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Analysis of the Impact of the Middle Corridor on Türkiye in Terms of Geopolitics and Economy in the OBOR Initiative

OBOR Girişiminde Orta Koridorun Jeopolitik ve Ekonomik Açından Türkiye'ye Etkisinin Analizi

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ABSTRACT

When the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Project was announced in 2013, it aimed to establish an uninterrupted transportation and commercial network between Asia and Europe. The Trans-European Networks (TEN) project initiated by the European Union (EU) and OBOR, which is considered an alternative to US-based commercial activities, has gained a global dimension in a short time. The OBOR project, which is planned as two lines of land and sea, concerns Turkey closely. These trade lines initiated by the EU and China will not only increase the geopolitical value of Turkey but also contribute to its economy. It is located on the Middle and South Corridors of the Turkish highway trade route. The Middle Corridor, which is predominantly built on a rail, reaches Europe through China, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey. The Southern Corridor will reach Europe by connecting to Turkey via Iran.

The main purpose of these projects was to provide uninterrupted access between production and consumption centers. China wants to be the country that directs and controls world trade rather than exporting raw and processed products. For this reason, it has tended to establish close cooperation with countries at the intersection of continents, and Turkey is one of them.

In this study, the relationship between the Middle Corridor between Turkey and China and its impact on the economy will be analyzed. Considering the impact of the country's geopolitical and geoeconomic structure and potential on the projects, a series of evaluations have been made.

Keywords: Turkey, Geopolitics and Geoeconomic, OBOR

ÖZ

Bir Kuşak Bir Yol (OBOR) projesi 2013 yılında ilan edildiğinde Asya-Avrupa arasında kesintisiz bir ulaşım ve ticari ağ kurma amacı taşıyordu. Aslında Avrupa Birliği'nin (AB) başlatmış olduğu Trans Avrupa Ağları (TEN) projesi ve ABD merkezli ticari faaliyetlere alternatif olarak düşünülen OBOR kısa zaman içerisinde küresel bir boyut kazanmıştır. Kara ve deniz olmak üzere iki hat olarak planlanan OBOR projesi Türkiye'yi yakından ilgilendirmektedir. AB ve Çin'in başlatmış olduğu bu ticaret hatları Türkiye'nin jeopolitik değerini daha da arttıracak gibi ekonomisine de büyük katkı sunacaktır.

Türkiye karayolu ticaret güzergahının Orta ve Güney Koridorları üzerinde bulunmaktadır. Ağırlıklı olarak demiryolu üzerine kurulmuş Orta Koridor Çin, Orta Asya, Kafkasya ve Türkiye üzerinden Avrupa'ya ulaşır. Güney Koridor ise İran üzerinden Türkiye'ye bağlanarak Avrupa'ya ulaşacaktır.

Bu projelerin ana amacı üretim ve tüketim merkezleri arasında kesintisiz bir erişim sağlamaktır. Aslında Çin, ham ve işlenmiş ürün ihraç etmekten çok, dünya ticaretini yönlendiren ve kontrol altında tutan ülke olmak istemektedir. Bu yüzden kıtaların kesişim noktasında ülkelerle yakından işbirliği kurma eğiliminde olmuş, bunlardan başında ise Türkiye gelmektedir.

Bu çalışmada Orta Koridorun, Türkiye Çin arasındaki ilişkisi ve ekonomiye etkisi analiz edilecektir. Ülkenin jeopolitik ve jeoekonomik yapı ve potansiyelinin projeler üzerindeki etkisi göz önüne alınarak bir dizi değerlendirilmeler yapılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türkiye, Jeopolitik ve Jeoekonomi, OBOR

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INTRODUCTION

Transportation, one of the economic activities that direct world trade, affects the economy straight-forwardly due to its potential and relationship with other economic activities today, as it did in the past. Transportation, with its constant relationship with economic, commercial, and political formations at the national and economic levels rapidly adapts to the changes and developments experienced in the economy (Taşlıgil 2010). In cases where the economy develops, investment, the number of vehicles, the amount of freight carried, the carrying capacity, and mobility increase, while the contractions in the economy lead to a decrease in investments in transportation activities and therefore a reduction in mobility. Population growth and the uneven distribution of products around the world underlie the development of transport activities

The distribution of agricultural, and animal products, industrial raw materials and processed products around the world has accelerated the development of the transportation sector. Especially among the places where the population is dense and the demand for necessities is high, the types of transportation that allow the transfer of more products in unit amounts are developing.

The historical Silk Road is among the oldest and most widely used transportation routes in the world. This term was first used by German geographer F.V. Richthofen in the 19th century. In this trade route that started in China, silk, which constituted an important part of China's export products, was transported (Bakırcı, 2014; Wang, 2019). The Silk Road, connecting the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, was divided into two routes, north and south. The north route started from Central Asia and reached The Black Sea through The Marmara Sea, the Balkans, Venice, Bulgaria, Eastern Europe, and Crimea, while the south route reached Turkistan, Iran, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia, then extended from Southern Anatolia to Egypt and Northern Africa (Bakırcı, 2014; Chance ve Mafinezam 2016; Nurhasanah et al., 2019) through Levant.¹ It is seen that the commercial route defined as OBOR today is the ancient Silk Road controlled by China about 2000 years ago. This historical transportation road forms the footprints of globalization. This transportation network, in which necessities were traded during the period of intensive use, could not be used actively until today, but now it is trying to be activated in a more developed way.

The aim of recent innovations in transportation activities, which serve the national economies in the form of passengers and freight transport, is to serve the purpose of transporting more cargo and passenger per unit amount, in an environmentally friendly and low-cost manner. In this direction, some measures have been taken especially in the 21st century against increasing fuel costs, the number of vehicles, and environmental pollution. Increasing carbon dioxide gas emissions creates several ecological problems. To eliminate them, countries are choosing to develop new strategies. Mostly they are changing the fuel used in transportation activities and using new technology. The EU aims to reduce the gas emission level, which is an important source of pollution, below 90% of the value of 1990 by 2050 to reduce environmental pollution and increase quality. It is planned that a significant 60% of this decrease will be due to transportation activities (European Commission 2011). In line with this purpose, it is planned to adopt new technologies in vehicles to increase the use of electrical energy instead of fossil fuels and to focus on rail and maritime transportation, which allows more transport in unit quantities. In this way, it has been considered to ensure a change of balance in transportation modes and to make transportation policies sustainable and user-oriented (Ministry of Development 2018). In addition to these, the cost is a determining factor when choosing between transportation and communication systems. The system that is safe and economical in transportation, especially in the transportation of bulk, and solid cargo, is maritime transport. In terms of cost, sea transportation is 3.5 times cheaper than rail, 7 times cheaper than the road and, 22 times cheaper than air. Therefore, this has made the maritime transport the most used mode of transport worldwide (CADA 2015).

