit to Pyongyang facilities, visit to EU humanitarian projects in the countryside (about 4.5 hours driving from Pyongyang) and EUMS presence.

The Supreme People’s Assembly expressed the wish to soon visit Brussels soon and, if exceptionally authorised, an incoming IPM could be held during the first part of 2019. The SPA also expressed the wish that the EP President and AFET Chair visit Pyongyang. This is an interesting invitation after years of a de facto frozen bilateral relationship.

It should also be said that the timing of the delegation was on the one hand very appropriate given the current political developments in the region, but on the other hand quite unfortunate, falling close to the end of the EP legislature, which limits or prevents a number of potential actions.

**Context and general overview**

“Confrontation is coming down” (the Chair of the SPA Friendship Group with the EU)

The visit took place at a crucial juncture, with North Korea facing severe sanctions and an overall evolving political situation in the Peninsula, following the Singapore Summit and the recent visit by President Moon Jae-in to Pyongyang in September 2018.

While in October 2017 the country seemed close to an outbreak of war under an extremely tense situation, just one year later the entire picture had dramatically changed. Subject to both international sanctions, among the most severe ever inflicted on a single country, and a monolithic totalitarian State, the delegation expected to find a broken country and a depressed society. Yet, at first sight, the DPRK capital appeared a remarkably modern and efficiently run city of two millions habitants, with clean roads, well-functioning public transport, parks, new
infrastructures, decent residential buildings, fully furnished restaurants, etc., not only in the central but also in the suburban areas. Certainly not at all seduced by the dictatorial shape of the city (a bubble in the bubble, the location of a privileged two millions habitants mostly very loyal to the regime), the delegation was surprised to find Pyongyang a capital more advanced than other ones in the Asian continent. The delegation visited a fully furnished and first class rehabilitation centre for disabled people, an astonishing “School Children’s Palace” with up to one hundred simultaneous classes of music, ballet, calligraphy and other cultural training for young people, and a perfectly working electric cables factory, with first class services for workers (sauna, beauty centre, sporting and cultural facilities). Propaganda monuments and pictures of the supreme leaders are disseminated everywhere, but there is never visible hostility, also in terms of statues or other public images, towards South Korea, Japan, USA, UN or PRC. During a field visit to the countryside, approximately 4,5 hours driving to the eastern port of Wonsan and the County of Anbyon, the landscape was marked by cultivated land and farmers’ houses, with no apparent sign of particularly severe poverty. Contrary to expectations, the protocol was relatively relaxed - for instance, photo restrictions were minimal - and the delegation could perceive, both in the capital and in the countryside, a lively, talkative and non-despondent population, with strong dignity, pride, kindness and no complex in dealing with foreigners, including a surprising sense of humour.

The policy of the American Administration and the recent direct talks and goodwill initiatives with the Republic of Korea, such as an increase of people-to-people exchanges or the planned resuming of a railway connection are creating a dynamic situation with a mix of expectations and a fundamental lack of clarity of the entire process. No public debate is possible in DPRK and the entire political strategy is in the hands of the Supreme Leader and of a restricted circle. Little, if nothing, is communicated to the population beyond a few announcements on “national reconciliation and pride” with the South and on achievements in economic advancements. The delegation felt that not only the DPRK citizens, but also most of the international community faces a general ambiguity on what is exactly at stake in the actual agenda related to North Korea.

**Sanctions**

“People suffer in this country, and people suffer even more from the sanctions” (EUMS ambassador).

Interestingly, DPRK interlocutors never displayed a complaining approach and at no point during the meetings blamed the UNSC, the USA or any other actor, of unfair treatment. They rather insisted on the fact that DPRK has now achieved its security strategy - through the development of its nuclear program, which they never explicitly discussed - and now focuses on national prosperity. They pointed out that although sanctions have an impact on the implementation of economic plans, the DPRK is used to having developed a strong self-reliance system. In particular Mr Tong Kyong Chol, of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea, emphasised this aspect; the visit of the delegation to the perfectly working cable factory and to first-class Mansu Rehabilitation Centre were indicators that such a position has some ground, at least for Pyongyang.

When asked which sanctions the DPRK would like to see removed first, the monotonous answer of its representatives was that this is not the point, rather there was a need to first see “confidence building” measures. Therefore, the request was, as a first step, to increase bilateral contacts, rather than to remove specific sanctions. As confirmed by EUMS diplomats, the main
impact of existing sanctions is more on the poorest sections of the population than on the ruling elite.

