

**Asan Issue Brief Release:
“Europe as a Strategic Partner:
The Case for a Sharper South Korea–Europe Policy”**

SEOUL, September 22, 2025 – Dr. KIM Saeme of the Asan Institute’s Center for Foreign Policy and National Security (<http://en.asaninst.org/>) has published a new *Asan Issue Brief*, titled “Europe as a Strategic Partner: The Case for a Sharper South Korea–Europe Policy”.

The *Issue Brief* examines what South Korea’s approach to Europe should look like under the Lee Jae Myung administration and makes the case for a more strategic orientation going beyond trade and values to encompass defense, security, and networked cooperation.

For much of the past two decades, South Korea’s Europe policy has been grounded in trade and normative commitments, supported by agreements such as the ROK–EU Free Trade Agreement, the 2010 Framework Agreement, and shared values of democracy, human rights, and non-proliferation. While cooperation has been broad and productive, it has remained imbalanced: Europe has been treated primarily as an economic and normative partner, with defense and security ties only beginning to take shape in recent years.

Today, intensifying U.S.–China rivalry, uncertainty in Washington’s commitment to allies, and the growing convergence between the European and Indo-Pacific theatres have created an environment in which Seoul needs to adopt a sharper and more strategic approach to Europe. Such a reorientation is essential for strengthening consolidation among U.S. allies, countering the North Korea threat, expanding defense cooperation, and deepening collaboration in the Indo-Pacific.

To this end, the Issue Brief outlines three recommendations for the Lee administration.

1. Firmer political commitment

South Korea should reinforce its political commitments to ROK–Europe relations by continuing support for Ukraine, maintaining sanctions on Russia, and engaging more actively in the NATO–IP4 framework. Such measures would demonstrate Seoul’s reliability as a security partner and enhance its credibility among like-minded allies.

2. Clearer security engagement

Seoul should expand its security engagement through active participation in joint naval exercises, defense dialogues, and intelligence-sharing with European partners. By integrating lessons from Russia’s war in Ukraine and North Korea’s involvement, South Korea will be able to better prepare its own defense posture.

3. Stronger networked coordination

South Korea should embed itself more firmly in minilateral frameworks with IP4 partners and Europe, moving beyond primarily bilateral ties. This could include trilateral dialogues and coordinated positions among IP4 members ahead of NATO summits.

The Issue Brief concludes that if South Korea does not go beyond a trade- and values-based approach, it risks marginalization and the perception of being a secondary player compared to other Indo-Pacific partners such as Japan or Australia. By contrast, a more strategic Europe policy offers Seoul durable defense partnerships and stronger alignment with like-minded partners in times of unpredictability.

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