

Three-Decade Overview: Evolution and Current Dynamics of Russia-Republic of Korea Bilateral Relations*

Vadim Akulenko(Research Professor, Chung-Ang University)

Abstract

This work examines the history of bilateral relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea over three decades and their current state. Throughout this extended period of progressive development, the parties have been able to build mutually beneficial cooperation aimed at peace and prosperity in East Asia. After the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the countries in 1990, Moscow hoped to receive significant investments in its economy and the development of bilateral trade from Seoul, while Seoul saw in it an opportunity to use Moscow's influence on Pyongyang. The absence of clear points of intersection of interests at the initial stage led to a decrease in the dynamics of their development by the mid-1990s. The appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, which changed the previous approach to foreign policy, opened a new chapter in Russian-South Korean relations. President Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy aligned with Russia's interests in the region, hence Moscow supported Seoul's initiatives. With the beginning of the 2000s, a prolonged era of progressive development of bilateral relations began, closely approaching strategic partnership level. Visits by leaders of the two countries and the active development of economic and humanitarian ties opened an era of mutually beneficial cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea. However, the escalating confrontation between Russia and the West has inevitably left its mark, leading in the last two years to increasing tension and the commencement of unilateral withdrawal from cooperation by South Korea. Unfortunately, the level of bilateral relations between the countries is currently at perhaps the lowest point in the past three decades, yet it still retains its functionality. Nevertheless, cultural and scientific ties between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea continue to function and develop, fostering hope for the normalization of bilateral relations in the future, when external political conditions permit.

Keywords: Russia, South Korea, Bilateral Relations, Russia-South Korea Relations

* 이 논문은 2017년 대한민국 교육부와 한국연구재단의 지원을 받아 수행된 연구임 (NRF-2017S1A6A3A03079318). This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2017S1A6A3A03079318).

I. Introduction

Despite the fact that in 2020, Russia and the Republic of Korea celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of their bilateral relations, the history of Russian-Korean contacts began long before the 1990s. The first interactions between Russians and Koreans date back to the confrontations between Russian Cossacks and the Manchus of Qing Dynasty in the 17th century, during which Korea inadvertently became embroiled in a series of border conflicts, in two of which Korean musketeers, nicknamed for their distinctive headgear as "big-headed", participated¹⁾. However, until the mid-19th century, there were no official contacts between Russians and Koreans.

The close acquaintance of Russians with Koreans began in the mid-19th century when Admiral Putyatin, originally dispatched with his squadron to Japan, took the initiative to survey the eastern coast of Korea and also sent a letter to the Korean government proposing the establishment of trade ties with Russia. However, the realization of Putyatin's idea spanned many decades.

In 1884, a treaty of friendship and trade was signed in Seoul between the Russian Empire and the Joseon State, marking the beginning of their official political relations. For two decades, Korea became the arena for competition between Russia, Japan, China, and England. A strong pro-Russian party emerged in Korea, which was favored by King Gojong and Queen Min. After the assassination of Queen Min in 1895, the Russian side presented evidence of Japanese involvement in the conspiracy, and Gojong sought refuge in the Russian mission. The leader of the pro-Russian party, one of the leading politicians of Korea at the time, Lee Beom-jin, was appointed the first Korean envoy to St. Petersburg. Following the signing of the Korea-Japan protectorate treaty in 1905, all Korean diplomats were recalled from their missions, but Lee

1) Акуленко, В.С., "Образ России и русских в «Реальных записях правящего дома Чосон»." *Известия Иркутского государственного университета. Серия История*, Vol. 34, 2020, p. 58.

Beom-jin remained in St. Petersburg, attempting to secure Russian support for the Korean national movement²⁾.

Amid the establishment of political and economic ties, a massive migration from Korea to Russia took place, primarily driven by the poverty and famine of Korean peasants. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were already 32 Korean settlements in Primorskaya Oblast, of which 31 were located in the South Ussuriysk district. Moreover, 22 villages formed the independent Yanchikhin volost³⁾. In just 10 years (1891-1902), the number of Koreans in Primorskaya Oblast alone increased from 12,857 to 32,380⁴⁾. Koreans actively engaged in various crafts and trade, but were particularly valued by the Russian administration for their achievements in agriculture.

The compact settlement and, in general, Russia's friendly stance towards Koreans resulted in a significant portion of the commanders of the anti-Japanese Righteous armies movement settling in the Primorskaya Oblast. Japan demanded that Russia prohibit such activities by Koreans. The Tsarist government, interested in stability after the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), issued an order not to allow overt anti-Japanese agitation and demonstrations. However, it effectively turned a blind eye to the covert activities of Koreans in the Russian Far East.