This study aims of this study is to analyze the impact of the OBOR project, initiated by China, which plans to open to the world, on Turkey with a critical perspective. Turkey needs to take an active part in this project in order to keep its economy and geopolitics strong. For this reason, many initiatives have been made and continue to be made in this field.

The Main Transport Corridors and OBOR

Today, the European and the Asian continent are attempting to introduce new commercial routes to plan their future and strengthen their economies. Intensive work has been initiated a long time ago in order to open new trade routes under the leadership of the EU countries in the western block and the China-based Asian countries in the eastern bloc.

1 For more information on the Levant, please refer to "Journal of International Relations", Vol. 15, No 60 (Special Issue), 2018.

Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) projects have been put into effect by the EU to strengthen the relations in terms of transportation, energy, and communication. In this way, the EU aimed to strengthen cooperation by establishing an infrastructure network between its members and its neighbors. TEN-T, which is planned to create a European-based transportation network where freight and people can move easily, basically consists of two stages (Özer ve Kişi 2011). One of them, the comprehensive network, includes land, rail, sea, and air as well as integration among them. The core network is a project with higher standards and high strategic importance. With this project, which is planned to be completed by 2030, the EU aims to reach the Asian markets easily. The Pan-European 4th Corridor (Orient / East-Mediterranean / OEM) connected to Turkey through Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Greece constitutes the important pillar of this project (Ministry of Development 2018; European Commission, 2011; Grosch 2020; European Commission 2021a).

The project of connecting Europe and Asia by rail, which was opened for discussion by the United Nations (UN) in 1960 for the first time, could not be realized due to some obstacles encountered. This project was planned to complete an important leg of the transportation network with a tube crossing under the Bosphorus or under the 3rd Bridge to be built on the Bosphorus (Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, which was opened in 2016). Some countries pledged to do their part in their 1996 contract. With this project, the connection between Europe and the Far East would be ensured with a single rail network, and the duration of freight traffic which took longer than a month by sea would be further shortened (Tümertekin & Özgüç 2005).

TER (Trans European Railway) is a railway project planned for the development of transportation between European countries, while TAR (Trans Asian Railway) is a railway project planned for integrated freight transportation between Europe and Southeast Asia. Both projects of which Turkey is a member are located in the southern corridor. The fact that a significant part of the TAR project follows the “Historical Silk Road” route led to the usage of the term “Iron Silk Road”. Part of the 3rd and 4th

Corridors (the project consists of 9 corridors) of the EATL (Europe-Asia Transport Links) railway projects planned by UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) and UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific) will use the Turkish route (European Commission 2021b; Ministry of Development 2018; Özer & Kişi 2011; UNECE 2021). Part of the network that will connect Europe to Asia through the Caucasus will traverse Turkey. The project, referred to as TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia), connects the Central Asian countries by rail and road, bringing them to the Pan-European Transport Corridor in Europe (Constanta) through the Caucasus and the Black Sea. Although limited, Turkey is involved in the project. Cargoes that will enter the country via Baku-Tbilisi will reach Samsun Port by Kars railway and be transported from there to Russia and Europe (Ministry of Development 2018; TRACECA 2021).

Apart from these projects planned by EU countries, the new trade route launched by China is the One Belt One Road / OBOR project², which consists of two lines and three corridors, with an investment of \$ 1 trillion. The land and sea route of this trade route was announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. This trade route, introduced as OBOR, actually forms the “Modern Silk Road” network of today. OBOR is also referred to as BRI and SREB³ and is used as OBOR / BRI for short (Blanckard & Flint 2017; Sternberg, Ariell Ahearn & McConnell 2017; Xie 2018; Chance & Mafinezam 2016; Nurhasanah, Napang & Rohman 2019; Cai 2017). Here, “One Belt” refers to the land and railroad extending from Asia to Europe, and “One Road” refers to the maritime trade route connecting Asia-Africa-Europe (Esmer 2017). There are 72 members (mostly in Asian countries) within OBOR on a global scale.⁴ Political moves as well as economy and trade have an important place in the creation of this line. Before the OBOR project, the EU, USA, and Russia were in similar studies, especially the USA’s encirclement of China in the Pacific⁵, and Russia’s attempt to establish a union in Central Asia (Alperen, 2018). He forced him to overcome the siege with the OBOR project that would reach Europe through their republics. The main elements of this road

2 It is stated that when the project is completed, there will be an investment of \$ 1 trillion. (Crandall & Crandall, 2017 citing from (Mutlu, 2021).

3 BRI ‘Belt and Road Initiative’, SREB ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’

4 Afghanistan, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Macedonia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Panama, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, South Korea, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, East Timor, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Yemen (Katutaş, 2019)

5 Another pillar of this containment is to establish a regional cooperation by establishing a union between Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and India after NATO. In this way, it is a project to contain China from the west as well (Firdous & Dar, 2014). However, this silk road project was shelved as a result of the lack of unity in the region. The OBOR project initiated by China continues to exist (Karluk, 2017).

have been signed between member countries and China. Considering the number of cooperation countries, economic structure and population, the project corresponds to more than 60% of the world population and 40% of the global gross domestic product. In addition, an important part of the world energy market, such as 4/3, stands on this line. Although it will take a long time to complete the construction of all corridors, the start of investments in already cooperating countries has provided an economic improvement. The project, which was initiated under the leadership of China, is planned to be put into effect in 2049⁶ (Işıkoğlu 2019; Güner 2018).

The basis for China to build these roads is to stop being a USA-focused market, (Wilson 2019; Oliveira, et al., 2020) to export the capital it has accumulated before 2008, (Summers, 2016; Asker & Koyuncu, 2021; Sabancı, 2018) and to cooperate with other countries with the concern that the dominance of production power will begin to weaken in the 4.0 industrial period.

