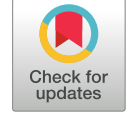




Türkiye Shanghai Cooperation Organization Relations



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Abstract

This study examines Türkiye's relations with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), its founding purpose, development, and strategic importance for Türkiye. Founded in 2001, the primary purpose of the SCO is to ensure security, economic cooperation, and regional stability among member states. Shaped in line with the goals of combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism, the SCO also provides a platform to promote economic development. In 2012, Türkiye joined the SCO as a dialogue partner and accelerated its efforts to improve cooperation with the organization. Türkiye's relations with the SCO offer significant opportunities for cooperation, particularly in energy security, trade, and regional security. While Türkiye's NATO and European Union (EU) membership processes with the West continue, it is also seen as pursuing a balancing policy in its relations with the SCO. The study analyzes the challenges Türkiye faces in its relations with the SCO, mainly how Türkiye can position itself as an independent actor in the face of Russia and China's leadership in the organization. Türkiye's efforts to join the SCO and its strategic goals in this process may open the door to deeper cooperation in the future. Türkiye's relations with the SCO have not only been limited to security and trade but have also created the potential for cooperation in large-scale projects such as China's Belt and Road Initiative. Under this initiative, Türkiye aims to become a key actor in economic development projects by acting as a strategic bridge between East and West. In conclusion, the SCO offers significant potential for Türkiye as a multifaceted foreign policy tool, and these relations are predicted to strengthen further.

Keywords

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) · Turkish Foreign Policy · Security Cooperation · Economic Cooperation · Energy Security



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Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) represents a model of regional cooperation with the capacity to influence global power dynamics, which has received significant attention in the field of international politics in the 21st century. Initially established in 1996 by the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Russian Federation (RF), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the SCO became an official international organization in 2001 with the inclusion of Uzbekistan. The organization is designed to promote strategic partnerships among its member states in various fields, particularly in the areas of security, economic, and energy cooperation. The rise of the SCO as a counterweight to the dominance of the United States (US) and the West, especially in the post-Cold War international order, has increased its importance in global affairs. Türkiye's relationship with the SCO reflects a multifaceted process that has evolved over many years. Despite its long-standing historical and strategic relations with Western countries, Türkiye has recently sought to strengthen its ties with the organization. In particular, the difficulties encountered during membership negotiations with the European Union (EU) have led Türkiye to seek alternative avenues for regional cooperation. In this context, the SCO offers an opportunity for Türkiye to rebalance its relations with the West and move towards multilateral diplomacy.

This study analyzes the opportunities the SCO provides within Türkiye's current foreign policy preferences and strategic objectives by comprehensively addressing whether the SCO can be an alternative for Türkiye. In addition, Türkiye's relations with the EU and how the SCO can be a counterweight in these relations will be evaluated, and the reasons behind Türkiye's interest in multilateral cooperation will be examined in detail.

This study will discuss the historical development of the SCO and its place among regional organizations in line with the sources in the literature. Türkiye's relations with the SCO and the diplomatic and economic ties it has established with this organization will also be detailed. Another critical point of the research is to analyze the effects of the SCO's security policies, especially on counterterrorism and regional stability. In this context, the aim is to examine Türkiye's relations with the SCO and Western institutions such as NATO and the EU and to discuss how Türkiye conducts a balanced policy between these organizations. Türkiye's efforts to maintain its relations with the West and develop cooperation with the East will be analyzed in the context of the SCO.

The study consists of three main parts. The first part will discuss the history of the SCO, its institutional structure, and its relations with the member states. In the second part, Türkiye's relations with the SCO will be detailed in the economic and political context. In the last part, Türkiye's relations with the EU and the SCO will be compared, and the advantages and disadvantages of these two international organizations for Türkiye will be discussed.

