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**Building Solidarity for the Future**  
**Bilateral Cooperation Between the Republic of**  
**Korea and the Republic of Türkiye**

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In 2025, the Republic of Korea (Korea) and the Republic of Türkiye (Türkiye) will celebrate 68 years of diplomatic relations, highlighting their deep historical ties. This connection, rooted in a shared history of mutual understanding and trust, is not just a chapter but a significant volume in the international relations of both countries, and it is expected to grow even thicker in the future. These historical ties act as a bridge connecting both countries and fostering future bilateral cooperation, creating a sense of shared history and continuity.

This paper examines the historical and current relations between Korea and Türkiye and illuminates the vast opportunities for future collaboration. It underscores the importance of building solidarity between the two countries to establish a new world order beyond the current international system. Given the similarities in their ambitions—Türkiye's goal of ushering in “the century of Türkiye” and Korea's aspiration to become a “global pivotal state”—the future is not just promising, but ripe with potential points of collaboration to explore, filling the two countries with optimism and hope for the future of their bilateral relations.

### ***Historical Context and Foundations of Bilateral Relations***

The formal diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Korea, which commenced in 1957, are not merely a result of political decisions. They are deeply embedded in a unique historical context, shaped by the aftermath of the Korean War and Türkiye's significant contributions that predate this official milestone. This context forms the bedrock for a profound and enduring relationship.

After liberating themselves from 35 years of Japanese colonial rule, the Korean people faced the harsh realities of trusteeship and the subsequent division of their country. They had hoped for a unified nation, but the geopolitical calculations of the major powers at the time differed significantly, resulting in the division of the Korean Peninsula.

After three years of trusteeship, two separate governments emerged on the Korean Peninsula: the Republic of Korea in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) in the north. This division resulted in a struggle for legitimacy, authenticity, and sovereignty, leading to an intense ideological confrontation that ultimately escalated into war.

In August 1949, Türkiye made a significant move by recognizing Korea as the sole legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula. This unique historical event marked the early support and its crucial role in the relationship. On June 25, 1950, the Korean War broke out, and Türkiye, as a member of the United Nations, played a pivotal role by sending brigade-level troops to support Korea, alongside the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada.

Türkiye's significant contributions during the Korean War, where it faced numerous challenges on the battlefield, left an indelible mark on the Korean people. The war concluded with an armistice in July 1953, after which Korea established diplomatic relations with Türkiye a few years later, in 1957.

This unique relationship has fostered close ties between the two countries across political, economic, social, cultural, and military domains. Türkiye's support during the Korean War laid a strong foundation for a partnership that has since evolved into a profound brotherhood. As we reflect on 68 years of diplomatic relations, it is evident that the connections between Korea

and Türkiye hold historic significance and promise for the future, symbolizing a shared history and continuity.

### ***Economic Cooperation: A Pillar of Growth***

Economic collaboration is a fundamental aspect of the relationship between Korea and Türkiye. As G20 members, both nations are dedicated to free trade, exemplified by the Korea-Türkiye Free Trade Agreement (FTA) established in 2013. This agreement has significantly boosted bilateral trade volumes and diversified the exchange of goods and services, highlighting the importance of this relationship.

During the 2010s, companies such as SK E&C, Daelim, and Hyundai E&C participated in large-scale national projects—the Eurasia Undersea Tunnel, the Third Bosphorus Bridge, and the Çanakkale Bridge—initiated under President Erdogan's strong political leadership. These efforts aimed to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Türkiye in 2023 and further expand Korea's presence in Türkiye.

Trade between Korea and Türkiye has consistently grown, reaching nearly \$9 billion in 2024—a remarkable increase since the FTA was enacted. Korea primarily exports machinery, electronic and electrical equipment, and automobiles to Türkiye, while Türkiye exports apparel, agricultural products, and metal goods to Korea.

Despite the substantial growth in trade, a significant trade imbalance persists between the two countries. Since the onset of trade relations, Korea has experienced a chronic trade surplus with Türkiye. Addressing this imbalance is crucial to strengthening their economic ties, fostering mutual growth, and enhancing confidence in their future partnership.

The potential for economic cooperation between Korea and Türkiye is vast, offering numerous opportunities for growth and innovation. Joint ventures in the automotive, electronics, and technology sectors and collaborations in renewable energy and smart city innovations present new avenues for sustainable growth. For instance, joint research and development projects in renewable energy could leverage Türkiye's geographical advantage in solar energy and Korea's technological expertise. Similarly, collaborations in smart city innovations could benefit from Korea's advanced urban planning and Türkiye's commitment to modernizing its cities. This potential fills both countries with optimism for the future of their bilateral economic relations.

