

Assessing South Korean Public Opinion on the European Union: Perceptions and Implications.*

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Abstract

This study explores South Korean perceptions of the European Union (EU) in 2021, emphasizing the public's awareness, understanding, and views on its role as a partner for Korea. Survey findings reveal that the EU is predominantly seen as an economic power, with limited recognition of its contributions to global diplomacy, security, or sustainability. South Koreans view European integration primarily through an economic lens, reflecting a stronger interest in trade and economic relations than political or security dimensions. Even a decade after the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the bilateral relationship is understood mainly economically. These insights underscore the need for the EU to enhance its communication strategies in South Korea, highlighting its broader roles in diplomacy, governance, and global stability to foster a deeper and more comprehensive partnership.

* This study acknowledges that some statistical data utilized herein were partially reused, with a differentiated research focus, from the chapter “A Survey on Perceptions of the EU among the General Public in Korea” in the 2021 publication *EU's Digital Public Diplomacy Strategy and Influence*. Beyond merely examining South Korean perceptions of the EU, this research provides implications and insights into the relevance of the EU's experiences in addressing future cooperation in Northeast Asia and resolving crises on the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, it underscores the necessity of enhancing the EU's extensive public diplomacy efforts to foster a deeper and more comprehensive relationship between South Korea and the EU.

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Keywords

EU, Korean perception of the EU, Korea-EU relations, Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement, Public Diplomacy.

I . Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

Relations between South Korea and various European countries began in the early 1960s under President Park Chung-Hee, who sought to diversify South Korea's foreign relations beyond its reliance on the United States. Recognizing the country's heavy dependence on the United States during the Cold War, he aimed to broaden South Korea's diplomatic outreach to include Europe (Casarrini et al., 2022, pp.19-31). In 1963, South Korea established diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community (EEC), marking the beginning of formal ties with Europe. Despite this initial diplomatic engagement, South Korea held little political significance for European policymakers throughout the 1980s, as it was primarily viewed as a U.S. ally. A significant milestone was reached in May 1989 when South Korea opened a mission to the European Community (EC), followed by the establishment of the EC Commission Delegation office in Seoul in March 1990, signaling a deeper level of engagement and cooperation.

Relations between South Korea and Europe have undergone significant transformations in recent decades. The partnership between South Korea and the European Union (EU) deepened considerably in the 2000s, culminating in the establishment of a strategic partnership in 2010. The signing of the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2011 further strengthened economic ties and trade relations. Beyond trade, cooperation expanded to political, social, and cultural domains. A notable milestone in security collaboration was reached in 2014 with the signing of the Crisis Management Agreement. South Korea became the first Asian country to conclude all three major agreements with the EU: The Framework Agreement, the FTA, and the Crisis Management Agreement. Over the decades, South Korea-EU relations have evolved from limited diplomatic interactions to a comprehensive partnership encompassing

economic, political, and security dimensions. This transformation underscores both parties' commitment to fostering a robust and multifaceted relationship (Casarrini et al., 2022, pp.1-2).

The relationship between South Korea and Europe has evolved through distinct phases: Early Diplomatic Ties (1960s-1970s), Limited Interaction (1980s), Expansion of Relations (Late 1980s-1990s), Strategic Partnership (2000s-2010s), and Broadening Cooperation (2010s-Present). Historically, this relationship has been primarily economic, with minimal security cooperation due to Europe's relatively low engagement in East Asian affairs, including tensions on the Korean Peninsula and the nuclear threat posed by North Korea (Casarrini et al., 2022, pp.23-24). Additionally, South Korea's limited understanding of the EU's experiences, values, and achievements has hindered deeper bilateral engagement. However, a turning point occurred with the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations in 2009 and the EU's designation as South Korea's "Strategic Partner" in 2010. This transition broadened the relationship beyond economic ties to encompass political, social, and cultural dimensions, grounded in shared commitments to democracy, human rights, and market-based economies.

A comprehensive understanding and recognition of mutual cooperation are essential for fostering strong bilateral relations. The Korean public's interest in and accurate perception of the European Union serve as a critical foundation for advancing collaboration between the two regions. The EU's success in achieving shared prosperity and lasting peace after World War II is particularly relevant to South Korea, a nation still grappling with prolonged division and disrupted regional exchanges. These experiences offer valuable insights into strategies for promoting regional stability and fostering sustainable cooperation. This study examines South Korean perceptions of the EU's values and achievements a decade after the signing of the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2011. Specifically, it investigates whether the significant institutional developments in

Korea-EU relations since the 2010s have influenced public perceptions of the EU. The findings also provide an important basis for assessing whether the EU's history of integration and peacebuilding can serve as a viable model for conflict resolution on the Korean Peninsula and for enhancing cooperation in Northeast Asia.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Research into how other countries perceive the European Union (EU) is crucial for determining whether the EU and its partners share a common vision for addressing global challenges and identifying solutions. As articulated by the European Council in 2003, examining external perceptions of the EU helps to understand the extent to which the EU's self-representation as "a global player," committed to sharing responsibility for global security and building a better world, is accepted (European Council, 2003). As the relationship between the EU and South Korea evolves, Korean perceptions of the EU have emerged as a significant area of inquiry within Korean academia. A thorough understanding of the EU among Koreans is essential for fostering meaningful cooperation. The central question is whether the EU and South Korea can cultivate a cooperative relationship that effectively addresses global challenges and issues related to the Korean Peninsula by aligning their shared values and recognizing their mutual significance beyond economic interactions.

Since the emergence of EU perception studies as a distinct academic discipline, research has primarily focused on how the EU is perceived by its major external partners, particularly China, India, and Japan—countries recognized as emerging global powers (Portela, 2010, p.150). In contrast, South Korean perceptions of the EU have received comparatively less scholarly attention, despite presenting a particularly compelling case. First, South Korea and the EU share a longstanding and prosperous trade relationship, forming a strong foundation for economic cooperation. Second, the Korean Peninsula

remains divided, having failed to establish a lasting peace system since 1945. The EU's success in securing peace through the creation of the European Economic Community holds significant implications for Korea. Third, Northeast Asia's geopolitical security landscape is marked by persistent tensions, including the China-Taiwan conflict, ongoing instability on the Korean Peninsula, and strained relations between South Korea and Japan. Positioned at the center of these regional conflicts, South Korea faces the critical challenge of developing a sustainable framework for peace and regional integration. In this regard, the EU's concrete experience in peacebuilding offers valuable insights and strategic lessons for South Korea.

1.3. Aim and Research Questions.

As highlighted before, in the Korea-EU relationship, Koreans' accurate comprehension of the EU serves as a crucial asset for fostering mutual cooperation. Moreover, these perceptions have the potential to shape the future trajectory of bilateral relations, influencing foreign policy decisions and reinforcing the strategic partnership between the two entities (Rudra et al., 2021). With this perspective in mind, this study aims to assess the level of awareness among Koreans regarding the EU. To achieve this goal, a survey was conducted to gather data on the extent of the Korean public's knowledge about the EU, their understanding of it, and the degree to which they perceive it as a significant partner for Korea. The analysis of this data is anticipated to yield meaningful insights into the direction public diplomacy should take to facilitate the advancement of Korea-EU relations.