Historical Development of The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

The Establishment Process of the SCO

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was established as a regional security and cooperation platform arising from the necessity to restore the balance among the great powers in the post-Cold War period. The roots of the SCO can be traced back to the "Shanghai Five" launched in 1996 (Örmeci and Kısacık, 2021: 5). This framework, which includes China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, was born primarily as a platform to enhance border security and increase mutual trust (Aydin, 2024: 51). The main objective of the Shanghai Five was to address border disputes between member states, facilitate the reduction of military forces in border areas and advance security cooperation (Lynch & Helms, 2024: 27). The Shanghai Agreement signed in 1996 between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan



and Tajikistan marked the first steps towards regional security cooperation. It aimed to restrict military operations in border areas and promote coordinated responses to security threats. It also reflected Russia and China's efforts to stabilize Central Asia and reduce Western influence in the region (Bilek, 2022: 27). In response to the power vacuum created by the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), a security-oriented cooperation was established between these two countries (Şensoy, 2018: 42). The official institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization took place with the accession of Uzbekistan in 2001. At this point, the Shanghai Five became a broad organization that included security, economic, and cultural cooperation. The establishment process of the organization resulted in the signing of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Agreement on 15 June 2001 (Akin, 2024: 26). This newly created structure set its goals as ensuring regional security, combating terrorism, promoting economic cooperation, and contributing to regional development (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2001).

Institutional Structure and Functioning of the SCO

The institutional framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is based on various mechanisms designed to promote cooperation among member states and achieve common goals. At the forefront of these mechanisms is the Council of Heads of State, which serves as the organization's highest-level decision-making body. This council meets annually to determine the strategic goals and policies of the organization (Bilek, 2022: 32). Moreover, the Council of Heads of State is responsible for making important decisions regarding the expansion of the SCO and the inclusion of new member states (Alakbar-Zada, 2023: 1847). Another vital component of the institutional structure is the Council of Heads of Government. This council provides a forum for the prime ministers of member states to consider cooperative initiatives in economic cooperation, trade, and other sectors. The Council of Heads of Government plays a vital role in making decisions on developing trade relations, financing infrastructure projects, and strengthening energy cooperation among SCO member states (Şensoy, 2018: 47; Alakbar-Zada, 2023: 1847).

The Council of Foreign Ministers is essential to the SCO's institutional framework. This council determines the organization's position on international affairs and enhances diplomatic cooperation among member states. Moreover, it coordinates the organization's interactions with other regional and international bodies (Bilek, 2022: 34).

The Regional Anti-Terrorism Agency (RATS) is the foremost institution for security cooperation within the SCO. Established in 2004, this agency facilitates the sharing of intelligence and operational cooperation among member states to address issues related to terrorism, separatism, and extremism (Abdullah, 2019: 76). The operations conducted by this agency enhance the ability for collective action against security challenges in the region and strengthen the SCO's overall effectiveness on security issues.

Expansion of the SCO and Relations between Member States

Since its establishment, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has aimed to develop and expand its relations with various regional nations. The inclusion of India and Pakistan as full members in 2017 led to the expansion of the organization's geographical reach in the Asian continent and thus increased its global influence (Akin, 2024: 33). This integration of India and Pakistan has shifted the SCO from a framework primarily focused on Central Asia and the Sino-Russian partnership to one that includes South Asia (Bilek, 2022: 36).

The SCO's enlargement strategy represents a significant progress towards the organization's goal of increasing its influence on the global stage. In this context, Iran was accepted as a new member



of the SCO at the meeting held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on September 17, 2021, bringing the total membership to nine. In addition, Egypt, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia were granted dialogue partner status (Akin, 2024: 26). During the 23rd Summit of the SCO Council of Heads of State, Afghanistan, Belarus, and Mongolia participated as observers, while Turkmenistan present as a guest country. As a result, the organization's total number of member states increased to nine, including China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan (Sputnik Global, 2024).

Map 1

Map of member, observer, and dialog partner countries in the SCO (Sputnik Global, 2024)



Common interests heavily influence interactions between member states as prominent members of the SCO, China, and Russia are considered the organization's primary catalyst countries. China has been strengthening its presence in the SCO, primarily through its investments in energy security and infrastructure initiatives in Central Asia (Bilek, 2022: 39). Russia, on the other hand, is trying to increase its military and political influence in the region by emphasizing the security aspect of the SCO (Akin, 2024: 35).

