



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of International Relations

**UNDERSTANDING MIDDLE POWERS' REGIONAL
INITIATIVES: A COMPARISON OF TÜRKİYE'S ASIA ANEW
AND THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA'S NEW NORTHERN POLICY**

Hanryung LEE

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2026

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POLICY

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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

The jury finds that Hanryung LEE has on the date of 13 January 2026 successfully passed the defense examination and approves his Master's Thesis titled "UNDERSTANDING MIDDLE POWERS' REGIONAL INITIATIVES: A COMPARISON OF TÜRKİYE'S ASIA ANEW AND THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA'S NEW NORTHERN POLICY".

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ABSTRACT

LEE, Hanryung. *Understanding Middle Powers' Regional Initiatives: A Comparison of Türkiye's Asia Anew and the Republic of Korea's New Northern Policy*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2026.

This thesis examines how structurally similar two middle powers: Türkiye and South Korea came with distinct regional initiatives under the same international conditions. Since the end of the Cold War, changing global structure created greater room for autonomy and heightened uncertainty. Middle powers became more active in the fields of global governance, norms and regional projects. Yet the concept of middle power still remains ambiguous allowing governments and other actors to set in terms of identity, history, domestic debates and capabilities for regional/global roles. Türkiye and South Korea are representative cases: both are located within great powers—geographically and ideologically, historically depended on the United States for security and sought greater autonomy in the post Cold War era. Despite similar backgrounds, the initiatives they produced took different forms. Türkiye's Asia Anew Initiative launched in 2019 reflected their civilisational identity, strategic depth and Eurasian positioning; while South Korea's New Northern Policy announced in 2017 grew from constrained autonomy, a new cabinet after impeachment, economic diversification and middle power diplomacy. The thesis asks why two middle powers developed region-specific initiatives at similar times but through different conceptualisations, tools and domestic pathways. The study argues that structural incentives alone cannot explain the variation. Middle powers do not automatically update their policies when conditions change; windows of opportunity must meet domestic actors who would diagnose problems, propose alternatives and mobilise resources. Using a four cue framework distinguishing idea and policy entrepreneurship, the thesis shows how identity framing, institutional channels, and interpretations of constraints produced different outcomes. The findings contribute to understanding how entrepreneurial agency interacts with domestic structures in shaping regional policies and what this suggests for the study of middle powers and regional cooperation.

Keywords

Türkiye, Republic of Korea, Asia Anew Initiative, New Northern Policy, Middle Power, Idea Entrepreneur, Policy Entrepreneur

ÖZET

LEE, Hanryung. *Orta Güçlerin Bölgesel Girişimlerini Anlamak: Türkiye'nin Yeniden Asya Girişimi ile Kore Cumhuriyeti'nin Yeni Kuzey Politikası'nın Karşılaştırması*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2026.

Bu çalışma, yapısal açıdan birbirine benzer iki orta gücün, Türkiye ve Güney Kore'nin, benzer uluslararası koşullar altında neden farklı bölgesel girişimler başlattığını incelemektedir. Soğuk Savaş'ın sona ermesinden bu yana küresel yapının değişmesi, daha fazla özerklik alanı yaratmış fakat aynı zamanda belirsizliği artırmıştır. Orta güçler, küresel yönetişimin destekleyicileri, normların teşvik edicileri ve bölgesel projelerin başlatıcıları olarak daha görünür hâle gelmiştir. Bununla birlikte, orta güç kavramı analitik açıdan net değildir ve bu belirsizlik, hükümetler ve diğer aktörlerin kimlik, tarih, iç tartışmalar ve kapasitelere dayanarak ülkeye bölgesel veya küresel roller atfetmesine imkân tanımaktadır. Türkiye ve Güney Kore bu bağlamda temsil niteliğindedir: her iki devlet de büyük güçlerin arasında konumlanmış, tarihsel olarak güvenlik açısından Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ne bağımlı olmuş ve daha fazla özerklik arayışına girmiştir. Benzer arka planlara rağmen geliştirdikleri girişimler farklı biçimler almıştır. 2019 yılında ilan edilen Türkiye'nin Yeniden Asya Girişimi, medeniyet kimliği, stratejik derinlik ve Avrasya konumlanmasına dayanmaktadır. Buna karşılık, 2017'de duyurulan Güney Kore'nin Yeni Kuzey Politikası, sınırlı özerklik, ilk kez yaşanan bir görevden alma süreci sonrası oluşan yeni kabine, ekonomik çeşitlendirme ve orta güç diplomasisinden beslenmiştir. Tez, benzer dönemde ortaya çıkan bu iki bölgesel girişimin neden farklı kavramsallaştırmalar, araçlar ve iç politik yollar üzerinden şekillendiğini sorgulamaktadır. Çalışma, yalnızca yapısal teşviklerin bu farklılığı açıklayamayacağını savunmaktadır. Ortam değiştiğinde orta güçler politikalarını kendiliğinden güncellemez; fırsat pencerelerinin, sorunları teşhis edebilen, alternatifler önerebilen ve kaynakları seferber edebilen yerli aktörlerle buluşması gerekir. Fikir ve politika girişimciliğini ayırt eden dört ipucuna dayanan çerçeve kullanılarak kimlik çerçevelerinin, kurumsal kanalların ve kısıtlamaların yorumlanmasının farklı sonuçlar ürettiği gösterilmektedir. Bulgular, girişimci ajansın iç yapılarla etkileşiminin bölgesel politikaları nasıl şekillendirdiğini açıklamakta ve orta güçler ile bölgesel işbirliği çalışmalarına katkı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Türkiye, Kore Cumhuriyeti, Yeniden Asya Girişimi, Yeni Kuzey Politikası, Orta Güç, Fikir Girişimcisi, Politika Girişimcisi

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAI	Asia Anew Initiative
AKP	Justice and Development Party
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
DEIK	Foreign Economic Relations Board
EU	European Union
KIEP	Korea Institute for International Economic Policy
KORAIL	Korea Railroad Corporation
KOTRA	Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NNP	New Northern Policy
PCNEC	Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation
SAM	Center For Strategic Research
TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
TÜİK	Turkish Statistical Institute
U.S.	United States of America
UN	United Nations
YTB	Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities

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INTRODUCTION

The changing international system structure since the end of the Cold War offered middle powers expanded room for autonomy and heightened uncertainty. As bipolarity collapsed, the world moved through a short lived unipolar moment and into a more diffused multipolarity with states, non-state actors and cross-regional institutions interacting across multiple levels. In this environment, middle powers have been increasingly visible not only as supporters of global governance but also as initiators of regional projects, norm promoters and brokers. Despite the rising importance, analytical boundaries of the category remain contested: literatures on middle powers cannot provide coherent or universally accepted definition. Because of this conceptual ambiguity, middlepowerhood becomes a notion that governments, politicians, media and other groups use identity, history, domestic discussions and capabilities set regional or global role.

Türkiye and South Korea are the two representative cases of middle power. Both states locate between great powers, historically depended on the United States for security during the Cold War and experienced rapid economic, military transformation under Western security umbrellas. Each faced persistent geopolitical constraints: Türkiye from its position as the crossroads of the West and the East; South Korea from its division with North Korea and proximity to China, Russia, Japan and the U.S. In the post-Cold War decades, both states sought greater autonomy, status and regional influence while managing structural dependence on Western partners, thereby diversifying external relations and developing images as proactive and responsible middle/regional powers.

Yet despite the similar external environments, the two states' regional initiatives took different forms though initiated at similar time: Türkiye's Asia Anew Initiative introduced in 2019 and South Korea's New Northern Policy launched in 2017. Why did the two middle powers make region-specific initiatives that were once distanced due to physical and ideological distance in similar period, but through such different aims and implementation paths which resulted in different policy results?

The answer requires examining not only external environment but also domestic structure and agents that are called here "entrepreneurs." Middle powers do not automatically

update their foreign policy when environment changes. Windows of opportunity—periods which existing policy frameworks become unstable or inadequate thus paving a way for new policy to come out must meet domestic actors capable of diagnosing problems, proposing alternatives and mobilizing resources. This study argues that policy entrepreneurs and idea entrepreneurs, understood through four cues (object pushed, primary tactic, location and phase of involvement), shaped the trajectory, scope, and framing of the two initiatives. The primary driving factors or the background of the ideas are considered to be external environments, and domestic political system affected the scope and boundaries of entrepreneurs. By comparing who are these entrepreneurs, how they came up with certain ideas and developed the ideas into policies, the thesis explains why two comparable middle powers adopted distinct regional strategies under similar international pressures.

To explore the dynamics, the thesis employs discourse analysis as main analysis method and frequency analysis as auxiliary tool. The primary sources of the case of AAI are: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye (MFA) policy sources regarding AAI, Asia-Pacific Relations, the 2019 İdare Faaliyet Raporu (2019 Administrative Activity Report) and 2020 İdare Faaliyet Raporu (2020 Administrative Activity Report); speeches and briefings by Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu: 2019 Opening Speech at the 11th Ambassadors' Conference, TBMM Genel Kurulu 2020 Yılı Bütçe Konuşması (TBMM General Assembly 2020 Budget Speech), XI. Büyükelçiler Konferansı Basın Toplantısı (Press Briefing at the 11th Ambassadors Conference), 12. Büyükelçiler Konferansı Büyükelçilere Hitap (Address at the 12th Ambassadors Conference), 2020 Yılına Girerken Girişimci ve İnsani Dış Politikamız (Our Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy on the Eve of 2020), and 2020 Yılı Dış Politika Değerlendirme Toplantısı Konuşması (Foreign Policy Evaluation Meeting Speech); and Stratejik Araştırma Merkezi's (Strategic Research Centre) Yeniden Asya Girişimi (Asia Anew Initiative). For NNP, four speeches by President Moon Jae-in: Keynote speech at the Eastern Economic Forum, Address to the Russian State Duma, Remark at the parliament of Uzbekistan and Opening remarks at the Korea-Kazakhstan Business Forum, and 29 press releases by the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Ministry of Economy and Finance and Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy are analysed as official foreign policy texts. In addition, for AAI

case semi-structured interviews with officials from the Department of East Asia in MFA, and for NNP case with a diplomat who served at the Embassy of South Korea in Russia during the implementation period of the policy as supplementary sources to verify factual information and provide contextual background on policy coordination and implementation. These analyses are further supported by literature reviews and quantitative data. The materials show how the states define their priorities, construct regional narratives and legitimize foreign policy choices. The purpose of this discourse analysis is to clarify: (1) the political and institutional background that made the emergence of the policies required; (2) the actors and ideas that resulted in AAI and NNP; and (3) the way Türkiye's new Asia policy was institutionalised in the form of AAI and South Korea's as NNP.

Discourse analysis sees texts and spoken words not as neutral expressions but as social and political acts that shape reality. Political discourse analysis (PDA) as developed by Teun A. van Dijk (1997, 2002) examines how power, dominance and resistance are reproduced or challenged through political language. It asks questions relevant to political science focusing on who speaks, under what institutional and situational conditions, with what rhetorical strategies and to what political effects. This study applies van Dijk's PDA framework for three main reasons. First, it helps to explain how patterns in political discourse are connected to power, institutions and policy. Second, as it defines what is 'political' based on function and context, it helps clearly select texts by identifying which actors, actions and events are politically relevant. Third, its multi-level focus on topics, arguments, rhetoric, and style makes it possible to systematically trace how discourse legitimizes policies and shapes political actors.

Following van Dijk (1997, 2002), the analysis will be consisted with four stages:

Table 1*Four Stages of Discourse Analysis based on Van Dijk's Political Discourse Analysis*

No.	Analytical Stage	Core Content
1	Identifying politicalness and context	Examine the political background and actors involved; determine what makes the discourse political by analysing its institutional, relational, and situational context.
2	Categorizing meanings within the text	Code sentences or segments according to their thematic content—topics, actor representations, rhetorical or justificatory strategies, and value framing.
3	Detecting discursive patterns	Identify recurrent or contrasting patterns across the text, such as repetition, position (opening/closing emphasis), binary oppositions, and causal linkages.
4	Interpreting and explaining political effects	Interpret how these discursive patterns construct, justify, or challenge political positions and power relations; explain why the discourse emerged and what political functions it serves.

Note. Content created by the author, based on Van Dijk (1997, 2002).

Chapter 1 develops the theoretical framework for middlepowerhood and entrepreneurship defining idea and policy entrepreneurs, and presenting the four-cue stages. Chapter 2 analyses Türkiye's foreign policy overview, Eurasian policies and the emergence of AAI analysing external and internal backgrounds, entrepreneurs and its outcomes. Chapter 3 traces South Korea's foreign policy trajectory, their northward policies since the 1980s, and identifying structural constraints, domestic political system and entrepreneurs of NNP with suggesting the findings of this study by comparing and contrasting external/internal environment, entrepreneurs and outcomes of the two polices. The conclusion summarizes the study by outlining what was examined, why it was examined

in that way, what were the main analytical steps and how the study contributes to the existing literature in the field.

CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: MIDDLE POWER THEORY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

This chapter puts Türkiye and South Korea within the middle power literature and specifies the entrepreneurs through which the states can reshape foreign policy. Section 1.1 clarifies the conceptual boundaries of “middle power,” distinguishing it from great- and small-state categories and surveying typical strategy repertoires. Section 1.2 turns to agency: it defines policy and idea entrepreneurship, shows how domestic structures raise or lower entry barriers, and explains why moments of critical juncture open windows for change. Together, these concepts provide the analytical lens for Chapters 2-5.

The study of middle powers gained increasing importance since the end of the Cold War, as international system turned from a bipolar order to a unipolar one and eventually to a multipolar structure with various actors interacting at various levels. In these new circumstances, middle powers have attained greater room to manoeuvre and pursue their own policy goals. Although the subject of middle powers is inherently difficult to analyse which we will examine deeper later on, studying middle powers offers a unique perspective to the international system: neither too elevated as the great powers’ view that has “danger of taking a too Olympian view” (majorly concerning main actors like earlier time historians), nor too limited to powerless small states: “pawns” in great power relations difficult to grasp process of decisions made at higher levels (Holbraad, 1971, pp. 77-78). Andrew Carr (2014) adds another point: the term is often used in both developed and developing states for political and public campaigns and rhetoric as it carries political appeal domestically and conveys a sense of strategic relevance within the global order, and the existence of the term have the field of international relations cautious from its great power focused bias (p. 71). Çelik argues taking a step more that middle power studies can allow a better understanding of great powers as it sheds light on how and why they engage with smaller states and make strategic choices (2017, p. 10).

Middle powers occupy strategic middle ground: they're strong enough to act yet not dominant enough to shape the world alone. This makes them ideal cases to understand the complexity and dynamism of international relations. According to Holbraad (1984), examining the experiences and aspirations, and complex relationships with both great and small states of middle powers, who often caution against the perils of great-power oligarchy and portray themselves as wiser and more virtuous actors along with, can offer a perspective on the international system that is more accurate than those suggested by traditional or newer approaches (p. 3).

Much of the literature on middle powers takes their 'middlepowerhood' for granted. Middle powers are often treated as so by definition, without being examined how this idea in the first place emerged and was constructed by politicians. Thus, it is essential to unpack how middlepowerhood is shaped at the domestic level, particularly through the role of policy and idea entrepreneurs in defining and advancing the idea of middlepowerhood. There is a significant gap in the literature: the processes through which middlepowerhood is constructed were largely neglected. This thesis aims to fill this gap by examining the domestic construction of middlepowerhood in middle powers. In addition, understanding idea and policy entrepreneurship is key for comprehending the actions of middle powers, because one of the major features of middle powers is being active in the international system by contributing to world economy, participating in global governance structures (such as the UN), mediating during crisis, providing humanitarian assistance abroad or being more autonomous and assertive in certain regions. All these initiatives are the outcomes of policy entrepreneurship of political actors who not only perceive but also portray their own country as a middle power.

1.1. POSITIONING MIDDLE POWERS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Middle powers are countries that tend to practice order building, coalition formation, multilateralism diplomacy, or hedging against great powers with emerging powers such as China, Russia and India in post-Cold War era (Kuik, 2016a, 2016b, as cited in Haacke, 2019, p. 376). States in this category often pursue strategies that emphasize autonomy, adaptability and multilateral engagement between great powers and regional constraints (Belanger & Mace, 1997; Chapnick, 1999; Cooper et al, 1993; Hocking, 1997).

The idea of middle power is at the centre of academic debate until this day. Despite differences in defining criteria, the definition of middle power as states positioned between great powers and small powers is widely accepted (Chapnick, 1999; Cooper et al., 1993; Cox, 1989; Çelik, 2017; Holbraad, 1971; Holbraad, 1984; Jordaan, 2003; Schiavon & Dominguez, 2016; Wood, 1988; Yalçın, 2012).

Historically, during the Cold War, traditional middle powers such as Canada often functioned as mediators or bridges between the polarized blocs of East and West, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. Their role at this time was primarily supportive, maintaining international norms and contributing to system stability (Cooper et al., 1993, pp. 20-21). However, significant shifts took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s as middle powers began to respond more proactively and flexibly to changing global conditions, driven by the increasing ambiguity of the international environment following the emergence of multipolarity (Nye, 1990, as cited in Cooper et al., 1993, p. 14). With the end of the Cold War, military issues declined in importance, allowing economic, environmental, and human rights concerns to dominate the global agenda. Increasing global interconnectedness created new economic vulnerabilities while simultaneously offering opportunities for middle powers to assert greater diplomatic autonomy and transition from supportive roles to leadership positions in specific areas. As the international environment became more fluid and issue driven, middle powers were able to wield influence more easily, as diplomatic skill gained importance relative to raw power (Hocking, 1997, pp. 131-132). This dynamic was reinforced by the rise of specialized, single issue international politics, which enabled middle powers to exert influence within niche policy fields (Hocking, 1997, p. 134). Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal (1993) identify two developments that encouraged middle power activism in the post Cold War era: shifts in the global agenda and the intensified connection between domestic politics and foreign policy, as internal societal demands increasingly influenced policy decisions on issues with both domestic and international implications, motivating middle powers toward more assertive international initiatives; nevertheless, commitments to multilateralism and international institutions have varied in practice, reflecting domestic political pressures that can alternately constrain or drive international engagement (pp. 21-22).

1.1.1. The Root of Middle Power Concept

The concept of middle power is known to have started in the 16th century by Giovanni Botero, an Italian philosopher in developing international power gradings. In his work “Ragion di Stato” (1589), he classifies states upon power as empires that can be considered as great powers, middle and small powers. He defines middle-sized states as states that “have sufficient strength and authority to stand on their own without the need of help from others” and the most stable, as their moderate power avoids both “aggression and envy,” curbs internal excess, and allows them to recover quickly from conflict (as cited in Wight, 1978, pp. 298-299).

The term “middle power” was used even prior to 19th century but in various different meanings. It ranged from geopolitically middle, middle as its position in a conflict to power hierarchy-wise middle-ness (Holbraad, 1971, p.79). German scholarship was coming up with the concept of ‘Mittelmächte’—states geographically or geo-strategically situated between European great powers which can be translated as middle power (Nossal et al., 2015, p. 63). Karl von Clausewitz (1831), renowned German strategist highlighted middle powers’ ‘separating function’ between great powers geographically and politically (Wood, 1988, p. 6). Lindner (1820) also recognized the strategic value of middle powers as “in-between” states—positioned between rival great powers and possessing sufficient capabilities to act as buffers—and their inherent tendency commit to equilibrium enables them to take balancing roles within the international system preventing any single great power from dominating it (Wood, 1988, p. 7).

The term and the self-conscious identity re-entered scholarly and diplomatic debate in the 20th century. By the early 1930s, David Mitrany published a work on world government and argued that the international community was made of two tiers of state powers: great and small, but some small states are getting more powerful and their strength shall be recognized through a “scheme of gradation” (Mitrany, 1967, as cited in Chapnick, 1999, p. 77). Chapnick (1999) highlights Mitrany’s work to be critical to the revival of middle power studies, as his idea of dividing international community into more than two tiers reintroduced the concept of middle power to scholarship (p. 77). The term ‘middle power-ness’ was introduced in 1946 by Lionel Gelber who argued some states’ functional

abilities differentiate them from lower-degree influencing states (Gelber, 1946, as cited in Çelik, 2019, pp. 15-16).

Middle power as political term and identity of states emerged in 1945 when the United Nation's (UN) design had certain middle power states to demand a status between great and small powers. The overwhelming power of Big Five in the UN Security Council: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States (U.S.) swirled countries such as Canada, Australia, Brazil who considered themselves to be entitled for positions different from small states and closer to the great powers' hierarchy (Holbraad, 1984, p. 57). As the first state employing the concept of middle power to foreign policy, Canada took ambiguous position in international hierarchy that has more influence than small powers but lacks economic and military capabilities: they were middle power by its own definition because they "participated as a junior partner within big alliances and actively engaged to conflict management beyond its border, the path which later Australia, South Africa, Japan and Brazil followed (Welsh, 2004, p. 584; Yalçın, 2012, p. 197).

The scholarship started departing from its great power-focused study tendency since the 1960s and 1970s, but focused on small states (Çelik, 2017, p. 10). Studies on middle-sized powers was still almost non-existent. Holbraad (1984) argues that few studies that appeared in the period were narrow in scope, focused on diplomatic issues at hand, or openly promoted particular foreign-policy lines (p. 2). Although numerous works examined problems and policies of individual middle powers, their collective nature and role was virtually absent (p. 2). It was the end of Cold War period—as mentioned above—that middle powers gained scholarly and diplomatic significance; the new window of opportunity/necessity endowed them with new challenges and roles to be more active players of global arena (Cooper et al. 1993, p. 21).

1.1.2. The Concept of Middle Power: A Contested Definition

The one thing middle power study unanimously agree is that the concept has not come to a single definition. To this long-lasting controversy in defining one term, Yalçın (2012) highlights the built-in ambiguity of the term *middle power*, noting that both "middle" and "power" are contested concepts. The word "middle," he argues, is inherently relative

because it “can exist only when ‘great’ and ‘small’ are defined first” (p. 199). Likewise, “power” is “one of the most controversial terms in the social sciences,” whose meaning is “hotly debated” across analytical positions, making it difficult to deploy as a stable variable in research (p. 199). Because of this dual ambiguity, he concludes that scholars generate “so many definitions of the concept that [they are] equal to the number of analysts writing on the concept” (pp. 198-199).

Welsh (2004) identifies several challenges in defining middle power. The concept of great and small power as reference point in defining middle power is more challenging as the emergence of the US hegemon changed international system from great powers rivalry to a single hegemon that far outstrips its nearest rivals (p. 585). He also pointed out relativity of power arguing while certain elements of hard power remain essential for great power status, soft power became increasingly decisive in exercising actual influence (p. 586). Additionally, questioning “what is middle power” contains a problematic assumption: as it presumes that a state’s position within the international power hierarchy determines its foreign policy behaviour. This underestimates domestic and societal factors and some states categorized as middle powers do not show commonly associated tendencies such as multilateralism or rule-based engagement (Stairs, 1998, as cited in Welsh, 2004, p. 585). Lastly, the concept of middle power is concerned with process rather than substance, defining such states by their tactics rather than substantive goals (Stairs, 1998, as cited in Welsh, 2004, pp. 586-587).

An establishment of middle power definition must be preceded as this study is based upon a hypothesis Türkiye and South Korea are identified as middle power. In order to do so, we must disintegrate the term into “middle” and “power” first. So what does “middle” mean? Cambridge dictionary defines the term as “the central part, position, or point in time” (n.d.b). In this sense, “middle” denotes a state that occupies an intermediate position in terms of influence, enabling it to interact with both ends of the power spectrum without fully belonging to either. This positional quality allows such states to perform intermediary functions, including mediation and facilitation, particularly in regional contexts where cooperation is required among unequal actors. At the same time, being positioned in the middle implies neither dominance nor marginality, but a condition of partial autonomy in which a state possesses sufficient weight to have its preferences

acknowledged, while remaining constrained by the structure of great power politics. Thus, the concept of “middle” in middle power is best understood as a relational and contextual category, grounded in relative position rather than absolute power.

Defining “power” is even more intricately than the prior case. Again, according to Cambridge dictionary the word power refers to “ability to control people and events; the amount of political control a person or group has in a country; strength; and an official or legal right to do something” (n.d.c). Power can be understood as both material capacity and intangible influence. Material capacity wise, it refers to the economic and military capabilities that enable a state to act to resource its policies, and, if necessary to compel outcomes. Intangible influence wise, it refers to the ability to persuade others to do what you want without coercion, by acting as a model that others want to follow and by building strong diplomatic, cultural and social ties that influence preferences and behaviour.

Accordingly, when the terms “middle” and “power” are combined based on their dictionary meanings, a middle power can be understood as a state that occupies an intermediate position within the international hierarchy and possesses both material capabilities and intangible influence sufficient to pursue autonomous policies and shape outcomes. However the concept cannot be fully captured through dictionary purely. Middle power studies approached the concept through multiple analytical lenses, these approaches and their respective classifications are discussed in the following subchapter.

1.1.3. Approaches of Middle Power Concept

Çelik argues that within existing literature it is possible to categorize middle power theories in four approaches: the functional model, the systemic-structural model, behavioural model, and identity approach (2017, p. 15). Before exploring definitions, we must crystalize basic principles: In line with Chapnick (1999), thesis assumes that “a middle power is a state” (p. 73). “The use of the term assumes a state-centric conception of the international community,” but the study does not agree upon that “‘powers’ are defined as geographically delineated entities” (p. 73). Building on Çelik’s categorization, I propose that middle power theories can be grouped into three main analytical approaches:

realism-based, liberalism-based, and constructivism-based. Each of these can be further divided into more specific conceptual models.

1.1.3.1. Realism-based Approach

Realism-based approaches to middle power conceptualization emphasize material capabilities, structural hierarchy—such as unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity—and a state’s relative position within the international system. Middle powers are understood as part of the broader category of secondary powers: states that stand between superpowers like the U.S. and China, and smaller states such as Laos and Cambodia in terms of power and resources (Wilkins, 2021, p. 95). In this study, I categorize realist approaches into two general models: system structural (hierarchical) and functional.

System-Structural (Hierarchical) Model

The system-structural model, in different terms hierarchical model views the international order as a vertical balance-of-power ladder, defining middle powers as states whose economic and military capabilities place them squarely between great and small powers. Developing from the classic positional model, the approach identifies middle powers through hard indicators—population, GDP, resource endowments, and military strength—and singles out those whose combined scores fall between the system’s leading and smallest actors (Nossal et al., 2015, p. 63). Organski (1958) was the first to formalise this hierarchy depicting a four-tier pyramid of dominant nation, great powers, middle powers, small powers and colonies (p. 326). He treated national income, population multiplied by economic development, as the principal gauge of power, with geography, resources, national morale, and government efficiency acknowledged secondarily as they are more difficult to quantify (pp. 201-204).

During the détente era, Vital classified middle powers by establishing population criterion while Hanson combined gross national product, per-capita income, and productivity, arguing that GNP is the most comprehensive single indicator because it reflects “population, territory, strategic location, institutional capacity, leadership, participation in international organisations, alliances, and trade networks” (Vital, 1967, p. 8; Hanson, 1966, as cited in Holbraad, 1984, p. 73). Some scholars highlight military capacity, as

Schneider classifying “medium powers” of the 1970s-80s as industrial or semi-industrial states able to spend US \$10-20 billion over five-to-fifteen years on significant nuclear forces (1969, as cited in Holbraad, 1984, p. 74). Finally, Holbraad (1984) called for a multidimensional assessment blending population size, economic development, and military capability with policy-adjusted economic indicators, on the grounds that government choices and strategic doctrines can shape raw capacity (p. 75).

Although the system-structural model has a deep history, scholarship heavily criticizes its analytic value on three fronts. First, indicator ambiguity: Nossal, Roussel and Paquin (2015) claims capability-based evaluation can be a “little more than an intuitive and impressionistic exercise” because scholars cannot agree which attributes count or how to weight them (p. 63). Second, boundary arbitrariness: Holbraad (1984) argues that in the absence of a formal status distinguishing middle powers from small powers, any attempt to define a lower bound such as GDP remains inconsistent by region (p. 80). Third, category incoherence: Jordaan (2003) notes that classifying Brazil with Canada or South Africa with Sweden “risks undermining the concept’s analytical power,” while Wood (1988) admits his own GNP based loose-tier list is “far from neat or symmetrical” (p. 165; p. 24). Thus, system-structural model offers a clear positional way to identify middle powers, yet its dependence on contested indicators boundaries and category weakens its analytical usefulness.

Functional Model

Functionalist model identifies middle powers as states “that are capable of exerting influence in international affairs in specific instances, and differentiates them from all the rest” (Chapnick, 1999, p. 74). That is, a state is classed as a middle power when, in a given issue-area, it makes a proportionately large functional contribution—military, finance, expertise, diplomatic effort, etc.—relative to the great and small powers. The idea of functionalism was born in Canada, when in 1942 Canadian Minister-Counsellor in Washington Hume Wrong came up with the idea of ‘functional principle’ which linked status to functional contribution rather than sheer size (Chapnick, 1999, p. 74).

Wood (1988) similarly observed that middle powers informally assume functional responsibilities by contributing meaningfully to international affairs in issue areas aligned

with their expertise or national interests, thereby gaining influence where their engagement is most impactful" (pp. 3-4). Developing from Canadian case, Holmes argued that middle powers can exert meaningful influence because they were less likely to be suspected of hegemonic ambitions nor possessed sufficient resources to play effective and constructive role in international affairs (Holmes, 1970, as cited in Cox, 1989, pp. 823-824). The functionalism settled down as Canadian diplomatic doctrine, and his use of term 'middlepowermanship' believing certain states would contribute to international society by mediating conflicts and those are middle powers as their central interests can be achieved in orderly and predictable environment (Holmes, 1970, as cited in Cox, 1989, pp. 823-824). Also, Welsh (2004) argues that a good definition of a middle power should combine both what a country is capable of and how it actually behaves: they rely on a "tactics toolkit" of compromising, building coalitions, participating in international organisations, forging consensus, and maintaining international order: traits of multilateralism and diplomatic mediation (pp. 586-587).

The functionalist model of middlepowerhood has the advantage of identifying states that are capable of exerting meaningful influence in international affairs in specific contexts. By embedding the functional principle in this concept, even relatively small states can secure recognition when their capabilities prove especially strong in a given issue-area (Chapnick, 1999, p. 75). The model allows a more dynamic understanding of global roles, recognizing that certain states can play constructive roles in diplomacy, institution-building, and multilateral negotiations. However, it lacks a stable and objective definition of what constitutes a middle power (Welsh, 2004, p. 585). Since influence is context-dependent, the status of middle power is often temporal and fluctuates with changes in domestic capacity or external circumstances. As a result, any non-great power could theoretically qualify for middle power status under the right conditions, making the category vague and unstable.

1.1.3.2. Liberalism-based Approach

Behavioural Model

Behavioural model suggests that middle powers are recognizable by their diplomatic behaviours: mediating, peacekeeping, and supporting multilateralism. What differentiates

this approach from Realism-based is that they refuse to take middle power-hood as a fixed status. The behavioural model identifies middle powers based on their behaviours as they share specific style of roles or norms.

Since the Glazebrook's essay in 1947, the behavioural model tried to frame middle power status less by size but conduct. Glazebrook argues that what separates middle powers from the smalls becomes clear when three elements are considered: resistance to excessive dominance of great powers, intentions to coordinate with similarly-situated states, and individual influence, introducing middle powers' tendency to seek for multilateralism (1947, p. 308). Also, Holmes's concept of 'middlepowermanship' highlights behavioural traits: preference for multilateral solutions to international problems, readiness to broker compromise, and embrace of "good international citizenship" to guide their diplomacy" (Holmes, 1966; cited in Cooper et al, 1993, p. 19). Cooper, Higgott and Nossal's 1993 work is considered as a milestone in the behavioural understanding of middle power (Çelik, 2017. p.18). They argue that the middle power idea depends on a state's own 'mode of statecraft,' which they break down into three parts: (1) building coalitions and encouraging cooperation, (2) offering entrepreneurial leadership, and (3) working as a catalyst and facilitator (Cooper, 1993, cited in Chapnick, 1999, p. 76). Chapnick similarly groups the same ideas under three headings—multilateralism, conflict management and moral power, while Wood adds that such states often chase higher international status, aim to lead in their regions and consider moral standing and prestige as important goals (1999, p. 76; 1988, pp. 19-20). In short, behavioural model defines middle powers less by what they are than by what they do to punch above their weight in international affairs.