How do South Koreans view the European Union (EU) as an important example of regional integration and peace settlement? In particular, in what ways do South Koreans view the EU as a model for regional integration, and do they consider it a significant partner for Korea? Furthermore, do South Koreans anticipate that the EU will play a vital role in fostering peace and

denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula? Understanding these perceptions is crucial, as they can significantly influence foreign policy decisions and promote mutual cooperation. Additionally, the EU's experience with peace settlement through economic integration offers valuable insights for South Korea, which faces the challenge of achieving peaceful regional integration in Northeast Asia—a region that has not experienced such integration in modern times. Thus, studying these perceptions not only enriches academic understanding but also provides practical insights for strengthening Korea-EU relations within an increasingly complex international environment.

1.4. Justification for the Study

In 21st-century global politics, communication and empathy have emerged as vital elements, highlighting the importance of fostering mutual understanding among nations. This shift underscores the growing prominence of public diplomacy as a distinct and indispensable domain within modern diplomatic practices. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which primarily centers on intergovernmental relations, public diplomacy engages directly with foreign populations. Advances associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution are expected to further expand the scope and influence of public diplomacy, enhancing global connectivity and facilitating dialogue (Kim, 2012, pp.118–119). Historically, effective communication with foreign governments and citizens has been a cornerstone of diplomacy, enabling persuasion and promoting international cooperation. However, public diplomacy goes beyond merely promoting a nation's image or policy objectives. It plays a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy, enhancing its credibility, and advancing national interests. Fundamentally, public diplomacy aims to build an accurate understanding and perception of other nations—an essential foundation for strengthening bilateral and multilateral relationships.

In the field of international politics, the growing emphasis on communication,

empathy, and perception is deeply influenced by the seminal discussions introduced by Joseph Nye and Mark Leonard. Joseph Nye, a prominent scholar, highlights the critical role of communication in public diplomacy and distinguishes between hard power and soft power. Hard power relies on coercive measures, such as military or economic influence, while soft power focuses on achieving desired outcomes through attraction and appealing to foreign audiences (Nye, 2008, p.94). Expanding on these ideas, Mark Leonard emphasizes the relational dimension of public diplomacy. He underscores the importance of building meaningful connections, understanding the needs of other nations, addressing misperceptions through constructive dialogue, and working toward shared objectives (Leonard, 2002, p.8). Leonard further stresses the necessity of winning the hearts and minds of foreign populations through effective and empathetic communication, thereby fostering mutual trust and enhancing international cooperation.

South Korea and the European Union (EU) are significant partners, engaging in cooperation that extends beyond the economic realm to include societal, cultural, educational, and political dimensions. For South Korea, the diversification of its diplomatic relations is especially imperative given its heavy reliance on the United States and China. A fundamental prerequisite for strengthening bilateral relations is a clear understanding and acknowledgment of the value of mutual cooperation. In this regard, the Korean public's interest in and accurate comprehension of the EU serve as essential foundations for fostering deeper collaboration. Therefore, an investigation into how South Koreans perceive and understand the EU offers valuable insights and provides a strategic framework for advancing Korea-EU relations in the future.

II. Previous studies on South Korean perceptions of the EU

The topic of EU perception in the Asia-Pacific region had been studied occasionally. The growing interest in researching the EU's external perception has coincided with the EU's concerns about its global image. Holland and Chaban conducted pioneering research on the EU's image outside Europe, specifically focusing on the Asia-Pacific region. Their work documented significant findings on public perceptions and media representations of the EU in this area.¹⁾ Following their research, various studies have examined the EU's perception in countries such as China(Chan, 2010; Jing, 2006; Zhimin, 2012), Russia(Utkin & Baranovsky, 2012), India (Jain, 2012), Japan(Oshiba, 2012), and South Korea (Park & Yoon, 2010). Current research on the EU's image primarily focuses on how the Union is perceived by the public, mass media, and elites in partner countries, although some regions and states remain under-researched. These studies have identified, measured, and compared public awareness and perceptions of the EU within the Asia-Pacific region.

The EU is often viewed as a model for regional integration, prompting several important questions. First, to what extent is the EU's experience considered a desirable example for promoting regional integration in other parts of the world? Second, which specific aspects of the EU's integration process are perceived as applicable or beneficial by people in other regions, and which

1) Their work includes *The EU Through the Eyes of the Asia-Pacific: Public Perceptions and Media Representations*. NCRE (National Centre for Research on Europe, University of Canterbury), Research Series no. 4, and *The European Union and the Asia-Pacific: Media, Public and Elite Perceptions of the EU*. 2008. Routledge. Additionally, they, along with Peter Ryan, have published *The EU through the Eyes of Asia*. 2009. World Scientific. <https://doi.org/10.1142/7525>.

elements are deemed unsuitable or impractical for their contexts? Additionally, what outcomes do these regions aim to achieve by adopting aspects of the EU model, and how do they plan to derive benefits from such efforts? Closely related to these questions is the EU's image as a partner to these countries. The EU's foreign policy is often characterized by its promotion of values such as advancing labor standards, strengthening human rights, protecting the environment, combating corruption, and bolstering democratic institutions (Karen, 2003). These value-based policies are generally seen as having a positive effect on Europe's partners, leading to the EU being perceived as a "friendly" and "non-threatening" entity by the international community.

From this perspective, the EU is often described as a "civilian power," "normative power," or "soft power." According to Duchêne, the concept of "civilian power" refers to the EU's historical lack of military capability, which until recently, positioned it as a unique international actor (Duchêne, 1972). As a powerful entity that has renounced the use of force, the EU emphasizes negotiation and persuasion to achieve its objectives in external relations. In contrast, the notion of "normative power" highlights the EU's commitment to promoting cosmopolitan values as a key aspect of its international agenda. This concept suggests that the EU exerts its influence in support of international law and universal values, rather than pursuing pure self-interest (Manners, 2002). Meanwhile, Joseph Nye introduced the idea of "soft power" as a form of influence rather than a type of international actor (Nye, 2005). This concept has been embraced by European policy circles to portray the EU as a benign actor that employs a variety of tools to advance a distinctly value-driven agenda. However, a crucial question remains: do these self-perceptions align with how third countries view the EU and its foreign policies?

How does South Korea perceive the European Union (EU) as a global power and a model of regional integration? Several significant studies have explored Korean public perceptions of the EU. Notably, the National Centre for Research

on Europe (NCRE) at the University of Canterbury initiated groundbreaking research with the launch of the inaugural EU global perception project, titled "Public, Elite, and Media Perceptions of the EU in the Asia-Pacific Region," in 2004. Since then, numerous research endeavors have examined media, public, and elite viewpoints to assess and enhance global public awareness of the EU.²⁾ The NCRE has consistently investigated South Koreans' perceptions of the EU since its establishment.

In 2015, it achieved significant milestones with the publication of "An Analysis of the Perceptions of the EU and EU Policies Abroad." This study focused on external perceptions of the EU and Europe, particularly among the EU's ten strategic partner countries. It provided comprehensive analyses of EU/Europe perceptions and conducted a comparative study of survey data across various nations. Serving as a pioneering effort in global awareness surveys of the EU, this study played a pivotal role in establishing the academic groundwork for subsequent research. According to findings from the NCRE, the EU's visibility in Korean perceptions lags behind that in the US or China. The prevailing perception of the EU in Korea primarily revolves around its economic prowess, with its role in global politics receiving comparatively less attention—a trend reflected in media coverage as well.³⁾ As depicted in the table below, nearly half of Korean respondents (42.5%) expressed neutral sentiments when asked about their views on the EU, neither distinctly positive nor negative.(Table 1)

2) Further detailed information on the EU perception project, please refer to the NCRE website: <https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/ncre/> (Accessed 16/Jan/2022).

