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50th Anniversary of Turkey-China Diplomatic Ties: Expectations and Feasibility



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The BRIQ Working Paper Series

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on contemporary Turkey-China Relations. 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of the first diplomatic relations between Turkey and China. The article examines the topic from a diplomatic perspective, with a deep analysis of important events in the last five decades. It employs a realist approach to examine the past 50 years of relations. From the first year to now, relations have been getting closer, and Turkey is receiving significant amounts of Chinese Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), especially after the declaration of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Turkey's strong support for it. Turkey combines its 'Middle Corridor' and 'Asia Anew' initiative with the BRI. Lastly, this article focuses on the expectation and feasibility of bilateral ties. This article shows that the 50 years of history tell us that the next 50 years framework will develop into a larger structure. It also points out that Turkey-China relations will extend while facing internal and external challenges.

Keywords: Asia anew, Belt and Road, diplomatic ties, middle corridor, Turkey-China relations

Introduction

OBSERVING CHINA FROM TURKEY AND vice versa are two notably different research areas. From the early years of the relations to now, Turkey views China as an Economic power and UN Security Council permanent member, and China views Turkey as a regional power and influential country (Zan, 2016); (Temiz, 2017). After 50 years, this concept has been unchanged. It became the main motivational background to conduct this research to understand the expectations and feasibility of the relationship.

This research was conducted under the scope of realism theory. A realist perspective interprets BRI and the 'Middle Corridor' as increasing economic influence and soft power. The realist perspective helps research to enlighten issues under this concept. (Bullock, 2020)

Lastly, this article aims to study how growing relationships deal with issues and extend the-

ir cooperation in common strategic economic platforms. The article probes the prospect of existing ties to the future relationship. Current economic and diplomatic investments all point towards long term plans. In this regard, the article will analyze the topic under the concepts of expectations and feasibility.

Historical Background

Recognition of China was put on the agenda in 1963 by the Turkish Foreign Ministry due to Turkey's NATO identity and close ties with the US. However, it was delayed by eight years (Weimin, 2003). Turkey recognized the People's Republic of China by 1971, even earlier than the US (Akdağ, 2019). In the early years, due to being in different camps of the Cold War, Turkey did not establish close ties with China. Because of different political attitudes, the two sides couldn't establish political trust-based relations.

Major influencing factors were the Cold

War, different opinions on Uyghurs, the Korean War, Turkey's NATO identity, and Pan-Turkism Paranoia. By the 2000s, the two sides sped up diplomatic activities, so the last two decades shaped today's Turkey-China Relationship. In the last 20 years, the two countries signed many agreements in different fields like the economy, military, security, and culture. In 2000, Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Turkey, where he met with Turkish President Suleyman Demirel and was awarded the Order of the State of Republic of Turkey (Affairs, 2020).

In 2010, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited Turkey, and bilateral relations elevated to 'strategic cooperation' (Shu Jinglin, 2014). The same year, Turkey invited the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) to conduct a military exercise with the Turkish army. It was the first time that the PLA could conduct a military exercise with a NATO army (Zambelis, 2010); (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). These two important events played a key role in the subsequent decade's relationship. China's participation in the military exercise symbolized a 'sustainable relationship' between the two countries (Keskin, 2019).

With the 2013 "Belt and Road" initiative, Turkey became a natural member. Under both countries determinant support and investment, Turkey-China Relations have developed positively in many ways.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, both sides donated significant amounts of medical aid. The two sides had phone calls at the presidential and foreign ministerial levels to build cooperation against COVID-19, trust and mutual support by the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2021).

50th Anniversary and Economic Relations

The anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations often carries importance for many countries. Countries can use an anniversary to develop relations or potentially fix rooted problems. 2021 may play a similar role between Turkey and China. This year contains further significance, besides being the 50th anniversary, as it marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party. Moreover, it also marks the first year of China's 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), which contains more cooperation with BRI partner countries. As a key and natural member of BRI, Turkey is likely to benefit from it.

As previously mentioned, the two countries' ties rapidly developed in the last two decades. The two countries are approaching each other with more empathy. Think tanks from the two sides focus on each other more than ever before. Universities are teaching Chinese and Turkish, keeping the ties stable and leading to healthy mutual understanding. The two countries leaders have met eight times in the last five years and discussed building better ties and cooperation. This year has the potential to create new agenda in mutual ties. Those are expected to be on BRI, public diplomacy, trust-based relations, economy, finance, and military.

Former Chinese ambassador Deng Li mentioned that 2021 is the 50th Anniversary of Turkey-China Diplomatic Ties. He explained his feeling toward 50th Anniversary in 3 parts:

"We want to double three things:

- 1) Double Turkey's Export to China to reach \$8 Billion.
- 2) Double China's investment in Turkey to reach \$6 Billion.