During the Civil War period, some activists from the Korean community in Primorskaya Oblast supported the Bolsheviks. After the Bolsheviks consolidated their power, Koreans showed loyalty to them and continued to live in national communities. With the international situation becoming tense on the eve of World War II, the Soviet government decided to relocate the Koreans to Central Asia, fearing that since Korea at the time was a part of the Japanese Empire, some Koreans could collaborate with Japanese intelligence.

2) Козлов, Л.Е., "Исторический фон современных российско-корейских отношений." *Актуальные вопросы общественных наук: социология, политология, философия, история*, No. 12 (52), 2015, p. 33.

3) Пак, Б.Д., *Корейцы в Российской империи*. Иркутск: Иркутский государственный педагогический университет, 1994, p. 76.

4) Пак, Б.Д., *Ibid.*, p. 74.

After the end of World War II, Koreans already living in the USSR were joined by those who had been relocated to the south of Sakhalin, which, like the Korean Peninsula, was under Japanese rule until Japan's surrender in 1945. Furthermore, in the 1950s, a significant number of migrants from the DPRK came to the Soviet Far East. As a result, by the time the USSR collapsed, about 600,000 Koreans lived within its borders⁵⁾.

After the proclamation of two independent states in the North and South of the Korean Peninsula, the USSR established diplomatic relations only with the DPRK. The USSR did not maintain official relations with South Korea and did not recognize the sovereignty of the "Seoul regime". Nevertheless, it should be noted that the South Korean intelligentsia had some understanding of Russian culture through Japanese translations, and in the 1960s and 1970s, departments of the Russian language were established in South Korea, and works of Russian literature were published in Korean⁶⁾.

During the period of perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev recognized the potential for relations with South Korea. The Seoul Olympics in 1988 served as a convenient occasion for establishing diplomatic relations.

II. Establishment and Development of Bilateral Relations Prior to "Primakov's Loop"

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the foundation of Russia's foreign policy became the establishment of new relationships with former Soviet republics and foreign states, as well as integration into the system of international relations. On April 23, 1993, Russian President Boris Yeltsin approved the "Fundamental Provisions of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" by decree ⁷⁾. The document emphasized that Russia's

5) Ён, Сонг Хьм, "Россия и Республика Корея: взгляд из Сеула." *Международная жизнь*, No. 3, 2012, <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/628> (검색일:2023.11.30).

6) Козлов, Л.Е., *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

foreign policy orientation should stem not from ideological premises but from "fundamental national interests." A policy was declared to develop special relations with three groups of countries: the near abroad states, "economically powerful and technologically advanced" Western countries, and "new industrial countries in various regions." In the first half of the 1990s, Russia sought to maximize rapprochement with the West, severing ties not only with former socialist countries but also with many states with which the USSR had established military-political cooperation. However, this course gradually began to change in the latter half of the 1990s after the appointment of Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, who, with his famous "loop" maneuver on March 24, 1999, effectively marked the beginning of a new period in Russian foreign policy.

The relations between the USSR and the Republic of Korea were normalized in September 1990 at a meeting of foreign ministers in New York after a challenging period of preliminary contacts that lasted almost two decades.

During the first half of the 1990s, Moscow hoped that Seoul would either provide significant material support to the country or actively engage in investment and trade cooperation, which would help to address the complex domestic economic situation. Meanwhile, South Korea primarily pursued political objectives. An important motive for Seoul was the desire to use Soviet 's connections with Pyongyang as a tool to influence the DPRK, as well as to reduce Soviet support for the North.

By the time Kim Young-sam came to power in 1993, Russian-South Korean cooperation was generally in decline. Seoul was hesitant to take risks and move towards further rapprochement. This also reflected in the dynamics of high-level communication: the new president visited Russia only in June 1994.

7) Бобров, А. et al., "Эволюция доктринальных основ внешней политики России." *Международная жизнь*, No. 2, 2022, <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2611>(검색일:2023.11.30.).

Following the negotiations, a rather extensive joint declaration was signed. Despite maintaining an overall positive tone, it was evident from the press conference after the Moscow negotiations that both sides were not entirely satisfied. Boris Yeltsin emphasized the need not to summarize the work done, but to make efforts to ensure that the already made progress "does not wane". The Korean side did not fully share this enthusiasm. During the 1994 visit and afterwards, Seoul persistently requested a final abandonment of the Soviet-North Korean treaty of 1961, hinting that the development of bilateral relations depended on it⁸).

The situation began to change with the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1996. Russia abandoned its unilateral focus on the South and began to restore relations with the North, in particular, attempting to negotiate a mutually acceptable revision of the 1961 treaty. Pyongyang initially received the new policy with mistrust, Seoul with disappointment.

