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Asia, Europe emerge from U.S. shadow

By **Choi Jie-ho**
Staff Writer

At a gathering here yesterday of 25 journalists from across Asia and Europe, the discussion of the relationship of the two continents was dominated by one central question: Where was the policy of the United States leading the world?

Excerpts of a keynote speech by William Pfaff and discussions. Page 7.

Invited to Seoul by the JoongAng Ilbo and the Korea Press Foundation, participants in the Asia-Europe Press Forum 2004 debated the role of Europe and Asia at a time when the United States is alienating many traditional allies. With this backdrop, they sought to define what roles newly enlarged Europe and economically dynamic, but politically disparate, Asia will play in world affairs.

In a keynote address, William

Pfaff, a world affairs columnist whose work appears in the International Herald Tribune among many other papers, said that "in Western Europe and much of northern Asia, a certain retreat or imposed absence from history has prevailed since the Second World War, confining these societies to roles dominated by the Cold War and the policies of the United States."

He said one of the defining events of the coming decade will be what he called Asia's "return to history."

"There will inevitably be an Asian and European re-engagement with history, for which both remain largely unprepared," Mr. Pfaff said.

Kavi Chongkittavorn, assistant editor of The Nation in Bangkok, in a speech to the group, said that to play a greater role, Asian nations would have to find more ways to cooperate more closely.

"Inclusivity is a strength, not a weakness," Mr. Chongkittavorn said,

raising at the same time the issue of India and how the largest democracy in the world should become part of the integration of Asian states.

During lunch, guest speaker Lee Sun-jin, the Foreign Ministry's deputy minister for policy planning, told the group the chief challenges facing South Korean foreign policy were the fallout from the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Korean Peninsula, the economic rise of China and the difficult pursuit of improved inter-Korean relations.

Speaking of the South's evolving policy toward the North, he said in the past any bad news from the North was greeted as "a victory for the South," but now calamities evoke sympathy and have come to be regarded as a burden that the South must step forward and help to alleviate "because they are our brothers and relatives."

jieho@joongang.co.kr