This situation can be expressed as China's soft marketing of its hard shell. In addition, OBOR is a step towards building and preserving China's future. According to Chinese philosophy, the order of the world should be built through Tianxia, the "world institution". Since Tianxia is the highest order of all, China must establish it. OBOR has begun to be played on the world stage as the real embodiment of this idea (Nurhasanah, Napang & Rohman 2019). OBOR is vital for China as the world's largest economy, (Chance & Mafinezam 2016) which tends to expand from east to west in the form of soft power, increase its influence and rejuvenate, that is, to build the Sino-centric order. Although this project seems to be realizing economic activities such as trade, transportation, and infrastructure, it is a political project on the one hand and a project that will facilitate the rejuvenation of China in every sense (Ünaldılar Kocamaz 2019; Song 2014; Rolland, 2017; Fallon, 2015; Sabancı, 2018; Alff, 2017). Xi Jinping stated that OBOR would not be a regional development but would cover all countries through the corridors to be established (Callahan 2008). In this way, China wants to dominate the whole world from different branches with the philosophy of "Tianxia". With OBOR, it aims to establish a world order in which China is at the center by replacing the current order (Pu, 2016). In this way, the idea that the project will be a product of China's expansionist policy has started to gain weight (Yılmaz 2020). The common side of these views is that the OBOR project is more than just an inter-spatial transport

project, it is an infrastructure investment project that will change the course of the economy (Zepp-LaRouche, 2016).

Surveys show that China plays a more active role in the world compared to 10 years ago. China does this through the debt trap, which it sees as one of the ways to increase its power. With this method, which is also described as new imperialism, China uses soft power instead of violence to rule a region. This method is burdening countries with debt that do not have the financial power to invest using Chinese financing. With OBOR, a high level of financing is provided, especially to countries with payment problems (Nurhasanah et al., 2019). The fact that these investments are irreversible and have a nature that will force the economies of the countries and contain special conditions continue to exist as an economic threat (Crandall & Crandall, 2017). China's relations, especially in Asia, are characterized by being Sinocentric and expansionist (Alff, 2017). An example of this situation is seen in Southeast Asia. Sri Lanka, one of the important countries of the Maritime Silk Road, could not repay the financing it used for the construction of the port (\$ 1.5 billion), in which the port was given to the Chinese administration, and it received easy terms of payment for 99 years in return. Having turned into a highly indebted country, Sri Lanka is forced to put its economic and strategic existence under Chinese control. A similar situation can be experienced by Pakistan, where a \$ 62 billion financing and 40-year operating agreement was made for the CPEC corridor and port construction (Moramudali, 2019). Thus, the process is managed in the form of a kind of soft and silent power. The most important point in the system is that if the debt is not paid on time, the investment made will be transferred to the control of China. This situation refers to the intervention in the form of confiscation of the country's resources.

When we look at the route of the OBOR project, which is one of the main tools of China's grand strategy, (Rolland 2017) it is seen that it covers economically underdeveloped and developing countries mostly (Ly 2020). Day by day, China is trying to tighten its cooperation with countries of high strategic importance which suffer from fragile economies, political weakness, or a tendency for destabilization. Among such countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey constitute the Iron Silk Road route and Southeast Asian countries, Pakistan, and Kenya, Somalia, and Djibouti on the east coast of Africa constitute the Maritime Silk Road all of which are of considerable importance for China.

6 100th anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic of China.

In the Iron Silk Road transportation corridor, China is making plans such as a new tunnel on the line extending to London via Kazakhstan, Russia, Poland, and Germany in terms of transporting products to the busiest ports in Europe. The support of the countries on this route to the Russia-Ukraine war in the region affects China's plans. The same situation exists on the Iran, Iraq, Syria, and North Africa line from Kazakhstan. The plans of this region can only be realized when the crisis and wars stop (Smulian, 2017). It further increases the geostrategic position of the Turkic Republics, especially Kazakhstan, located in the heart of Asia, for the trade volume of more than 500 billion dollars between China and Europe to continue to increase (Rykov & Zehong, 2015). The fact that Kazakhstan is an important land gate of China opening to the west (Yılmaz, 2020) and the existence of energy resources ensured good relations with China in the long term. With the relations established within the scope of the OBOR project, China-based investments in the search for new energy sources have increased, and new pipelines to China have been commissioned (Yılmaz, 2020; Özdaşlı, 2015; Omonkulov, 2020; Yıldız, 2018). Apart from this, railway projects in China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran continue (Omonkulov, 2020). The first phase of this project is worth 2.7 billion dollars between Khorgos and Aktav (Alperen, 2018). With these lines, the Caspian energy resources, the continuation of which will pass through Turkey, constitute an important pillar of the middle corridor. Other important countries of the Middle Corridor are Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran. Turkmenistan is China's largest gas supplier⁷ (Omonkulov, 2020). In addition, Turkmenbashi Kimani, which is within the scope of TRACECA, is important on this route as it is an important gas transfer point (Ovalı, 2015; Mutlu, 2021). The railway project between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is one of the important initiatives of the power plants OBOR project (Omonkulov, 2020).

Although Russia and China act as allies within the scope of this project, the policies followed may change when it comes to regional interests. Although the former Soviet countries are mostly under Russian control, the countries establish allied relations with China. There are Russian military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, while the Chinese air defense system on the Afghanistan and Tajikistan border causes competition in the region (Alperen, 2018). The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the internal turmoil in the countries of the region, especially in Kazakhstan, make it difficult for China to

face the OBOR project. This situation also has the potential to adversely affect the development of the Middle Corridor.

Azerbaijan is one of the most important countries within the scope of this project for China. The fact that the country is rich in underground resources and has both land and sea connections in the Middle Corridor adds special importance. Therefore, the investments made in the country are quite high. Working in conjunction with Turkey, this corridor not only allowed direct access to China, but also enabled Turkey and Azerbaijan to expand their sphere of influence.

