



Middle Power Foreign Policy Behavior in Peripheral Regions: The Cases of Türkiye and South Korea in Central Asia

Çevre Bölgelerde Orta Büyüklükte Güç Dış Politika Davranışı: Orta Asya'da Türkiye ve Güney Kore Vakaları

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Abstract

This study examines the foreign policy behavior of Türkiye and South Korea in Central Asia comparatively in the post-Cold War era. The article argues that both Ankara and Seoul accomplished to expand and institutionalize their interaction with the Central Asian states through the establishment of multilateral diplomatic platforms, allocation of development assistance and utilization of soft power instruments. While Türkiye's political bonds with the Central Asian states are more entrenched and institutionalized compared to the South Korea's political association with Central Asia, South Korea surpasses Türkiye in terms of economic performance in the region. The socio-cultural sphere is a domain in which Russia still prevails despite the increasing Turkish and South Korean efforts in education and entertainment realms. Furthermore, while both Türkiye and South Korea resorted to middle power means of convening international meetings and extending aid in Central Asia, they were unable to assume conciliator/mediator roles in regional conflicts.

Keywords: Rising middle powers, Türkiye, South Korea, foreign policy behavior, Central Asia

Özet

Bu çalışma, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Türkiye ve Güney Kore'nin Orta Asya'daki dış politika davranışlarını karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Makale, hem Ankara'nın hem de Seul'ün çok taraflı diplomatik platformların kurulması, kalkınma yardımlarının tahsis edilmesi ve yumuşak güç araçlarının kullanılması yoluyla Orta Asya devletleriyle etkileşimlerini genişletmeyi ve kurumsallaştırmayı başardığını savunmaktadır. Türkiye'nin Orta Asya devletleriyle olan siyasi bağları, Güney Kore'nin Orta Asya ile olan siyasi ilişkisine göre daha köklü ve kurumsallaşmışken, Güney Kore, bölgedeki ekonomik performans açısından Türkiye'yi geride bırakmaktadır. Sosyo-kültürel nüfuz sahası, eğitim ve eğlence alanlarında Türkiye ve Güney Kore'nin artan çabalarına rağmen Rusya'nın hala hâkim olduğu bir sahadır. Ayrıca, hem Türkiye hem de Güney Kore, uluslararası toplantılara düzenlemek ve Orta Asya'ya yardım uzatmak gibi orta büyüklükte güç araçlarına başvururken, bölgesel çatışmalarda uzlaştırıcı/arabulucu rollerini üstlenememişlerdir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yükselen orta büyüklükte güçler, Türkiye, Güney Kore, dış politika davranışı, Orta Asya

The geopolitical overexpansion of the United States of America (USA) in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, the severe financial crisis of 2007-2008 which took its toll on the American banking system and financial services industry along with the travails Washington had to undergo in the Middle East and in North Africa in the wake of the Arab Spring indicated the slow but steady decline of the American power in the international arena. This situation paved the way for emanation of alternative groupings to the USA-led political and economic order, the most compelling of which proved to be the BRICS, the intergovernmental organization composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa that has speeded up cooperation in the domains of economy, political security and people-to-people exchanges since mid-2000s.

Another significant outcome of the gradual erosion of the American ascendancy became the increasing prominence of middle powers which took an interest both in regional problems and in global matters. Although the International Relations (IR) scholars had yet to reach a consensus on the definition of middle power, it was possible to identify three models of middle power classification. The first one was the hierarchical or positional model which specified the medium ranking of a state in terms of material capabilities. While Andrew Cooper, Richard Higgott and Kim Richard Nossal based the middle power features of a state on territorial size, population, complexity and strength of economy and military capability, Jonathan Ping identified middle powers through population, geographic area, military expenditure, gross domestic product (GDP), GDP real growth, value of exports, gross national income per capita, trade as a percentage of GDP, and life expectancy at birth (Cooper et al., 1993, p. 17; Ping, 2005, pp. 51-53). The functional model referred to the international influence of a state which depended on the extent of its involvement and its ability to contribute to the solution of international issues (Chapnick, 1999, p. 73). According to this model, a middle power showed willingness to take responsibility in specific situations or in niche areas regarding international matters in conformity with its national interests (Engin and Baba, 2015, p. 4). The third one was the behavioral model that defined a middle power by its behavioral tendency to engage in regional and global order through multilateral forums (Cooper et al., 1993, p. 19). The middle power might act as a catalyst which provided the intellectual and political wherewithal to spearhead an initiative and convinced the other parties to follow it. It might assume the role of facilitator that focused on agenda-setting and took part in some form of associational, collaborative, and coalitional activities. It might also take on the role of a manager which was concentrated on institution-building such as the creation of formal organizations and regimes and development of conventions and norms (Cooper et al., 1993, pp. 24-25).

The gathering of high-level international meetings, conciliation/mediation efforts for the settlement of global and regional conflicts, allocation of humanitarian and development aid to the states in need and employment of soft power tools to elevate global standing could be named as major behavioral attributes which were adopted by middle powers. The hosting diplomacy while bringing international recognition to the middle powers also enabled them to raise new issues which were of interest to them through agenda-setting (Cooper and Parlar Dal, 2016, p. 523). The conciliation/mediation endeavor, also called good-offices diplomacy, helped to bring out mutual understanding and exchange of knowledge between the negotiating parties which was requisite for the emergence of an accord or agreement (Henrikson, 1997, p. 56). This facilitating role earned the middle power acknowledgement by major powers as well. The provision of humanitarian and development aid to the low-income countries assisted the middle power to brand itself as a benevolent state and a responsible actor that took into account the grievances of economically poor nations, thus scaled up its international prestige and reputation. Moreover, some middle powers had greater faith in the capacity of developing countries for successful development compared to the major powers as they too had risen to their current growth level from absolute poverty and difficult socio-economic conditions (Mo, 2016, p. 590). The concept of soft power which was introduced by Joseph Nye in the early 1990s was defined by “getting others to want what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 1990, p. 166). Nye pointed out that the soft power of a country emanated from its political values, foreign policy and culture. Middle powers frequently made use of soft power instruments as these instruments helped them to build coalitions among like-minded parties, to mediate conflicts (Lee, 2012, p. 19) and to diffuse their power through non-military means.

