


Opinions

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The Role of Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum for Eurasia Initiative



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As of recent, economic integration activities, including China's 'One Belt, One Road' policy and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union, are being actively implemented around the Eurasian region. In the rapidly-changing environment of international relations, the promotion of cooperation between Central Asia and Korea, located respectively in eastern and central Eurasia, has geological and geopolitical values. Central Asia sits in the middle of the Eurasian Continent, and is the heartland where the national strategies of China (One Belt, One Road), Russia (Eurasian Economic Union), and the United States (New Silk Road) intersect. Given its geo-strategic importance and economic development potential, the advancement of the cooperative

relationship between Korea and Central Asian countries will contribute to opening up a new horizon in Eurasian economic cooperation in terms of transportation, logistics, energy, and trade network-building.

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992, Korea has maintained cooperative relations with Central Asian countries. This was thanks to efforts to promote mutual understanding and friendly relations through numerous summit talks, high-ranking meetings, and joint economic projects. However, the five Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Korea are currently faced with structural changes due to situation of the global economy. Thus, they should seek a new level of cooperative measures for the further advancement of mutual cooperation and realization of growth potential.

Korea and the five Central Asian countries have coordinated mutual interests through the creation and operation of the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum, where they exchange opinions about mutual cooperation. The Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum was established under the leadership of the Korean government, with the aim of developing close cooperation and relationships between Korea and the countries involved. Such an establishment of a multilateral cooperative system between Korea and Central Asian countries sets a milestone in laying the foundation for Eurasian international cooperation.

The following is a summary of how cooperation between Korea and Central Asia developed, by phase, since the establishment of diplomatic ties.

The first phase is the 'Korea-Central Asia Cooperation 1.0 Era.' This indicates the period that witnessed a rapid rise in the establishment of diplomatic ties and cooperative relations. With consideration to geopolitical importance, mutually complementary economic structures, cultural similarity, and the presence of ethnic Koreans, the countries began to engage in mutual exchanges and cooperation. However, the absence of an institutional cooperation system presented difficulties for Korea and Central Asian countries in further advancing their relations into more sustainable, multifaceted ones. In November 2006, the Korean government established a comprehensive strategy and discussed specific implementation measures for entry into Central Asia, in order to strengthen ties with the region, which was regarded as the next-generation emerging market thanks to its abundant energy resources.

The second phase is the 'Korea-Central Asia Cooperation 2.0 Era.' This is when the launch of the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum laid the foundation for multilateral cooperation.

Thanks to the inauguration of the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum, Korea and Central Asian countries were given a new opportunity to advance their relations. The existing scope of cooperation, focused on energy resources on the back of participation from the private sector, could be expanded to various fields including high-tech·IT, construction, culture·tourism·education, textile, agriculture, etc. Korea and Central Asian countries were able to promote multilateral cooperation as a result. This is because the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum, initiated by the Korean government, established itself as a regular multilateral consultative body to discuss future-oriented, win-win cooperation.

Third is the 'Korea-Central Asia Cooperation 3.0 Era.' This is when the institutional cooperation system will be reinforced and will produce substantial outcomes through the launch of the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Secretariat after the 10th Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum. According to Korea's 'Eurasia Initiative' announced in October 2013, Central Asian countries were regarded as important partners of Eurasian cooperation. Therefore, Korea and Central Asian countries need to seek new measures for Eurasian cooperation commensurate with economic growth potential. The future development of the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum and the launch of the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Secretariat have very important implications. In particular, substantial multilateral and bilateral cooperation projects need to be identified by setting up two subcommittees under the permanent Cooperation Secretariat, respectively in charge of one of the two cooperation priorities: economy and social culture. Also, an organic cooperation system between research institutions, industry, government and academia must be established to further strengthen the integration and linkage with related cooperation businesses.

Finally, the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum must further strengthen and substantiate its institutional system for its future development. The former can be delivered through the establishment of the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Secretariat. The latter is closely connected with the development and implementation of Korea-Central Asia core cooperation projects. Based on these, the advancement of a substantial cooperative relationship between Korea and Central Asian countries can open up a new horizon in the Korean government's Eurasian diplomacy. **KIEP**