3) Double Chinese tourists in Turkey and reach 1 Million visitors” (TÜSİAD, 2019).

BRI has already become the most common platform between the two sides. Besides BRI’s economic role, it also promotes a cultural role. BRI’s ‘Community with shared future for mankind’ is a sub-platform that promotes cultural exchange and extends a people to people relationship (People’s Daily, 2018). In other words, under BRI, Turkey and China will extend their trade and campaign for public diplomacy. Trust-based relations are another area that plays a significant role in shaping policies between the two sides. Therefore, the two countries need to set common strategies and interests.

Cooperation capacity between Turkey and China faces challenges, including instability in the region and structural problems (Min, 2017). Insecurity for each other has overshadowed positive developments and potential. For example, Turkey and China have different understandings on issues such as Uyghurs and international conflicts like the Syria crisis.

Despite this, the economy is the most common platform for developing mutual ties. Although it plays a major role in relations, Turkey faces a trade deficit issue. Turkey has the largest foreign trade deficit with China. Besides the economy, China shows a strong position in the financial field. China has several banks ranked Top 10 in the world. Among them, the Bank of China and Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) are operating in Turkey. Those banks’ Turkey branches focus on massive projects rather than individual services. While Turkey has a lower credit score, those banks are a chance for institutionalized investment (Forbes, 2021; Bank of China, 2017).

Lastly, military ties bring security cooperation

between two states. Turkey and China have had military cooperation since the late 1990s (Özden, 2001). China’s current military power and military technology may extend Turkey’s current rapid developments on Turkish-made military equipment and vehicles.

Belt and Road

Turkey, with its geostrategic position, has an important role in the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative. Turkish President Erdogan explains Turkey’s role as “Turkey strongly supports the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative. We became one of the first countries to support the initiative in 2013. Turkey’s ‘Middle Corridor’ initiative is the heart of the BRI.” The ‘Middle Corridor’ initiative is Turkey’s Multilateral Transportation Policy that, via its geographical location between continents and regions, creates connections in terms of transportation and economies.

According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ‘Middle Corridor’ begins in Turkey and passes through the Caucasus region via Georgia and Azerbaijan, crosses the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, and reaches China (Foreign Ministry of Turkey, 2021). Turkey links its Middle Corridor initiative with BRI based on the “win-win” principle (Xue Jingjing, 2016). Turkey is willing to harmonize its initiative, ‘Middle Corridor’, to contribute to BRI (Zhang Ji, 2020). Although the cooperation between the two countries still faces some difficulties, generally, the opportunities far outweigh them. Under current rapid developments, the “Belt and Road” seems does not challenge national interest (Sheng Rui, 2015).

Moreover, Turkey’s ‘Asia Anew’ initiative may play a larger role in BRI. The ‘Asia Anew’ initiative aims to diversify Turkey’s economic network in

Asia, especially in Asia-Pacific and East Asia. The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs announced the initiative with “Asia is becoming the economic center of the world. The international community vies for greater involvement in Asia. Turkey has deep roots in this most dynamic region of the world. Being Asian and in Asia is as important as being European and in Europe for us” (Xinhua, 2019).

“Under the common vision for the future, our goal is to further improve the win-win relationship between the two countries. This is also part of the ‘Belt and Road’ spirit”

Turkish President Erdogan released an article in the Chinese newspaper Huanqiu Shibao and mentioned that Turkey-China relations upgraded to strategic cooperation in 2010. “Under the common vision for the future, our goal is to further improve the win-win relationship between the two countries. This is also part of the ‘Belt and Road’ spirit” (Global Times, 2021).

On this point, Turkey Expert Zou Zhiqiang summaries Turkey’s role in BRI in 3 points: (Zhiqiang, 2021):

(1) Turkey is a hub country linking East and West, Europe and Asia, which can play a role of link and radiation.

(2) In terms of Belt and Road, Turkey is a strong participant and promoter of the region’s economic strength. China can enhance its cooperation in the Middle East, Africa and Europe

(3) Turkey has a close economic relationship with the EU, and the relevant tax union agreement is an important base to enter the EU market.

In this regard, Turkey aims to extend its coo-

peration with China and its strength in Middle Asia. In doing so, Turkey and China need to work on more agreements under ‘Belt and Road’ and ‘Middle Corridor’ just like the ‘Railway Cooperation Agreement’ at the G20 Summit in Antalya in 2015. The Turkish government gives importance to the Middle Corridor. Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, Adil Karaismailoğlu, regarding the Suez Canal Crisis in March 2021, said that the most convenient transportation alternative route to the Suez Canal is the ‘Middle Corridor’ (Canli, 2021). In 2017, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey completed joined railroad project, which provides freight and passenger connections between Europe and China (RFE/RL’s Azerbaijani Service, 2017). The first export train from Turkey to China reached its terminal station in China’s Xian on Dec 19, 2020. (Isik, 2020)

After the Karabakh War in 2020, Turkey and Azerbaijan built a direct railway through The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. It will make the Middle Corridor faster and shorten transit between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Huseynov, 2021).