Türkiye and South Korea have stood out as significant examples of rising middle power activism in the post-Cold War period. With its material capacity and its stance as a pivot state between the Eastern and Western worlds as a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member with strong attachments to the USA and Europe during the Cold War era, Türkiye had retained positional and functional middle power characteristics for some time (Parlar Dal, 2018, pp. 6-7). However, Türkiye’s assumption of behavioral middle power attributes such as convention of international meetings, conciliation/mediation of regional conflicts, provision of humanitarian aid and utilization of soft power instruments has been a recent phenomenon.

The geostrategic position of Türkiye with its connections to the Balkans, South Caucasus and Middle East endowed the country with significant regional clout in the post-Cold War period. Türkiye initiated the foundation of many regional organizations, namely the Black Sea Economic Cooperation,

Developing Eight Organization for Economic Cooperation and the Southeast European Cooperation Process in its surrounding regions. Ankara also contributed to the both regional and global peace efforts by taking part in the peace-keeping operations in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Iraq, Kosovo, Lebanon, Macedonia, Somalia and Sudan (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Defense General Staff, 2023). Türkiye's endeavor towards maintenance of global security and stability was rewarded with Ankara's election to non-permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat during the 2009-2010 term after near a half-century hiatus.

Türkiye's attempts to act as conciliator/mediator for the peaceful settlement of the regional conflicts starting from mid-2000s has become another significant aspect of Türkiye's rising middle power activism. Türkiye initiated the trilateral summit meeting process with Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2007 to ensure peace and security in Afghanistan and mediated the indirect rounds of peace talks between Israel and Syria in 2008. It cooperated with Brazil in 2010 to broker a deal for resolution of the impasse between Iran and the West over the former's nuclear program. The year 2010 also witnessed the foundation of trilateral consultation mechanisms of Türkiye-Bosnia-Herzegovina-Serbia and Türkiye-Bosnia-Herzegovina-Croatia upon Türkiye's instigation in order to reduce tensions between the autonomous entities of the Federation and the Republika Srpska within Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Ankara strove to institutionalize the mediation efforts globally by co-launching the Group of Friends of Mediation with Finland under the auspices of the UN in 2010. Türkiye, with Finland and Switzerland also formed the Group of Friends of Mediation in 2014 within the structure of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and co-chaired a Contact Group at the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 2018 with the participation of the OIC General Secretariat, Saudi Arabia, and Gambia. (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023a). Türkiye has also been hosting the Istanbul Mediation Conferences since 2012 to bring together various actors engaged in conflict prevention and mediation activities to increase the effectiveness of mediation efforts on a global scale.

Türkiye's latest initiative of active diplomacy turned out to be the introduction of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in 2021 which was set up to exchange views on global and regional issues and to provide solutions to outstanding foreign policy problems. Accordingly, Ankara managed to bring together the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for the first time after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in March 2022. Although that meeting did not bring out any concrete upshots, Türkiye's mediation efforts between the two sides with the contribution of the UN resulted in the signing of

a deal between them in July 2022 which opened a corridor from the Ukrainian city of Odessa to resume global grain shipments (Turan, 2022).

Türkiye hosted the 2015 G20 Summit in Antalya as the term president and utilized this multilateral platform for its niche diplomacy objectives. It promoted the humanitarian-development nexus within the forum, as well as inclusive economic growth and equitable distribution (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023b). Türkiye held the first UN World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016, developed various humanitarian aid programs and became one of the largest donors in terms of allocation of international humanitarian assistance (Development Initiatives, 2022, p. 52). The country also shelters the largest number of refugees in the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022). Furthermore, Türkiye, despite its growing financial difficulties, managed to exceed the UN's Official Development Assistance (ODA) as a percentage of Gross National Income target of 0.7% with 0.95% in 2021 (OECD, 2022).

Türkiye has been increasingly making use of soft power tools since mid-2000s in its foreign policy making. The officials of the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) positioned Türkiye as a center of attraction with its conservative democratic values and successful track record of economic progress that might be an inspiration for developing countries (Kalin, 2011: pp. 9-10). Ankara also aimed to reach out to the global audience via scholarship programs, cultural centers, and products of popular culture.

Divided after a bitter war in 1953, South Korea became one of the front-line states during the Cold War epoch enjoying close economic and military ties with the USA. Concomitant to its rapid economic development and technological achievements which came into being as a result of remarkable investments in education and infrastructure, Seoul had elevated to the middle power status by the early 1990s. These developments engendered a gradual rise in South Korea's stature in Northeast Asia amid the presence of powerful competitors such as China, Russia and Japan. Yet, similar to Türkiye, it took some time for South Korea to adopt the behavioral dimensions of the middle power diplomacy.

South Korea raised its international profile progressively in the wake of its membership to the UN in 1991. It participated to the UN peace-keeping operations commencing with Somalia in 1993 and continued with Angola, Western Sahara, Georgia, Kashmir, Liberia, Burundi, Sudan, Afghanistan, Mozambique, Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina and East Timor (Hong, 2009, pp. 27-29). South Korea became one of the non-permanent members of the UNSC during the 1996-1997 term. The South Korean politician and diplomat Han Seung-soo served as the President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) between 2001 and 2002. This high-level diplomatic work at the UN

culminated in another South Korean politician and diplomat Ban Ki-moon's election to the post of UN Secretary General in 2007.

