

GUEST EDITORIAL

EU–Korea Cooperation in Climate Change Policies and Carbon Neutralization: Strategic Imperatives in a Turbulent World

Keywords

European Union (EU), Republic of Korea (South Korea), EU–Korea cooperation, climate change policy, carbon neutrality, sustainable development

Article History

Submitted: 12 Aug 2025

Accepted: 12 Aug 2025

Published: 30 Aug 2025

Sunkung Choi

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics and Business,
University of Groningen

S.E. (Stefan) Weishaar

Professor of Law and Economics, Faculty of Law,
University of Groningen

We are pleased to present this special issue devoted to the evolving cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the Republic of Korea in the realm of climate change policy and carbon neutralization. This marks the second time we have brought together a collection of scholarly contributions on a closely related theme. Our previous special issue examined EU–Korea carbon neutralization policy in the context of economic diplomacy; in this new project, we broaden the lens to address cooperation in climate change policies more generally, while retaining a focus on the strategic, legal, and economic dimensions of carbon neutrality. The urgency of climate action is beyond question: rising global temperatures, accelerating biodiversity loss, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events demand decisive, coordinated responses. Yet, these challenges unfold amid a turbulent geopolitical and economic backdrop that risks diverting attention from the climate agenda.

Global politics is currently marked by escalating trade disputes, tariff measures among major economies, and the continuing political and economic consequences of the Russia–Ukraine war. These developments have disrupted energy markets, reshaped global supply chains, and revived concerns over energy security and industrial competitiveness. In such an environment, there is a danger that climate objectives may be perceived as secondary to immediate security and economic priorities. However, these crises reveal the opposite. It is crucial that a rapid, coordinated transition to low-carbon, resilient economies is not just compatible with, but essential for, long-term political stability, economic resilience, and security.

The EU and Korea are longstanding partners in trade, innovation, and sustainable development. Together, they are well placed to show how climate ambition can strengthen both economic performance and geopolitical influence. Politically, their collaboration reinforces their credibility as global leaders committed to the Paris

Corresponding author

Sunkung Choi
Faculty of Economics and Business
Global Economics & Management
Management
Nettelbosje 2, 9747 AE Groningen
The Netherlands
Email: s.choi[at]rug.nl

Agreement and a rules-based international order. Diplomatically, it builds stronger channels for dialogue and coalition-building in multilateral forums such as the UNFCCC, the G20, and the Climate Club. In these settings, coordinated positions allow them to shape the global climate agenda. Economically, cooperation creates opportunities for joint investment in green technologies, alignment of standards to support low-carbon trade, and expansion of markets for innovative industries. For Korea, closer alignment with the EU's advanced climate and trade measures, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, can help maintain access to key export markets. For the EU, Korea's technological expertise, industrial capacity, and strategic location in East Asia make it a valuable partner for building resilient and diversified green supply chains.

This special issue brings together contributions that examine the economic, legal, and political dimensions of EU–Korea climate cooperation. The articles address the interplay between climate policy and trade governance, the prevention of carbon leakage through regulatory convergence, sectoral decarbonization challenges, and the role of middle powers in bridging divides between developed and developing countries. Collectively, they illustrate how cooperation can generate mutual gains while advancing the shared objective of carbon neutrality.

The central message is clear. Even in times of geopolitical tension and economic uncertainty, climate cooperation must remain a strategic priority. Climate change is not an isolated environmental issue. It is a systemic risk that can undermine trade stability, energy security, and economic competitiveness if left unaddressed. By sustaining their commitment to joint action, the EU and Korea can show that climate ambition is not a luxury to be postponed in times of crisis, but a strategic necessity for ensuring prosperity and stability in a rapidly changing world.

We extend our gratitude to the contributors and reviewers for their expertise and dedication, and to the Korea Foundation for its generous support. We hope this issue will inspire further research, informed debate, and concrete cooperation between the EU and Korea in advancing the shared vision of a climate-neutral, sustainable, and resilient future.

Sunkung Choi Stefan Weishaar