The Evolution of the SCO as an Alternative Power Center Against the US and the West

The SCO's establishment and development were shaped mainly to create a counterweight to the West. In particular, the US military interventions in Central Asia and the Middle East and Western attempts to expand its influence in these areas have increased the importance of the SCO, which was established under the auspices of China and Russia. In this framework, the SCO aims to counterweight the US military presence in the region.

The US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 and the establishment of military bases in Central Asia mark essential turning points in the SCO's security strategy. During this period, SCO member states united, intending to reduce the US military presence in the region and create a collective defense mechanism against foreign interventions (Bilek, 2022: 41). One of the critical steps taken by the SCO to achieve this goal was the closure of the US military base in Uzbekistan in 2005 (Altundağ, 2016: 108).

The SCO serves as an alternative cooperation platform against the US dominance in the global economic system. One of the most important economic initiatives undertaken within the SCO is the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (Şensoy, 2018: 53). This project aims to establish a comprehensive trade and infrastructure network spanning Asia, Europe, and the Middle East and to create a counterweight to Western economic supremacy. In this context, the SCO has emerged as a power center that challenges the West in both security and economic fields (Akin, 2024: 39).

The SCO countries account for more than 30 percent of the global economy as measured by purchasing power and play a significant role in global defense spending. At its founding in 2001, SCO countries represented less than 17 percent of the world economy. Since then, they have made significant progress in economic growth, largely thanks to China's leadership. They account for more than 15 percent of global trade and can potentially exceed \$2 trillion in foreign direct investment stock, putting them in a position to exert significant influence on the world energy market under the guidance of Russia and Central Asian countries (İstikbal, 2019).

Relations Between Türkiye and The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Historical Development of Relations between the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Türkiye

Ethnic components are essential in establishing and maintaining Türkiye's relations with the Central Asian Republics. During the USSR period, Türkiye could not develop adequate relations with the Central Asian Republics due to this country's closed governance model. In the power vacuum that emerged after the dissolution of the USSR, Türkiye had the opportunity to establish easier ties with these countries; however, relations could not reach the desired level. This state of affairs is because Russia, with its Commonwealth of Independent States-like structures in the region, created an environment where the outside world could not easily integrate into the region, although not as much as the USSR. Over time, both Russia and China have made significant progress in the political and economic spheres, while the Turkic Republics have gained more awareness of state-building processes and foreign policy. Moreover, the SCO has evolved significantly since its inception, emerging as an influential entity within the international system. For Türkiye, the SCO is an avenue for interaction with the Turkic Republics and an essential platform for cooperation with a prominent organization in the international systemic structure.

The SCO operates through a framework that includes Member States, Observer States, and Dialogue Partners. In 2011, Türkiye applied to join the organization as a "Dialogue Partner". This application was approved during the Leaders' Summit held on June 6-7, 2012. As noted by the SCO, countries recognized as dialogue partners do not have the authority to ratify any decision. Dialogue Partner status represents the first stage of cooperation with the organization. Dialogue partners can attend specific meetings, share their perspectives, and essentially function as a consultative arrangement (Özalp, 2019: 3451).

Türkiye's interest in the SCO has increased in the context of its problems in its relations with the West, especially the bottlenecks in the EU membership process. While the SCO offers Türkiye the opportunity to establish closer economic and political cooperation with the East, it also serves as a balancing platform against the West (Bilek, 2022: 45).

Türkiye is increasingly developing its relations with the SCO, especially regarding energy cooperation and trade. Türkiye's interactions with Russia and China allow it to assume a more influential position within the SCO. However, Türkiye's NATO affiliation and solid strategic links with Western countries require a carefully balanced approach in its interactions with the SCO.