Both the North and the South soon found it easier to accept Moscow's new course due to a change in leadership. Kim Jong-il took the helm in the DPRK, appearing in public only after several years of mourning for Kim Il-sung, who passed away in 1994. In the Republic of Korea, Kim Dae-jung became the president at the beginning of 1998. The new leader drastically changed the approach towards Pyongyang, shifting from isolation to engagement. This new paradigm was termed the "Sunshine Policy." It turned out that the adjusted Russian course aligned with Seoul's interests, and Russia, in turn, supported the South's initiatives⁹).

Simultaneously with these events, Russia's foreign policy landmarks began to change significantly. The commencement of the bombing of Yugoslavia and

8) Забровская, Л.В., *Россия и Республика Корея: от конфронтации к сотрудничеству (1970-1990-е гг.)*, Владивосток: Издательство ИИАЭ ДВО РАН, 1996, p. 28.

9) Толорая, Г.Д., "Россия и проблемы Корейского полуострова на современном этапе." *Вестник МГИМО-Университета*, No. 4(37), 2014, p. 87.

the famous "Primakov's loop" marked an end to the previous principles of building relations between Russia and Western countries. However, the cooling of relations with Europe and the USA during these years did not affect the development of relations with South Korea. In my view, a significant role in this was played by the independent stance of President Kim Dae-jung.

The wisdom and equity of President Kim Dae-jung in Russian-South Korean relations became evident during his visit to Moscow in May 1999. At that time, the Russian side persuaded the South Koreans that for the "Sunshine Policy" to be effective, they needed to gain the trust of the DPRK, which could not be based solely on declarations and gestures. As a result, the South increased its active support for the North.

III. Bilateral Relations After the Start of Russia-West Confrontation

After Vladimir Putin became the President of Russia, the changes that had begun in Russian foreign policy were formalized within the framework of the new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, adopted on June 28, 2000¹⁰). During this period, relations with the United States and the European Union started to gradually deteriorate. Concurrently, Russia became increasingly active on the international stage, rebuilding the positions it had lost in the 1990s and developing existing relationships, including those with South Korea.

Vladimir Putin outlined the fundamental principles of Russian policy on the Korean Peninsula: non-interference in inter-Korean dialogue, a peaceful diplomatic approach to resolving emerging issues, and a nuclear-free status for

10) "Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации от 28 июня 2000 г." *Электронный фонд актов уальных правовых и нормативно-технических документов*, <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901764263>(검색일:2023.11.30.).

the Korean Peninsula. The Russian president also emphasized the importance of joint economic projects between Russia, South Korea, and North Korea.

The most attention was drawn to the project extending the Trans-Siberian Railway southwards onto the Korean Peninsula and the project connecting the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Korean Railways. Discussions also revolved around energy issues, prospects for laying a gas pipeline to the southern Korean Peninsula through China¹¹).

A new momentum in relations was provided by Vladimir Putin's visit to Seoul in 2002. The countries agreed to cooperate on the Korean settlement and reached agreements on debt repayment through the supply of Russian goods. A tangible manifestation of the new level of relations was Seoul's demand for Moscow's mediating role in the Inter-Korean relations. For instance, in July 2002, it was precisely due to the trip of Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov to Seoul and Pyongyang that the tension in inter-Korean relations was alleviated after the incident with the battle between the North and South ships in the waters off the western coast of Korea.

Kim Dae-jung's foreign policy course was succeeded and continued by Roh Moo-hyun, who held the presidential post from 2002 to 2007. During this period, the development of relations between Russia and the Republic of Korea gained new momentum, which was largely associated with Russia's active involvement in resolving the situation surrounding the DPRK's nuclear program. Participation in the six-party talks, a soft stance towards the North, and the general trend towards revitalizing Russian policy in Asia all aligned with Roh Moo-hyun's overall policy of peace and prosperity.

In September 2004, the South Korean president visited Moscow, and as a result of the meeting, a Joint Russian-Korean Declaration was adopted. In the document, the parties recorded their aspiration to develop constructive and mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields, primarily in political,

11) "Российско-корейское совместное заявление." *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, 2001.02.26., <http://special.kremlin.ru/supplement/3304>(검색일:2023.11.30.).

military-technical, aerospace, energy, and economic areas. An agreement was also signed on cooperation in the exploration and peaceful use of outer space, which opened up new prospects for the development of interaction between the two countries¹²⁾.

In 2005, President Roh Moo-hyun visited Moscow to participate in the ceremonial events marking the 60th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War.

In the fall of 2005, President Vladimir Putin took part in the APEC Economic Leaders' forum held in the South Korean city of Busan. During the meeting of the two presidents, a joint action plan in the field of trade and economic cooperation was signed, aimed at further development of bilateral ties.