Other countries that are close concerned with the Middle Corridor are Afghanistan and Pakistan. China has a close relationship with both of these countries. Pakistan, on the other hand, has easy access to the Indian Ocean thanks to the CPEC corridor it has created. Due to the Kashmir problem between India and Pakistan, India does not favor this corridor study (Bocutoğlu, 2017; Gökten, 2018). Afghanistan and Pakistan, in terms of their geographical location, act as a regional stabilizing element in Asia before the OBOR corridors, so they serve as two countries that China attaches importance. Many infrastructure works have been carried out in the field of transportation and energy in these two countries. The hydroelectric power line from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan (Firdous & Dar, 2014), and the Iran-Afghan railway are among the works carried out (Gökten, 2018). In this corridor, especially Iran, Afghan, and China railway is very important in terms of providing a second connection network with Turkey. In this way, Turkey will be able to communicate directly with many countries through both the Caucasus and the Middle East. The unrest in this region harms Turkey both economically and in terms of refugees. Turkey's close relations with these two countries, together with the Turkic Republics, in the region where China and Russia want to establish dominance, constitute the efforts for the stability of the region. Because of the low living conditions in these two countries, there are migrations to many countries including Turkey. The most effective way to prevent this situation is to implement projects that will support the development of countries. Undoubtedly, investments within the scope of OBOR come first among these projects.

Turkey is the core of the Historical Silk Road. For centuries, the connection between Asia and Europe has been established through Turkey. It is self-evident that dominating the region until

⁷ With the China-Central Asia natural gas pipeline built between Turkmenistan and China, China purchases 30 trillion m³ of natural gas from Turkmenistan every year (Alperen, 2018).

today has meant directing world politics. The economic circulation of the past will continue in this region today as goods from China must pass through Central Asia, Turkey, and the Mediterranean before reaching the European market. The fact that Turkey is both a market and a commercial partner standing on the route of transition to other markets draws the attention of China. The Chinese Ambassador in Ankara stated that “there are many roads in the New Silk Road project; however, every road will pass through Turkey, wherever it heads to” drawing attention to the indisputable geopolitical and geo economic presence of Turkey in the Europe-Asia axis (Tahincioğlu 2015). This is because, in the Eurasian context, geoeconomics always intersects with geopolitics (Yılmaz & Changming 2018). Although China has chosen the Piraeus Port of Greece as the European leg of the seaway, (Iftikhar & Zhan 2020; Nicoll 2015) it has also made some investments in Turkey and continues to do so. The most important among these, in 2019, is the taking-over of Turkey’s most container-handled (3.1 million TEU) (DTİ 2019) port (Ambarlı/Kumport) (Kumport 2021; Nicoll 2015). China is looking for ways to increase its investments in Turkey, and in this direction, it makes some agreements with Middle Eastern countries (especially Iran and Arab countries) and Turkey. The approval of the Kanal Istanbul project (TRT Haber, 2021) after the visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister (MEU 2021) in March 2021 has led to the belief that the channel will be built with Chinese financing (Kahveci 2021).

Turkey was planned as an Iron Silk Road route rather than the Maritime Silk Road, and investments were predominantly developed in this direction. The location of Turkey at the intersection of continents, being at the center of the historical trade network, adjacent to the world’s oil and natural gas deposits, surrounded by seas and having important ports in terms of shipping mean that its effectiveness in the region will increase further. Therefore, Turkey has an important position and potential in marketing these energy resources on a regional and global scale in terms of all transportation methods (Akengin 2012). It is necessary to evaluate China’s visit and its investments in the Middle East from this perspective. In the meeting with Turkey, China stated that it wanted to cooperate on the reconstruction of the global order, international system, and the UN system (Adıbelli 2021).

“Turkey is one of the two important gateways of China’s Belt and Road Initiative to Europe. For the EU, Turkey is the only gateway to Asia and China. Therefore, the EU’s signal to soften against Turkey and the great importance attached by China to Turkey heralds the emergence of a new geopolitical balance in

the region.” (Adıbelli 2021). In this way, its geopolitical position turns Turkey into an indispensable country for China and the new order.

The Chinese government’s “go out” (Oliveira et al., 2020) instruction to companies and Turkey’s position as a G20 country had an impact on the increase in investments. In addition to the undertaking, colossal-budgeted transportation projects such as the construction and maintenance of HST (High Speed Train) (Rayhaber.com 2016) between Istanbul-Ankara, Ankara-Konya, Ankara-Sivas, Chinese companies have also purchased the shares of several companies. China has focused more on energy and transport-based projects. It has made an investment of \$ 15 billion by 2018, with \$ 9 billion of investments in energy and over \$ 2 billion in rail transport infrastructure. Investments increased during the OBOR process and 56% of the total investment was realized in this period (Scissors 2020). In the next ten years, a trade of 2.5 trillion dollars is expected to be substantiated on the Caspian transit railway between Lianyungang and Istanbul (Casarini 2016). This shows that there will be increases in transit rail transport (ICBC 2021). In the field of financing, the China-based Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) acquired 92.8% of the Textile Bank in 2015, (ICBC 2021) and the Bank of China started its operations by obtaining a license in 2017 (BC 2021).

Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge (YSSB) and Northern Marmara Motorway (NMM) 51% share were sold to a Chinese consortium for 688.5 million dollars in 2019. Bridges and connection roads built within the framework of EU transport programs are integrated into this post-sales OBOR initiative. With the activation of the railway line on the bridge, the process will accelerate and alternative routes in transportation will be activated.

The fact that Turkey is one of the belt countries, the increase in infrastructure investments, and the opening of the railway line between China and Istanbul will bring along increases in trade volume, as well as strengthen the connection between the Turkic Republics and Turkey. This way, Turkey will become more attractive to investors. Aware of its potential and strategic position, Turkey continues to implement important projects to increase its effectiveness in the Silk Road Trade Belt.

As China approached the realization of the project, it faced some sanctions by the USA as a global power. The US could not be expected to ignore a project of this magnitude (Bayar 2021). In 2018, the US imposed several embargoes, enforcing additional

taxes on Chinese products (BBC 2018). The EU, on the other hand, supported this process by approaching it more moderately because the EU provides more than 80% of its gas needs from the line passing through Russia-Ukraine (Kakışım, 2019). The long-term political instability in the region has caused the EU to support this new trade route. Russia, Central Asia, and the Caspian constitute an important energy basin. While China is investing heavily in OBOR member countries, the EU is building pipelines through Turkey, which it sees safe for its energy needs. The war that is still going on today and the tense lines between Russia and the West strengthen Turkey's political hand. Upon this, Russia's cutting off gas shipments to Europe and the explosion in the Nord Stream Pipeline once again revealed Turkey's geopolitical importance in the energy corridor. In the second statement made after Russia decided to stop the gas flow to Europe due to the embargoes due to the war (www.bbc.com), it was stated that the gas need could be met through the Turkish Stream (www.trthaber.com). This situation shows that Turkey is in the position of a country that directs world politics in this corridor. The fact that Turkey is a safe route for energy and cargo transfer has led to the intensification of EU and OBOR investments. US sanctions, political problems between Ukraine and Russia (Bayramlı & Kapan 2018; Şenol 2022), and ongoing instability in the Middle East have further improved the geopolitical position of Turkey, which is in the middle corridor.