The model contributes to the study of middle powers by shifting the focus from material capabilities and fixed status toward the distinctive roles these states adopt in the international system. Because the model identifies middle powers by what they do rather than what they have, it makes middle power concept clearer, less random and broad enough to cover more countries (Cooper et al., 1993, p. 27). Lastly, it helps understanding middle power internationalism particularly their engagement to multilateral institutions (Carr, 2014, p. 74; Jordaan, 2003, p. 166).

However limitations persist as well. A main criticism lies in definitional ambiguity: ‘tautological’ nature as many scholars points out. Tautological means being repetitive over a same thing in different words, circular in another term. Chapnick (1999) claims so as it “characterizes middle power behaviour as the actions of states it already considers middle powers.” Black criticizes tautologicalness pointing out their labelling of countries as ‘middle powers’ that already practice multilateral and compromising diplomacy; and then presenting that behaviour as evidence of their middle power character (1997, as cited in Jordaan, 2003, p. 166). The model’s definition and its evidence are the same thing, so it goes in a circle rather than offering an independent test of middle power status. Furthermore, the idea that middle powers can promote cooperation and prevent conflict was repeated often yet there’s not enough historical evidence to strongly support this claim. Because of this, behavioural approaches are often seen as drifting into normative idealism or being used to justify positive evaluations of middle powers. Some scholars argue that there is no real difference between normative and behavioural approaches, and classify both under a ‘revisionist’ perspective (Carr, 2014, p. 75).

1.1.3.3. Constructivism-based Approach

Identity Model

The constructivist approach emphasizes that middle power status is not merely about state's physical capabilities nor diplomatic practices. Rather, it is fundamentally a constructed identity shaped by political actors, especially policymakers. According to Hynek (2007), middlepowerhood is best understood as a political category deliberately crafted and created by states themselves (p. 140). In other words, a state’s middle power identity emerges through self perception and deliberately framed by its elites. Keohane’s 1969 work also suggests to focus on the roles of small and middle states perceived by their leaders than resources in terms of security maintenance (p. 295). Çelik (2017) focuses on the Keohane’s emphasis on leaders’ self perceptions as a statement connected to the formation of state identity arguing that Keohane’s sentence is compatible for middle power studies as part of a constructivist logic of self-definition (p. 17). Carr (2014) proposes that the identity-model treats middlepowerhood as “a deliberately constructed political category” that can rise or fall with each change of government making it fluid yet politically useful term for signalling diplomatic style and priorities (pp. 74-76).

Cooper (2011) likewise claims that middlepowerhood is best seen as “a state of ideas rather than a positional or behavioural fact,” a self-branding by decision making elites that makes middle states with legitimacy and niche for coalition building on global security issues (pp. 318-319). That is, under constructivist assumptions, middle power behaviour is tied to identity narratives that policymakers create and continuously reinforce at both domestic and international levels.

However the model received notable criticisms. First inherent instability: If middle power status depends heavily on political discourse, the identity may change drastically with changes in government or political leadership (Carr, 2014, p. 76). For instance, when a government abandons the “middle power” term, does that mean the state's practical power or international influence actually declines? This volatility harms attempts to systematically categorize states as middle powers. Furthermore, Chapnick (1999) argues the approach risks broadening the category too much making it difficult to distinguish genuine middle powers from states strategically adopting the term to strengthen their diplomatic credentials (pp. 74-75). Building on Wendt’s (1999) point that identity is at once subjective and intersubjective, a related problem is the potential mismatch between a state’s self perception of middle power status and its external recognition: when others do not represent the state as it represents itself, the label risks collapsing into performative rhetoric with limited explanatory and predictive value (p. 224).

In sum, scholars explain “middlepowerhood” through three broad lenses, each with its own strengths and blind spots. Realist approaches treat middle powers as secondary states with population, GDP and military strength, but the lines they draw between power tiers remain arbitrary and they say little about how those states will actually behave. Liberal theories shift the focus from what a state has to what it does, defining middle powers by their actions of coalition-building, mediation, and multilateral activism. This captures their distinctive diplomatic style, yet risks tautological logic and liberal bias. Constructivist approach lastly shows that middle power status is a self-chosen identity promoted by domestic elites in legitimising niche diplomacy. The approach highlights change and diversity, but it can vanish as easily as it is adopted weakening analytical consistency. These perspectives show that middle power is not a single, fixed category

but a fluid mixture of material position, functional contribution, diplomatic practice, and self-narration.

Thus South Korea and Türkiye stand on middle power ground. For Realists, system-structural criteria are satisfied in quantitative terms: Wood's GNP categorization already classifies the two states in 1979 as "mid-sized economies," and today they rank 13th and 15th among G20 members by GDP standing between giants and smaller players (Wood, 1988, p. 18). Behaviourally, their diplomacy shows the "mode of statecraft:" forming cooperative groups, showing initiative in leadership, and facilitating coordination among multiple actors, most visibly through multilateral forums such as MIKTA (Cooper et al., 1993; MIKTA, n.d.). Identity wise, both engage actively in shaping and projecting middle power identity. In the case of South Korea, the term "middle power diplomacy" often takes central place in foreign policy discourse, such as 'trusted middle power' and setting bridge diplomacy as a core strategic objective (MOFA, 2019a; MOFA, 2020b). Türkiye rarely mentions itself as a middle power in its official rhetoric, but both countries' participation in MIKTA: a platform that self-identifies as a consultative forum of middle powers and been externally recognized as a club of middle powers suggests unspoken acceptance of the identity.

This thesis approaches to the concept of middle power through integrating identity-based model of constructivist approach with the system-structural model of realist approach. Examination of Asia Anew Initiative and New Northern Policy reveals that these foreign policy strategies are not only expressions of self middle power identity, but also pragmatic political responses to structural realities. Both countries take intermediate position in the international hierarchy and face geopolitical constraints such as regional instability, limited material capacity, and great power rivalry under the growing pressure of bipolar strategic competition. In this context, their initiatives can be translated as middle power diplomacy with bridge building and policy diversification. This thesis aims to more accurately capture how Türkiye and South Korea construct and apply their middle power roles within the bounds of their structural limitations.

1.2. POLICY AND IDEA ENTREPRENEURSHIP

1.2.1. Origins

Foreign policy change rarely occurs by chance. Rather, it tends to emerge when three key elements align: windows of opportunities, state's domestic structure and actors. Actors' capacity to navigate policy change depends on domestic institutional frameworks, and their success is conditioned by windows of opportunities (Blavoukos & Bourantonis, 2012, p. 598; Köstem, 2017, pp. 723-724). Yet structural conditions and windows do not bring change alone. This thesis emphasizes the indispensable role of actors: policy and idea entrepreneurs who reframe policy agendas and seize these moments to push for innovation (Blavoukos & Bourantonis, 2012, p. 599).

Scholars tried to transplant the economic notion of entrepreneur(ship) into the study of international relations, and today the notion of political entrepreneur is observed in the field, yet as Mintrom observes, the sustained effort to turn political entrepreneurship into a full theory is still limited (2000, p. 4). Before exploring how the concept migrated, we must ask what "entrepreneur" is. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the word as "someone who starts their own business, especially when this involves seeing a new opportunity" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.a). The clause "seeing a new opportunity" is what makes the term attractive to political analysis. When applied to politics, the entrepreneur is not just a creator of something new, but someone who is able to spot chances for action and move quickly to take advantage of them. Mintrom (2000) describes entrepreneurs as significant beings in marketplace in that they attempt to introduce innovative products, and "when successful, their actions can be transformative, making people think and act in ways that represent a break with the past" (pp. 4-5).

Use of the term in the field of political science was popularized by Robert Dahl (Sheingate, 2003, p. 187). In 1961, Dahl used the term "political entrepreneur" to describe innovative and resourceful political leadership highlighting their role in shifting political coalitions and power dynamics (p. 187). For 'idea entrepreneur.' It appeared sporadically in earlier scholarships but Köstem uses the term to refer to nonstate actors who promote the entry and institutionalisation of a specific idea in foreign policy, with the objective of reshaping the conceptual framework through which foreign policy is formulated and practiced

(2017, p. 723). Sheingate introduces advantages of merging the concept of entrepreneurship into International Relations. First, unlike mainstream theories that see institutions as generally stable, the concept of entrepreneurship questions this view by arguing that innovation becomes possible when this stability is broken. Second, entrepreneurship bring our attention to boundaries between institutions, challenges and redefines. Much like in markets where entrepreneurs break monopolies, political entrepreneurs challenge exclusive control over decision making and redefine the boundaries of authority. Finally, entrepreneurship brings attention to internal factors that were previously explained mainly by external causes. By highlighting how political actors continuously seek strategic advantage and how they reshape the boundaries of institutional authority, entrepreneurship injects the idea that meaningful changes can emerge within institutions, even in the absence of major external shocks (pp. 185-186). Thus, the notion of the entrepreneur refers to an actor who, driven by self-interest—which may vary according to individual motivations—uses creativity to suggest or initiate changes in domestic or foreign policy (Blavoukos & Bourantonis, 2012, p. 600).

1.2.2. Entrepreneurs in Foreign Policy

Before distinguishing policy and idea entrepreneurship, it is worthy noting that the existing literature keeps it blurry: most studies speak broadly of ‘policy entrepreneurs’ and few works explicitly use ‘idea entrepreneurship,’ the label often expands to cover various actors in most of stages. In this study, I draw a clearer, though still flexible, line between the two. I introduce four cues: object pushed, primary tactic, location, and phase of involvement as summarized in Table 1 below.

1. Object pushed: broad frames/vocabularies vs. concrete policy packages/instruments
2. Primary tactic: framing/narrative/vocabulary building vs. process management, budgeting
3. Location / embeddedness: outside vs. inside government (or mixed)
4. Phase of key involvement: agenda setting vs. design/implementation/maintenance

I classify entrepreneurs first by what they push and how they push it—cues 1 and 2—and then refine the label with where they’re located and when they intervene—cues 3 and 4. This approach is more preferable than simple inside/outside distinction, as what truly differentiates idea and policy entrepreneurs lies in what they advance (broad frames vs. concrete tools) and how they do so (framing vs. process managing), not merely in their institutional position. This framework also captures hybrid cases: for example, officials inside government who primarily engage in reframing, or external actors who draft implementation details. So who are policy and idea entrepreneurs?

Table 2

Cue-Based Framework for Distinguishing Idea and Policy Entrepreneurs

	Cues	Idea entrepreneur	Policy entrepreneur	Tie-break rule
Primary	1. Object pushed	Broad frames, narratives, vocabularies	Concrete policy packages, instruments, procedures	If both appear, use Cues 3 & 4
	2. Primary tactic	Framing/reframing; narrative/vocabulary-building	Process management, budgeting	
Secondary	3. Location / embeddedness	Often outside (academia/think tanks/NGOs/media); can be inside if mainly reframing	Often inside government (ministries/agencies); can be outside by case	Yields labels like state-embedded idea / outside policy entrepreneur
	4. Phase of key involvement	Early: agenda setting, reframing	Later: policy design, negotiation, budgeting, implementation, maintenance	Early → idea-leaning Later → policy-leaning

Note. Content created by the author

Policy Entrepreneurship

Policy entrepreneurship gained prominence in political science as scholars increasingly examined how policy ideas emerge, gain support and turn into policy change. It talks about actors who invest resources to advocate and push for policy proposals that align with their interests (Kingdon, 1984, as cited in Macdonald, 2015, p. 4; Mintrom, 2000, p. 122). Entrepreneurs need capital, which here means financial sources, energy, reputation, network, time. They use these to shape policy debates, define or reframe problems and develop narratives that link policy solutions to public issues (Mintrom, 2000, pp. 124-125). Entrepreneurs are influential because they understand strategic interactions that take place within hierarchically structured political environments (Macdonald, 2015, p. 2). They may actively seek to open windows of opportunities, use events such as elections or budget renewals and move quickly when sudden crises force leaders to search for new solutions. (Macdonald, 2015, p. 5). The timing and strategic intervention capabilities of entrepreneurs are critical, as nature of policy making processes is inherently dynamic and uncertain (Mintrom, 2000, p. 129). Policy entrepreneurs reshape ideas to fit domestic political environment and material capabilities, changing how problems are viewed and making policy changes possible (Ipek, 2015).

Thus, policy entrepreneurs can be defined as individuals or groups who interpret ideas that came up through the chances of policy changes—windows of opportunities into concrete policy, propose and implement by investing capitals trying to find room to maneuver under the domestic structural constraint—domestic political structure. This study treats actors as policy entrepreneurs when they push specific policy measures or instruments (Cue 1) and mainly use process management (Cue 2). Cues 3 and 4 help adjust/clarify the label or break ties when unclear, rather than determine it outright. While policy entrepreneurs can be inside or outside the state, the analysis here concentrates on state-embedded cases for scope and comparability—not because being inside of government bodies automatically makes actor policy entrepreneur. However policy entrepreneurs are only part of the picture; the next subsection examines idea that brought broader frames and helped sustain momentum beyond formal institutions.

Idea Entrepreneurship

Unlike policy entrepreneurship, the notion of idea entrepreneurship is somewhat newborn. Thus studies on idea entrepreneurship is shallow and distinction and categorization of the two concepts are blurry. So who are idea entrepreneurs? Köstem (2017) defines idea entrepreneurs as “non-state actors who advocate the entry into and subsequent institutionalisation of an ideational cause in foreign policy” whose ambition is to “change the conceptual framework within which foreign policy is conducted” (p. 723). That is, idea entrepreneur is someone outside government who pushes leaders to adopt a whole new way of seeing and doing foreign policy. They intervene by handing leaders “a ready-made set of policies to follow” at the very moment they are “redefining national interests” (p. 723). Idea entrepreneurs succeed only when two gates open simultaneously: (1) a critical juncture that forces officials to look for a fresh foreign-policy roadmap; (2) the new idea “overlap(ing) with the evolving national identity conceptions of the ruling elite” (p. 722).

Levinson (2021) defines idea entrepreneurs as actors who advocate ideational cause in foreign policy (p. 4). They are story builders: they create and disseminate terms that resonate—what Finnemore and Hollis calls ‘framing’ and what Pantzerhielm calls ‘vocabularies’—through network of governments, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), firms, and experts, so those words become the material of policy debate (Levinson, 2021, p. 4). In other words, they come up with simple, powerful words that people start using, and those words help shape how the whole issue is understood and discussed.

For Ipek (2015), foreign policy change is driven by a small group of foreign policy elites and policy intellectuals who define value goals and appropriate policy instruments. Their ideas matter when principled beliefs and causal beliefs converge, enabling soft power to function as a foreign policy instrument (pp. 176, 182-183). Ipek employs the notion of policy entrepreneurship in a relatively narrow sense referring to the phase which these actors translate convergent beliefs into concrete policy instruments under an enabling political environment and a window of opportunity. She does not introduce the concept of idea entrepreneurs as a distinct analytical category though having similar idea on ideas, instead rely on the terms foreign policy elites, policy intellectuals and policy entrepreneurship (pp. 179, 189-191).

Building on Köstem's emphasis on non-state actors who seek to institutionalise an ideational cause and reshape the conceptual frame of foreign policy and Levinson's focus on the crafting and circulation of discursive terms across organisational and national boundaries, this study conceptualizes idea entrepreneurs as actors who introduce and promote new interpretive frames into the political arena under enabling political environments (Köstem, 2017, p. 723; Levinson, 2021, p. 4). Following the four cue framework, idea entrepreneurs primarily push broad frames and discursive terms and rely mainly on framing narrative construction and discursive work. Their entrepreneurship is therefore observable not through formal authority or resource control but through sustained discursive intervention and frame diffusion. Also they often operate at the pre-policy stage, shaping how problems, regions and strategic options are understood and discussed. Their influence is most visible when a window of opportunity opens and when their frames resonate with the ruling elite's identity or beliefs, allowing ideas to be adopted and institutionalised. Even when structural change or crisis exist, it does not automatically lead to a uniform policy outcome; only when ideas align with ruling elite in interpreting the situation they translate into policy adoption and institutionalisation. The scope and form of entrepreneurs are conditioned by domestic political structure which shapes both the access to political realm and the boundaries of their influence. As idea entrepreneurs are typically less embedded within formal state institutions, their effectiveness particularly depends on the permeability of the political system and the openness of elite belief structures to external ideas.

This study adopts a two category coding that distinguishes idea entrepreneurs and policy entrepreneurs. The observable behaviour in the cases examined centres on two domains: the design and diffusion of broader frames and discursive terms that indicate idea entrepreneurship; and drafting, approval and execution of policy through instruments such as budgets, programs and projects that reflect policy entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is not defined by a single core attribute but a set of overlapping features that vary across actors and contexts. Classifying actors with four cues avoids an artificial dichotomy (non-state = idea; state = policy) and allows comparison of AAI and NNP in a clearer sense.

Yet in the field of politics the notions of decision makers, policy makers and visionary leaders already exist. What is the difference with them and idea/policy entrepreneurs? In the field of social science, decision maker often refers to an actor who actually possesses the authority and responsibility to choose one option among multiple alternatives in a given situation. Depending on the theoretical perspective, this may refer either to a unitary actor that makes a single decision—such as the state as a whole or the top political leader—or to a collective actor composed of multiple governmental ministries and agencies that possess different interests, information, and degrees of authority (Afinotan, 2014, pp. 252-255). Meanwhile, policy maker is understood as individual who has the decision-making authority to sign policy documents, or allocate funds at the national level, while visionary leaders are those who shape the future together with their members, move collectively toward shared goals, and remain open to change and development (Hyder et al., 2010; R. Yilmaz, 2023, p. 1080). These three concepts all share the characteristic of referring to senior actors who possess the authority to determine ideas or policies that shape the behaviour of a state or an organisation. At first glance they may appear similar to the concept of entrepreneurship applied in this study. However, the focal point of entrepreneurship follows a different trajectory from that of the former concepts.

The key distinction lies in the analytical focus of entrepreneurship. Unlike decision makers, policy makers or visionary leaders whose roles are defined primarily by the possession of authority to decide, approve, or allocate resources, idea and policy entrepreneurs are defined by the functions they perform within the policy process. Entrepreneurship does not presuppose decision making authority; instead, it highlights how ideas are generated, framed, promoted, translated, and operationalized under given domestic constraints. Depending on the structure of the political system, entrepreneurial roles may be concentrated in senior executives or dispersed across multiple actors, with some advancing ideas and others planning or implementing specific policy components. This characteristic covers the gap decision/policy maker and vision leader notions overlook. However, classifying entrepreneurs with these dimensions shows only one part of the explanation. Their capacity to influence foreign policy is shaped not only by their roles and strategies but also by the domestic structures and opportunity conditions.

1.2.3. Domestic Structures and Windows of Opportunity

We have examined entrepreneurs, key agents of foreign policy and differentiated their types using four cues. Yet, as the previous sections show focusing on actors alone is incomplete. Entrepreneurial influence is conditioned by environment. This study highlights two decisive conditions: domestic structure and windows of opportunity.

Domestic structures affect how foreign policy changes occur and who is able to initiate them. Here, domestic institutional frameworks refer to the formal rules, organisations and decision making procedures that decide which parts of the government handle foreign policy matters, political culture refers to shared values, identities, and normative expectations that guide leaders and society how to define national interests and judge foreign policy behaviour (Katzenstein, 1996, pp. 2-3; Köstem, 2017, p. 725).

A state's domestic structure affects its openness to new ideas and the likelihood that those ideas will be adopted as policy (Evangelista, 1995, p. 1). For instance, centralized and authoritarian structures might limit the entry of entrepreneurs, but once policy ideas gain support from high level decision makers the structures can promote fast and effective implementation (Risse-Kappen, 1994, p. 187). By contrast, pluralistic and decentralized political systems allow wider access to actors, but increase competition of diverse interests which complicates policy adoption process (Risse-Kappen, 1994, p. 188).

Considering that both South Korea and Türkiye follow presidential democracies, this study applies Jang's (2007) four-category classification typology to the analysis of domestic structures which was proposed for the analysis of foreign policy decision making. Jang's typology of presidential system types and the degree of power dispersion, and its effect to foreign policy making is particularly useful in specifying which actors play central roles, how policy decisions are made and how the resulting scope of foreign policy differs across types, and so forth.

First, in imperial type president monopolizes initiative and remains relatively free from external checks, prioritizing long term strategy and the national interest. The term imperial here is close to authoritative, yet is a word very often witnessed in Korean political, academic or public discourses when depicting president that has high and sole authority over others. In this type, citizens occupy passive position and foreign policy

rhetoric tends to show an ideological orientation. Delegative type is characterised by weak horizontal checks by parliament and political parties, while the president, civil society, NGOs, and the participatory public work together making vertical checks. Here the president plays the role of political coordinator while civil society creates an open and competitive decision making process through agenda setting and pressure. Yet, foreign policy tends to be short term and deeply tangled into domestic politics consequently its scope of fields and issues stay narrow and rhetoric swings between ideology and norms. Representative type commonly observed in advanced democracies balances among president, parliament, political parties and the public; with policy decisions made by open compromise and negotiation where supports and demands are combined. Lastly, in institutional type, president, parliament and political parties are the core actors. Policy decisions proceed according to standard procedures and rules, but citizens are excluded from policy making process (2007, pp. 13-14).

Table 3*Jang's Foreign Policy Decision Making Typology*

Category	Imperial	Delegative	Representative	Institutional
Core Actors	President	President, NGOs, Public	President, Public, Legislature, Political Parties	President, Legislature
Mode of Decision Making	Domination	Coordination / Public Support or Control	Balance of Checks	Interlocking and Overlapping
Time Horizon	Long-term	Short-term	Diverse	Diverse
Linkage with Domestic Politics	Low / Avoided	High	Moderate	Moderate
Scope of Foreign Policy	Broad	Broad	Broad	Broad
Nature of Policy	Ideological	Ideological / Normative	Pragmatic	Pragmatic
President-Citizen Relationship	Citizens' Obedience	Citizens' Demands	Citizens' Support	Citizens' Alienation

Note. Content created by the author, based on Jang (2007).

While domestic structure clearly matters, it is neither the only factor that shapes actors' behaviour nor always a decisive one. As Köstem (2017) argues, under certain conditions can actors influence without being tightly constrained by institutional frameworks: in his words, "render irrelevant any previous barriers presented by the domestic institutional framework" (p. 724). This perspective aligns with Blavoukos and Bourantonis's (2012) understanding that although entrepreneurs' capacity to lead policy change depends on domestic structural parameters, such structures do not dictate the outcome (pp. 598-599). An element that crucially affects their change is their ability to utilize 'windows of opportunity'.

Windows of opportunity are crucial points where the likelihood of policy change rises. This study adopts the two-level categorization proposed by Blavoukos and Bourantonis (2012) who divides it as critical junctures and opportunity windows. Critical junctures

refer to system-wide developments that “alter the terms of international interactions, thus making foreign policy in general more amenable to change in order to adjust to the new international environment,” while opportunity windows are “case-specific developments, such as a security crisis that highlights the shortcomings of the current foreign policy and renders the domestic policymaking setting more conducive for a policy entrepreneur to pursue policy change” (p. 603). Köstem also similarly considers critical juncture as external changes, but it allows an environment for domestic decision makers to search for a new foreign policy framework under changing conditions (2017, p. 723). In this study, the two-level conceptualization of Blavoukos and Bourantonis (2012) is combined with Köstem’s (2017) focus on its domestic impact. While critical junctures refer to system-level transformations, their significance ultimately depends on how national leaders and institutions interpret these. For policy and idea entrepreneurs, these windows are decisive moments when institutional rigidity loosens and decision makers become more receptive to new ideas. Their ability to drive change rises when windows lower entry barriers and make the policy-making setting more conducive to change and when entrepreneurs serve as the causal link that connects ideas to policy under those conditions (Blavoukos & Bourantonis, 2012, p. 603; Köstem, 2017, p. 723). In sum, this subsection highlights that foreign policy change is enabled by the interaction of domestic structures and windows of opportunity, which weakens institutional rigidity and creates space for policy and idea entrepreneurs to translate elite interpretations into policy change.

Critical junctures and opportunity windows both provide entrepreneurs with chances to diagnose problems and generate and propose new ideas or policies. In other words, these windows of opportunity make entrepreneurship valuable by revealing gaps in existing policies, institutions or ideas. However, they do not shape entrepreneurs’ action in the same way: opportunity windows tend to facilitate the infiltration of an idea or a policy response because short term events or sudden shifts make the need for change and the shortcomings of the current approach visible and pressing, while critical junctures are system wide transformations that signal a more general need for reorientation. A North Korean provocation, for instance can send South Korea an immediate and concrete signal that change is required, while the rise of Asia as a new centre of the global economy signals the need to reset strategic direction without pointing as directly to one discrete policy fix. The difference is like navigating a vessel: when the current of sea gradually

changes and confronting a large iceberg appearing directly ahead. Both require adjustment, but the former encourages revising the route while the latter creates an acute opening for a specific corrective move.

This thesis integrates the two frameworks: middle power and entrepreneurship to explain how Türkiye and South Korea developed distinct foreign policy initiatives in response to changing international dynamics in similar time period. At the systemic level, when the global strategic landscape shifts—such as the intensified Sino-US rivalry in the late 2010s—middle powers experience both pressures and opportunities that compels them to adjust their foreign policies. Türkiye and South Korea reacted by launching region focused initiatives to where they once stayed distanced due to physical or ideological distance: Asia Anew Initiative and New Northern Policy aimed at enhancing diplomatic and economic diversification. At the domestic level, plans, goals, narrative and effectiveness of the initiatives depend significantly on policy-access filters and roles of policy and idea entrepreneurs.

Applying this lens, Chapter 2 traces how Türkiye’s Asia Anew Initiative launched in response to shifting global conditions developed into funded diplomatic program shaped by global pressures, internal decision processes, and policy/idea entrepreneurs and Chapter 3 applies the same lens to South Korea’s New Northern Policy; by so comparing the two cases to explain how similar external shocks produced similar policy outcome but divergent designs, speeds, and outcomes are made due to domestic factors.

CHAPTER 2

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AND EURASIA

2.1. OVERVIEW OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE COLD WAR

The Cold War that lasted nearly four decades under the rivalry and uncertainty of the U.S. and the Soviet Union against each other. As Rose (1998) describes, it was a time of “murky anarchy” where no state could be fully certain of another’s intentions (p. 154). For middle and small powers they could act yet only within the boundaries set by the superpowers. Türkiye’s geographic position had particular weight in this environment, and the Cold War left mark on their political foundations.

The end of the Cold War turned the external environment that Türkiye long been part of. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and collapse of bipolarity in 1991, the once-southern flank of the West found itself confronting a U.S.-led unipolar order and the spread of neoliberal globalization. Türkiye was heavily affected facing destabilized neighbourhood having to rethink its role and identity (Günay, 2021, p. 461). Türkiye’s external challenges in this period were (1) anxiety about marginalization within the West as the Soviet threat vanished; (2) war and disorder among neighbours along with the emergence of new states; and (3) identity reframing as global politics shifted from ideology to identity.

Within this new context, Türkiye began to reimagine itself not just as Western ally but as a liminal actor positioned between East and West. This liminal identity was expressed through bridge metaphor: a mediator and connector of civilizations while borders were realigned based on culture and civilizations. When the newly independent states in the Balkans, South Caucasus and Central Asia emerged, they didn’t only bring economic opportunities but also leveraged shared Ottoman history and Turkic diaspora identity.

Renda (2011) argues that post-Cold War Turkish foreign policy was shaped by two intertwined tendencies: renationalization and internationalism. Renationalization dominated the 1990s and reflected “the reassertion of national identity and domestic

priorities in the shaping of foreign policy” driven by regional instability. This produced a security-oriented, state-centric approach prioritising territorial integrity over cooperation. Internationalism emerged gradually as a “liberal orientation toward economic cooperation, multilateral engagement and soft power strategies,” strengthened by the 1999 EU candidacy and the 2000-2001 economic crises (pp. 90-95).

Within this context, the rise of the the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 marked a shift toward a more multidimensional and proactive internationalist posture. Their soft power-based cohabitation orientation reflected a middle power preference for coalition building and multilateral engagement (Oğuzlu, 2007, p. 83; Robins, 2007, pp. 289, 292). Reformation was made based on seven EU harmonization packages in 2003, accession negotiations were opened in 2005, for Iraq issue they sought second Security Council resolution while keeping military actions under UN or NATO umbrellas (Robins, 2007, p. 294). Under Ahmet Davutoğlu: former foreign policy advisor, foreign minister and prime minister’s ‘Zero problems with neighbours’ principle, Türkiye expanded its diplomatic and economic ties with its southern and eastern neighbours aspiring to “become a leading state, facilitator and broker” in regional affairs (Haugom, 2019, p. 210). This regional activism aligned with middle power behaviour “inclined to pursue multilateral diplomacy, target niche areas in global governance, [and] build alliances” (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021, p. 3052). In practice, Türkiye supported the UN’s Annan Plan for Cyprus, sought to reduce Northern Cyprus’s isolation through OIC and Arab League channels and participated NATO and EU peacekeeping in the Balkans (Robins, 2007, p. 298). Early AKP foreign policy increasingly integrated identity, culture and history including Islamic-Ottoman elements while maintaining the Western anchor and economy-first pragmatism.

Turkish foreign policy underwent a major shift after the AKP’s second term, widely identified as the 2013 and onwards period. Existing literatures commonly frame this phase as a move away from the soft power driven, Western anchored activism towards more autonomous and assertive stance (Öniş, 2010, pp. 5, 10). This shift was not an axis change, but a recalibration of Türkiye’s middle power posture. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis weakened the EU’s political and economic appeal, the 2010 Arab Spring created a regional power vacuum and security challenges that made the earlier zero problems with

neighbours inadequate (Öniş, 2010, p. 2). Domestic turbulence, especially the 2013 Gezi protests and the international criticism over democratic backsliding deepened polarization and tightened the link between regime security and foreign policy (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021, pp. 1087-1088; Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015, p. 301).

After the Prime Minister's move to presidency in 2014 and Davutoğlu's exit in 2016, foreign policy became more centralized in the executive. The failed coup attempt in July 2016 is considered to have tightened the link between regime security and external threat perceptions, leading to the more frequent use of security narratives in foreign policy (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021, p. 1088). 2013 and onwards Turkish foreign policy thus blended soft power instruments with coercive tools: military operations in Syria, Iraq and establishing overseas bases in Qatar, Somalia and Libya. Ankara adopted a transactional stance toward the EU and the U.S. seeking greater strategic autonomy by exploring cooperation with Russia and China. At multilateral forums such as the UN and G20, Türkiye pursued agenda setting roles, presenting itself as a responsible stakeholder and bridge actor. While strategic autonomy expanded, institutional and economic interdependence with the EU persisted, and Türkiye combined identity-based and soft-power practices with increasingly assertive and coercive foreign policy instruments (Günay, 2021, pp. 475-476).

Although the narrative of Eurasia was part of Turkish political and intellectual debates since the 1990s, it was the 2010s that intensified their interest to the non-Western partners and created a space Eurasian narratives could be reframed and used. Discourses tying Türkiye to Asia, the Turkic world and broader civilizational linkages became more common in political debates. The next chapter examines how these debates evolved and how Eurasianism emerged in Türkiye in what form, under what environment.

