Korean Reunification in the Eyes of Seoul and Pyongyang Today

This "sacred" topic for North and South Koreans is in the epicenter of international attention again.

There was a time when the northerners were more initiative on this issue, and the southerners were apprehensive about "communization" from the North. Now, in a radical shift of the economic power factor in favor of South Korea, according to many experts, North Korea is concerned more about self-preservation than about global projects of reunification.

However, in recent years this problem has sounded very loudly again. This time Seoul is playing a leading part.

Interested readers remember, that one of the stated priorities of South Korea’s current government has been the task of creating trust between North and South. However, three years later, analysts decided that this target has been replaced in practice by the policy of forcing the union through the acceleration of "collapse and regime change" in North Korea. Today, most of the discussion in South Korea centers has the topic what and how Seoul should do after the reunification: how to repair the destroyed economy, which principles (South Korean or international) should guide the legal aspect of the "attached" territories and how to carry out justice against the "criminal" leadership of the current North Korea.

Many researchers think this statement to be, at least, a premature attempt to "cook a hare before catching him". However, this is the reality of the current discourse of the South Korean political elite.

Back in March, 2014 the President of South Korea, Park Geun-hye, being in Dresden, said in a keynote speech, where on the background of seemingly attractive proposals for Pyongyang the idea of reunification was gradually carried out and was based on "the German version", so the reunification of Korea by absorption of the North by the South (and in the Korean language version of the speech the term "absorption" was clearly stated). Dresden itself, which is located in the absorbed the German Democratic Republic, was chosen to host a keynote speech by Park Geun-hye for a reason.

Another confirmation of this phenomenon is the global "Eurasian initiative", announced by the President of South Korea, Ms. Park Geun-hye in November 2013. Obviously, this initiative is a new mega project, which is designed for a much wider area than just East Asia.

However, the analysis of the "Eurasian initiative" through the prism of this article’s topic makes it clear that the second main goal of this concept is the target - "Let's achieve peace and prosperity of Eurasia by the opening up and nuclear disarmament of North Korea."
According to the Speaker of the South Korean government, "the main purpose of the mega project is the creation of "a giant wave" of peace and prosperity in Eurasian societies, which will arise in Europe, Southwest Asia and the Middle East as a reason for the restructuring, opening up and renunciation of nuclear weapons by North Korea as well as the improvement of human rights in the North. We can use the Eurasian countries as a lever to persuade North Korea. However, if Pyongyang refuses, we will increase the pressure on North Korea - this is where the line of Eurasian prosperity breaks out - to connect the Eurasian line with North Korea by force. Can Pyongyang stop the "locomotive" of Eurasian society which is the fundamental revolution of world history?

It is not surprising that in Pyongyang, this proposal was met negatively. In September 2014, at the UN General Assembly in New York, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Korea, Lee Soo-young, gave a detailed response to the "peace" initiative of the South, recalling the concept of reunification of Korea formulated by Kim Il Sung - a union based on the creation of "the Federal Republic of Korea."

Today, this debate between the officials of the two Koreas continues to gain momentum. High-ranking South Korean officials constantly voice confidence in the inevitable reunification of Korea in the near future, under the terms of South Korea. The South Korean Reunification Minister, Ryu Gil-jae, speaking in Washington, D.C. at the end of 2014, stated: "... for the reunification of Korea, we need ‘three wheels’: one of them - improvement of inter-Korean relations; the second - formation of a consensus on reunification within South Korean society (because, as the minister admits, now, for many South Koreans, especially young people, the reunification is not the highest priority). "

But the most important 'wheel' is working closely with the international community, since its participation, and especially that of the United States in the preparation of reunification is necessary and even essential. It is thanks to their support that the reunification of Germany became possible. "I am convinced that if the United States will firmly support and assist in the reunification of Korea, our dreams of the reunification of Korea will become a reality."

North Korean scientists also gave their response. In the February, 2015 report by the Institute for Disarmament and Peace of the Foreign Ministry of North Korea, the necessity of an objective evaluation of the realities that exist on the Korean peninsula is emphasized. And today they are such that "for 70 years, the two Koreas have been developing along different trajectories determined by opposing ideologies and political systems. At the same time, neither of the Korean sides is willing to give up their own ideology and political system. Therefore, the desire of one party to impose its system on the other is sure to lead to war and the involvement of neighboring states in it. Given the characteristics of the military capabilities of both the Koreans and their neighbors, the result of attempts to implement such a scenario would be a "catastrophic Armageddon", with which the tragic consequences of the Korean War of the 1950s, the current military conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine would pale by comparison."

On the basis of the conducted analysis the North Korean author concludes that the coexistence of the two systems is the only realistic way for the reunification of Korea. The differences between the systems are not an "Achilles heel", but rather the reason for the necessity of their coexistence. If the two Korean sides were to reunite in one state and begin to respect the unique features of their respective political systems, then the inter-Korean cooperation could develop smoothly and achieving the ultimate goal of reunification would cease to be an issue.

At the same time, Pyongyang is convinced, that in the course of the integration process the two Korean sides "should not blindly copy the experience of other countries, but form the structure corresponding to the realities and specifics of Korea... then there will be no need to use other people's brains, seek permission from external forces or their approval of our decision on how to merge."

Here, we believe it is appropriate to pause and give the reader an opportunity to assess the current approaches of both Koreas to the actual problem.

Alexander Vorontsov, PhD in History, Head of the Korea and Mongolia Department at the Institute of Oriental Studies RAN, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.