Additionally, both nations actively engage in foreign direct investment (FDI). Korean companies recognize the opportunities within the Turkish market and invest in sectors such as automotive, electronics, construction, and energy, with significant contributions from Hyundai Motor and LG Group. In return, Turkish companies are increasingly interested in entering the Korean market and fostering partnerships, particularly in tourism and services.

### ***Cultural and Educational Exchange: Bridging Societies***

Cultural exchange programs and educational partnerships are vital to the Korea-Türkiye relationship, enhancing understanding and fostering mutual appreciation. These initiatives, which include student exchange programs, joint research projects, and cultural immersion experiences, are not just about sharing knowledge but building trust and strengthening the

connections between the two peoples, reinforcing the foundations of the bilateral relationship. They also open the minds of the two peoples to new perspectives and make them appreciate the richness of their cultural diversity.

Cultural collaborations, such as film and art festivals, enrich the cultural landscapes of both nations and promote the globalization of their identities. The phenomenon known as Hallyu, or "the Korean Wave," refers to the growing popularity of Korean pop culture in Türkiye. Many young Turks have become captivated by Korean culture through dramas and music, leading to an increased demand for Korean language education.

Popular media portray Korea's modern lifestyle and beauty, appealing to many people in Türkiye. Additionally, the rising number of Korean-Turkish couples reflects the influence of the Korean Wave on relationships and marriages, contributing to greater cultural understanding and exchange. This has resulted in families with diverse backgrounds.

Events such as cultural exchange initiatives between Seoul and Istanbul, K-pop concerts, and Korean film screenings are crucial in promoting the Korean Wave and establishing deep cultural ties between Türkiye and Korea.

In recent years, Korea and Türkiye have referred to each other as "brothers" or "brotherly nations" in various contexts, including government, business, and private sectors. Since the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup, this terminology has become commonplace in both countries. The discourse of "brotherhood" in Korean and Turkish societies is often invoked to suit social and cultural contexts.

While emphasizing the concept of brotherhood at the national level may sometimes create negative perceptions, the shared sense of brotherhood among Korean and Turkish people facilitates communication. This feeling is a unique to the two nations' historical experiences and cultural affinities.

A study examining how Korea and Koreans have been portrayed in Turkish media focused on headlines and controversies over the decades. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Korean War dominated coverage in the Turkish press. During the 1970s and 1980s, the focus shifted to democratization, economic growth, and the 1988 Olympics. In the 1990s and 2000s, coverage expanded to broader issues, particularly highlighting the foreign exchange crisis and its recovery. Since the 2010s, interest in Korean cultural content has surged in Türkiye, fueled by the Korean Wave. This rapid growth has positively impacted the perception of Korea and Koreans in Türkiye, leading to Korea being recognized as a strategic partner for Türkiye.

### ***Political and Diplomatic Cooperation: Addressing Global Challenges through Collaboration as Middle Powers and Seeking a New Status***

Türkiye and Korea share a vision of peace and stability in their regions and actively engage in international coalitions. This commitment emphasizes their dedication to confronting global challenges such as terrorism, nuclear disarmament, and climate change. Engaging in dialogue and collaboration within international organizations, like the United Nations, is essential for advancing their shared interests and responding to urgent issues.

Joint diplomatic efforts, including peacekeeping missions and humanitarian assistance,

exemplify Türkiye and Korea's proactive global roles. Both nations can enhance their diplomatic influence and contribute more effectively to global stability and prosperity by strengthening cooperation in international forums.

As middle powers, Korea and Türkiye are committed to improving global governance and ensuring regional stability. Both countries possess significant economic, political, and military influence, providing a robust foundation for collaboration within the international community. As they move into the 2030s, they are expected to serve as vital links between Asia and Europe, creating increased trade, security, and technological cooperation opportunities.

One platform for this collaboration is MIKTA, an informal consultative group comprising Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Türkiye, and Australia. This group was formed to discuss and respond to international issues from the perspective of middle powers. It operates on shared values and development goals, serving as a venue for enhancing global governance cooperation.

Through the MIKTA platform, Korea and Türkiye have numerous opportunities to expand their cooperation across various fields. Their joint efforts aim to develop solutions for international challenges, including economic growth, environmental sustainability, humanitarian aid, and peacekeeping initiatives.

Within the MIKTA framework, both countries actively promote economic collaboration. Initiatives are being developed to facilitate cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in both nations, thereby deepening their economic relationship through enhanced trade and investment. Agreements like the Korea-Türkiye Free Trade Agreement (FTA) align with this vision and objective.

MIKTA member countries prioritize climate change and sustainable development. Through this platform, Korea and Türkiye share experiences and best practices in areas such as renewable energy, environmental protection, and sustainable growth and explore joint project opportunities. Such collaboration is expected to contribute to achieving their sustainable development goals.

The MIKTA framework also allows for increased cooperation between Korea and Türkiye in humanitarian aid and disaster response. Both nations can create systems for swift collaboration during humanitarian crises, enhancing their positive image in the international community.

