

**SINO-TURKISH RELATIONS AND THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE**Ozan ÖRMECİ<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Turkey-China relations hardly progressed for many years due to conflicting ideological priorities and the two countries' membership in different political/strategic blocs. Although both countries initiated formal diplomatic relations in 1971, Cold War dynamics prevented them developing extensive relations. However, starting in the 1980s and particularly after 2010, Chinese economic transformation and political empowerment spurred an accelerated development in Turkey-China relations. These nations officially opened the era of "strategic cooperation" in 2010. The economy has always been the dominant aspect of Turkey-China relations with China perennially in a superior position due to a structural trade surplus in commerce. With China's transformation into an economic superpower in the 2010s and President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) strategy to facilitate global trade, the two countries have also begun to harmonize their political and economic stances. Both Ankara and Beijing prefer rules-based international order, peaceful relations with other countries, and increasing globalization, especially in trade. This study aims to analyze Turkey-China relations by looking at their history, recent political developments and problematic issues, and finally Turkey's approach to the BRI.

**Keywords:** *Turkey-China relations, Trade imbalance, Xinjiang conflict, Covid-19, Belt and Road Initiative.*

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor and Head of the Department at Istanbul Kent University Political Science and Public Administration (English) department.  
Email: [ozan.ormeci@kent.edu.tr](mailto:ozan.ormeci@kent.edu.tr) / [ozanormeci@gmail.com](mailto:ozanormeci@gmail.com).  
ORCID: 0000-0001-8850-6089.

## TÜRKİYE-ÇİN İLİŞKİLERİ VE KUŞAK YOL PROJESİ

**Öz:** Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri, uzun yıllar çatışan hâkim ideolojiler ve iki ülkenin farklı siyasi/stratejik bloklara mensubiyetleri nedeniyle gelişmemiştir. İki ülke resmi diplomatik ilişkilerini 1971’de tesis etseler de, Soğuk Savaş dinamikleri iki ülkenin kapsamlı ilişkiler geliştirmesini engellemiştir. Ancak, 1980’lerden başlayarak, özellikle de 2010 sonrasında, Çin’in ekonomik dönüşümü ve siyasi açıdan güç kazanması Türkiye-Çin ilişkilerinde de hızlanan bir gelişmeye neden olmuştur. Nitekim iki ülke, 2010 yılında resmi olarak “stratejik iş birliği” dönemini başlatmışlardır. Türkiye-Çin ilişkilerinde ekonomi her zaman hâkim unsur olurken, Çin, dış ticaret fazlası nedeniyle avantajlı bir konumdadır. Çin’in 2010’larda ekonomik bir süpergüç haline gelmesi ve Çin Devlet Başkanı Şi Cinqing’in dünya ticaretini hızlandırmak için Kuşak Yol Projesi’ni ortaya koymasıyla, iki ülkenin siyasi ve ekonomik duruşları uyumlu hale gelmeye başlamıştır. Hem Çin, hem de Ankara kurallara dayalı uluslararası düzeni desteklemekte, diğer ülkelerle barışçıl ilişkileri tercih etmekte ve özellikle ekonomide artan bir küreselleşmeyi savunmaktadırlar. Bu çalışma, Türkiye-Çin ilişkilerini tarihsel sürece, yakın zamanlı gelişmelere, ihtilafli konulara ve son olarak Türkiye’nin Kuşak Yol Projesi’ne yaklaşımı temelinde analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri, Ticaret dengesizliği, Uygur Sorunu, Covid-19, Kuşak Yol Projesi.*

## Introduction

Turkey-China relations hardly progressed for many years due to conflicting ideological priorities and the two countries' membership in different political/strategic blocs. Although both countries initiated formal diplomatic relations in 1971, Cold War dynamics prevented them developing extensive relations. However, starting in the 1980s and particularly after 2010, Chinese economic transformation and political empowerment spurred an accelerated development in Turkey-China relations. These nations officially opened the era of “*strategic cooperation*” in 2010. The economy has always been the dominant aspect of Turkey-China relations with China perennially in a superior position due to a structural trade surplus in commerce. This study aims to analyze Turkey-China relations by looking at their history, recent political developments and problematic issues, and finally Turkey's approach to the BRI.

### 1. Turkey-China Relations: A Brief History

#### 1.1. Relations Prior to the Establishment of the People's Republic of China

During the Ottoman era, there were no official diplomatic relations between the two countries. Following the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, Turkey began to take steps towards establishing relations with the then-Republic of China (1912-1949). On the initiative of Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, official diplomatic contact was made in 1927. Then, in 1929, the Turkish Embassy in Nanjing was opened with Hulusi Fuat Tugay becoming Ankara's first *chargé d'affaires*.<sup>2</sup> However, due to economic problems, the Turkish Embassy was closed down in 1931 and Tugay returned home. In 1934, the countries signed a Treaty of Friendship before the reopening of the Turkish Embassy in 1939 with Emin Ali Sipahi becoming the new *chargé d'affaires*. In 1944, China and Turkey elevated their diplomatic relations to the level of appointing ambassadors. Hulusi Fuat Tugay became Turkey's first ambassador to China, but during this period diplomatic and economic relations between the two countries were quite limited and rather insignificant.

#### 1.2. The 1950s: Hostility-Based Relations

With the civil war victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over nationalists, the People's Republic of China arose in 1949. Nationalists escaped to the island of Taiwan and formed

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<sup>2</sup> Zekeriyya Akdağ (2019/b), “Türkiye – Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi”, *Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 1, No: 1, December 2019, p. 42.

Taiwan or the Republic of China (ROC). By that time, Turkey had already entered into an alliance with the United States of America (USA) and NATO against Soviet Union danger<sup>3</sup>. Beginning in the late 1940s, Ankara decided to act in concert with Washington and refused to recognize the People's Republic of China for long years. Instead, Turkey agreed with the Western powers to recognize Taiwan as the official government of China.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, before it acceded to NATO in 1952, Turkey engaged in the Korean War (1950-1953) and sent troops to Korea to fight communist forces. The People's Republic of China, on the other hand, actively supported Korean communists; Chinese volunteers even fought on their side during the Korean War. That is why, in the early 1950s, Turkey and China were military opponents for the first and last time in their history.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the 1950s were characterized by hostility-based relations.

### **1.3. 1960s: Early Efforts to Restart Diplomacy**

In the 1960s, positive signals came from Beijing to recommence formal diplomatic relations. For instance, Beijing supported the 1960 military coup in Turkey and CCP leader Zhou Enlai stated, in 1965, that there was no barrier to prevent Ankara and Beijing from establishing official diplomatic relations.<sup>6</sup> Enlai also underlined that both China and Turkey are Asian countries that share deep rooted, historical, and cultural ties. On November 30, 1966, an unofficial trade committee from China visited Turkey. Although Zhou Enlai's statements and Turkey's search for a multi-dimensional foreign policy encouraged both sides to pursue official diplomatic relations during the 1960s, Turkey's heavy dependence on the USA obliged Ankara to wait a few more years to establish official contacts with Beijing. An example of this cautious approach is seen in the fact that although Turkish Prime Ministers İsmet İnönü and Suat Hayri Ürgüplü made official plans to recognize China, they later retreated from these policies out of deference to the USA. In addition, Radio Peking's Turkish language broadcasts contributed to bilateral relations when they went on the air first in 1957.<sup>7</sup>

### **1.4. The 1970s: Initiation of Diplomatic Relations**

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<sup>3</sup> After the Second World War, then-Soviet leader Joseph Stalin made territorial demands against Turkey.

<sup>4</sup> Selçuk Çolakoğlu (2018), "Turkey-Taiwan Relations: Opportunities and Limitations", *Taiwan Insight*, 05.04.2018, Date of Accession: 04.09.2021 from <https://taiwaninsight.org/2018/04/05/turkey-taiwan-relations-opportunities-and-limitations/>.

<sup>5</sup> Zekeriyya Akdağ (2019/b), "Türkiye – Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi", p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Çağdaş Üngör (2012), "China Reaches Turkey? Radio Peking's Turkish Language Broadcasts During the Cold War", *All Azimuth*, Vol. 1, No: 2, July 2012, pp. 19-33.