On the EUMS side, there was no unanimous evaluation of the merit of imposed sanctions. Voted at the UN, sanctions are perfectly legal from an international law point of view and all EU member states fully implement them. However, some EUMS diplomats ruled out the possibility of easing sanctions in the absence of concrete steps by the DPRK in the denuclearisation process, while others considered that there is no evidence that they produce any significant impact on the political decisions of the Central Committee but could even reinforce a strong sense of pride. Such different views are mirrored also in the approach of the region: RoK would be in favour of a more relaxed approach in order to gain more mutual trust between the parties, contrary to China and Japan.

Beijing recently resumed direct flights to Pyongyang (the only other international destination for the modern and underused airport being Vladivostok) and plays a crucial role in the implementation of sanctions, controlling the main access to the DPRK, which is subject to slow and strict custom procedures. China has room in the implementation process, but when asked about the exact state of play of the PRC’s sanctions policy on the DPRK, the Chinese experts met by the delegation in Beijing were not able or willing to disclose detailed information. The impression is that a grey zone exists.

Humanitarian activities also face serious constraints due to sanctions. The delegation Members visited a number of EU projects in Anbyon County, about 4.5 hours’ drive from Pyongyang: a greenhouse to provide food security in wintertime, a drinking water plant, a food process factory. With a well-educated working class and several skilled technicians, the DPRK could develop such facilities on its own, but in this case, the impact of sanctions was evident. Only humanitarian projects may ask for exceptions for indispensable materials under sanction - such as, for instance, metal junctures for water pipelines or glass for greenhouses.

As stated by the director of the International Department of the Ministry for Agriculture, fertilizers are not on the list of forbidden imports, but pumping machines are and therefore the entire food production chain is affected - a serious issue in a country hit hard by climate change effects such as heavy rains and droughts - as he pointed out.

The delegation Members felt some paradox in imposing sanctions on dual use materials and by doing so preventing the DPRK from implementing certain civilian projects, and then step in with humanitarian aid. Moreover, also EU NGO’s face long delays of up to one year in the delivery of materials subject to sanction exemption requests, due to a long process of authorisation in New York and very slow custom procedures applied by China. The EP delegation believes that a more fast-track procedure should be established for humanitarian exceptions by the UNSC Sanctions Committee 1718 in New York, whose activity is sometimes led by confusion, as underlined during the briefing by EUMS diplomats (mentioned, for instance, were pharmaceutical products mistakenly put under embargo while specific dual use technical components were allowed). Alternatively, the UN could undertake a comprehensive revision of existing sanctions to limit effects on humanitarian aid and the poorest sections of the population. Even more importantly, according to the EP delegation, would be that the EU takes the initiative of launching an overall evaluation of the impact of sanctions, also by undertaking a dedicated international conference that could also lay the ground for a broader multilateral discussion on the peace process. A proposal that was defined by a European diplomat “an interesting one, for the future”.

The denuclearisation process

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“We had no information whatsoever by the Americans, before and after the Singapore summit” (an EU diplomat)

“What about the human factor? How can we dismantle the community of well-prepared scientists at work in DPRK?” (PRC expert)

Last year’s confrontational tones had almost vanished and the DPRK interlocutors underlined recent achievements in their direct contacts with the South and presented plans of railway and road connections with the RoK. This is a major development following ten years of reciprocal blockade, and it is a process still facing obstacles by the USA, not by Seoul. However, there is no evidence whatsoever that this “rapprochement” is matched by any serious de-militarisation. Contrary to Chinese experts - who believe that denuclearisation is a realistic option in exchange for economic prosperity - EUMS diplomats ruled out any genuine interest by Kim Jong Un in denuclearising the country, and the DPRK focussed mainly on the implementation of the National Development strategy. The term “stability” was referred to as a goal for the internal economic landscape, never for a more relaxed security climate.

However, the two issues are strictly interconnected, and the ongoing process lacks any clear roadmap and contents. While the USA seem to ask for a quick and “everything at the same time” settlement (normalisation of relations in exchange for nuclear dismantlement), the DPRK favours a step-by-step process, starting with the much emphasised “confidence building” measures. However, the entire framework lacks clarity and the EP delegation could not assess a more precise content of the ongoing talks with the USA, or of the actual progress in the direct contacts with the South. The delegation was confronted with an opaque process, a dimension confirmed by the EUMS diplomats, who also complained about the total lack of communication from the USA. Indeed the entire Korean framework is based on the combination of several bilateral relationships (DPRK-China, DPRK-South Korea, USA-South Korea, USA-Japan, and so on) in the absence of any multilateral platform outside the UNSC. In this context, the EP delegation came to question the real intentions of the USA, which would perhaps not rule out the possibility of allowing the DPRK to maintain a somehow controlled nuclear force, while maintaining its own basis in the South - a scenario that would see China on the losing side. As a preliminary conclusion, the EP delegation believes that in this ambiguous state of play the EU should engage more and also promote some kind of international conference to discuss the impact of sanctions.

