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## BRINGING PYONGYANG BACK: THE PROSPECTS FOR ESTABLISHING A MULTILATERAL COOPERATION MECHANISM IN EAST ASIA

**ABSTRACT** In this interconnected world, the multilateral mechanisms become more and more present and relevant. However, East Asia is a notable exception with no such institutionalised tool. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remains the most troubling state and the main reason why collaboration has not resulted in strengthening the stability in East Asia. Although a formal dialogue called the Six Party Talks exists, it currently remains in deadlock after two nuclear tests conducted by Pyongyang in 2009. The actions that took place throughout last year have once again drawn greater attention to the Korean Peninsula, raising the possibility of resuming the negotiations. Nevertheless, the question about what this new agenda should include remain relevant. The purpose of this paper is to outline international relations in Northeast Asia from both theoretical and practical perspective and provide ideas on what can be done to facilitate the cooperation between the states.

**KEYWORDS** *Cooperation, East Asia, North Korea, Security in the Asia-Pacific, Six-Party Talks*

### INTRODUCTION

From the global point of view, East Asia is a region that constantly grows in power. The main reason for this is the accumulation of vital interests of the most relevant state actors within the international system. The significant number of the world's population, capital as well as innovation is rooted in this area. The number of linkages between the

actors is still growing vastly, making the states more and more dependent on each other. It is therefore surprising that despite such favourable conditions for cooperation, the region lacks any major or efficient multilateral mechanisms, whereas such forms become more commonly used in every other part of the system.

The adherence to the region can be divided into two categories. Looking at East Asia<sup>1</sup> from the geographical perspective, the states that belong to this area are: Mongolia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russia (Russian Far East), the Republic of Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Japan. The second level accounts for the actors whose fundamental interests are embedded in the region with the United States of America as an example. The complexity of the region does not allow its researchers to describe it satisfyingly and provide arguments for the lack of cooperation by referring only to one concept or theory. The elements emphasised and popularised by scholars associated with neoliberal or constructivist theories are being applied to the region to an increasingly greater degree. However, the neorealist argument cannot be omitted and it seems that despite the growing popularity of other theories, it currently remains dominant. Therefore, it should be stressed that mutual animosity can only be fully explained by applying assumptions of the three main international relations (IR) theories as the possibilities they offer are much more comprehensive.

The primary purpose of this paper, apart from presenting the region's intricate nature through combining theoretical and practical dimensions, is to provide the current prospects for establishing a multilateral cooperation mechanism for Northeast Asia. Thus, it will be argued that in order to bring the states together and establish the instrument that will be reliable, adequate and profitable for each party, two solutions could be taken into account. Firstly, Mongolia should be included in the process of building a security mechanism within the region, as it enjoys favourable relations with all the Northeast Asian countries, especially with the DPRK. Secondly, if the system that used to serve as a tool for negotiating the denuclearisation of North Korea, named the Six-Party Talks, is about to be restored, it should be preceded by a series of efforts to overcome or at least assuage the relations between Japan, China and South Korea. It is crucial for bringing Pyongyang back to the table at which all the other parties can speak with one voice and demonstrate the unity with regards to the Kim Jong Un's actions.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first section, the basic assumptions of three main IR theories applicable within the region will be provided, followed by the state policy examples based on those concepts. The main section will focus on presenting the thesis. Thus, the rising role of Mongolia as a potential Northeast Asia Peacemaker as well as the actions that should be taken into consideration with regard to the improvement in relations between China, Japan and South Korea will be discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> When one peruses the literature it can be observed that terms "East Asia" and "Northeast Asia" are more and more commonly being used alternatively. Therefore, in this paper those two phrases should be also understood as synonymous.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Looking at East Asia from the perspective<sup>2</sup> of IR theories results in the observation that a single concept is not sufficient to provide a broader picture of interstate relations within the region. Consequently, three main concepts need to be considered in order to explain a greater amount of vital issues occurring in that area. Those theories are: structural realism, neoliberal institutionalism and constructivism<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.1. Neorealism

Structural realism, also called neorealism, is one of the grand theories of IR, provided by Kenneth Waltz and based on the assumptions of classical realism. Waltz puts states at the centre of his concept, perceiving them as still the most relevant units that think of themselves as competitors. According to Waltz, this mutual animosity is caused by the structure of the system itself: states are only capable of controlling their own territory while on the international level they need to achieve their goals in conditions of anarchy, with no higher authority that would establish common rules. Therefore, the pressure of the system coerces states to compete in order to secure their vital interests<sup>4</sup>.

The next assumption of structural realism is concerned with stability. As Waltz created his theory during the Cold War, he considered a bipolar system, with two opposite states or coalition of states, as the most stable. According to him, such a situation enables actors to calculate their future actions more precisely and abates the level of uncertainty within the whole system<sup>5</sup>.

