When the European Community was founded, preserving the environment did not appear to be the primary concern. Its main interests were to rebuild its war-shattered economies by economic and political integration. A hope to prevent the recurrence of wars and ensure peace and security was so high that fears about the accelerating damage to the environment were easily neglected. In hindsight, this might be ascribed to a lack of convincing data and the understandably overwhelming focus on the dangers posed by economic and military threats. However, environmental degradation constituting a security risk has encountered hardly any voices of dissent since the late 1980s.

Perceiving the gravity of environmental security, the EU has begun a process that has resulted in gradual treaty revisions and the steady accommodation of the environmental security agenda both in its internal governance and external relations. In particular, the singing of the 1987 Single European Act was a watershed event. It has led to institutional arrangements to cope with new environmental challenges by highlighting the imperativeness of environmental protection. In its wake, tangible actions have ensued since the 1990s and a window of opportunity has been opened: the EU has come to claim its leadership in global environmental issues, whereas the US’s role has been descending.

As of today, there seems to a tacit agreement that environmental security can no longer be dominated by the logic of power politics and that a new critical reflection seems inevitable. In particular, this is particular the case as long as the post Cold-War era embraces the contention that the state-centric ontology and epistemology in world politics is to some extent de-legitimized. In this context, the EU’s new identity in the post-Westphalian order has its own implications, since the identity of the Union is part of a political ethos that informs its external action in general and its response to environmental issues in particular.

It is then imperative to examine whether and to what extent the identity of the EU has indeed affected its relations with South Korea, not least when the latter has recently claimed to focus on ‘low-carbon, green growth’. To this aim, this research seeks to elucidate how and to what extent the EU has balanced its environmental cooperation with Korea by considering both the logics of consequentialism and appropriateness that are considered the two dominant views in this domain of activities.

This research compares both rationalist and normative perspectives. In the process, this work basically assumes that the environmental cooperation between the EU and South Korea is predicated upon the ways in which self-interests of individual actors are weighed against normative ethics.
against the backdrop in which the nature of the external environment, as well as individual actor’s preferences and behaviours, is being affected and transformed.

Based on this theoretical framework, the EU and Korea’s environmental policies, as well as the path and trajectory of their cooperation, will be examined. To undertake comparative studies, this work will delve into how the Union and Korea have formulated their individual environmental policies that reflect the diverse interests of multiple layered of political actors and why they decide to cooperate for the purpose of environmental protection. This empirical comparison will be undertaken by focusing on how normative environmental missions conflict with material interests resulting from bilateral trade policy.