Türkiye's Approach to the SCO and its Strategic Position

In 2012, Türkiye became a "Dialogue Partner" of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, marking the beginning of a transformative phase in its foreign policy outlook. Especially in the 2000s, the slowdown of the European Union (EU) membership process and the uncertainties in relations with



Western countries led Türkiye to seek alternative strategic alliances (Şensoy, 2018: 55). Türkiye's efforts to increase its interaction with the SCO were influenced by both expectations of economic cooperation and the idea of establishing new partnerships that address regional security concerns (Akin, 2024: 42).

In addition to Türkiye's difficulties in its relations with Western countries, the country's geopolitical position plays a vital role in Türkiye's interaction with the SCO. Positioned as a critical nexus within Eurasia, Türkiye has a strategic location where it can develop strong links with both Western and Eastern countries (Bilek, 2022: 50). This geopolitical position allows Türkiye to develop deeper and deeper relations with SCO member states, especially in trade, energy, and security issues.

Throughout its accession process to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Türkiye has demonstrated a careful balancing approach. While maintaining its relations with Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union, it also demonstrates a critical foreign policy strategy by strengthening its ties with an Eastern-based organization such as the SCO. This approach can be interpreted as an attempt to strike a balance that enables Türkiye to cooperate with Western and Eastern powers within a multipolar global framework (İstikbal, 2020: 302). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Türkiye remains committed to its desire to achieve full membership in the SCO, which is expanding under the auspices of Russia and China, and emphasized that NATO and the SCO should not be seen as mutually exclusive options and that Türkiye would not abandon one in favor of the other (BBC, 2024). Türkiye's SCO membership would provide Türkiye with unprecedented strategic and geopolitical leverage if it is seen as a complementary relationship rather than a substitute for its commitments to the EU and NATO. In addition to its historically essential and deep-rooted relations with the EU and NATO, Türkiye also shares historical and cultural ties with the Turkic states. It is also developing economic ties with China and positively advancing trade, economic, and diplomatic ties with Russia. This membership could represent a significant advance for Türkiye's foreign policy. Being part of both NATO and the SCO would enable Türkiye to serve as an effective geopolitical bridge (Eren, 2022: 14).

Türkiye's Economic Relations with the SCO

Economic relations between Türkiye and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are essential to Türkiye's strategic partnership with the organization. The SCO has placed a significant emphasis on initiatives that promote economic cooperation among its member states, facilitating various partnerships, particularly in the areas of energy trade, infrastructure investments, and trade development (Şensoy, 2018: 57). Türkiye aims to improve its relations with SCO member states by focusing on energy security. To this end, cooperation has been established with countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, and China on energy trade and infrastructure projects (Bilek, 2022: 52). Between 2019 and 2023, Türkiye's exports to SCO countries increased by 85%. Moreover, it is projected that by 2023, the share of exports to these countries will account for about 10 percent of Türkiye's total exports (Davut, 2024).

Given Türkiye's significant dependence on foreign countries for energy imports, increasing energy cooperation with SCO member states is seen as a vital strategy for ensuring energy security (Akin, 2024: 45). Importing natural gas from Russia is essential for Türkiye's energy supply security and working together within the SCO framework will further solidify this partnership (Şensoy, 2018: 60). Similarly, developing relations with China in the areas of trade and infrastructure projects offers significant opportunities to help Türkiye achieve its economic development goals.

Türkiye's trade relations with the SCO are not limited to energy. According to data from the last five years, Türkiye's trade volume with SCO member countries has been increasing rapidly, and economic relations with these countries have an important place in Türkiye's foreign trade balance (Bilek, 2022: 54). Trade relations with China offer great economic potential for Türkiye. China has become one of

Türkiye's largest trading partners, and the trade volume between the two countries has increased significantly in recent years.

Economic interactions between Türkiye and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are critical in promoting infrastructure projects and regional development efforts. In this context, cooperation with Türkiye under China's Belt and Road Initiative is of significant importance. This initiative represents a vast infrastructure development linking Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, with Türkiye acting as an essential transit hub (Yıldırımçakar, 2019: 150). In addition to improving Türkiye's transportation and logistics infrastructure, the Belt and Road Initiative also enables the diversification of trade routes.