3) Analysis of the perception of the EU and EU's policies abroad: <https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:1280e44d-9fd8-4014-822f-20d9bade36bf#pageNum=1>(Accessed 02/Jan/2021), p. 55.

European Union (EU)

Responses from:	Very Positive	Somewhat positive	Neither positive nor negative	somewhat negative	Very negative	Do not know/cannot answer	Total responses (N)
(all countries)	13.8%	32.8%	34.3%	8.5%	3.2%	7.4%	11621
USA	12.2%	26.4%	36.9%	6.9%	3.2%	14.4%	1007
Canada	7.9%	30.8%	36.1%	7.3%	3.2%	14.6%	1022
Russia	5.5%	17.4%	35.3%	24.8%	13.6%	3.5%	1321
Japan	3.3%	23.5%	52.6%	5.8%	1.3%	13.5%	1024
China	12.8%	42.9%	36.1%	4.7%	0.6%	2.8%	1410
Brazil	22.3%	36.3%	28.6%	40.9%	1.7%	6.2%	1210
Mexico	23.2%	39.5%	25.9%	5.8%	1.9%	3.7%	1164
South Korea	7.7%	36.1%	42.5%	8.4%	1.4%	3.9%	1238
South Africa	17.1%	35.7%	28.5%	8.4%	3.3%	6.9%	1169
India	26.5%	36.7%	21.3%	5.7%	0.9%	8.9%	1056

Table 1: Analysis of the perception of the EU and EU's policies abroad (source: footnote 18)

Additionally, the study indicates that the European Union (EU) is regarded by the South Korean general population as one of the most positively viewed global actors. In a comparison with a preselected list of countries and multilateral organizations, the EU ranks just below the United States among countries and second only to the United Nations among multilateral organizations. Survey data reveal that 44% of South Korean respondents hold a positive view of the EU, whereas only 10% perceive it negatively.⁴⁾

Furthermore, Chaban and Chung conducted a comparative analysis of South Korean public surveys spanning from 2004 to 2006. Their findings revealed

4) For further information of South Korean perception of EU, see Analysis of the perception of the EU and EU's policies abroad:file:///G:/Korean%20perception%20of%20EU/Analysis_of_the_Perception_of_the_EU_and.pdf (Accessed 02/Jan/2021), 159.

that, consistently across both years, South Koreans ranked the US, China, and Japan as their top three crucial partners. However, there was a notable escalation in the perceived importance of these countries over the two-year period: the US increased from 65% to 80%, China from 47% to 73%, and Japan from 44% to 60%. One striking change was the substantial surge in the EU's significance, rising from 3.5% in 2004 to 41.5% in 2006. This remarkable shift can be attributed to evolving dynamics between South Korea and the EU, notably the initiation of preliminary negotiations for the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement.⁵⁾ These developments underscore the growing recognition among the Korean public of the EU as a significant trading partner (Chaban & Chung, 2009, pp.19-39).

What are the perceptions of the European Union (EU) among Korean university students? The HUFHS-HRI EU Centre, established in 2011, seeks to advance understanding and strengthen relations between Korea and the EU. This center was founded through the collaboration of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFHS), a leading institution in European studies, and the Hyundai Economic Research Institute (HRI), a prominent Korean think tank. The center is dedicated to research and education concerning the EU. In 2011, the HUFHS-HRI EU Centre conducted a survey involving 1,766 Korean university students to evaluate their perceptions of the EU. This research systematically examined the students' views on the EU through a comprehensive questionnaire. The questionnaire addressed several dimensions, including general perceptions of the EU, understanding of its developmental history, and recognition of the EU's

5) The Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was initiated by the Roh Moo-hyun administration in early 2003. Preliminary negotiations commenced in July 2006, and formal negotiations began on May 4, 2007, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Seoul. These negotiations, which comprised eight official rounds, concluded in March 2009. A declaration announcing the conclusion of the negotiations was made in July 2009. Unlike the Korea-U.S. FTA, the Korea-EU FTA was signed by representatives of both parties in Brussels in October 2010, without significant confrontation. The agreement officially came into effect on July 1, 2011.

role, comparative methods of recognition between Korea and the EU, and recent pertinent issues.

The analysis revealed the following insights:

1. A significant majority of respondents demonstrated high awareness of the EU (94.7%).
2. Respondents generally viewed the EU as a regional bloc focused on economic development.
3. However, respondents exhibited limited understanding of the EU's history, organization, institutions, composition, and authority.
4. Despite anticipating that the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement would benefit the Korean economy, many students still regarded the US, China, and Japan as more prominent partners in international affairs.

The results indicate that the majority of Korean university students are aware of the European Union (EU) and primarily perceive it as a regional bloc focused on economic integration. The economic and trade sectors are identified as the most significant areas in the Korea-EU relationship. However, there is a noted deficiency in the students' understanding of the EU's historical development and core values. Furthermore, the EU is perceived as less important in Korea's foreign relations, ranking fourth behind the United States, China, and Japan (HUFS-HRI, 2012, pp.49-74).

In 2020, Yoon published an article titled "Evolving Relations, Changing Perceptions? The Reflection of EU Representations in South Korea," offering a comprehensive overview of South Korea's evolving perception of the EU through data from NCRE projects conducted between 2004 and 2015. Her findings indicate that "the US, China, and Japan are the three most significant international counterparts in Korea's present and future." Furthermore, the study revealed that the Korean public does not evaluate EU-Korea relations positively or negatively, suggesting an understanding of the EU based more on its

presence than its impact (Yoon, 2020, pp.207-209). Yoon highlights that perceptions of the EU in South Korean news media have become increasingly salient over time, with coverage growing more frequent and diverse. As a result, the Korean audience now views the EU not only as an “economic giant” but also as a “growing and highly anticipated global power” in normative fields. Despite this, she notes that the South Korean public still perceives the bilateral relationship as “neither good nor bad.” Yoon emphasizes that the involvement of major powers on the Korean Peninsula limits how the EU is reported in South Korea. (Yoon, 2020).

In summary, research conducted between 2004 and 2020 on Koreans' perceptions of the European Union (EU) reveals that Korean university students exhibit a high level of awareness of the EU (94.7%). However, they generally perceive it as a regional bloc primarily focused on economic development. Overall, their perception of the EU tends to be neutral, neither distinctly positive nor negative. The general population in South Korea associates the EU with mostly positive attributes and is less likely to view it negatively. While Koreans consider the United States, China, and Japan to be the three most significant international counterparts in Korea's foreign relations, they also recognize Europe as a powerful international actor, particularly due to its economic and trade influence.

Drawing from pivotal insights and foundational references in prior research, this study constructs a rigorous survey methodology and delineates specific research questions. The primary objective of this investigation is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of changes in Korean perceptions of the European Union (EU) in 2021, subsequent to the implementation of the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA). By building on insights from previous studies, this research seeks to examine the nuanced dimensions of Korean awareness of the EU. The study aims to elucidate significant implications for the development of Korea-EU relations by evaluating contemporary perceptions of the EU among Koreans and

assessing its relative significance within Korea's foreign policy framework. Additionally, the findings of this study will contribute to the enhancement of EU public diplomacy initiatives.

III. Methodology

Public perception investigation methodologies typically fall into two categories: media analysis and public opinion surveys (Chung, 2020, p.223) notes that South Korean perception research has traditionally focused predominantly on media analysis. However, this study diverges from that trend by concentrating on South Korean perceptions of the EU through a public opinion survey, excluding media analysis. The methodological framework of this paper is influenced in part by the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE). Our survey was meticulously designed to examine the following aspects of Korean public awareness regarding the EU:

- 1) how the Korean public understands the EU;
- 2) to what extent Koreans' perceptions of the EU are positive, negative, or neutral as an important international actor; and
- 3) whether the EU is perceived as an important partner for solving Korean problems.