Diplomatic relations between Turkey and the People's Republic of China started in 1971. This was a direct consequence of the “*Sino-Soviet split*” of the 1960s, which inspired a positive approach towards China from the Western bloc. Turkey became the 8<sup>th</sup> member of NATO -after France, United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark- to recognize China.<sup>8</sup> After recognizing China, Turkey immediately moved its embassy from Taipei to Beijing and halted all diplomatic relations with Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> Following Turkey, USA, with the diplomacy orchestrated by Henry Kissinger, also recognized China. Beijing replaced Taipei in the United Nations (UN) Security Council. In July 1974, Turkey and China signed their first official economic agreement.<sup>10</sup> However, in general, the 1970s were wasted years; diplomatic and economic relations between Turkey and China were almost non-existent. This was mainly because of opposing ideological affiliations as well as diverging bloc politics. As a member of NATO and a close USA ally, Turkey did not dare much independence in relations with China. But still, China's admission to the UN Security Council as a permanent member was a significant occurrence that increased Beijing's value to Ankara. In addition, since 1971, Turkey has recognized Beijing as the only representative of China. Ankara has not engaged in official diplomatic relations with Taiwan even at times when bilateral relations with Beijing have been weak and has always pursued a “*one China policy*”.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.5. 1980s: The “Earlier Golden Age”

In the 1980s, Chinese economic transformation initiated by Deng Xiaoping coincided with Turkish economic liberalization and integration into the global economy during the Prime Ministry of Turgut Özal following the 1980 military *coup d'etat*.<sup>12</sup> These currents revived

<sup>8</sup> Zekeriyya Akdağ (2019/b), “Türkiye – Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi”, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> Selçuk Çolakoğlu (2018), “Turkey-Taiwan Relations: Opportunities and Limitations”, *Taiwan Insight*, 05.04.2018, Date of Accession: 04.09.2021 from <https://taiwaninsight.org/2018/04/05/turkey-taiwan-relations-opportunities-and-limitations/>.

<sup>10</sup> Türk – Çin Dostluk Vakfı, “Ticari İlişkiler”, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <http://www.turkcindostlukvakfi.org.tr/sayfa.php?id=3>.

<sup>11</sup> Turkey cut off official ties with Taiwan in 1971 but reestablished relations again in 1993 under the auspices of the “*Turkish Trade Office*” in Taipei and the “*Taipei Economic & Cultural Mission*” in Ankara. Since that time, although Turkey did not officially recognize Taiwan, economic relations between the two partners have notably grown. See; Selçuk Çolakoğlu (2018), “Turkey-Taiwan Relations: Opportunities and Limitations”, *Taiwan Insight*, 05.04.2018, Date of Accession: 04.09.2021 from <https://taiwaninsight.org/2018/04/05/turkey-taiwan-relations-opportunities-and-limitations/>.

<sup>12</sup> Chinese economic transformation started in 1978 with Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's plan. Accordingly, with those market reforms, the state's share in industrial output gradually fell from about 80 percent in 1985 to a little over 30 percent in 2005. See; Pieter Bottelier (2008), “China's economic rise: implications for the USA”, in (ed. by

Turkey-China relations.<sup>13</sup> The weakness of the Turkish military regime, isolated by European democracies, was also a factor in Ankara's decision to take steps to improve relations with Beijing. According to Çolakoğlu<sup>14</sup>, Turkey had two basic goals in developing its relations with China: 1) To gain China's support in the UN Security Council in votes crucial to Turkish interests, 2) To take its share from the massive and rapidly developing Chinese market. Accordingly, the first official visits also took place in the early 1980s. For instance, then-Foreign Minister İlder Türkmen visited China in December 1981. During that visit, a pledge of Chinese support of the Turkish military regime guaranteed defense against Soviet expansionism. Economic and technical agreements also solidified economic relations. In December 1982, Kenan Evren became the first Turkish President to visit China.<sup>15</sup> Following President Evren's visit, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Chuochiang reciprocated in October 1983. The following year, Li Xiannian became the first Chinese President to visit Turkey. Then-Prime Minister Turgut Özal also visited China in 1985. Although he was a pro-American statesman, Özal showed his willingness to diversify the Turkish economy by increasing economic relations with Beijing. As a sign of the growing strength of these relations, Chinese Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang visited Turkey in 1986.

The decade of the 1980s was characterized by cultural exchanges and an increasing number of visits by various ministers from both countries. During the late 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet threat was emphasized by both countries' officials to show that their interests were in harmony. In that sense, bad memories of the Korean War were forgotten and a new era ("*Earlier Golden Age*") began. Although these were positive developments, Cold War dynamics and Turkey's heavy dependence on the USA and NATO muted optimism and enthusiasm. Moreover, it should be added that Turkey's positive relations with China throughout the 1980s were not a pathological situation since China was considered an "*exception*" by the USA and Western world in general following the Sino-Soviet split. Beginning with the Nixon administration, all USA Presidents including Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan maintained the same policy of avoiding

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Suisheng Zhao) *China-U.S. Relations Transformed: Perspective and strategic interactions*, London: Routledge, p.189.

<sup>13</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı/a, "Türkiye - Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Siyasi İlişkileri", Date of Accession: 01.09.2021 from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-cin-halk-cumhuriyeti-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>.

<sup>14</sup> Selçuk Çolakoğlu (2012), "Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri: Tek Taraflı Aşk mı?", *OrtadoğuAnaliz*, Vol. 4, No: 45, September 2012, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Zekeriyya Akdağ (2019/b), "Türkiye – Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi", pp. 45-46.

involvement in China's internal affairs.<sup>16</sup> However, the 1989 Tiananmen Incident became a major dividing line for the USA Congress and the Western world. China was designated a hostile state again in the early 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Thus, China was left internationally isolated and friendless and Western countries began to impose sanctions against Beijing.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.6. The 1990s and 2000s: Lost Years

Following the end of the Cold War, Turkey-China relations entered a short pause because the dissolution of the Soviet Union gradually decreased China's importance in the Western world. The Western approach towards China became completely negative after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident. In the USA, Ross H. Munro<sup>19</sup> and James Walsh<sup>20</sup> published influential articles that helped turn the American public quickly onto an anti-China wave.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, with the recurrence of pan-Turkish ideals in during the early 1990s, defined by the slogan "*Turkic world from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China*", Xinjiang conflict became a political controversy in bilateral relations.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the positive mood of the 1980s disappeared in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, the establishment of the Turkey-China Business Council in 1992 demonstrated mutual willingness to sustain economic relations.<sup>23</sup>

From the mid-1990s, reciprocal state visits helped to gradually reset bilateral relations. In that sense, Süleyman Demirel's presidential visit in 1995, then-Foreign Minister İsmail Cem's official visit in February 1998, and then-Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit's official visit to China in June 1998 were important steps. These three visits were followed by then-Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Turkey in 2000 and then-Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's visit in

<sup>16</sup> Tao Xie (2009), *U.S.-China Relations: China Policy in Capitol Hill*, Routledge Contemporary China Series, New York: Routledge, p. 101.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>18</sup> Qingguo Jia (2008), "Learning to live with the hegemon: China's policy toward the USA since the end of the Cold War", in (ed. by Suisheng Zhao) *China-U.S. Relations Transformed: Perspective and strategic interactions*, London: Routledge, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Ross H. Munro (1992), "Awakening Dragon; The Real Danger in Asia Is from China", *Policy Review*, No: 67, Fall 1992, pp. 10-17.

<sup>20</sup> James Walsh (1993), "China: The World's Next Super Power", *Time*, Asia edition, 10.05.1993, pp. 15-39.

<sup>21</sup> Nuraniye Hidayet Ekrem (2003), *Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Dış Politikası (1950-2000)*, Ankara: Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, pp. 35-36.

<sup>22</sup> Zekeriyya Akdağ (2019/b), "Türkiye – Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi", p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı/a, "Türkiye - Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Siyasi İlişkileri", Date of Accession: 01.09.2021 from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-cin-halk-cumhuriyeti-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>.

2002.<sup>24</sup> During his visit, President Zemin was awarded Turkey's highest medal of honor, the Order of Merit.<sup>25</sup> During Rongji's visit, four economic agreements were signed between the two states. Furthermore, in 1998, then-Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz issued a confidential memorandum expressing the Turkish government's decision to consider the Xinjiang problem within the framework of Chinese territorial integrity. The memorandum also banned Turkish officials' participation in activities organized by Uyghur associations located in Turkey.<sup>26</sup> During then-Minister of the Interior Sadettin Tantan's visit to China in 2000, officials signed a bilateral agreement to fight transnational crimes.<sup>27</sup> In 2002, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Devlet Bahçeli also made an official trip to China.