Türkiye's Security Cooperation with the SCO

One of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) primary objectives is to promote regional security, which Türkiye seeks to advance through cooperation with the SCO to address security threats in the region. The SCO's security cooperation focuses mainly on combating terrorism, extremism, and separatism. Türkiye aims to increase its effectiveness in addressing these challenges by participating in the security cooperation frameworks established by the SCO (Tümer, 2021: 321).

The Regional Anti-Terrorism Agency (RATS) serves as a key institution for counterterrorism efforts within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Within the framework of RATS, Türkiye aims to build strong partnerships with SCO member states in areas such as intelligence sharing and operational cooperation (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2017). The importance of this cooperation has increased, mainly due to the civil war in Syria and the security challenges along Türkiye's borders. Cooperation initiatives with SCO member states are essential in Türkiye's overall counterterrorism strategy. Moreover, SCO security cooperation includes joint military exercises to mitigate cross-border threats. As an observer, Türkiye participates in these exercises together with SCO member states and closely follows regional security strategies (Bilek, 2022: 58). Such exercises enable member states to improve their military capabilities and respond to cross-border challenges in a more coordinated manner.

Türkiye's NATO and EU Membership and SCO Relations

An important factor influencing Türkiye's interactions with the SCO is its continued membership in NATO and the EU. Türkiye has adopted a dual strategy of maintaining its commitment to the Western alliance while at the same time strengthening its ties with Eastern countries. In this context, Türkiye's commitment to NATO necessitates a careful balancing approach in its relations with the SCO (Akın, 2024: 52). Framed around military defense and security cooperation, NATO membership not only strengthens Türkiye's relations with the West but also imposes constraints on security cooperation with the SCO (Bilek, 2022: 60).

Türkiye's 2015 airplane crisis with Russia highlighted the challenges Türkiye faced in its efforts to strengthen its ties with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) while maintaining its relations with the West as a NATO member. The incident highlighted the fundamental need for a balancing approach in Türkiye's foreign policy strategies. Following this event, Türkiye sought to normalize its relations with Russia while adhering to its commitment to the Western alliance (Yeltin and Işık, 2017: 46-47, Taşlıcalı Koç, 2024: 65-77).

A similar scenario can be seen in Türkiye's relations with the European Union. The prolonged deadlock in EU accession negotiations has led Türkiye to explore alternative cooperation platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The uncertainties surrounding the EU accession process have necessitated the expansion of diversity in Türkiye's foreign policy strategies (Eminoğlu and Demir, 2018: 136). This framework considers The SCO an essential alternative cooperation platform for Türkiye. In

response to these challenges, Türkiye has adopted a strategy to strengthen its ties with multilateral platforms such as the SCO while simultaneously avoiding altogether severing its ties with Western countries. In conclusion, Türkiye's balance policy demonstrates its determination to develop a multi-lateral and multipolar approach to foreign relations.

The Future Of Türkiye's Relations With The SCO'a

Türkiye's relations with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have continued to develop in recent years and have become essential to Türkiye's foreign policy strategy. Türkiye pursues a multilateral foreign policy within the framework of its NATO membership and relations with the EU and has strengthened its relations with the SCO. This section will assess the future of Türkiye's relations with the SCO regarding potential opportunities, challenges, and strategies.

Membership Process

Türkiye first applied to the SCO 17 years ago, but the People's Republic of China vetoed this request. Later, the issue of SCO membership was raised during the visit of then Türkiye Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Russia in 2007. The "Dialogue Partner" status, which Türkiye applied for in March 2011, is a status in which Türkiye cannot participate in the decision-making process within the SCO. Technically, Türkiye will not be able to intervene in the SCO's decision-making processes unless it leaves this status and becomes an observer or full member (Abdullah, 2019: 119-120).