Another important premise refers to the aim of the actors. Structural realists claim that the primary goal for every unit is to survive. It does not mean that states do not wish to pursue other interests, but for Waltz the survival is the first and fundamental objective<sup>6</sup>. It can also be linked to the self-help as well as security-dilemma assumptions. The first one refers to the need of relying entirely on one's own resources. The latter explains the mechanism of the deepening mutual distrust which is the result of one state's certain actions (e.g. building-up its military capacity) and the other's reaction<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that the problem of misperception and misunderstanding may arise from analysing East Asia through the lens of Western IR theories as all the three concepts essentially belong to that tradition and, as a consequence, focus on providing an explanation in order to secure "Western" interests. However, it seems that IR scholars cannot rely on either the Chinese or Korean theory of IR while developing their arguments as regional concepts are still in their initial phase and lack the assumptions of original theories. See: A. Acharya, B. Buzan (eds.), *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia*, London–New York 2010.

<sup>3</sup> This section aims to provide only a general and synthetic overview of the arguments proposed by the three theories and does not reflect a diversity of approaches within them.

<sup>4</sup> T. Dunne, "Realism", in J. Baylis, S. Smith (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, New York 1997, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> K. N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Long Grove, IL 2010, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> E. Cziomer, L. Zyblikiewicz, *Zarys współczesnych stosunków międzynarodowych*, Warszawa 2005, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> K. N. Waltz, *Theory...*, pp. 186-187.

## 1.2. Neoliberal institutionalism

The elements of neoliberal institutionalism, created by Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane, can also be found in contemporary IR of East Asia. Whereas the main assumptions are coherent with those proposed by neorealists<sup>8</sup>, they differ with regard to the consequences of uncertainty within the system. For neoliberals, the cooperation of states as well as other actors is not only possible, but also desirable. According to Nye and Keohane, the role of international organisations, is gradually becoming more and more extensive due to the process of globalisation and the growing amount of linkages between the countries. Interdependence has made the possibility of establishing common rules and institutions more accessible to states. As a result, various multilateral platforms and regional organisations help to bring states together and make mutual benefit relations possible<sup>9</sup>. What is more, neoliberal institutionalists also pay attention to the concept of soft power. According to this idea, the new dimension of security emerges and embraces new aspects such as economic or ecological ones. Therefore, relying only on hard sources is no longer beneficial and states should be also required to develop public diplomacy tools and refer more to common values<sup>10</sup>.

## 1.3. Constructivism

The theory that is gradually gaining more recognition, especially with regard to analysing IR in the Asia-Pacific, is constructivism. This concept, provided by Alexander Wendt, shares certain assumptions with neorealists as they generally agree on the anarchic nature of global affairs and the state of uncertainty that drives the agents' actions in the system<sup>11</sup>. The fundamental difference occurs with respect to the composition of the structure. For neorealists it consists of only material resources<sup>12</sup>, while for constructivists, it also includes social relations, common knowledge and patterns of behaviour embedded in culture, mentality and language<sup>13</sup>.

Additionally, constructivists share the belief of the importance of international institutions with neoliberals. In this case, however, it is caused by those above-men-

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<sup>8</sup> For both neorealists and neoliberals, the nature of the international system remains anarchic and states that are its primary participants are essentially egoistic and rely on their own resources in order to sustain their position. See: Ch. Brown, K. Ainley, *Understanding International Relations*, Houndmills–New York 2005, p. 45–46.

<sup>9</sup> R. O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Can Interdependence Work?", *Foreign Policy*, no. 110 (1998), p. 91, [online] <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1149278>.

<sup>10</sup> R. O. Keohane, J. S. Nye Jr., "Power and Interdependence in the Information Age", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 77, no. 5 (1998), p. 86, [online] <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20049052>.

<sup>11</sup> A. Wendt, "Constructing International Politics", *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1995), p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> K. N. Waltz, *Theory...*, p. 131.

<sup>13</sup> A. Wendt, "Constructing...", p. 70.

tioned intersubjective structures that help to define agents' interests and shape their identity<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. APPLYING THEORIES TO EAST ASIA – WHAT HAS BEEN PREVENTING THE STATES FROM COOPERATING?

East Asia is a region where the assumptions of all the theories mentioned above can not only be observed, but also have their reflection in states' policy. So far this has only brought evidence with regard to the lack of the willingness of actors to cooperate.