The survey questions were organized into three primary categories: "Understanding of the EU," "Perceptions of the EU as a significant international actor," and "The Importance of EU Partnerships for South Korea." Particular care was taken in designing the questionnaire to ensure the generation of meaningful and analytically robust survey results. To mitigate potential respondent fatigue or psychological burden, especially from overly technical or

academic phrasing, the questions were deliberately formulated to be concise and accessible, facilitating ease of comprehension. Rather than solely measuring the extent of public knowledge about the EU, the survey aimed to investigate more nuanced dimensions: whether the South Korean public perceives the EU as an active and influential partner in its bilateral relations with South Korea and how they evaluate the EU’s role on the global stage.

The survey was conducted in January 2021 in South Korea, with a representative sample of 1,000 individuals selected evenly across gender, age, and region (both metropolitan and local areas). A set of questions was presented to each sampled population of 1,000 individuals. The data collection was facilitated through online omnibus surveys. The table below provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the survey participants. (Table 2)

<Table 2> The demographic characteristics of survey subject respondents

Gender	men	(512)	total number of responses(N)1000
	women	(488)	
Age	20-29	(182)	1000
	30-39	(184)	
	40-49	(220)	
	50-59	(233)	
	over 60	(181)	
Region	Seoul	(195)	1000
	Busan	(66)	
	Daegu	(48)	
	Incheon	(59)	
	Gwangju	(27)	
	Daejeon	(27)	
	Ulsan	(23)	
	Gyeonggi-do	(262)	
	Ganwon-do	(28)	

	Chungcheongbuk-do	(30)	
	Chungcheongnam-do	(40)	
	Jeollabuk-do	(32)	
	Jeollanam-do	(33)	
	Gyeongsangbuk-do	(48)	
	Gyeongsangnam-do	(63)	
	Jeju-do	(12)	
	Sejong-si	(7)	

IV. Findings & analysis

Chapter 4 is subdivided into three subchapters based on question categories:

- a) General View of the EU,
- b) Image of the EU's Role in International Affairs, and
- c) Relationship between Korea and the EU.

Each subchapter explores a distinct aspect of Korean public perception regarding the EU, providing insights into these key areas of interest.

1. General view of the EU

The first category of questions aimed to gauge respondents' general perceptions of the EU. The primary question asked was, "How much do you know about the EU?" Responses were categorized into five levels of recognition: ① Very well, ② Somewhat aware, ③ Normal, ④ Not well, and ⑤ Not at all. The survey results indicate that when respondents were asked about their knowledge of the European Union (EU), the most common response was "to some extent" (39.7%), followed by "knowing at a normal level"

(36.8%). Consequently, 81.1% of respondents (4.6% reporting high familiarity, 39.7% moderate familiarity, and 36.8% average familiarity) expressed at least some level of awareness about the EU, suggesting that a significant portion of Koreans possess a better-than-average understanding of the EU. Conversely, 18.9% of respondents (16.9% with limited knowledge and 2.0% with no knowledge) indicated a lack of awareness or familiarity with the EU. (Figure 1)

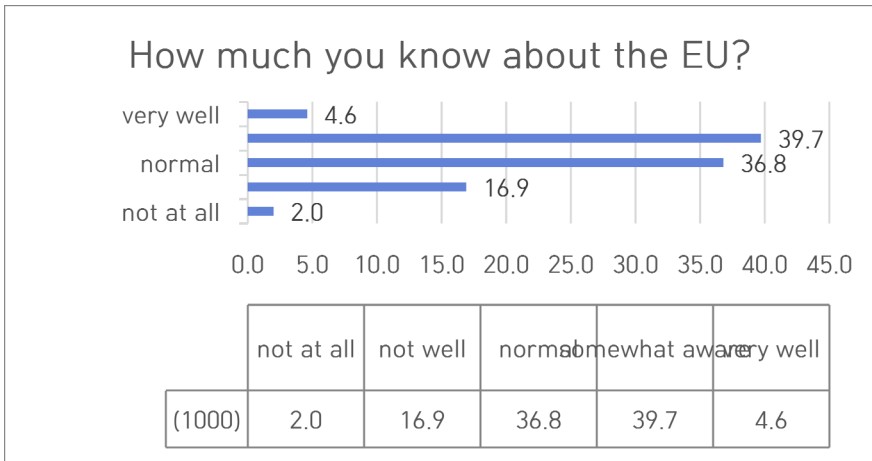


Figure 1: General View of the EU

We further investigated how perceptions of the European Union (EU) differ across various age groups. The sample was segmented into respondents aged 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s or older. Analysis revealed that among respondents in their 20s, the most frequent response to the question, "How much do you know about the EU?" was "somewhat aware" (50.0%), followed by "normal" (26.9%), and "not well" (15.4%). In comparison, respondents in their 30s, 40s, and 50s predominantly reported having a "normal" level of knowledge about the EU. Interestingly, those in their 50s were the most likely to state, "somewhat aware"(36.9%). (Figure 2) These results indicate that age influences perceptions

of the EU in South Korea. Younger respondents, particularly those in their 20s, tend to express a greater degree of familiarity with the EU, whereas older age groups generally describe their knowledge as average. Notably, those in their 50s demonstrated the highest confidence in their understanding of the EU, suggesting nuanced differences in perceptions across different age demographics.

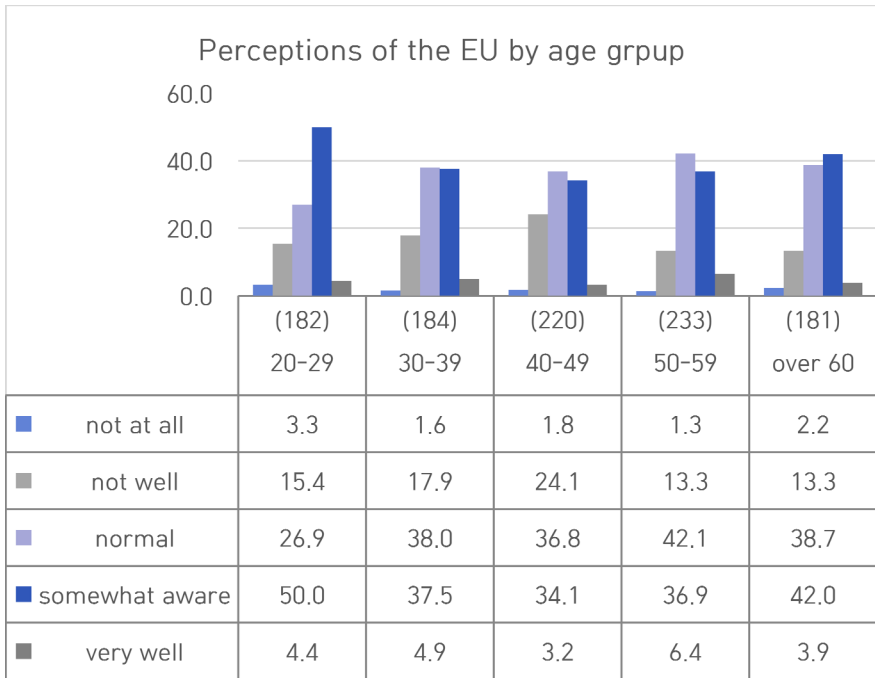


Figure 2: Perceptions of the EU by age group

To examine differences in perceptions of the European Union (EU) based on gender, we analyzed responses segmented by male and female respondents. The data reveal distinct variations in EU perceptions between genders. Among male respondents, the most common response to the question, “How much do you know about the EU?” was “somewhat aware” (50.4%), followed by “normal”

(31.3%), “not well” (9.6%), “very well” (7.4%), and “not at all” (1.4%). In contrast, female respondents most frequently selected “normal” (42.6%), followed by “somewhat aware” (28.5%), “not well” (24.6%), “not at all” (2.7%), and “very well” (1.6%). (Figure 3) Notably, the proportion of female respondents indicating “normal” was higher than that of their male counterparts, whereas a lower percentage of women reported being “somewhat aware.” These findings suggest that while both genders exhibit a moderate level of familiarity with the EU, women are somewhat more likely to categorize their knowledge as average rather than somewhat familiar. Thus, men tend to have slightly higher levels of familiarity with the EU compared to women, who are more likely to describe their knowledge as average.