Economic cooperation between Russia and South Korea was successfully developing, but overall remained at a relatively low level. Russia's share in South Korea's trade turnover was about 1%, while South Korea's share in Russian trade was less than 2%. Positive aspects included a reduction in the trade balance deficit and a trend towards a positive balance for Russia. The Korean side exported machinery, equipment, vehicles, and chemical industry products. Russia traditionally supplied South Korea mainly with hydrocarbons. In the investment sphere, a positive trend was also observed; however, even in this area, cooperation was not at a sufficiently high level¹³⁾.

At the end of 2007, in the presidential elections in South Korea, the candidate from conservative political forces, Lee Myung-bak, emerged victorious. Meanwhile, in early 2008 in Russia, Dmitry Medvedev succeeded Vladimir Putin as president. The foreign policy direction of the new South Korean president suggested a change in the nature of relations with several states. Russia became the country with which the Republic of Korea's relations

12) "Российско-корейская Совместная декларация." *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, 2004.09.21., <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/2038>(검색일:2023.11.30.).

13) Ланцова, И.С., "Эволюция отношений Российской Федерации и Республики Корея: от первых контактов в к интеграционным проектам." *Евразийская интеграция: экономика, право, политика*, No. 18, 2015, p. 143.

evolved into strategic partnership. In September 2008, talks between Lee Myung-bak and Dmitry Medvedev were held in Moscow, during which the parties discussed the outcomes of cooperation since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1990. The final document indicated that bilateral cooperation should be elevated to the level of a strategic partnership¹⁴).

A significant initiative in shaping a new level of relations between the two countries was the implementation of the "Russia-South Korea Dialogue" project, based on the interaction of the civil societies of both nations. This project aimed to foster the development of strategic partnership between Russia and South Korea, as well as to enhance public, academic, and business contacts. The idea to create such a format was first voiced within the walls of St. Petersburg State University and received support from Dmitry Medvedev¹⁵). In 2009, the main concept of the forum was formulated, coordination committees, working groups, and a secretariat were established. The first "Russia - Republic of Korea Dialogue" forum took place in Seoul in the fall of 2010, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In 2010, Dmitry Medvedev made an official visit to Seoul, which coincided with his participation in the G20 summit held in the capital of South Korea during the same period. The parties agreed to give concrete content to the agreement on strategic partnership, announced back in 2008. During the meeting, a number of documents were signed, including agreements on temporary labor activities, cooperation in the fields of communication, transport, and fisheries¹⁶).

14) "Совместное Заявление Российской Федерации и Республики Корея." *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, 2008.09.29., http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/237(검색일:2023.11.30.).

15) *Диалог Россия - Республика Корея*, <http://drk.ru> (검색일:2023.11.30.).

16) "Официальный визит в Республику Корея." *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, 2010.11.10., <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/9474>(검색일:2023.11.30.).

IV. Bilateral Relations in the Era of Integration Initiatives

In 2012, both Russia and South Korea held presidential elections. In Russia, Vladimir Putin returned to the presidential post, while in South Korea, Park Geun-hye was elected as president. The change in political leaders of the two countries occurred against the backdrop of intensified integration processes in the Asia-Pacific region and Eurasia. On the initiative of the President of the Russian Federation, the formation of the Customs Union was accelerated, which laid the groundwork for the Eurasian Economic Union that began its operations on January 1, 2015. Meanwhile, China proposed the "economic belt of the new Silk Road" concept. South Korea also sought to access markets beyond the Pacific Basin. Hence, in October 2013, Park Geun-hye introduced her Eurasian initiative for the so-called "Silk Road Express", spanning through the inland of Eurasia from the South Korean port of Busan to Western Europe. The proposal involves creating a unified system of power lines, oil and gas pipelines, and joint development of China's and East Siberia's energy resources. In the same context, South Korea's interest in using the Northern Sea Route was expressed. Vladimir Putin supported Park Geun-hye's Eurasian initiative. Moreover, this initiative aligned with projects previously proposed and supported by Russia, particularly plans to connect the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Korean railways.

However, not everything was smooth in the relations between the two countries in the 2000s. One example of such disagreements can be the difficulties in bilateral relations in the field of fisheries. These accumulated issues led to a genuine bilateral crisis in this field in 2013 when the Russian side refrained from granting South Korean fishermen quotas for harvesting an essential fishery resource – pollock, for an extended period of time. The reason was South Korea's failure to fully comply with the terms of a previously signed agreement to counteract illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. The Russian side demanded that South Korean authorities stop the illegal import of

illicit crab caught in Russian waters. However, the issue was eventually resolved, and both parties continued their mutually beneficial cooperation¹⁷⁾.

Following the well-known events of 2017, a new president, Moon Jae-in, came to power in South Korea. One of the pillars of his diplomatic course was a focus on improving relations with Russia. In part, this step was necessary to reinforce the new policy toward the DPRK aimed at restoring ties with Pyongyang. A boost in contacts between Russia and South Korea occurred immediately after the new leader took office. For instance, in 2017, Moon Jae-in attended the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok and also frequently communicated with the Russian leader before that (at the G20 meeting in Hamburg and on multiple phone calls). Such intensity was also explained by Seoul's promotion of a new format for resolving the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula. In June 2018, the South Korean leader visited Moscow on an official visit, and several rather general documents were signed.

