

Korea and EU studies: the Role of European Union and Jean Monnet Programs.

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1. Introduction

This paper tries to assess the current EU studies in Korea and addresses the challenges for promoting EU studies in Korea, highlighting the possible role of the EU. In Korea, the EU is not very much present due to its close link with the US. The EU has been at best another US and at worst an invisible giant in Korea. Thus the promotion of EU studies should be accompanied by the actions to increase the awareness of Korean publics on EU affairs. This paper is composed of two parts. The first part of this paper will overview the current state of EU Studies in Korea and the problems linked to its promotion. The second part will try to suggest some recommendation.

2. Current state of EU studies in Korea and its potential

The current state of EU studies in Korea is very rudimentary. At the graduate level, there are only two EU studies programs, one at Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul National University and another at Hankuk University of Foreign Languages. These programs were initiated as one of priority actions to promote internationalization by Korean government in 1997. Compared to graduate programs, under-graduate level EU studies programs remain far more underdeveloped or virtually absent. Courses about Europe are rather for individual European member countries and European languages. It is not strange at all that Jean Monnet programs were hardly known to Korean academics and students. In fact, there are few Jean Monnet programs applied by Korean academics (for instance there is only one Jean-Monnet professor in Korea until today). Nevertheless, there seems quite a high potential for developing EU studies in Korea for two reasons.

First, there is a strong interest in regional integration issues among Korean public. Given that Korea is a divided nation, experiencing constant military threats by Japan and China as well as North Korea, establishing peace and prosperity in East Asia is the most important national agenda. In this respect, successful European integration process itself is a model to follow for almost all Korean publics, and there is a continuing interest in studying European integration. But studying European integration is not enough, because so far its integration itself was too specific as a particular historical product of Europe. There is a need to develop broader and general study on regional integration,

such as theory and practice of regional integration. If it takes time, of course, developing comparative studies on regional integration could be considered as an intermediate step.

Secondly, there are growing interests in EU policies because of the EU's role as an international actor. This will be especially so for policy makers and specialists in Korea, although they do not know much on EU institutions and integration. It is then essential to ask about how Korea will apply such policies in the specific Korean and Asian context and their implications for Korea. Again comparative and global perspective in studying European public policies is important.

Currently the EU is the second largest trading partner for Korea well ahead of the US and the first largest foreign investor to Korea. The recent signing of Korea-EU FTA will create a huge opportunity to increase the awareness of Korean publics about the strategic importance of the EU. It seems that the EU is also aware of the strategic position of Korea in its external policy. Korea is the 4th largest non European trading partner to the EU after the US, China and Japan. More importantly, Korea is a gateway to Asian markets, which allow European companies to access ever growing Asian markets, especially Chinese market. Furthermore, Korea is a country to share European common values such as democracy and human right. The importance of Korea is evidenced by the recent establishment of three EU centers supported by European Commission. These increasing Korea-EU relations will certainly help to strengthen the interests of Korean students about EU studies. There is however a serious problem for developing EU studies in Korea as an independent program (especially at graduate level). So far, EU studies programs in Korea were all academic ones without a consideration about job placement. Developing job-linked EU studies program is a serious challenge for Korean and Asian students. (This is all the more so because citizens of non European countries are not allowed to work in EU institutions). There should be ways to suit the demand from the private and business sector, too. It means that there might be a need to combine business studies with EU studies

3. Recommendation

In summary, this paper proposes to develop comparative studies on regional integration, and to develop trans-regional double/joint degree programs including one school in Asia and one in Europe, at least or including two heterogeneous disciplines, for example one in business and the other in EU studies. It means that Jean Monnet actions and Erasmus programs should be far more actively extended beyond European borders to non-member countries, especially to Korea and Asian countries. Korea and many Asian nations will certainly welcome these initiatives from Europe, trying to do their best efforts in internationalizing their education systems and learning from European experience. For instance, as incarnated by the recent ICI-ECP project, Korean government is very eager to cooperate to extend Korea-Europe bilateral student exchange and education cooperation, committing itself to financing 50% of the necessary mobility funds. Korean government is also

interested in participating in Erasmus Mundus program, bringing it its own financial resources. Now it is high time for Europe and Asia to jointly design high quality education and research, targeting at developing regional integration studies, strengthening Asia-European nexus of scholars and schools and ultimately capable of creating a trans-regional job market.