Furthermore, Korea and Türkiye use MIKTA to explore joint strategies for addressing international security issues. Their cooperation in peacekeeping efforts in the Middle East and Asia highlights their commitment to maintaining security and stability, which is vital in strengthening the global safety net.

The cooperation between Korea and Türkiye within the MIKTA framework reinforces the role of middle powers in the international community and contributes to achieving shared goals. By working together, both countries enhance their capacity to tackle various global issues and foster a deeper relationship. Ultimately, this cooperation is essential for both nations' peace, stability, and prosperity.

While Korea and Türkiye have historically been viewed as typical middle powers, their positions have evolved as they seek to become more active and influential players on the global stage. This shift can be traced back to Türkiye's aspiration for its "Century of Türkiye,"

articulated by President Erdogan and supported by Türkiye's foreign minister.

Political analyst and freelance journalist Klaus Jurgens noted that "analyzing modern Türkiye's foreign policy is the perfect case study of how, over time, a nation-state can completely restructure its approach to engaging with the outside world."

### ***Military Collaboration: Enhancing Security Partnerships***

Military collaboration is vital to the bilateral relationship between Türkiye and Korea. This partnership originated during the Korean War and has developed into a robust security alliance.

Both nations are modernizing their defense capabilities and improving interoperability through joint military exercises and cooperation in defense technology. In an era of unpredictable security challenges, such collaborations are essential for maintaining regional and global security.

Strengthening military ties and sharing strategic knowledge will better equip both countries to respond to emerging threats and promote peace in their regions.

In recent years, Türkiye and Korea have emphasized collaboration in defense technology, which includes joint research, development, and production of military equipment. A notable example of this cooperation is defense systems, where both countries aim to enhance their capabilities through technology transfer and shared expertise.

Both nations regularly conduct joint military exercises to improve interoperability and readiness. These exercises enhance tactical coordination and foster camaraderie between the armed forces of both countries. The exercises cover various scenarios, including humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping operations, and counterterrorism.

Türkiye and Korea also engage in various training programs and military exchanges. These initiatives help cultivate mutual understanding and professional development among military personnel while facilitating sharing of best practices in command and control, logistics, and operational strategies.

Furthermore, both countries participate in international peacekeeping operations, demonstrating their commitment to global stability. Their collaborative efforts reflect a shared dedication to maintaining peace in conflict-affected regions. Through these operations, Türkiye and Korea showcase their ability to work together in multinational environments.

Military collaboration also addresses broader regional security issues. Both nations share concerns about security challenges in their respective regions, such as terrorism, geopolitical tensions, and military buildups. Their cooperation in military affairs signifies a united front in tackling these challenges and enhancing regional stability.

As both countries modernize their military forces, the potential for deeper collaboration remains high. There are opportunities for further joint ventures in advanced weapon systems, cyber defense, and intelligence sharing. Cooperation within multinational frameworks like NATO and the UN may strengthen their strategic alignment.

Overall, military collaboration between Türkiye and Korea is a significant aspect of their bilateral relationship. Rooted in a shared history and commitment to mutual security, this

partnership continues to evolve, addressing contemporary security challenges and bolstering both nations' defense capabilities. This ongoing cooperation enhances the operational effectiveness of both countries' armed forces and contributes to regional and global stability.

### ***Challenging the Existing World Order and the Need for Building Solidarity***

The slogans "The Century of Türkiye" and "Global Pivotal State" reflect the two countries' aspirations to reshape the current world order. Competing with the Western-centric international framework, they envision a new global environment that respects diverse cultures and values. This approach aims to challenge the dominance of the U.S. and Europe, creating an inclusive system of international cooperation that acknowledges the voices of a broader range of countries and regions.

Korea aims to expand its influence at the forefront of technological innovation and the global economy. Meanwhile, Türkiye enhances its role in promoting regional stability and fostering economic integration at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. They can amplify their shared vision through collaboration, improve their standing in the international community based on their brotherhood, and establish robust solidarity.

### ***Conclusion: A Future of Shared Prosperity and Vision***

The cooperation between Korea and Türkiye goes beyond simple economic and political interests. Their shared vision and collaborative efforts will enable more effective responses to global challenges and mark a significant step toward establishing a new international order. This partnership, rooted in historical ties, is continuously strengthened through cooperation in various fields, showcasing the potential of bilateral collaboration to promote global peace and prosperity.

Türkiye's ambition of "the Century of Türkiye" aligns closely with Korea's aspiration to become a "Global Pivotal State". Both countries share overarching goals within this partnership. They can create more interconnected, peaceful, and sustainable world order by fostering solidarity and addressing everyday challenges.

As Korea and Türkiye navigate the complexities of the 21st century, the need for strategic cooperation to shape a new global order becomes increasingly apparent. This will pave the way for a future characterized by shared prosperity and vision.

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