South Korea decided to take up the middle power role full-heartedly in 2008 with the introduction of the Global Korea Initiative that emphasized South Korea's global role as convener of high-level gatherings, agenda-setter of international environmental matters and contributor of ODA (Kim, 2016, p. 5). South Korea chaired the November 2010 G20 Summit in Seoul and became the first non-G8 country that hosted a G20 leaders' summit. The Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat which brought together China, Japan and South Korea to promote peace and prosperity among the three states was founded in Seoul in 2011. In that year, South Korea also hosted the Fourth High-Level Forum for Development Aid Effectiveness in Busan that was coordinated through the OECD. One year later, the Second Nuclear Security Summit took place in Seoul. Next year, South Korea was again elected to serve as a non-permanent member on the UNSC for the 2013-2014 period. The year 2013 also witnessed the introduction of the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative by South Korea with the aim of promoting sustainable peace and cooperation in its immediate region.

South Korea made use of hosting of international summits to unveil its ideas, strategies, and plans pertaining to the global concerns of environment and development. Clean energy and green growth became the two issue areas which were prioritized by the South Korean government during and after the 2010 G20 Summit. The country promoted investments in environmental technology, renewable energy and creation of green jobs (Mo, 2016, p. 591). South Korea established the Global Green Growth Institute in Seoul in 2010 and set up the UN's Green Climate Fund in Incheon in 2010 as well.

The enhancing diplomatic leverage and growing economic performance of South Korea entailed the upgrading of its voting quota in the International Monetary Fund in 2008 and the World Bank in 2010 (Shim and Flamm, 2013, p. 398). It joined the OECD Development Assistance Committee in 2009, thus became the first former aid recipient country that participated to the group as a donor member. The UN Office for Sustainable Development was opened up in Incheon in 2011 as well. South Korea contended to act as a bridge between the Western donors and the developing countries, sought South-South cooperation and struggled to incorporate new donors such as China to the international aid system (Lee, 2012, p. 19). In 2021, it ranked third after France and Japan in providing the highest shares of bilateral ODA as sovereign loans (OECD, 2022). South Korea also spearheaded the formation of MIKTA, the cross-regional grouping in 2013 with the partaking of Mexico, Indonesia, Türkiye and Australia to promote global governance in the fields of development cooperation, global

health, disaster risk management and humanitarian assistance (Parlar Dal and Kurşun, 2016, p. 620).

The employment of soft power tools has been another important aspect of South Korea's middle power diplomacy since the early 2000s. South Korea, being a successful example of rapid democratization and economic modernization might serve as a role model for developing nations. Seoul initiated a comprehensive national branding program in 2009 which encompassed passing down its development experience, offering scholarship programs, promoting Korean language and sports (Presidential Council on Nation Branding, 2023). The country also made good use of its burgeoning entertainment industry to disseminate its traditional culture to the global audience.

The rising middle powers of Türkiye and South Korea have also demonstrated interest in regions beyond their immediate borders in addition to making foreign policy moves in their respective areas and pursuing niche diplomacy regarding some global matters. Central Asia became one of those peripheral regions where both Türkiye and South Korea endeavored to expand their influence in the post-Cold War era. Being ruled initially by the Russian Empire then by the Soviet Union for about a century, the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan became independent in 1991. Türkiye entertained ethnic, linguistic and religious ties with the Central Asian states. Central Asia was also home of an ethnic Korean population that had been deported to the area in the 20th century from the Russian Far East at Stalin's orders. Moreover, Central Asia was a welcoming place for Turkish and South Korean products and services.

This article examines foreign policy behavior of Türkiye and South Korea in Central Asia in a comparative fashion in the post-Cold War period. The paper focuses on these two states because they are both non-Western middle powers which retain close political and military ties with the USA. Türkiye and South Korea have also scaled up foreign policy activism at the international level in recent years. So the investigation and comparison of rising middle power engagement in a region where their common ally USA also holds some sway will be interesting. The paper aims to find answers to questions such as how have Türkiye's and South Korea's foreign policy practices towards Central Asia evolved throughout the years? To what extent do they resort to instruments of middle power diplomacy in the region? Which political, economic, socio-cultural tools do they make use of to enhance their influence in Central Asia?

The study claims that both Türkiye and South Korea have achieved to expand and institutionalize their interaction with the Central Asian states in the post-Cold War era through establishment of multilateral diplomatic platforms, allocation of ODA and utilization of soft power instruments. While Türkiye's political bonds with the Central Asian states are more entrenched and institutionalized compared

to South Korea's political association with Central Asia, South Korea surpasses Türkiye in terms of economic performance in the region. The socio-cultural sphere on the other hand, is a domain in which Russia still prevails despite the increasing Turkish and South Korean efforts in education and entertainment sectors.

There exist many studies in International Relations literature that focus on Türkiye's foreign policy towards Central Asia in the post-Cold War epoch (Aydın, 1996; Aydın, 2004; Fidan, 2010; Balcer, 2012, Çınar, 2013; Parlar Dal and Erşen, 2014; Köstem, 2017; Balcı and Liles, 2018) The literature also has its share of works which concentrate on South Korea's engagement with Central Asia (Hak, 2009; Hwang, 2012; Fumagalli, 2012; Fumagalli, 2016; Dadabaev, 2018). Yet, it is devoid of a study that examines foreign policy moves of Türkiye and South Korea in Central Asia in the post-Cold War period on a comparative basis. This paper intends to fill the lacuna in this area. Furthermore, this survey, by comparing and contrasting the foreign policy stratagems of two rising middle powers in a peripheral region throws light on an under-researched aspect of middle power diplomacy, thus contributes to the literature in a broader sense as well.

The Institutionalization of Political Association with Central Asia: Organization of Turkic States versus the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum

The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union allowed for Türkiye's connection with the Central Asian states and diversification of its foreign policy options. Türkiye's reaching out to the Central Asia for political, economic and socio-cultural cooperation purposes was backed up by the Western world, especially by the USA. Türkiye with its secular democracy, market economy and strong ties with the Western institutions was a more preferred alternative compared to radical and revisionist Iran which was also making inroads into the region.