2.2.EURASIA(NISM) IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

Eurasia, the term that covers the widest continents of Europe and Asia is carved into the Turkish politics since the 1990s, or even before. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the term as “geologically single enormous landmass composed of the continents of Europe and Asia and geopolitically sociopolitical entity within that landmass whose exact borders are debated by scholars (2025). Then what is Eurasianism? The notion was a

Russian-style nation and state project developed by Russian intellectuals in the early 1900s amid an empire-level crisis: it was driven by hostility toward Western Europe-centred civilisation and ideas and sought to establish Russia's distinctiveness by making culture the core axis, framing Russia as belonging to a third continent, Eurasia, neither Europe nor Asia, and it later re-emerged in a renewed form in the post-Cold War period (Tufekci, 2015, pp. 62-64, 69). The term often refers to building non-Western "Eurasian space" through alliances among Russia, Iran, and the Turkic republics, often extended to Pakistan, India, and China (Akçalı & Perinçek, 2009, p. 551).

In Türkiye, the idea of Eurasia operated less as a settled ideology but as a flexible notion which political actors narrated Türkiye's post-Cold War role (Yanık, 2019, p. 35). For nationalists the term was used to push for civilizational kinship with the newly independent Turkic republics, for liberal and centre-right circles it was for a geoeconomic opening to new markets and corridors, and for others at various moments an idea accommodating selective cooperation with Russia or an Ottoman sphere of interest (Akçalı & Perinçek, 2009, p. 551). The Turkish debate on Eurasianism is less in the Russian sense which refers to a coherent civilizational ideology that places Russia at the core of a distinct Eurasian bloc, but more about competing attempts to fix and instrumentalize the term that helps explaining its persistence across divergent identity conceptions and foreign policy priorities (Yanık, 2019, p. 34).

2.2.1. The Eurasianist Pivot in 1990s Turkish Foreign Policy: Ambition and Activism

In the 1990s, the term Eurasianism was re-interpreted and created by Turkish academics. With the emergence of newly independent Turkic states and the shift in Türkiye-Russia relations from hostility to competitive coexistence, the sense grew that an existing West centred framework was no longer sufficient to explain or respond to the regional landscape (Tufekci, 2015, p. 86). In that perceived void, Eurasianism entered Türkiye as an alternative discourse (Tufekci, 2015, p. 89). In this view, Turkish Eurasianism is not a single coherent ideological group but a loose convergence of actors with different orientations who gather around it for their own purposes. For some Kemalists and Eurasianists, there was overlap around scepticism toward Western-led political and economic projects, and preference for a state-dominant perspective on international

affairs. They stood together to oppose policies that weakens the state, divide authority or prioritise external liberal models over domestic order. A convergence between Kemalist and Eurasianist discourse was visible though it never developed into a single program (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 550).

Eurasianist ideas was across the political spectrum. Right wing, religious, and ultra nationalist actors supported closer ties with the Turkic world turning nostalgia, civilisational narratives and ethnic kinship into policy aims. Liberals and the centre right by contrast emphasised access, connectivity, and markets, treating Eurasia as a route to energy, trade, and transport opportunities that could diversify Türkiye's external ties. The aim was primarily geoeconomic rather than civilisational or ideological, and they sought to raise Türkiye's value in regional affairs avoiding direct confrontation with the West (Larrabee & Lesser, 2003, p. 99).

Within this, a Kemalist variant of Eurasianism also emerged in the 1990s. By "Kemalist Eurasianism" it refers to actors rooted in the Kemalist state tradition who adopted eastward cooperation frame while keeping a secular, unitary, statist outlook domestically. The idea grounded on anti-imperialist element in Kemalism and advocated cooperation with eastern powers to build a non-Western space which Türkiye could be a secure and welcomed participant. In domestic debates, the Kemalist Eurasianism opposed decentralisation and neoliberal reforms (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 562-563). They saw major Asian states' resistance to Western governance as evidence of strategic independence and as an example for how Türkiye could expand its policy space.

In the 1990s Türkiye put its Eurasia narrative into action, especially with the newly independent post-Soviet states. They set up Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) in 1992, launched scholarships that brought Central Asian students to Turkish universities, opened cultural centres in the region and expanded television broadcasting to foster affinities and networks (Kınıklıoğlu, 2022, p. 8). For energy and transport, Ankara supported East-West corridor linking the Caspian to the Mediterranean, most notably the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, and deepened military and political ties with Georgia (Kınıklıoğlu, 2022, p. 9). Russia's more confident further helped broader, market-focused Eurasia discourse among Turkish business groups (Akçali & Perinçek, 2009, p. 563).

Even with active outreach the limits were clear. Larrabee and Lesser (2003) explains that Türkiye lacked financial and bureaucratic capacities to drive large economic change in Central Asia and overestimated the returns. Their big brother tone toward the Turkic republics cooled down their interests as their rulers rather preferred to stay in power (p. 101). Meanwhile, the PKK conflict, Aegean tensions with Greece and the 1997 civil-military strain at home left little time and capacity to act. Turkish policymakers often misread local politics, so their policies did not fit conditions on the ground (p. xv). At home, ministries, semi-public agencies, and civil-society and business networks ran separate agendas with weak coordination (p. 125). There was plenty of activity, but without a central coordinating hub it often broke into scattered small projects.

2.2.2. Eurasia(nism) during the AKP Period

In the 2000s, early AKP years, Eurasia discourse took a pragmatic turn toward security and markets while Eurasianism remained largely a domestic label; policy worked with Russia and other eastern partners on transactional terms. After 9/11 the strategic setting across Eurasia changed incrementally: the US-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the temporary American basing presence in Central Asia and Russia's subsequent reassertion made security and energy primary issues for Ankara (Larrabee & Lesser, 2003, p. 7). AKP initially started from a neutral position toward Russia and Eurasia, but afterwards changed its way of understanding Eurasia several times (Yanık, 2019, p. 42). The term got into foreign policy narrative with Davutoğlu's introduction of the term Afro-Eurasia emphasizing Central Asia and Ottoman history that contains Eurasian elements (Yanık, 2019, p. 42). The long-standing antagonism with Russia also started recovering at a rapid pace after the AKP came to power.

2.2.2.1. Ideational and Discursive Discussion of Eurasianism

In the early 2000s, Eurasianist discourse emerged as a central theme in domestic political and foreign policy debates and used mainly by opposition parties, political movements and intellectuals; whereas after 2013 it was pragmatically adopted by the government to criticize Türkiye's Western partners and seek new alignments in Eurasia (Tanrısever, 2018, p. 29). The tendency of Foreign Minister Davutoğlu to use geopolitics to justify AKP's foreign policy choices illustrates how central geopolitics became within Türkiye's

foreign policy discourse, showing discursive change from earlier narratives that portrayed Türkiye as inside Western civilization or in the middle to leader of its own civilizational sphere emphasizing connections with Eurasia through culture, geography, religion and kinship (Bilgin & Bilgiç, 2011, p. 180). This approach introduced a division between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ placing states such as Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan in the former, and the West, Israel, and Armenia in the latter (Bilgin & Bilgiç, 2011, pp. 188-189).

In Foreign Minister Davutoğlu’s November 29, 2010 speech at Washington D.C. at the Brookings Institution entitled “Turkish Foreign Policy at a Time of Global and Regional Transformation: Vision and Challenges,” he said that the end of the Cold War and 9/11 brought a chain of transformation to global politics, economy, culture, rising global tensions and redefinition of foreign policy was required globally, as well as Türkiye (Davutoğlu, 2010, p. 7, 13). He affirmed its commitment to its traditional Western orientation, and pursued EU-oriented reforms signalling Türkiye’s interest in EU membership (p. 8). The AKP did not seek for paradigm shift of foreign policy nor a turn away to the East, however it is difficult to deny that economic restoration from the 2001 economic crisis leaned more on eastern opportunities rooted in history and geography (p. 9). The restoration he mentioned referred not only at home but also to being influential regional and international player who consolidates peace and stability near abroad and expands their relations to “Afro-Eurasia” (p. 13). The minister framed its “proactive” and “ambitious” engagement with the region as not only pragmatic but also idea-driven: drawing on Ottoman legacies and diasporic ties (p. 11). Davutoğlu made clear that the new leadership sought to normalise the history distorted by the Cold War and integrate fully with all of Türkiye’s neighbours (p. 12). This was named as zero problems with our neighbours policy: a transformation from the isolated location surrounded by rivals by reconcile, build relations and be actively involved.

In the period, Eurasia and Eurasianism circulated in Türkiye across different layers of discourse. In academic and media debates, the label of a “Eurasian pivot” or “return to Eurasia” became common, especially by the mid-decade as scholars framed Ankara’s diversification away from the West in civilizational or geopolitical terms and increasingly discussed a shift of axis. Erşen and Köstem raise the question on whether Türkiye’s so-called pivot to Eurasia reflected genuine strategic reorientation or mainly served as a

pragmatic means of bargaining with the West, showing how central the term has become in discourse (2019, p. 15). Yet Eurasianism was never an official self-designation of the AKP government. It was rather connected with a loose alliance inside Türkiye that brought together parts of the military, left-wing nationalists, and parts of right-wing nationalists around pro-Russian and anti-Western sentiments (Aktürk, 2015, p. 54). Official state discourse avoided ‘-ism’ labels and preferred neutral, operational terms such as strategic autonomy, multi-dimensional diplomacy and transactional cooperation. In MFA statements, Eurasia usually appeared in a geographical sense: “Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security” or “a broad region spanning across the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian geographies”: phrases used geographically rather than ideologically (Meriç, 2012; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2025). While Eurasianism functioned primarily as a politicized identity marker in domestic and scholarly debates, their policy practice understood it as pragmatic terminology of autonomy, diversification, and transactional engagement.

2.2.2.2. Economic Relations with Eurasia

Türkiye’s Eurasia economic strategy deepened throughout AKP period through diplomatic repositioning and an energy centred approach. This was a trajectory built on the foundations of eastward opening laid by President Özal and Foreign Minister Cem in the late 1990s, which later AKP assigned clearer economic priorities. In particular, the vision of transforming Türkiye into an energy hub materialized in the form of constructing a multilayered network encompassing Russia as the central axis together with the Central Asia, Middle East and South Caucasus. During this period, Türkiye’s Eurasia focused economic strategy was strengthened through three main pillars: the integration of energy, trade, investment and transportation networks, the expansion of economic interdependence and the economic use of multilateral diplomacy.

Within Türkiye’s Eurasia focused energy structure Russia was the most important partner and the core supplier. The AKP government pursued the expansion of energy transportation corridors which continued into the late 2000s in a direction that institutionalised cooperation with Russia. They actively pursued new initiatives Russia took part, the most notable being the Blue Stream natural gas pipeline in 2005 (Bilgin & Bilgiç, 2011, p. 188). This project not only positioned Türkiye as a major importer of

Russian gas but also accelerated the institutionalisation of long term economic cooperation between the two countries. The institutionalisation of economic cooperation between the two countries was supported by several high level agreements. Signing consultation programs in 2004-2005 for security, counterterrorism, economy and consular affairs; and the 2008 agreement on the simplification of customs procedures (Anadolu Agency, 2014). In 2010 with President Medvedev's visit introduction of a mutual visa free agreement, the agreement on the construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant and the establishment of the Türkiye-Russia High Level Cooperation Council were made (Milliyet, 2010). Bilgin and Bilgiç (2011) evaluate the rapid growth of the two states' economic relations as a key driver of Eurasia's changing trade structure emphasizing that the trade volume increased from approximately USD 350 million in 1980 to USD 26.5 billion in 2010 (p. 179).

The South Caucasus functioned as a key point for energy transportation corridors in Türkiye's economic strategy. Türkiye defined its relationship with Georgia as good neighbourliness with economic cooperation and operation of BTC and BTE pipelines (MFA, n.d.d). Also Türkiye continued to strengthen energy and trade linkages with Azerbaijan: the trade foundations accumulated since the 1990s further expanded in the 2000s and the discourse framing Azerbaijan as a major partner highlighted by historical and cultural proximity to Türkiye functioned as a framework that justified economic cooperation.

Economic relations with Central Asian states shifted from the 1990's cultural solidarity to a more pragmatic and economy focused approach during the AKP period. Although Central Asia's priority was relatively lower in the early AKP years compared to surrounding key partners such as Russia, South Caucasus and the Middle East, Türkiye's trade volume with Central Asia steadily increased after reaching USD 650 million in 1995 and reached approximately USD 6.3 billion in 2010 (Bilgin & Bilgiç, 2011, p. 179).

The economic expansion of Türkiye's Eurasia outreach during the AKP period was most prominent in the Middle East. Between 2000 and 2010, Türkiye's trade volume with Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon and Syria all increased from 3 to 10 times the highest (Tür, 2011, p. 595). During this period, Türkiye's trade with Iran surged from USD 1.2 billion in 2001 to USD 10 billion in 2010 (Insight Turkey, 2012). Free trade, double

taxation avoidance, investment protection and transportation agreements were concluded with Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Qatar. In particular, the 2009 agreement with Syria on the construction of the Arab Natural Gas Pipeline and the LNG import and energy development agreements with Qatar supported Türkiye's energy diversification strategy (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Investment & Finance Office, 2009). Furthermore, High level Cooperation Council was established to build a free trade and free movement zone among Türkiye, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon (MFA, 2010).

East Asian states were not the main focus of Türkiye's expansion to Eurasia, but one that must be mentioned is China. Türkiye-China economic relations expanded rapidly since the 1990s and became one of Türkiye's most dynamic external economic partnerships. China is Türkiye's largest import partner with imports reaching 37.42 billion USD as of 2024, accounting for 13.27 percent of Türkiye's total imports (TÜİK, 2024). Chinese foreign direct investment rose from 502 million USD in 2012 to 3.02 billion USD in 2023, while Türkiye secured 3.9 billion USD in financing for 119 projects by 2023 at Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), mainly in clean energy and transport (Textor, 2024; El Sheikh, 2023).

2.2.2.3. Cultural Relations with Eurasia

Türkiye's cultural relations with Eurasia were distinguished from earlier decades through the interaction of soft power expansion, identity reconfiguration and institutionalisation of development cooperation. Above all, Türkiye pursued a consistent foreign policy aiming to strengthen cultural affinity by drawing on historical and civilizational heritage.

Since the 2000s Türkiye gradually moved away from a foreign policy centred on military deterrence and emphasized attraction-based influence in its surrounding regions. Soft power was understood as a channel to persuade other states and a means to secure legitimacy, and Türkiye sought to form cooperative relations through images of culture, values, institutions, and norms (Oğuzlu, 2007, pp. 82-84). It was important that Eurasian countries perceive Türkiye not as an external great power but as a friendly state with historical and cultural continuity. In addition, Türkiye began to build cultural cooperation with Eurasian states in an institutional form: expansion of TİKA functioned as a core tool of Türkiye's cultural and development cooperation. TİKA carried out multilayered

activities such as cultural heritage restoration, education and language programs, support for religious and social infrastructure and highlighting of historical ties (Beşgöl, 2024, pp. 60-64). This was not merely humanitarian assistance but cultural diplomacy that implemented soft power in practice. Such expansion was also related to changes in the perceptions of Türkiye's foreign policy elites. Policymakers regarded Central Asia and the Caucasus as regions tied to Türkiye's historical roots and cultural connections, and as a natural space for political and economic cooperation (Ipek, 2015, p. 173). The majority-government structure in particular created an environment which normative ideas could be translated into policy, and the expansion of TİKA's activities was a representative case of these ideas materializing as concrete cultural cooperation (Ipek, 2015, pp. 177-180).

Another feature of Türkiye's Eurasian cultural relations was the attempt to turn its liminal identity into an asset for cultural diplomacy delivering different messages to each region (Rumelili & Suleymanoglu-Kurum, 2017, pp. 549-552). To North Africa, Middle East and Eurasia, Türkiye promoted Ottoman heritage and shared civilizational ties through cultural products such as Turkish television series that highlighted historical continuity and cultural proximity showcasing their Western lifestyle and Islamic culture (Rumelili & Suleymanoglu-Kurum, 2017, pp. 560-561). In sum, these practices indicate that Türkiye's cultural relations with Eurasia were shaped by a deliberate strategy to convert history and culture into practical instruments of soft power.

2.2.2.4. Strategic and Political relations with Eurasia

Middle powers often use multilateral platforms to strengthen their global standings, and this characteristic is observed in Türkiye under AKP leadership (Beeson, 2011, p. 564). Among the platforms Türkiye is part of, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) emerged as one of the most visible institutional expressions of Türkiye's civilizational framing in Eurasia in 2009. OTS institutionalised a sense of shared heritage, language and kinship across Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan merging identity-based affinity with geopolitical cooperation. The efforts to create an Organization of Turkic states started in the 1990s with 10 Heads of State Summit of Turkic Speaking Countries, and in 2009 the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States was established based on Istanbul (MFA, n.d.d). The organization aims to "widen cooperation and solidarity ...

based on common history, language and culture” holding presidential summit every year strengthening Türkiye’s claim to leadership in the Turkic sphere (MFA, n.d.d).

Stagnation of Türkiye’s ties with Western allies after 2013 expanded the political space for non-Western partnerships. Haugom (2019) observes that after the 2016 coup attempt, trust between Turkey and its Western allies declined sharply leading Ankara to engage more assertively with non-Western partners and to reconfigure the balance of its foreign policy orientations (pp. 213-214). This shift did not mean a full realignment but generated momentum for alternative Eurasian options. Türkiye’s interest in Eurasian platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) should be understood in this context.

China as a status-seeking counter-hegemonic actor, one that did not merely challenge the West rhetorically but offer material incentives and alternative economic partnerships stood attractive for Türkiye, particularly as BRI aligns with Türkiye’s long standing aspirations for transit corridor role linking Eurasia—Middle Corridor (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021, p. 1086). At the same time, deepening relations with Russia added another layer to Türkiye’s engagement with Eurasian political platforms. Russian-Turkish relations rest on a mix of pragmatism and shared grievances, allowing the two sides to coordinate on selective issues (Kubicek, 2022, p. 788). The SCO where Russia and China are central actors thus served as a convenient venue for Türkiye to maintain political dialogue, signal strategic flexibility and hedge against deteriorating relations with Western partners. In 2013, Prime Minister Erdoğan told President Putin if they include Türkiye into Shanghai Five, they “will say farewell to the European Union” (Daily Sabah, 2013).

These developments were accelerated with domestic political restructuring that strengthened the leadership’s capacity to centralize foreign policy decision making. Kutlay and Öniş argue that the consolidation of executive authority under the presidential system produced a foreign policy style more inclined to pursue assertive initiatives framed through notions of national autonomy (2021, pp. 1095-1097). When combined with the deterioration of trust with Western partners, this centralization made Eurasian platforms more appealing for Türkiye. Interest in BRICS consultations or SCO thus acquired a dual function: externally, they allowed Ankara to diversify its diplomatic engagement beyond Western institutions; domestically, they were used to demonstrate

that Türkiye possessed room to manoeuvre within Eurasia than confined to traditional Euro-Atlantic frameworks which harmonized with the growing public support for turn-to-East: Eurasianism.

2.3. AN ANALYSIS OF ASIA ANEW INITIATIVE (2019-2024)

The failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016 marked a decisive rupture in Türkiye's relations with its Western partners and shaped a political atmosphere that the search for diversified partnerships gained new relevance. Western governments' slow and cautious initial response was widely interpreted in Türkiye as half-hearted solidarity (Lesser, 2016, pp. 45-46). Anti-Western sentiment sharply increased as many in Türkiye believed that Western actors failed to appreciate the existential threat represented by FETÖ. Public dissatisfaction intensified as Western media focused on the purge rather than the coup itself, often portraying the government's response as authoritarian while paying less attention to the civilian resistance on the night of the coup (İçener, 2016, pp. 71-72). EU criticism of post-coup measures and later call to halt accession negotiations intensified mutual distrust dragging relations into what they describe as a "stalemate" and a "zigzag" trajectory strengthening sense that Türkiye could no longer rely on Europe (Akçay & Deniz, 2022, pp. 862-866). With the U.S., their refusal to extradite Fethullah Gülen: alleged mastermind of the coup attempt and ongoing cooperation with the YPG—Kurdish militia in Syria that Türkiye considers as Terror organisation—increased Türkiye's frustration (Gürsoy, 2021, p. 138). Thus, what was an asymmetric but functional security partnership gradually shifted toward a more transactional and deadlocked relationship (Lesser, 2016, p. 53; Akçay & Deniz, 2022, p. 862). Within this context, Türkiye's foreign policy began to reassess the country's strategic boundaries and explore alternative platforms where they could exercise greater autonomy. The sense of uncertainty in Türkiye-West relations with more unstable regional environment created pressure to reassess its strategic direction Eurasia standing as meaningful region (Gürsoy, 2021, p. 138). President Erdoğan juxtaposing th EU and Shanghai Five signifying their ambition to join the later, mentioning the centre of global economy is moving eastward in the BRI forum opening ceremony, emphasizing Türkiye-BRICS cooperation and being part of the sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN between 2016 to 2018 showed their rising interest to their interest to Asia (Ergöçün, 2018; Gaspers, n.d.; Reuters, 2016). Thus, the AAI

emerged responding to the need for diversified partnerships and reduced dependence on Western political.

The AAI was launched in 2019 representing Türkiye's attempt to diversify its diplomacy and expand its strategic presence in Asia. As a middle power, Türkiye sought to translate its quest for visibility and autonomy into concrete regional engagement through this initiative, as reflected in their new foreign policy slogan: Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy¹ (Çavuşoğlu, 2017, p. 6). It has four main pillars: the improvement of interstate political relations, the expansion of private sector trade capacity, the strengthening of academic and educational cooperation, and the development of societal and cultural interaction (Gürbüz, 2019). The initiative was primarily driven by domestic policy and idea entrepreneurs whose emergence was enabled by specific opportunity windows and whose scope and type of agency were conditioned by Türkiye's domestic structure. The target region and states AAI designate are marked in Figure 1, as well as Middle Corridor plan that overlaps with BRI.

¹ Introduced in 2018, the policy is an activist foreign policy approach emphasizing proactive diplomacy across political, economic, humanitarian, and cultural fields operating globally and remaining effective at the local level with 8 pillars: networks of cooperation, regional ownership, platforms for regional and global diplomacy, active citizen participation, and developmental and humanitarian aid (S. Yılmaz, 2023, pp. 206-207).

Figure 1

AAI's regional scope and routes of the Middle Corridor and the Belt and Road Initiative



Note. Content created by the author based on Mercator Institute of China Studies (2018); MFA (n.d.d).

The AAI initially placed its main emphasis on economic cooperation, but it later evolved through a series of working level workshops that drew broad participation. These meetings brought together officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Treasury and Finance and the Ministry of Trade, as well as Asia specialists and a large media presence. A second workshop jointly hosted by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities and Ankara University's Asia Pacific Studies and Research Center developed the initiative further by clarifying details of implementation and specifying role divisions across institutions, and the MFA established an AAI coordination ambassador position. These helped consolidating the AAI as a wide ranging policy framework oriented toward maximizing national interests across Türkiye's Asia engagement, including public diplomacy (Oh & Lee, 2022, p. 10).

The initiative was driven by a set of policy and idea entrepreneurs whose roles are identified through four analytical cues: the object they pushed, the tactic they used, their institutional location and the phase of their key involvement. These entrepreneurs linked

external opportunities with domestic priorities, transforming rhetoric into actionable framework. Through this lens, the section interprets AAI as a manifestation of Türkiye's middle power diplomacy in Asia and sets the stage for comparison with South Korea's New Northern Policy.

In 2019, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's introduction of AAI at the 11th Ambassadors Conference represented Türkiye's attempt to redefine its position within the emerging Asian Century. The initiative was presented as part of a recalibration of Turkish foreign policy that emphasized diversity and multidimensionality beyond its traditional Western-centric axis. The slogan "Asia Anew" simultaneously symbolized a metaphorical 'return' to ancestral geography of the Turkic peoples and pragmatic response to the shifting global balance of power toward Asia (Üngör, 2025, pp. 429-430). Türkiye's post-Cold War opening policies to farther region goes back to 1990s: to Latin America and Africa in 1998 and formed Asia-Pacific Action Plan in 1999. When maintaining close relations with the West, Türkiye integrated its self identification as an Asian country, later expanded its diplomatic missions, increased the volume of trade and investment, joined SCO as a dialogue partner, co-founded the middle power consultative platform MIKTA and became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN. Yet, the significance of AAI lies in its role as an effort to revitalize Türkiye's relations with Asia by unifying these fragmented engagements within a coherent strategic framework encompassing diplomatic, economic, and cultural dimensions (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025).

For AAI, the term "bütüncül" (holistic) has been consistently emphasized across the MFA's documents, statements, minister's speeches and an interview with officials. For the initiative, "bütüncül" does not carry a vague meaning of comprehensiveness but refers to an approach that is (1) administratively integrated, (2) geographically broad in its vision, and (3) cross-sectorally connected. Minister's word "Faaliyetlerimiz, kurumlararası işbirliği ve eşgüdümle bütüncül şekilde..." (Our activities, through inter-agency cooperation and coordination, in a holistic manner...) and the way they listed 9 government/non-government institutions for supporting AAI show the term is used to describe an integrated structure which administrative organisations are interwoven horizontally (Çavuşoğlu, 2019, pp. 6-7). In 2020 Minister Çavuşoğlu also emphasized

importance back to Asia with holistic approach: centre of the world's economic power (Çavuşoğlu, 2020b). All the institutions, business world, relevant organisations, academia, culture, education, trade, investment and defence industry were mentioned as partners, and AAI is to strengthen relations with all countries and with regional organisations (Çavuşoğlu, 2020b). These texts also show that the term 'bütüncül' refers to covering and incorporating both institutions and sectors altogether respectively. These satisfied the first and the third meaning of bütüncül. For the second, the officials from the Foreign Ministry confirmed the importance of the term, highlighting that the term means Türkiye aimed to target Asia not as separate regions, but as a whole continent itself that requires development and diversification of relations (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025).

AAI is not an entirely new policy, but it symbolizes Türkiye's recognition at the particular moment in 2019 of the need to revitalize its goals of strengthening and diversifying relations with Asia. As previously noted, the emergence of such a policy typically results from a combination of specific factors. From this point, through discourse analysis this study will examine which international or domestic factors created the new demand, how Türkiye's domestic political structure empowered which idea and policy entrepreneurs, and how those entrepreneurs contributed to the emergence of AAI.

2.3.1. Enabling Circumstances: Windows of Opportunity and Domestic Structure

In 2010s, especially the later half Türkiye experienced a strained period in its relations with the West, and narratives advocating closer engagement with Eurasia became increasingly prominent within government and public. Between 2017 and 2018 the U.S. continued support for YPG, while the detention of Pastor Brunson triggered a cycle of sanctions and tariff retaliation that further strained bilateral ties (Al Jazeera, 2017; Al Jazeera, 2018). In 2019 Türkiye's acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defence system led the US suspension to Türkiye's participation in the F-35 program, and at the same time the Eastern Mediterranean drilling crisis intensified resulting in the EU applying restrictive measures (Council of the EU, 2019; Mehta, 2019). On this background President Erdoğan stated that Türkiye should stop considering the EU membership and

instead consider becoming part of the Shanghai Five and advance South-South cooperation through engagement with BRICS (Anadolu Agency, 2016; Ergöçün, 2018).

Surely we should be cautious from saying these series of events had Türkiye declare AAI. This is crosschecked by the MFA officials: who made it clear that the AAI is not a result of those international issues (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). However, policies are born in certain needs, they do not come out of nowhere: critical junctures and opportunity windows must be analysed in order to understand the background of the policy.

Critical Junctures and Opportunity Windows

For this, a political discourse analysis focusing on Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu's Opening Speech at the 11th Ambassadors Conference 2019, the MFA Foreign Policy Report 2020, and the AAI Information Notes posted on the official website of SAM was conducted. In addition, the Overview of Türkiye's Relations with East Asian and Pacific Countries on the MFA website and the minister's Press Conference Script following the 11th Ambassadors Conference were also used. All the sources chosen follow similar structure though order can differ: (1) crisis and uncertainty, (2) structural transition, (3) active response, (4) identity and values, (5) geopolitics and strategy, (6) institutions and multilateralism, (7) innovation and creativity. Among these, categories 1, 2, and 6 constitute the "crisis-transition discourse" which diagnoses instability in the international environment and institutional voids emphasizing the need for a new approach. Categories 3 and 7 form the "opportunity-innovation discourse" which justifies the emergence of AAI through arguments calling for active and creative diplomacy by Türkiye. Finally, categories 4 and 5 are "identity-geopolitics discourse" that legitimizes and naturalizes the policy by defining Türkiye as both a state of East-West synthesis and a moral actor. These three correspond to processes of crisis perception, opportunity capture, and identity redefinition, ultimately situating 2019 as a period of structural transformation in Türkiye's foreign policy toward Asia and the critical juncture that enabled the emergence of AAI.

The first layer that appears in the major discourses related to AAI is the crisis-transition discourse that recognizes instability of the international system and limitations of existing

institutions, providing justification for why Türkiye's foreign policy must've adopted new approach. The materials repeatedly highlight a few key terms: uncertainty, transformation, multicentric structure and institutional gap. In his address at the 11th Ambassadors Conference, Çavuşoğlu remarked that "the world is not a rose garden anymore" pointing out that the international environment is no longer stable (2019a, p. 44). He went on to say that "the existing global economic, social and political order is under strain," explicitly identifying cracks in the established system (2019a, p. 50). His statement, "the uni-polarity that emerged after the Cold War did not last long," further declared the collapse of the post-Cold War unipolar structure emphasizing the ongoing structural transition in global diplomacy (2019a, p. 50). The same narrative continues in the MFA's Foreign Policy Report 2020 where "Dünyamız ... kapsamlı bir değişim ve dönüşüm sürecinden geçmektedir" (Our world is going through a comprehensive process of change and transformation) presents systemic change as an irreversible reality (Çavuşoğlu, 2019b, p. 4).

This discourse goes beyond and underscores policy urgency. Çavuşoğlu's statement that "uncertainty is pervasive in the world and the range of sight is short" reflects an awareness that uncertainty itself limits the scope of policy foresight thus Türkiye must seek new diplomatic thinking and mechanisms, signalling the need for adaptation (2019a, pp. 45, 50). The official explanation by SAM and the Asia Pacific-Türkiye relations overview by MFA follow the same reasoning. They describe the 21st century as a period expected to be shaped by a multicentric structure emerging alongside the rise of Asia, highlighting both the inefficiency of multilateral systems and the ongoing power shifts (SAM, n.d.; MFA, n.d.e). Within this, AAI is presented as the natural extension and response of Türkiye's foreign policy within such structural transformations.

The crisis-transition discourse explains AAI as a response to an unstable international environment and the limits of existing institutions. In Türkiye's diplomatic discourse, this framing presents 2019 when need for a new policy direction rose. Crisis perception creates the reason for change, while the idea of transition allows institutional and strategic adjustment. Through AAI, Türkiye follows a middle power foreign policy pattern by seeking greater autonomy, promoting connectivity and multilateral cooperation and combining economic, cultural and diplomatic efforts. It also relies on normative terms

such as inclusiveness and mutual benefit to present itself as a responsible and creative actor during a time of transition.

The ‘opportunity-innovation’ discourse begins from a shared self perception that Türkiye’s diplomacy must position itself not as a simple responder but as a creative and active actor within the global situation where uncertainty and competition are deepened. Repeated expressions: “oturup beklemeden” (without sitting and waiting), “new ideas and new moves”, “transform risks into opportunities” are discursive markers of such activeness (Çavuşoğlu, 2019a, p. 51; Çavuşoğlu, 2019b, p. 4). Türkiye is defined not as a passive being that merely balances within the instability of the international order, but as a state that tries to transform that instability into a space for new diplomatic experiments and imagination. In Çavuşoğlu’s 2019 speech, “We must transform these risks into opportunities” functions at the peak of the discourse, and the sentence in the Foreign Policy Report 2020, “dış politikasını değişen koşullara göre ilerletmektedir” (advances its foreign policy according to changing conditions) extends this to the institutional level (Çavuşoğlu, 2019a, p. 51; Çavuşoğlu, 2019b, p. 4). Both interpret uncertainty not as something to be avoided but as a foundation on which diplomatic creativity is to be exercised, and crisis is reinterpreted as a potential driving force for national re-leap.