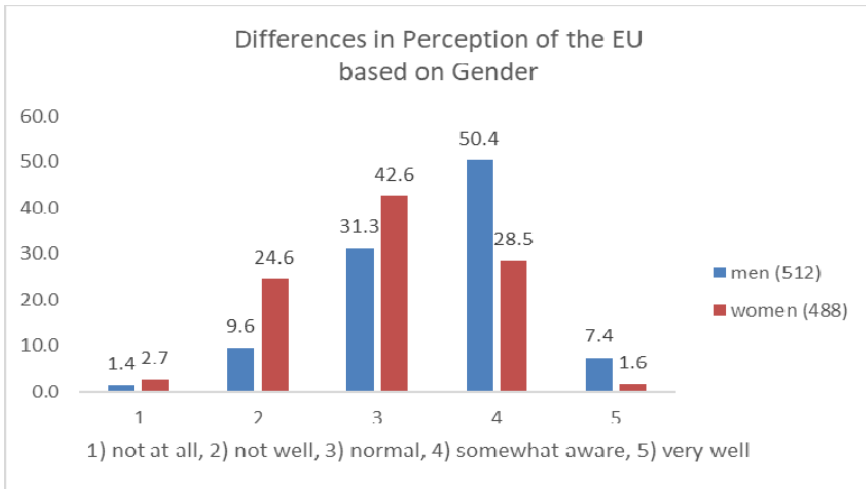


Figure 3: Differences in Perception of the EU based on Gender

The results of examining how perceptions of the EU differ by region are as follows: Jeju-do ranked first, followed by Daejeon in second place, and Gwangju in third. Interestingly, Seoul, Daegu, Gyeongsangbuk-do, and

Gyeongsangnam-do ranked similarly. (Figure 4) It was anticipated that metropolitan areas would exhibit a significantly higher level of EU awareness compared to non-metropolitan areas. However, this expectation was not met. Surprisingly, the non-metropolitan areas displayed the same level of awareness as the metropolitan areas, or in some cases, even demonstrated higher awareness levels than the metropolitan areas.

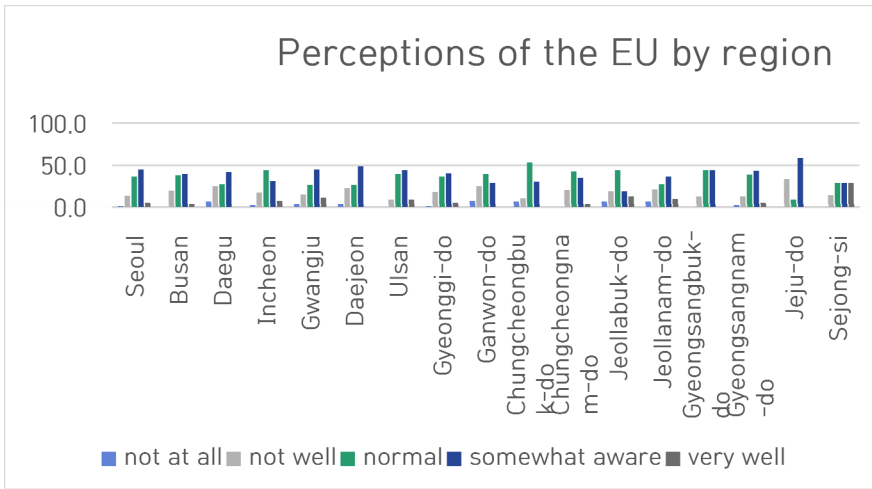


Figure 4: Perceptions of the EU by region

Subsequently, respondents were prompted to identify their level of familiarity with significant EU issues or events, including Brexit, the Korea-EU FTA, the EU refugee problem, EU terrorism, and the EU COVID-19 response. By exploring these questions, the study sought to ascertain the extent of Koreans' awareness about the EU and identify the topics that resonate most with them. We asked respondents to tell us what the decisive EU issue or event they had learned about. Questions like this can inform on what subjects or events the Korean general public is particularly interested in regarding the EU.

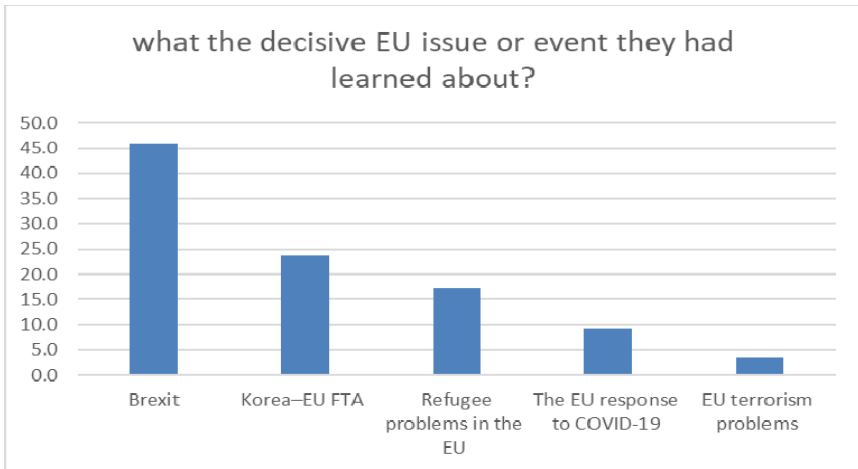


Figure 5: The level of familiarity with significant EU issues or events

The survey results revealed that the issues or events that garnered the most awareness among the general public in Korea were as follows (Figure 5):

- Brexit (46.0%)
- Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement (23.8%)
- Refugee problems in the EU (17.4%)
- The EU response to COVID-19 (9.3%)
- EU terrorism problems (3.5%)

In terms of Brexit, respondents most commonly reported being "somewhat familiar." Similarly, for questions regarding the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement, EU refugee issues, and the EU's response to COVID-19, the most frequent response was "average awareness." (Figure 6) Hence, it is evident that the general public in Korea exhibits the greatest interest in Brexit, which has emerged as a significant international issue.