Türkiye became the first country which recognized Central Asian Republics in December 1991. Shortly after, embassies were opened in Central Asian capitals, reciprocal high-level visits took place and many bilateral cooperation agreements were signed. Türkiye's next step was the inauguration of Turkic Summits starting in 1992 which gathered together the leaders of Azerbaijan and Turkic Republics of Central Asia with the aim of setting up the foundations of an institutional framework between the parties. As the summits were organized on the pillars of common identity and common language, Tajikistan, a Persian-speaking country with close historical and cultural ties to Iran, was excluded from this mechanism. Türkiye's political relations with Tajikistan were conducted on a bilateral basis through the Cooperation Council established in December 2012.

The succeeding summits occurred in Istanbul in 1994, Bishkek in 1995, Tashkent in 1996, Astana in 1998, Baku in 2000 and Istanbul in 2001 (Organization of Turkic States, 2023a). It was decided to establish a Permanent Secretariat in Istanbul at the Baku Summit of 2000 to speed up the implementation of decisions made in the summits. However, it took a decade to actualize the launch of the Permanent Secretariat. The institutionalization process of the Turkic Summits took quite a long time due to the eruption of myriad of problems among the attendees. The Turkish-Uzbek relations deteriorated at the end of the 1990s after the Uzbek leadership accused Türkiye of hosting and supporting the influential figures of the opposition. The relationship further went downhill in November 2005 when Türkiye voted in favor of two resolutions against Uzbekistan which were drafted in Council of the European Union and UN that encompassed sanctions on the Uzbek government because of its handling of the Andijan incident of May 2005. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan fell out concerning the delimitation of the Caspian Sea. Turkmenistan eschewed from being part of any intergovernmental organization after its adoption of permanent neutrality in 1995.

Türkiye, as originator and active organizer of the Turkic Summits, played crucial role in elevation of the gatherings to a structured format. Yet, with Justice and Development Party's (JDP) coming to power in November 2002, Ankara mostly channeled its efforts to enhance its bonds with the European Union (EU), the USA and the Middle East. Central Asia fell down on the foreign policy priority list of the new government. So it was not surprising that Türkiye convened the Eight Turkic Summit in Antalya in 2006, after a five-year hiatus, amidst tensing relations with Washington in the wake of the USA's invasion of Iraq and growing problems with Brussels regarding the opening of chapters owing to the Cyprus dispute.

The transformation of the Turkic Summit mechanism to Turkic Council was decided at the Nakhchivan Summit of 2009 with the signing of the Nakhchivan Agreement on Establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye. The Permanent Secretariat was kicked off in 2010 in Istanbul. Uzbekistan's rapprochement efforts with Türkiye and its Central Asian neighbors under the leadership of the new President Shavkat Mirziyoyev ensued its joining to the Turkic Council in October 2019. The Turkic Council changed its name to the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) at the Istanbul Summit of November 2021 and welcomed Turkmenistan's participation to the organization as an observer member. The Heads of State also approved the first strategic document of the organization, Turkic World Vision-2040 at the November 2021 convocation which envisioned collaboration between the parties in political and security cooperation, economic

and sectoral cooperation and people-to-people cooperation realms (Organization of Turkic States, 2023b).

Türkiye accomplished to institutionalize its political relations with Central Asia via the creation of intergovernmental schemes as well as accession of Central Asian states to the extant multilateral organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization and the OIC. However, Ankara fell short of expectations regarding the mediation of regional conflicts. When a serious unrest broke out in Kazakhstan in early January 2022, the OTS, upon the initiative of the then Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, convened an extraordinary online meeting of foreign ministers to discuss the situation in Kazakhstan. The foreign ministers declared that the Turkic World stood by Kazakhstan and fully supported the country in restoring security and stability (Organization of Turkic States, 2023c). A similar statement was made by the OIC which announced that it stood in full solidarity with Kazakhstan in its struggle to preserve its security and national unity. (OIC, 2023) While Türkiye's mediation attempts were limited to these solidarity messages, it became the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization that deployed peace-keeping troops in Kazakhstan upon the request of the Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to stabilize the situation in the country. The OTS maintained a similar attitude when in late January 2022 border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in which civilians were killed, burst out. While the Organization welcomed the dialogue between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to find a peaceful solution to the dispute (Organization of Turkic States, 2022), it eschewed from taking any tangible steps to expedite the process.

South Korea established diplomatic relations with the Central Asian states in 1992. Yet, from the early 1990s until mid-2000s, Seoul lacked a region-wide foreign policy with respect to Central Asia. The center of gravity of the foreign policy of South Korea centered on Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. These two countries retained the largest ethnic Korean diaspora in Central Asia. Koryo-saram, the ethnic Korean population of the post-Soviet states had migrated to the Russian Far East starting from the mid-19th century. In September 1937, all the Korean population of the Far East which was approximated to be 700,000 was deported from the Far East at the behest of Stalin and 500,000 of them were settled in Central Asia (Fumagalli, 2012, p. 76). Today, according to the data provided by the South Korea's Foreign Ministry, the Central Asia is home to nearly 303,000 ethnic Koreans. Uzbekistan possesses the largest number of Koryo-saram (175,431) (Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023a) whereas Kazakhstan comes second (108,396) (Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023b). Moreover, these two countries had higher economic potential compared to other Central Asian states.

South Korea came up with its first inclusive strategy for Central Asia in 2006 following the holding of a Central Asia conference in December 2005 with the

participation of both state and private organizations. The Comprehensive Central Asia Initiative that was publicized soon afterward the conference revealed South Korea's plans to utilize Central Asia as a springboard for advancement to the Eurasian continent in addition to secure long-term supply of energy resources and to explore a prospective market for South Korean goods and services (Fumagalli, 2016, p. 42).

Another initiative of South Korea towards institutionalization of its relationship with Central Asia became the introduction of the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum in November 2007. The Forum aimed to create a platform which facilitated regular dialogue, exchange of ideas, broadening of network and opening up channels of cooperation (Hwang, 2012, p. 2). While the New Asia Initiative announced in March 2009 named Southeast Asia, Central Asia and the Oceania as targeted regions for expansion of South Korea's political, economic and cultural influence, Central Asia was deemed significant in terms of reducing energy dependence of South Korea on the Middle East, enhancing exports and protecting the overseas Koreans (Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009). Accordingly, South Korea commenced to organize Caravan events in Central Asian countries in 2011 to boost business collaboration and to increase cultural exchanges.