First, recalling neorealism assumptions, the potential for the emergence of the bipolar system with China and the United States as poles appears. The mutual relations of those two states are marked by distrust, despite engaging in deepening economic relations. The growing U.S. military presence within the region has made the Chinese leaders invest more in army modernisation, which can be perceived as an example of a security dilemma. Although American policy-makers still invest much more in the military build-up, the recent data shows that China, assuming that the growing army expenditure will continue, could overtake the U.S after 2035<sup>15</sup>.

This military build-up has not been left without American response. As Barack Obama stated in the "National Security Strategy" published in 2010, Washington *will monitor China's military modernization program and prepare accordingly to ensure that U.S. interests and allies, regionally and globally, are not negatively affected*<sup>16</sup>.

Simultaneously, it can be observed, that the primary goal of each of the actors is to survive in the system and do not allow other states to influence their internal order. The most accurate example is North Korea with its attempt to isolate the society to the greatest degree possible. Japan is also a case here, since it is reluctant to engage more into international affairs and trying to preserve its economic prosperity, leaving the military affairs to its ally in Washington.

The next relevant factor that constrains the cooperation of the actors in East Asia and can be linked to structural realism theory, are the territorial disputes between the states. The most relevant cases worth mentioning are:

- disagreements over the Senkaku Islands administered by Japan but also claimed by the PRC and Taiwan (the island is called Diaoyu in China and Diaoyutai in Taiwan),
- the dispute between Japan and China over maritime sovereignty in which Beijing claims the whole continental shelf to the Okinawa Trough,

<sup>14</sup> Idem, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State", *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 88, no. 2 (1994), pp. 389-390, [online] <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2944711>.

<sup>15</sup> "China's military rise: the dragon's new teeth", *The Economist*, 7 April 2007, [online] <http://www.economist.com/node/21552193>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>16</sup> *National Security Strategy*, 2010, p. 43, [online] [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf), 10 May 2015.

- the conflict between Japan and South Korea over Takeshima (Japanese pronunciation)/Dokdo (Korean pronunciation) islands, currently administered by Seoul,
- controversies occurring between Russia and Japan over the four Kurile Islands which Tokyo calls the Northern Territories<sup>17</sup>.

Secondly, the constructivists' arguments also provide explanation as to why the co-operation in East Asia is problematic. Scholars associated with this school of IR state that historical animosities and conflicts are still embedded in the leaders' minds. The resentment of the Korean and Chinese people regarding the Japanese occupation in 20th century is still intense, which can be proved by the fierce reaction of both Seoul and Beijing to the Japanese prime minister's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. Some of the soldiers honoured there are at the same time perceived as war criminals in neighbouring countries<sup>18</sup>. What is more, the conflict on the Korean Peninsula remains officially unresolved and the memory of American engagement in defeating Pyongyang still precludes effective negotiations between North Korea and the United States and its allies in the region.

What seems to be most significant, with regard to this paper's thesis, are the examples provided by the neoliberal school of thought as cooperation within the region should be fostered by successful application of core neoliberal assumptions.

First and foremost, the economic relations of the countries within the region are becoming more and more linked to and dependant on each other which is reflected in the table below. China is the main import partner for both Japan and South Korea as well as the first export direction for the ROK and second for Japan. Those two countries are also among the top trading partners of the PRC.

Table 1. Trading partners of China, Japan and South Korea

Rank	Trading partners of China (2014)		Trading partners of Japan (2013)		Trading partners of South Korea (2013)	
	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export
1	South Korea (9,7%)	US (16,9%)	China (21,7%)	US (18,8%)	China (16,1%)	China (26,1%)
2	Japan (8,3%)	Hong Kong (15,5%)	US (8,6%)	China (18,1%)	Japan (11,6%)	US (11,1%)
3	US (8,1%)	Japan (6,4%)	Australia (6,1%)	South Korea (7,9%)	Saudi Arabia (7,3%)	Japan (6,2%)
4	Taiwan (7,8%)	South Korea (4,3%)	UAE (5,1%)	Hong Kong (5,2%)	Qatar (5%)	Hong Kong (5%)

<sup>17</sup> B. Dolven, S. A. Kan, M. E. Manyin, *Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia: Issues for Congress*, 30 January 2013, Federation of American Scientists, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42930.pdf>, p. 13-19, 10 May 2015.

<sup>18</sup> S. Song, "Korea's balancing act in history dispute", *The Korea Herald*, 26 January 2014, [online] <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140126000224>, 10 May 2015.

Rank	Trading partners of China (2014)		Trading partners of Japan (2013)		Trading partners of South Korea (2013)	
	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export
5	Germany (5,4%)	-	Qatar (4,4%)	Thailand (5%)	Australia (4%)	-

Source: The *CIA World Factbook*, [online] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>, 1 September 2015.