The main direction of South Korean policy towards Russia unfolded within the so-called "New Northern Policy" and Nine Bridges Initiative, which was intended to include South Korea in the free trade zone of the Eurasian Economic Union and to develop trilateral economic cooperation between Russia, North and South Korea.

Korea also showed interests in the Arctic: one of the objectives of the "New Northern Policy" was to turn the Northern Sea Route into a new logistic route and to increase the efficiency of its commercial operation with the aim of strengthening the position in the Arctic market. South Korea emphasized shipbuilding and ship servicing. Foreign direct investments grew significantly during this period. However, it should be noted that among them were many openly unsuccessful deals (Incheon International Airport Corporation's exit from a stake in JSC "Khabarovsk Airport", the sale of the Hyundai Motor plant in

17) Акуленко, В.С., "История двустороннего сотрудничества в области рыбного хозяйства между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Корея." *Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2020, pp. 174-176.

Rimorsky Krai, and the DSME shipyard's refusal of an investment deal with the "Zvezda" plant). This created an unfavorable background for economic relations. There were also problems related to investment risks: Korean companies were hesitant to invest in Russia, fearing corruption, an insufficient legal base for investor protection, etc.

Such complexities highlight the intricate nature of economic and political relations between countries and underscore the need for careful management and diplomacy in ensuring the growth and development of bilateral relations¹⁸⁾.

V. Current Dynamics and Future perspectives of Russia-Republic of Korea Bilateral Relations

After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, relations between countries were put on an involuntary hiatus. Established supply chains were disrupted, and humanitarian exchanges were reduced or ceased altogether. Fearing the epidemiological situation in Russia, South Korea even temporarily suspended of the visa-free regime. Nevertheless, it can be noted that all planned contacts along the lines of interaction between the countries were conducted with the same intensity, though mostly through video conferences. And while trade turnover did decrease in 2020, there were tendencies for its recovery in following year.

In 2021, the Republic of Korea ranked 8th on the list of Russia's trading partners, with a trade share of 3.8%, trailing behind China, the Netherlands, Belarus, and others. Meanwhile, Russia entered the top 10 primary trading partners of South Korea, with China leading at \$301 billion, followed by the USA at \$169 billion, Japan at \$84.69 billion, Vietnam at \$80.69 billion, and

18) Антонов, Р.Р., "Корейско-российские международные торговоэкономические отношения в период президентства Мун Чжэ Ина." *Корееведение в России: направление и развитие*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2023, p. 134.

Taiwan at \$47.77 billion. Thus the start of 2022 held great promise for bilateral economic partnership, not only in terms of trade turnover recovery but also a resurgence of interest from South Korean investors towards Russia. After the negative trend in 2020, which was largely due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there was an observed growth in the volume of Russo-South Korean trade turnover. In 2021, this amounted to \$29.88 billion, including Russian exports of \$16.89 billion and imports from South Korea of \$12.99 billion¹⁹).

Nevertheless, 2022 undoubtedly became a turning point in bilateral relations. Despite the fact that the newly elected president of South Korea, Yoon Seok-youl, neither during his election campaign nor in the initial months of his presidency, engaged in overtly anti-Russian rhetoric, the onset of military actions in Ukraine almost instantly made the impact of US-imposed anti-Russian sanctions felt by the South Korean business community due to the fact, that the majority of payments facilitating trade turnover and business processes between Russia and South Korea are conducted in US dollars and, to a lesser extent, in euros²⁰).

At the same time, there are absolutely no economic prerequisites for South Korea to wind down its partnership with Russia. The foundation laid in recent years clearly indicates the potential in bilateral partnership and the interest of South Korean businessmen in developing cooperation in medicine, IT, and other sectors. Moreover, Russian suppliers have established themselves as reliable producers of quality products, evidenced by, for instance, the growth in exports of Russian food to South Korea. In this context, imposing sanctions against Russia poses significant losses, and the previous South Korean administration

19) Самсонова, В. Г., “Торгово-экономическое сотрудничество России и Республики Корея в условиях современных вызовов Trade.” *Современные проблемы Корейского полуострова 2022*, Москва: ИКСА РАН, 2022, p. 47.

20) Иванов, К. В., “Российско-южнокорейские отношения в условиях турбулентности системы международных отношений: вызовы и перспективы.” *Россия и Корея в современном информационном пространстве*, Иркутск: Издательство ИГУ, 2022, p. 24.

understood this. They acted cautiously, avoiding terms like "South Korea sanctions" and instead using phrases like "international sanctions".