Established under the leadership of China, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) contributed to the smooth progress of the process. With this agreement, China has continuously expanded its systematic economic power over Asia (Sternberg et al., 2017; Dadabaev 2014) However, China did not see the SCO as an adequate level of economic union. Therefore, it signed some infrastructure agreements to expand relations with Russia, which has a considerable influence on Central Asia. In this way, it started to coordinate the New Silk Road through the Eurasian Economic Union. In 2015, Russia and China created a free trade zone as a result of the agreement with the EU (Lukin 2018). The aim is to complete the process by improving the land and sea infrastructure connections between Europe and China with the financing provided (Dong 2015; Ünalldılar Kocamaz 2019). The import and export figures of the countries on this transit route have displayed an increase after these years (Roberts 2016). The trade volume between Central Asian countries and China, which was \$ 2.3 billion in 2002, increased to \$ 30.1 billion in 2010 and \$ 41.6 billion in 2018. China's trade volume with Turkey, which was \$ 1.3 billion in 2002, reached \$ 15 billion in 2010, (WITS 2021) \$ 24.6 billion in 2018, and \$ 25.9 billion in 2020 (Turkstat 2021). In this way,

China has taken steps to facilitate trade through mutual agreements by gaining a greater chance of dominating the corridor countries.

China wants to tighten its relations with Central Asian countries and Turkey. Turkey is an indispensable country due to its location and Central Asian countries are valuable in terms of energy resources. In this direction, China is more interested in countries with energy sources (fuels) (Serikkaliyeva 2019). In terms of exports to China, energy sources constituted 95% in 2010 and 98% in 2018 from Turkmenistan, 52% in 2010 and 29% in 2018 from Kazakhstan, and 62% in 2018 from Uzbekistan. Until the Turkmenistan-China pipeline was commissioned in 2009, (ORASAM 2019) Kazakhstan was one of the most important energy importers of China. The commissioning of this pipeline decreased the energy exports of Kazakhstan while increasing the exports of Turkmenistan. In this way, a significant change has occurred in Turkmenistan's export goods. In 2018, 16% of Chinese imports consisted of fuels. Its largest suppliers are the countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa (WITS 2021) China's dependence on the Central Asian countries for energy used in every field will increase to 70% (Ünalldılar Kocamaz 2019). Until 2030, 60% of global oil demand will be made by China alone (Dargnat 2016). Today, the demand of countries for energy is increasing day by day, regardless of their level of development. However, this demand is higher in industrialized countries (Akova 2016). The high dependence on oil means that China, which wants to remain a superpower, continues its search for energy overseas. Connecting three continents with the OBOR initiative, China cooperates with strategically important countries so that oil transfer and its continuity are not interrupted (Nurhasanah, Napang & Rohman 2019).

China leads such financing institutions as Silk Road Project Fund, (Katıtaş 2019; Chance & Mafinezam 2016; Bartosiewicz & Sztlerlik 2019) Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (AIIB 2021a) and New Development Bank (NDB) (NDB 2021) founded for potential investments. AIIB is a development bank that provides financing for infrastructure development in Asia and the Pacific. The Bank has approved a total of 115 projects since 2016, 45 of which were in 2020. A significant 56% of these projects belong to energy (22%), transportation (17%), and financial institutions (17%). A total budget of \$ 23.55 billion including 2021 was approved through the bank (AIIB 2021b). NDB, founded by BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries in 2014, is an international development bank. The purpose of the bank's establishment is to provide financial support for the infrastructure and development of

BRICS countries. At the same time, the bank is one of the infrastructure development banks that provide support to OBOR. NDP approved its second investment in 2017 (\$ 2.5-3 billion). In this way, support to the economies of countries and integration between them is supposed to be provided together (Nurhasanah et al., 2019; Callahan 2008). AIIB decided to support infrastructure projects in Pakistan and other developing countries because of the agreement concluded with the World Bank, European Commission, and European Investment Bank. In 2016, China officially joined the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in order to strengthen bilateral relations within the scope of OBOR (Minghao 2016).

China and European countries have the largest share of Turkey's global trade. Turkey carries out the necessary infrastructure works to make its supplies from China, its biggest importer, in a cheaper and faster manner. The Iron Silk Road, which was put into service between China, Turkey, and Europe, is the first phase of the investments that will serve this purpose. New lines are now planned to shorten this transportation line regionally.

For Turkey to preserve its political and economic place among the countries of the region, it must not only improve its commercial activities but also eliminate its energy dependence. For this reason, it has carried out numerous projects in recent years, especially hydroelectric power plants, dams, nuclear power plants, roads, bridges, and power lines. The limited economic resources of the country (2020 net foreign debt of 244 billion dollars) cause most of the projects to be undertaken by private companies with the build-operate-transfer method.

In summary, OBOR is a trade and economy project that China has presented to the world. Each country will benefit depending on its investments, potential and strategic position. During this period, not enough investment has been made in the Maritime Silk Road route in Turkey, as the country mainly focuses on the Iron Silk Road.

OBOR in Turkey: Political and Infrastructure Processes

Turkey, one of the OBOR member countries, will support projects that serve their interests in this process. It has made some attempts to lay the groundwork for this transportation and infrastructure project, which is an economic, cultural, and political action. These initiatives can be divided into two legal and de facto groups. Legal initiatives are infrastructure / legislative actions applied to activate actual activities.

Legal Infrastructure

The first step in the Turkish leg of the OBOR project was taken at the G20 Leaders' Summit held in Antalya in 2015. The "Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Turkey on the Harmonization of the Silk Road Economic Belt in the 21st Century Maritime and the Middle Corridor Initiative" signed between the two countries on November 14, 2015, the legal foundations of cooperation mainly on railway, highway, and ports have been laid (Resmigazete, 2017a). As a result of this memorandum, it was planned to develop the high-speed train line between Kars-Edirne, and integrate it into the system.