Another important turning point for Turkey-China relations was the Chinese accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, which accelerated and facilitated economic relations for private companies in subsequent years. However, due to the high priority of Turkey's accession to the European Union (EU) in the early 2000s, Turkey-China relations and Turkey's Asia opening were forgotten in Ankara as the European agenda came to dominate Turkish foreign policy and Turkish politics. Despite the heavy European agenda, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited China in 2003 and met with his Chinese counterpart Zhu Rongji. During that encounter, the two statesmen agreed on developing economic relations. Another problematic aspect of the early 2000s was Turkey's economic losses in the textile industry due to Chinese inclusion in WTO and China's comparative advantage in this sector (due to lower costs) over Turkey.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, after the rejection of the Annan Plan in 2004 in a referendum by Greek Cypriots, Turkey and Turkish Cypriots began to develop concepts such as the "*Taiwan model*" to open North Cyprus to international trade. This policy, which created suspicions in China, did not create good results in terms of Turkey-China relations when then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül visited China in February 2005. It should be stated that after Rongji's visit in 2002, no Chinese officials visited Turkey again until 2010. Then-Chinese President Hu Jintao visited all Turkey's

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<sup>24</sup> Akkan Suver (2020), "Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti ile diplomatik ilişkilerimiz 49 yaşında", *Milliyet*, Düşünenlerin Düşüncesi, 04.08.2020, Date of Accession: 01.09.2021 from <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/dusunenlerin-dusuncesi/cin-halk-cumhuriyeti-ile-diplomatik-iliskilerimiz-49-yasinda-6274412>.

<sup>25</sup> Zekeriyya Akdağ (2019/b), "Türkiye – Çin İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi", p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

neighbors -but not Turkey- and made some statements supporting the territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus in 2001.<sup>29</sup>

These events exhibited the Chinese discontent with Turkey in the early 2000s. Thus, the 1990s and 2000s could be defined as lost or wasted years for Turkey-China relations. However, economic relations continued to develop; in 2009, the total trade volume between the two countries for the first time surpassed the level of 10 billion American dollars.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, it should be stated that Chinese leaders' more confident approach to international politics became evident in the early 2000s. For instance, a senior advisor for the CCP, Zheng Bijian, in 2003 publicly articulated their foreign policy approach as the “*peaceful rise*” or “*heping jueqi*” in Chinese.<sup>31</sup>

### 1.7. From 2010 Onwards: “Strategic Cooperation” and the “Golden Age”

In June 2009, 14 years after President Demirel's visit, Turkey's 11<sup>th</sup> President, Abdullah Gül, visited China. Gül became the third Turkish President to visit China. Moreover, Gül visited Ürümqi as well and became the first Turkish President to visit Uighurs.<sup>32</sup> This was also a confident move by the Chinese as they intended to show to the whole world that there was nothing to hide. But shortly after Gül's departure, a riot broke out in Ürümqi, which eventually led to the rise of an anti-China attitude once again in Turkey.

Despite political problems, Turkey-China relations reached the status of “*strategic cooperation*” in 2010.<sup>33</sup> During Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit, agreements were signed on nuclear energy cooperation and bilateral trade using Chinese yuan and Turkish lira.<sup>34</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping made his first visit to Turkey when he was Vice-President in February 2012. Then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited China a couple months later and, subsequently that year, Turkey declared it China Cultural Year, and China responded by doing the same for

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>30</sup> Türk – Çin Dostluk Vakfı, “Ticari İlişkiler”, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <http://www.turkcindostlukvakfi.org.tr/sayfa.php?id=3>.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Economy (2008), “China, the USA, and Japan: reconfiguring relations in Southeast Asia”, in (ed. by Suisheng Zhao) *China-U.S. Relations Transformed: Perspective and strategic interactions*, London: Routledge, p. 212.

<sup>32</sup> Zekeriyya Akdağ (2019/a), “Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinde Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi'nin Önemi”, *Birey ve Toplum*, Vol. 9, No: 1, p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı/a, “Türkiye - Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Siyasi İlişkileri”, Date of Accession: 01.09.2021 from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-cin-halk-cumhuriyeti-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>.

<sup>34</sup> Selçuk Çolakoğlu (2012), “Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri: Tek Taraflı Aşk mı?”, *OrtadoğuAnaliz*, Vol. 4, No: 45, September 2012, p. 60.

Turkey in 2013.<sup>35</sup> More importantly, in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared his Belt and Road Initiative, a project that would shape the global economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The project was first presented in Turkey as the “*New Silk Road Project*” (*Yeni İpek Yolu Projesi*) and later as the “*One Belt, One Road Project*” (*Tek Kuşak, Tek Yol Projesi*).<sup>36</sup> Starting from 2019, the BRI (*Kuşak Yol İnisiyatifi*) name was adopted by the Turkish press and academia. In 2015, both countries also signed a memorandum of understanding for the BRI, which was a clear sign of Turkish willingness to participate in this project from the start. In the meantime, trade relations continued to develop and, by the early 2020s, China became Turkey’s biggest trade partner after Germany. Moreover, in June 2021, the two countries signed an enlarged swap agreement.<sup>37</sup> The agreement was made at a time when Turkey's Central Bank had exhausted its reserves.

Cultural relations have also developed in the last two decades. For example, in 2008, China opened its first Confucius Institute in Turkey; nowadays there are four different Confucius Institutes in Turkey.<sup>38</sup> Reciprocally, Turkey opened its first Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in Beijing in 2021.<sup>39</sup>

Starting from the 2000s, China has gradually transformed into a great power with its constantly increasing influence in the global economy and politics. In the Western academia and press, the rise of China has become a very popular research topic. For instance, British journalist Martin Jacques published his highly contested work *When China Rules the World*<sup>40</sup> in 2009. He was one of the earlier experts to claim that China would become the world’s largest economy and wield ever greater influence over global politics in the following few decades. Zhao, on the other hand, underlined that China entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a “*rising global power*”.<sup>41</sup> In addition, more

<sup>35</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı/a, “Türkiye - Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Siyasi İlişkileri”, Date of Accession: 01.09.2021 from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-cin-halk-cumhuriyeti-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>.

<sup>36</sup> Ozan Örmeci (2018), *Ejder’in Ayak Sesleri: Dünya Siyasetinde Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti*, İstanbul: Cinius Yayınları, p. 194.

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Sabah* (2021), “Enlarged swap deal with China recorded in accounts: Turkish central bank”, 16.06.2021, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/finance/enlarged-swap-deal-with-china-recorded-in-accounts-turkish-central-bank>.

<sup>38</sup> *CRITürk* (2021/a), “Türkiye ile Çin, ilişkilerin 50’nci yılında geleceğe umutla bakıyor”, 04.08.2021, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://www.criturk.com/turkiye-ile-cin-iliskilerin-50inci-yilinda-gelecege-umutla-bakiyor/>.

<sup>39</sup> Yunus Emre Enstitüsü (2021), “Yunus Emre Institute Opened in Beijing”, 18.06.2021, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://www.yee.org.tr/tr/node/15256>.

<sup>40</sup> See; Martin Jacques (2009), *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World*, London: Allen Lane.

<sup>41</sup> Suisheng Zhao (2008/a), “China rising: geo-strategic thrust and diplomatic engagement”, in (ed. by Suisheng Zhao) *China-U.S. Relations Transformed: Perspective and strategic interactions*, London: Routledge, p. 21.

recently, the influential author and analyst Parag Khanna declared this is not only China's time, but that indeed "*the Asian century has arrived*".<sup>42</sup> Moreover, China's success during the 2008-2009 financial crisis proved that the Chinese economic was working better compared to the Western-type free-market system.<sup>43</sup> In the meantime, Turkey's problems with the USA after the Iraq War and permanent disagreement with its Western allies in terms of the Kurdish Question encouraged Turkey to counterbalance Western influence by improving relations with other important powers such as Russia and China.

