

Review

On the Work of the Special Forum “Implications of the Russia-Ukraine War and Its Impact on Korean Peninsula” (March 7, 2022, Seoul, Korea)

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Рецензія

Про роботу Спеціального форуму “Наслідки російсько-української війни та її вплив на Корейський півострів” (7 березня 2022 р., м. Сеул, Республіка Корея)

Ірина Збир

On March 7, 2022, a Special Forum “*Implications of the Russia-Ukraine War and Its Impact on Korean Peninsula*” was held at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, initiated and organized by the Department of Ukrainian Studies. The purpose of the conference is to discuss and understand the goals and positions of the USA, Russia, Ukraine and the countries of Eastern Europe in the Russian-Ukrainian war, the international political, economic and security consequences, the impact on Korea and the determination of countermeasures. The working languages of the event were Korean, English and Ukrainian. The moderator of the Forum, as well as the organizer and main initiator, was the dean of the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Professor Hong Sogu.

It is no coincidence that immediately after the full-scale invasion of Russian troops into the territory of Ukraine, Korean scientists, political, public and cultural figures began to discuss this problem. After all, the consequences of the Korean War of 1950–1953 (the division of the country, the development of North Korea’s nuclear potential) still remain painful topics for Korean society. Today, the neighborhood of the People’s Republic of China, the DPRK, and the Russian Federation pose a danger to the entire Far Eastern region.

The Plenipotentiary and Extraordinary Ambassador of Ukraine to the Republic of Korea, Dmytro Ponomarenko, addressed the participants of the Forum with a welcome speech. In his speech, Mr. Ambassador emphasized the importance of consolidated actions in the fight against the Russian aggressor and thanked the Korean people for their support and assistance to Ukraine in this difficult time of the war. The head of the Ukrainian Embassy also outlined the challenges facing our country today that require a quick solution. In particular, Mr. Ambassador addressed the Korean students, who in the future will work in various spheres of Ukrainian-Korean relations, stressing that “*youth should remember and never forget the events of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which began back in 2014, and terrible crimes of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine*”¹.

Another speaker who joined the work of the Forum via video conference is

¹ Ponomarenko D. Keynote Speech. URL: <https://youtu.be/DJpVK3LP3mw>

the People’s Deputy of Ukraine, Deputy Head of the inter-parliamentary group for relations with the Republic of Korea, Mr. Andriy Nikolayenko. In his speech, the parliamentarian talked about the situation in Ukraine, in particular, in the cities of Kharkiv, Mariupol, Chernihiv and other cities and villages, where people are now left without gas, water, electricity and other means of livelihood. Mr. Nikolayenko noted that these are all the consequences of the terrible war that Putin started against Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, calling Ukrainians nationalists and Nazis. But today everyone has already understood who is a real Nazi. The People’s Deputy of Ukraine drew special attention to the fact that the Korean people will remember the terrible war that was fought on the Korean Peninsula and its terrible consequences. Therefore, he called on all Koreans to help and support Ukraine in the fight against the Russian aggressor and emphasized that *“15 nuclear reactors are located on the territory of Ukraine and damage to one of them could lead to a nuclear disaster not only in Europe, but in the whole world”*². However, Mr. Nikolayenko assured that *“Ukraine will definitely win this war, because the Ukrainian people are strong and united around one idea, and they also feel the invaluable support of their allies”*³.

After that, those present had the opportunity to ask questions to Mr. Ambassador and find out what was bothering them. In particular, the majority were interested in the question of how to help the Ukrainian people in this extremely difficult time, how humanitarian aid will be delivered to Ukraine and where the funds transferred by Koreans to a special account opened at the Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Korea will be spent. Mr. Ambassador was happy to share all the ideas regarding the implementation of these plans in the shortest possible time.

In the second part of the forum, Korean and Ukrainian scientists, public and political figures in their reports touched on the most pressing issues of the Russian-Ukrainian war and its impact on the situation in East Asia and the Korean Peninsula in particular. The Former Korean Ambassador to Ukraine and Russia, Mr. Park Robyug outlined the differences in the historical development and political life of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples,

² Nikolaienko A. Video Message. URL: <https://youtu.be/DJpVK3LP3mw>

³ Nikolaienko A. Video Message. URL: <https://youtu.be/DJpVK3LP3mw>

democratic values and vectors of the future, for which Ukraine is fighting today. Mr. Ambassador compared Ukraine and Russia with South and North Korea, whose paths diverged long ago, and the countries chose different directions of building society. However, the leadership of the Russian Federation is trying in every way to revive the former Soviet Union and the idea of a “superpower”.