On this point, China’s state-owned company China Merchants Express intended to purchase 51% of the company’s stock share, which operates the newest bridge, Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, and North Marmara Highway, connecting the two continents (Cumhuriyet, 2021). Moreover, China is often mentioned in the ‘Canal Istanbul’ project, which may create an alternative to Bosphorus Strait, the only connection between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea (Altun, 2020).

The Zhejiang Expressway withdrew from the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge negotiation, part of the Chinese consortium in the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge. According to the statement made by the company to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange,



the consortium wants to terminate the agreement because the terms of the agreement do not meet expectations (Bloomberg, 2021). However, the Chinese Cosco Pacific investment in Kumport Port will be one of the connection points between Asia and Europe. Kumport is the third-largest port in Turkey, located just next to the Bosphorus strait (Cosco, 2022).

Moreover, BRI was introduced as an initiative that offers prosperity to member states. Turkey gave open support to BRI by 2013, which brought many investments from China. Turkey's unemployment rate was 13.4% in 2021 (TUIK, İşgücü İstatistikleri, 2021). Especially after the Turkish Lira lost value, the country faced sanctions and conflicts and experienced pressure from other countries, hurting its economy. Furthermore, the

Turkish economy suffered due to the pandemic in 2020. The crisis deepened as the Turkish economy is directly connected to foreign markets, foreign investments, and tourism. At this point, large-scale Chinese investments played a very significant role.

Additionally, BRI allows member states to extend their influence along with BRI geography. Joseph Nye explains this situation in his Soft Power Theory as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.” (Nye, 2008). BRI countries may expand their influence as much as possible.

Besides positive comments on BRI, some arguments criticized BRI's role in member countries. The main arguments are BRI's 'Imperialist Agenda' on the countries (Greer, 2018). But it should

not be ignored that China is not the only country that can extend its influence, but other member countries can also extend their influence on the member countries. In other words, China is not the only country that has increased its influence in Turkey, the Middle East, and Europe. Turkey also increased its influence in Central Asia and China.

Turkish academia focuses on China more than ever. The number of academic articles on China Studies is increasing in Turkey.

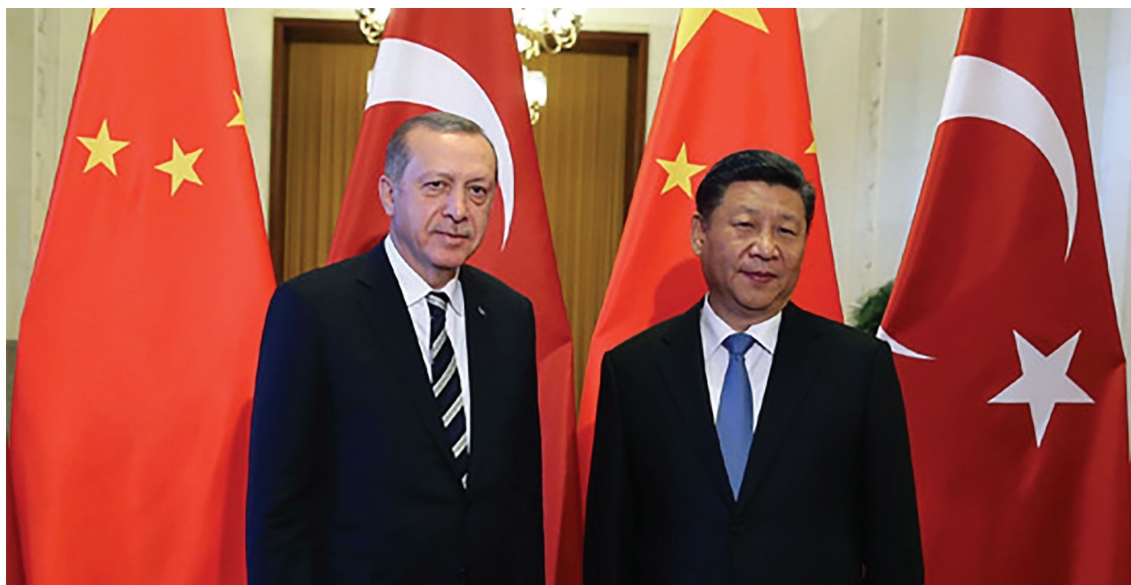
Moreover, this situation is welcome by the local countries in most cases. Countries like Kazakhstan see Turkey as a balancer toward Russia and China. It's important to note that Turkey is the ending point of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the China-Central West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC). On the other side of the coin, Turkey's 'Middle Corridor' brings China more connectivity through Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Hedlund, 2021). According to Chinese Expert Li Bingzhong from Turkey Research Center of Shaanxi Normal University, the two countries share common values of international equality and multilateralization. Turkey's successful and stable profile increases its importance for China's interest in the region. It makes China extend its cooperation with Turkey. Moreover, Turkey's European identity also plays an important role in Chinese investment to extend to the European Union (EU) (Sputnik, 2021).