As Güneş noted, the economy has always been the driving force behind Turkish-Chinese relations.<sup>44</sup> Atlı also underlines that the two countries have often acted with economic minds in bilateral relations<sup>45</sup>: while Ankara in recent years has always aimed to bring more investments from China to Turkey, Beijing has considered Turkey's geopolitical position as a valuable asset for BRI project. Accordingly, as economic relations intensified, political-diplomatic relations also improved and official visits became more frequent. For instance, President Erdoğan visited China four times in recent years: in 2012 as the Turkish Prime Minister and in 2015, 2017, and 2019 as Turkish President.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, President Erdoğan and President Xi Jinping had face-to-face talks in the 2015 G20 Hangzhou Summit, 2016 G20 Antalya Summit, 10<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit at Johannesburg (2018), 2018 G20 Buenos Aires Summit, and 2019 G20 Osaka Summit.<sup>47</sup> It should be noted China considers Turkey a rising power and a convenient country for new investments.<sup>48</sup>

However, here we should mention that Turkey's interest in Asian geopolitics is not only limited to China. In 2019, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs started the "*Asia Anew*" (*Yeniden Asya*) initiative to increase Turkey's weight in Asian politics and economics and transform it into

<sup>42</sup> McKinsey & Company (2019), "The Asian Century has arrived", 15.11.2019, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/asia-pacific/the-asian-century-has-arrived>.

<sup>43</sup> The term "*socialist market economy*" is used to describe the Chinese economic model. The term was first used by President Jiang Zemin in 1992 during the 14<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP. The system is based on the predominance of public ownership and state-owned enterprises within a market economy. See; Zhiyuan Cui (2012), "Making Sense of the Chinese "Socialist Market Economy": A Note", *Modern China*, Vol. 38, No: 6, p. 665.

<sup>44</sup> Mehmet Güneş (2021), "50'nci Yılında Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Politik Ekonomi Perspektifinden Geleceği", Stratejik Düşünce Enstitüsü, 09.08.2021, Date of Accession: 02.09.2021 from <https://www.sde.org.tr/mehmet-gunes/genel/50nci-yilinda-turkiye-cin-iliskilerinin-politik-ekonomi-perspektifinden-gelecegi-kose-yazisi-23235>.

<sup>45</sup> DW Türkçe (2019), "Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri: Önce ekonomi", 01.07.2019, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.dw.com/tr/t%C3%BCrkiye-%C3%A7in-ili%C5%9Fkileri-%C3%B6nce-ekonomi/a-49430610>.

<sup>46</sup> Fuat Kabakçı (2021), "Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri birçok alanda gelişiyor", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 24.03.2021, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turkiye-cin-iliskileri-bircok-alanda-gelisiyor/2186643>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Erkin Ekrem (2011), "Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri: Çin'in Gözünde Türkiye", *Yeni Fikir*, No: 7/2011, p. 31.

a country that bridges Asia and Europe in more than just the geographic sense.<sup>49</sup> Since China is the biggest economy in Asia and the second biggest economy in the world, Turkish foreign policy opening towards Asia also facilitates relations with Beijing.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, unlike the case in earlier decades, Turkey's AK Parti (Justice and Development Party) government now acts with an economic consciousness in foreign policy. There are several reasons for this focus. The main reason for this is the improvement of civilian supremacy and democracy in the 2000s that led to business groups and organizations becoming more influential in the country. For instance, the DEİK (Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey), founded in 1985, became an important actor in shaping Turkish foreign policy starting from the 2010s. DEİK was influential in the “Asia Anew” initiative as well.<sup>51</sup>

With China becoming an economic superpower to challenge some notions of the international status quo and global order, Turkey-China relations face a constant dilemma: Can developing economic relations suffice against political crises that will be constantly provoked by Western powers to prevent Turkey-China rapprochement? In that sense, while intensifying economic relations necessitate good diplomatic relations between China and Turkey, political problems, diverging national interests, and security concerns force states to reduce their speed and optimism. This is why; “*economic partnership*” rather than “*strategic partnership*” might be a better term to define Turkey-China relations for the moment. Moreover, the rise of China became first an academic interest in the USA with a growing literature on the issue and later a political

<sup>49</sup> Cenk Tamer (2021), “Yeniden Asya Girişimi Çerçevesinde Dışişleri Bakanı Çavuşoğlu'nun Güneydoğu Asya Ziyaretleri”, ANKASAM, 05.01.2021, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://www.ankasam.org/yeniden-asya-girisimi-cercevesinde-disisleri-bakani-cavusoglundun-guneydogu-asya-ziyaretleri/>.

<sup>50</sup> According to many experts, China will become the world's largest economy in the near future. For instance, *Bloomberg* forecasts the year 2031 for Chinese take-over in the world GDP ranking. See; Eric Zhu & Tom Orlik (202), “When Will China Rule the World? Maybe Never”, *Bloomberg*, 06.06.2021, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-07-05/when-will-china-s-economy-beat-the-u-s-to-become-no-1-why-it-may-never-happen>. However, according to influential American political scientist Joseph Nye, this does not mean that China will replace the USA in terms of political-diplomatic influence. See; Joseph Nye (2012), “Joseph Nye: The Rise of China and American Power”, GBH Forum Network, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwWT0kbYSzS>. In addition, in terms of the purchasing power parity (PPP), China is already leading the world. See; Zekeriyya Akdağ (2019/a), “Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinde Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi'nin Önemi”, p. 66.

<sup>51</sup> DEİK (2021/b), “DEİK, YENİDEN ASYA: “TÜRKİYE’NİN ASYA ÜLKELERİ İLE TİCARETİNİN GELİŞTİRİLMESİNDE YENİ PERSPEKTİFLER” TOPLANTISINI GERÇEKLEŞTİRDİ”, Date of Accession: 04.09.2021 from <https://www.deik.org.tr/basin-aciklamalari-deik-yeniden-asya-turkiye-nin-asya-ulkeleri-ile-ticaretinin-gelistirilmesinde-yeni-perspektifler-toplantisini-gerceklestirdi>.

issue starting from the Donald Trump presidency.<sup>52</sup> Although Trump is out of power now, some experts claim that his trade wars initiated a “*New Cold War*” between Washington and Beijing.<sup>53</sup>

## 2. Recent Political Developments and Problematic Issues

Since 2010, the relationship between Turkey and China is continuously progressing through its best times. In 2013, a deal was done for the Turkish acquisition of a Chinese manufactured air missile defense system. However, due to Western pressure, Ankara later had to cancel the contract in 2015.<sup>54</sup> Economic relations have continued to develop since 2010 despite some political problems and the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the Xinjiang conflict and the situation of Turkic Muslim Uighurs sometimes spark political reactions in Turkey, especially among the nationalist/Islamist groups, bilateral relations have nonetheless continued to develop despite the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, China supplied Sinovac vaccines to Turkey without any political obstruction or condition, while Turkey rejected some Western governments’ and media institutions’ anti-China campaign and officially did not get involved in the Xinjiang conflict. However, some Turkish nationalist politicians from the opposition parties such as Meral Akşener and Mansur Yavaş expressed criticism that created reactions in Beijing. Accordingly, due to their approach to the Xinjiang conflict (these two politicians considered the 1990 Baren Township conflict a “*genocide*” the Chinese State committed against Uighurs), the Ankara Embassy of the People’s Republic of China showed a diplomatic reaction to these two politicians in a Twitter

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<sup>52</sup> Influential American academics and statesmen who wrote and spoke extensively on the rise of China can be listed as Joseph Nye, John Mearsheimer, Graham Allison, and Henry Kissinger. Of particular note is an insightful book written by Graham Allison in 2017 (*Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*). This book shaped American minds about the risks of the rise of competitive feelings in great power struggles of the last 500 years. 12 out of 16 of those conflicts between an existing power and a rising power resulted in war. See; Graham Allison (2017), *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. In addition, American public opinion toward China can be roughly categorized in two different camps: 1-) “*Liberal optimists*” who think that globalization and strategic interdependence among great powers will direct China to act as a responsible stakeholder and 2-) “*Realist alarmists*” who argue that the rise of China will inevitably lead to negative consequences for the Western world and the USA. See; Suisheng Zhao (2008/b), “Implications of China’s rise for U.S.-China relations”, in (ed. by Suisheng Zhao) *China-U.S. Relations Transformed: Perspective and strategic interactions*, London: Routledge, pp. 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Marcus (2021), “ABD ve Çin arasında yeni bir 'Soğuk Savaş' mı başlıyor?”, *BBC Türkçe*, 17.03.2021, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-56427609>.