All non-DPRK interlocutors agreed that in any case, the monitoring of actual dismantlement of nuclear and missile facilities in North Korea is very problematic, due to the high number of locations (up to 400 according to some sources) and the geographic morphology of the country. The Chinese experts who met with the delegation repeatedly asked for joint EU and PRC efforts in developing advanced technologies for effective verification of denuclearisation in North Korea - a request that should not be overlooked.

**Role of the EU**

“Following a friend can lead you to the promised land” (the DPRK vice-minister of economy).

“The DPRK needs to come up with a verification system, involving not only the Americans” (a EUMS diplomat).

At almost every meeting with DPRK actors, the delegation noted a degree of insufficient knowledge of the actual role of the EU, of its foreign policy, and of the EP. The absence of an
EEAS Delegation in Pyongyang, mirrored by the absence of a DPRK embassy in Brussels, certainly plays a role in such a regrettable situation. Yet, the EU is ultimately perceived as the only possible honest broker on the peninsula, since Koreans have historically mistrusting relations with both China and Japan, while the USA are perceived as one-sided and the Russians, although appreciated in Pyongyang, have limited resources. Moreover, the EU could valorise the highly appreciated presence in Pyongyang of a number of Member States that developed strong ties with the DPRK since the Soviet times, and that have both knowledge of the country and direct contacts. While the current USA administration seems to favour an “all or nothing” approach, the EU is traditionally more keen on a step-by-step method (“ultimately this is what the EU is all about”, said a PRC expert).

DPRK personalities insisted that there is no problem from their side with the EU, although the DPRK’s Vice-Minister of Economy stressed that the EU should play a more autonomous role and warned that supporting only the USA line “will not go too far”. The EU and the EP should demand the implementation of the Singapore dialogue and work towards creating a better climate of mutual trust between the parties. He also invited the EU to increase direct contacts, in order to build more mutual confidence and to “remove a false perception about communism”. Moreover, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that the opening of a DPRK embassy in Brussels is a serious option.

While the EU prefers not to add another critical division with the American Administration, it is not clear to which extent the EU wishes to engage. In the three meetings with the EUMS diplomats, it appeared clear that there is some discrepancy within the European family, as much as there is in Washington. In addition to existing disagreements with the USA, the EU should be careful not to add additional scenarios of discrepancy with the Trump Administration. At one point one diplomat said that the time has arrived to finally have a stronger “EU dimension”, while another said that “some MS have clearly invited the EEAS to stay out” of the Korean scenario.

However, there is room for EU action, even within a limited scope - such as the already mentioned EU-sponsored international conference on the impact of sanctions or joint research activity with China and/or other partners to provide technology for monitoring possible dismantlement of nuclear facilities. Ultimately, it is of paramount importance that any involvement in the DPRK file should not end up dividing the EU, nor, as far as possible, distance the EU further from Washington with which there is already enough controversy.

Humanitarian Aid

“We are still waiting since last year for a small piece of metal to connect two tubes” (a worker of a European NGO).

Another EU asset in the country is its humanitarian aid. The delegation visited a number of EU projects in the Anbyon County, about 4,5 hours driving from Pyongyang - greenhouse to provide food security in wintertime, drinkable water plant, food process factory. With a well-educated working class and several skilled technicians, DPRK could well develop such facility by its own, but in this case, the impact of sanctions was evident. Only humanitarian projects may ask for exception for indispensable material under sanctions - such as, for instance, metal junctures for water pipelines or glasses for greenhouses. The delegation felt some paradox in imposing sanctions and by doing so preventing DPRK from implementing some civilian projects because of dual use material, and then step in with its own humanitarian aid. Moreover,
also EU NGOs face long delays, up to one year, in the delivering of any material subject to sanction exemption request, due to long process of authorisation in New York and very slow custom procedures applied by China.

**Human Rights**

“The government is there to implement the party’s policies” (WPK Central Committee member)

In North Korea no opposition, or even any kind of independent “civil society” organisation exists, and the delegation had no opportunity at all to discuss the human rights situation in the country, except with the EUMS diplomats. North Korea has a very old fashioned and strictly one party one vision system, where full loyalty to the supreme leader is simply everything. The State takes care of the citizen in all aspects - social life, education, accommodation, salary, voucher to buy food supplies, etc. Internal movement in the country is very restricted and possible only through authorisation, State TV broadcasts only propaganda, the only existing English language newspaper had (for example) on the front page of its 27 October issue two articles titled “Workers party of Korea’s invincibility splashed across world media” and “DPRK leaders’ works published in different countries”. More feared than sanctions is access to internet and the country is totally closed to external influences - even phone connections are almost possible with the outside world. There is little information available on the existing mass detention camps in the countryside, and nothing like an independent judiciary system, opposition circles or even different wings in the party, is present in such a monolithic country. At present, no “human rights dialogue” would be conceivable with the DPRK.