Furthermore, the two sides spend great effort

on public diplomacy to help understand each other better and increase the influence on the other side. China's Confucius Institutes and diplomatic offices are the windows to understand China in Turkey. Turkish ambassador Emin Onen mentioned that Turkey aims to establish a Yunus Emre Institute, the Turkish-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and the fourth consulate in China this year (PARA, 2020; Kofteoglu, 2021). More than ten universities in both countries teach the other country's language (Sabah, 2021). The Yunus Emre Institute was inaugurated with a ceremony on 21 May 2021 (Institute, 2021).

Currently, Turkey has three consulates in China, and China has only one consulate after closing Izmir Consulate 'temporarily' (MFA T. , 2021) Most public diplomacy between the two countries occurs at governmental levels. Two of the most significant public diplomacy activities were Turkey and China celebration years. 2012 was celebrated as the China Culture Year in Turkey, and 2018 was celebrated as the Turkish Tourism Year in China (TRT, 2012, Türkiye'de Çin Yılı Olarak Kutlanacak, 2011). There are no specific NGOs that play an active role in public diplomacy. Governments organize the majority of the activities. It shows that civil society still needs to involve in bilateral ties, and governments need to open space for civil society.

Besides government efforts, academia also spends great effort to deepen academic understanding. Turkish academia focuses on China more than ever. The number of academic articles on China Studies is increasing in Turkey. However, a China Research Center is still an urgent need in Turkey. Despite the situation in Turkey, China has several Turkey Research Centers (University, 2021).



President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and General Secretary of CCP, President Xi Jinping
(Turkish Republic Presidential website, 2017).

According to Kadir Has University's annual Turkish Foreign Policy survey across Turkey in 2021, the second-largest group of participants, with 19.7%, believe that China will be the second strongest country in the following ten years. Moreover, 16.2% of the participants put China on the list of 'The Most Important Foreign Policy Events Turkey Will Face in the Next 10 Years'. The rate was 14.9% in 2020 and 6.3% in 2019. Also, 27% of the participants believe that China is friendly, and 42.2% believe the opposite. What's more, China's score increased 15.2% from last year. 18.9% of the participants believe that China is a threat to Turkey, and 52.9% thinks positively of China. China's rate in the list of 'Countries to Cooperate With' as follow; 23% in 2021, 11.8% in 2020, 10.4% in 2019, 4.8% in 2018, 3.4% in 2017, 3.1% in 2016, 3.7% in 2015, and 4.2% in 2013. 61.2% of the participants said 'Yes' to 'The development of economic relations between Turkey and China is good for the Turkish economy' (Aydın, 2021). All those

recent data show that China's visibility, positive profile, and credibility are improving in the eyes of the Turkish public. The survey demonstrates that extending connectivity and trade will create a more positive image of China in Turkey. More or less, the same situation is expected in China.

Trust-Based Relations

Since Turkey and China established diplomatic ties only 50 years ago, the two countries are still building trust. At the very beginning, the two countries established their diplomatic ties during the Cold War. Turkey was involved in the Korean War and became a NATO member, and China was exporting its ideology to other countries (Myšička, 2015; Anton, 1967) Besides ideology, different opinions on Uyghurs increase tension between the two sides. Current leaders seem determined to keep relations stable and avoid any conflict. As mentioned above, most of the activities are run by

governments; therefore government to government relations shape public opinion. The current positive political atmosphere has a positive effect on public opinion.

Turkey and China have similar problems, such as the PKK and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement. China does not support the PKK in any aspect.

On the other hand, the current global atmosphere about China is quite negative. The ‘trade war’ is getting serious between the US and China. The US claims of a ‘trade war’ and ‘human rights’ in China started by Trump Administration and influenced many countries attitudes toward China. The Biden Administration has not changed the attitude toward China. At this point, Turkey has not had any parallel policy against China. Although some opposition parties and civil society announced their counterargument, they did not affect governments decisions. Just a few comments came from the spokesman of the Turkish Foreign Ministry and spokesman of the ruling party AKP (Aksoy, 2019).