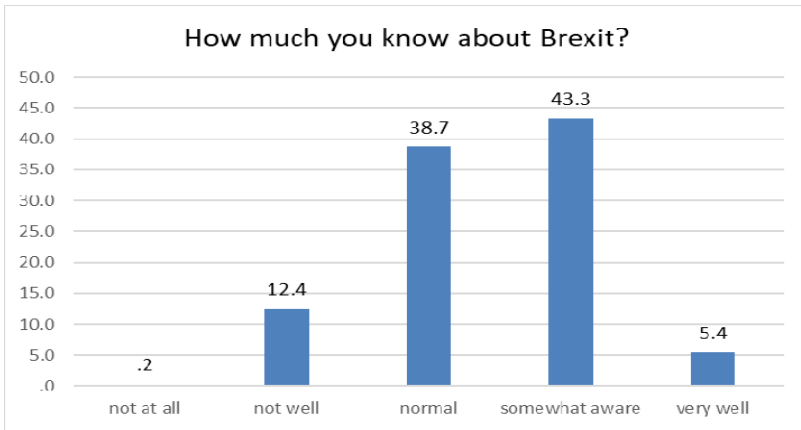


Figure 6: How much you know about Brexit?

Britain's departure from the EU in 2021, commonly referred to as Brexit, was a significant geopolitical event that deeply resonated with the South Korean public. The decision was perceived as a shocking development due to the UK's long-standing membership in the EU and the anticipated economic and political repercussions. At the time, South Korean media extensively covered Brexit's potential impact on international trade, diplomatic relations, and global economic stability. The unexpected move was seen as a challenge to the EU's cohesion, prompting many Koreans to reassess the dynamics of regional integration and consider the potential volatility of such alliances. Furthermore, the event sparked discussions about the sustainability of European integration, with questions frequently raised regarding its long-term viability and stability (See Yoon & Chung, 2021)⁶⁾

6) For further information on the relationship between Korean perception and media, see S.W. Yoon and S.W. Chung's article, "Framing the EU: Big Data Analysis of South Korean News Media," published in *Sustainability*, 2021, 13(4)). The authors argue that images of the EU in South Korean media have turned negative since the mid-2010s, largely due to various crises, including the Eurozone crisis, the refugee crisis, Brexit, and, more recently,

Finally, concerning the level of Korean interest in the EU, respondents were asked whether they believed they were knowledgeable enough about the EU. The responses were intriguing. The majority of Koreans indicated that they did not feel adequately informed about the EU and expressed a desire to learn more (51.1%). Following closely, the second most common response was that they felt they knew enough about the EU but desired to deepen their understanding further (33.0%). (Figure 7) These findings underscore a significant level of interest among Koreans in expanding their knowledge and understanding of the EU, indicating a keen desire to engage more deeply with EU-related issues and developments.

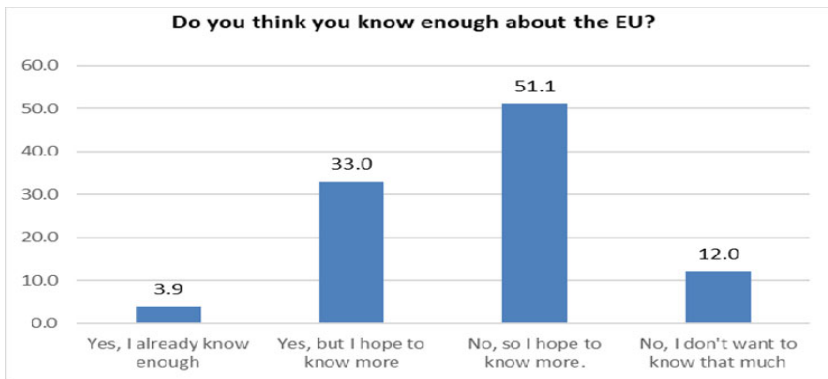


Figure 7: The level of South Korean interest in the EU

This interest reflects a notable level of engagement between South Korea and

the COVID-19 pandemic. They suggest that Korean media has shifted its focus to discussing the EU in terms of its crises rather than highlighting the beneficial potential of EU-Korea cooperation. This shift in communication indicates that South Korean media has employed a crisis-focused approach when covering EU affairs. Notably, following the Brexit referendum in 2016, think tanks and experts presented research on the potential impacts of Brexit on the South Korean economy and EU-Korea relations.

the EU. The EU's success in achieving peace through economic integration offers valuable lessons for South Korea, providing insights that could help enhance regional stability and cooperation. For East Asian countries, such as South Korea, the EU's experience in conflict resolution through integration serves as a potential model for fostering regional stability. To strengthen Korea-EU relations, the EU must enhance its communication efforts, particularly by highlighting its broader role in global diplomacy, security, and governance. This approach would foster a better understanding of the EU's values and policies, ultimately enriching the bilateral relationship.

2. Images of the EU as an important international actor

The second aspect of our study examines how Koreans perceive the European Union (EU). Specifically, we sought to determine whether Koreans view the EU positively or negatively. The response options included: '① very positive', '② somewhat positive', '③ neutral', '④ somewhat negative', '⑤ very negative', and '⑥ unfamiliar'. To gain a deeper understanding of Koreans' perceptions of the EU, we first asked respondents what image or word comes to mind when they hear the term "EU." Additionally, we inquired about their views on the EU's influence as a leader in maintaining global peace and stability. These questions aimed to capture how Koreans feel about the EU and its role on the international stage.

The majority of respondents indicated a neutral stance when asked whether they perceive the EU positively or negatively, with 60.0% selecting "neither positive nor negative." However, a considerable proportion of Koreans (27.3%) responded "somewhat positive." Interestingly, this figure surpasses the combined total of responses categorized as "very negative" and "somewhat negative" (0.3% + 5.3%). Such findings suggest a predominantly positive view of the EU among the general public in Korea. (Figure 8)

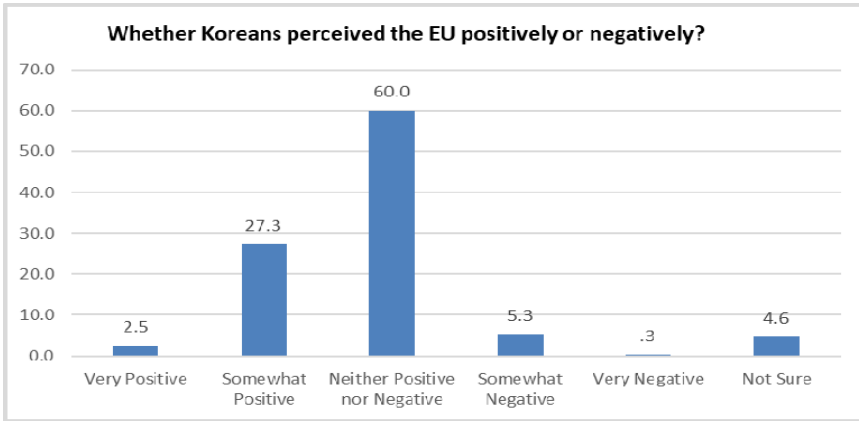


Figure 8: The EU's Image in Korea: A Positive or Negative Perspective?

The second question asked respondents what images or words come to mind when they heard the word EU. The words that came to mind the most were 1) monetary integration (Euros); 2) economic integration (single market), 3) peace settlement, 4) cultural integration; and 5) political integration. (Figure 9) Thus, it appears that Koreans' understanding of the EU is focused on economic integration rather than political and cultural integration.