What is more, the countries within the region, particularly China, Japan and South Korea are active participants of the regional forums of cooperation. All the three economies are members of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)<sup>19</sup>. They also participate in the dialogue with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This particular form of cooperation has been institutionalised and is known as ASEAN +3<sup>20</sup>. Last but not least, those three states, aiming to overcome historical animosities and other issues hindering closer collaboration, established the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat in 2011. The main goal of this organisation is to foster common prosperity and promote peace among the three nations<sup>21</sup>.

Additionally, recalling other arguments of neoliberals, some of the states try to apply *soft power* in their policies in order to shape its international perception in a more favourable way. China is an interesting example. Despite dominating the region economically, Chinese policy-makers have re-orientated the government's practices in order to promote *peaceful rise* and change the image of *the threatening power*<sup>22</sup>. The whole concept, named the Beijing Consensus, relies on pillars through which China will accomplish the global power status – innovation, self-determination in foreign policy and equality as well as sustainability<sup>23</sup>. The main challenges are to persuade other Asian countries to willingly accept Chinese rise and to increase Beijing's participation in the affairs of the international community<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, the last couple of years have been proof of China's great effort in adapting the soft way. In 2008, the Olympic Games were hosted in Beijing and two years later, the World Expo was held in Shanghai. Along with those major events, Chinese authorities strongly promote and support the establishment of successive branches of the Confucius Institute in many countries<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> See: Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation website, [online] <http://www.apec.org/>, 1 September 2015.

<sup>20</sup> See: Overview of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation, [online] <http://www.asean.org/asean/external-relations/asean-3>, 1 September 2015.

<sup>21</sup> See: Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat Overview, [online] <http://www.tcs-asia.org/dnb/main/index.php>, 1 September 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Y. N. Cho, J. H. Jeong, "China's Soft Power: Discussions, Resources and Prospects", *Asian Survey*, vol. 48, no. 3 (2008), pp. 455-462, [online] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/as.2008.48.3.453>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> L. Blanchard, F. Lu, "Thinking Hard about Soft Power: A Review and Critique of the Literature on China and Soft Power", *Asian Perspective*, no. 36 (2012), p. 565.



Another crucial feature of neoliberal institutionalism has been brought to East Asian leaders' attention. This characteristic is concerned with promoting multilateral negotiations, and other institutionalised forms of cooperation. The main reason for choosing that particular tool seems to be the state that threatens almost all other in the region – North Korea. The Six-Party Talks is the most relevant example. It is a process that allowed six states: the USA, PRC, DPRK, ROK, Japan and Russia to sit at one table in order to negotiate and find a solution to the North Korean nuclear program. The mechanism itself was established in 2003, after Pyongyang reacted emphatically to American accusations the secret development of the nuclear weapons program. Kim Jong Il then restarted nuclear installations at Yongbyon, breaking the promise of the Agreed Framework signed in 1994, and announced the withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)<sup>26</sup>. The talks continued without any major result throughout 2004. The six states managed to reach a joint statement in September 2005. North Korea was willing to abandon its nuclear program and return to the NPT. In return, Pyongyang was to receive two light-water reactors<sup>27</sup>. After reaching that provisional agreement, the Six-Party Talks became a significant negotiating tool for the entire region. Nevertheless, this potential has been put into question by North Korea's continued provocations, and eventually a nuclear weapon test on October 9, 2006<sup>28</sup>. Surprisingly, despite the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) immediate sanctions<sup>29</sup>, the talks resumed in December 2006, and the most significant and complex agreement was reached only after three months. As a result of that last settlement, North Korea shut down its nuclear facilities and the United States decided on taking Pyongyang off the list of the sponsors of terrorism<sup>30</sup>. The agreement of 2007 remains the most relevant achievement of the Six-Party Talks process. However, as the reports prepared for the U.S. Congress rightly point out, implementing the provisions of the arrangement proved to be ineffective, as North Korea conducted a ballistic missile test, followed by a second nuclear test in 2009 which led to the suspension of talks<sup>31</sup>.

Since 2009, the Six-Party Talks have not been contained and remain deadlocked, mostly due to the attitude presented by the DPRK. Hostile actions performed by

<sup>26</sup> R. G. Sutter, *The United States in Asia*, Lanham, MD 2009, pp. 64-68.

<sup>27</sup> R. Hassing, K. Oh, "Kim Jong-un Inherits the Bomb", *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, no. 1, vol. 20 (2011), p. 36, [online] [http://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/pub/pub\\_03\\_01.jsp?page=1&num=187&mode=view&field=&text=&order=&dir=&bid=DATA03&ses=&category=11](http://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/pub/pub_03_01.jsp?page=1&num=187&mode=view&field=&text=&order=&dir=&bid=DATA03&ses=&category=11).