The Eurasia Initiative put forth in 2014 envisaged developing energy, transport and trade links across the Eurasian continent. Reaching out to the Eurasian economic space via the formation of new transportation and trade networks would open up new markets for South Korean companies, would help South Korea to balance its commercial ties with China and the USA and might also make positive impact on relations with North Korea (Dadabaev, 2018, p. 36).

The South Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum Secretariat was installed in Seoul in July 2017 and two months later South Korea delineated the details of its strategy in Eurasian Initiative with the launch of the New Northern Policy. The policy anticipated the creation of nine bridge areas (gas, railways, ports, power generation, North Pole Route, shipbuilding, agriculture, fisheries and industrial complex) to connect South Korea with North Korea then with Russia and through Central Asia to Europe (Kim, 2018, p. 5). The South Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum was upgraded to a foreign ministerial level in 2020 as well and it identified six medium and long-term goals in Central Asia in the fields of climate change, education, energy, healthcare and medicine, modernization and diversification of industry and transport and logistics (Akmatalieva, 2021).

South Korea, different from Türkiye, did not pay much attention to the regional conflicts of Central Asia. South Korea's Foreign Ministry refrained from releasing any declaration concerning the turmoil in Kazakhstan or border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Both Türkiye and South Korea have succeeded in elevating their bilateral political association with the Central Asian states to a multilateral plane in the post-Cold War era. Ankara had more encompassing and profound engagement with the region compared to Seoul, therefore its institutionalization of political interaction with the Central Asian Republics via the OTS took place earlier than Seoul's South Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum. Moreover, while South Korea shunned making reference to political goals in the official documents of the Forum, the OTS, nonetheless, underlined the need to strengthen political solidarity and mutual support on vital issues of national interest in the Turkic World Vision–2040.

The Economic Moves of Türkiye and South Korea in Central Asia: Development Aid, Trade, Investments

Türkiye's first step towards beefing up economic bonds with the Central Asian Republics was the establishment of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) in 1992 to provide development assistance to these states. The TIKA has channeled its assistance into the fields of restoration and infrastructure development, education, healthcare and agriculture development in Central Asia throughout the years. Although the shares of the African, Balkan and Middle Eastern states have started to augment in Türkiye's development aid figures since the mid-2000s in accordance with the enlargement of TIKA's regions of activity, Kazakhstan ranked seventh (21.73 million US dollars) and Kyrgyzstan ranked eighth (20.97 million US dollars) among the top 19 recipient of Turkish bilateral ODA in 2020 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, 2020, p. 20).

The Joint Turkic Business Council which was founded in 2011, the Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry that was set up in 2019, the High Level Strategic Cooperation Councils formed with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan along with the Cooperation Council created with Tajikistan helped Türkiye to institutionalize its economic and commercial ties with the Central Asian countries by bringing together politicians, state officials and private sector representatives on a regular basis. The Turkic World Vision–2040 also drew out possible areas of economic collaboration between Türkiye and the Turkic Republics such as transport and customs, information and communication technologies, energy, tourism, health and agriculture (Organization of Turkic States, 2023b).

Türkiye's trade volume with Central Asia exceeded 9.5 billion US dollars in 2021 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023a; 2023b). Uzbekistan became Türkiye's number one trade partner (more than 3.6 billion US dollars) in Central Asia, followed by Kazakhstan (nearly 2.9 billion dollars) and Turkmenistan (nearly 1.7 billion dollars). Central Asia held promises both for prominent Turkish construction, textile and energy firms and for small and medium sized Turkish

enterprises which were looking opportunities abroad for expansion. The Turkish investments in Central Asia amount to around seven billion US dollars and they are mostly concentrated on construction/infrastructure development, healthcare, textile and food sectors.

The construction/infrastructure development sector leads the Turkish investments in Central Asia. Turkish contractors built power stations, hospitals, trade centers, government buildings, residential complexes, temples in the region. They also renovated kindergartens, schools, healthcare centers, water channels, mosques, universities, historical monuments (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, 2023). The infrastructure development works of the Turkish undertakers encompassed the building of an international port in Ashgabat and rebuilding of Turkmenbashi International Seaport as well (Lukyanov et al., 2022). Turkish healthcare and pharmaceutical companies have production facilities in Central Asia which produce pharmaceuticals, medical devices, masks and respirators that have been crucial in the time of contagious diseases such as COVID 19. They also supplied medicine to the Central Asian governments which faced drug shortages because of Russian export ban (Pannier, 2022). The Turkish firms operating in textile and food industries in Central Asia contributed to the accumulation of technological know-how in the region via utilization of cutting edge manufacturing methods and equipment in their working environments.

The Central Asian laborers that have been coming to Türkiye in increasing numbers since 2010s constitute another important link between Türkiye and the Central Asian states in the economic sphere. The growing unemployment rates in Central Asia, Russia's inauguration of entry ban law in 2013 and the visa-free regime¹ of Türkiye precipitated the migration to Türkiye. Most of the Central Asian laborers in Türkiye come from Turkmenistan (250,000), Uzbekistan (100,000) and Kyrgyzstan (30,000) (ORASAM, 2019; Urinboyev and Eraliov, 2022, p. 55; p. 118) and they work in agriculture, cleaning services, construction, domestic care, hospitality, retail, textile and tourism sectors.