<sup>54</sup> *Reuters* (2015), “Turkey confirms cancellation of \$3.4 billion missile defense project awarded to China”, 18.11.2015, Date of Accession: 09.09.2021 from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-china-missile-idUSKCN0T61OV20151118>.

message<sup>55</sup>. In the meantime, the approval of the extradition treaty between Turkey and China by the Turkish Parliament (TBMM) created a positive atmosphere in bilateral relations in 2021.<sup>56</sup>

China is now Turkey's second-biggest trade partner after Germany. In 2021, bilateral trade volume reached a new record and passed 32 billion American dollars (see, Table 1). Moreover, people-to-people contacts between Turkey and China are also on the rise. For instance, Turkish Airlines (THY) in recent years has expanded service to make seven weekly flights to Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai, six weekly flights to Hong Kong, and three weekly flights to Xi'an.<sup>57</sup> In addition, China Southern Airlines recently started its Beijing-Istanbul and Wuhan-Istanbul flights. Thus, there is no exaggeration in the "Golden Age" definition. For instance, according to Selçuk Çolakoğlu, the relationship between Turkey and China is in its brightest period in the last 5 years due to developing economic ties and has even greater future potential.<sup>58</sup> However, another expert, Altay Atlı points out that the two sides do not have confidence in each other even though economic relations are at their best level.<sup>59</sup> This lack of confidence is often caused by ideological prejudices and differences as well as political problems like the Xinjiang conflict.

The year 2021 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the commencement of diplomatic relations between Ankara and Beijing as well as the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the CCP. That is why, bilateral relations gained momentum throughout 2021 despite political problems and the pandemic. According to the Turkish ambassador to Beijing, Abdulkadir Emin Önen, after many centuries, the pendulum of history is swinging towards Asia once again. As two rising regional and global powers, Turkey and China are taking steps for the future by strengthening their relations in many different sectors.<sup>60</sup> That being said, we should recognize that there are some political problems between the two nations that must be solved before there can be a real strategic partnership.

<sup>55</sup> Follow this link to the tweet: <https://twitter.com/ChinaEmbTurkey/status/1379379955042242562>.

<sup>56</sup> Ceren Ergenç (2021), "Çin'in Türkiye ve Ortadoğu ziyareti, Sincan pamuğu", *Gazete Duvar*, 02.04.2021, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/cinin-turkiye-ve-ortadogu-ziyareti-sincan-pamugu-makale-1517944>.

<sup>57</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı/a, "Türkiye - Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Siyasi İlişkileri", Date of Accession: 01.09.2021 from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-cin-halk-cumhuriyeti-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>.

<sup>58</sup> *CRITürk* (2021/b), "Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri son beş yılda tarihinin en parlak dönemini yaşıyor", 03.08.2021, Date of Accession: 29.08.2021 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-j0RKGft8U>.

<sup>59</sup> *DW Türkçe* (2019), "Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri: Önce ekonomi", 01.07.2019, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.dw.com/tr/t%C3%BCrkiye-%C3%A7in-ili%C5%9Fkileri-%C3%B6nce-ekonomi/a-49430610>.

<sup>60</sup> *Aydınlık* (2021), "Türkiye'nin Çin ile ilişkileri derinleşiyor! Tarihin sarkacı yeniden Asya'ya doğru kayıyor", 16.01.2021, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://aydinlik.com.tr/turkiye-nin-cin-ile-iliskileri-derinlesiyor-tarihin-sarkaci-yeniden-asya-ya-dogru-kayiyor-229449-1>.

## 2.1. Trade Imbalance

Although Turkey-China economic relations are moving forward, Turkey's official statistics agency TÜİK (Turkish Statistical Institute) charts a continuous trade imbalance that favors China (see Table 1). Starting from 2013, every year Turkey has imported from China 6 to 10 times more than it has exported. This is a huge imbalance in favor of China when measured by official statistics. Kadir Temiz identifies the situation as “*asymmetrical mutual dependency*”.<sup>61</sup>

However, the deficit could be reduced over the years if Turkey would diversify its export products. For instance, Fuat Kabakçı noted that due to Turkish exports in agriculture and stockbreeding, the trade deficit began to diminish in recent years.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, these statistics prove that in recent years China has become Turkey's best trading partner after Germany by surpassing Turkey's traditional economic partners such as the USA, Russia, United Kingdom, France, and Italy. It should also be noted that China is the leading country for Turkish imports in recent years. When we highlight the most exported and imported products; we see that China imports chrome, copper, marble, travertine, metallic packing, iron, zinc, borate, and boron from Turkey, whereas Turkey imports ships, electronic data processing machines, cellular phones, and toys.<sup>63</sup>

**Table 1.** Trade relations between China and Turkey in recent years (in American dollars) (TÜİK Dış Ticaret Veri Portalı)

Year	Total Export	Total Import	Total Trade Volume	Trade Deficit for Turkey
2013	3,755,649,229	25,260,751,246	29,016,400,475	21,505,102,017
2014	2,970,633,344	25,732,865,100	28,703,498,444	22,762,231,756
2015	2,500,618,224	25,283,734,393	27,784,352,617	22,783,116,169
2016	2,378,537,723	24,852,474,113	27,231,011,836	22,473,936,390

<sup>61</sup> Kadir Temiz (2020), “Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Fay Hatları”, *Perspektif Online*, 19.03.2020, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.perspektif.online/turkiye-cin-iliskilerinin-fay-hatlari-2/>.

<sup>62</sup> Fuat Kabakçı (2021), “Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri birçok alanda geliyor”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 24.03.2021, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turkiye-cin-iliskileri-bircok-alanda-gelisiyor/2186643>.

<sup>63</sup> Ümmügülüm Çavuş (2021), “Asya: Türkiye - Çin İlişkileri”, *TASAM*, 30.06.2021, Date of Accession: 04.09.2021 from [https://tasam.org/tr-TR/Icerik/66926/asya\\_turkiye\\_-\\_cin\\_iliskileri](https://tasam.org/tr-TR/Icerik/66926/asya_turkiye_-_cin_iliskileri).

<b>2017</b>	3,037,675,041	23,753,643,673	26,791,318,714	20,715,968,632
<b>2018</b>	3,078,644,213	21,506,001,136	24,584,645,349	18,427,356,923
<b>2019</b>	2,726,077,500	19,128,159,865	21,854,237,365	16,402,082,365
<b>2020</b>	2,865,865,809	23,041,354,105	25,097,219,914	20,175,488,296
<b>2021</b>	3,377,764,282	29,099,543,833	32,477,308,115	25,721,779,551

Here it is important to mention that the Chinese effect on Turkey's economy is not only limited to trade relations. Chinese investments are also a considerable factor in Turkish economic development. Nowadays, Chinese investments in Turkey have reached almost 2 billion American dollars.<sup>64</sup> Chinese investments are mostly concentrated in sectors including energy, transportation, infrastructure, logistics, finance, mining, stockbreeding, and telecommunications.<sup>65</sup> In recent years, Chinese banks such as the ICBC (in 2015) and the Bank of China (in 2017) entered the Turkish market. Moreover, Chinese technology companies including Huawei, Xiaomi, Aviation Industry Corporation of China, and China North Industries Corporation, as well as other Chinese companies such as China Railway Construction Genertec, Sinomach, Datong, China Merchants, Dongfang Electric, and Power Construction Corporation also recently entered the Turkish market.<sup>66</sup> Since Turkey suffers from high rates of unemployment, especially among the youth population, Chinese investments are welcomed in Turkey not just by the government, but also by the public.

Another important sector for bilateral economic relations is tourism. Chinese tourism to Turkey had been constantly increasing until the pandemic crippled this sector in 2020.<sup>67</sup> Turkish officials have previously declared their wish to host one million Chinese tourists per year. This seems a realistic target in coming years if diplomatic relations are not repeatedly damaged by political disputes. In 2018, Turkish Tourism Year was celebrated in China in order to motivate Chinese

<sup>64</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı/b, "Türkiye-Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Ekonomik İlişkileri", Date of Accession: 04.09.2021 from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-cin-halk-cumhuriyeti-ekonomik-iliskileri.tr.mfa>.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Şerif Dilek & Büşra Zeynep Özdemir & Deniz İstikbal (2019), *Asya Yüzyılında Türkiye-Çin Ekonomik İlişkileri*, Ankara: SETA Yayınları, p. 46.

<sup>67</sup> In 2016, 167,570 Chinese tourists visited Turkey. In 2017, the total number of Chinese tourists rose to 247,277. In 2018, with another rise, it reached 394,109. Finally, in 2019, a year before the pandemic, the number of Chinese tourists visiting Turkey set a record of 426,344. See; Fuat Kabakçı (2021), "Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri birçok alanda geliyor", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 24.03.2021, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turkiye-cin-iliskileri-bircok-alanda-gelisiyor/2186643>.

travelers to visit Turkey more often.<sup>68</sup> Turkey-China economic relations could be balanced and Ankara's trade deficit against Ankara could be lowered with the Chinese government's decision to encourage more Chinese tourists to visit Turkey each year, especially after the pandemic.