**Follow up required:**

“We jump from one summit to another without ever discussing details and involving experts” (an EUMS diplomat)

Any follow-up depends, to a large extent, on the degree of the overall involvement that the European Union wishes to have on the Korean peninsula. In any case, DKOR should report to AFET; DEVE could examine the rules of engagement for sanctions exemption of material needed in humanitarian projects. The Supreme People’s Assembly’s request to hold an IPM early next year should be taken very seriously as also suggested by EEAS. Such an incoming IPM could be justified on the grounds of exceptional political reasons and the fact that for the entire current mandate no IPM took place until this delegation visit. If this meeting were to take place, full involvement of AFET and SEDE, and possibly of DROI and DEVE, should be envisaged. The delegation will also request a meeting with the EEAS to directly report on the outcome of the mission and on possible actions along the lines suggested in this report.
**European Parliament**

2014-2019

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**Delegation for relations with the Korean Peninsula**

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**5th EU/Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Interparliamentary Meeting**

28 October - 3 November 2018

Beijing/Pyongyang

**FINAL PROGRAMME**

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**Saturday 27 October**

Departure from Europe and Arrival in Beijing

**Sunday 28 October**

Beijing

18.00-20.30 Preparatory meeting and security briefing
Venue: hotel

**Monday 29 October**

08.45-09.15 Presentation by Mr Peter Huang on China-EU villages in the People’s Republic of China’s provinces
Venue: China Institute of International Studies (CIIS)
3 Toutiao, Taijichang, Beijing, 100005

9.15-11.00 Meeting on PRC and DPRK relations with Professor Mr Yang Xiyu, Senior Research Fellow, Dept. for Asia-Pacific Security and Cooperation Studies
Venue: China Institute of International Studies (CIIS)

13.35 Flight CA 121 to Pyongyang

16.20 Arrival in Pyongyang

19.00 Welcome dinner hosted by the Supreme People’s Assembly
**Tuesday 30 October**

08.30  Departure from Hotel

09.00-10.00  Briefing by EU Heads of Mission, coordinated by the EU Presidency (Czech Republic)

10.15-11.30  5th EU-DPRK Interparliamentary Meeting  
Venue: Mansudae Assembly Hall

11.35-12.35  Meeting with Mr Pak Myong Guk, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs

14.00  Departure from hotel

14.30  Visit to Mangyongdae, native home of Kim Il Sung

16.00-17.30  Meeting with Mr Ri Kwang Gun, Vice-Minister of External Economy

18.00-19.00  Meeting with Mr Kim Chol Huen, Official from the Ministry of Agriculture

19.30  Dinner hosted by Nirj Deva, Chairman of the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with the Korean Peninsula, for Members of the Supreme People’s Assembly

**Wednesday 31 October**

08.00  Departure from hotel

12.45  Arrival at Wonsan, lunch

14.30  Visit to EU-funded project sites (drinkable water plant, water pipeline, greenhouses, food process factory) in Anbyon County, Kangwon Province

17.30  Depart for Pyongyang

22.30  Arrival at hotel

**Thursday 1 November**

09.30  Departure from hotel

10.00-11.00  Meeting with Mr Tong Kyong Chol, Head of Division, International Department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea

11.30-12.30  Meeting with Mr Choe Thae Bok, Chairman of the Supreme People’s Assembly

14.45-15.45  Visit to the Mansu Rehabilitation Centre

16.00-17.45  Visit to the Mangyongdae Schoolchildrens’ Palace

18.00-19.30  Debriefing at the Polish embassy with the EU HoMs, coordinated by the EU
Presidency (Czech Republic)

20.00-21.30 Dinner with Korean officials and the EU HoMs

Friday 2 November

09.15 Depart from hotel

09.30-11.30 Visit to the Pyongyang 326 Electric Cable Factory

11.30-12.00 Visit to the Tower of the Juche idea

14.40 Departure to airport

17.20 Flight CA 122 to Beijing

18.20 Arrival in Beijing

21.30-23.30 Debriefing with the EEAS

Saturday 3 November (following official programme)

09.00-10.00 Debriefing with the CIIS, Professor Mr Yang Xiyu, and Ms Fan Zhengjie, CIIS Research Assistant in charge of EU; with EEAS

10.00-11.00 Debriefing with Mr Sun Jing, Chinese Association for International Friendly Contact; with EEAS
Venue: International Red Cross Committee, Beijing

14.00-15.00 Debriefing (Chair only + EEAS) with Mr Pierre Dorbes of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
Venue: International Red Cross Committee, Beijing