For ‘identity-geopolitics discourse.’ Türkiye’s foreign policy identity aims to shift from a reactive state to that envisions and generates ideas. Sources commonly indicate a shift in Türkiye’s diplomatic goals from short term crisis management to medium and long term vision making. For instance, SAM argues that Türkiye should become a centre of thought production in Asia linking diplomatic creativity to intellectual capacity (n.d.). MFA also underscores their efforts over the past decade to strengthen economic and trade relations in the Asia-Pacific region and emphasizes the need to institutionalise this progress under an “Asia-Pacific Opening Policy” (MFA, n.d.e). This marks the point in the discourse where creative thinking is transformed into actual diplomatic behaviour. His emphasis on Türkiye as both “West and East” aligns with his another speech “Westernmost Asian and easternmost European” showing their identity-wise ambition of AAI as putting themselves dual-identity that allows entrance to Asia as part of it (Çavuşoğlu, 2019a; Çavuşoğlu, 2019, as cited in Demirci & Cam, 2019).

All these texts share a common symbolic background: the discourse of the Rising Asia. Asia appears not merely as a geopolitical category but as a space where Türkiye can redefine itself and experiment with diplomatic innovation. The rise of Asia is interpreted as critical juncture: an environment development that can be considered to be altering the terms of international interactions, which offered them a room to extend autonomy. This discursive shift is reflected in SAM's official explanatory note, which states "Asya kıtası, küresel ekonominin ve siyasetin ağırlık merkezi haline gelmiştir" (The Asian continent has become the centre of gravity of the global economy and politics), presenting Asia's rise not as a simple regional development but as a key factor restructuring the cognitive foundations of Türkiye's diplomacy (n.d.). Their Asian identity emphasis signify that Türkiye thus holds a position within the "center of gravity". The Rising Asia functioned not as an external variable merely providing new diplomatic direction but as a structural opportunity that enabled the birth of the AAI.

In the years leading up to 2019, Türkiye increasingly framed its foreign policy debates around the need for a renewed strategic orientation amid a changing international environment. As calls for diversification of partnerships, new policy narratives, and a more proactive diplomatic posture accumulated, enterprising and humanitarian diplomacy gradually emerged as a guiding framework. Within this evolving context, the Asia Anew Initiative took form as more than a regional adjustment. It reflected a discursive process through which Türkiye reinterpreted its identity and strategic direction in foreign policy. Rather than addressing uncertainty as a discrete challenge, AAI embodied an effort to channel prolonged structural pressures and shifting expectations into a more creative and forward-looking diplomatic approach. In conclusion, AAI emerged at a critical juncture shaped by the convergence of increasing uncertainty in the international system and the acceleration of multipolarity. The repeated phrases in primary sources, era of uncertainty, multipolar transformation and institutional gap fit the characteristics of such a transitional period. AAI was thus a product of change that rose as Türkiye recognized that existing rules and frameworks no longer reflected its strategic interests well enough and sought diplomatic framework not subordinated to the established order.

In contrast, opportunity windows which refer to short term moments within domestic institutions when constraints are temporarily relaxed, allowing policy entrepreneurs to promote change are not separately observed in the case of AAI (Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2012, p. 603). As Köstem (2017) argues, idea entrepreneurs can influence foreign policy when critical juncture have decision makers search for new framework and when the evolving conceptions of ruling elite overlap with their proposals (p. 722). The case of AAI originated from such a cognitive shift. It would therefore be more accurate to view AAI not as a result of an externally triggered opportunity window or an internally generated one, but as an instance where policymakers' discursive interpretation of the changing external environment produced a new direction in foreign policy.

The year 2019 was a period when Türkiye's relations with the West generally cooled due to tensions over natural gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean, military operations in northeastern Syria, the purchase of the Russian-made S-400 air defence system, and the stagnation of EU accession talks. However, interviews with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of East Asia confirmed that these events cannot be directly regarded as having created the opportunity window that triggered the AAI. As Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu explicitly stated when announcing the AAI in 2019, the officials explained that the initiative was not an axis change, but rather a continuation of the regional opening policies, along with their policies towards Latin America and Africa Initiative² that had been ongoing since the early 21st century (2019a, p. 65; MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). In other words, AAI is better understood not as a policy shift but as an example of revitalization: a reactivation of Türkiye's engagement with Asia rooted in its historical and geographical foundations and its Asian identity. According to the officials, this revitalization was driven by the growing political and economic importance of Asia in the 21st century which created a need for Türkiye who is historically and economically dependent on the West to strengthen relations and diversify cooperation with Asian countries (MFA officials, personal communication,

² Introduced in 1998, Africa Initiative that aimed to develop diplomatic and economic relations with the African continent resulted in high level visits and opening new dipomatic missions. Under AKP this developed into 2005 Year of Africa, obtain of African Union observer position, 2008 strategic partner state, and new Turkey-Africa partnership policy in 2013 (Öztürk, 2023, p. 224).

October 17, 2025). This reasoning aligns with the logic revealed in the earlier discourse analysis.

In summary, AAI emerged as a result of domestic actors' reinterpretation of the external environment and their construction of a new foreign policy framework within the conditions of a critical juncture provided by the structural transformation of the international system. In other words, while Türkiye's foreign policy during this period met the condition of a critical juncture, there was no short term institutional opening functioning as an opportunity window observable. Rather than being a reaction to external shocks, AAI can be understood as the outcome of a structural awareness translated into policy discourse.

Domestic Structure and Decision Unit

The formation and change of foreign policy cannot be explained solely by the capacity of actors. Their influence is always conditioned by domestic political structures and institutional environments. Therefore, this section aims to analyse within what kind of domestic structure Türkiye's foreign policy decisions are made. To clarify this, the study adopts Jang's (2007) typology of four types of presidential systems—imperial, delegative, representative, and institutional—as an analytical framework. By applying this framework, the study seeks to specify within what kind of institutional balance each country's foreign policy is determined and which actors possess access and influence in the process.

With the 2017 constitutional amendment, the parliamentary system was abolished and a presidential system was introduced reconstructing Türkiye's administrative structure in a way that concentrated executive power to the presidency. Following this systemic transition, several institutional changes took place including the abolition of the prime minister's office, the end of the cabinet's accountability to the parliament, the expansion of the president's authority to appoint vice presidents and ministers, the introduction of presidential decrees, and the broadening of the president's discretionary power in judicial and administrative appointments. Studies point out that these changes led to a centralization of the decision-making system. As Uzel (2022) notes “the accumulation of

power in the hands of the president and his close entourage” demonstrates that the new constitutional system redistributed authority from the parliament to the presidency (p. 3).

The formation and coordination of foreign policy also reflect these structural changes. The Security and Foreign Policy Council established under Presidential Decree No. 1 was granted an advisory function responsible for setting macro-level directions and developing policy recommendations. There is no hierarchical structure among these advisory bodies and that they all report directly to the President, while decision making within the presidency operates in a highly compartmentalized and personalized manner (Neset et al., 2019; Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2018). When viewed through Jang’s framework, such an integrated structure owns weak horizontal power distribution and institutional checks, President exercising coordination over the entire executive branch serving as the head of the ruling party, and that the Presidential Office functions as the supreme decision making body for core policies including foreign and security affairs allow President to secure a position free from external political constraint: reflecting characteristic of the Imperial type of presidency.

However, at the same time Türkiye’s foreign policy is shaped through an interaction with the domestic political context. Kutlay and Öniş (2021) argue that the discourse of strategic autonomy functions as a domestic narrative that legitimizes shift toward authoritarian governance and strengthens the president’s popular support and electoral legitimacy through an assertive foreign policy course (p. 1099). Similarly, Yavuz (2022) notes that the AKP used foreign policy as a political instrument for maintaining regime legitimacy, weakening opposition forces, mobilizing its support base and constructing an Islamic-nationalist identity (pp. 665, 672). In this sense, public opinion and the reactions are to some extent taken into account in Türkiye’s foreign policy decision making process. Although the president performs a role that exceeds that of a mere coordinator, non-governmental actors and public’s checks on foreign policy and the close linkage between foreign policy and domestic politics indicates partial conformity with some features of the delegative type.

These characteristics of the Delegative type can also be observed in the AAI discourses. In Imperial type leader’s ideology dominates the policy rhetoric and foreign policy discourse is composed of ideological justification, while in Delegative ideological and

normative language coexist pursuing moral justification and political mobilization. Çavuşoğlu's (2019a) remarks such as "We are both the West and the East" declare that Türkiye is not a boundary between the two civilizations but a synthesis and symbolic centre of both, thereby linking national identity to this civilizational positioning (pp. 52-53). Similarly, in the MFA's AAI overview and SAM, expressions such as "based on her unique geographical position" and 'deep rooted historical and cultural ties with the centre of the world economy and geopolitics' portray Asia's rise as the restoration of civilizational belonging and position Türkiye as a central and leading actor within that process (MFA, n.d.a; SAM, n.d.). These discourses employ expressions of centrality, responsibility and continuity presenting diplomacy not as an institutional function but as a moral obligation that give shape to the nation's identity and mission.

In the case of normative discourse, Çavuşoğlu (2019a) explains democracy, rule of law, free market economy, individual rights and freedoms, pluralism, secularism and welfare state are the foundation Türkiye putting their diplomacy within a universal value system (p. 51). He further states "sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the nation. Peace at home and peace abroad complement our foreign policy. This is the fundamental principle" and these identify popular sovereignty and the complementarity of peace as the core principles of foreign policy (p. 51). This value discourse continues in the SAM document asserting that 'in line with the founding principle of the Republic of Türkiye—"Peace at home, peace in the world"—we must strengthen our ties with all regions, thereby legitimizing diplomacy as the practice of moral continuity and responsibility' (SAM, n.d.). They depict Türkiye's diplomacy as a process of realizing normative values by defining the direction of cooperation as a future based on peace, stability, and shared prosperity.

Under the presidential administrative system, the decision making of foreign policy is institutionally unified yet at the political level it is linked to social variables such as legitimacy consolidation and popular mobilization. In terms of foreign policy discourse rather than legitimizing policies solely through a leader-centred ideological narrative, a rhetoric that swings between ideology and norms can be observed. Therefore, in accordance with Jang's (2007) typological classification, Türkiye's presidential system can be characterised as a hybrid type combining elements of both the Imperial and the Delegative types.

2.3.2. Discursive Framing of Idea Entrepreneurs

In Türkiye's presidential system: hybrid of Imperial and Delegative types, the scope and activity of policy and idea entrepreneurs are constrained structurally. As foreign and security policy decisions are made primarily by the president, a small circle of close aides and senior bureaucratic elites, collaboration or interception at an equal level among the parliament, political parties, non-governmental actors, or different ministries becomes difficult to realize. Accordingly, this section conducts both frequency analysis and discourse analysis on the official AAI related discourse materials published by the Turkish government during the 2019-2020 period. Through frequency analysis actors repeatedly mentioned in relation to AAI are identified to determine which entities directly influenced or participated in the policy. Then, discourse analysis is applied to categorize each actor's statements and classify them according to the four entrepreneurial cues. In addition, interviews with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are used as supplementary material to examine whether and how the way actors are presented in official discourse aligns with, or diverges from, the actual structure of policy implementation. The analysis period is limited to 2019-2020 because the aim of this subchapter is to identify which policy and idea entrepreneurs promoted the AAI and within what cognitive frameworks and institutional contexts the initiative was formed, therefore focusing on the first two years when the policy was announced and initiated is considered most appropriate.

This section analyses the Opening Speech of Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the 11th Ambassadors Conference 2019; the Opening Speech of Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the 12th Ambassadors Conference 2020; the Press Conference held by Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu after the 11th Ambassadors Conference 2019; the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019 Administrative Activity Report; MFA's Foreign Policy Report "Our enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy entering 2020"; and the official overview of AAI at the website of MFA. These documents issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contain broad explanations of Türkiye's foreign policy orientation as well as specific references to the AAI. Since this study focuses on the AAI, only the sections addressing general foreign policy framework and the AAI were extracted and analysed. The materials were

deliberately selected as publicly accessible sources directly addressing the AAI are limited, moreover as will be discussed later the initiative was in practice led and coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Minister. Therefore, this study concentrates on official publications of the Ministry.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Let us first analyse the role of the President. Although the President has rarely mentioned the AAI directly in his public statements, an examination of the five primary sources reveals that his leadership is repeatedly portrayed as the symbolic axis defining the direction and meaning of Türkiye's diplomacy. In 2019, Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that “a strong diplomacy requires thinking widely in the form of a network, and reaching to our national interests and goals in line with the priorities set out by the President,” emphasizing that the actual achievement of diplomatic objectives must align with the priorities articulated by the President (2019a, p. 49). In the same speech it was explicitly noted that Türkiye conducts its diplomacy “under the leadership of our President,” a formulation identically repeated in the 2019 Administrative Activity Report and the Foreign Policy Report 2020 (Çavuşoğlu, 2019a, p. 64; Çavuşoğlu, 2019b, p. 4; MFA, 2019, p. I).

Particularly noteworthy is the sentence in the 2019 Administrative Activity Report: “Sayın Cumhurbaşkanımızın talimatıyla Yeniden Asya girişimini hayata geçirmede eşgüdüm görevi Dışişleri Bakanlığına verilmiştir” (by the instruction of our President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been given the task of coordinating the implementation of the Asia Anew initiative) (MFA. 2019. p. 84). This is the sole statement among the primary sources showing the President's direct involvement in AAI. The expression that the President “gave the task” of implementing the policy to the MFA “by instruction” suggests that the original idea of AAI did not originate within the MFA but from the President himself, while the practical implementation and procedural management were delegated to the Ministry. In the press conference following the 2019 Ambassadors Conference, the Minister stated that ‘it is important that the President especially supported and instructed the AAI process to be accelerated,’ once again emphasizing that the President did not intervene in the qualitative or procedural execution of the policy (Çavuşoğlu, 2019c). The 2020 Our Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy

Entering 2020 reiterated similar phrasing: “Ülkemiz Sayın Cumhurbaşkanımızın liderliğinde ... dış politikasını, kurucu felsefesini oluşturan Yurtta Barış, Dünyada Barış ilkesi doğrultusunda ve Girişimci ve İnsani bir yaklaşımla yürütmektedir” (Under the leadership of our President, our country is conducting its foreign policy in line with the founding philosophy of Peace at Home, Peace in the World and with an entrepreneurial and humanitarian approach), underscoring again President’s supreme and overall role to foreign policy (Çavuşoğlu, 2019b, p. 4). It is noteworthy that in important topics such as the EU, Asia Anew, Israel etc. and overall foreign policy the President very often take place as similar role in multiple speeches. The recurring use of terms such as instruction, leadership and support especially in combination with the preposition ‘under’ indicates that the President exerts influence above the Ministry, shaping the direction of foreign policy and AAI at a higher level of authority. Furthermore, a day after its announcement president Erdoğan himself at the ambassadors’ conference explained the growing importance and weight of Southeast Asia and Pacific, and that they plan to implement the AAI (Erdoğan, 2019). His direct reference to the initiative at the conference of mainly MFA personnels, immediately following its formal announcement by the Foreign Minister indicates that it was not merely a ministerial policy but higher.

These expressions do not refer to specific instruments such as policy design or budget allocation, instead they portray the President as a leader who provides vision and legitimacy. In other words, it is difficult to say that the specific object pushed by the President was AAI with detailed objectives and measures—as the absence of any direct policy explanation by the President supports, but rather the idea itself: the necessity of accelerating and reinvigorating relations with Asia in a holistic manner as repeatedly highlighted in sources. Such actions operate at the discursive and normative level setting direction and aligning the behaviour of other actors. Therefore, in terms of Cue 1 (Object Pushed), the President is more appropriately classified as the primary Idea Entrepreneur.

Regarding Cue 2: Primary Tactic, the analysis of the extracted statements related to the President remains inconclusive due to the limited availability in the primary sources. This cue is designed to distinguish whether an actor engaged in practical and institutional forms of procedural coordination or discursive means, including framing, reframing or narrative building. However the examined materials contain no explicit references

detailed enough to identify such procedural involvement. As a result, it is not possible to determine whether the President's influence extended beyond the level of symbolic or rhetorical leadership.

When the primary cues do not allow for a clear classification Cues 3 and 4 are applied. For Cue 3 (Location/embeddedness), although the President is formally positioned as an internal actor at the highest level of government thus appearing to be a policy entrepreneur, his involvement in the AAI process as observed through Cues 1 and 2 corresponds more to discursive reframing than to administrative or technical coordination. In this sense, he is best understood as a state-embedded idea entrepreneur.

Finally, considering Cue 4 (Phase of Key Involvement), the President's role in the development of AAI was concentrated in its initial phase. That he gave the task of coordinating the implementation of AAI to MFA shows that the initiative did not originate from MFA but from a direct presidential instruction (*talimat* in Turkish) (MFA, 2019, p. 84). However, in subsequent MFA speeches and official reports the President is no longer mentioned in connection with AAI's detailed design, goal-setting, or implementation stages. This distribution suggests that while the President was actively involved in the initial agenda-setting and direction defining stages, he receded into a symbolic role during institutionalisation and execution. Therefore, under Cue 4, the President is classified as an Idea Entrepreneur.

Yet, as the President stands as the chief policy decision maker after its transition to the presidential system, one can question if is this due to his actual role as the leading idea entrepreneur for the AAI or is policy culture of Türkiye deriving from its presidential centrality thus just promoted so as any other policies? Thus, it is difficult to argue that the existing literatures and the primary sources used here solely can be considered as a concrete evidence that AAI derived from his idea. To complement this gap, this thesis conducted an interview with two diplomats from the MFA. The officials confirmed that the idea of AAI came from the President himself. When the interviewer—the author—explained how South Korea's NNP was based on the President Moon Jae-in's idea in the beginning yet was expanded with the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation's ideas consisted with governmental/non-governmental actors and questioned what are the differences of AAI compared to NNP, the officials explained that

in the international environment where Asia was rising, the President and the Foreign Minister identified the need of revitalizing its existing foreign policy towards Asia: that they are the core actors of AAI (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). These statements are consistent with the results of the previous cue-based analysis demonstrating that the President functioned as the initial proponent who conceptualized and legitimized AAI as a central axis of Türkiye's foreign policy: that is, as an idea entrepreneur who raised the necessity of the policy and set its overall direction. In conclusion, during the emergence and early implementation of AAI between 2019 and 2020, President Erdoğan's role can be defined as that of an idea entrepreneur, who established and accelerated the vision and discourse of the initiative.

Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu

One of the most indispensable actors in the analysis of AAI is the Minister of Foreign Affairs: Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu who was in office when the initiative was announced and implemented. Among the five primary sources examined, four were either spoken or published by the Minister including the 2019 Ambassadors Conference speech that AAI was discussed most actively and in the greatest detail. In examining the minister as an idea entrepreneur, the focus lies on how he framed principles, identity and conceptual justification for AAI.

In his 2019 address at the Ambassadors' Conference where he announced AAI for the first time, the minister began his remarks on foreign policy and national objectives by framing the changing international environment stating that "The world is not a rose garden anymore" (2019a, p. 44). Building on, he shifted from diagnosing uncertainty to outlining the values and orientations that should guide Türkiye's foreign policy. He emphasized that the country must enter "a period where we have to come up with new ideas, new initiatives and new moves," underscoring the need for a "new opening that will keep our approach up-to-date and carry it into the future" (2019a, pp. 51, 64). These reflected a need for forward-looking renewal, depicting diplomacy as a dynamic process that must adapt to global transformations

Also, "Turkey and the Turkish nation have stood tall and always used their national strength at the service of the Truth and on the side of the righteous," and that "our foreign

policy reflects our very own story” placed emphasis on moral and historical self-perception (p. 52). Through these narratives, Türkiye was depicted as principled and self-confident, founding legitimacy from its historical resilience. Lastly, the expression “What makes us unique and special is our strong standing on these two pillars [Europe and Asia]” served to establish a framing of identity and direction, positioning the country as a bridge between civilizations while justifying the need for a renewed and future-oriented engagement with Asia (2019a, p. 64). These value and identity oriented arguments constituted the ideational groundwork of the AAI and demonstrate the Minister’s role in shaping the justification narrative behind the initiative.

If we look into cue 2 we find similar result but with a bit of difference. In this framework as well both idea entrepreneur and policy entrepreneur’s traits are witnessed which the latter will be discussed later. As we saw above he underscores Türkiye’s identity which lies in Asia but at the same time is European as their justification to the new Asia-ward policy, and in the press conference that took shortly after he again mentioned that Türkiye plays a genuine bridge role between Europe and Asia connecting geographically and also in many fields, and thus being in Asia and being Asian is very important (Çavuşoğlu, 2019b). The 2020 Foreign Policy Report begins its discussion of regional diplomacy under the AAI framework with identity-based narratives. Statements such as ‘South Caucasus that we have historical and cultural connections,’ ‘Central Asia that we have the connections of common language, history and culture,’ “our political, economic, and cultural ties that date back to history in Afghanistan,” and “the Republic of Korea with which we have a historical friendship in the region” were observed (Çavuşoğlu, 2019b, pp. 89, 92, 97, 105). By emphasizing historical, linguistic and cultural bonds with regions it demonstrates that Türkiye’s engagement is framed not only as policies but also as an idea-driven approach. Thus, across speeches and documents, the minister consistently constructed the ideational justification for the AAI fulfilling the characteristics of an idea entrepreneur.

2.3.3. Enabling Implementation: Policy Entrepreneurs in Public and Private Sectors

Policy entrepreneurs, who are the actors who bring the ideas into concrete policies and lead the implementation process are the drivers of policy if the former were initiators.

These actors push concrete policy instruments such as laws, budget, programs, their vocabularies deal with process management and specific goals/data, and often at the implementation stage of policy inside a government.

In the case of AAI, one of the most indispensable policy entrepreneurial actors is the Minister of Foreign Affairs: Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu again. Among the five primary sources examined, four were spoken/published by the Minister himself including the 2019 Ambassadors Conference speech that AAI was discussed most actively and in the greatest detail. To evaluate him as a policy entrepreneur, emphasis is placed on how he designed, operationalized and coordinated AAI.

In the same 2019 speech, the Minister not only used ideas, conceptual frameworks and made ideational advocacy, but also announced more concrete policies and objectives. He introduced the new initiative AAI emphasizing that Türkiye would improve its relations with Asia in a holistic manner, capturing a brand-new energy with all Asian partners on the basis of mutual respect, the principles embodied in the United Nations Charter, common values and harmony (2019a, pp. 64-65). He noted that this comprehensive approach would reflect the core tenets of Türkiye's Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy which is active both "on the ground and at the table" (2019a, p. 65). To achieve this, Türkiye would develop the necessary instruments to embrace Asia holistically through cooperation among the public and private sectors, universities, and civil society (2019a, p. 65). He further explained that the initiative would adopt an integrated perspective across various areas: "education, defence industry, investment, trade, technology, culture, and political dialogue", signalling a shift from mere declaration to policy design to specific target fields (2019a, p. 65). To clarify its normative positioning, he underlined the aim of AAI id not to pick an axis but to strengthen Türkiye's role between Europe and Asia contributing to their sustainable development (2019a, p. 65).

In the 2020 Foreign Policy Report as well, he reiterated almost the same visions and objectives but with more expanded objectives:

Bu süreçte bizimle aynı vizyonu paylaşan Asyalı dostlarımızla siyasi temas ve istişarelerimizi arttırmayı, güvenlik, ticaret, yatırımlar, yeni teknolojiler, çevre,

kalkınma, enerji, ulařtırma, insani yardım ve savunma sanayii dahil geniř bir yelpazede orta ve uzun vadeye de yayılabilecek iřbirlięi fırsatlarını ele almayı, muhataplarımızın öneri ve gereksinimleriyle olanak ve yeteneklerimizi buluřturabilmeyi, mümkün olduęu takdirde üçüncü ülke ve bölgelerde ortak projeler yürürlüęe koymayı arzu ediyoruz. (Çavuşoęlu, 2019b, p. 89)

Translation:

In this process, we desire to increase our political contacts and consultations with our Asian friends who share the same vision with us, to address cooperation opportunities that may extend into the medium and long term in a wide range that includes security, trade, investments, new technologies, environment, development, energy, transportation, humanitarian assistance and the defence industry, to be able to bring together our means and capabilities with the proposals and needs of our counterparts, and, if possible, to put into effect joint projects in third countries and regions.

These detailed objectives—defining goals by term, broadening sectoral target areas, and explicitly extending cooperation from bilateral to multilateral settings—demonstrate that as the head of the Ministry directing AAI Minister Çavuşoęlu possessed a clear understanding of the implementation stage and was willing to explain this operational dimension publicly.

In the 2019 press conference, the minister once again emphasized a holistic approach that also takes differences into account and stated that Türkiye aims to further develop its relations with regional organisations (Çavuşoęlu, 2019c). He also explained that Asia is essential for achieving the economic goals set by the President: while the focus is on the economy, cooperation in education, science, defence, and digital sectors will also play important roles (Çavuşoęlu, 2019c). As can be continuously observed, the Minister's narrative include the term holistic and particular sectors that AAI aims to develop with Asian counterparts, which serve as evidences that his words were based upon concrete policy not merely an idea to improve relations.

Furthermore, at the 2020 Ambassadors Conference he self-evaluated the AAI that mechanisms for policy coordination and implementation had been established, and with the support of relevant institutions, organisations and the public the initiative helped

motivating Asia-ward cooperation of business sector and academia (Çavuşoğlu, 2020a). As part of the initiative, ambassadors—including the foreign minister himself—developed a 2 year priority action plan covering 40 major areas in 31 countries and determined country-specific priorities for each region. A year after its initiation, it is observable that AAI took more structuralized form. The Minister does not share details, but his speech here reveal that he is in the middle of policy procedure by setting plans and priorities. As well as his knowing of the implementation process, his vocabularies tilt to practical and procedural than ideational which satisfies cue 2 as policy entrepreneur again.

As mentioned earlier, the interview with MFA officials lastly explained that the President and Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu were the two main actors who recognized the need for a policy toward Asia and played the most significant roles in advocating AAI (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). The officials further stated that while the MFA led the planning and implementation of the policy and the minister naturally contributed (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). In conclusion, in the policy entrepreneur dimension, Minister Çavuşoğlu not only brought up the idea of revitalizing Asia policy but also translated it into concrete instruments, coordination mechanisms and action plans.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye

Analysing the last main actor MFA is a little tricky: as the data are from the foreign minister, it is difficult to separate MFA's role and perspective from the head of the institution. Rarely was the MFA mentioned independently or solely in explaining the AAI or Asia-ward policies, and it is challenging to argue that the institution has a separate idea or approach towards a policy that the minister introduced himself. Yet, it is still valuable to analyse MFA's entrepreneur-ness as as mentioned above, it is very clear that the MFA is the main—and even sole in some extent—institution that plans, implements and evaluates AAI; and beyond the minister's individual leadership MFA serves as the institutional foundation that ensures policy continuity and inter-agency coordination therefore worth being analysed as an independent actor.

The question of what do they push: idea or policy is unlike the formers vivid. The repeated sentence that AAI coordination task was given to MFA by the President was used to

underscore the role of the president at the same time points out the role of MFA in AAI. “The ‘task of coordinating implementation’ and the fact that it was assigned by a higher authority reflects that the MFA’s object of action is policy rather than idea, as its role given was defined in terms of coordinating the implementation process of the initiative not producing new conceptual frames.

Moreover, in 2020 foreign minister’s speech he used expressions as “concrete steps” and “mechanisms to coordinate and implement:” referring to policy packages, instruments, and procedures designed to operationalize AAI rather than discursive or ideological framing. Likewise, the joint efforts of the minister and ambassadors in formulating major activity areas, priority action plans, and country-specific priorities that he mentioned reveal that the MFA dealt directly with the technical and procedural design of AAI. The AAI overview on the MFA’s official website also focuses on objectives, strategies, focusing fields, sectoral goals, and the execution and management structure, all of which describe institutionalised policy frameworks rather than abstract visions. Therefore, regarding Cue 1 (what they push), the MFA is clearly pushing policy itself: concrete institutional design and implementation rather than broad ideas or narratives about Asia.

For Cue 2 (Primary Tactic) the MFA can be classified with greater certainty. In its 2019 Administrative Activity Report, the Ministry stated that following the announcement of the AAI, a coordination meeting with various government institutions chaired by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs took place. It emphasized that the initiative should be advanced through coordination and cooperation not only among all relevant ministries and institutions but also with the private sector and civil society organisations, incorporating dimensions of coordination, implementation, monitoring, consultation, communication, and data collection. Moreover, during the same year, an AAI workshop was organized under the auspices of the Foreign Minister, chaired by the Deputy Minister and coordinated by SAM, targeting participants from the Grand National Assembly (TBMM), the Presidency, universities, think tanks, foreign diplomatic missions in Ankara, and student organisations. These activities were carried out after the MFA was officially assigned by the President to coordinate the AAI, showing that the Ministry led both inter-governmental meetings and public-private workshops. This reflects a clear pattern of process management: a marker of policy entrepreneurial behaviour. Therefore, based on

Cue 2, the MFA is confirmed to be a policy entrepreneur, as it was tasked with expanding and operationalizing the ideas and directives of the Foreign Minister and the President into concrete policy form. Since both Cue 1 and Cue 2 present consistent results, it is appropriate to classify the MFA so.

Public and Private Institutions

In the primary sources, other various domestic actors were mentioned as well: ministries, Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), universities and think tanks, the business sector, NGOs, the Directorate General of Foundations, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), Turkish Airlines, TIKA, the Turkish Red Crescent, the Türkiye Maarif Foundation, and the Yunus Emre Institute (YEE). Truly, a coordination board was founded with 31 institutions including all ministries and the presidential high councils with the coordination of MFA (Çavuşoğlu, 2021, as cited in DEIK, 2021). These domestic actors were referred to in the documents as partners supporting and cooperating with the MFA within the framework of the AAI. However, due to the limited depth and quantity of related data this study cannot analyse them in detail. Then what role did these actors actually play in the AAI? Were they active supporters and partners? To explore this question, relevant issues were addressed during interviews with MFA officials. Yet solely relying on MFA is insufficient: despite their overarching role in AAI, many of actual policies would be under other institutions, if not AAI would've remained as narrative or diplomacy focused half-a-policy. The ministry seems to be aware of this as well as they underscored multiple times that this is a 'holistic' policy that have other institutions to take a supportive role.

Regarding governmental institutions, the interviewees highlighted TIKA and the Ministry of Trade explaining that while the AAI is led by MFA, it functions as a whole-of-government project which these ministries actively cooperate and provide support in. They added that when projects or collaborations with Asian countries are required, MFA works in coordination with these institutions. Likewise, YTB contributes through the Turkish Government Scholarship Program and the YEE supports soft power diplomacy by promoting the Turkish language and culture abroad (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). For instance, TIKA made 2019 opening of a vocational training centre in Pakistan; 2024 creation of the Keleşek Rehabilitation Centre

for Disabled Children in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; and the 2025 establishment of a textile workshop at Bentong Prison in Malaysia to support inmates' rehabilitation and skills training (TIKA, 2019; TIKA, 2024; TIKA, 2025). YTB's biggest program is Türkiye Scholarship program which has 15,472 awardees and over 150,000 alumni as of 2025 from 184 countries (Türkiye Scholarship, n.d.). The program offers students various programs such as International Student Science Congress, as well as holding 34 alumni associations (Türkiye Scholarship, n.d.). Currently 16 offices of YEE out of 50 and 20 TIKA coordination office out of 55 can be found in Central Asia, Asia and the Fareast (TIKA, n.d.; YEE, n.d.).