<sup>28</sup> R. G. Sutter, *The United States...*

<sup>29</sup> October 14, 2006 UNSC condemned the DPRK's nuclear test and agreed to establish an embargo under Resolution 1718. In the document, the states decided, among other provisions, to prevent the supply of arms and luxury goods to North Korea. See: *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718 (2006)*, [online] [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1718\(2006\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1718(2006)), 10 May 2015.

<sup>30</sup> R. Hassing, K. Oh, "Kim Jong-un..."

<sup>31</sup> E. Chanlett-Avery, M. A. Taylor, "North Korea": U.S. Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation", 10 November 2010, Federation of American Scientists, [online] <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/152629.pdf>, p. 1, 10 May 2015.



Pyongyang directly after the nuclear test and throughout 2010 have raised concern of all the actors involved in the stabilisation process in Northeast Asia. Moreover, the sudden death of Kim Jong Il and the immediate succession of his son Kim Jong Un at the turn of 2012 have resulted in more belligerent actions taken by Pyongyang that can be linked to the process of power consolidation within the country. Nevertheless, the question about the possibility of returning to the Six-Party Talks formula in the near future remains. The relations between the two countries of the Korean Peninsula have improved in the second half of 2014. What is even more notable, the relations between the other parties in the talks seem to advance as well, which will be described in detail in the next section. Overall, it can be observed that upcoming months may provide a favourable ground for considering the next round of negotiations in the form of the Six-Party Talks or a different multilateral mechanism. Therefore, it is worth analysing what possibilities should be taken into account in order to possibly facilitate cooperation, and what steps need to be considered by particular actors to bring more certainty into the East Asia region.

### **3. WHAT CAN BE DONE WITH PYONGYANG: THE PROSPECTS FOR MULTILATERAL COOPERATION IN EAST ASIA**

This section will examine the main prospects for establishing a reliable multilateral mechanism for East Asia and what actions should be acknowledged as fostering the collaboration. Thus, the main focus will be drawn to Mongolia's possible role as the Northeast Asia Peacemaker, the possibility of returning to the Six-Party Talks and the opportunities for the breakthrough in Chinese-Japanese, Korean-Chinese and Korean-Japanese relations.

#### **3.1. The Rising Role of Mongolia**

The Six-Party Talks process brought together the six states that either belong geographically to the region, or their interests within this area are vital. Although Mongolia is generally included as an East Asian state, it has not been a part of negotiations. Yet, its fast development in the last couple of years as well as the rising relevance in the region in general, have brought scholars' attention to the possibility of including Mongolia in the negotiations on North Korea's denuclearisation.

Mongolia's economy has been growing impressively over the years after recession. The data in the table below show the GDP raise expressed in percentages as well as in U.S. dollars from 2009, and the estimation for upcoming two years according to the International Monetary Fund. Looking at the figures, one can say that although the trend is slightly unfavourable, the actual value in U.S. dollars is still growing.

Table 2. Mongolia's GDP in current prices expressed in percentage change and in U.S. dollars

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Growth (%)	-1.269	6.365	17.514	12.401	11.743	9.103	8.438	7.610
Value (billions of U.S. dollars)	4.584	6.197	8.761	10.322	11.516	11.725	12.222	12.976

Source: Website of International Monetary Fund, [online] [www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org), 10 May 2015.

Along with the development came the advancement of international recognition. Mongolia has been chosen the host country of 11th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)<sup>32</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2016<sup>33</sup>. This may be an opportunity for Ulaanbaatar to increase its international prestige as well as present itself as a relevant player in the region. The planned summit is particularly worth mentioning due to the fact that it is going to mark the 20th anniversary of the dialogue. It is also the confirmation of the Mongolian president's diplomatic success. Since the elections in 2009, he has devoted most of his efforts to foreign policy<sup>34</sup>. It can be assumed, then, that if Mongolia manages to present itself as a good host, its position within East Asia may prominently increase, also with regard to the situation with North Korea.

What seems to be the most fundamental thing when one analyses the rising role of Mongolia within the region is the fact that Ulaanbaatar enjoys the respect and at least neutral, if not friendly, relations with every state involved in the East Asia stabilisation process. Even more importantly, the country sees itself as an active player and an initiator of new ideas. Due to both of those factors, Mongolia may become the peacemaker in Northeast Asia. First of all, it remains in peaceful relations with Pyongyang. In 1948, Mongolia was the second country after the Soviet Union to offer recognition to the DPRK. Bilateral relations continued to be favourable during the Cold War, as Ulaanbaatar was a part of the Soviet bloc. What is even more interesting, however, is the fact that even after the collapse of the USSR both countries still managed to act towards each other in a peaceful manner despite choosing clearly different ways of existing in the international area<sup>35</sup>. Currently, those state to state affairs still exhibit mutual trust and understanding. In 2011, during his visit at the Brookings Institution, the Mongo-