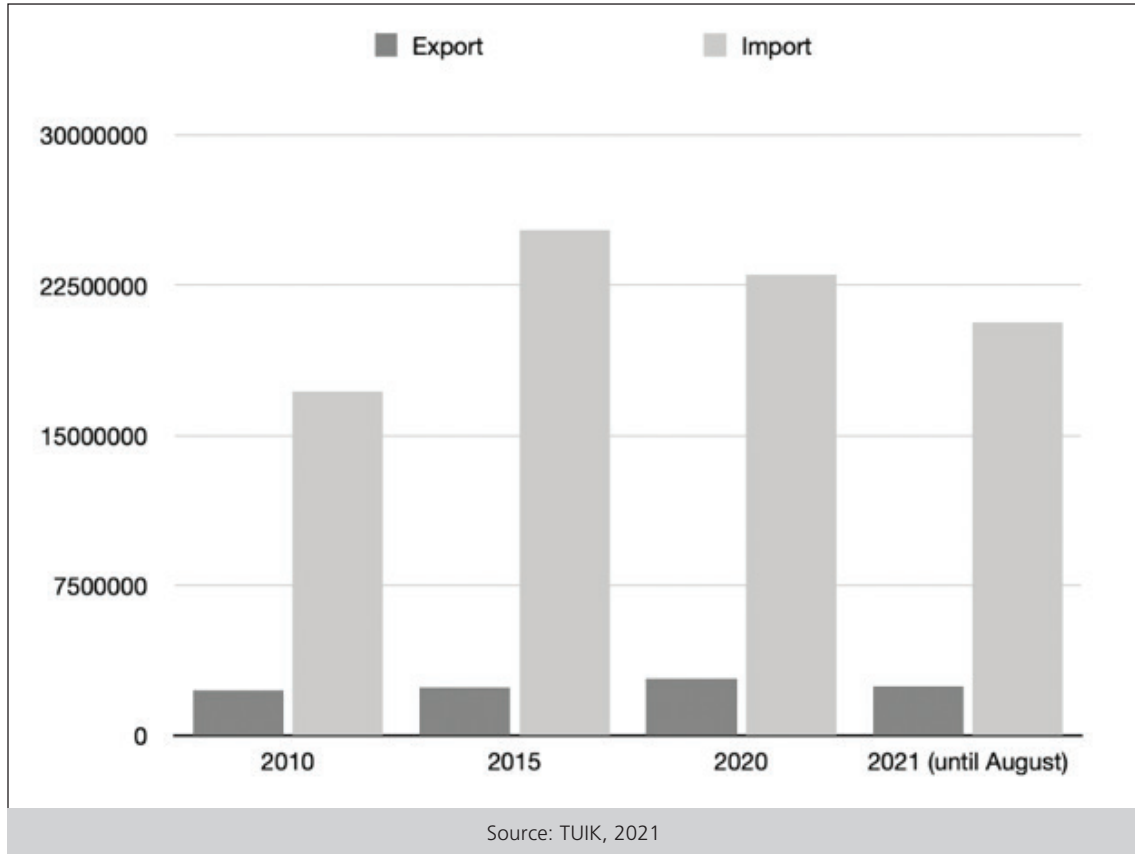
This situation allowed China to extend more importance to the current ruling party, which is why Chinese investment increased in Turkey and Turkey gained more space in China. But it’s important to note that once President Erdogan was Prime Minister, he described Chinese government security measures after the ‘Urumqi 7/5 2009 Incident’ as a ‘massacre’. It shows that from that year to now, Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkey-China Relations changed a lot under the

same party (Kartal, 2019) In the last visit of the Chinese State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi, Wang expressed the “hope that Turkey will continue to understand and support China in terms of its main interests related to China and issues of great concern to China” (MFA, 2021).

Turkey became the first Muslim-majority country to criticize China about the treatment of Uyghurs in 2019 publicly. The Turkish Foreign Ministry described the situation as “a great shame for humanity” (Fulton, 2019). Turkey is also the only country where protests occurred during Wang Yi’s visit to 6 Middle East countries in 2021.

In this context, according to an interview from Fudan University, Middle East Research Center Researcher, Sun Degang said, “Turkey and China have similar problems, such as the PKK and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement. China does not support the PKK in any aspect. China was the country that visited Turkey right after the coup attempt in 2016. It shows that China supports Turkey’s unity and solidarity. The comments made by Turkish officials hurt Chinese people’s feelings” (Degang, 2021). Chinese officials and academia are being careful about Turkey’s domestic issues like PKK and expect the same care from the Turkish side (Yunge, 2018).

China comes to the table with its security concerns, and Turkey is now hoping to change this by convincing Beijing that Turkey is supporting China’s territorial integrity and taking specific actions. Turkey and China have signed mutual extradition of criminals agreement in 2017 (Işık, 2020). Although it did not specify Uyghurs, the media and activists perceived it as a specific action against them. These claims have since been declined by Turkey’s ambassador to Washington

Figure 1. Turkey's Export-Import Rate with Mainland China

Serdar Kılıç (AA, Turkey Envoy Slams US Senators for Uyghurs Comments, 2020). More importantly, Turkey's Grand National Assembly has yet to approve the deal.