South Korea prioritized Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in its economic strategem towards Central Asia from the early 1990s until mid-2000s. Seoul invested in automotive, energy, telecommunications and textile sectors in these countries but had to call off most of its projects by the end of 1990s due to the negative impact of the Asian financial crisis of 1997 on its economy. Nevertheless, the increasing economic prosperity, augmenting international profile and growing political clout in Asia have spurred South Korea to put more emphasis on ODA efforts in Central Asia as of mid-2000s. Most of the ODA

¹ Türkiye cancelled the visa-free regime for Turkmen citizens on 13 September 2022 upon the request of the Turkmen government.

work was carried out by the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) which was set up in 1991 to share South Korea's development experience and know-how with the countries in need. Kyrgyzstan received the highest amount of ODA in Central Asia in 2020 (about 7 million US dollars), followed by Uzbekistan (4.4 million US dollars), Tajikistan (about 1.1 million US dollars) and Turkmenistan (704,000 US dollars) (KOICA, 2020, p. 79). KOICA directed its ODA efforts to agriculture, education, environmental protection, health, public administration and technology domains in Central Asia (KOICA, 2020, p. 81-85).

South Korea also launched Knowledge Sharing Programs (KSPs) in Uzbekistan (2004), Kazakhstan (2009), Kyrgyzstan (2014) and Tajikistan (2014) as part of its development aid activities in Central Asia. The KSP was launched by the Korean Ministry of Economy and Finance in 2004 to lend assistance to states which seek to derive policy implications of the Korean development model (KSP, 2023a). It provides research, consultation and technical help on policy issues identified with partner countries. South Korea extended support to Uzbekistan in education, healthcare, industrial development², IT, public administration, waste management, water management, to Kazakhstan in banking, healthcare, housing, industrial development, to Kyrgyzstan in agriculture, education, environmental protection, healthcare, public administration, regional development, small and medium-sized enterprises development, IT (KSP, 2023b). The Country Partnership Strategy signed with Tajikistan in January 2022 envisaged South Korean assistance in priority areas of industry, education, energy, agriculture, forestry and fisheries and transportation (ODA Korea, 2023).

The economic relations between South Korea and Central Asia gained an institutional and multilateral character with the establishment of the Korea-Central Asia Business Council in June 2020. It is a consultative platform which gathered together the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum Secretariat, the Korea International Trade Association, chambers of commerce of the Central Asian Republics, state officials and business people (Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023c). Korea-Central Asia Caravan events have also been beneficial to build networks between governments and businesses across the region. South Korean business model appealed to Central Asian states as it featured close collaboration between state and private sector and could deliver capital and technological know-how which was dearth in Central Asia (Fumagalli, 2016, p. 45).

² South Korea helped Uzbekistan to build two Free Economic Zones in Navoi and Angren. Korean Air Cargo also built the largest terminal in the region in Navoi.

South Korea's trade volume with Central Asia came at 15.6 billion US dollars in 2021. Kazakhstan ranked first (9.75 billion US dollars) (Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023d) among South Korea's largest trading partners in Central Asia followed by Uzbekistan (5.33 billion US dollars) (Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023^e) and Kyrgyzstan (33 million US dollars) (Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023^f) Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan also took the lion's share in South Korean investments in the region. The 95% of South Korea's 14.7 billion US dollar investments in the region was realized in these two countries (*Mechanisms of Deepening Uzbek-Korean Cooperation*, 2022; President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019; Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023^g; Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023^h).

The South Korean investments in Central Asia are concentrated on energy, construction/infrastructure development, technology, automobile and mining sectors. Korea National Oil Corporation explored Zambil, Aktobe, Arystan, Kulzhan, Akzhar, Besbolek, Karataikyz and Alimbai oil fields in Kazakhstan (Korea National Oil Corporation, 2023). Korea Gas Corporation co-developed Surgil gas field and Korea Resources Corporation developed uranium deposit of Zhantuar in Uzbekistan. South Korean companies also took part in energy infrastructure projects in Central Asia such as construction of a petro-chemical plant in Atyrau and power generation plants in Balkash in Kazakhstan (Dadabaev, 2018, p. 36), Bukhara Oil Refinery in Uzbekistan and Kiyarly gas-chemical plant in Turkmenistan (Akmatalieva, 2021). South Korean corporations of SK Ecoplant and Korea Expressway have also been collaborating with the Turkish companies of Alsim Alarko and Makyol Construction since 2018 in a joint venture to complete the Big Almaty Ring Road project. South Korean contracting firms also built residential apartments in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

South Korea has earned itself a reputable position in terms of production of high-tech, knowledge-intensive and innovative products and services since the 2010s. Therefore, Central Asian Republics were eager to seek Seoul's help in technology domain. LG CNS launched a joint venture in Uzbekistan in 2015 to implement corporate/individual database systems and projects for e-government. Samsung manufactured household appliances with Artel Company (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2017). KOMSCO undertook a project in 2022 to digitize government-issued documents, including identification cards and certificates of tax payment in Kyrgyzstan (Ahn, 2022). Hyundai's opening of an automotive assembly plant in partnership with Astana Motors Company in Almaty in 2020 loomed large for Kazakhstan as the plant produced over 20,500 cars, 10.6% of which were exported to Belarus and Uzbekistan (Hyundai, 2023). The enterprise also transferred knowledge and technology to the automotive sector of Kazakhstan and provided employment opportunities for the Kazakh

people. The launch of ferroalloy plants in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan by SIMPAC and SAC (Kumar, 2022) and in Bekabad, Uzbekistan by Posco Daewoo (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2018) contributed to the improvement of manufacturing technologies and processes in the mining industries of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The transformation of South Korea from an agrarian economy to a technologically advanced state created labor shortages in many low-skilled positions in manufacturing, construction and agricultural sectors in the mid-2000s. The South Korean government decided to fill the void by encouraging the return of overseas Koreans as well as inviting cheap foreign labor to the country. Accordingly, Korean Chinese and former Soviet Koreans were officially included in the co-ethnics abroad category in 2004. In 2007, Seoul also launched the Visit and Work Program which issued work visas for the former Soviet and Chinese ethnic Koreans. This program, coupled with South Korea's signing of bilateral agreements with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to recruit workers and its visa-free regime with Kazakhstan made the country an attractive place for Central Asians who were seeking employment abroad due to the unpromising work prospects at home. There exist approximately 41,000 Central Asian residents in South Korea³, the majority of whom came to the country as labor migrants to work in the so-called 3D Factories, where jobs were dirty, dangerous and difficult.