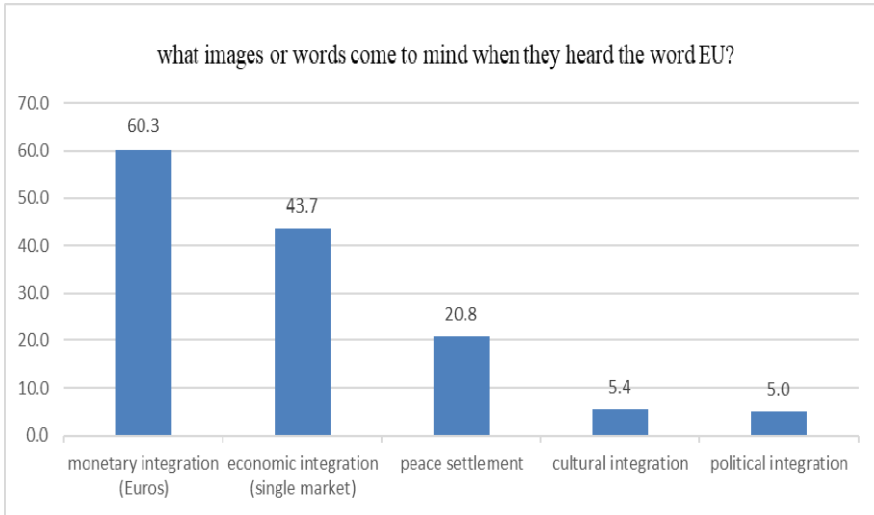


Figure 9: Korean Perceptions: Common Imagery of the EU (duplicate response)

The third category of questions pertained to the significance of the EU in the international community and global economy. The majority of respondents indicated that the EU plays either a "slightly important role" (45.4%) or a "very important role" (21.5%). (Figure 10) These contrasts with Koreans' perception of the EU's political influence, as a significant number of respondents view the EU as a crucial economic organization.

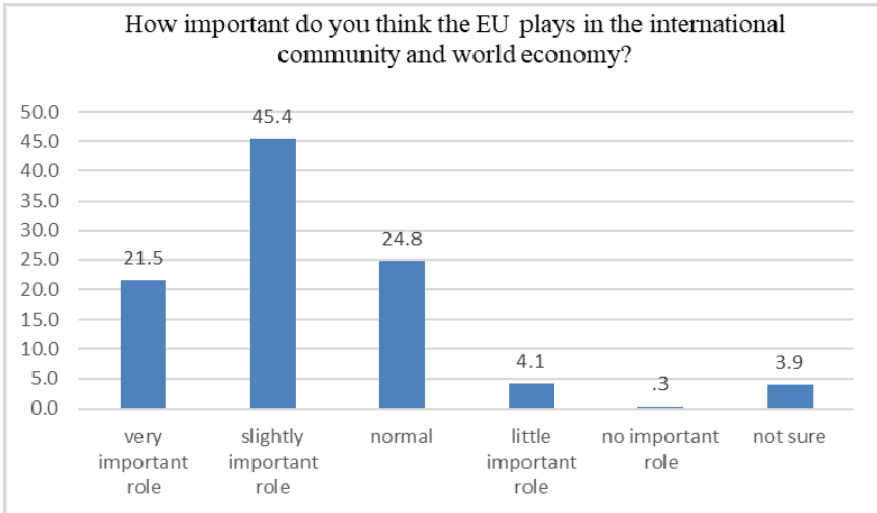


Figure 10: The EU's Role in world economy

The fourth question was, "Do you see the EU as a leader exerting great influence in maintaining world peace and stability?"

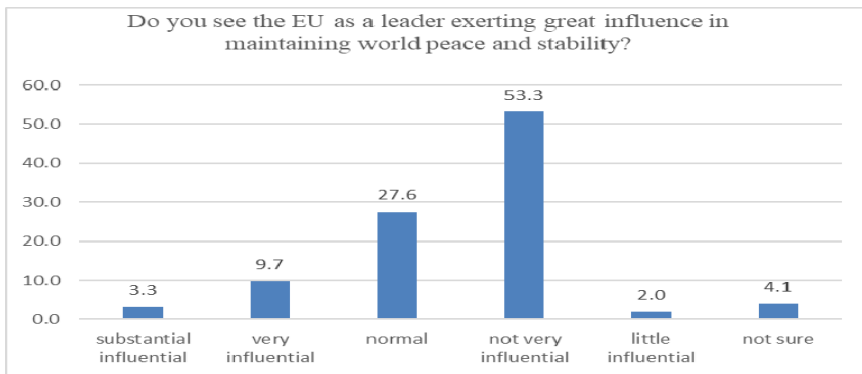


Figure 11: The EU's role and influence in maintaining world peace and stability

Regarding EU leadership, the general public in Korea most frequently responded with "not very influential" (53.3%), followed by "normal" (27.6%), and "very influential" (9.7%). (Figure 11) These findings suggest that a significant portion of Koreans do not perceive the EU as a prominent leader in the maintenance of world peace and stability. The survey results indicating that a majority of Koreans view the EU as "not very influential" in terms of leadership for global peace and stability provide several insights into perceptions of the EU in South Korea.

In conclusion, the perception of the European Union (EU) among Koreans is characterized by a limited recognition of its political influence, with many individuals associating the EU primarily with economic activities rather than with political or diplomatic leadership on the global stage. Despite the EU's efforts to position itself as a leader in diplomacy, security, and sustainability, its influence appears less pronounced to the South Korean public. These perceptions have important implications for the EU's diplomatic strategy in Korea. To bolster its image as a global leader, the EU may need to undertake more targeted public diplomacy initiatives that emphasize its contributions to global peace and stability, such as its roles in conflict mediation, humanitarian aid, and environmental leadership.

3. Importance of the EU for South Korea as a partner

The third category of questions focused on Korea-EU relations, specifically examining whether the general public in Korea views the European Union as an important partner for Korea and what role the EU might play in promoting peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. This line of questioning aims to elucidate the Korean public's understanding and perception of the importance of mutual cooperation between Korea and the EU. By exploring these perceptions, the study seeks to derive meaningful insights for fostering closer Korea-EU relations.

Initial inquiries regarding the perception of Korea-EU relations revealed that a significant portion of the Korean public recognizes the EU as a key partner. When asked whether the EU is considered an important partner for Korea, 55.3% of respondents affirmed that the EU is "an important partner," while 11.0% described it as "a very important partner." (Figure 12) These findings suggest that the Korean public acknowledges the EU's importance in its international partnerships.

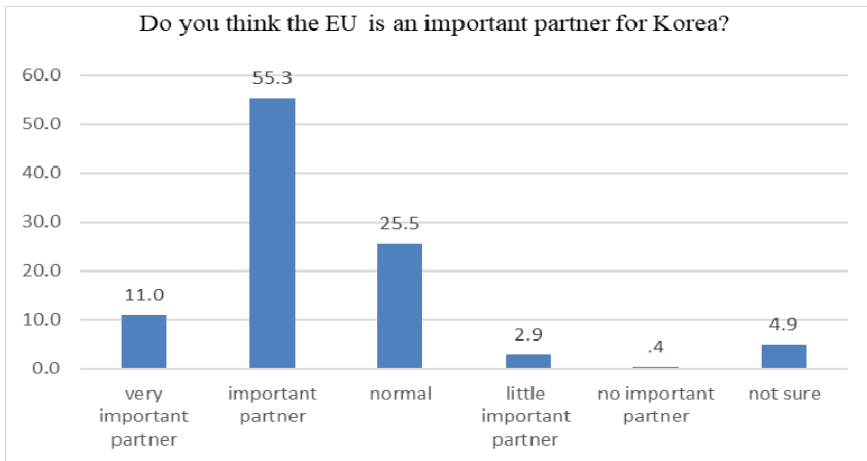


Figure 12: Perception of the EU as an important partner for Korea

Subsequently, we inquired about the area in which the EU's influence on Korean society is perceived to be the most significant. Respondents identified the economy as the field in which the EU has the greatest influence, with 57.3% indicating this belief. Other areas where the EU's influence was recognized, though to a lesser extent, include politics and security (14.7%), the environment (6.2%), science and technology (4.6%), culture and the arts (3.6%), development cooperation (3.3%), society (2.1%), and energy (1.9%). (Figure 13)

These findings align with responses to an earlier question regarding the images or concepts associated with the EU, where monetary integration and economic integration ranked first and second, respectively. This consistency suggests that the general public's understanding and interest in the EU are predominantly concentrated in the economic domain.