## 2.2. Xinjiang Conflict

The Xinjiang conflict or “*Uighurs Problem*” becomes a problematic issue in bilateral relations especially when there are riots in China. In recent years, we have seen two peaks in terms of the Xinjiang conflict-related crises. The first peak occurred after the July 2009 Ürümqi riots, a crisis that arose suddenly, but was gradually forgotten. The Ürümqi riots caused harsh reactions in Turkey and then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had to use harsh expressions to calm down the public anger.<sup>69</sup> Although the riots in 2009 created a diplomatic crisis, in 2010 both countries officially started the era of “*strategic cooperation*” and subsequently overcame the crisis. In fact, in September and October 2010, there were joint Turkish-Chinese air force military exercises (e.g. *Anatolian Eagle*) in Konya.<sup>70</sup> The second crisis took place starting from late 2018 when China's Xinjiang internment camps were discovered by the Western media institutions. The crisis developed slowly, but attracted diplomatic attention. After the *BBC* broke news about Xinjiang internment camps in late 2018, the issue gradually returned as a political matter.<sup>71</sup> The Turkish press also began to cover the issue during the following months. However, Turkey did not officially get involved in the crisis. In fact, Ankara did not even sign the international declaration prepared by Western states in 2019 to condemn China's Xinjiang policy; business continued as usual.<sup>72</sup> Turkey's actual lack of interest in the Xinjiang conflict at present times is mainly caused by Turkey's traditional fear of an independent Kurdish State in Iraq and in Syria, economic concerns, Ankara's problems with its Western allies in recent years, and also by Turkish awareness of the fact that it could not do much to change the situation in Xinjiang without having good relations with Beijing. In addition, due to its problems with the

<sup>68</sup> Ümmügülüm Çavuş (2021), “Asya: Türkiye - Çin İlişkileri”, TASAM, 30.06.2021, Date of Accession: 04.09.2021 from [https://tasam.org/tr-TR/Icerik/66926/asya\\_turkiye\\_-\\_cin\\_iliskileri](https://tasam.org/tr-TR/Icerik/66926/asya_turkiye_-_cin_iliskileri).

<sup>69</sup> Erkin Ekrem (2009), “Urümçi Olayı, Çin Basınında Türkiye”, *Türk Yurdu*, Year: 98, No: 264, August 2009, Date of Accession: 06.09.2021 from <https://www.turkyurdu.com.tr/yazar-yazi.php?id=2368>.

<sup>70</sup> Eren Alper Yılmaz (2021), “2009'dan Günümüze Türkiye'nin İnsan Hakları İhlalleri Karşısındaki Tutumu”, *UPA Strategic Affairs*, Vol. 2, No: 1, March 2021, pp. 5-28.

<sup>71</sup> John Sudworth (2018), “China's hidden camps”, *BBC*, 24.10.2018, Date of Accession: 07.09.2021 from [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/China\\_hidden\\_camps](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/China_hidden_camps).

<sup>72</sup> Eren Alper Yılmaz (2021), “2009'dan Günümüze Türkiye'nin İnsan Hakları İhlalleri Karşısındaki Tutumu”, pp. 16-17.

USA and the EU, Turkey does not want the Xinjiang conflict to be politicized and instrumentalized by the Western states to set Beijing and Ankara at odds. China expert Ceren Ergenç, on the other hand, underlines that there is still a strong Uighur lobby in Turkey. Likewise, the electoral base of the governing AK Parti generally leans towards a pro-Uighur approach due to mass Islamist and Turkish nationalist sensitivities.<sup>73</sup>

### 2.3. USA and the Western Barrier

As a staunch NATO member and traditional American ally, Turkey is, first of all, an Occidental state. Turkey's economy and politics are still tied primarily to Brussels and Washington. The EU is by far Turkey's largest import and export partner, as well as its main source of investments. In 2020, 33.4 % of Turkey's imports came from the EU and 41.3 % of the country's exports went to the EU.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the USA is also a critical country for Turkish foreign policy and domestic politics with its traditional and cordial ties to the Turkish Armed Forces, the National Intelligence Agency, and political parties. The USA is still very influential over the Turkish and global economy. In the recent past, political problems with Washington -such as the Pastor Andrew Brunson crisis of 2018- led to devaluation of the Turkish Lira and disturbed the economy.

In recent years, with its quest for a more independent and multi-dimensional foreign policy, Turkey has established developing economic relations with Russia and China. While Russia is a critical country for Turkey's energy (natural gas) deficit and a card Ankara could play in case there is too much pressure coming from its Western allies, China is an economic superpower that Ankara courts for more business and investments to reinvigorate the Turkish economy. However, Turkey's Western allies do not want Ankara to deepen its ties with Moscow and Beijing. It is not surprising that, in the late 2000s and early 2010s, one of the most popular discussions in Western academia concerning Turkish foreign policy literature was about the "*shift of axis*".<sup>75</sup> These discussions were aimed at warning Ankara in its search for an independent foreign and economic policy. Although NATO is built against Soviet expansionism, in recent years the USA has made

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<sup>73</sup> Dorian Jones (2021), "Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri Uygur Sorununa Rağmen Derinleşiyor", *VOA Türkçe*, 24.03.2021, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/turkiye-cin-iliskileri-uygur-sorununa-ragmen-derinlesiyor/5826904.html>.

<sup>74</sup> European Commission, "Countries and regions: Turkey", Date of Accession: 07.09.2021 from <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/turkey/>.

<sup>75</sup> Mehmet Babacan (2011), "Whither an Axis Shift: A Perspective from Turkey's Foreign Trade", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No: 1, pp. 129-157.

important progress in transforming the organization into an anti-China military alliance. For example, after the NATO meeting in June 2021, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned of Chinese military and technological advancement, but also stressed that the organization does not want a new Cold War with Beijing.<sup>76</sup> In addition, as a result of American pressure, NATO has listed China as one of its strategic priorities for the first time, saying Beijing's ambitions and its "*coercive policies*" challenge the Western bloc's "*interests, security and values*" in its 2022 Strategic Concept document.<sup>77</sup> These are concrete developments showing that the "*Western iron curtain*" acts as a barrier against further Turkey-China rapprochement.

In addition, with their large influence and popularity, Western media institutions and Western financed non-governmental organizations also work against the Chinese regime and Chinese global influence. For instance, Turkish journalist Kamil Erdoğan, who works as the executive editor for the Chinese *CRITürk* radio, writes that Western media and academia deliberately spread false and exaggerated news about China.<sup>78</sup>

#### 2.4. Covid-19 Pandemic

Since the Covid-19 or coronavirus pandemic was first discovered in the Chinese city of Wuhan and the 45<sup>th</sup> USA President Donald Trump tried to use this fact as an influential means to demonize and isolate China with his "*Chinese virus*" slurs, in some Western countries the pandemic has led to a rise in anti-Chinese sentiments.<sup>79</sup> In the USA, Australia, and United Kingdom, some state officials even declared a desire to make China pay compensation for the virus. As China is a member of the UN Security Council and the pandemic is not only related to China, these demands would probably not rise above the level of populist rhetoric. However, the rise of anti-China feelings is real for many Western societies. For instance, according to an actual study conducted by the Henry Jackson Society in Britain, 74 % of British people think that China has deliberately allowed the spread of the pandemic and 71 % support a lawsuit against

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<sup>76</sup> BBC (2021), "Nato warns of the military challenge posed by China", 15.06.2021, Date of Accession: 07.09.2021 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57466210>.

<sup>77</sup> NATO (2022), "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept", Date of Accession: 22.07.2022 from [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf), p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> Kamil Erdoğan (2021), *Bilmediğimiz Çin*, İstanbul: Kırmızı Kedi Yayınevi, pp. 35-36.

<sup>79</sup> Jérôme Viala-Gaudefroy & Dana Lindaman (2021), "Donald Trump's 'Chinese virus': the politics of naming", *The Conversation*, 13.04.2021, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-chinese-virus-the-politics-of-naming-136796>.