Fundamental purposes of this initiative are as follows:

- 1- Establishing the infrastructure plans and standards of the route countries through the infrastructure connection, and the construction of the main transportation road.
- 2- The route countries taking measures to facilitate investment and commerce through the trade link.
- 3- Financial cooperation through capital connection
- 4- Establishing a policy link and regional cooperation in the political field of the countries on the route
- 5- Developing cooperation in the fields of culture, academy, human resources, tourism, science, technology, and media through cultural connection" (Resmigazete 2017a; Işıkoğlu 2019).

This memorandum was approved on 15/02/2017 with the law number 6792 and was published in the official gazette on 08/03/2017 (Resmigazete 2017b). Thereafter, Ashgabat Declaration was signed between Turkey-Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan on 01.09.2016. In this declaration, it was decided to transport Turkmen and Caspian oil and natural gas to the European market via Turkey, to increase the functionality of the middle corridor, and to facilitate practices in customs to reduce costs (MFA 2015; TRT News 2021). Later, the "Trans-Asian Railway Network Intergovernmental Agreement" was approved and published in the official gazette on 31.03.2017.

In these years when relations with China were intense, several agreements were concluded between the two countries,

mostly on the axis of transportation and energy. Among these, the “Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Transport Infrastructure and Maritime Between the Government of the Turkish Republic and the Government of the People’s Republic of China” and the “Decision on the Approval of the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Railways between the Government of the Turkish Republic and the Government of the People’s Republic of China” (Resmigazete 2017c) were approved on 01.05.2017 and by the decision of the Council of Ministers and their implementation was decided. The last agreement between the two countries is the “Agreement on the Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investments between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of the People’s Republic of China”, which includes the protection of investments made in both countries. It was published in the official gazette on 01.10.2020 (Resmigazete 2020).

De facto Initiatives

The cooperation and memorandums signed between Turkey and China constitute the legal basis for the infrastructure and investments required to modernize the Historical Silk Road. In this context, primary railway projects have been tried to be implemented in Turkey. In addition, the effort is being paid to plan ports, highways and logistics centers and integrate them into the railway system.

The “Middle Corridor” or “Iron Silk Road” route, which provides the most important connection for Turkey, reaches Azerbaijan through the Caspian Sea traversing Central Asia, and from there to Turkey and Europe via the BTK (Baku-Tbilisi-Kars) Railway line. The passage of the line through this geographical region is both a necessity and a contribution to the acceleration of the process. The use of different rail intervals between countries (China and Turkey 1,435 mm, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia 1,520 mm) makes transit transportation impossible. However, this problem was eliminated thanks to the bogiechanging base established on the Turkish-Georgian border. The rapid completion of the infrastructure of the connection of this line to the Black Sea ports and the fact that it is safer than the southern corridor further increase its importance. Inter-country line intervals should be matched to each other in order to maintain uninterrupted transportation. To increase the availability of this line, care has been taken to traverse as few countries as possible. Trains between China and Turkey enter and exit through the customs of three countries (Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan-Georgia). Among these countries, facilitating practices in customs has been very beneficial in terms of time and cost savings.

Turkey sent its first export train to China via OBOR countries in December 2020. Traveling 8,693 km, the train crossed two continents and five countries and reached China after 12 days (TCDD 2020; TRT Haber 2020) The first train sent by China to Europe passed through Turkey and reached Prague in November 2019 (Xinhua.net 2019; Railturkey.org 2020). In the future, by using new lines, access to important centers of Europe will be provided. Transportation using the Marmaray tube crossing will make a great contribution to Turkey economically and strategically. In this way, the Silk Road route has turned into a “Modern Iron Silk Road” and the transportation term from the Pacific to the Atlantic has been reduced to two weeks. The fact that it is shorter than the Beijing-Moscow-London line (North Corridor) indicates that this corridor will attract rail trade soon. Until the end of 2034, it is foreseen that 17 million tons of freight and 3 million passengers will be transported on this line (MTI 2020).

The trade volume of Turkey with the Caucasian and Central Asian Turkic Republics will increase thanks to this corridor. As of 2020, it has a total trade volume of \$ 4.25 billion with Georgia and Azerbaijan, of which \$ 3.5 billion in exports and \$ 750 million in imports. This corridor initially attracted more than \$ 4 billion in trade from these three countries only (Turkstat 2021). The importance of this line shows how essential Turkey is in the process. Turkey is making considerable effort to fulfill its obligations so that this corridor can operate actively and without interruption. First, the railway networks on this route in the country were renewed and HST (High Speed Train) and ST (Speed Train) integration construction work has been partly completed; part of the construction work is pending.

One of the reasons for the agreement signed between China and Turkey is to “create infrastructure plans and standards of the route countries through infrastructure connection and to build the main transportation road” (Işıkoğlu 2019). In this direction, Turkey is striving to create a double-track railway in the east-west and north-south directions to support the middle corridor. Until 2023, the length of ST and HST lines will be increased to 12.915 km and the conventional line to 12.293 km. In this way, efforts are continuing to increase the total railway network to 25,208 km to increase the freight (15%) and passenger (10%) transport rates. Until 2035, it is foreseen that the length of the high-speed train line will be increased to 18,915 kms and the total railway line to 31,000 kms. The integration of the railway with other transportation systems will accelerate and Turkey will turn into an important corridor between Asia-Europe-Africa with the passage of the Bosphorus and the gulf. In this way, 15% of

passenger transport and 20% of freight transport will be carried out by rail; (MTI 2020) in addition, it is estimated that a majority of the trade will be made with Asian countries. This situation is already being witnessed. When the plans are implemented, the share of Turkish railways in 75 billion dollars of commercial transportation between Asia and Europe will increase further (MTI 2021). When the railway works reach the international dimension from the national level, there will be direct access by railway, especially to the OBOR belt countries. This situation will increase the number of tourists coming from the Far East and Central Asia.

Infrastructure projects within the scope of OBOR are uncertain. Investments can be divided into two (i) China's desires and (ii) the plans of the countries (Sternberg et al., 2017). Turkey aims to open its railway infrastructure investments to international use improving the speed and comfort in freight and passenger transportation, and increasing the freight and passenger (especially tourist) transportation with new ports on the seaway and generating economic income. Rapid transportation is planned with many airports built across the country, and it is desired to become an intercontinental hub and transfer center with the new airport built in Istanbul (Istanbul Airport). New initiatives have been made to establish a rapid integration between transportation modes and regions thanks to the infrastructure such as roads, bridges and tunnels built on the highways.