During the expansion process of the SCO, while Pakistan and India were accepted as full members, Türkiye was vetoed because of Türkiye's NATO membership. The countries that make up the SCO, when considered an organization that opposes NATO regarding security, want to keep Türkiye away from NATO membership. Therefore, it is considered that Türkiye's ability to obtain full membership status in the SCO depends on Türkiye's withdrawal from NATO membership, the suspension of its EU membership, and especially the future development of Türkiye-China relations (Khaleqi and Oghli, 2021: 113)

Due to Türkiye's close relations with the West and its NATO membership, the SCO member states did not welcome Türkiye's request to join the SCO. Türkiye's NATO membership is seen as an obstacle to joining the SCO. In this case, for Türkiye to become a full member of the SCO, it should leave NATO and stop its EU membership. It is predicted that Russia and China, decision-makers in the SCO, may support Türkiye's full membership only if these conditions are met (Akin, 2024: 62).

Potential for Economic Cooperation

Türkiye's economic relations with the SCO have the potential to deepen further in the future. The SCO has attracted significant interest as a platform that promotes cooperation among member states in the fields of energy, trade, and infrastructure projects (Bilek, 2022: 90). Türkiye has the opportunity to develop strong cooperation with SCO member states on energy security and economic development.

Although Türkiye's relationship with the SCO is relatively new, its direct ties with member states go back centuries. Its historical ties with the Turkic Republics are significant in some arguments regarding the economic, political, and cultural advantages of rapprochement with the SCO. Improving Türkiye's relations with the SCO, which includes economically growing countries such as China and India, will help Türkiye gain access to new markets (Sagbansua and Can, 2011: 82; Işık, 2016: 153).

According to World Bank data for 2023, the combined GDP of SCO member states accounts for 32.4 percent of global GDP. Of this, 26.6 percent belongs to China and India. According to 2024 data, the member states account for more than 40 percent of the world's population, a quarter of the world's territory, and a quarter of global GDP (Haberrus, 2024).



Cooperation and joint projects among member states further strengthen the SCO's strong position in the global economy. In particular, large-scale projects in energy, transportation, trade, and other fields have increased the SCO's role in the global economic balance.

In the field of energy, Türkiye's relations with Russia, Azerbaijan, and other countries are of great importance in terms of energy supply security. Türkiye has a strategic location on energy transmission routes, making it an essential actor in the field of energy security (Şensoy, 2018: 82). Moreover, cooperation with Central Asian countries offers opportunities to increase Türkiye's access to energy resources and expand trade volumes (Akin, 2024: 80).

Türkiye's relations with SCO member states are gradually strengthening in the field of trade. The increasing trade volume between Türkiye and China has created significant economic opportunities for Türkiye (Bilek, 2022: 92). Türkiye's participation in the projects carried out within the framework of China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative will be an essential step in strengthening economic cooperation.

Türkiye has strong production capabilities in the agriculture and food sectors. It wants to expand agricultural trade with SCO member countries and realize mutual investment projects. Russia and Central Asian countries, in particular, have great potential to import agricultural products from Türkiye. At the same time, Türkiye can improve its capabilities in this field by cooperating with SCO countries to share agricultural technology and expertise.

Türkiye's recent progress in the defense industry offers potential for cooperation with SCO member states. Türkiye has significantly succeeded, especially in producing drones and unmanned fighter jets. These technologies can be seen as an opportunity to develop defense cooperation with SCO member states. Moreover, Türkiye's defense industry cooperation with Pakistan shows that similar projects can be carried out with other SCO member states.

Developing economic cooperation with the SCO provides Türkiye with essential opportunities but also some challenges.

Opportunities

Big Market: SCO member states provide Türkiye with a considerable market. Access to large economies such as China, India, and Russia could allow Türkiye to increase its exports.

Investment Opportunities: Türkiye has the potential to attract significant investment from SCO member countries. Investments in SCO countries, especially in infrastructure, energy, and technology, can contribute to Türkiye's economic development.

Trade Diversification: Cooperation with the SCO can serve Türkiye's strategy of diversifying its export markets. This way, Türkiye can reduce its dependence on Western markets and gain a stronger position in Asian markets.

Challenges

Relations with the West: Türkiye's evolving economic relationship with the SCO requires a careful and balanced policy on how it will affect its trade and investment relations with the West. Türkiye's trade volume with the EU and the US is more significant than with SCO member states. It is crucial for Türkiye to ensure that these relations are not jeopardized.