The 'Trade war' atmosphere started by the Trump Administration and continued by Biden Administration shows that the 'trade war' is not a government policy but a state policy. Moreover, Turkey faces many issues like the future of the Russian Air Defense System S-400, the Eastern Mediterranean Sea conflict, Turkey's removal from the F-35 aircraft project, and the 'Halkbank Case' in the New York Court. Therefore, Turkey does not want to be part of the conflict and has extra pressure from the US and China on the 'Uyghur issue'. Those issues sometimes bring to question whether

Turkey is adopting 'Eurasianist' policies, but research shows that those opinions are not realistic (Xucheng, 2018; Svarin, 2015). Currently, the ultimate goal of Turkish Foreign Policy is to maintain a multidimensional foreign policy as before.

Trade Deficit Issue

Trade between Turkey and China has grown rapidly in recent years, from around \$21 billion in 2013 to over \$25 billion in 2020. Turkey had \$2.2 billion in exports and \$17.1 billion in imports in its trade with China in 2010. After a decade, the numbers became \$2.6 billion in exports and \$23 billion in imports in its trade in 2020. China is the country that Turkey has the largest foreign trade deficit with.

Table 1. Turkey's Export-Import Rate with Mainland China in Number

	EXPORT IN \$	IMPORT IN \$
2010	2,269,175	17,180,806
2011	2,466,316	21,693,336
2012	2,833,255	21,295,241
2013	3,755,649	25,260,751
2014	2,970,633	25,732,865
2015	2,500,618	25,283,734
2016	2,378,537	24,852,474
2017	3,037,675	23,753,643
2018	3,078,644	21,506,001
2019	2,726,077	19,128,159
2020	2,865,865	23,041,354
2021	2,437,306	20,639,239

Source: TUIK, 2021

The Turkish side mentions the trade deficit situation in almost every diplomatic meeting with the Chinese side. China extends the number of import items from Turkey and encourages more Chinese companies to invest in Turkey. However, it's not realistic to balance the export-import rate of the two countries in this way. Therefore, Turkey needs to have a clear import-export policy toward China. It must include attracting more Chinese investment and encouraging Turkish companies to invest in China, extending business between the two.

Economic Cooperation

As historian İsenbike Togan said, trade is the first area mentioned in Turkish-Chinese Relations (Ünay, 2014). Turkey's current ambassador, unlike previous ambassadors, is not a career diplomat but a businessman with work experience in China. On the other hand, China's current ambassador to Turkey, Deng Li, used to be General Director at the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was responsible for West Asia and North Africa in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He served as Undersecretary and Head of Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Asia General Directorate, Deputy General Director of Foreign Security Affairs, and General Director of Foreign Security Affairs (Embassy, 2019). This is the first time in the history of the PRC that an ambassador to Turkey has reached such a high-level position. Current ambassadors give an idea of how two countries approach each other.

China has become one of Turkey's three largest trading partners. In 1990, trade was \$238 million. By 2000, trade reached \$1.4 billion (Chen, 2019). Increasing ties brought cooperation in the finance banking sector as well. Chinese banks like the Bank of China and ICBC are operating in Turkey. Those banks focus on bilateral cooperation projects and have provided tens of billions of dollars in financial support for local projects in Turkey.

For example, the Turkish Wealth Fund



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was welcomed with an official ceremony by the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping in Beijing (Turkish Republic Presidential website, 2019).

(TWF) and Sinosure reached a memorandum of understanding in March 2020. Under the current agreement, Sinosure provides \$5 billion worth of insurance support to Turkey (Ekoturk, 2020). Although some claim that China's investment under BRI is 'debt trap diplomacy', Turkey still welcomes Chinese investments and is open to financial activities between the two countries. During all these financial activities, two countries use the Chinese Yuan (RMB), which helps China to internationalize RMB. It shows Turkey's positive attitude to economic and financial ties with China. Lastly, it's important to note that Turkey became a founding member of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015 (AIIB, 2021).

Tourism is one area expanded by BRI. People-to-people ties bring a basement into the dip-

lomatic relationship and play a significant role. Due to strict tourist visa regulations toward Turkish citizens, visitors between the two countries are mostly dominated by Chinese tourists.