<sup>32</sup> "The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an informal platform of dialogue and cooperation bringing together the 28 European Union member states, two other European countries, and the European Union with 21 Asian countries and the ASEAN Secretariat. The ASEM dialogue addresses political, economic and cultural issues, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between our two regions, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership". See: About the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), ASEM InfoBoard: The Official Information Platform of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), [online] <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/about>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>33</sup> *11th ASEM Summit (ASEM11)*, ASEM InfoBoard: The Official Information Platform of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), [online] <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/events/11th-asem-summit-asem11>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>34</sup> W. Turner, "ASEM 2016: Mongolia in the Spotlight", *The Diplomat*, 9 December 2014, [online] <http://thediplomat.com/2014/12/asem-2016-mongolia-in-the-spotlight/>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>35</sup> M. Batchimeg, "Mongolia's DPRK Policy: Engaging North Korea", *Asian Survey*, vol. 46, no. 2 (2006), pp. 278-282, [online] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/as.2006.46.2.275>.

lian president Tsakhia Elbegdorj stressed the unique bond between Ulaanbaatar and Pyongyang<sup>36</sup>. In 2013, the president visited the capital of North Korea, where he met Kim Jong Un and discussed several issues concerning bilateral relations, including the economic ones<sup>37</sup>. Apart from affairs with the North, Mongolia also enjoys the good bilateral relations with other parties. China, as a major consumer, is greatly interested in Mongolian mines and natural resources, and so those two countries become more and more co-dependant. The similar reason seems to apply to Russia. According to the data from 2013, 89 percent of Mongolian foreign trade was with Beijing and Moscow, and those two countries also provide three-fourth of Ulaanbaatar's gasoline and diesel fuel as well as most of the electricity. With regard to the ROK, Mongolia has also been treated more as a potential partner rather than a competitor. Moreover, president Elbegdorj's active role in shaping multilateral relations in Northeast Asia goes well with South Korean leader Park Geun-hye's *trustpolitik*<sup>38</sup>. Similarly to the president of the ROK, the Japanese prime minister Shinzō Abe also seems to seek Mongolia's assistance with regard to the North Korean threat. During the summit in September 2014, both officials expressed the willingness to further develop a strategic partnership. Regarding the concerns about North Korea, Mongolia committed itself to facilitating bilateral meetings between Tokyo and Pyongyang e.g. by providing locations for the meetings and the country cooperates closely on the issue of abductions<sup>39</sup>. Lastly, relations with the United States need to be mentioned as Washington's interests in the region and can be perceived as strategic. Generally speaking, bilateral connections are rather friendly-oriented. The U.S. stress democratic changes after the end of the Cold War that occurred in Mongolia as well as its assistance to Ulaanbaatar in order to overcome economic struggles<sup>40</sup>. It also seems that Washington realised the rising importance of Ulaanbaatar within East Asia. President Elbegdorj was Barack Obama's guest in the White House in 2011. In August that year, Vice-president Joe Biden visited Mongolia as one of the three countries in Asia, next to China and Japan. Hillary Clinton, during her time in office as the Secretary of State, also visited Mongolia in 2012<sup>41</sup>. The U.S. should also be well inclined to Mongolia's new regional agenda, emphasizing the need for fostering multilateral cooperation in East Asia.

<sup>36</sup> T. Elbegdorj, *Mongolia's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, The Brookings Institution, 16 June 2011, [online] [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2011/6/16%20mongolia/20110616\\_mongolia](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2011/6/16%20mongolia/20110616_mongolia), 10 May 2015.

<sup>37</sup> A. Panda, "What Do North Korea And Mongolia Have In Common", *The Diplomat*, 30 October 2013, [online] <http://thediplomat.com/2013/10/what-do-north-korea-and-mongolia-have-in-common/>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>38</sup> D. L. Capara, K. H. S. Moon, P. Park, *Mongolia: Potential Mediator Between the Koreas and Proponent of Peace in Northeast Asia*, The Brookings Institution, January 2015, [online] <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2015/01/20-mongolia-north-korea-caprara-moon-park>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>39</sup> *Japan-Mongolia Summit Meeting*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 24 September 2014, [online] [http://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/mn/page3e\\_000240.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/mn/page3e_000240.html), 10 May 2015.