So what kind of projects and cooperation did government institutions other than MFA push in the period? First and foremost, Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure has important role as Türkiye perceives connecting the continental Eurasia with railways and road connections critical for economy and its own role in global transportation and trade, with its Middle Corridor initiative. In this framework Türkiye pushes its connection with China's Belt and Road Initiative as well. As the government institution in charge of this grand strategy, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure advanced a set of connectivity projects. These included large-scale infrastructure such as the Edirne-Kars High Speed Railway, new port constructions in Filyos, Çandarlı and Mersin, and the enhancement of multimodal links that form the backbone of the Middle Corridor (MFA, n.d.d). The ministry also pursued international coordination mechanisms: it co-organized the 2025 Global Transport Connectivity Forum to promote the Middle Corridor to Asian partners, facilitated agreements under the Organization of Turkic States to harmonize freight transport rules, and led follow-up meetings on the Lapis Lazuli route to streamline customs ensure secure transit and expand rail freight (MFA, n.d.d). In cooperation with China, it supported the integration of the Middle Corridor with the Belt and Road Initiative symbolized by the operation of the Trans-Caspian China Railway Express Chang'an Train's complete journey from Xian to Prague that went through Türkiye's BTK Railway and Marmaray in 2019, and by launching the first Middle Corridor-BRI joint working group meeting in Beijing in 2024 (General Directorate of the State Railways Administration of the Republic of Türkiye, 2019, p. 88).

As economic relations are the main objectives of AAI, one of the most important institution is the Ministry of Trade. In 2020 the ministry released lists of target countries and priority countries for 2020-2021 to increase bilateral and commercial relations. Among the 17 target countries and 28 priority countries, 7 countries (China, India, Iraq, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Uzbekistan) were identified as the former and 11 countries (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Georgia, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Vietnam) were the latter as countries that AAI covers, which constitute over one third respectively (Medina, 2021). In 2022-2023 they also released remote and target countries list for information technologies sector, which included India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, South Korea took place as top 10 remote countries and Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Russia, Singapore, UAE and Uzbekistan as target countries (Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate General for International Service Trade, n.d.). Not only including multiple Asian states in the period to its target, in 2021, Minister Pekcan mentioned AAI particularly at the Conference of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the Member States of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) that they're planning for multiple actions to strengthen relations with Asian countries (Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye, 2021). Also Türkiye currently has preferential trade regimes with six ACD countries that negotiations for additional preferential trade arrangements are ongoing, and that Türkiye closely follows regional integration efforts such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement (Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye, 2021). In the same year she and the Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu attended a meeting organized by the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK). She mentioned the target/priority countries and the proportion of Asian countries among them, and added that in 2020 the Ministry held 131 business events with 30 countries supported by 54 commercial counselors in 38 centres (Pekcan, 2021, as cited in DEIK, 2021). She explained that the Ministry of Trade encourages corporates to view China and India as key export markets, and highlighted the contracting sector as another major area of cooperation with AAI target countries (Pekcan, 2021, as cited in DEIK, 2021). Turkish contractors she stated carried out 5,582 projects worth about 201.9 billion USD, representing roughly half of Türkiye's global projects (Pekcan, 2021, as cited in DEIK, 2021). The Minister added that contracting activities remain concentrated in Russia and the Caucasus, accounting for

up to 70-90 percent of regional projects, and noted that Türkiye already cooperates with South Korea and Japan in the contracting sector in Africa and the Caucasus, which she argued should now extend to South Asia (Pekcan, 2021, as cited in DEİK, 2021).

Various institutions took roles in Asia-ward diversification. However this thesis does not categorize them as policy entrepreneurs. There are two reasons. First, their portrait of AAI in sources. Primary sources mention that such institutions were understood primarily as supportive partners and are mentioned very briefly in explaining AAI. Also, Trade Ministry, TİKA and YEE's sources commonly highlight AAI is started/coordinated by MFA as a foreign policy while other ministries/institutions participated. DEİK's 2021 meeting with Foreign and Trade Ministry for AAI, TİKA's visit to Laos and Cambodia for project assessment, YEE's education cooperation with Brunei all underscore the programs being assisted by or part of AAI which is foreign policy by MFA, rather than presenting themselves as part of the policy or their policies as part of AAI (DEİK, 2021; TİKA, 2023; YEE, 2023).

Second, the interviewees of MFA made clear that these actors play a certain role in the AAI, yet they did and do not participate at the stage of idea generation or main policy implementation. Non-governmental actors keep track of government policies yet involvement begins only after the government announced and implemented the policy, the government primarily facilitates and opens channels of cooperation. For instance, DEİK's collaboration with a Japanese municipality or the establishment of the Türkiye-Japan Science and Technology University illustrate how nongovernmental institutions such as DEİK, universities and think tanks cooperate with foreign governmental and nongovernmental institutions in the economic and cultural spheres (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). For other government institutions, they push for policies and projects that aligns with AAI as it is holistic initiative yet highlighted it is MFA who made and leads policy This indicates that non-governmental actors are not deeply involved in government projects or planning processes, and government institutions' roles are also limited from acting as main actor within AAI. Thus, these actors are better understood as second-tier implementers or collaborators rather than idea or policy entrepreneurs.

Yet, their efforts contributed to AAI: Turkish Airlines aimed to increase tourist inflow by expanding flight routes, while defence companies such as Aselsan and Havelsan pursued active cooperation with Asian partners such as Indonesia (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). Furthermore, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB) hosted the 1st ACD Member Countries Chambers of Commerce and Industry Conference as a virtual meeting (Turan, 2022). The Turkish Maarif Foundation also carried out projects within the AAI framework: in 2024 it signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the Education University of Hong Kong in the field of global education, established a Maarif Turkish Studies Centre in Indonesia, and opened schools in Australia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan (Koca, 2024). In academia, the Asia Pacific Research Application and Research Center (APAM) of Ankara University organized the academic workshop “Asia-Pacific Workshop: Opportunities and Challenges within the Framework of the Asia Anew Initiative” in 2021 (Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University, 2021). Lastly, Turkish defence and technology companies strengthened partnerships across Asia. Following the 2019 Kuala Lumpur Summit, 14 MOUs were signed between Turkish and Malaysian defence and technology firms, and Turkish Aerospace opened an office and university partnership in Malaysia in 2021 (Doğan, 2022, p. 11).

In sum, although these public and private institutions neither shaped the ideational foundations of the AAI nor directed its core policy design and execution, their projects, partnerships and activities substantially reinforced the initiative by translating an MFA-led foreign policy framework into concrete economic, infrastructural, educational, and societal engagement across Asia, positioning them as effective contributors without constituting idea or policy entrepreneurs.

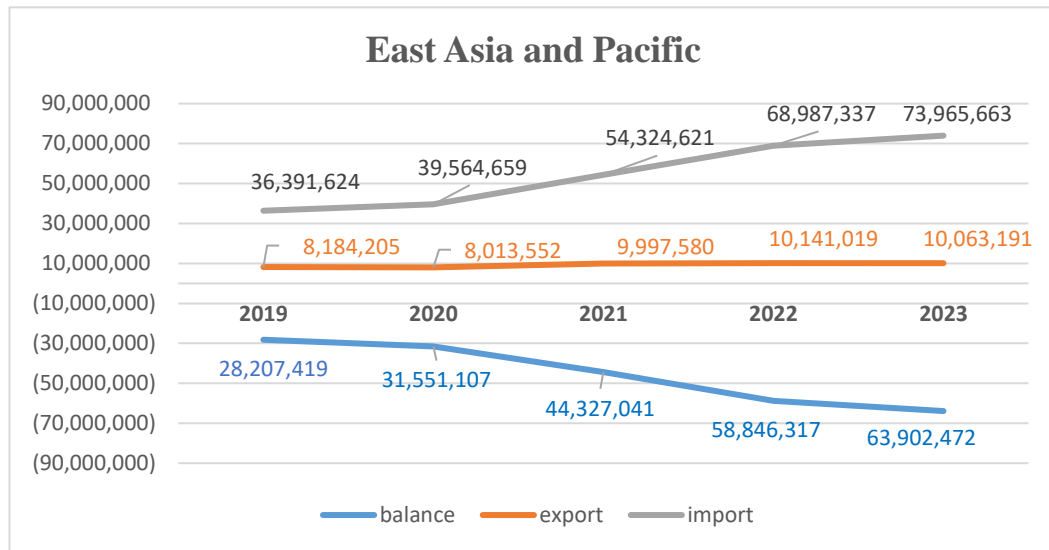
Outcome

6 years passed after the initiative was announced. Did Asia Anew Initiative bring results that Türkiye sought for? When asked to the MFA officials, they said they believe AAI was overall successful and they reached most of the goals they set: particularly economic relations were increased, what can improve is trade deficit and the number of investments, but especially in trade volume it is as expected (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). The primary objective AAI sought for was boosting economic

relations with the region's fast rise as new centre of world economy, and surely between 2019 and 2024 growths of Türkiye's economic relations with Asia was observed. As Figure 2.1 shows, there is a slight growth of Türkiye's export to East Asia and Pacific, rising from just over USD 8 billion in 2019 to around USD 10 billion in 2023, while imports expanded much more sharply from roughly USD 36 billion to nearly USD 74 billion over the same period (World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.a.; World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.b.; World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.c.; World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.d.; World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.e.). This twofold increase in imports illustrates both the region's weight in Türkiye's supply chains, but the AAI alone could not offset structural asymmetry as trade deficit increased even more twofold, even though overall economic interaction strengthened as intended. Figure 2.2 similarly indicates widening commercial activity in surrounding regions of Middle East and North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan during 2019-2023—though North Africa is not part of AAI target countries. Their overall trade volume is more stable: export volume from Türkiye rose from about USD 44 billion to over USD 56 billion, while imports remained in the mid-USD 20 billion range preserving a sizable positive trade balance (World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.a.; World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.b.; World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.c.; World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.d.; World Integrated Trade Solution, n.d.e.). Furthermore, in Central Asia between 2020-2024 Türkiye's export volume was approximately 36.6 billion USD and 26 billion USD for import securing trade surplus (Tolmac & Yildirim, 2025). Including these regions provides a broader picture: across both East Asia-Pacific and adjacent areas, Türkiye's economic engagement generally increased after 2019 demonstrating that the launch of AAI coincided with a measurable expansion of Asia-oriented trade even if imbalances with East Asia persisted as an imminent problem to be solved.

Figure 2.1

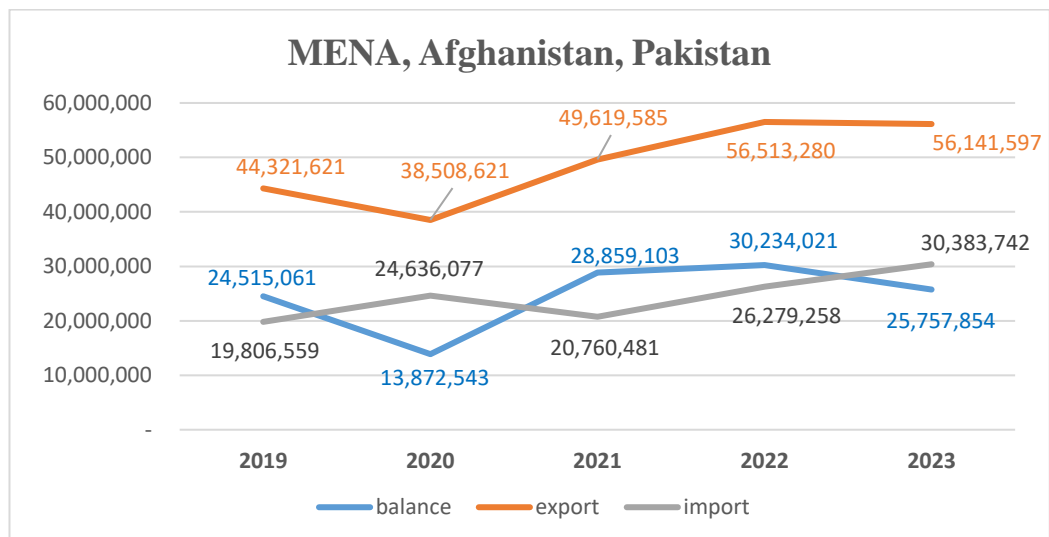
Export, Import and Trade Balance of Türkiye with East Asia and Pacific in 2019-2023



Note. Content created by the author, based on World Integrated Trade Solution (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

Figure 2.2

Export, Import and Trade Balance of Türkiye with Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2019-2023



Note. Content created by the author, based on World Integrated Trade Solution (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

In tourism Türkiye witnessed sharp increase despite 2020 pandemic. Between 2019 and 2024, or Kazakhstan tourists visiting Türkiye increased from 455,724 to in 2024—nearly twofold; Japan 103,320 to 134,697 which showed they recovered from pandemic's impact; with China, 426,000 tourists declined significantly with pandemic, but recovering from 248,100 in 2023 to 409,700 in 2024 they show a rapid increase—with twofold increase of flights between the two countries from 21 to 49 per week (Hafizoglu, 2020; Hürriyet, 2025; Huaxia, 2025; Kabakci, 2021; Nakispekova, 2025).

However the analysis reveals structural limitations of the policy as well. Oh (2025) analyses these into four. First, as Türkiye's foreign policy often shifted sharply in response to domestic political change, it made it difficult to maintain a coherent long term Asia strategy stably supported by bureaucratic structures. Second, since Türkiye conducts simultaneous diplomatic efforts across Europe, the Middle East and Africa, it leaves insufficient personnel and funds available for Asia complicating accumulation of regional expertise and durable networks. Third, as Asia has established regional powers such as China, Japan, South Korea and India, Türkiye is limited for available diplomatic space for late entrance. Lastly, gap persists between the emphasis on liberal democratic norms in the Asia Anew discourse and international criticism on democratic backsliding, media freedom and human rights, thereby constraining the initiative's normative credibility.

This reveals a gap between the coherent and strong discourse and its translation into practice. As shown in the analysis, the implementation structure was closely tied to strong presidential leadership and MFA, which was advantageous in the initial phase by enabling the rapid presentation of policy direction but at the same time constrained inter-ministerial diffusion and flexibility in policy adjustment in the execution stage. Most notably, the notion of being holistic appeared repeatedly, and although Çavuşoğlu stated in 2020 that a 2 year priority implementation plan was prepared by himself and ambassadors covering 40 core activity areas across 31 countries, there is limited evidence that these efforts were accompanied by clearly specified and differentiated goals nor the plan itself was revealed to public (Çavuşoğlu, 2020a). Treating Central, South, East and Southeast Asia together as a single strategic space further diluted strategic focus. As a result, symbolic visits, events and projects were repeated in some countries, but country specific strategies capable of generating deeper long term relationships remained limited. When asked about

self evaluation of Asia Anew, the MFA officials responded that the initiative aimed to expand relations with Asian countries, particularly by increasing economic exchanges such as investment and trade, and by 2025 most targets had been achieved (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17 2025). This assessment itself points to the holistic yet relatively shallow trait of the AAI.

From a South Korean scholarly perspective, AAI is assessed as a late but strategic recalibration of Türkiye's foreign policy as the prospects and leverage of Europe focused orientation weakened, pushing them to diversify toward Asia (Oh, 2025a, pp. 142). To their analyses AAI functions more as a declared grand vision than a specified blueprint, seeking to reposition Türkiye as an Asian actor by redefining identity frames and reducing dependency on Europe while prioritising Southeast Asia for markets and investment and Northeast Asia for advanced technology and higher level cooperation, along with expanded economic and public diplomacy outreach (Oh, 2025a, p. 142; Oh & Lee, 2022, pp. 10-11). At the same time, they underline that detailed plans and measures remained insufficiently concretized, so implementation leaned on existing organisations and coordination discussions, with actors such as TİKA, Türkiye Investment Office and the Yunus Emre Institute expected to take central roles (Oh & Lee, 2022, p. 4). The AAI is linked to Korea-Türkiye cooperation as a practical avenue, pointing to the strategic meaning in bilateral public diplomacy collaboration based on Korea's experience and emphasizing the potential to combine South Korea's institutional diplomatic capacity with Türkiye's cultural and regional inclusiveness for sustained cooperative platforms (Oh, 2025b, p. 57).

2.3.4. Comparison and Contrast of Discourse and Practice

The preceding subsections showed that under Türkiye's presidential system, idea and policy entrepreneurship are concentrated in a small set of state actors. Foreign policy decisions are taken primarily by the President and Foreign Minister, which structurally limits horizontal and plural participation by other actors. Within this setting, AAI emerged as a policy that ideational foundations and practical design were almost entirely produced within the presidential centre and MFA.

On the side of discourse, the President appears as a main idea entrepreneur despite the lack of sources. That policy priorities were set out by the President, AAI was made by the instruction of President and repeated references to Türkiye conducting its diplomacy under the leadership of President is seen more often in comparison with the South Korea's case, which will be analysed in the later chapter (Çavuşoğlu, 2019a, p. 49; Çavuşoğlu, 2019a, p. 64; Çavuşoğlu, 2019b, p. 4; MFA, 2019, pp. I, 84). These present the President as the source of the vision who decided that a new Asia policy is needed and authorizes its implementation, but does not design its modalities. In Cue 1 terms, what he 'pushes' is not a detailed policy package but the idea that relations with Asia must be revitalized in a holistic and accelerated way. The Foreign Minister's discourse develops this presidential idea into a more elaborate ideational structure which again belongs to the sphere of idea entrepreneurship with normative and ideational phrases: framing a deteriorating global environment that requires renewal, presenting Türkiye as a principled and resilient actor with a distinct historical identity, and positioning AAI as the natural ideational response to Türkiye's dual European-Asian standing through references to historical and cultural affinity with Asia (Çavuşoğlu, 2019a; 2019b).

The Minister and the MFA move beyond ideational framing and operate as policy entrepreneurs translating the vision of AAI into concrete policy. In introducing the initiative, the Minister specified the need to develop concrete instruments for comprehensive engagement with Asia and situated implementation within coordinated interaction among public and private sectors, academia and civil society. He further mentioned sectoral priorities across economic, technological, cultural, security and political domains, and subsequently expanded this scope with medium and long term cooperation frameworks that include joint projects and spatial extension into third countries. Through these interventions, the same actor who previously justified the need for a new opening now specifies timelines, sectors and modes of implementation, marking a clear transition from idea entrepreneurship to policy entrepreneurship (Çavuşoğlu, 2019a; 2019b). The MFA appears even more clearly on the practical side. It is positioned as a policy entrepreneur because it is officially assigned the task of coordinating implementation. The Ministry convenes inter-institutional meetings, brings multiple public bodies into a single coordination channel and extends that coordination to private sector and civil society actors. It also institutionalises AAI through organized platforms

such as workshops that gather state institutions, parliament, the presidency, universities, think tanks, foreign missions and societal groups, indicating a deliberate effort to operationalize the initiative across sectors. By 2020, AAI is treated as a managed policy process with implementation and coordination mechanisms evaluated as established and with a multi year priority action plan prepared for specific countries and areas of work. These practices fit policy entrepreneurship in cue 1 and cue 2 terms: the objects pushed are action plans, coordination mechanisms and implementation arrangements while the primary tactic is sustained process management across institutions and stakeholder groups (MFA, 2019; Çavuşoğlu, 2020b).

Comparing the two sides reveals a significant degree of alignment between discourse and practice, but also some important gaps. AAI's ideational discourse remains limited in substance but gradually took institutional form through the organisation and coordination of policy implementation. This development should be understood as policy formation at the level of operation and management. For foreign policy discourse to be considered translated into policy, certain conditions need to be observable: assignment and coordination of tasks, division of policy into procedures, plans, timelines and responsible actors, and its incorporation into administrative arrangements. At the ideational stage, AAI emphasizes ideas such as strengthening relations with Asia, adopting an inclusive approach and pursuing active diplomacy. In later stages, these ideas are reflected in practice through the classification of cooperation by sector, the management of cooperation as an ongoing process and the sequencing of activities over time. This indicates that AAI reorganized how existing diplomatic activities are carried out rather than introducing fundamentally new policy objectives.

But there is a noticeable gap. In the Minister's speeches and reports, there are repeated references to cooperation with the private sector, universities, think tanks, civil society organisations and regional partners. However, the empirical record for 2019-2020 shows that the concrete instruments of AAI were designed and managed within the MFA and its diplomatic network. The AAI workshop and coordination meeting were both chaired and coordinated by the MFA, and the most detailed practical outcome mentioned in the sources, the two-year action plan covering forty areas in thirty-one countries, was prepared by ambassadors under the Minister's guidance (MFA, 2019, p. 84; Çavuşoğlu,

2020a). Interviews with MFA officials strengthened this, as they stated that the idea of AAI was formed and led by the President and the MFA, and that private sector actors did not participate in the idea-creation phase (MFA officials, personal communication, October 17, 2025). This suggests that although AAI repeatedly emphasized pluralism in its rhetoric, the actual implementation in the early years reflected that principle only to a limited extent.

The temporal sequencing of idea and policy entrepreneurship also reveals a patterned division of labour. The President's involvement was concentrated in early phase when he recognizes the need for a new approach toward Asia and gave instruction to MFA (MFA, 2019, p. 84; Çavuşoğlu, 2019a, p. 64). In later documents that described the detailed design and institutional mechanisms of AAI, his role was mostly recalled in formal expressions rather than substantive policy content. By contrast, the Foreign Minister and the MFA appeared in practical roles, shifting from framing global uncertainties and Türkiye's identity to specifying sectors, time frames, coordination structures and progress evaluation. In Cue 4 terms, the President is primarily an idea entrepreneur in the agenda setting phase while the Minister in this case and the MFA are policy entrepreneurs who sustain practice over policy design and implementation.

These traits are closely tied to the institutional characteristics of Türkiye's presidential system. The concentration of authority in the presidency means that idea entrepreneurship tends to be confined to state-embedded and personalized, with limited institutionalised channels for bottom-up or horizontal proposal of new ideas. At the same time, the delegation of implementation tasks to a powerful foreign ministry that controls diplomatic instruments and external representation places policy entrepreneurship inside a highly capable but narrow bureaucratic arena. Under these conditions, the distinction between discourse and practice is not mapped on sets of actors, but onto different functions that a few actors perform in different phases and sectors.

Presidential and ministerial discourse did not merely decorate a pre-existing policy but helped to construct the problem definition, identity framing and normative justification that made AAI carry meanings and be coherent. Policy entrepreneurship did not emerge independently of these discourses but translated ideas into projects, meetings, workshops and action plans. At the same time, the analysis reveals the limits of this process: the small

number of actors involved, limited practical role of non-state participants although called for rhetorically, and the concentration of both idea and policy entrepreneurship to state institutions/actors. These features will be important when comparing AAI with South Korea's middle power initiatives in the upcoming chapters, as they show how a centralized presidential system shapes not only who speaks in favour of a new policy, but also who is able to institutionalise it in practice.

CHAPTER 3

KOREAN FOREIGN POLICY AND EURASIA

3.1. OVERVIEW OF KOREAN FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE COLD WAR

Surrounded by four major powers: China, Japan, Russia and the U.S., divided and lacking natural resources, South Korea attaches particular importance to diplomacy and economy as it is deeply influenced by external conditions. Within half a century, South Korea achieved remarkable growth and now clearly emerged as a middle power and a global actor. Nevertheless, its foreign policy remains constrained by the structures of North-South division and the U.S.-ROK alliance. Only five years after independence from Japan in 1945 the Korean War broke out, and from the outset their foreign policy developed under the Cold War and strong US influence with its autonomy extremely limited. Here, autonomy is defined, borrowing from Kim (2009), as a capacity to set and pursue objectives or interests in inter-state relations that may run counter to those of other states (p. 388). For a middle power located within great power cross-pressures, the pursuit of autonomy is not an end state but ongoing management task that mixes reassurance with diversification. The U.S. influenced nearly every dimension of South Korea's policy formulation: liberation enabled by the U.S. atomic bomb, defence against Chinese secured with American military support, economic aid, the maintenance of legitimacy as the only legal government on the peninsula through the US backing and security umbrella (Kim, 2009, p. 388). Consequently, South Korea's external policy consistently prioritised US interests and demands over its own (Kim, 2022, p. 84). For a newborn state amid great powers, accepting the demands of a hegemon was the sole viable path for survival, hence it is difficult to speak of autonomy in South Korea's Cold War foreign policy. For example, during the Park Chung-hee regime,³ normalization of relations with Japan was pushed under the strong US pressure and support only three decades after independence, while Korea's attempt at an independent nuclear weapons program pursued as a response

³ President Park (1963-1979) who came to power by May 16th military Coup in 1961 served 4 consecutive terms and led rapid industrialization.

to the security anxiety triggered by U.S. troop reductions—consequently closed under intense US opposition.

South Korea during the Cold War largely assimilated into U.S. policy while seeking to enhance its autonomy through self-strengthening and limited diversification (Kim, 2022, p. 79). President Park leveraged shared experiences of division and rapid economic growth—the Miracle on the Han River by Korea and Rhine of West Germany—to approach West Germany, sending miners and nurses in exchange for economic benefits. Under Chun Doo-hwan regime⁴ they kept stable relations with the U.S., president's tour to Asia, Africa and Europe, while making efforts to improve inter-Korean relations and host the Olympic Games. These moves increasingly aimed to position Korea as a recognized actor in the international arena.

For South Korea the Cold War had been a threat, but at the same time functioned as a framework that ensured security and economic development under U.S. protection. In post-Cold War era, thus the greatest challenge was the possibility of abandonment by the U.S. Yet the emergence of new states in regions such as Central Asia offered opportunities for diplomatic diversification and renewed hopes for unification. The Roh Tae-woo administration's⁵ Northern Policy thus established diplomatic relations with 45 socialist states including the Soviet Union and China, and leveraged this for North-South relations and autonomy (Kim, 2022, p. 96).

In the post-Cold War period, the Bush Senior administration initiated transitional phase emphasizing multilateralism and international norms (Kim, 2009, p. 393). In Northeast Asia, there were cautious conciliatory measures such as easing economic sanctions on former communist bloc states. Despite the political conditions of the region that limited the impact of the post-Cold War transformation South Korea pursued diplomacy aimed at expanding autonomy. President Kim Young-sam⁶ sought greater autonomy from the

⁴ President Chun (1980-1988) came to power with December 12 military Coup d'état and served 2 consecutive terms.

⁵ President Roh (1988-1993) participated in Chun's coup, served as minister and congressman in his period and later was inaugurated as the first elected president.

⁶ President Kim (1993-1998) came from Democratic Liberal Party which later evolved into South Korea's main conservative party. He pushed for reformism emphasising anti-authoritarian political reform, market openness and integration with global institutions.

U.S. by utilising Korea's rising national power, expanding multilateral participation, and promoting public support for diplomacy. The predecessor President Kim Dae-jung⁷ adopted proactive regional strategy seeking to shape East Asian relations through multilateral cooperation and institutional links. His Sunshine Policy aimed at inter-Korean reconciliation, promoting gradual change through engagement, dialogue and economic exchange than isolation.

President Roh Moo-hyun⁸ also pursued autonomy through 'Northeast Asia balancer diplomacy' seeking mediator role among regional powers. However, the September 11 attacks and the War on Terror redirected US foreign policy toward hard security priorities significantly narrowing the space for South Korea's balancing role. At the same time, China's rapid rise and emergence as South Korea's largest trading partner strengthened the domestic appeal for pragmatic cooperation: 'security with the U.S., economy with China' (Kim, 2022, p. 108). President Lee Myung-bak⁹ worked to improve relations among China, Japan, and South Korea, deepen resource and energy cooperation with Russia, and promote 'New Asia diplomacy:' a strategy to broaden South Korea's presence in Asia by using infrastructure, investment and energy cooperation to secure markets and resources beyond Northeast Asia. These attempts were facilitated by smooth relations with the U.S. which strengthened Korea's international position (Kim, 2022, pp. 103-104). With the solid U.S. relationship, President Park Geun-hye¹⁰ pursued a breakthrough in North-South Korea relations through the Trust Building Process on the peninsula, advanced the 'Eurasia Initiative' that covers the whole continent for its economy-focused cooperation objectives and sought to repair ties with China and Japan. However, controversy with China over the deployment of the U.S. THAAD system, repeated North Korean nuclear tests and the President's Park's impeachment paved the way

⁷ President Kim (1998-2003) which is considered to be the first leader from the left wing came from first National Congress for New Politics and then Millennium Democratic Party. He promoted democratisation, social welfare expansion and market reforms and a cooperative approach in foreign policy.

⁸ President Roh (2003-2008) came from Millennium Democratic Party later moved to Open Our Party and was also considered to be left wing. While admitting the importance of the U.S. in terms of security, he sought greater role and self-dependency of South Korea in its region.

⁹ President Lee (2008-2013) based on right wing Hannara Party (later Saenuri Party) represented a market-oriented and pro-U.S. foreign policy stance. He was called 'Economy President' who underscore pragmatism (Presidential Archive, n.d.).

¹⁰ President Park (2013-2017), daughter of President Park Chung-hee, belonged to Saenuri Party. She emphasized trust with North Korea thereby expand it to regional peace and to north. Her term was cut short by impeachment in 2017.

for Moon Jae-in's (2017-2021) victory in the 2017 presidential election. Moon was rooted in the progressive camp where more often seek for peace and unification via conversation and reconciliation. President Moon sought for proactive diplomatic diversification by targeting Eurasia with NNP, Southeast Asia with New Southern Policy, leveraging traditional diplomatic approaches such as the Northeast Asia Plus Community and initiated inter-Korean summits to resolve chronic security threat issue, which led to commitments for denuclearization, military tension-reduction measures, and steps toward partial demilitarization of the Korean Peninsula (Kim, 2022, p. 106). However, the collapse of U.S.-North Korea talk, the latter's halt to external engagement with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the transition of US administration, missile tests by North Korea and deepening U.S.-China strategic rivalry fuelled by trade war combined to leave the NNP an unfinished project.

Thus, South Korea's foreign policy consistently sought to promote regional stability and cooperation through multilateral meetings, policy initiatives, and other means, while striving to strengthen its status as a global actor by expanding diplomatic relations. Yet independent from South Korea's policy preferences, will and interests of the U.S. repeatedly imposed strong constraints functioning as a decisive brake. Kim (2022) evaluates post-Cold War South Korea as pursuing a "dual diversification" and "multilateralization" strategy (p. 79). Despite constraints of North Korea's nuclear threat and the intensifying U.S.-China rivalry, Korea pursued dual diversification by expanding relations with Japan, Russia, and China to reduce its dependence on the U.S.; and by reaching out to regions like Central Asia, Southeast Asia, India and Australia they reduced the importance of the four great powers strengthening its own voice and autonomy (Kim, 2022, pp. 107-108). At the same time, Korea emphasized multilateralization of international relations through international organisations and cooperative forums, seeking to address the "Asian Paradox"—the contradiction in which economic cooperation and interdependence among Asian states deepen even as political and security tensions intensify—and to elevate Korea's international status (Kim, 2022, p. 108). In this sense, post-Cold War South Korean foreign policy enhanced diplomatic visibility, yet they could not remove fundamental limits imposed by alliance dependence and regional security dynamics, leaving autonomy as a conditional and negotiated outcome rather than a settled condition.

3.2. EURASIA(NISM) IN KOREAN FOREIGN POLICY

In Korean, the term “Bukbang” means “northern.” Thus the term Bukbang Jeongchaek—northern policy—may, depending on the context, refer either to the policy in Roh Tae-woo administration or to a general Eurasia-focused policy and it is observed across various studies that the term is frequently employed in overlapping ways. In this paper, to avoid confusion, President Roh’s policy will be addressed as ‘Northern Policy,’ and the South Korea’s general Eurasian policy will be distinguished as ‘northward policy/engagement.’

South Korea’s “Eurasia” is understood in terms of economics and security—in other words, pragmatic space of engagement rather than a zone of identity. To be precise, we must talk about the meaning of the “north(ern),” since in Korean foreign policy it was more commonly framed in terms of the “North” rather than “Eurasia.” The orientation toward the north existed across different periods even when the name “Northern Policy” was not used, and the term’s meaning kept changed after the policy’s formal launch. In the late 1980s, the Institute of Foreign and National Security defined northern diplomacy as efforts to improve relations with the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea underscoring that “north” functioned as a policy category rather than a fixed geography (Jung, 2021, p. 246). In South Korea, the term north referred to states geographically to Korea’s north, states tied to North Korea, former socialist countries, or even the whole landmass north of the peninsula: from China and Russia out to Central Asia and parts of Eastern Europe. So north is better understood not as a geographically fixed area but a layered and complex imagined space that meaning shifted depending on the speaker’s purposes, and related agendas and issues making it imagined, variable and constructed space (Jung, 2021, p. 247). Thus due to its geography, when said ‘north,’ it is inevitable to include North Korea, whether as the starting point or ultimate objective of policy.

