

## Editorial

# *Building Bridges in Turbulent Times: Interdisciplinary Insights and Innovations in East Asia-Europe Relations*

**Eun-Jeung Lee**

As I write this, the global community is grappling with an extraordinary convergence of crises. The wars in Ukraine and between Israel and Hamas have underscored the fragility of peace in our time. The spectre of further escalation—such as reports of North Korean soldiers entering active conflicts in the war in Ukraine, the insecurities surrounding Trump’s re-election and South Korea’s own political upheaval, which pose significant risks of instability and escalation—adds to an already volatile (geo)political landscape. Amid such uncertainty, the value of stable, cooperative relationships between nations becomes not just desirable, but essential. It is my hope that this issue serves as a catalyst for dialogue, encouraging readers from diverse backgrounds—scholars, policymakers, students, and the broader public—to engage with the ideas presented here and to reflect on their implications for a more peaceful and just world.

Several articles in this issue examine the intricate interplay between economic and political diplomacy, emphasizing how these forces can shape and enhance international relations. The strategic partnership between South Korea and the EU reveals both the potential and the limitations of economic diplomacy, with South Korea emerging as a key player in EU policy due to its status as a like-minded nation, a vital commercial partner, and a strategic ally in managing regional security challenges—particularly as China’s trajectory diverges from EU expectations. Insights into the evolving relationship between the European Commission and South Korea since the 2011 Free Trade Agreement further highlight the enduring influence of technocratic frameworks in shaping the political dimensions of these economic ties.

Other articles in this issue examine the geopolitical challenges faced by middle

### **Eun-Jeung Lee**

Corresponding Author:  
Eun-Jeung Lee  
Freie Universität Berlin  
Institute of Korean Studies  
Eun-Jeung.Lee@fu-berlin.de

powers, as both Germany and South Korea strive to diversify dependencies while balancing economic ties with China and security reliance on the United States. One article highlights opportunities for enhanced bilateral cooperation between Seoul and Berlin, particularly in addressing shared regional challenges, through a comparison of their Indo-Pacific strategies. Two other articles focus on the evolving security discourse in East Asia: the first examines the trilateral cooperation between South Korea, the United States, and Japan, which faces mounting challenges from North Korea's nuclear threats and the complexities of a multipolar global order. The second proposes innovative security architectures for the region, including Non-Traditional Security (NTS) minilaterals and regional international commissions led by emerging second-tier powers like South Korea, offering complementary approaches to traditional multilateral frameworks to build more resilient and adaptive alliances.

The remaining contributions circle back to the role of civil society and civil society organizations (CSOs) in promoting peace. The examination of the humanitarian work of Good Neighbors, a South Korean CSO, on the Korean Peninsula demonstrates how humanitarian diplomacy can help de-escalate conflicts and foster peace. The last contribution critically examines the concept of nation-building, contrasting Western and Eastern European understandings of nationhood.

On behalf of the entire editorial team, I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude for the interest and support this publication has received from the community of Korean and East Asian Studies so far. This encouragement inspires us to continually enhance the Korea Europe Review as a premier venue for Korea-related intellectual endeavours within the global academic community. This current issue stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, bringing together insights from authors within our Berlin Network, colleagues I have met at conferences such as the Eco-Peace Forum in the DMZ, and experts who have contributed to previous issues and re-join us. This issue is proof that our mission to foster dialogue and provide a platform for meaningful exchange on critical issues affecting both regions is fruitful.

By featuring contributions that analyse current challenges while proposing innovative solutions, this issue embodies the essence of our interdisciplinary approach. From examining the role of economic diplomacy and the complexities of security cooperation in East Asia to exploring comparative Indo-Pacific strategies and the humanitarian diplomacy that builds bridges on the Korean Peninsula, these articles underscore the urgency of international collaboration. The Korea Europe Review remains committed to its mission of providing a platform for dialogue and knowledge exchange, aiming to contribute to a more peaceful and equitable world. I hope this issue will not only inform but also inspire our readers to engage further in these vital conversations.

Eun-Jeung Lee  
Editor-in-Chief