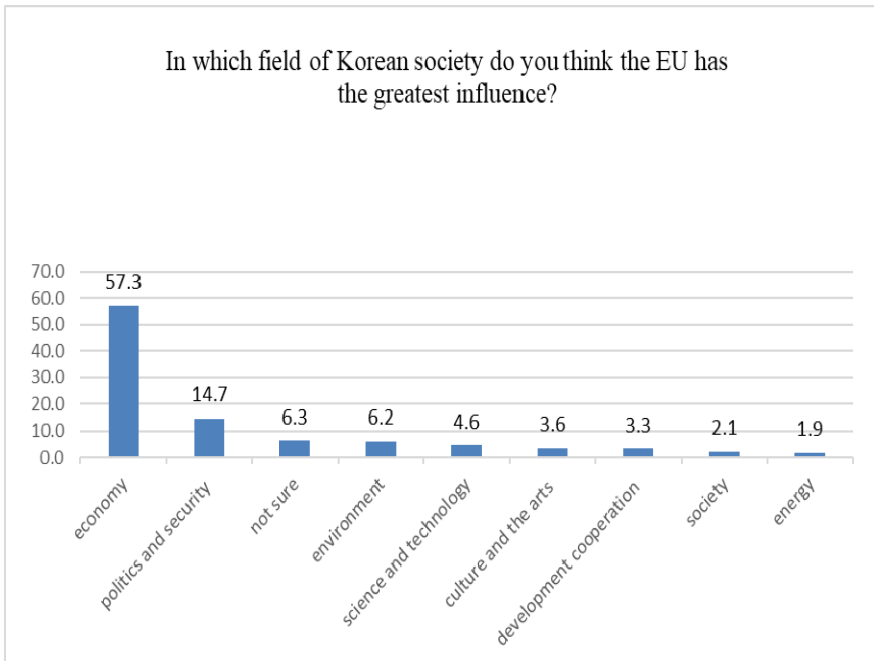


Figure 13: Perception of the EU' s influence in Korean society

Finally, when asked whether the EU is expected to play a significant role in establishing peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, they responded as follows.

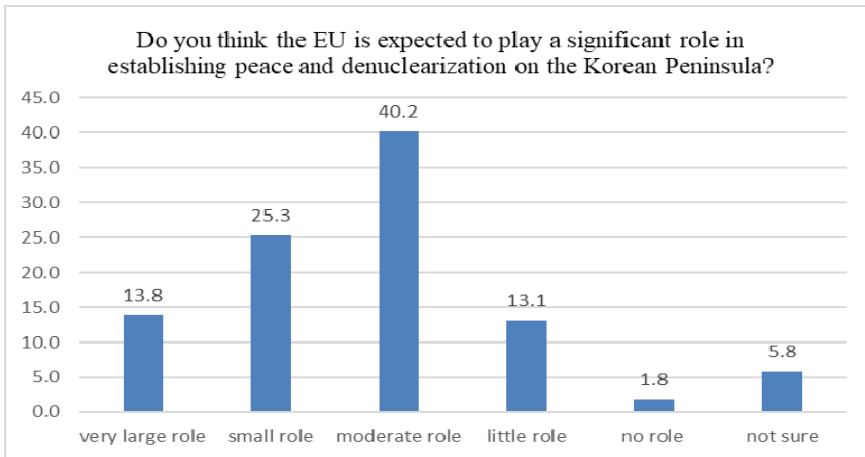


Figure 14: Perception of the EU' s role in establishing peace and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

The largest proportion of respondents indicated, "I think it can play a moderate role" (40.2%), followed by "I think it can play a small role" (25.3%), and "I think it can play a very large role" (13.8%). (Figure 14) These responses suggest that the South Korean general public believes the EU can contribute to establishing peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, though they generally perceive this role as moderate rather than substantial.

V. Conclusion: Results of Korean Perceptions of the EU

This study conducted a survey to evaluate the level of awareness of the European Union (EU) among the general public in South Korea. The sample consisted of approximately 1,000 individuals, selected to ensure balanced

representation across various age groups and regions. The survey explored multiple aspects, including general perceptions of the EU, the extent of awareness about its functions and impact, and the nature of the Korea-EU relationship. The findings provide valuable insights into how Koreans perceive the EU.

The survey results on perceptions of the EU among the South Korean public can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, respondents reported a moderate level of familiarity with the EU overall. Analysis by age group showed that individuals in their 20s had a level of familiarity similar to that of other age groups. Gender analysis indicated that both male and female respondents demonstrated comparable moderate awareness of the EU. Notably, Jeju Island had the highest proportion of respondents with moderate knowledge of the EU, while awareness levels were similar across both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Furthermore, the survey revealed a notable interest among the South Korean public in various EU-related issues, with Brexit emerging as a particularly significant topic. Extensive media coverage and public discourse in South Korea portrayed Brexit as a major geopolitical event that challenges the cohesion and stability of the EU. As a result, the South Korean public viewed Brexit as a relevant case study of the complexities involved in regional integration and disintegration.

Secondly, regarding the overall perception of the EU, respondents generally adopted a neutral stance. A significant proportion expressed neither positive nor negative views, with a smaller segment holding a somewhat positive outlook. Most South Koreans perceived European integration predominantly through an economic lens rather than a political or cultural one. In terms of the EU's role in maintaining global peace and stability, the largest segment of respondents regarded the EU as "not very influential." These findings underscore that the prevailing image of the EU among South Koreans is primarily centered on its economic features, such as the monetary union and the single market.

Thirdly, with respect to Korea-EU relations, South Koreans recognize the EU as a significant partner, particularly highlighting the economic dimension as the area where the EU exerts the most substantial influence on Korean society. However, when inquired about the EU's potential role in promoting peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, the prevailing response was that the EU "can play a moderate role." These findings suggest that the South Korean public exhibits a stronger interest in the economic aspects of Korea-EU relations compared to political and security issues. Ten years after the signing of the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA), South Koreans continue to view the relationship primarily through an economic and trade perspective.

In conclusion, the EU is primarily seen in South Korea as an economic power, with less recognition of its role in global diplomacy, security, or sustainability. This perception has implications for the EU's diplomatic strategy in South Korea, where economic aspects dominate public understanding. Despite the growing institutional ties between the two, the focus on economics persists. To strengthen its global leadership profile, the EU should enhance its public diplomacy by better communicating its contributions to global peace and stability.

The South Korean public has shown significant interest in learning more about the EU, particularly in terms of its success with peace through economic integration, which could offer valuable insights for regional stability and cooperation in Northeast Asia. However, the EU is still perceived largely as an economic entity, underscoring the need for the EU to improve how it conveys its political and diplomatic roles to South Koreans. Given the ongoing security challenges in East Asia, such as the China-Taiwan dispute and tensions on the Korean Peninsula, the EU's experience in conflict resolution offers valuable lessons. To enrich the bilateral relationship, the EU should focus on expanding its communication beyond economic issues, highlighting its broader influence in diplomacy, security, and governance.

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