Beijing.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic severely undermined China's relations with Western states and the Chinese government's lack of transparency was heavily criticized. However, so far Beijing has managed the crisis perfectly well, received support from international organizations (including the World Health Organization), and showed goodwill by donating two billion doses of the Sinovac vaccine to many countries and 100 billion American dollars in aid to Covax.<sup>81</sup> Turkish academic Hüseyin Bağcı also pointed out that China managed the crisis much better compared to Western democracies and China's influence on global politics will rise again soon.<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that China had 2.3 % economic growth in 2020; in 2021 so far this rose to 8.1 %.<sup>83</sup> Thus, it will not be wrong to claim that the Chinese economy quickly recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic's negative effects.

Strangely, unlike China's relations with the other Western countries, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a relatively positive impact on Turkey-China relations. According to Turkey's ambassador to China, Abdulkadir Emin Önen (2021), since the two countries helped each other during the pandemic and China did not have any problem providing millions of doses of vaccine, the disaster empowered bilateral relations during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the initiation of official diplomatic relations.<sup>84</sup> Thus, we can conclude that although Turkey-China relations were not affected by Covid-19, due to the degradation of China's relations with the Western countries, Turkey-China relations were nevertheless indirectly affected by this pandemic.

These four issues can be stated as the most problematic subjects in bilateral relations. Besides these issues, the lack of knowledge about China in Turkey, cultural differences between the two nations, and different regime types and political cultures could be noted as other problematic issues that impede establishment of a trust-based strategic partnership.

### 3. Turkish Position on the Belt and Road Initiative

<sup>80</sup> *Milliyet* (2020), "İngiltere, Çin'den corona virüs tazminatı istiyor!", 20.04.2020, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/dunya/ingiltere-cinden-corona-virus-tazminati-istiyor-6193325>.

<sup>81</sup> Huizhong Wu (2021), "China pledges 2 billion vaccines globally through year's end", *AP News*, 06.08.2021, Date of Accession: 07.09.2021 from <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-business-health-china-coronavirus-pandemic-7b3a7e0f5949b6976d4cf7f69bba71d0>.

<sup>82</sup> Hüseyin Bağcı (2020), "Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri – Nisan 2020 Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Bağcı", 28.04.2020, Date of Accession: 07.09.2021 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L47SyUjSq0E>.

<sup>83</sup> DEİK (2021/a), "Çin Bilgi Notu", DEİK Ekonomik Araştırmalar, Haziran 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Abdulkadir Emin Önen (2021), "Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri: 50 yıllık saygı ve dostluk", *CRITürk*, 06.08.2021, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://www.criturk.com/turkiye-cin-iliskileri-50-yillik-saygi-ve-dostluk/>.

The BRI is a comprehensive global infrastructure development project announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 during his visit to Kazakhstan.<sup>85</sup> The project is designed to include 70 different countries from the Far East to Europe, as well as international organizations. Initially labeled in the Western press as “*China’s Marshall Plan*”, Chinese authorities including Foreign Minister Wang Yi and President Jinping repeatedly stated that the project does not advance a neocolonial agenda and is based on a “*win-win*” mentality.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, President Jinping defined the project as “*a real choir of all states, not just China’s solo*” to underline that it is an international initiative to facilitate global trade.<sup>87</sup> China had already invested 152 billion American dollars in resources to the project from its Silk Road Fund, the China-led Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), the China Development Bank, the China Exim Bank, and the Agricultural Development Bank of China.<sup>88</sup> The Chinese government pledged 800 billion American dollars more in funds for a five-year investment plan beginning in 2018.<sup>89</sup> With a planned completion date in 2049, the project has the additional goal of raising China to a higher level of socialist success by eliminating poverty and underdevelopment.

### Map 1: Belt and Road Initiative<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> *People’s Daily Online* (2016), “Chronology of China's Belt and Road Initiative”, 24.06.2016, Date of Accession: 06.09.2021 from <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0624/c90883-9077342.html>.

<sup>86</sup> Ozan Örmeci (2018), *Ejder’in Ayak Sesleri: Dünya Siyasetinde Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti*, pp. 197-198.

<sup>87</sup> Laurentiu Gagu (2020), “The Belt and Road Initiative in the Context of the COVID-19”, *AUDRI*, Vol. 13, No: 1/2020, pp. 20-35.

<sup>88</sup> Selçuk Çolakoğlu (2019), “China’s Belt and Road Initiative and Turkey’s Middle Corridor: A Question of Compatibility”, *MEI@75*, 29.01.2019, Date of Accession: 06.09.2021 from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-and-turkeys-middle-corridor-question-compatibility>.

<sup>89</sup> Şerif Dilek & Büşra Zeynep Özdemir & Deniz İstikbal (2019), *Asya Yüzylında Türkiye-Çin Ekonomik İlişkileri*, p. 40.

<sup>90</sup> Bradford Betz (2020), “What is China's Belt and Road Initiative?”, *Fox News*, 30.04.2020, Date of Accession: 06.09.2021 from <https://www.foxnews.com/world/what-is-chinas-belt-road-initiative>.



The BRI project consists of two corridors: 1-) The “*Silk Road Economic Belt*” (SREB) follows the historical overland Silk Road through Central Asia, Iran, Turkey, and eventually to Europe; 2-) The “*Maritime Silk Road*” (MSR) originates in the South China Sea, passing through the Malacca Strait, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and extending into the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>91</sup> Turkey is very important for the completion of the SREB, which would connect Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Russia, and European states (see Map 1). Turkey is also highly valued in the BRI vision as part of the China-Pakistan-Turkey railroad project.<sup>92</sup>

Turkey furthermore considers this project beneficial for its “*Middle Corridor*” (*Orta Koridor*) strategy. According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Ankara wants to revive the traditional Silk Road by connecting itself with Georgia, Azerbaijan, other Caspian states, and China via railroads and highways.<sup>93</sup> From the Turkish point of view, the BRI is a project that could help Ankara to realize its aim to become a regional power and economic hub. Following this strategy, Turkey

<sup>91</sup> Selçuk Çolakoğlu (2019), “China’s Belt and Road Initiative and Turkey’s Middle Corridor: A Question of Compatibility”, *MEI@75*, 29.01.2019, Date of Accession: 06.09.2021 from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-and-turkeys-middle-corridor-question-compatibility>.

<sup>92</sup> Kübra Merve Topgül (2019), “Kuşak ve Yol Projesi Kapsamında Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri”, Boğaziçi Asya Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 26.08.2019, Date of Accession: 07.09.2021 from <http://bogaziciasya.com/kusak-ve-yol-projesi-kapsaminda-turkiye-cin-iliskileri/>.

<sup>93</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı/c, “Türkiye'nin Çok Taraflı Ulaştırma Politikası”, Date of Accession: 07.09.2021 from [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye\\_nin-cok-taraflı-ulaştırma-politikasi.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_nin-cok-taraflı-ulaştırma-politikasi.tr.mfa).

already successfully terminated the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway with Azerbaijan and Georgia<sup>94</sup> (see Map 2) and also started the construction on the Edirne-Kars High-Speed Network.<sup>95</sup>

**Map 2: Middle Corridor<sup>96</sup>**



When we look at the aims of the project, first of all, the BRI is based on classical Chinese foreign policy goals: 1-) sovereignty and respect for territorial integrity, 2-) pacifism, 3-) non-interference in other nations' domestic affairs, 4-) equality and mutual benefit, 5-) peaceful

<sup>94</sup> Fuat Kabakçı (2021), "Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri birçok alanda geliyor", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 24.03.2021, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turkiye-cin-iliskileri-bircok-alanda-gelisiyor/2186643>.

<sup>95</sup> Ouyang Shijia (2021), "China, Turkey more closely linked by rail", *China Daily*, 21.07.2021, Date of Accession: 04.09.2021 from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202107/21/WS60f77d6fa310efa1bd6634a4\\_2.html](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202107/21/WS60f77d6fa310efa1bd6634a4_2.html).

<sup>96</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı/c, "Türkiye'nin Çok Taraflı Ulaştırma Politikası", Date of Accession: 07.09.2021 from [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye\\_nin-cok-terafli-ulasirma-politikasi.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_nin-cok-terafli-ulasirma-politikasi.tr.mfa).

coexistence.<sup>97</sup> According to Topgül, on the other hand, Beijing's main motivations for developing such an enormous project can be listed as follows:<sup>98</sup>

- Reducing transportation costs,
- Reducing the economy's dependence on domestic infrastructural investments,
- Expanding the international market for Chinese companies,
- Increasing the use of Chinese currency yuan in international trade,
- Providing the energy security of China,
- Increasing global demand for Chinese products.