Turkey wants to control national and international passenger and freight transport by setting Ankara (MTI 2020) as the center of the ongoing railway projects. Trains that arrive in Ankara from Kars, Erzurum, and Erzincan railway lines can from here reach important cities and ports of Turkey such as Adana, Mersin, İzmir, Kocaeli and Istanbul. Part of this line (between Kars-Sivas) where transportation is carried out consists of the old railway line. However, the ST infrastructure renewal/construction process between Ankara-Sivas, Ankara-Kayseri, Ankara-Afyon-Uşak-İzmir HST, Osmaniye-Bursa and Konya-Ulukışla (Niğde) continues and it is planned to be completed soon.

Special action is being taken to integrate railroads with ports and provide combined transportation. It is planned to establish Bursa-Balıkesir-Çandarlı and Aliğa-Çandarlı connection lines for Çandarlı Port, which will become an important port, especially for the "Maritime Silk Road" and will compete with Greece's Piraeus Port. In this way, cargo coming through Asia will be able to be transported to Çandarlı Port.

The most critical area that TER, TAR, TRACECA, and OBOR railway transportation projects must use jointly is the lines passing through the straits. Turkey has made some investments for uninterrupted rail transport with Europe and Asia, the most important of which are the Marmaray and YSSB. Among these projects, Marmaray railway and YSSB were built for both road and rail transportation. These projects, built following the modern Iron Silk Road transportation corridors, are expected to be the central base in Trans Asia-Europe Railway transportation in the future. The railway has not been integrated into the YSSB for the moment, but such has been planned. Parallel to the Northern Marmara Motorway, the train line starting from Gebze will pass through YSSB and connect to the Edirne line in Halkalı. This line will also facilitate access to Sabiha Gökçen and Istanbul Airports.

The Southern Corridor has a different feature from the others. The existence of railway lines in the same rail interval (1,435 mm) from Europe to China enables uninterrupted transportation. There is no need to establish a bogie changing base in the Middle Corridor at the entrance from Turkey to Georgia. If it starts to operate rapidly, an uninterrupted transportation environment will be created between Southeast Asia, the Arabian Peninsula and Europe, and freight and passenger trains that will enter Turkey via Iran and Iraq (mostly Iran) will increase the volume of trade.

The Chinese pay attention to Iran which they see as a key country between Asia and the Middle East for the OBOR project to be successful. During the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping in January 2016, the construction and repair works of the HST between China and Iran for passenger and freight transportation came to the agenda (Casarini 2016). In 2021, a \$ 400 billion aid agreement was signed between China and Iran in exchange for oil (Bağ 2021). This situation indicates that the infrastructure process of the corridor will take place under the control of China (with financial support). China's considerable infrastructure investments in Pakistan, and its positive attitude towards the country's economic planning and cooperation agreements clearly show this situation. It can be thought that Iran, which developed an alliance with Russia and China on the Syrian problem, will be warm to these developments. In addition, the existence of the US embargo in Iran and its insufficient investment budget show that the project will be realized under the control of China. In this context, the Kars-Nakhchivan and Mardin-Iraq railway projects planned by Turkey will contribute positively to the development of this corridor in the medium and long term and will strengthen Turkey's regional effectiveness.

In addition to infrastructure renewal in Turkey, another important development has been the involvement of the private sector in addition to the public sector on the railways. With the law enacted in 2013 (6461), the private sector has gained the right to carry out freight and passenger transportation on the rail (Resmigazete 2013; MTI 2020). This situation paved the way for the faster development of railway transportation in Turkey.

The realization of OBOR projects that will affect the national economy necessitates the establishment of new Logistics Centers (LC). These centers will ensure the transfer and storage of national or international cargo between regions. For this reason, they decided to be established in suitable places, primarily considering the proximity to the industrial zones and transportation costs. For now, it is planned to establish 21 LCs, and construction of some of them has already begun (MTI, 2020). These centers, which are planned according to the cargo to be transported in the Trans Asia-Europe transportation corridors, will serve as warehouses of goods to be distributed over a wide geography. In addition, this situation will support the economy by increasing the commercial flexibility, alternatives, and trade volume of Turkey. In this way, the change in the cost of basic products and time factor will contribute positively to domestic price indices.

The facts that Turkey is on the road extending from the Middle East and Asia to Europe, that international logistics companies have been operating in the country for many years and local companies are learning the operation of the sector, and that it has an advanced road network, transportation sector and fleet will make it easier to develop LCs. Turkey will gain more profit from this process if it combines its strengths (development of rail infrastructure, an unsaturated sector and market, increased international trade, and availability for the new port) with its opportunities (CADA 2015).

Time spent on freight and travel and comfort is as important as uninterrupted transport on highways. Investments have been made in this regard; some of them have been completed and put into effect, while others are still ongoing. YSSB, which is the main artery in Trans Asia European transportation, supports airway as well as road and rail transportation. With the introduction of the Northern Marmara Motorway (NMM) and the Northern Marmara Railway (NMR) line, the corridor will be further revitalized. Connecting the Gulf of Izmit between Dilovası and Altınova, the Osmangazi Bridge (OGB) has a regional strategic location besides freight and passenger transportation. In addition to passenger transport to the Southern

Marmara, Aegean, and Mediterranean regions, it also facilitates international freight transport. OGB not only facilitates the distribution of cargoes arriving at logistics centers by rail but also enables fast connections between Balıkesir (Bandırma), Bursa (Gemlik), Kocaeli (Gulf Ports), and Istanbul (Istanbul Ports). The 1915 Çanakkale Bridge (1915 ÇB), which is under construction, has the potential to support international trade and the national economy. Strengthening the connection of OBOR transportation corridors, it will provide a great convenience for the cargo transported by the Maritime Silk Road to the European market. Therefore, a divided road connection is established between important centers such as Balıkesir, Bursa, and İzmir and the bridge to maintain the same level of transportation. In addition, the 1915 ÇB offers essential support to Çandarlı Port versus Piraeus Port. If Turkey makes good use of this situation, Çandarlı, Bandırma, Tekirdağ and Ambarlı (Kumport) ports will be able to direct the Turkish economy and 1915 ÇB, OGB, and YSSB will be important transportation pillars that control this process.