Throughout his presidency, Yoon Seok-yeol has been keen to demonstrate his commitment to the US foreign policy course, which in the context of confrontation between Russia and Western countries inevitably leads to conflicts. Undoubtedly, South Korea's imposition of sanctions against the Russian Federation has significantly damaged Russo-South Korean relations. For three decades since their official establishment in 1990, these relations have consistently been based on the principles of good neighborliness, mutual respect, and mutually beneficial cooperation. However, South Korea, unlike its Western partners, have sought to pursue a more balanced and pragmatic approach towards Russia, refraining from getting involved in the "Ukrainian conflict", not joining the efforts of the "buyers' cartel" to set a "price cap" on Russian oil and oil products. This demonstrated the Republic of Korea's interest in preserving the bilateral cooperation architecture built by joint efforts and further realizing the potential of cooperation between the two countries.

The continuity of political dialogues, exchanges at the highest and high levels, and maintaining bilateral contacts are indeed commendable. They signify that, even in the face of political turbulence, diplomatic channels remain open. This is particularly significant considering the geopolitical dynamics of the region, where both Russia and South Korea play pivotal roles.²¹⁾

However, South Korea's recent actions under President Yoon Seok-yeol's leadership have raised concerns in Moscow. Firstly, Yoon's statements regarding the potential assistance with lethal weapons reflect a significant shift in Seoul's position. Such remarks, even if made in a hypothetical context, can send alarming signals to neighboring nations. Additionally, Yoon's visit to Ukraine, amid the ongoing conflict, could be perceived by Moscow as a direct challenge or even an intervention in a matter that Russia views as a regional concern.

21) "Андрей Кулик: Москва готова возобновить полноформатный диалог с Сеулом." *РИА Новости*, 2023.02.10., <https://ria.ru/20230210/kulik-1851052566.html>(검색일:2023.11.30.).

The escalation in South Korea's arms exports, particularly the controversial transfer of ammunition to the US - which was perceived in Russia as an indirect supply to Ukraine - further intensified suspicions and mistrust.

The introduction of additional sanctions against the export of goods to the Russian Federation by South Korea is another step that underscores the growing rift between the two nations. Such measures not only impact bilateral trade but can also have repercussions on the broader geopolitical landscape, influencing alliances, and regional stability.

It's evident that the recent actions and policies of the South Korean leadership have added layers of complexity to the Moscow-Seoul relationship. For both nations to coexist peacefully and cooperatively in the region, it's crucial to prioritize diplomatic dialogues, mutual respect, and understanding over unilateral actions that can potentially escalate tensions. Overall, at the current juncture, it can be asserted that official bilateral relations are at one of the lowest points in their history.

However, not all is bleak in light of the ongoing robust development of people-to-people diplomacy and cultural exchanges. Mutual visits continue to be reinstated following the lifting of epidemiological restrictions. For instance, just two weeks ago Seoul welcomed a delegation of Russian writers. The ensembles of both countries persist in conducting performances, introducing citizens of each nation to their respective cultures and traditions. The number of Russian students studying the Korean language continues to surge. For example, at the Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU), the annual intake reaches 100, comparable to the intake for Chinese studies and considerably surpassing the number eager to study Japan or Southeast Asian countries.

In this context, regarding the prospects of Russian-Korean collaboration, I maintain an optimistic perspective. Undoubtedly, much will hinge on the stance of the South Korean side. I believe that the majority of countries are inclined towards an equitable dialogue, mutually beneficial cooperation, and joint efforts to forge an inclusive and democratic international relations system grounded in

the respect for the interests of all nations. Russia consistently sends signals about resuming full-fledged dialogue and cooperation with the Republic of Korea, jointly seeking avenues for continuing mutually beneficial collaboration in the new international milieu.

In this vein, I can cite an example from the fisheries. While the dialogue with the Japanese side was disrupted earlier this year, resulting in Japanese fishermen losing the opportunity to fish off the shores of the Southern Kurils in 2023, South Korean fishermen maintained the capacity to harvest quotas in Russian waters.

Certainly, destructive actions also find their response at the highest levels. The current state of affairs stands as a testament to this. An unwillingness to acknowledge the interests of a partner, particularly the red lines that have been repeatedly articulated by the Russian leadership, leads to a gradual decline in bilateral relations, which is indeed regrettable.

The current state of relations between the countries, as it seems to me, is well illustrated by the events of late 2023. While Georgy Zinoviev, appointed as ambassador in December, in an interview with the newspaper 'Kommersant', called South Korea 'one of the most friendly among the unfriendly countries' and expressed hope for improvements in bilateral relations²²⁾, it became known about the intention of the South Korean government to almost double the list of goods banned for export to the Russian market²³⁾, which not only harms the South Korean economy itself, but also cannot fail to provoke a proportional response from the other side.