Political and Geopolitical Factors: Türkiye may sometimes face political and geopolitical challenges in developing economic cooperation with the SCO. In particular, Russia's and China's dominance among SCO members may create a situation incompatible with Türkiye's interests.

Security Cooperation and Partnerships

Another critical aspect of Türkiye's relations with the SCO is security cooperation. The SCO provides an essential platform for member states to combat terrorism, extremism, and separatism. In this context, Türkiye has the opportunity to cooperate with the SCO to jointly respond to regional security threats (Akin, 2024: 84).

Türkiye has been fighting the PKK terrorist organization since the 1980s. In addition, the presence of the YPG and the rise of DAESH after the Syrian civil war have created significant security threats for Türkiye in the region. At the same time, after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, the fight against the FETÖ organization has become one of the priorities in Türkiye's security policy. In this context, Türkiye's increased security cooperation with SCO member states, especially Russia and China, may provide new possibilities and opportunities in the fight against terrorism.

Türkiye-Russia security cooperation has become increasingly prominent in recent years, especially in the Syrian crisis. Although the two countries have sometimes clashed over their interests, they have managed to cooperate against terrorist threats, especially in northern Syria. Strengthening security cooperation within the SCO could help deepen these partnerships.

As one of the two most powerful countries in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China has the potential to improve its security relations with Türkiye. China has taken strict measures against separatist forces and terrorist organizations within its borders and has effectively used the SCO's counterterrorism mechanism. As Türkiye faces similar security threats, it may prefer to strengthen cooperation with the SCO in this area.

Türkiye seeks cooperation with SCO member states in the fight against the Syrian civil war and terrorist organizations such as the PKK. Institutions such as the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) can provide essential support mechanisms to ensure Türkiye's national security (Şensoy, 2018: 85).

Türkiye aims to play a more active role in security by sharing intelligence through RATS (Bilek, 2022: 94).

In the future, Türkiye and the SCO can cooperate on security in the following main areas:

Counterterrorism and Border Security: SCO member states are strengthening their cooperation on counterterrorism and border security. Türkiye's cooperation with the SCO in this field can enable it to combat terrorist threats more effectively, especially on the Syria-Iraq border. In this context, organizing joint operations and exercises can increase Türkiye's effectiveness in the fight against terrorism.

Cyber Security: The SCO also cooperates in cyber security. Cyber attacks have become a threat exploited by states and terrorist groups. Türkiye can increase its capabilities by sharing its cyber security knowledge and technology with the SCO.

Combating Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime: SCO member states also cooperate in the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime. Türkiye can fight organized crime more effectively by initiating joint projects with the SCO in this field.

Challenges Faced

Türkiye may also face some challenges in developing relations with the SCO. First, Türkiye's strong relations with NATO and the EU may impose some constraints on more profound engagement with the SCO (Akin, 2024: 90). Although the SCO is not seen as a direct competitor of NATO, Türkiye's participation in a platform dominated by non-NATO powers such as Russia and China could lead to cooperation with NATO's strategic rivals. This delicate situation would force Türkiye to implement a multifaceted



foreign policy that balances security cooperation with NATO and the SCO. This situation also points to the difficulties Türkiye may face in its EU accession process (Akın, 2024: 67).

Moreover, the balance of power within the SCO may also put Türkiye in a difficult position. In particular, Türkiye may have difficulty positioning itself as an independent player in an organization dominated by China and Russia. To overcome this situation, Türkiye needs to develop strategies to increase its role and influence within the SCO (Bilek, 2022: 101).

Future Vision

The SCO has two main geopolitical axes: Russia and China. Central Asian countries and India seem closer to the Russian axis, while Pakistan and Iran are closer to the Chinese axis. It is predicted that Russia may invite Türkiye to become a full member to maintain the power balance within the organization. The SCO is an important international organization that aims to promote stability and security in Eurasia. Relations between Russia and Türkiye are strengthening in the SCO context, and Turkish energy, transportation, and trade projects support this cooperation. Türkiye's position and future in the SCO will become an essential factor affecting Eurasia's political and economic balance. The SCO's position in the global economy and Türkiye's relationship with the organization will play an essential role in future international dynamics. (Haberrus, 2024).