The Eurasian continent can be divided into a narrow and a broad Eurasia: the former includes Russia, Mongolia, China, and Central Asia; the latter extends to Europe, Southeast Asia, and the MENA region (Lee et al., 2018, pp. 111-112). Often Korean usage refers to the narrow definition, though it sometimes expands toward the broader one depending on issues and partners. That means, less emphasis is placed on pinning down what Eurasia is, and more on how and why to pursue cooperation within a flexible

policy space. The term entered official discourse when the Park Geun-hye administration from 2013 proposed the Eurasia Initiative as an extension of efforts to address the Asian Paradox. Prior to her, discussions of Eurasia in Korea largely remained confined to continent-linking infrastructure agendas such as rail and energy, but under Park's government they were elevated to the forefront of external policy and articulated as a core strategy (Lee et al., 2018, pp. 47-48).

So, what is the importance of Eurasia for South Korea? Eurasia is evaluated as a space of diverse strategic value, not only under the current division of the peninsula but also looking ahead to post-unification. First, it is regarded as a region which South Korea can stably secure the energy and mineral resources from, essential for economic development; and as urgent task of overcoming stagnation in economic growth rather than a mere expansion of interconnectivity of economy (Lee, 2018, p. 174). In addition, Eurasia cooperation is directly tied to various tasks such as establishing logistics hub in Northeast Asia, consolidating peace framework in the Korean Peninsula, promoting inter-Korean economic cooperation and opening of North Korea, and fortifying international leadership. The development of the Arctic Sea route presents possibilities to be logistics bridgehead; while the reconnection of inter-Korean railways offers opportunities to link with Russia's Trans-Siberian Railway (TSR), China's Trans-China Railway, and Mongolia's Trans-Mongolian Railway, thus develop into an international railway network (Kim, 2015, pp. 37, 50; Song, 2019, p. 7). Furthermore, the necessity has been emphasized in terms of the need for cooperation linking Eurasian logistics and energy networks with resolving the North Korean nuclear issue and achieving Korea's unification. Beyond economics, resources and nuclear diplomacy, it has also been discussed in the aspect of the discovery and reinvention of a shared identity (Kim, 2010, p. 24). So, how did Korea's Eurasia-ward policy start?

3.2.1. Northern Policy under the Roh Tae-woo Administration (1988-1993)

Regarding South Korea's northward engagement foreign policy, most studies trace the origin back to President Park Chung-hee's Special Declaration on Foreign Policy for

Peaceful Unification in 1973 which renounced the Hallstein Doctrine¹¹ and announced the opening of doors to the socialist bloc (MOFA, 1990, as cited in Bae, 2014, p. 80). The term “Northern Policy” was officially used at the governmental level first in 1983, but at the time it remained at the level of declaratory intent for normalizing relations with the communist bloc rather than a concrete plan or strategy, thus difficult to put significance to it (Roh, 1993, as cited in An & Park, 2015, p. 133).

As South Korea’s adopted export-led growth strategy and was fighting global economic crisis, it was necessary to broaden diplomatic and economic borders beyond the U.S. and its traditional allies (Bae, 2014, p. 95). Accordingly, in his inauguration speech on 1988, President Roh Tae-woo said he will ‘vigorously pursue Northern diplomacy by opening broad channels of international cooperation even with those continental states with which we had no exchanges:’ the launch of the Northern Policy (Roh, 1988, as cited in Jeong, 2021, p. 244). The Northern Policy was a new and significant development: it moved away from hostile relations with the socialist bloc and sought formal diplomatic ties.

The Northern Policy functioned as a unification policy, a foreign and security, and an economic. The policy started formally “to actively leverage the changes in the international order and situation around the Korean Peninsula, improve the peninsula’s security environment and set a new inter-Korean relationship” (MOFA, 1992, as cited in Jeong, 2021, p. 249). That is, the approach to the “North” was treated as a way to improve North-South Korea relations as a detour strategy.

The reasons such an autonomous diplomacy was possible can be grouped into three: changes in the international environment, the stance of the U.S. and perspective of President Roh and his core decision makers. The systemic change brought by the end of the Cold War enabled the active pursuit of the policy and led major northern states adopt open stance toward improving relations (An & Park, 2015, pp. 135-136). Second, relative non-interference and inactiveness towards North Korea by the U.S. had the Roh government explore more independent path beyond the fixed order of international

¹¹ A doctrine of West Germany (1955-1969) that the state cannot maintain diplomatic relations with those with East Germany, and in Park Chung-hee period it was actively examined and applied flexibly as an internal guideline towards neutral, non-aligned states but renounced in 1973 (European Commission, 2021; Kim, 2023). South Korea also applied this doctrine against North Korea in the period (Jeong, 2021, p. 244)

politics (An & Park, 2015, p. 136). Lastly, it was President Roh, Park Chul-eon, Minister for Political Affairs and Kim Chong-hwi, Senior Secretary for Foreign and Security Affairs were the ones actively recognized the change in the international environment and devised their own strategic responses (An & Park, 2015, p. 140).

Northern Policy decision making was concentrated to Cheong Wa Dae (The Presidency). An and Park (2015) argue that although democratization began in 1987, under President Roh the leader's passivity and the diplomatic sensitivity of cooperating with North Korea and socialist bloc resulted in the lack of public communication and authoritarian style of secret diplomacy that kept actors other than the core politicians outside the agenda (p. 149). After Minister Park left office Kim created a unit within the Cheong Wa Dae to accelerate progress on the Northern Policy, and achievements were attributed to the team rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Lee, 2012, p. 137). As President Roh and Secretary Kim developed the idea and drove the policy, while Minister Park focused on implementing the policy by using institutions and resources.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Korea (MOFA) official assessed the Northern Policy particularly as critical for both Korea-Russia relations and inter-Korean dynamics. Following the establishment of South Korea-Russia diplomatic relations and the subsequent expansion of economic cooperation, the North Korea-Russia military alliance broke down and was reduced to symbolic and political ties in the 21st century. This process laid the groundwork for South Korea-Russia cooperation policies for the next 30 years and the emergence of the NNP can be understood as an extension of the outcomes generated by the Northern Policy. This was a critical point since Russia always stands as the biggest, most influential and with high potential actor in the Eurasia region (MOFA official, personal communication, January 2, 2026).

3.2.2. Between 1993 and 2013: General Northward Engagement

Although the Northern Policy faded from Korean diplomacy after president Roh left office and was often treated as a "policy of the past" until the Moon Jae-in government advanced the New Northern Policy, the northward orientation in South Korea's foreign policy persisted even if the exact label "Northern Policy" was not used (Jung, 2021, p. 245). The scope of what counted as north changed as governments changed. President

Kim Young-sam inherited and expanded the policy with Segyehwa (globalization) policy, yet as North Korea announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty in 1993 and its nuclear program emerged as a direct security threat, as well as the U.S.'s hardline policy (Yoo, 2007). Thus, his Segyehwa policy not only lost its value as an extension of the Northern Policy aimed at unification, but his North Korea policy is also often considered to have failed due to a lack of consistency and an inability to respond effectively to emerging threats. Diplomatic and economic networks with former socialist states continued to expand, yet increasingly lacked a clear strategic purpose. (Jung, 2021, p. 251).

The Kim Dae-jung government, which pursued the Sunshine Policy of reconciliation and engagement with North Korea, focused on restoring inter-Korean relations and reducing security risks posed by nuclear issue. At the same time, they proposed a project that connects Trans-Korea Railway to Eurasian rail networks: Trans-Siberian, Chinese, Mongolian, and Manchurian railways and build into a single corridor, the so-called "Iron Silk Road" (Hong, 2004, p. 56). Its significance lies in that it added economic interest dimension to the diplomacy-first Northern Policy and introduced the idea of connecting the Eurasian continent through multilateral cooperation, and the idea survived and continued in later administrations under different project names. President Roh Tae-woo and Kim Dae-jung were able to sustain more friendly stances toward former communist bloc and North Korea, and to repair ties in part as, during the transition period after the Cold War the U.S.' relatively hands-off posture toward South Korea persisted, permitting their diplomatic and economic expansion.

From the same Democratic Party, President Roh Moo-hyun proposed a sequence differing from Roh Tae-woo's: build peace and prosperity first on the peninsula, then in Northeast Asia, and finally at the global level. He inherited Sunshine Policy and aimed to make South Korea a bridge and regional hub amid Northeast Asia's rapid growth (Roh, 2003a; Roh, 2003b). In this context, they sought to link South Korea's "the Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative for Peace and Prosperity" with Russia's Far East and Siberia development strategy, promoting large-scale connectivity projects such as the linkage between the Trans-Korean Railway and the Trans-Siberian Railway. As well as attempting to participate in gas and oil field development projects, Roh's economic

diplomacy extended with state visits to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan aimed at expanding trade, investment, and resource cooperation (Choi, 2004; Lee & Shin, 2007). Yet after 9/11, the U.S. turn to the war on terror, worsening U.S.-North Korea ties, and rising U.S.-China rivalry further constrained these efforts (Lee et al., 2018, pp. 30-31).

Drawing on his experience in securing overseas construction contracts during his tenure as chairman of Hyundai Engineering and Construction, President Lee Myung-bak personally led summit diplomacy centred on project acquisition: “business diplomacy.” Through state visits to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 2011, they secured projects worth approximately USD 10 billion and concluded around thirty MOUs (Choi, 2011). Under the goal to increase energy self-sufficiency, Russia and Central Asia were designated as two of the four strategic regions for energy security, and the president negotiated agreements on energy and resource development and imports (Cheong Wa Dae, 2009). While energy and resource cooperation constituted the core focus and the northern region was not primary strategic space, Lee’s approach to the North was important as engagement with Russia and Central Asia was pursued not as an extension of North Korea policy but as an independent resource-driven strategy: a pragmatic redefinition of northern diplomacy centred on energy and economy.

For South Korea, North Korea is a constant rather than a variable particularly for advancement to Eurasian region. Yet as visible in every administration, South Korea was aware of value of the North in terms of economy, energy and even security, thus northward policies continued in various forms, with differing focal points.

3.2.3. Park Geun-hye Government’s Eurasia Initiative (2013-2017)

President Park Geun-hye, who inaugurated in 2013, occupies an important place in the context of Korea’s northward policy. In 2013 she announced the ‘Eurasia Initiative’ reintroducing continental policy as a major foreign policy agenda for the first time in two decades. Similar to the predecessors, Park administration regarded peace on the Korean Peninsula and the cooperative framework establishment among Northeast Asian states essential for advancing towards Eurasia. As Ko (2014) explains, the Eurasia Initiative proposed an interconnected set of objectives through three visions. First, the vision of a “One Continent” sought to build an integrated infrastructure system from logistics, energy

to trade . This included realizing the Silk Road Express and cooperation on Arctic shipping routes, interconnecting energy infrastructure such as power grids, gas pipelines and oil pipelines, and reducing institutional barriers to trade and investment (p. 8). Second, the “Creative Continent” aimed to generate new engines of growth by integrating science and information technology into the logistics and energy sectors, combining the economic innovation efforts of various countries, and promoting cultural and human exchanges including youth networks, by so creating synergy effects across multiple domains (p. 8). Lastly, the “Continent of Peace” sought to expand foundation for regional peace and cooperation by connecting Eurasia Initiative with the “Korean Peninsula Trust Building Process” and the “Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative” (p. 8). It aimed to manage North Korea related issues and prepare the ground for reunification while resolving Asian paradox.

Under these objectives, President Park actively pursued summit diplomacy, including meetings with the top leaders of the United States, China, Russia and Europe. She also sought to broaden international support for the policy at bilateral and multilateral levels by utilizing platforms such as the Asia Europe Meeting, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation and East Asia Summit and advanced North Korea policy for cooperation aiming to address the nuclear issue and reunification (Ko, 2014, pp. 4-5).

With Russia, agreements were made for high level diplomatic and security dialogue through regular visits and summit meetings, exchanges between state-affiliated and private research institutes, and the Foreign Ministry hosted forums involving various government agencies, business leaders, and experts to draw interest and cooperation from the private sector (Kang & Sakong, 2014, pp. 3-4; Ko, 2014, p. 28). Ministries pursued projects aligning with the three visions: the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs advanced infrastructure-related cooperation; the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy promoted projects such as communication network modernization and electronic trade platforms; and the Cheong Wa Dae and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs utilized bilateral and multilateral summits to explain the initiative and build broader support (Kang & Sakong, 2014, pp. 3-4; Ko, 2014, p. 28). President Park also highlighted the creation of a Eurasian cultural identity, rediscovering Eurasian roots and fostering

Eurasian identity through soft power (Park, 2013). “Eurasia Friendship Express” project that participants from various sectors travelled across Eurasia with cultural festivals, visits to historic sites, concerts and exhibitions facilitating communication with local citizens and overseas Korean communities (MOFA, 2015).

The Eurasia Initiative is assessed to have strengthened qualitative Eurasia relations by advancing cooperation and integration across diverse sectors, in contrast to the Northern Policy which focused primarily on diversifying diplomatic relations (Lee et al., 2018, p. 44). Unlike Northern Policy where policy planning and implementation were confined to the president and his close decision makers excluding the others, President Park centred on government officials in summit diplomacy while actively drawing interest and cooperation from private firms and experts for their participations. This produced a public-private two track approach to diplomacy and trade, and by extending beyond diplomacy and trade into transport, energy, logistics, and investment. Despite the geopolitical constraints that limited past northward policies, Eurasia Initiative is significant for bringing the agenda as the core strategic concept of Korean foreign policy (Lee et al., 2018, p. 47). It also brought Eurasia region into the foreground and used the geographic term “-sia” at the policy level focusing on the economic dimension of the region. The Initiative represented a new attempt by placing such projects within a comprehensive roadmap and pursuing in a systematic manner (Lee et al., 2018, p. 48).

Despite the ambitious vision, the Eurasia Initiative had limited outcomes as plans did not connect to concrete execution. In the absence of a comprehensive policy framework, remaining at listing of sectoral tasks, failed to overcome the ambiguity of target region and, ultimately, it failed to induce strong private sector participation or sustained governmental commitment (Lee et al., 2018, p. 45). Moreover, there has been no confirmed official support from the U.S. or China. Russia voiced interest in linking the initiative eastern policy, but they faced international sanction due to Crimea annexation and discussions stalled after North Korea’s nuclear test. With China’s 2015 launch of the BRI and AIIB, the hub of large scale regional infrastructure cooperation shifted toward China diminishing the initiative’s momentum and appeal (D. Lee, 2017).

According to existing literatures on Eurasia Initiative, President Park set the overall discursive direction of the Eurasia Initiative by announcing the initiative and specifying

its vision and goals, while government-affiliated research institutes played a central role in translating this vision into a concrete policy framework. In early 2014, the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP) organized a research council comprising 16 national think tanks and policy research bodies, which divided the agenda into sectoral areas such as transportation and logistics, energy, agriculture and fisheries, industry and trade, and development finance, and developed a comprehensive roadmap that elevated the initiative to the stage of policy planning (Lee, 2016, pp. 9-10). According to the Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements, the implementation structure extended beyond a single ministry: involving multiple ministries, public institutions, and research institutes under the National Research Council simultaneously identifying practical measures and cooperation projects, including joint policy symposiums conducted across Russia, China, Central Asia, and Türkiye and the preparation of an economic roadmap led by the Ministry of Strategy and Finance (Kang & Sakong, 2014, pp. 1-2). In the implementation phase, sectoral responsibilities were distributed across ministries, with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries overseeing railway, port, and Arctic route projects, and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy reviewing power grid linkage and trade-related infrastructure, while public corporations and private firms such as KORAIL and RUCO-participating companies were actively involved in executing rail and logistics connectivity plans (Cho et al., 2014, pp. 59-60).

The Eurasia Initiative thus represented the most extensive attempt to revive northward engagement in a systematic manner with a comprehensive roadmap, multi-actor participation, and the elevation of 'Eurasia' as a policy level concept which earlier northward policies hadn't achieved, yet its progress was ultimately limited by structural constraints. When geopolitical pressures intensified, inter-Korean tensions reemerged and a call for new leader and ideas was sought, the newly inaugurated Moon Jae-in administration introduced the New Northern Policy.

3.3. AN ANALYSIS OF NEW NORTHERN POLICY (2017-2021)

Between 2015 and 2017 South Korea entered one of the most turbulent phases of its contemporary foreign policy environment. First, intensification of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs fundamentally altered regional security dynamics. North Korea

conducted its fourth and fifth nuclear tests and repeatedly launched ballistic missiles contributing to what analysts described as heightened instability and uncertainty on the Peninsula (M. Lee, 2017, p. 46). These developments forced South Korea to reassess deterrence posture and alliance coordination as the threat environment was rapidly worsening. In 2016 decision by South Korea and the U.S. to deploy the THAAD missile-defence system—response to North Korean threats as Korea argued—marked significant point of cool down with China with their retaliatory economic reprisals and public's extreme anti-Korea sentiment (M. Lee, 2017, pp. 45-46; Lee, 2018, p. 42). China perceived THAAD as the U.S.'s strategy to irritate China as its radar could undermine China's strategic deterrent, and Korea's bandwagoning to the U.S. could cause a shift toward U.S.-centred regional security architecture (Lee, 2018, pp. 42, 60). This event revealed the vulnerability of South Korea's structure which depends security on the U.S. and the economy more on China, forcing them to search for a balance between.

Simultaneously, South Korea faced uncertainty in its alliance management due to the political transition in the U.S. The early period of the Trump administration was characterised by unpredictability, transactional tendencies and a lack of clarity in regional policy directions with transactional, China bashing principles (Lee & Lee, 2017, p. 1). The US emphasis on burden sharing, pressure on allies and increasing focus on North Korea's missile threat added further complexity for Seoul (Ku, 2024). The THAAD controversy and shifting U.S. strategic priorities placed South Korea in a difficult position.

The balance of power in Northeast Asia was also experiencing rapid transformation with intensifying U.S.-China strategic rivalry, the expansion of China's regional influence and Russia's interest to the region created a geopolitical environment that middle power such as South Korea need to diversify relations to preserve strategic autonomy (M. Lee, 2017, p. 58). By 2017 with the President Moon's inauguration, as a result, the NNP emerged in response to these circumstances.

The NNP is positioned as a continental strategy that strengthens cooperation with Eurasian states on the basis of peace. The policy sought to institutionalise cooperation among major actors in Northeast Asia and to link the Korean Peninsula with Eurasia through multilayered economic engagement tools such as expanding economic cooperation focused on Russia's Far East development, promoting a Korea-Eurasian

Economic Union FTA, and exploring points of connection with China's BRI (Daehanminguk Jeongchaekbeuriping, 2020). Also, the policy carried the geopolitical element of the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and the geoeconomic meaning of encouraging North Korea's reform and opening (Lee et al., 2018, p. 89).

Due to these objectives, its size and influence, Russia was inevitably the most crucial partner of NNP. It was since Northern Policy when South Korea considered the Russian Far East and Siberia to have potential yet lacked infrastructure and institutional framework. Russia also sought to develop the region, but as it was difficult to initiate alone they responded proactively to Korea's call (MOFA official, personal communication, January 2, 2026). The two did not only share economic objectives but also security: Russia also saw Moon's progressive orientation a chance to establish peace in Korean peninsula. Indeed, in the period not only Korea's but also Russia's discourse on South and North Korea's cooperation and reconciliation is often witnessed (MOFA official, personal communication, January 2, 2026). That is, NNP largely corresponded to Russia's demands and objectives and had South Korea consider them as one of the priorities of NNP.

The NNP which inherited the basic line of the Northward Policy reconstructed line in a form to overcome its limitations and corresponded to the new international environment. The NNP shows three differences from the Eurasia policies of previous administrations. First, while past policies pursued individual projects when promoting economic cooperation with northern states, Moon administration approached these projects as a package expanded step by step and linked them with major national policy tasks. Sung (2019) explains even when setting the activation of the Arctic route as a goal, the NNP approaches not merely as transportation and logistics issue but closely connected to the development of energy and resources along Russia's Arctic coast and advancement of the shipbuilding industry (p. 59). In addition, NNP established control tower and institutional arrangements. Unlike the past which high level government officials or individual ministries led projects separately and problems emerged because of the absence of an overall command centre, PCNEC coordinated the interests of the ministries and bring proactive communication (Sung, 2019, p. 57). According to the presidential decree issued 2017, the PCNEC established to create future engines of growth for the Korean economy

and to build the foundation for inter-Korean unification by strengthening connectivity with Eurasian states (President of the Republic of Korea, 2017). PCNEC was established as a counterpart of Russia's Ministry for Development of Russian Far East, also an existence of separate government institution with a prominent politician Song as the first chairman was to signal Russia their practical commitment to boost the relations under NNP (MOFA official, personal communication, January 2, 2026). Finally, the NNP did not remain at simple government level cooperation but pursued diversification toward public-private cooperation, cooperation among private actors, cooperation among local governments and cooperation between local levels. The Korea-Russia Business Council, Local Cooperation Forum, Business Dialogue, Agricultural Business Dialogue and Joint Investment and Financing Platform are the examples (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea, 2019b, p. 84; Park et al., 2019, pp. 7-8). The policy aimed to create new engines of growth through infrastructure development and cross border cooperation with Eurasian states and of building a mutually beneficial economic community (Daehanminguk Jeongchaekbeuriping, 2019).

It is also noteworthy that the term 'sa-eop (project/business)' appears frequently in primary and secondary sources. As seen in the case of Türkiye, policy discourse often contain abstract frames such as strategy, direction, goals, and vision, but NNP stretches further using "project" is used at two major levels: one is cooperation projects, meaning comprehensive cooperation packages aimed at multiple states; and the other refers to individual projects accompanied by actual investment and implementation such as the modernization of the five major ports in the Far East or the construction of LNG vessels (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs of the Republic of Korea, 2017, pp. 5, 11; Moon, 2021). Referring to a policy with the term "project" gives the impression that the policy is understood as a programmed unit of execution, that is the policy itself is already planned as detailed projects. Furthermore, the fact that the policy discourse presents these two levels gives the impression together that policy conception and policy practice are bound within a single grammar.

The core vision of NNP was the establishment of a Northern Economic Cooperation Community of Peace and Prosperity: virtuous cycle which regional peace, securing of new growth engines and joint prosperity would be achieved through economic

cooperation with northern states. Under this vision, NNP was promoted on the basis of three principles: People, Prosperity and Peace. At its second meeting in 2018, the PCNEC organized sixteen priority tasks and fifty six detailed tasks, and at its ninth meeting in 2021 reflecting the changed circumstances it confirmed the three principles and eight initiatives and derived a total of seventy implementation tasks by dividing each initiative into short term and long term tasks, (Seo et al., 2022, p. 3).

This thesis asks what external or internal factors drove the Moon government to actively promote cooperation with Eurasia; the domestic structure which offers clues regarding the environment and the types of policy and idea entrepreneurs who shaped and designed the NNP; and the entrepreneurs who were involved in the policy's idea formation, planning, implementation and other stages.

The primary sources analysed in this study are official documents produced between 2017 and 2021 by relevant government institutions such as the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Presidential Office, the Korea National Diplomatic Academy, the Ministry of Strategy and Finance and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. Because the NNP was a policy directly proposed and officially announced by the President, presidential speeches and speeches by senior government officials are included as primary sources in this study. Additionally, policy-related press releases issued by government ministries associated with NNP, reports and evaluation materials produced by quasi-governmental bodies and the private sector that were involved in the implementation process, and an interview with a MOFA official who served at the Embassy of Korea in Russia until 2019 will be used. Before analysing how the policy was implemented, it is necessary to understand the conditions that made it possible. The next section therefore turns to the domestic political environment and the external strategic shifts that enabled the NNP to emerge.

3.3.1. Enabling Circumstances: Windows of Opportunity and Domestic Structure

Through multilayered plans, NNP is a continent centred diplomatic strategy that pursued both peace on the Korean Peninsula and prosperity in Eurasia. The policy cannot be

understood as a simple economic cooperation policy but as a continental strategy and a peace diplomacy conception that sought to build a network of prosperity encompassing the peninsula's peace regime, South Korea-North Korea-Russia triangular cooperation and Northeast Asia and Eurasia. The NNP reflects the intention to shift the direction of Korean diplomacy from a Cold War frame centred on survival to an inclusive one centred on peace and prosperity. Earlier we have utilized seven categories for sources of Türkiye's case as the structure varied by sources, but in President Moon's speeches do not follow a linear seven-stage sequence but exhibit a narrative block structure organized around an idea → policy implementation → idea pattern.

Critical Junctures and Opportunity Windows

Due to its environment, South Korea faces constraints when publicly explaining its diplomatic direction. In particular, after the deployment of the U.S. missile defence system THAAD in 2016, Korea-China tensions intensified and from 2017 onward as U.S.-China competition intensified on a large scale, South Korea whose diplomacy was exposed to a flat axis of confrontation came to face diplomatic dilemmas produced by a strong-against-strong configuration (Sung, 2019, pp. 58-59). In this context, it is understandable that South Korean government didn't provide concrete explanations of the background for promoting the NNP when announcing the policy. Even if the NNP aimed at expanding cooperation with northern states, emphasizing this strongly would've risked being interpreted as a shift in alignment or as taking sides.

So what were the circumstances NNP came to emerge, and how come did it present a policy package unlike the past northward policies that were focused toward certain areas such as railways, energy and the strengthening economic relations? And what kind of background explains the fact that, even though the Moon administration and the previous Park administration belonged to different political parties, both placed wholesome Eurasia related policies at the centre of their foreign policy? Although official speeches remain silent regarding this, reports and plans do not. The Formulation of the New Northern Economic Cooperation Strategy and Basic Plan by PCNEC is a research report officially published in 2018 by the institution overseeing the NNP represents the government's voice as it also was prepared with consultation from various ministries, government institutions and academia.

The report begins with the sentence ‘A New Northern economic cooperation with Russia as centre is required to prevent conflicts in the neo Cold War system’ and emphasizes that the main driving motive of the NNP is the rising tension among the U.S., Japan, China, Russia and North Korea in East Asia (Lee et al., 2018, p. 9). At that time, South Korea understood the East Asian situation as an increase of China’s influence over the Korean Peninsula, a strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance, rising Russian interest in the Far East, and the spread of competitive country centred tendencies (pp. 63-64). Under these conditions the report stress that while South Korea will remain as core ally of the U.S., Russia can take a more effective role than China as mediator and as a balancer of power on the Korean Peninsula because of its influence over North Korea and interest in regional stability (p. 63). Therefore, the purpose of the NNP is to make use of Russia’s intention to develop its Far Eastern region to achieve improvement in relations and ultimately to induce stability and prosperity in the Northeast Asian region (pp. 65-66).

Short but similar expressions appeared in the 2018 and 2019 Diplomatic White Papers as well. MOFA explains that in 2017 the world saw the U.S. under the Trump administration shift toward protectionism, the influence of China and Russia expand, and tension on the Korean Peninsula escalate due to North Korea’s nuclear and missile provocations (2018, pp. 8-9). It also states that the external environment for foreign policy in 2017 was marked by deepening uncertainty in the international order and an increase in regional and global challenges, and that the Moon Jae-in administration’s foreign policy was carried out within the advancement of North Korea’s nuclear/missile capabilities and its provocations, intensifying competition among major states in Northeast Asia, and the worldwide spread of protectionism and country first tendencies (p. 17). NNP aims at creating in the long term a peaceful and cooperative environment favourable to South Korea amid geopolitical tension and competitive dynamics in the Northeast Asian region, thereby explaining its driving motives and background (p. 72). Similarly, for 2018 when the policy began to be implemented, the MOFA (2019) defined the environment as characterised by the rise of country first tendencies, authoritarianism, and populism, as well as the continued weakening and instability of free trade and the rules based order (pp. 19, 83).

These three primary sources show the critical juncture and the opportunity windows which the NNP was promoted in. As with the AAI, it is more appropriate to see the NNP as driven not by a single event but by the reconfiguration of the international environment: particularly the shifts in the regional situation in Northeast Asia. The sentence that runs throughout the reports which explains that the system of the “neo-Cold War” that made the NNP necessary, presents the most direct critical juncture. (Lee et al., 2018, p. 9). Two other junctures also contributed to South Korea’s recognition of the limitations and blind spots of its existing foreign policy and encouraged new attempts: China’s growth and its increasing influence on the Korean Peninsula—together with the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance making maintaining balance difficult; and Putin administration expanding strategic and economic engagement in the Eurasian and Far Eastern regions. Added to this, the weakening of norms in the international order and the rise of country first tendencies, led above by the Trump administration further strengthened the justification.

It is also reasonable to argue that opportunity windows also existed: “case-specific developments, such as a security crisis that highlights the shortcomings of current foreign policy” (Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2012, p. 603). Yet what this means is, South Korea’s northward policies took different forms under different administrations but formed a continuous trajectory. Thus it would be inappropriate to conclude that the new policy emerged simply because of a single event. What is more important is to examine what events occurred at the very moment the policy was promoted, how those events revealed the limitations of the existing foreign policy, and which goals and strategies the government consequently chose. In other words, while South Korea’s northward policy constitutes one lineage, the policy goals and strategies of each administration are structured differently depending on the events, constraints and opportunities of that period. The NNP should be understood in the same context: by examining the circumstances of 2017-2018, one can explain why a northward policy reconstructed in that particular way emerged at that particular time.

The opportunity windows that can be identified accordingly are as follows. First, since 2016, growing strains in South Korea’s relations with both the U.S. and China combined with the strengthening of protectionism under the Trump administration weakened the

stability of the existing diplomatic and economic route. The imposition of U.S. steel tariffs on South Korea, criticism by the U.S. Trade Representative regarding South Korea's trade surplus, and the raised possibility of a reduction of U.S. Forces in Korea increased uncertainty in the alliance framework and underscored the need to seek new economic and diplomatic channels beyond the existing dependence structure (Choi, 2018, p. 3). Second, when President Putin declared his intention to continue promoting Russia's New Eastern Policy and announced the expansion of economic, transportation, and infrastructure cooperation projects in the Russian Far East and Siberia, a timely overlap emerged between South Korea's New Northern Policy and Russia's policy direction, opening a concrete possibility for bilateral and regional cooperation. Third, as North Korea's missile provocations persisted and sanctions as well as discussions on military options intensified, there was a growing recognition of the need for an alternative approach that could advance inter-Korean relations through non-military paths. This context exposed the limitations of the Park Geun-hye administration's Eurasia Initiative, particularly what Sung (2019) describes as the trap of North Korea reductionism, referring to the failure of continental outreach due to an excessive focus on the North Korean nuclear issue and a containment-oriented North Korea policy (, p. 48). According to both existing studies and interview evidence, these developments were collectively recognized as strategic opportunities for the New Northern Policy, providing the decisive moment that enabled the promotion of a more comprehensive and strategic version of northward policy by supplementing the shortcomings of previous approaches.

Domestic Structure and Decision Unit

Under what type of presidency then did NNP take place? South Korea follows a presidential system which the president is the central and final actor in foreign policy, but not in the form of exclusive and authoritarian dominance (2007, p. 18). Theirs takes place within a structure that presupposes interaction with citizens and NGOs. The president remains the core axis of foreign policy but the available power resources vary according to practical factors such as the president's term, approval ratings, and intra party base. Depending on the interplay between a specific foreign policy issue, domestic politics and external threats, the president may choose to appeal to citizens or attempt persuasion in different ways (Jang, 2007, pp. 19, 21).