Making predictions is always a challenging task. However, at present, two trends can be discerned: a deterioration in official bilateral relations while maintaining their functional essence, and continued development in the

22) "Южная Корея – одна из самых дружественных среди недружественных стран." *Коммерсант*, 2023.12.18., <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6410748>(검색일:2023.12.30.).

23) 차대운, "굴착기·중대형 승용차·배터리 러시아 수출 금지." 『연합뉴스』 2023년 12월 23일, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20231226068600003>(검색일:2023.12.30.).

humanitarian field and in people-to-people diplomacy. The persistence of the latter trend, though, is heavily dependent on the former, as we already observe tendencies to suspend several bilateral projects in the humanitarian sphere.

Currently, the most pressing issue appears to be the joint development of new forms of cooperation, which can be implemented without detriment to both parties amidst sanction pressures. The participation of a proactive group of South Koreans in this year's Eastern Economic Forum indicates the willingness, if not of official Seoul, then of certain citizens of the country to engage in this process. Overall, the experience accumulated over three decades of bilateral relations provides hope for their gradual restoration in the future.

VI. Conclusion

Over the last three decades, the relationship between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea has undergone significant changes. The initial euphoria over the establishment of diplomatic relations soon gave way to the realization that the goals of their establishment significantly differed between the parties. Russia was generally interested in the broad development of economic relations between the countries and attracting South Korean investments, while South Korea pursued mainly political goals, hoping to use Soviet- and later Russian-North Korean relations to pressure Pyongyang.

After all the dots were put over the "i" in the relationship, the parties began to adhere to a more pragmatic approach. The change in relations between the countries is also largely related to the change in the foreign policy vector in Russia, which began after Primakov took office as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as the change in political leadership in both countries.

Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, relations between Russia and South Korea continued to develop and deepen successfully, gradually moving towards strategic partnership, as was declared at the highest level in 2008. The

development of trade and economic relations was especially active and dynamic, which largely corresponded to the policy of the "pivot to the East" declared by the Russian government, aimed at strengthening Moscow's relations with the countries of East Asia, as well as expanding Russia's economic and political influence in the region. This Russian policy also found support in South Korea, which sought to implement the 'Eurasian Initiative' under Park Geun-hye and the 'New Northern Policy' under Moon Jae-in.

However, the growing confrontation between Russia and Western countries could not but affect bilateral relations, which, along with the change in political leadership in South Korea, collapsed the relations between the countries, virtually negating the progressive development of bilateral relations that had been built over the last three decades. It should be noted that despite the cooling of relations, their technical functionality is preserved – diplomatic staff are present in both states, various humanitarian events are held, consultations on various issues at the official level are conducted, and visa-free exchanges are carried out. Meanwhile, the Russian side, forced to react to the unfriendly steps of the South Korean leadership, seems to still hope for the preservation of, if not friendly, then good-neighborly relations between the countries. Thus, the future of bilateral relations at the moment seems to depend heavily on how far the South Korean side intends to go in solidarity with Western countries. The author of these lines hopes that South Korea, as before, will build its relations with Russia within the framework of its fundamental national interests, within which cooperation with the Russian side looks much more attractive than the prospect of freezing and rolling back bilateral relations.

References

- 차대운, “굴착기·중대형 승용차·배터리 러시아 수출 금지.” 『연합뉴스』, 2023년 12월 23일, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20231226068600003>(검색일:2023.12.30).
- Акуленко В.С., “История двустороннего сотрудничества в области рыбного хозяйства между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Корея.” *Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2020.
- Акуленко В.С., “Образ России и русских в «Реальных записях правящего дома Чо сон».” *Известия Иркутского государственного университета. Серия История*, Vol. 34, 2020.
- Антонов, Р. Р., “Корейско-российские международные торговоэкономические отношения в период президентства Мун Чжэ Ина.” *Корееведение в России: направление и развитие*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2023.
- Бобров, А. et al., “Эволюция доктринальных основ внешней политики России.” *Международная жизнь*, No. 2, 2022, <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2611> (검색일:2023.11.30).
- Диалог Россия – Республика Корея*, <http://drk.ru> (검색일:2023.11.30).
- Ён, Сонг Хым, “Россия и Республика Корея: взгляд из Сеула.” *Международная жизнь*, No. 3, 2012, <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/628>(검색일:2023.11.30)
- Забровская, Л.В., *Россия и Республика Корея: от конфронтации к сотрудничеству (1970-1990-е гг.)*, Владивосток: Издательство ИИАЭ ДВО РАН, 1996.
- Иванов, К.В., “Российско-южнокорейские отношения в условиях турбулентности системы международных отношений: вызовы и перспективы.” *Россия и Корея в современном информационном пространстве*, Иркутск: Издательство ИГУ, 2022.
- Козлов, Л.Е., “Исторический фон современных российско-корейских отношений.” *Актуальные вопросы общественных наук: социология, политология, философия, история*, No. 12(52), 2015.
- Ланцова, И.С., “Эволюция отношений Российской Федерации и Республики Корея: от первых контактов к интеграционным проектам.” *Евразийская интеграция: экономика, право, политика*, No. 18, 2015.