Currently, Chinese tourists rank first as the biggest spenders among other nations. China's outbound tourism total spending was \$257.7 billion in 2018 (Rosen, 2018). Before the pandemic, Turkey hosted 52.5 Million tourists in 2019 and Chinese visitors counted as 426,000 (AA, 2021). This number kept increasing until the pandemic. The Turkish government took specific steps to have the new Istanbul Airport certificated as a 'Chinese Friendly Airport' to attract more Chinese tourists. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality added Chinese into public transportation signs, but the initiative was canceled after being heavily criticized. (Istanbul

Metropolitan Municipality, 2019). Many Turkish banks started to give services with Union Pay, and some company owners provide Chinese payment methods like WeChat and Alipay. Those steps are expected to contribute to Turkish tourism.

China's technology investments and support will contribute to developing Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0 concepts in Turkey.

Turkey's economic development has encountered bottlenecks and crises, with weak economic growth, insufficient endogenous power, and uncertain economic prospects. Turkey's financial market is free but vulnerable, and its exchange rate risk remains high, which seriously affects investor expectations. Turkey's investment access threshold and other policy changes are frequent, bureaucratic problems and low-efficiency investments. In recent years, investors have been in a strong wait-and-see mood. Due to funds and policy problems, enterprises delay project bidding and contract signing. The confrontation between domestic political parties affects strategic advancement, government decision-making, and foreign cooperation is affected by domestic political disputes. To solve those feasibility issues, the Turkish government should have a clearer economic development strategy, build a strong driving force for economic growth, and adhere to the market-oriented principle and open economy. Moreover, Turkey should implement prudent fiscal and monetary policies, maintain a stable exchange rate, attract

foreign investment, and provide adequate credit support for foreign investors like China.

Energy Technology Cooperation

The two countries have been cooperating in many fields. The energy field is one of the promising cooperation areas between the two countries. Turkey is willing to have technology transfer from China. China wants to use Turkey as a technology hub. In 2016, the two countries signed an agreement on nuclear energy. The Turkish government and the Chinese State-owned China Nuclear Energy Technology Company (SNPTC) agreed on building Turkey's third nuclear energy plant (DEIK, 2016). Currently, China is building a thermic energy plant in Adana city. The projects were introduced as "China's largest fixed capital investment in Turkey and the Middle East" (Haberturk, 2020). The two countries also focus on solar energy. Turkey established the first integrated solar energy factory with the Chinese State's own China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC). The factory currently can produce up to 500 MW and will have 1 GW (KalyonPV, 2021). There are some other Chinese investments like CSUN for the demand in the domestic capacity and regional markets (CSUN, 2021).

The two countries are also involved in military and telecommunication infrastructure in terms of technological cooperation. Since the 1990s, Turkey and China have cooperated in the national defense sector, especially on the air defense system. Turkey used to sign a deal on China's Air-Missile System in 2013, which was canceled by the Turkish side (Kibaroglu, 2016). Turkey's new ballistic missile system Bora is



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Turkish committee met with President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping and Chinese committee at the Xi-hu State Guest House in Hangzhou, China (Turkish Republic Presidential website, 2017).

also a product of the Turkish-China partnership (AA, 2019).

In terms of the telecommunication sector, companies like Huawei, ZTE, Xiaomi, Oppo, and Alibaba use Turkey as a hub in the region. For example, Huawei contributes to Turkey in 5G development and plays a significant role. Huawei uses Turkey as a hub in the region and extends its services. Huawei has its second-biggest foreign R&D center in Turkey. More importantly, Turkey refuses to put pressure on the U.S. on Huawei. In other words, Turkey is a safe hub for Chinese investments. One recent development is that Chinese White goods manufacturer Haier invested €40 million in Turkey (Dünya, 2021). All those investments create job opportunities and make the Turkish economy more robust. Within all these basic parameters, China's technology investments and support will contribute to developing Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0 concepts in Turkey.

COVID-19 Era

Since the first COVID-19 virus cases in Wuhan, the virus quickly spread worldwide. Turkey has been one of the hardest-hit countries (Worldometer, 2021). The high number of COVID-19 cases make Turkey the biggest crisis area in Asia and second in Europe.

Like other affected countries, the Turkish economy and society have been affected by the virus in many ways. Recently, the government brought serious measures to block the spread of the virus across the country. Turkey has signed agreements for 100 million vaccine doses with CoronaVac (also known as SinoVac), 90 million doses with BioNTech, and 50 million doses with Sputnik.

In the days of the pandemic, cooperation in fighting against COVID-19 became another battleground of nations. In this regard, Turkey and China are two significant examples. Currently, Turkey is one of five countries in Europe that use

Chinese vaccines (CGTN, 2021). Turkey became one of the first users of CoronaVac in the world.

The CoronaVac vaccine arrived in Turkey from China on December 30, 2020. It was given “Emergency Use Approval” by the Turkish government. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan received the first doses of the Chinese CoronaVac vaccine (AA, 2021). Currently, the Turkish government has vaccinated people who work in hospitals and schools, government officials, and people over 60 with CoronaVac and BioNTech. As of October 29th, 115,162,139 people were vaccinated. (Total populations 83 614 362) (Health, 2021).