Türkiye and South Korea have managed to invigorate their economic and commercial ties with the Central Asian Republics in the post-Cold War period. Seoul performed better than Ankara in terms of trade statistics and investment size. They mostly competed in construction/infrastructure development sector although they were able to collaborate in Big Almaty Ring Road project. South Korea's economic achievements in the region however, paled in comparison to China's and Russia's trade⁴ and investment figures.⁵ Both Türkiye and South Korea made use of ODA as a middle power foreign policy tool to exalt their influence in Central Asia. While Türkiye extended more development aid to Central Asian states in 2020 compared to South Korea, South Korea offered development strategies tailored to the specific needs of each Central Asian state

³ The distribution of the Central Asians in South Korea is as follows: Uzbekistan (25,961), Kazakhstan (12,469), Kyrgyzstan (1,622), Turkmenistan (237), Tajikistan (217). See (Dadabaev and Soipov, 2020, p. 124).

⁴ China's trade with Central Asia came at 50.1 billion US dollars in 2021, whereas Russia recorded 37 billion US dollar worth trade with the region in 2021. See (Global Times, 2022) and (Alimov, 2022).

⁵ China registered 40 billion US dollar worth investment in Central Asia at the end of 2020 while the volume of Russian investments in the region reached about 30.5 billion US dollars in 2021. See (Woods and Baker, 2022) and (Lavrov, 2022).

which seemed to be a more structured, innovative and sustainable cooperation model with the region.

The Attempts to Diffuse Turkish and South Korean Soft Power in Central Asia: Education, Language, Entertainment

Both Türkiye and South Korea have resorted to soft power tools of education, language and popular culture in the post-Cold War period to expand their influence in Central Asia. Türkiye founded the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY) in 1993 to promote Turkic culture, art and language. TURKSOY currently operates as an affiliated organization of the OTS and convenes events such as academic conferences, literature congresses, and painters' gatherings to bring together artists and scholars of the Turkic World to exchange their experiences.

Turkic Academy and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation are two other related organizations of the OTS which aimed to consolidate educational and cultural ties between the Turkic countries. Turkic Academy was established in 2012 to lead scientific studies on Turkic history, ethnography, languages as well as to prepare common teaching materials across the Turkic world (Organization of Turkic States, 2023d). The latter was established in 2015 to protect and promote Turkic culture and heritage through projects and programs and support and funding activities. The Turkic University Union that was set up in 2013 under the aegis of the OTS as well, assembled together 22 universities from the Turkic World and initiated the Orkhun Exchange Program, Sports Games of the Union and Student Council (Organization of Turkic States, 2023e).

Türkiye has taken many steps to leave its imprint in the field of education in Central Asia as of early 1990s. Turkish-Kazakh International Hoca Ahmet Yesevi University was established in Turkestan in 1992 and the Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University was inaugurated in Bishkek in 1995. Ankara launched the Great Student Exchange Project that offered scholarships for higher education to the students of Azerbaijan and Central Asian states in 1992. This project was transformed into the Türkiye Scholarships Program under the auspices of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities in 2012. The new program welcomes students also from African, Asian, Balkan, Latin American and Middle Eastern countries and covers tuition fee, monthly stipend, health insurance, one-year Turkish language education, accommodation in state dormitories, and a round-trip flight ticket (Türkiye Scholarships, 2023). According to the statistical data of the Türkiye's Council of Higher Education (YÖK) 26,989 students from the Central Asian Republics receive tertiary education in Turkish universities. Students coming from Turkmenistan (19,384) constitute the majority of Central Asian students, followed by students from Kazakhstan (2,909), Uzbekistan (2,421), Kyrgyzstan (1,649) and Tajikistan (626) (YÖK, 2023). The YÖK also introduced the Mevlana Exchange Program in the

academic year of 2013-2014 which included exchange of students and academic staff between Turkish higher education institutions and higher education institutions of other countries via signing of bilateral protocols. In this respect, Türkiye signed cooperation protocols with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan (YÖK, 2021, p. 50).

The Turkish Ministry of National Education and the Turkish Maarif Foundation, the two institutions which were authorized to provide educational services abroad contributed to the conduct of educational activities in Central Asia at the primary and secondary education levels. The Turkish Ministry of Education opened up pre-school education institutions, primary schools, secondary schools, high schools, Turkish language education centers in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. 2,497 Kyrgyz, 1,025 Tajik, 429 Turkmen and 369 Uzbek students received education in these schools and institutions in the academic year of 2021-2022 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Education, 2022, p. 241). The Turkish Maarif Foundation put into operation its first education complex in Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan in September 2021 which would offer courses from pre-school to high school levels. Kyrgyzstan also hosts a Faculty of Divinity at Osh State University and a religious high school in Osh sponsored by Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, the organization founded to bolster the activities of the Presidency of Religious Affairs of Türkiye. A branch of Yunus Emre Institute was founded in Astana as well to acquaint the Kazakh with the Turkish language.

Turkish movies and TV series, significant instruments of Turkish soft power found their way into Central Asia starting with Kazakhstan in the early 2000s. They, in a short span of time, encountered a receptive audience in the region and became popular in other Central Asian Republics except Turkmenistan which did not allow any foreign entertainment material flowing into its territory. The number of Turkish TV series which aired on Kazakh TVs had ascended to 42 by the 2010s (Yurtbilir, 2021, p. 153) Kazakhs also voted Magnificent Century the best serial of 2012. Yet, Turkish series broadcasted in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were banned from time to time on the grounds of protecting national culture and family values (Tursunbaeva, 2014).

