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Trans-Pacific Partnership

Korea Likely to Sign on to TPP But Political Debate Anticipated

South Korea is likely to sign on to the prospective Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement, but a lively political debate is anticipated because the impact of market access concessions in previous deals is well-known, a Korean researcher said April 10.

June Park, a visiting fellow at the East-West Center in Washington, said trade deals are part of daily life in Korea, and while many are numb to the prospect of preferential trade agreements, farmers have become more aggressive in their opposition to these deals because tariff cuts have affected their lives.

Speaking at a discussion hosted by the center, Park said a recognizable polarization in the population has taken place, even though it is premature to fully assess the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS), which went into effect in March 2012.

She said it is known that Korean small- and medium-sized electronics and auto parts exporters have benefited from KORUS and that U.S. exports to Korea of frozen beef, almonds, chemicals, lemons and wine have increased.

With Japan in the TPP, Korean policymakers felt left out, she said, and Seoul formally expressed interest in joining the TPP in November 2013. It was announced in late March that Korea obtained from the 12 countries participating in the TPP consensus to eventually sign on to the rules side of the pact—once completed—and to negotiate on market access, which includes tariffs, ser-

vices and government procurement, with the first tranche of TPP countries (63 ITD, 4/2/15).

Park said the South Korean government should take steps to scrutinize each sector that would be affected by the TPP and put in place compensatory measures to help reach a general consensus among the public.

“By preempting public outcry and addressing sector-specific concerns in advance, the adoption and implementation of TPP will proceed more smoothly than KORUS,” Park said.

She noted that the South Korean government launched the TPP Strategy Forum in January to foster discussion among the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, academics and policy analysts across four sectors—economy and industry, politics and diplomacy, international trade law and country analysis for each TPP member state.

In an April 9 article in the East-West Center’s Asia Pacific Bulletin, Park said for South Korea to get the most out of the TPP, South Korean policymakers should take advantage of the opportunity to prioritize key areas of the South Korean economy.

“For instance, South Korea’s strengths in the information and technology industry demonstrate the country’s potential to thrive, especially if supported continuously with research and development on software and content,” she said.

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The article by Park is available at <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/print/35046>.