Yet Jang's analysis was made ten years before the President Moon came to power. The question is: would this analysis also apply to the Moon administration? First, as seen in the composition of the core actors and primary sources, the president stood at the centre of the Moon government's foreign policy, but the influence of civil society and public was more powerful than that of the National Assembly or political parties. The PCNEC consisted not only of the ministers and presidential aides, but also of experts and members of civil society than congresspeople, and direct interaction among them took place (PCNEC, n.d.a). Cooperation projects were also carried out mainly through MOUs and administrative policies, which did not require parliamentary consent for ratification. For this reason, the policy can be seen as having been promoted through a direct channel between the executive and civil society (Na et al., 2020, p. 384). Second, this pattern is also evident in foreign policy formulation. The Moon administration's North Korea policy and the NNP were strongly driven by events that drew broad public attention, such as the inter-Korean and North Korea-U.S. summits and the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics where North Korea joined. The government stated in its "Five Year Plan for State Affairs" that it would strengthen the domestic foundation of its North Korea policy by expanding unification-related public opinion, indicating an intention to use public sentiment as a source of policy momentum (Kim, 2023, pp. 142-143). Third, from a temporal perspective the Moon administration's state agendas and foreign policy goals were planned on the basis of short, mid and long term objectives with detailed roadmaps. However, President Trump's political motivations served as a key driving force and the collapse of the North Korea-U.S. agreement fundamentally shook the 'New-Korea Peninsula Initiative' that the Moon administration envisioned (Ipsos Korea, 2019). For this reason, it is difficult to classify the administration's policy as purely long term because it was heavily influenced by short term events, yet it is also difficult to see it as purely short term as its mid/long term goals were clearly defined.

In addition, the linkage between domestic politics and foreign policy is one of the key elements of Korea's type (Jang, 2007, p. 13). Since the Moon government emerged from candlelight protests¹², it repeatedly emphasized a paradigm shift toward an era of popular

¹² The Candlelight Protest was peaceful mass demonstrations in South Korea in 2016-2017 that called for President Park Geun-hye's resignation after a corruption scandal and resulted in her impeachment.

sovereignty in foreign affairs and placed importance on public expectations and participation in formulating/adjusting foreign policy (Kim, 2018). Lastly, the interaction that appears in the relationship between the president and citizens is decisive. In 2018, Senior Presidential Secretary for Civil Affairs stated that the Moon administration sought to reorganize the state power institutions emphasizing mutual checks and professionalization among institutions (Cheong Wa Dae, 2018). President Moon made inauguration pledge to eliminate authoritative presidential culture, communicate directly with the media and citizens, divide imperial powers of the presidency and create checks and balances by fully separating the power institutions from politics (Moon, 2017). However the government's agendas show that while it aimed to enhance public participation in foreign affairs, it treated this as a separate category—public diplomacy or people's diplomacy—whereas major foreign policy areas were delegated to the Ministry of National Defense, Unification, Foreign Affairs, and the PCNEC (Cheong Wa Dae, 2017a). Although public interest and participation were recognized as one component of foreign policy, there is insufficient evidence to consider their level of involvement to be high.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to classify the Moon administration just as Jang's analysis did ten years earlier. However, in the temporal dimension and the linkage between domestic politics and foreign policy, they show features closer to the representative type. The Moon government also made clear its intention to promote active citizen involvement and bilateral communication, so some aspects allow space for citizens to support the president rather than being excluded from foreign policy making. Thus they are delegative type with representative features.

3.3.2. Discursive Framing of Idea Entrepreneurs in NNP

In the case of NNP the line of idea and policy entrepreneurs is blurry. The NNP does not contain any actor who can be classified as a purely idea entrepreneur. Rather, the key actors performed hybrid roles that combined both idea and policy entrepreneurial functions. Even so, the policy shows a layer of idea entrepreneurship visible in the institutional design of the PCNEC and in President Moon's speeches.

South Korea's foreign policy system offers far more room for idea and policy entrepreneurs. The NNP clearly illustrates this, and this is most evident in the structure of the PCNEC. The committee consisted of the chairperson; 5 ex-officials—the Ministers of Economy and Finance, Foreign Affairs, Unification, and Trade, Industry and Energy, and the Economy Senior Secretary from the Cheong Wa Dae—who were connected with the Business Council, the Research Institutions Council, and the Local Governments Council; and 18 civilian members from academia, research institutes, public institutions, business sectors and legal profession, who were linked to the Special Committees on Far Eastern Economic Cooperation, Hydrogen Energy and Strengthening Economic Cooperation with Central Asia (PCNEC, n.d.a.). All of these were supported by a team headed by the Cheong Wa Dae Secretary for New Southern and Northern Policies (PCNEC, n.d.a.). This shows that the NNP began on the basis of a concrete plan in terms of the composition of personnels, and that civilian actors occupied important position in setting goals, designing roadmaps and advancing NNP.

The PCNEC provides the clearest institutional expression of idea entrepreneurial behaviour. According to its description on the official website, one of its four core roles is the blueprint designer which presents the vision for joint prosperity and future growth of Eurasia' (PCNEC, n.d.b.). The blueprint designer role precedes the other three roles and offers the overarching conceptual framework that informs subsequent planning and facilitation. This aligns with cue 1 of the idea entrepreneur definition by advancing a vision-oriented objective and simultaneously aligns with cue 3, since the blueprint function is carried out by a committee whose eighteen civilian members originate from academia, research institutes, public institutions, business associations and legal profession. Their civilian and knowledge-oriented background puts them to make broad policy visions rather than merely manage procedural tasks. The fact that this role appears first among the four PCNEC roles and provides the foundation for the dynamic facilitator indicates its conceptual primacy and satisfies cue 4 regarding involvement in early agenda setting. These features show that PCNEC included an idea entrepreneurial dimension even as it simultaneously performed concrete policy coordination tasks.

Given that the NNP was announced by the president and that government officials from the Cheong Wa Dae were included in the committee, one can argue that President Moon

played a certain role in shaping the policy. To identify which category his role falls into, this study conducts discourse analysis of five major speeches: 2017 keynote address at the Eastern Economic Forum, 2018 address to the Russian Duma speech, 2019 address to the Uzbekistan Parliament, and the 2019 keynote speech at the Korea-Kazakhstan Business Forum. President Moon consistently begins by emphasizing deep historical and cultural commonalities thereby explaining why cooperation should be pursued before presenting concrete policy measures.

In the case of 2017, ‘Times have changed, yet the Far East is still full of potential and charm,’ ‘Today, the Far East is a land of hope that can lead cooperation and shared prosperity not only for Russia but also for Northeast Asian states including South Korea,’ and ‘This hope’s becoming reality under leadership of President Putin, and South Korea will also deepen cooperation with Russia and Northeast Asian states with the motto of the Eastern Economic Forum: Let us create a new reality’ all present the region as a symbolic space of opportunity and shared destiny showing how broad meanings are used to justify cooperation. Likewise, the sentences ‘This Far Eastern region is a place where Russians and Koreans have long worked together’; ‘it is land that was pioneered by the ancestors of Russia and where the ancestors of Korea came and lived together’; ‘this land of frozen earth became warm through the sweat of Russians and the sweat of Koreans’ connect current cooperation to a shared origin story, suggesting that future partnership is a natural continuation of the past rather than a new or artificial initiative (Moon, 2017).

Also he described Russia as forests and a land full of energy, reminding tiger moving between Siberia and Mount Baekdu of Korea (Moon, 2017). As tiger is sacred for Koreans, President Putin is also said to resemble a Siberian tiger in spirit, and “in” in his name Moon Jae-in signifies tiger: thus they share courage and spirit which will help the co-development of the Far East (Moon, 2017). The importance of this sentence is that it uses symbols and shared identity. The speech creates an emotional link between South Korea and Russia, cooperation in the Far East is therefore presented not as a strategic calculation but as something natural for two peoples who share courage and spirit. This kind of symbolic storytelling gives legitimacy to cooperation and creates an optimistic belief that future development will succeed, which is a typical feature of an idea-oriented discourse. The final sentences, ‘I feel the long and deep relationship between our two

countries,' 'we have shared memories and experiences of living and helping one another in the Far East,' 'these memories will be the strength that allows us to live together in the future,' 'and these experiences will be the foundation for greater development,' 'Through the Mariinsky Far East Theater, I feel President Putin's strong commitment to the New Eastern Policy.' They make cooperation appear emotionally legitimate: the past is presented as proof that both sides already belong together, so working together now feels like returning to something familiar rather than creating something new (Moon, 2017).

And lastly, he emphasized TSR is together with Korean history. Mentioning special envoy's boarding to the train for the Hague Peace Conference in 1907 and marathon gold medallist's boarding to Berlin in 1936, he said the connection of their railways and TSR will become a passage that links the Eurasian Continent and the seas (Moon, 2017). He used history to make the project feel meaningful: by recalling historical figures the railway becomes part of a shared past, so linking it today is presented as completing something that started long before.

In 2018 Russian Duma, the President started the speech saying 'The vast continent of Eurasia is a space where large and small civilizations move toward the future through exchange and interaction, nurturing hope,' 'President Vladimir Putin's New Eastern Policy is a declaration of the Eurasian era that contains the dream of peace and shared prosperity,' 'It is a grand plan to place the strengths of Western civilization and the strengths of Eastern civilization into the great melting pot of Eurasia, and present a new vision to humanity' (Moon, 2018). These sentences also included ideational expressions that bring justification to the region and Russia's counterpart policy they aspire to cooperate with by blowing positive idea into them. This also shows the importance President put on Russia's New Eastern Policy in accomplishing NNP.

Additionally, 'The Korean people also hope for peace and shared prosperity not only on the Korean Peninsula but throughout Northeast Asia,' 'The New Northern Policy that I announced at last year's Eastern Economic Forum is the dream of the Korean people that responds to the New Eastern Policy,' 'I have sincerely worked, believing that cooperation between South Korea and Russia is the cornerstone of peace on the Korean Peninsula and the prosperity of Northeast Asia,' 'The dreams that both countries have in the Far East are no different,' 'Working for peace and prosperity in Eurasia is a mission entrusted to

all of us by our citizens’ and ‘I hope that through close cooperation between our two countries, our peoples will become happier, and that our citizens will feel the value of our relations in their everyday lives’ build a narrative which cooperation is not the product of state elites alone, but the continuation of public expectations and shared duty of society (Moon, 2018). By grounding policy aims in the hopes of people and linking prosperity to everyday experience, these sentences present bilateral cooperation based on NNP as something legitimate, desirable and morally positive rather than purely strategic. In this way, partnership with Russia is positioned as a collective project that answers citizens’ dreams, reinforces a shared mission and promises for daily life.

Furthermore, in 2018 at Russian Duma he highlighted the symbolic and practical depth of South Korea-Russia cooperation by recalling his visit to Geoje Island where the icebreaking LNG vessel Vladimir Rusanov conducted a trial departure, an event he presented as a joint technological achievement that drew global attention to Eurasia and the Arctic. He framed this as evidence of South Korea’s commitment to working with Russia and sign of the potential for cooperation across Eurasia with mutual trust and shared aspirations. The President also situated contemporary cooperation within a longer historical trajectory with early 19th century contacts between Korean envoys and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing which described as the foundation of a relationship with goodwill and respect. He emphasized that Russia’s early support fostered enduring ties arguing that the historical affinity is reflected today in the positive reception of Korean industrial products among the Russian public, thereby linking past diplomatic encounters with present day economic and technological collaboration (Moon, 2018). The importance of these sentences is that they present the cooperation not as strategic calculation but continuation of shared experience and friendship. By connecting personal experience to concrete project and bringing historical and cultural elements, the speech creates emotional connection and symbolic meaning. Past gestures of help and present achievements are linked so that current cooperation appears natural and rooted in a long relationship. In this way, future partnership is made to feel not only possible but expected.

Lastly in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 2019, he said ‘I am convinced that the exchanges with Uzbekistan, a country that has long been a friend of Korea, will lead to innovation

in the twenty-first century and achieve joint prosperity for both countries,' 'This place, Kazakhstan, which is more than 4,500 km away from Seoul, feels very close and war' And 'The two countries have similar language and culture. The word order is the same, and there are many words with similar pronunciation and meaning. Both peoples have the Mongolian spot, and the culture of respecting elders is also similar' (Moon, 2019a; Moon, 2019b). They also present cooperation as something grounded in familiarity by utilizing the words of emotional proximity and cultural kinship. Cooperation is therefore framed as natural, friendly and rooted in shared identity.

Particularly his speech in Uzbekistan Moon emphasized that South Korea and Uzbekistan are destined to meet through the continent, describing their relationship as uniquely special and grounded in long-standing mutual affection, deep understanding and friendship (2019a). He further framed Uzbekistan's development as inseparable from Korea's own development and expressed their willingness to share its experience of economic growth together (2019a). The significance of this passage is that cooperation is presented as a shared path rather than a transaction. The relationship is described to be long standing and unique which makes future interaction expected. The willingness to share development experience highlights companionship and support instead of competition. In this way, cooperation appears not as a policy choice among alternatives but as a meaningful journey that both countries are already walking together.

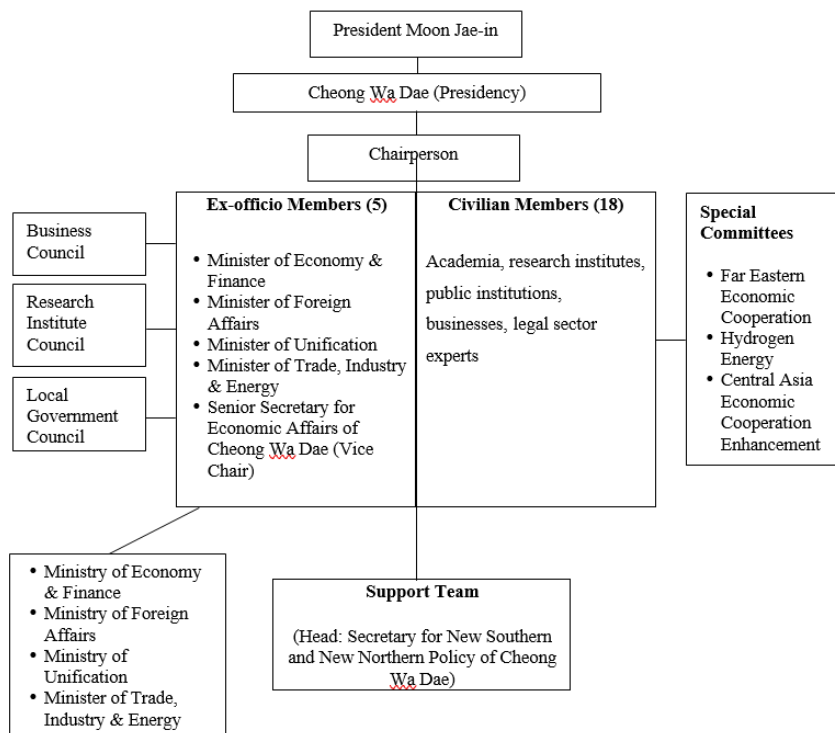
Thus, the institutional design of the PCNEC and the president's rhetoric shows the presence of idea entrepreneur components within the NNP. The PCNEC's blueprint designer role advances long term visions of joint prosperity and regional development, supported by a civilian-centred committee structure that fits the criteria for idea-oriented agenda setting. President Moon's speeches reinforce these visions by repeatedly emphasizing shared identity, cultural linkages and historical continuity creating a narrative that legitimizes cooperation at the abstract level. While neither the PCNEC nor the president function as idea entrepreneurs exclusively, their actions collectively provided the conceptual and normative basis for the NNP and thus constitute the idea entrepreneurial layer.

3.3.3. Enabling Implementation: Policy Entrepreneurs in Public and Private Sectors

Following the above analysis, the PCNEC members were clearly policy entrepreneurs as well as idea. According to the ‘Roles of the Committee’ on the PCNEC website, the PCNEC served as the control tower for the NNP maintaining regular consultation channels with counterpart states and domestically responsible for setting the basic policy direction, reviewing the implementation status and achievements of projects, establishing close cooperation systems with relevant agencies and securing communication channels with local governments, research institutions, business sector and general public (PCNEC, n.d.a.). The following figure is the organisation chart of PCNEC.

Figure 3

Organisation chart of Cheong Wa Dae, the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation and Ministries



Note. Created by the author based on the organisational chart of the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation (n.d.a).

Accordingly, its three roles besides blueprint designer are as follows: control tower which establishes the basic direction and mid to long term plans for the northward economic cooperation policy as a presidential committee; dynamic facilitator which identifies various projects and supports them so that they may develop into concrete initiatives; and policy coordinator that reviews and coordinates the implementation status and outcomes of major NNP related projects of each ministries (PCNEC, n.d.a). In practice, the PCNEC functioned as the institution overseeing the entire NNP. Its roles in project planning, project support and reviewing/coordinating ministerial NNP projects fits into the policy entrepreneur through cue 1 (concrete policy instruments), cue 2 (process management), and cue 4 (involvement in policy design, implementation, and maintenance). President Moon, in his keynote address at the Eastern Economic Forum in 2017 when the NNP was officially announced also stated that the PCNEC was the national system for cooperation for Far Eastern development and that it would prepare practical cooperation measures for developing the Far East cooperating with foreign government agencies. This declared that the PCNEC would play leading role in transforming the idea of expanding economic relations with the north into the concrete policy of the NNP, and when applying 4 cues, this likewise satisfies the criteria of the policy entrepreneur. Therefore, according to the PCNEC's explanation on its website, the PCNEC itself and its members can be classified as hybrid: policy and idea entrepreneurs.

President Moon Jae-in

As discussed above, President Moon had a role of idea entrepreneur and it was analysed by his usage of cultural, historical and ideological vocabularies in speeches. But what is unique in NNP case is that the President himself take policy entrepreneur role: not confined to talking about the vision and ideas in early settings but also following the process of the policy and reporting to public in a form of remark. After identification of commonalities through references to the counterpart's history, culture, and geography, what followed commonly in the four speeches are numerical and economic relations; mention of the NNP along with cooperation goals and directions; reference to the goal of North Korea's denuclearization; and the closing with literary quotations.

Revisiting the 2017 remark, the president stated that the vision of the NNP was 'economic cooperation with the northern region including the Far East, and especially a very close

relationship with Russia,' and made clear that this was his own intention. He also emphasized that the NNP depended on cooperation with Russia due to its regional overlap with the New Eastern Policy and presented specific examples such as shipbuilding and maritime cooperation, the development of the Arctic Route, energy development and the formation of a community, and the goal of developing these into an economic and security community through the Northeast Asia Super Grid. He underscored that the PCNEC had been established by himself, and by announcing the agreement with President Putin to launch a local cooperation forum, the introduction of the 9-Bridge Strategy¹³ as the NNP's Russia strategy, and even the need to distinguish between short and long term projects he directly showed that he understood and was deeply involved in the concrete content of the policy (Moon, 2017).

In 2018, less than a year after the NNP began the President mentioned expected trade volume and human exchanges presenting three goals and announcing project items such as the establishment of innovation centres, the expansion of science and technology cooperation centres, expansion of private sector and local government cooperation within the 9-Bridge Strategy, and cooperation in medical technology and hospital construction. He also introduced progress in discussions on South-North Korea-Russia economic cooperation (Moon, 2018). In Uzbekistan, he combined idea and policy entrepreneurial elements by revealing the goal of connecting the two states with rail, Korea-Uzbekistan trade figures, the number and scale of completed or ongoing projects, and the need for cooperation in ICT, advanced space technologies and health, and again referred to projects (Moon, 2019). Likewise in Kazakhstan he cited specific figures to show that trade, human exchange and investment increased significantly through the NNP, mentioning business sectors of Korean firms and cultural exchange, and presented three economic cooperation measures and mentioned the projects himself (Moon, 2019). These statements satisfy both cue 1 and cue 2 for policy entrepreneurs as President Moon referred to the policy itself, its goals, policy instruments and procedures, and cited data.

¹³ 9-Bridge strategy refers to NNP's cooperation projects with Russia in 9 fields of electricity, railways, Arctic route, fisheries, gas, ports, shipbuilding, agriculture and industrial complexes (Presidential Global Window, n.d.).

The fact that he mentioned not only areas of cooperation but also multiple ongoing projects demonstrates that he was well informed about procedural aspects of the NNP.

Additionally, the interviewed diplomat confirmed that projects were implemented and technical talks were made by various institutions, before summits every institution gathered policy progresses and reported to Cheong Wa Dae/the President as the overarching institution. Furthermore, the policy was pushed rapidly with the President's will: as soon as his inauguration special envoys were sent to Russia, presidential visit was made to Eastern Economic Forum, he paid state visit to Russia, and high-level visits were made in an extensive amount (MOFA official, personal communication, January 2, 2026). Thus President Moon can be classified as a hybrid actor performing both idea and policy entrepreneurial roles. To understand how these ideas and plans of the leader were translated into practice, it is necessary to examine which institutions in the field actually implemented the policy and how they participated throughout the NNP.

Public and Private Institutions

The NNP sought to complement the lack of communication and cooperation among government ministries, which was identified as a major limitation of the Park administration's Eurasia Initiative (Sung, 2019, p. 57). A frequency analysis of the 29 press releases issued by the PCNEC between 2017 and 2021 in order to identify which actors participated and led the NNP projects was conducted to verify actors of NNP.

A total of 25 government and non-government institutions appear in the materials who are introduced as the actors responsible for carrying out activities under the NNP. The PCNEC appears 23 times and served as the department overseeing most of the projects, covering a broad range of activities including general meetings, seminars, forums, signing Memorandums of Understanding (MOU), consultations and launch of councils. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy followed with 11 appearances attending 7 PCNEC meetings, the second most frequent actor after the PCNEC. The Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) appeared 5 times jointly organizing business councils, consultation channels, exhibitions, and Investors' Day events with the PCNEC. The Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated as relevant ministries in 5 and 4 meetings respectively. The Ministry of SMEs and

Startups appeared 3 times leading consultations among venture companies, and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport; Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries; and Ministry of Unification each participated 3 PCNEC meetings. The Korea Institute for International Economic Policy organized two seminars and the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry led the launch of 2 business councils. The Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Environment, and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism also attended the semi-annual meetings twice each. Non-governmental organisations—the Korea International Trade Association (KITA) and the National Research Council for Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences—organized Investors’ Day events, seminars, and the Northern Forum. Other government institutions, including the Ministry of Science and ICT and the Ministry of Education and local governments such as Ulsan City, Gangwon Province, North Gyeongsang Province and the City of Pohang attended one PCNEC meeting each.

In the PCNEC meetings where review of the policy’s progress and direction, the PCNEC and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (each attending 8 times) appeared most frequently, followed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (each attending 4 times. However, although 13 and 7 ministries attended the second and third meetings respectively, participation decreased significantly in the later stages with only 3 ministries joining the seventh meeting and only one attending the eighth. This indicates that the policy’s dynamism and momentum weakened compared to earlier years (Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry et al., 2017; Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry et al., 2018; Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs of Republic of Korea, 2017; Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2019; Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea, 2018a; Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea, 2018b; Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea, 2019a; Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea, 2019c; PCNEC et al., 2017; PCNEC & KOTRA, 2018a; PCNEC, 2018c; PCNEC, 2018d; PCNEC, 2018e; PCNEC, 2018f; PCNEC, 2018g; PCNEC, 2018h; PCNEC et al., 2018h; PCNEC, 2019a; PCNEC, 2019b; PCNEC, 2019c; PCNEC, 2019d; PCNEC, 2019e; PCNEC, 2019f; PCNEC et al., 2019g; PCNEC et al., 2019h; PCNEC, 2020a; PCNEC, 2020b; PCNEC, 2020c; PCNEC et al., 2020d).

The materials analysed in this study consist of reports on the projects carried out by the government under the NNP, including the launch of the Korea-Russia Council, the activation of consultation channels for the 9-bridge projects, efforts to strengthen the foundation for economic cooperation, the full scale promotion of the northward policy, seminars on the achievements and future directions of Korea-Central Asia cooperation, vision and strategy seminars, forums, enhanced energy cooperation, and public-private consultations. As the institutions responsible for each sector of the NNP, these actors pushed concrete policy procedures and oversaw the relevant processes, and, although not explicitly stated, carried out projects using their own budgets. For these reasons, they fully satisfy cues 1 and 2 and are appropriately classified as policy entrepreneurs.

The interview with a diplomat strengthened these findings. According to the official, ministries were the main actors that planned, implemented the policy and related projects while keeping in touch with foreign counterparts. Although PCNEC existed as an overarching institution, a single institution faces limitations in possessing expertise across all policy areas. As a result the NNP was implemented according to sectoral divisions, such as maritime-related policies by the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, diplomatic affairs by the Foreign Ministry, and other ministries were informed of what the respective institutions were doing. In addition, although various councils and committees existed with partner countries ministries had overlapping relationships: for instance in joint economic committees the Minister of Economy and Finance served as the chief representative placing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a lower position, whereas in foreign affairs-related consultation bodies the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took the leading role. Therefore, unlike AAI, the NNP didn't operate under a structure led by a single ministry or institution. PCNEC served as the coordinating body yet all ministries implemented policies within their respective fields (MOFA official, personal communication, January 2, 2026).

Therefore, the idea entrepreneurs in the NNP can be identified as President Moon and the PCNEC. As shown in the composition of the PCNEC and the division of its roles, these actors occupied a central position in designing the overall vision and establishing the legitimacy of cooperation with the northern region. The PCNEC's proposals for joint prosperity, the establishment of mid to long term basic plans and the blueprint for the

development of the northern region satisfy cue 1 by advancing vision-oriented objectives, while its civilian centred structure clearly reflects the criteria of cue 3. President Moon's speeches also align with the idea entrepreneurial role as they emphasize historical, identity-based and cultural linkages with partner states, and repeatedly use abstract messages such as references to the Koryoin community, 'a land of hope' and 'joint prosperity' thereby reinforcing the ideal purpose and symbolic meaning of cooperation.

The policy entrepreneurs of the NNP include the PCNEC at the centre, the government ministries such as the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Economy and Finance, Foreign Affairs and SMEs and Startups, the implementing institutions such as KOTRA and the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the president himself. These actors designed and managed policy instruments and procedures by advancing the 9-Bridge Strategy, setting trade and investment targets, identifying projects and operating consultation mechanisms, expanding the participation of local governments and the private sector, and reviewing the progress of each ministry's NNP projects. The president also satisfied both cue 1 with concrete policy instruments and cue 2 process management by going beyond the presentation of visions and talk about specific projects, numerical targets and coordination at the implementation stage. In addition, the participation of various ministries and institutions identified in the PCNEC press releases demonstrates active involvement in the design and execution of the policy, and these actors can therefore be classified as the policy entrepreneurs who substantively drove the NNP.

Outcome

The NNP made visible achievements. In the time South Korea-Russia relations reached the highest level with increased diplomatic contacts, trade volume and institutional frameworks prepared (MOFA official, personal communication, January 2, 2026). The policy achieved visible expansion across energy, infrastructure, trade, agriculture and fisheries, transportation, health cooperation and SME support: responding to the structural reality that northern partners possess 'abundant resources and a large market... highly complementary to Korea's industrial structure' at a moment when Korea's major industries had reached maturity and China's economic growth was slowing (Kim, 2021, p. 2). Eurasia was identified as a strategic growth engine containing 4.5 billion people, or 75 percent of the world's population, and nearly 70 percent of global GDP: a scale

repeatedly highlighted as a major driver of Korea's diversification efforts (Hong, 2020, pp. 9-10). The policy also conducted large scale cooperation programs such as shipbuilding, ports, the Northern Sea Route, gas, railways, electricity, agriculture and fisheries, while strengthening regional logistics connectivity through tasks related to the Trans-Siberian Railway, the Trans-China Railway, new air routes, multilateral electricity-grid cooperation and plans for Arctic shipping development (Kim, 2021, pp. 7-8). As the documents describe, the northern region emerged as Korea's 'new blue ocean,' functioning as a large export market, energy security base, construction and plant market, a food security production zone and a platform for ICT driven industrial cooperation (Hong, 2020, pp. 2-3, 9-10).

The NNP press releases show what projects have been done from its title already: not only multi-ministerial meetings of PCNEC, South Korea-Russia Business Council was established; PCNEC visited energy related facilities in European countries and Russia with large corporates such as Hyundai ENG, Daewoo and Korea Electric Power Corporation; Launch of the South Korea-Russia Council for the Nine Bridges and signing of MOU; holding international academic seminar for northern cooperation; holding Korea Brand & Entertainment Expo at Moscow; and appointed Youth e-supporters to promote NNP (PCNEC, 2018c; PCNEC, 2018e; PCNEC, 2018f; PCNEC et al., 2019h).

In the cultural and educational sector, NNP achieved meaningful outcomes by bringing culture and education to one of the eight core cooperation pillars of the policy and implementing 20 detailed tasks that significantly deepened human exchange and expanded South Korea's soft power presence across the northern region (Byun & Park, 2022, p. 3). The Moon administration organized its cooperation policy around expanding human exchanges, disseminating Korean language and Korean studies, spreading K-content and commemorating the establishment of relations, expanding cultural ODA, and repatriating the remains of independence activists, reflecting an integrated strategy that covers exchange, education, heritage and cultural diplomacy (Byun & Park, 2022, p. 1). NNP brought a meaningful result: compared to 2016, in 2019 tourists between South Korea and northern countries increased 60.7%, students who came to Korea increased 124% and visitors for medical purpose to South Korea increased 10.6% (Byun & Park, 2022, p. 8). The ratio of Korean Government Scholarship awardees from NNP target

countries increased from 21.1% in 2017 to 25.8 in 2021, number of elementary/middle school with Korean language course increased nearly 30% and students who take the courses increased 37%, and various activities such as online festivals, expos, Central Asia movie industry capacity building support programs, and Korean Culture Centres' cultural activities (Byun & Park, 2022, pp. 9-10, 13-14, 18).

Yet the policy at the same time showed several limitations and it is easier to identify as the term of the President who pushed for NNP is over, and the policy as well. First, the policy suffered from ambiguity in its strategic orientation as there was a lack of clear goals and key priorities creating early conceptual instability and making it difficult for ministries to identify actionable direction (Seo et al., 2022, p. 23). Furthermore, within escalating U.S.-Russia tensions, sanctions against Russia, North Korea, large scale projects such as railway, gas, and electricity linkages faced obstacles in political momentum, funding, and the establishment of a viable governance structure (Kim, 2021, pp. 12-13). And although multiple agreements and MOUs were signed, their weak legal force and the lack of follow up measures limited substantive progress (Kim, 2021, p. 13). Also PCNEC was constrained by its lack of executive authority, its time-limitedness and frequent leadership changes all of which led Russia to view it as an unreliable partner (Kim, 2021, p. 12-13). Structural limitation also stemmed from domestic level constraints: diplomatic capability and process management were weak, and the policy was not strongly institutionalised within Korean ministries, leading to slow progress in transport, logistics and energy projects that required deep intergovernmental coordination (Seo et al., 2022, p. 23). The policy was also showed limitation with low regional visibility and insufficient demand driven design: South Korea's initiatives often reflected a Korea-centred perspective rather than the needs of northern partners reducing the degree of reciprocal engagement (Seo et al., 2022, p. 29).

The official similarly suggested two limitations: geopolitical limitation and lack of systematicity of institution. The institutional foundation was set with the NNP yet 2020 pandemic put a break to this proactive approach, and 2022 Russia-Ukraine war pushed South Korea to participate in sanction rapidly cutting down channels and foundations NNP built. Furthermore, PCNEC was not organised nor had authority and information. He admitted its importance as the counterpart of Russia's Ministry for Development of

Russian Far East, but contrary to its widely perceived importance, the institution ended up like a consulting committee only covering a few agendas such as South-North Korea-Russia cooperation, making them one of the actors than the overarching one. That the first chairman Song was political figure also showed that PCNEC served to showing Russia and public the government's dedication to NNP, yet the institution did not have 'arms and legs' and failed to ensure effective implementation and oversight. Yet despite the limitations, he added, the NNP established firm institutional foundation where South Korea can re-pursue northward policy upon in the future (MOFA official, personal communication, January 2, 2026).

3.3.4. Comparison and Contrast of Discourse and Practice

The analysis of discursive framing and practice reveals that the NNP contained two distinct but intertwined layers: a discursive layer shaped primarily by idea entrepreneurs and an implementation layer driven by policy entrepreneurs which we have revealed that same actors take both roles. While the policy does not display a clear division between purely idea and purely policy entrepreneurs, examining these two dimensions separately helps to clarify how the NNP was legitimized, framed and operationalized.