The two countries would take the 50th anniversary as an opportunity for further cooperation.

Turkish President Erdogan and Chinese President Xi had a phone call to discuss the fight against COVID-19 on April 9th (AA, 2020). On April 21st, foreign ministers had another phone call to strengthen bilateral cooperation against the pandemic (Hurriyet, 2020).

In March, Turkish President Erdogan said that if the two sides agree, Turkey may purchase 50 million doses of CoronaVac (TRT, 2020). After a month, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca announced that Turkey signed an agreement to receive 50 million doses of the Sputnik V vaccine from Russia within six months (DW, 2021). About the postponed delivery of CoronaVac, he said that the Chinese government has imposed restrictions on vaccine companies and let companies supply for China first. He also added that “My biggest fear is vaccine nationalism” (TRT, 2021).

This statement appeared as a message to companies to let them make vaccines ‘global property’ of all humans. The limited access of developing countries to vaccines has sparked the debate on “vaccine nationalism”. In this regard, China’s effort appears as “vaccine diplomacy”. Moreover, Turkey is one of the five countries that gave a CoronaVac production license along with Indonesia, Brazil, Malaysia, and Egypt (TRT, 2021).

On May 6, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said that “We signed an agreement with China for a total of 100 million doses, equivalent to 50 million doses each on two occasions. Those that ask ‘where are the vaccines from China?’ are trying to spoil our relations with China. They are the same people who were scratching the sensitive issues between Turkey and China. I can’t say they were successful, but they certainly damaged the Turkish-Chinese relationship (Communications, 2021). As an answer, the Chairman of the IYI Party, Aksener, who has made anti-China and pro-nationalist Turkish statements, and criticisms on the ‘Uyghur Human Rights Issue’, said they try to knock the responsibility on me for the Chinese vaccine issue (Duvar, 2021). According to the Chinese Embassy Press Counselor, Cheng Weihua, there is no postponement of vaccines, and the current situation is not related to the Uyghur issue (Haberturk, 2021).

Conclusions

From 50 years ago to now, the bilateral relationship between China and Turkey has grown and become closer. Although the relationship is affected by internal and external factors, it shows continuous growth in many fields. Diplomatic ties increased to the ‘strategic cooperation’ level in 2010. In 2013, BRI was announced, and Tur-

kish President Erdogan became one of three leaders that gave a speech at the first BRI summit. Turkey's message was clear: Turkey is aiming for a multipolar world system as part of its Multidimensional Foreign Policy. Turkey's strong messages on BRI tied bilateral relationships. It brought a question mark of whether Turkey is experiencing an 'axis shift' or not. Turkey's recent unstable relationship with its traditional allies also played a very important role in Turkey's strong support.

Turkey and China are involved in global and regional governance. Both countries are willing to play a role and cooperate in regional and global platforms. China and Turkey play increasingly important roles in Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, and Palestine. They are active participants in UN peacekeeping and conflict resolution. China and Turkey are both G20 members, and they are reshaping global economic and financial structures. All those mentioned factors show that there are many cooperation areas in global governance. Although there might be different attitudes on some global issues, developing relations lead both countries to have a more common understanding.

To summarize, the two countries would take the 50th anniversary as an opportunity for further cooperation. Turkey's geostrategic position and organic ties with the EU are important for China's current and upcoming investments in Turkey. Therefore, China would not want to see a country in conflict with the West and regional countries. Also, as Turkey is a Turkic and Muslim-majority country, its support or neutral position is significant for China's domestic poli-

cies like in Xinjiang. Presently, Turkey does not show any specific position and remains unpredictable.

In terms of increased technology transfer, reducing unemployment, and giving trust to other foreign direct investors, Chinese investments play an important role in Turkey. On the other hand, Turkey wants to gain China's support in UN Security Council. Additionally, there has been improved dialogue and cooperation with the recent economic crisis and COVID-19 pandemic. Under current connectors' indicators, building ties with China is a necessity for Turkey.

Currently completed cooperation projects show that multilateralism is in line with the common interests of each other. In the light of developing bilateral relations, the two countries need to set new strategies for managing their conflict between the two sides. Two countries lack clear common strategic interests. Therefore, cooperation may not be more than current investments and slogans. Common strategic interests would benefit the two countries and increase country profiles in terms of global governance. To extend cooperation and influence, the two countries can set their strategies under 'Belt and Road', 'Middle Corridor', and 'Asia Anew' strategies. Potential cooperation areas might be artificial intelligence, big data, high-speed rail, aviation, and further military technology projects. The 50th anniversary is an important date to remind two countries about their previous cooperation to analyze their future strategies.

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