

Breaking: North Korea Supports Economic Cooperation with Russia and South Korea, but Not Until a Later Date

A great deal of hope and much work to do.

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North Korea's representative at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok has given his first public statement to journalists since President Vladimir Putin announced his plans for trilateral economic cooperation between Russia and the two Korean states.

Subsequently, North Korea's Minister for External Economic Affairs, Kim Yong-jae told reporters that in principle, his country supports the plan but that North Korea does not plan to immediately enact such proposals. Such a statement is not surprising given North Korea's generally cautious approach to international engagement.

Kim Yong-jae [said](#),

"We are not opposed to the trilateral cooperation (with Russia and South Korea), but this is not an appropriate situation for this to be implemented".

He continued,

"We severely condemn attempts by South Korea and Japan to use the EEF for their impure political purposes. Their attacks against self-defensive measures to strengthen the DPRK's nuclear deterrent forces — they are clearly at variance with the purpose and nature of our forum, where economic cooperation between the Russian Far East and Asian countries is discussed".

Earlier, President Putin spoke of Russia's desire to build transport links between the entire Korean peninsula and Russia.

Putin [said](#),

"It is necessary to gradually involve North Korea in cooperation in the region, and Russia has specific proposals, everyone knows about this — a joint road linking the Trans-Siberian Railway and the Korean railways through North Korea, pipeline transport, development of North Korean ports and so on and so forth. We have something to offer and work on".

North Korea's statement indicates that it seeks a gesture of good will from Seoul in order to

proceed with such a project. Such a gesture would almost certainly be some commitment to cease acceptance of further THAAD missile system deliveries from the United States, something which South Korean President Moon pledged to do during his recent election campaign. This pledge however was nullified in the summer of 2017, ostensibly due to pressure from Washington. South Korea could alternatively withdraw heavy weaponry from areas near the 38th parallel which divides the Korean states.

If South Korea was to engage with North Korea on a disarmament plan, even one that due to the highly weaponised topography of the Korean peninsula would be largely symbolic, this could be the necessary element which would see Pyongyang state that it is ready to fully engage with Putin's proposal.

The fact that Pyongyang responded positively to the Russian plan is indicative of the fact that now it is up to South Korea to show it will respond with care and good measure to statements from the North.

Clearly, North Korea's statement will open up a period wherein Russia could act as a go-between in respect of the Korean states in an attempt to have both sides offer each other the assurances necessary to kick-start cooperative economic endeavours.

In this sense, the ball is largely in South Korea's court. If Seoul is to re-activate its so-called Sunshine Policy of engagement with the North which was a staple of South Korean diplomacy under the Presidencies of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, there is every chance that when combined with Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov's famously skilled diplomatic tactics, such a policy could result in Moscow, Pyongyang and Seoul initiating the process which Vladimir Putin spoke of at the Eastern Economic Forum.

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