Relations between Türkiye and the SCO have the potential to deepen further in the economic and security fields in the future. Türkiye aims to become a more effective player in regional cooperation through the SCO and develops various strategies for this purpose (Şensoy, 2018: 92). Strengthening Türkiye's ties with the SCO will help ensure regional stability and will increase the country's influence on the international stage.

In conclusion, Türkiye's strategic priorities include relations with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which China and Russia lead, cooperates in a wide range of areas ranging from counterterrorism to joint investment in Central Asian energy, and has rapidly completed its institutionalization. Türkiye could be an observer or a full member of such an organization, which has the potential to become a global powerhouse due to its geopolitical position as a bridge between East and West and its orientation towards the West. If this happens, it will help Türkiye to implement effective and balanced policies in its relations with the United States and the European Union. In addition, the geo-cultural structure of the Caucasus, which is within the SCO region, will enable Türkiye to play a role in this geography in a very short time (Çoğal, 2024).

Therefore, the relationship between Türkiye and the SCO will enter a multifaceted development process in the future. Türkiye can gain a stronger position in the SCO by building economic opportunities, security cooperation, and strategic ties. This process is expected to strengthen Türkiye's balancing role in the international arena and contribute to regional cooperation.

Conclusion

This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of Türkiye's relations with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, its historical development, economic and security dimensions, and comparisons with other regional organizations. Türkiye aims to cooperate with the West and the East to create a strategic balance in a multipolar world order where international relations are becoming increasingly complex. In this context, the SCO is becoming an essential alternative cooperation platform in line with Türkiye's foreign policy objectives.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a security and economic cooperation organization established in 2001. It was established to combat terrorism, separatism, and extremism in

Central Asia and to promote economic cooperation. Member states take a stricter stance against regional threats by sharing intelligence on security issues and organizing joint operations. At the same time, the expansion of the SCO and the accession of large countries such as India and Pakistan have increased the organization's influence and strengthened its role at the global level. In 2012, Türkiye joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a dialogue partner, marking a new direction for Türkiye's foreign policy. Türkiye's engagement with the SCO offers significant opportunities for energy security, economic development, and regional security. In particular, Türkiye's geopolitical position makes it an essential player in relations with the West and the East.

In the energy sector, Türkiye's relations with Russia and Azerbaijan are crucial for energy security. Türkiye has the capacity to strengthen energy cooperation with these countries through the SCO and take important steps to ensure energy supply security. At the same time, the deepening of trade relations with China contributes positively to Türkiye's foreign trade balance.

Another critical aspect of Türkiye's relations with the SCO is security cooperation. Türkiye has the opportunity to cooperate with the SCO to tackle regional security threats jointly. However, Türkiye's strong ties with NATO and the EU may impose some constraints on more profound engagement with the SCO. This balance requires a complex structure in Türkiye's foreign policy strategy. Moreover, the balance of power within the SCO may also put Türkiye in a difficult position. In particular, Türkiye may have difficulty positioning itself as an independent player in an organization dominated by China and Russia. Therefore, Türkiye needs to follow a careful and balanced policy to protect its national interests and become an influential player in regional security.

The relationship between Türkiye and the SCO is expected to deepen in the future. Partnerships in economic cooperation, energy security, and regional security are the main components of Türkiye's foreign policy strategy. Türkiye aims to strengthen cooperation with the East while maintaining relations with the West. In this process, increasing the effectiveness of Türkiye's relations with the SCO will not only help maintain regional stability, but will also help increase Türkiye's influence in the international arena. Türkiye will become an essential economic player in the future thanks to its developing relations with SCO member states in energy security and trade. In this context, Türkiye's relations with the SCO will remain essential to its future foreign policy strategy.



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