In remarks of the President, the NNP was based on in normative and identity based narratives first. President Moon's speeches repeatedly highlighted historical continuity, cultural affinity and shared identity with northern partner states. These rhetorical expressions built on abstract concepts such as joint prosperity, hope, brotherhood and long-standing friendship, acted as idea entrepreneurial elements that justified why cooperation with the northern region should be pursued. Similarly, the PCNEC's blueprint designer role positioned as the initial and concept setting function of the committee who provides long term vision centred on regional development, cooperation and future prosperity. These elements demonstrate that the NNP assigned idea entrepreneur role to certain institution knowing its importance, and was initially framed through discourses emphasizing normative vocabularies for Eurasian cooperation.

In practice, however, the NNP relied on a dense network of governmental and private sector actors whose activities mark policy entrepreneurship. The PCNEC's operational roles: control tower, dynamic facilitator and policy coordinator focused on concrete

instruments such as consultation channels, project identification, MOUs, local cooperation councils and ministerial review mechanisms. President Moon as well moved beyond abstract rhetoric by referencing specific figures, trade and investment targets, sectoral projects, and implementation plans in every major speech to NNP target countries, signalling his direct involvement in process management. The 29 PCNEC press releases further show that ministries such as Trade, Industry and Energy, Economy and Finance, Foreign Affairs, SMEs and Startups as well as KOTRA and business associations pursued projects of NNP through structured procedures and evaluations. These actors collectively produced an implementation-oriented pattern that fulfilled cue 1 and cue 2 of policy entrepreneurship through concrete policy instruments and procedure management.

As the NNP sources reveal idea and policy entrepreneurial discourses directly, let us compare the discourses by going back to the four presidential remarks. In 2017 speech at Russia by the President, he described the Far East as ‘land of hope’, evoked shared settlement history through lines such as ‘land pioneered by the ancestors of Russia, and a place where the ancestors of Korea came and lived together,’ and constructed emotional solidarity by connecting national character to the image of the tiger, which he connected it with courage and spirit, and to their Far East relations development plan (Moon, 2017). These discursive choices bring cooperation to a story of destiny and shared spirit, portraying regional engagement as something that grows out of collective memory and identity building legitimacy. The practitioners’ words show contrast. The sentences ‘As I promised, I established the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation’ and ‘in response to Russia’s Ministry for the Development of the Far East, Korea also made national system for Far Eastern development cooperation’ mark the President’s role in establishing committee with his direct order and that he understood the institutional structure of the counterpart and was involved in preparing the corresponding system (Moon, 2017)..

Similarly, in 2018 at Russian Duma his idea entrepreneurial expressions included ‘The vast Eurasian continent is a space where large and small civilizations nurture hope as they move toward the future through exchange and interaction,’ ‘New Far Eastern Policy is ... a grand design that seeks to present a new vision for humanity by placing [the West and the East’s strong points] in a great melting pot of Eurasia,’ ‘NNP is Korean citizens’

dream that responds to New Far Eastern Policy’ and ‘working for Eurasian peace and prosperity is a mission entrusted to all of us by our people’ (Moon, 2018). At the same time he mentioned political measures to expand cooperation between Russia and South Korea with specific numerical goals for trade volume and human exchange, greater plan to establish Korean peninsula peace regime that will be developed as trilateral cooperation and the sectors he expect to be in such as railway, energy, gas pipeline (Moon, 2018).

In Uzbekistan he said that, just as the ancient states of the two countries had once interacted through the Silk Road, the vision for the 21st century was to pursue shared prosperity through an Iron Silk Road that would link the two nations by rail. And Koreans would be able to participate in the limitless development potential of Central Asia, while the people of Uzbekistan, a double landlocked country would gain access to the Pacific and imagine a shared future with South Korea: the homeland of the Koryoin community. He emphasized that the connection created by the railway symbolized a new dream of prosperity that Central Asia and the Pacific could meet, and he added that this vision evoked the image of ancient ancestors stepping out of old murals to join hands once again (Moon, 2019). These four sentences are very unique, as idea entrepreneurial and policy entrepreneurial expressions are mixed up. He mentions ancient times, mutual prosperity, homeland, dream of prosperity and ancestors. At the same time even in the same sentence he mentions iron silk road, connection of two states via railway and opening a road for Uzbekistan to reach the Pacific. As an actor who’s involved in both idea generation and policy implementation, President Moon used the practical vocabularies to concretize and narrow down the field of interest while using ideational ones to touch the hearts of the listeners and advocate objectives. While calling his counterpart ‘friend and brother’ and talk about special relations and favourable impression, President Moon also talked about the amount of trade volume, number of Korean corporates in Uzbekistan, number of corporates’ projects in energy, infrastructure sector while mentioning 5G, Big Data, Artificial Intelligence as sectors for cooperation, and the establishment of a satellite direct reception station and the Korea-Uzbekistan Health and Medical Cooperation Centre (Moon, 2019).

The comparison of idea oriented and policy oriented discourse shows that the NNP cannot be understood through a single dimension of narrative or implementation. The ideational

layer supplied meaning, historical depth and moral purpose that framed northern cooperation as part of a shared regional future, while the practical layer supplied procedures, institutions and sectoral commitments that turned these aspirations into structured action. The same actors moved between these roles, shifting from symbolic expressions that justified why cooperation mattered to concrete descriptions of how it would be carried out. This dual pattern indicates that the NNP advanced through a continuous interaction between meaning making and implementation, and that its momentum depended on leaders and institutions capable of shaping both the conceptual direction and the operational path.

And surely, in press release by PCNEC and KOTRA vocabularies are procedural: ‘the First Korea-Russia Council Meeting and the Second Korea Investors Day event were held with the participation of relevant stakeholders,’ ‘the PCNEC explored the direction for advancing the 9-Bridges projects through multiple high level contacts and working level meetings since last year’ and ‘purpose of the visit is to explore ways to strengthen cooperation on electricity, gas, and the Arctic sea route under the 9-Bridges strategy pursued as core task:’ all of which solely push concrete projects and particular sectors they’re in charge (PCNEC, 2018c; PCNEC, 2018f).

The comparison shows that idea-oriented discourse and policy oriented discourse serve fundamentally different functions. Idea oriented expressions created meaning, invoked history and appealed to collective identity, presenting northern cooperation as a story of shared destiny and moral purpose. Policy oriented expressions were locked on institutional readiness, sectoral plans and procedures showcasing how cooperation projects would actually proceed. The contrast reveals that ideational discourse worked to motivate, justify and broaden support, while policy entrepreneurial discourse translated those aims into operational terms. Understanding this difference clarifies why the NNP developed through both symbolic framing and concrete implementation, and why key actors had to perform both roles to sustain the policy. This contrast reveals that the NNP depended on two separate modes of persuasion: one that mobilized support through symbolic framing and one that advanced implementation through concrete policy design. These show that the policy moved forward not only because it inspired nor it was shaped through practical instruments, but both pushed simultaneously.

3.4. FINDINGS: COMPARISON OF THE ASIA ANEW INITIATIVE AND THE NEW NORTHERN POLICY

From the perspective of foreign policy one can argue that South Korea and Türkiye share many commonalities as middle powers. But South Korea's understanding of Eurasia differs significantly from that of Türkiye. Türkiye is a country situated on the boundary between Europe and Asia connecting two continents and sharing both identities as a bridge or a central state, whereas South Korea is located at the eastern end of Asia functioning as a point where the maritime and continental spheres meet. For Türkiye Eurasia is not a fixed ideological bloc but a flexible, multi-layered geopolitical, economic and cultural space where meaning shifts across time, actors, and political contexts. In 1990s the region meant the newly independent post-Soviet states that opened geopolitical opportunity, economic routes, cultural-diasporic ties and thus new foreign policy space. With AKP it served as pragmatic and multi-directional field as an economic corridor, culture sphere and strategic arena bind with identity and history; and later a rhetoric resource and region of opportunity. By contrast, for South Korea Eurasia serves as a region of engagement to extend economic, cultural and political relations rather than identity zone. In presidential discourses such rhetorics are observed as well but are utilized to pave the road of justification, both in his speech and policy implementation pragmatic, interest-driven calculations mostly took place. Furthermore, the term 'Eurasia' came to centre political discourse in 2013. So for them Eurasia is an imagined space that expands or contracts according to policy objectives from simple geographical notion of north of the Korean Peninsula to states connected with North Korea or the former socialist bloc, functioning as a strategic space where economic, energy, security, peace and unification considerations converge.

When compared, AAI and NNP shared similar understanding to external environment, particularly critical juncture. In Türkiye's case, the critical juncture was diagnosed as rising uncertainty, multipolarization, institutional gap, erosion of Western centred institutions and Asia's rise as the new centre of gravity of global politics and economy. Importantly, this was explicitly decoupled from specific opportunity windows such as the S-400 crisis, tensions with the EU, Syria related conflicts, the Pastor Brunson sanctions or their turn to presidential system, and no identifiable short term opportunity window

was present. A similar pattern is observable in South Korea, where the NNP likewise did not originate from a single triggering event but from a perceived restructuring of the regional and systemic environment. However, South Korea's diagnosis of the structural turning point was more directly tied to its immediate strategic surroundings, such as rising tension and changing power configuration in East Asia or U.S.-China rivalry: neo-Cold War undermining the sustainability of existing policies. But here opportunity windows are also observed: strengthening of protectionist measures of the U.S., Russia's declaration to continue New Eastern Policy, prolonged North Korean nuclear crisis and straining relations with China. It is also noteworthy both countries went through events that endangered their existing relations with great powers, yet only South Korean sources identified them as effecting elements.

The puzzle of this study: why they adopted similar regional visions are explained above, then why their policy trajectories and outcomes ultimately diverged? The first explanation lies in domestic structure. To capture this dimension, the thesis applied Jang's typology which distinguishes presidential systems in foreign policy decision making: imperial, delegative, representative and institutional type. The contrast begins with how authority is organised and checked. Türkiye was assessed imperial type with delegative elements due to the concentration of authority to the presidency, weak horizontal checks but foreign policy used to secure domestic political legitimacy and justifying policy choices through value oriented discourses. South Korea by contrast shows delegative type combined with representative elements—president as final decision maker, legitimacy depending primarily on policy visibility through events such as summits and the Olympics, PCNEC functioning to facilitate interaction between the executive and experts from civil society. The divergence is most clearly visible at the level of policy trajectory. Although South Korea's policy was designed with explicit mid and long term roadmaps, its evolution was heavily shaped by short term events and external variables. Türkiye's configuration reduced reliance on institutionalised mediation and enabled rapid executive coordination, broadening justificatory discourse through value and identity oriented frames. As a result, similar regional visions translated into divergent trajectories because domestic structures filtered decision making, justification and implementation in systematically different ways.

Different domestic structures allow different types and diversity of foreign policy entrepreneurs. In this regard, the comparison demonstrates that variation in presidential systems not only conditions who can act as entrepreneurs but also determines whether idea formation and policy execution are separated or fused. In Türkiye, entrepreneurship is hierarchically structured producing a clear division of labour: the president functions as a state-embedded idea entrepreneur who forms the necessity and legitimacy of AAI, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the foreign minister Çavuşoğlu subsequently took responsibility for discursive elaboration and institutionalisation, with the minister playing a decisive role in making coherent ideational framework grounded in identity, history, morality and civilizational positioning. Idea entrepreneurship thus operates in a vertical and sequential manner. In South Korea by contrast entrepreneurship is fused and distributed. No single actor performs the role of a pure idea entrepreneur. Instead, idea-oriented functions are embedded in institutional design and presidential discourse. The PCNEC creates long term visions of shared prosperity and Eurasia's future growth, and the president's discourses construct Eurasia and the Far East as spaces of history, symbol and moral continuity. This contrast indicates that Türkiye's domestic structure favoured a centralized and differentiated model of idea entrepreneurship, whereas South Korea's enabled a dispersed and jointly produced one.

In identifying policy entrepreneurs, the AAI was implemented through a highly concentrated configuration centred on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu performed a dual role as both idea entrepreneur and policy entrepreneur combining ideational framing with defining priorities, objectives and cooperation sectors. The MFA functioned as the principal policy entrepreneur and institutional backbone changing political directives into coordination frameworks and implementation. Although inter-ministerial cooperation was discursively emphasized, other ministries largely played supportive roles rather than acting as autonomous entrepreneurs. Policy entrepreneurship in the AAI case was therefore vertically organised and strongly MFA-led. In the NNP case policy entrepreneurship was more dispersed. While the PCNEC served as the central coordinating platform, it did not monopolise entrepreneurship but institutionalised the participation of multiple ministries. Ministries such as Foreign Affairs, Economy and Finance, Unification, and Trade, Industry and Energy were

embedded in the committee structure allowing them to act as policy entrepreneurs rather than mere implementers.

Regarding non-governmental actors in the entrepreneurship analysis, as can be seen, the AAI does not include any non-governmental actors classified as entrepreneurs. Although the business sector, academia or DEIK were mentioned, they functioned as supporters or partners and were categorized as second-tier implementers. In the case of the NNP, the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the KITA were classified as policy entrepreneurs, as they worked together with the PCNEC in business related projects. In addition, the PCNEC included 18 civilian members from academia, research institutes, public organisations, private sector and the legal profession. Although they weren't specified in the primary sources, the PCNEC itself was categorized as a hybrid actor, so accordingly these members were also treated as entrepreneurs. As a result, while in AAI an individual and his subordinate institution led the policy in general, while NNP had an overall organisation which could disperse to other institutions in implementation phase.

Table 4*A Comparison of the Asia Anew Initiative and the New Northern Policy*

	Asia Anew Initiative	New Northern Policy
Critical Juncture	Uncertainty, multipolarization, erosion of existing order, institutional gap, Asia as the centre of politics and economy	Neo-Cold War system; Rising tensions of U.S., China, Russia, Japan, North Korea
Opportunity Windows	Not Identified	Strained U.S./China-Korea Relations Russia's New Eastern Policy Reassertion
Domestic Political Structure	Imperial Type with Delegative Features	Delegative Type with Representative Features
Idea Entrepreneur	President Erdoğan Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu	President Moon The Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation
Policy Entrepreneur	Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu Ministry of Foreign Affairs	President Moon The Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism Ministry of Economy and Finance Ministry of Environment Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Health and Welfare Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries Ministry of Science and ICT Ministry of SMEs and Startups Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy Ministry of Unification Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry Korea Institute for International Economic Policy Korea International Trade Association National Research Council for Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences Local governments (Ulsan City, Gangwon Province, North Gyeongsang Province, Pohang City)

Note. Content created by the author.

But why are various ministries and institutes of NNP categorized as policy entrepreneur, while AAI's didn't although both implemented projects aligning with the policies? The distinction rests on whether implementation was integrated into a centralized policy governance structure or remained sectorally autonomous: in the NNP case, ministries and institutes consistently carried out projects together with PCNEC, introduced those projects explicitly as part of NNP and attended PCNEC-led coordination and reporting meetings. In the AAI case, although ministries and affiliated institutions implemented activities compatible with AAI objectives and sometimes referred to AAI, projects were rarely defined or presented as AAI projects as such, neither the MFA classified these actors as the main implementers driving AAI.

A comparative assessment of AAI and NNP shows two differing patterns of outcomes shaped by differences in policy scope, institutional design and strategic orientation. AAI produced measurable but uneven results, while the NNP generated dense institutional activity and outputs yet ultimately encountered limits that curtailed sustainability. In Türkiye's case, the AAI aimed at broad development of relations with Asia as a whole rather than the pursuit of narrowly defined cooperation sectors or projects. Due to this reason, the initiative shows similarities with South Korea's Northern Policy under the Roh Tae-woo administration too which emphasized comprehensive engagement and gradual normalization rather than project-driven cooperation. Türkiye's trade with Asia expanded after 2019, with modest growth in exports to East Asia and the Pacific and a sharp rise in imports, resulting in a widening trade deficit. This pattern reflects deeper economic integration without a corresponding correction of structural asymmetries. At the same time, with the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia followed a more balanced trajectory. Exports increased steadily, imports remained comparatively limited and trade surpluses were preserved. Societal interaction also deepened as tourism from several Asian countries recovered strongly after the pandemic particularly with China. Taken together, these trends suggest that the AAI succeeded in diversifying partnerships and boost trade relations, even though it did not fundamentally transform trade relations with East Asia. Institutionally, that idea and implementation remained concentrated within few institutions with other actors confined to functional and supportive roles raises questions about policy reproduction capacity and policy sustainability.

In contrast, NNP was conceived as project-oriented initiative. The policy framed Eurasia for large cooperation in energy, infrastructure, transportation, logistics, agriculture, health and SME support. This approach produced dense policy activity including multi-ministerial coordination meetings, business councils, facility visits, academic forums, programs and expos. Cultural and educational cooperation was institutionalised as a core pillar too resulting in growth in tourism, human exchange, scholarships and Korean studies programs. Despite these, NNP is more assessed with limits. Unlike the AAI which covered a broad geographic and sectoral range, the NNP remained constrained by regional structural limits and Korea-centred planning logic. Excessive focus on Russia, insufficient understanding of partner countries' needs and limited prioritization within Eurasia reduced the policy's adaptability. Geopolitical constraints from North Korea further obstructed major initiatives in railways, gas and electricity. And PCNEC lacked executive authority, suffered from leadership turnover and was time limited which weakened coordination capacity. As a result, although the NNP generated extensive outputs and visibility during its implementation phase, its long term impact was limited.

When compared, AAI prioritised breadth, diversification and balance employing economic, cultural, historical and identity-based instruments to sustain cooperation across a wide set of partners, even without highly detailed project design. The NNP demonstrated the advantages of strong inter-institutional coordination, concrete planning and projectization, but also revealed the risks of overstructuring, regional concentration and insufficient sensitivity to partner demand. This contrast reflects deeper differences in how the initiatives balanced discursive ambition, institutionalisation and entrepreneur configuration. The AAI was driven by a strong ideational and discursive push allowing Türkiye to view Asia as a single, integrated strategic horizon and to mobilize multiple diplomatic instruments beyond economics. Yet this same breadth combined with a narrow entrepreneurial core centred on presidential leadership and the MFA limited inter-ministerial and public-private cooperation. By contrast, the NNP relied on a dense institutional framework and clearly delineated bureaucratic roles which facilitated early-stage coordination and execution. But the initiative's scope was unlike their declaration was limited to Russia especially, and individual ministries gradually showed more autonomy weakening the coordinating capacity of the PCNEC.

While the AAI would benefit from selectively incorporating elements of South Korea's stronger institutional coordination and project-based implementation capacity, the experience of the NNP equally demonstrates the limits of excessive structuring, narrow economic prioritization and regional concentration. In this sense, the NNP highlights the importance of strategic flexibility, partner diversification and adaptability to heterogeneous regional demand, particularly for middle powers operating under structural constraints. Ultimately, the comparison shows that the durability of middle power regional initiatives depends not only on policy ambition or execution capacity in isolation, but on how scope, institutional design and policy entrepreneurship are aligned to balance breadth with depth, coordination with flexibility and vision with sustained implementation over time.

The comparison of the Asia Anew Initiative and the New Northern Policy suggests that the effectiveness and trajectory of middle power regional initiatives are determined less by the scope of their visions than by the domestic structures that organize entrepreneurship. Both Türkiye and South Korea diagnosed a similar structural transformation in the international system and made ambitious outward looking policies toward Eurasia. Yet these diagnoses translated into divergent policy paths because the two states institutionalised the relationship between ideas and execution in fundamentally different ways. In Türkiye, a centralized presidential system enabled vertically organized model that policy entrepreneurship was concentrated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, allowing rapid translation of vision into action but limiting institutional diffusion. In South Korea, a more institutionalised and plural idea entrepreneurship dispersed policy entrepreneurship across multiple institutions under the coordination of the PCNEC, facilitating inclusiveness and integration while increasing vulnerability to political turnover and external shocks. The comparison also indicates that each case shows potential strengths absent in the other, suggesting that centralized coherence and institutionalised pluralism represent alternative but partially complementary pathways for middle power regional initiatives. This study presents that middle power initiatives cannot be understood solely through their discursive ambitions or international motivations; rather they must be analysed through the domestic configurations that determine who is empowered to bring up ideas and turn them into policy. In this sense, the AAI and the NNP reveal that the decisive variable in middle power foreign policy is not whether states

seek to expand their diplomatic horizons, but how domestic structures shape the capacity to sustain, coordinate and institutionalise such expansion over time.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined why two middle powers, Türkiye and South Korea, adopted outward looking regional initiatives toward Eurasia in the same period yet produced different policy trajectories. Rather than explaining these outcomes through policy scope, leadership personality or international alignment choices alone, the study approached through interaction between international structural change, domestic political structures and entrepreneurship.

The thesis first established a conceptual framework that treats middle power foreign policy not as a function of material capability or normative aspiration alone but as an outcome shaped by who is able to formulate ideas, translate them into policy, and sustain implementation within specific domestic structure. To do so, it integrated middle power theory with the entrepreneurship literature and developed four-cue analysis framework that distinguishes idea entrepreneurs from policy entrepreneurs according to the object they push, the primary tactic they use, their institutional location, and their phase of involvement. This framework was designed to move beyond abstract discussions of vision and instead identify how foreign policy ideas are organized, institutionalised, and executed in practice.

Building on this, the thesis reconstructed historical and structural background that made Eurasia a meaningful policy horizon for each country. In the Türkiye case, it traced how post-Cold War uncertainty, identity resetting and concerns about marginalization within a Western-centred order produced continued Eurasian orientations, resulting in AAI. Eurasia was shown to function not as a fixed geography but as a flexible political and discursive space that mixed economic objectives with identity narratives and autonomy seeking. This background analysis was necessary to demonstrate that the AAI didn't emerge from short term crises but from a critical juncture tied to systemic transformation.

In South Korea case, the thesis examined how enduring structural constraints from division, alliance dependence and great power rivalry shaped continued northward orientation in foreign policy. Eurasia, or more precisely the 'north' was analysed as a pragmatic policy space constructed around economic cooperation, security management

and future unification considerations rather than identity. By tracing the evolution from early Northern Policy through the Eurasia Initiative to the NNP, the thesis showed that the NNP was not an isolated innovation but a reconfiguration of a longstanding policy under new international and domestic conditions. Particular attention was paid to how democratization changed decision making patterns, expanded the range of participating actors resulting in blurry boundary between idea and policy entrepreneurship.

The purpose of this design was to show that similar understandings of changes in the international structure do not necessarily lead to similar policy outcomes. By grounding the analysis in domestic structures and entrepreneur structures, the study aimed to explain why Türkiye's initiative evolved through a centralized, vertically organized foreign policy system, while South Korea's policy was institutionalised through a more plural and coordinated framework centred on the PCNEC. In doing so, the study sought to show that the decisive variable in middle power regional initiatives lies not in the ambition of policy visions but in how domestic systems organize the relationship between ideas and implementation.

Analysis of this thesis is to identify who functioned as idea entrepreneurs and policy entrepreneurs in two middle power regional initiatives and to explain why these roles differed despite similar international diagnoses. The study argues that divergence in outcomes is explained by how domestic structures constrain entrepreneurs' numbers and roles, and how entrepreneurs themselves differ. It is identified that idea and policy entrepreneurs through a cue-based framework combined with discourse analysis, frequency analysis and elite interviews—in the case of Türkiye. Idea entrepreneurs are identified as actors who identified systemic change, framed the meaning and necessity of engagement to Eurasia and brought normative and interpretive logic of the policy (Cue 1 and Cue 4). Policy entrepreneurs are identified as actors who translated these ideas into concrete strategies, sectoral priorities, coordination mechanisms and implementation procedures (Cue 2 and Cue 4). Actors were classified based on what they pushed, how they acted and at which stage they intervened, rather than on formal titles.

In the Turkish case, the analysis shows that idea entrepreneurship was concentrated in the President and the Foreign Minister. The President functioned as a state embedded idea entrepreneur by recognizing systemic transformation and authorizing new Asia-oriented

vision, while minister Çavuşoğlu performed idea and policy entrepreneurial roles simultaneously. He created the ideational frame linking Asia to identity, history and autonomy, and at the same time operationalized this frame by defining priorities, roadmaps and coordination mechanisms. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs emerged as the dominant policy entrepreneur by institutionalising presidential directives into administrative structures and managing inter-agency coordination. Other ministries and public actors participated mainly as implementers, which is why they are not classified as policy entrepreneurs despite involvement in projects.

In contrast, the South Korean case shows different configuration. Idea entrepreneurship was not concentrated in a single individual but found in presidential discourse and the institutional design of the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation. President Moon Jae-in functioned as a hybrid entrepreneur by combining ideational framing with repeated engagement in concrete policy content, while the PCNEC as well worked as collective idea and policy entrepreneur by setting long term visions, designing strategies by sector and coordinating implementation. Policy entrepreneurship was further scattered across multiple ministries—including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economy and Finance, Trade, Industry and Energy and Unification which ministers were found in the PCNEC as members, managed and reviewed projects. Their involvement in planning and execution satisfies criteria for policy entrepreneurship rather than mere implementation.

Thus, as idea entrepreneurs the AAI had President Erdoğan whereas NNP had no single idea entrepreneur. For policy entrepreneurs, AAI was led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NNP involved the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, the Ministry of Science and ICT, the Ministry of SMEs and Startups, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, the Ministry of Unification, KOTRA, Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry, KIEP, KITA and National Research Council for Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences, and local governments. As hybrid, AAI had Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu while NNP had President Moon and PCNEC.

In conclusion, this study shows that Türkiye and South Korea diagnosed the international environment in similar ways. Both countries perceived critical juncture similarly, expressed as increasing uncertainty, multipolarization and the rise of Asia as the centre of the global economy and politics. These encouraged the two middle powers to pursue economy-focused autonomous regional initiatives and to attempt a recalibration of national identity. However, despite this similarity their policy trajectories and outcomes diverged. The key reason lies in domestic political structures and the composition and operation of entrepreneurs within them. In both cases, idea entrepreneurs were concentrated at the highest level, yet the pathways ideas were translated into policy differed significantly. In Türkiye, a centralized presidential structure constrained the scope of policy entrepreneurs, producing a narrow and executive-driven pattern of implementation. By contrast, South Korea enabled participation of a wider range of policy entrepreneurs, allowing multilayered and simultaneous policy initiatives. Yet, the Korean interviewer argued that this arrangement also strengthened the autonomy and influence of individual ministries, leaving the PCNEC without sufficient executive authority over actual implementers—in his words no arms and legs—and resulting in fragmentation of policy execution. The main contribution of this study, therefore, is to demonstrate empirically that middle power regional initiatives do not follow a single trajectory under structural constraints; rather, their development and outcomes are shaped by how domestic political structures organize the scope of entrepreneurs and by how these actors define problems and translate ideas into policy.

Existing literatures on middle power foreign policy and regional initiatives reviewed in this study made meaningful contributions to explaining why middle powers pursue new regional policies at specific moments in time. In particular, studies that focus on structural transformations since the end of Cold War such as growing uncertainty in the international order, the shift toward multipolarity, the weakening of the Western centred system and the rise of new regions provide a convincing account of the shared background behind the emergence of the Asia Anew Initiative and the New Northern Policy. Likewise, research that analyses leaders' speeches, policy documents and official discourse effectively present how both initiatives were justified under goals such as the expansion of economic cooperation, the pursuit of greater diplomatic autonomy and the redefinition of middle power identity. However, these literatures tend to concentrate on the emergence

and meaning of policies, while paying limited attention to how policies were actually designed and implemented, and why similar problem identified resulted in different institutional forms and policy trajectories. Particularly, existing studies often treat as secondary or implicitly assume the ways which key actors such as presidents, ministries and dedicated coordinating institutions formulated ideas and managed coordination, as well as how differences in these processes shaped policy continuity and coherence.

The contribution of this study lies in moving beyond explanations that treat middle power regional initiatives simply as products of the international environment or as reflections of leaders' visions, and instead incorporating analysis of the domestic processes through which ideas are translated into policy. By comparing the Asia Anew Initiative and the New Northern Policy, this thesis demonstrates that despite sharing similar international environment and problem perceptions, the two initiatives followed different policy trajectories primarily because of differences in how policy ideas were organised and implemented domestically. In this regard, the study makes a contribution by analysing the external environment and domestic structures of both countries through the lenses of windows of opportunity and Jang's typology. Furthermore, in examining the policy formation stage, the study identifies policy and idea entrepreneurs through cue-based analysis and their roles using primary sources. In doing so, it fills up the gap in existing literature clarifying how two major policy initiatives of late 2010s until now—since current president of South Korea Lee Jae-myung brought NNP back to their official policy agenda—were shaped not only by their broader context but also by the actors and mechanisms that produced them. Through this approach, the study argues that understanding middle power foreign policy requires shifting analytical attention from what was said to who acted, within which institutional structures and through what processes, thereby offering a framework that connects discourse centred and structure centred explanations.

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APPENDIX 1 ORIGINALITY REPORT

	HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ	Doküman Kodu Form No.	FRM-YL-15
		Yayın Tarihi Date of Pub.	04.12.2023
	FRM-YL-15	Revizyon No Rev. No.	02
	Yüksek Lisans Tezi Orijinallik Raporu <i>Master's Thesis Dissertation Originality Report</i>	Revizyon Tarihi Rev.Date	25.01.2024

<p>HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tarih: <u>28.1.2024</u></p> <p>Tez Başlığı (Türkçe): ORTA GÜÇLERİN BÖLGESEL GİRİŞİMLERİNİ ANLAMAK: TÜRKİYE'NİN YENİDEN ASYA GİRİŞİMİ İLE KORE CUMHURİYETİ'NİN YENİ KUZEY POLİTİKASI'NIN KARŞILAŞTIRMASI</p> <p>Yukarıda başlığı verilen tezin a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 157 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 26/01/2026 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda işaretlenmiş filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezin benzerlik oranı % 7'dir.</p> <p>Uygulanan filtrelemeler*:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kabul/Onay ve Bildirim sayfaları hariç 2. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kaynakça hariç 3. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alıntılar hariç 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Alıntılar dâhil 5. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5 kelimeden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç <p>Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları'nı inceledim ve bu Uygulama Esasları'nda belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tezin herhangi bir intihal içermediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumlarda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.</p> <p>Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Hanyung Lee</i> Ad-Soyad/İmza</p>

Öğrenci Bilgileri	Ad-Soyad	Hanyung Lee
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	Programı	ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER-TEZLİ YÜKSEK LİSANS

DANIŞMAN ONAYI

[Signature]
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(Unvan, Ad Soyad, İmza)

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Kadri Karan Benda

* Tez Almanca veya Fransızca yazılıyor ise bu kısımda tez başlığı **Tez Yazım Dilinde** yazılmalıdır.

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		Revizyon Tarihi Rev. Date	25.01.2024

TO HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
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DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Date: 25.1.2024

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APPENDIX 2 ETHICS COMMISSION FORM

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KURUL KARARI

<u>TOPLANTI TARİHİ</u>	<u>TOPLANTI SAYISI</u>
9 Eylül 2025	2025/16

Üniversitemiz Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Uluslararası İlişkiler Anabilim Dalı Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencilerinden Hanryung LEE'nin Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Kadri Kaan RENDA danışmanlığında hazırladığı "Understanding Middle Powers' Regional Initiatives: A Comparison Of Türkiye's Asia Anew And The Republic Of Korea's New Northern Policy" (Orta Güçlerin Bölgesel Girişimlerini Anlamak: Türkiye'nin Yeniden Asya Girişimi İle Kore Cumhuriyeti'nin yeni Kuzey Politikası'nın Karşılaştırması) başlıklı tez çalışması Üniversitemiz Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Araştırma Etik Kurulunun **9 Eylül 2025** tarihinde yapmış olduğu toplantıda incelenmiş olup, etik açıdan **uygun bulunmuştur.**

Prof. Dr. İsmet KOÇ
Kurul Başkanı

Prof. Dr. Özgür
TEOMAN
Kurul Üyesi

Prof. Dr. Selda
ÖZDEMİR
Kurul Üyesi

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