- Пак, Б.Д., *Корейцы в Российской империи*, Иркутск: Иркутский государственный педагогический университет, 1994.
- Самсонова, В.Г., “Торгово-экономическое сотрудничество России и Республики Корея в условиях современных вызовов Trade.” *Современные проблемы Кореянского полуострова 2022*, Москва: ИКСА РАН, 2022.
- Толорая, Г.Д., “Россия и проблемы Кореянского полуострова на современном этапе.” *Вестник МГИМО-Университета*, No. 4(37), 2014.
- “Андрей Кулик: Москва готова возобновить полноформатный диалог с Сеулом.” *РИА Новости*, 2023.02.10., <https://ria.ru/20230210/kulik-1851052566.html>(검색일:2023.11.30.).
- “Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации от 28 июня 2000 г.”, <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901764263>(검색일:2023.11.30.).
- “Официальный визит в Республику Корея.” *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, 2010.11.10., <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/9474>(검색일:2023.11.30.).
- “Российско-корейская Совместная декларация.” *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, 2004.09.21., <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/2038>(검색일:2023.11.30.).
- “Российско-корейское совместное заявление.” *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, 2001.02.26., <http://special.kremlin.ru/supplement/3304>(검색일:2023.11.30.).
- “Совместное Заявление Российской Федерации и Республики Корея.” *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, 2008.09.29., http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/237(검색일: 2023.11.30.).
- “Южная Корея - одна из самых дружественных среди недружественных стран.” *Коммерсант*, 2023.12.18., <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6410748>(검색일:2023.12.30.).

논문요약

30년 개관: 한-러 양국 관계의 진화와 현재 동향

바딤 아쿨렌코(중앙대학교 중앙사학연구소 HK+접경인문학연구단 연구교수)

본 연구는 러시아 연방과 대한민국 간의 지난 30년 걸친 양국 관계의 역사와 현황을 분석한다. 이 긴 발전 기간 동안 양국은 동아시아의 평화와 번영을 목표로 하는 상호 이익을 바탕으로 한 협력 관계를 구축해 왔다. 1990년 두 나라는 수교 이후 러시아는 한국으로부터의 무역 확대와 상당한 투자 유치를 기대했고, 한국은 러시아가 북한에 미치는 영향력을 활용할 기회를 모색했다. 그 이유로 초기 단계에서 양국의 이해관계가 명확하게 일치하지 않아, 1990년대 중반까지 양국 관계의 발전이 주춤하게 되었다. 예브게니 프리마코프가 러시아 연방의 외무장관으로 임명된 것은 한-러 관계에 새로운 장을 열었다는 평가를 받는다. 이는 그가 취임하면서 이전의 외교 정책 방식에서 변화를 가져왔기 때문이다. 특히, 김대중 대통령의 햇볕정책은 러시아의 전략적 이익과 조화를 이루었고, 이로 인해 모스크바는 서울의 이니셔티브를 지지하는 입장을 취했다. 2000년대 초반부터는 양국 관계가 급속도로 발전하며 전략적 파트너십 수준에 접근했다. 이 시기에는 양국 지도자들의 상호 방문이 활발해졌으며, 경제 및 인도적 유대 관계가 크게 확대되었다. 이러한 변화는 러시아 연방과 대한민국 간의 상호 유익한 협력의 시대를 여는 데 결정적인 역할을 했다. 러시아와 서방 국가들 사이의 증가하는 대립은 한국과 러시아 관계에도 영향을 미치며, 지난 2년간 이 관계는 점차 악화되는 양상을 보였다. 이러한 상황은 한국이 일반적으로 양국 간 협력을 축소하기 시작한 것으로 보인다. 현재 한-러 간의 관계 수준은 지난 30년 동안 아마도 최저점에 도달했다면 과언이 아니라고 생각한다. 그러나 문화와 과학 분야에서는 한-러 관계가 여전히 활발하게 유지되고 발전하고 있으며, 이는 양국 관계가 완전히 단절되지 않았음을 보여준다. 이러한 지속적인 교류는 외부 정치적 상황이 개선될 때 양국 관계의 정상화를 향한 희망을 제공한다.

주제어: 러시아, 한국, 양국 관계, 한-러 관계

투고일: 2024년 1월 10일, 심사일: 2024년 2월 7일, 게재확정일: 2024년 2월 19일