South Korea, similar to Türkiye, utilized education as a soft power tool to raise its influence in Central Asia. The Central Asian states benefited from Global Korea Scholarship program which bestowed scholarships to international students to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies at higher education institutions in South Korea. The program included tuition fee, resettlement and living allowance, medical insurance, language courses and airfare (Study in Korea, 2023). The number of Central Asian students utilizing the program ranged from 5 to 25, depending on the quota for each state (Varpahovskis, 2019) The KOICA presented scholarships to the government officials and researchers in

state institutes with the Capacity Improvement and Advancement for Tomorrow fellowship program that provided short-term and long-term degree and non-degree training. Seoul also launched programs to reach out to ethnic Koreans in the former Soviet Union. The Local Fellowship program in China and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in this regard aimed to encourage outstanding talent in China and CIS regions to create special bonds with their home country (Korea.net, 2023).

South Korea carried out educational and training activities in Central Asia as well. There exist ten South Korean universities operating in the region. The KOICA opened vocational training centers in Tashkent, Samarkand, Shakhrisabz and Ferghana in the fields of automobile production, cosmetology, electronics, hairdressing, IT, sewing (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2021). Uzbekistan also reformed its pre-school education system based on the Korean practices and standards. Seoul communicated the Korean language and culture to the Central Asian people via the King Sejong Institutes which were founded in Kazakhstan (3), Kyrgyzstan (5), Tajikistan (2), Turkmenistan (1) and Uzbekistan (8) (King Sejong Institute Foundation, 2023).

The popularity, impact and outreach of Korean popular culture has expanded exponentially since the early 2000s and led to the emergence of a global phenomenon called *hallyu* (the Korean wave). The Korean movies, dramas, pop music and video games drew great interest especially in the youth. The Korean government undergirded the spread of *hallyu* through institutional mechanisms such as the Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS), Korea.net and the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA). The KOCIS enhances cultural exchanges with other countries through opening of cultural centers that promote Korean heritage and arts (KOCIS, 2023). Korea.net provides up-to-date information about Korea across a variety of fields, such as government policies, cultural developments, arts, history, science, technology, business and sports in ten languages (Korea.net, 2023). The KOCCA oversees and coordinates the promotion of Korean content industry.

The Korean cultural centers which have been functioning in Central Asia since 2010 have been instrumental to convey Korean culture and ways of life to the residents of Central Asia. They hold seminars, speech contests, literary evenings, calligraphy events, music competitions, poetry exhibitions, film screenings, theatrical performances and K-pop concerts (Akmatalieva, 2021; KOCIS, 2022). South Korean movies and dramas have been airing on TV channels of the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan since the early 2000s. South Korean K-pop bands appealed to a large audience in Central Asia. Furthermore, new music groups inspired by the K-pop bands have appeared in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in recent years. The Kazakh boy band Ninety One which called their music genre as Q-pop is the most famous of them.

Another famous K-pop inspired music group is the girl band BirAi in Kyrgyzstan whose music style is named as KG-pop (Nikolova, 2021). Despite the growing popularity of these bands in Central Asia especially among young people, band members are criticized continuously by conservative groups regarding the incompatibility of their make-ups, colorful hairs, flamboyant attire and daring dancing figures with cultures and traditions of their societies.

Türkiye and South Korea recorded some success to penetrate into Central Asia through utilization of soft power tools of education, language and entertainment in the post-Cold War epoch. The historical and cultural ties with Türkiye increased enthusiasm of the Central Asian youth to learn Turkish and to travel to Türkiye for tertiary education. South Korean higher education system on the other hand, was renowned for its extensive use of English as medium of instruction and its high-technology research environment which were quite attractive for Central Asian students. The entertainment industry has also been helpful to familiarize Central Asian people with the language and culture of Türkiye and South Korea. Yet, neither Türkiye nor South Korea was a match for Russia in terms of spreading socio-cultural influence in Central Asia. The Russian language still retained its importance as the medium of commerce, entertainment, inter-ethnic communication and media in Central Asia. Moreover, Moscow sustained strong educational links with the region via local branches of its prominent universities in Central Asia and the presence of about 150,000 Central Asian students that came to Russia for higher education (Dubnov, 2018).

Conclusion

The end of the Cold War and relative decline of the American hegemony by mid-2000s have induced Türkiye and South Korea to position themselves as rising middle powers on the international stage. Both Ankara and Seoul displayed keen interest in regional matters as well as in global issues. Furthermore, they commenced to demonstrate behavioral middle power attributes such as gathering high-level international summits, partaking in conciliation/mediation efforts for resolution of regional conflicts, extending development aid to the countries in need and making use of soft power instruments.

Central Asia got its share of Türkiye and South Korea's post-Cold War middle power activism. Türkiye's ethnic, cultural, and religious bonds with the Central Asian people, the presence of substantial number of ethnic Koreans in Central Asian Republics, coupled with economic potential of Central Asia aroused interest both in Ankara and Seoul towards the region despite its peripheral character. Türkiye and South Korea employed diverse set of political, economic and socio-cultural tools to step up power and influence in Central Asia.

Türkiye managed to strengthen, deepen and institutionalize its political association with Central Asia through the foundation of the OTS with the contribution of Turkic states of Central Asia and via the establishment of

Cooperation Council with Tajikistan. Türkiye also assisted the Central Asian Republics to be accepted to the international organizations such as the ECO and the OIC. South Korea kept a lower diplomatic profile compared to Türkiye and preferred creating a looser mechanism, the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum. Neither Ankara nor Seoul however, was ready to take on a conciliator/mediator role during the turmoil in Kazakhstan or over the border discord between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While South Korea eschewed from any involvement in regional disputes, Türkiye only settled for a convener role of international meetings regarding the matters.

Both Türkiye and South Korea made use of ODA extensively as a significant tool of middle power diplomacy in Central Asia. Türkiye has recently surpassed South Korea in terms of the amount of the development aid granted to the Central Asian states. Yet, South Korea got ahead of Türkiye with respect to trade and investment figures though being outshone by the economic performance of China and Russia in the region. Russia also still held the supremacy in soft power in Central Asia despite Türkiye and South Korea's remarkable efforts in education and entertainment domains to appeal to the Central Asian public.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar tarafından çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.

Destek ve Teşekkür: Yazar tarafından destek ve teşekkür beyan edilmemiştir.

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