<sup>40</sup> *U.S. Relations with Mongolia*, U.S. Department of State, 3 September 2014, [online] <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>41</sup> D. L. Capara, K. H. S. Moon. P. Park, *Mongolia: Potential Mediator...*

This new plan for the region fully emerged in 2013. In December that year, during the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) General Conference, the idea was presented by Ganbat Ts, director of the Institute of Strategic Studies of Mongolia. He elaborated more on the Ulanbaatar Dialogue on the Northeast Asian Security that was originally introduced by the Mongolian president in April that year. It was pointed out that Ulaanbaatar has informed foreign ministers of Northeast Asian countries about the idea and provided them with details. The Dialogue was presented as a two-track approach that will combine the official and unofficial academic path. The second track is especially worth pointing out as a kind of a consultative body consisting of researchers that is new to East Asia. The scope for planned cooperation seems to be rather wide, as it covers issues such as regional stability, economic and environmental cooperation, military transparency or transnational security. The mechanism was designed for six countries geographically located in Northeast Asia, although the participation of other parties can be the subject of discussion<sup>42</sup>. The idea has been transformed into taking real actions relatively quickly, as the first meeting, organised by the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mongolia's Institute of Strategic Studies, took place in June 2014, bringing together experts from nine states (Mongolia, South Korea, North Korea, Japan, China, Russia, the United States, the Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom). Although no official agenda was agreed upon during that conference, it allowed an exchange of different views and opinions from the countries deeply interested in establishing more peaceful relations in the region<sup>43</sup>.

In recent years, Mongolia has been struggling to define its position within the international system. It sees itself as a part of Northeast Asia, and it seems that its engagement in establishing an efficient multilateral tool within the region is on the rise. Over the last decade, Ulaanbaatar has been expressing its willingness to contribute to the negotiations on the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and finally established its original proposition in 2013. Taking into account the favourable relations with all countries in the region, particularly with North Korea, as well as the growing recognition of Mongolian *soft power*, placing the country at the core of East Asian security cooperation accounts for a promising concept and should be considered by all the other actors in this area.

### 3.2. The new approach to the Six-Party Talks – how to show the unity?

Although the Six-Party Talks process, as mentioned above, has been suspended since 2009, it has not disappeared from the agenda. Over the last few months, as the bilateral

<sup>42</sup> G. Ts, *Ulanbaatar Dialogue on the Northeast Asian Security*, presentation given during the 9th CSCAP General Conference, 3 December 2013, [online] <http://www.cscap.org/uploads/docs/Related%20Research/9GCUlaanbaatarDialogueOnTheNEASecurity-GanbatTs.pdf>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>43</sup> A. J. Campi, "Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on East Asian Security", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 11, no. 126 (2014), [online] [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=42618&cHash=ec1cf151b8c35e97e5048fb26f02a969#.VPHmQvmG-So](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42618&cHash=ec1cf151b8c35e97e5048fb26f02a969#.VPHmQvmG-So), 10 May 2015.

relations between the two Koreas have been gradually improving, the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry expressed Washington's willingness to return to the talks. According to American administration, though, it would require Pyongyang's firm commitment to denuclearisation in exchange for foreign aid<sup>44</sup>. Even though the recent tensions between the U.S. and North Korea over the latter's alleged cyber-attack on Sony Pictures have certainly not contributed to the stabilisation of bilateral affairs, Washington would still consider resuming the negotiations as long as Kim Jong Un agrees to follow the arrangements of 2005 joint statement<sup>45</sup>. Currently, a major breakthrough between the U.S. and Pyongyang does not seem likely to occur. Nevertheless, the American administration remains committed to implementing the idea of a multilateral mechanism of which North Korea will be a legitimate part.

The Six-Party Talks have proved to be ineffective in the past not only due to the DPRK's attitude of withdrawing from the negotiations when its internal affairs seemed to be endangered or after receiving the agreed upon amount of foreign aid. It was also futile due to the lack of trust among other actors. As mentioned above with regard to constructivist examples, international relations in Northeast Asia are partially driven by common history. Therefore, the accession to negotiations should occur after the relations between other states transform in favour of mutual understanding.

Analysing the major events in Asia-Pacific from the last several years may provide the evidence that attempts to overcome the distrust have become an inseparable part of reconstructing Northeast Asia. The Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat mentioned earlier accounts as one of best examples for such efforts. In March 2014, Park Geun-hye and Shinzō Abe met for the first time since both took office, along with president Barack Obama in Hague. The subject of the discussion was the non-proliferation issue. Although no major breakthrough was achieved during the summit, such trilateral meeting allows one to hope for the further development of more peaceful relations between those two still antagonised Asian countries<sup>46</sup>. Japan is also seeking to improve its relations with China. During the November 2014 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

<sup>44</sup> S. Tiezzi, "Kerry: Return to the Six Party Talks Possible 'in the Next Weeks, Months'", *The Diplomat*, 25 October 2014, [online] <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/kerry-return-to-six-party-talks-possible-in-the-next-weeks-months/>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>45</sup> A. Panda, "U.S. and North Korea: Talking about Talks", *The Diplomat*, 4 February 2015, [online] <http://thediplomat.com/2015/02/us-and-north-korea-talking-about-talks/>, 10 May 2015.