Other than these stated goals, by creating economic interdependence, China can be understood to be making efforts towards global stability and peace by increasing economic relations between states that are included in the project. The BRI involves many states currently at various levels of conflict and economic interdependence generally reduces political and military tensions between states. Therefore, this project could be perceived as a positive development from a liberal perspective. In addition, as China established the AIIB to finance this enterprise, it could also be understood as beneficial to global equality insofar as it would create an alternative to the World Bank. As seen in the early 2000s, although the USA has been a functioning democracy, in a unipolar system it has gratuitously started wars (e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq) that even Washington itself considered wrong in hindsight. Thus, having an alternative global financial institution that could give credits and funds to underdeveloped states to establish better political and economic systems is in every sense a positive development for global security and stability. Moreover, with an enhanced trade system from Asia to Europe, European and American firms could also increase their profits and shares in different markets connected by the BRI. Lastly, since China still adheres to some communist ideals such as eliminating poverty, China-led infrastructural investments in China or other countries would certainly increase the quality of life of millions of people around the world.

As noted earlier, Turkey politically supported the project from the start and did not see any imperial or colonial aims related to the BRI. Both countries already signed a memorandum of

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<sup>97</sup> Arzu Durdular (2016), "Çin'in "Kuşak-Yol" Projesi ve Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerine Etkisi", *Avrasya Etüdüleri*, Vol. 49, No: 1, p. 80.

<sup>98</sup> Kübra Merve Topgül (2019), "Kuşak ve Yol Projesi Kapsamında Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri", Boğaziçi Asya Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 26.08.2019, Date of Accession: 07.09.2021 from <http://bogaziciasya.com/kusak-ve-yol-projesi-kapsaminda-turkiye-cin-iliskileri/>.

understanding for the BRI in 2015. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan even wrote an article published in the Chinese daily *Global Times* on July 1, 2019, a day before his most recent visit to China. His op-ed made it clear that Turkey officially endorses the China-led BRI and shares China's vision “when it comes to serving world peace, preserving global security and stability, promoting multilateralism, and upholding the principle of free trade”.<sup>99</sup> President Erdoğan also underlined that Turkish-Chinese relations have evolved into a strategic cooperative relationship since 2010, and the BRI is the greatest development project of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>100</sup> In order to show his support for the Chinese leader, President Erdoğan also addressed Jinping as “my dear friend”.<sup>101</sup> Abdulkadir Emin Önen also many times emphasized that Turkey officially supports the BRI.<sup>102</sup>

Turkish experts who study China generally express a positive consideration of the BRI. For instance, Emre Ozan from the Turkish think-tank ANKASAM thinks that Turkey is a critical country for the project's implementation due to its geopolitical positioning and the opportunities afforded Ankara to obtain Chinese-led infrastructural investments may facilitate greater trade.<sup>103</sup> Kadir Temiz also considers the BRI as an opportunity to improve bilateral economic relations.<sup>104</sup> The scholar Barış Doster claims that the BRI will help enhance Turkey-China relations.<sup>105</sup> He reasons that because of its problematic relations with the West, Ankara will be very willing to extend its relations with Beijing, especially for economic objectives.<sup>106</sup> Altay Atlı, on the other hand, thinks that Western countries condemn the BRI politically, yet they do not offer an

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<sup>99</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2019), “Turkey, China share a vision for future”, *Global Times*, 01.07.2019, Date of Accession: 29.08.2021 from <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1156357.shtml>.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Abdulkadir Emin Önen (2021), “Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri: 50 yıllık saygı ve dostluk”, *CRITürk*, 06.08.2021, Date of Accession: 03.09.2021 from <https://www.criturk.com/turkiye-cin-iliskileri-50-yillik-saygi-ve-dostluk/>.

<sup>103</sup> Emre Ozan (2021), “Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri: Fırsatlar ve Engeller”, ANKASAM, 24.03.2021, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.ankasam.org/turkiye-cin-iliskileri-firsatlar-ve-engeller/>.

<sup>104</sup> Kadir Temiz (2017), “Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri”, SETA, April 2017, No: 196, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2017/04/TRCin.pdf>.

<sup>105</sup> Yıldız Yazıcıoğlu (2021), “Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri Nasıl Yorumlanıyor?”, *VOA Türkçe*, 15.04.2021, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/turkiye-cin-iliskilerinde-son-durum-nasil-yorumlaniyor/5854030.html>.

<sup>106</sup> *bid.*

alternative project for Asian development.<sup>107</sup> DEİK and its different experts also support Turkish inclusion in the BRI and project a 15 % rise in Turkish exports as a result.<sup>108</sup>

However, the BRI carries some risks for Ankara and other countries as well. For instance, Indian geostrategist Brahma Chellaney introduced the concept of “*debt-trap diplomacy*” in 2017 to interpret Chinese foreign policy behavior concerning the BRI.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, according to Temiz (2020), Turkey might suffer some losses in terms of competitive capacity. He also speculates that Turkey’s financial fragility might worsen if this project comes to fruition.<sup>110</sup> However, a recent report prepared by Lee Jones and Shahar Hameiri for Chatham House concluded that the project is largely based on economic dynamics and does not contain specific geopolitical goals to promote the rise of China.<sup>111</sup> From an opposite viewpoint though, some China researchers in Turkey presented the BRI as a means to a China-led world order.<sup>112</sup> That fear makes the BRI maligned in the USA and Europe as a project that will lead to domination of Western markets by Chinese products, rising unemployment and pollution.<sup>113</sup>

## Conclusion

We can therefore, conclude, first of all, that the rhetoric surrounding the rise of China is influential in Turkey as well: China has very recently become Turkey’s second-biggest trade partner as proven by official Turkish statistics.

Secondly, although the economic relationship between Turkey and China has a fundamental and structural problem of trade deficit for Ankara, Chinese investments in Turkey and China’s great potential for the Turkish tourism industry encourage both sides to further develop trade relations.

<sup>107</sup> Selin Çalık Muhasilović (2018), “Çin’in Bir Yol Bir Kuşak Projesi’ni Batı politik malzeme olarak kullanıyor”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 19.09.2018, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/cinin-bir-yol-bir-kusak-projesini-bati-politik-malzeme-olarak-kullaniyor/1259170>.

<sup>108</sup> DEİK (2021/c), “DEİK, TÜRKİYE’NİN KUŞAK VE YOL GİRİŞİMİ’NDEKİ KONUMUNU 8 FARKLI SENARYOYLA ORTAYA KOYDU”, Date of Accession: 08.09.2021 from <https://www.deik.org.tr/basin-aciklamalari-deik-turkiye-nin-kusak-ve-yol-girisimi-ndeki-konumunu-8-farkli-senaryoyla-ortaya-koydu>.

<sup>109</sup> Brahma Chellaney (2017), “China’s Debt Trap Diplomacy”, Project Syndicate, 23.01.2017, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-one-belt-one-road-loans-debt-by-brahma-chellaney-2017-01>.

<sup>110</sup> Kadir Temiz (2020), “Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Fay Hatları”, *Perspektif Online*, 19.03.2020, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.perspektif.online/turkiye-cin-iliskilerinin-fay-hatlari-2/>.

<sup>111</sup> Lee Jones & Shahar Hameiri (2020), “Debunking the Myth of ‘Debt-trap Diplomacy’”, Chatham House, 19.08.2020, Date of Accession: 05.09.2021 from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/08/debunking-myth-debt-trap-diplomacy/6-conclusion-and-policy-recommendations>.

<sup>112</sup> Zekeriyya Akdağ (2019/a), “Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinde Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi’nin Önemi”, p. 67.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Thirdly, due to Turkey's Western orientation and the Western barrier against Turkey-China rapprochement, developing economic relations have some political risks. The Xinjiang conflict and Chinese restrictions against Muslim freedoms especially constitute the most important problems in bilateral relations as the Turkish government's Islamist rhetoric in domestic politics expresses a worldview of Muslim solidarity held by religiously conservative Turks who make up the ruling party's base.

Fourthly, Turkey officially supports the China-led BRI and considers it beneficial for its Middle Corridor strategy. China also treats Turkey as a great asset for the project's completion. That is why; the BRI could enhance Turkish-Chinese economic partnership since both countries prioritize trade relations, globalization, and rules-based international order.

Finally, China experts in Turkey generally have a positive perception of the BRI project, which could be noted as an encouraging factor for further rapprochement.

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