Professor of Sookmyung Women’s University, Former Deputy Minister for Defense Reforms Hong Kyudok noted in his speech that “*the Russian invasion of Ukraine is becoming more and more unpredictable due to the fierce resistance of the Ukrainian army and people, despite the optimistic mood of the US administration and the complete support of President Biden, this war will fundamentally change the international community and international politics*”⁴. The professor also drew attention to the fact that the USA and the West could not reliably defeat the Russian military strategy “fait accompli”. And, finally, the speaker talked about the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war for Korea and East Asia, where China and North Korea pose the main danger. Therefore, South Korea should not forget the importance of its allies and the disarmament of the Ukrainian armed forces, which were once the strongest in Europe, with the exception of Russia. Also, the Republic of Korea should keep in mind the consequences of the invasion of Ukraine and use it as a basis for future defense reform, and what happened in Ukraine is in no way the business of a “*stranger on the other side of the world*”⁵.

Mr. Kim Shinkyu, a scientist of the East European and Balkan Research Institute, gave a speech on the topic “Relations between Ukraine and Central and Eastern Europe and future prospects”, in which he outlined the concern of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that the current war will spread to their territory, because in the past they were satellites of the Soviet Union. However, the greatest danger is felt by Poland and the Baltic countries, which are directly bordered by Russia, so they are worried about direct military

⁴ Hong K. Implications of the Russian-Ukrainian War and its Impact on the Korean Peninsula. URL: <https://youtu.be/DJpVK3LP3mw>

⁵ Hong K. Implications of the Russian-Ukrainian War and its Impact on the Korean Peninsula. URL: <https://youtu.be/DJpVK3LP3mw>

intervention by the Russian Federation, a large-scale influx of refugees, a threat to energy security, economic decline, etc. The speaker noted that “today’s war can be seen as Russia’s response to the fear of losing its buffer zone due to Ukraine’s radical turn to the West (EU, NATO), so Ukraine needs balanced moves and compromises to get out of the buffer role”⁶. First of all, this is about medium- and long-term cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe, strengthening regional cooperation in the field of military security through unification with Poland, which will guarantee Ukraine’s full membership in the EU and NATO in the future.

The Secretary of the Defense Installations Agency, Ms. Seo Wonhee, in her speech named three reasons why Russia cannot abandon Ukraine: “*first, ethnic identity, second, the importance of the Black Sea Fleet, and third, the geopolitical value of Ukraine – a line of defense protecting Russia from Western states*”⁷. The speaker emphasized that Ukraine has a completely different position – it declared independence and defined a way of building a society different from Russia. However, according to Ms. Seo Wonhee, “*the Russian Federation has been preparing for war with Ukraine for a long time, accumulating wealth and modernizing its armed forces, as well as enlisting the support of its ally – China*”⁸. In the end, the Secretary of the Agency noted that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine creates a sense of danger in Korea, which, like Ukraine, is a region of sharp conflict between the interests of the great powers. Therefore, Korea must always be ready for battle, as evidenced by the Ukrainian crisis.

In her speech, the professor of the Department of Ukrainian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Mrs. Olena Shchegel, outlined the terrible crimes of Russia against Ukraine not only in today's war, but in the historical plane, starting with the Pereyaslav Council and ending with the February 24 invasion. The teacher also tried to discuss with the previous speakers, who in different ways highlighted the crimes and dangers of the

⁶ Kim S. Relations between Ukraine and Central Eastern Europe and prospects for the future. URL: <https://youtu.be/DJpVK3LP3mw>

⁷ Seo W. The position of Ukraine and Russia in the war and its consequences for Korea URL: <https://youtu.be/DJpVK3LP3mw>

⁸ Seo W. The position of Ukraine and Russia in the war and its consequences for Korea URL: <https://youtu.be/DJpVK3LP3mw>

Russian Federation in Ukraine and the world. In particular, Mrs. Olena noted that “*all human and civic values are foreign to Russia, and behind democratic transformations totalitarianism, absolutism, authoritarianism and other crimes are masked*”⁹. Therefore, in the speaker’s opinion, it is not necessary to talk about these problems tolerantly or with certain fears, but to tell the truth to the whole world at the top of my voice.

So, during the discussion, scientists, public and political figures once again emphasized that the invasion of Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine should be condemned by all the countries of the world, and the leadership of the Russian Federation should bear the most severe punishment. Of course, the USA, Western countries and the entire international community should support and help Ukraine in this struggle, as well as promote Ukraine's entry into the EU and NATO, as these organizations can guarantee security and create conditions for the development of Ukraine as an economically and politically strong state in the world. It should also not be forgotten that Russia and China will continue to work on expanding their power, including territorial expansion, so Korea and the international community must be ready for this and respond decisively to such actions.

⁹ Shehegel O. Russia’s crimes against Ukraine: a historical aspect. URL: <https://youtu.be/DJpVK3LP3mw>