<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting that the governments of both Japan and South Korea gradually improve their bilateral relations, especially in the political field and the fact that the two states remain in the military alliance with the US is also a significant factor in bringing them closer. However, it is equally important to stress that especially the territorial dispute over Takeshima/Dokdo island and issues related to joint history still constitute an obstacle that hinders closer collaboration. See: K. Haba, *The Power Shift: National Anxiety, Territorial Disputes and Confidence Building in Asia under the American Rebalance Strategy*, a presentation at the 12th Rhodes Forum, 27 September 2014, [online] [http://wpfdc.org/images/docs/Kumiko\\_Haba\\_Rhodes\\_2014\\_web.pdf](http://wpfdc.org/images/docs/Kumiko_Haba_Rhodes_2014_web.pdf), 10 October 2015; G. Wacker, *Security Cooperation in East Asia: Structures Trends and Limitations*, SWP Research Paper, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin 2015; *Japan, Korea Participate in First Summit Since 2012*, Nippon: Your Doorway To Japan website, [online] <http://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00050/>, 10 May 2015.

(APEC) Summit, Shinzō Abe and Chinese president Xi Jinping held a meeting that lasted approximately 25 minutes, but was the first of this kind in two years. Both parties expressed their willingness to strengthen economic ties and cooperate on stabilising security environment within the region<sup>47</sup>. With regard to fostering friendly relations between China and Korea, the efforts are also notable. President Park Geun-hye stated at the beginning of 2014 that relations with Beijing have reached a historic high point. The two states are also working on the Free Trade Agreement and, above all, on resolving North Korea's nuclear program issue<sup>48</sup>.

The fact that a series of high-level meetings occurred throughout the last year is not a reason for hoping that the cooperation concerning the issue of North Korea will become any more productive immediately. Yet, looking at the history of those three countries, and resentment that is clearly present in national communities and official government discourse, such small steps in building relations based on common interests should be perceived as a success of East Asian leaders. Whether all the countries involved in the security strengthening process within the region will be able to speak with one voice with respect to North Korea is not certain. Nevertheless, stressing the need for such unity should be promoted by each party.

## CONCLUSION

Northeast Asia possibly accounts for one of the most complex regions in current IR as the acquisition of power within this area is so tremendous that the relations between the actors at the regional level have a significant impact on global affairs. In the circumstances of nuclear threat, prosperity and accomplishing other interests of states cannot be fulfilled as the sense of unthreatened survival is not sufficient.

Nevertheless, the region seems to be approaching a turning point in its history. The pressure rising from each actor to resolve the impasse on the Korean Peninsula is becoming more and more apparent. The actions taken by Asian leaders in order to reduce tensions over history and territorial disputes may be seen as an opportunity to achieve a single stance on Pyongyang's aggressive behaviour. China's position, as the host and main proponent of the Six-Party Talks, has transformed from the open support for the regime in the North to the position related more to the South. This, in turn, is a significant step to the unity among the actors that seems to be crucial for any multilateral mechanism.

Last but not least, the rising role of Mongolia should be taken into consideration when designing a new cooperation instrument. Ulaanbaatar, despite conducting capitalist and democratic reforms after the collapse of the USSR, managed to remain in peaceful and relatively friendly relations with the DPRK and build favourable connec-

<sup>47</sup> *Japan-China Summit Meeting*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 10 November 2014, [online] [http://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/cn/page4e\\_000151.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page4e_000151.html), 10 May 2015.

<sup>48</sup> S. Snyder, S. Byun, *China-Korea Relations: China's Red Line on the Korean Peninsula*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2014, [online] [http://csis.org/files/publication/1401qchina\\_korea.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/1401qchina_korea.pdf), 10 May 2015.



tions with other states. It also seems to balance well between those two blocks and this may contribute to its perception as the possible Northeast Asia Peacemaker.

The fundamental breakthrough in IR within the East Asian region has not occurred and it is not likely that this will take place in the nearest future as some of the obstacles are challenging to conquer. What is more, the stance of North Korea itself, reduced to an occasional thaw in order to secure international aid resources and prolong the state's survival does not allow for optimism or confidence with regard to resolving this case. However, notable steps have been taken over the last several months in order to eventually establish an efficient multilateral cooperation mechanism and bring Pyongyang back to the table. If all the leaders involved in this process remain committed to the idea of more peaceful and secure Northeast Asia, preeminent changes may be expected in upcoming years.

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