The OBOR project consists of an economic network beyond being a transportation project. One of the most important parts of this network is undoubtedly tourism. Tourism is directly proportional to the ease of access of people to a place. In the OBOR project, countries will increase their influence and strengthen cultural connections through common heritage. Thanks to this corridor, Turkey is one of the most important countries to be at the heart of tourism.

To develop relations between Turkey and China, the Chinese started a cultural relationship by opening Confucius Institutes in our country and Yunus Emre Institutes in Turkey in China. At the beginning of the OBOR project announcement, the “Chinese Culture Year” was celebrated between the two countries in 2012, and the “Turkey Culture Year” in China in 2013. On top of all these developments, entering a new process with the OBOR project has further revived bilateral relations. The number of Chinese tourists coming to Turkey in 2002 was around 28,000. This number was 77,000 in 2011, 200,000 in 2014, and 426,000 in 2019 (Gezer, 2020; Kılıç, 2021).

As can be understood from the increasing number of tourists every year, there is a great expectation for Chinese tourists with the investments made. It is thought that the declaration of 2018 as the “Turkey Tourism Year” by China has contributed to the arrival of Chinese tourists to Turkey (Çatal, 2019). Facilitations such as the development of bilateral relations and the easing of procedures in the province of China make a significant

contribution to this process. In this regard, thanks to the networks that will pass through the middle corridor, transportation will accelerate and Turkey will host thousands of Chinese tourists every year with the investments it has made. Although the number of tourists is not at the expected level, it will increase even more in the coming years.

Deng Li, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Ankara, said in a statement. *“As China, we are working with Turkey, one of our most valuable trade partners, to develop our current potential. The state leaders of both countries make a great contribution to the achievement of the common goals set in order to increase economic relations. The world economy will experience a great change in the coming period. In this respect, Generation and The Road Project also offers a unique opportunity. As China, we have achieved great success with Turkey, especially in the fields of energy, infrastructure and finance, in recent years. As China, we are determined to improve our relations with Turkey in economy and trade. We strive wholeheartedly towards this goal. Every year “We are taking new concrete steps and reinforcing this in diplomatic negotiations. We aim to double the number of tourists coming from China to Turkey by 2021. Therefore, we expect information points to be established with Chinese signs so that Chinese tourists can travel comfortably in Turkey.”* After the announcement, the number of tourists has increased significantly (DEİK, 2019).

China has an important place in international cruise tourism. The Chinese company named COSCO has started to use this region as a base for tourism, especially after purchasing a part of the Pireus Port. On the other hand, Turkey took care of some of its cruise ports on the Aegean coast. Especially the Galata port in Istanbul was rebuilt and opened to tourism.

Turkey, China, and the EU: Trade Cooperation and Middle Corridor

Socio-economic factors color trade and therefore OBOR relations with China. Countries may react differently to China's expansion towards the west with a huge infrastructure program depending on their economy and ethnic elements. Cynophobia, which makes its presence felt in Asia, and the negative trade balance of some countries can cause the process to take different directions. The insistence of China is using its soft power in these countries may adversely affect the development of OBOR by causing geopolitical and social fractures (Sternberg et al., 2017; Günay et al., 2019). For China to reach the west, it must first tighten relations with the corridor countries between Central

Asia and Turkey. Economically, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are the strongest countries against China. These countries have been able to maintain their foreign trade balance positively, so they feel economically strong. The trade balance of Turkey, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan has been in a negative direction for a long time. Therefore, they remain in a position open to future foreign direct investments. In this case, countries that do not have a deficit take part in a decision-making process in the OBOR process, while countries with a foreign trade deficit are more in the role of implementers. However, Turkey has a different position from these countries. Its place in the single crossing point of the Middle and Southern Corridor railway (Marmaray and YSSB) strengthens Turkey's hand and even makes it a decision-making country.

Another goal of China, after connecting with Asia and Turkey, is to establish cooperation with Europe on the axis of OBOR. The EU aims to stimulate regional investment with its European Investment Plan, (European Commission 2019) whereas China wants to further economic cooperation with the EU through the OBOR initiative (MOFCOM 2016) China sees the European market as an important destination for investment. Likewise, the EU wants to access the Chinese market. With the Comprehensive Investment Agreement between the EU and China, China is accelerating its investments in Europe, (Williamson 2016; Hanemann ve Huotari 2017) while the investments of European companies in China are decreasing (Hanemann ve Huotari 2017). Increasing Chinese investment in Europe has sparked panic. The European Commission wants to control Chinese investments by proposing regulations to control foreign investment in the strategic assets of member countries (EURACTIV 2018). These two initiatives support each other. China and the EU, which have large economies, are at the level of regional and international cooperation in a variety of areas (trade, investment, finance, and development) (Yin 2018). However, the parties cannot agree on the principle of openness and transparency (Bulckaert 2018). The EU remains undecided that China will comply with the agreement, fulfill its commitments and act transparently (Clauss 2018). Although they have collaborated in many different fields, complete trust has not been established. Theoretically, several opportunities will be seized by cooperating in the fields specified by the EU's Investment Plan and OBOR (Yin 2018). If this cooperation is fully achieved, Turkey can seize a large market share and profit as much as its ability to manage the process.

China has an important place in Turkey's foreign trade. According to the data for 2020, China is the top importer of

Turkey. With \$ 23 billion, it represents a significant portion such as 1/3 of the imports from Asia (\$ 69 billion). It can be said that it ranks far lower in terms of Turkey’s export partners. The foreign trade volume between Turkey and China has not exceeded 30 billion dollars. High imports and low exports disrupt in the trade balance, thus causing the more foreign currency to leave the country. In 2013, imports from China were worth \$ 25,261 million, while exports amounted to \$ 3,756 million. In 2020, Turkey’s import was \$ 23,020 million and its export was around \$ 2,866 million. The low level of exports shows that Turkey should be more active in the Chinese market. Turkey sells salt, sulfur, soil, lime, cement, mines, machinery, vegetables, fruits, iron and steel goods, textile products, and cardboard to China, and it imports electronic devices, machinery, chemicals, nuclear devices, textiles, plastics, glasses, cameras, vehicle accessories and paints from China. The ease of transportation provided by the OBOR project, and the easing of customs procedures allow the trade balance between countries to start to change in favor of Turkey. Thanks to this project, while China will easily enter the European market it wants to reach, Turkey will be able to communicate more easily with the Turkic Republics, with which it has sought to expand its common ground for years (Figure 1).

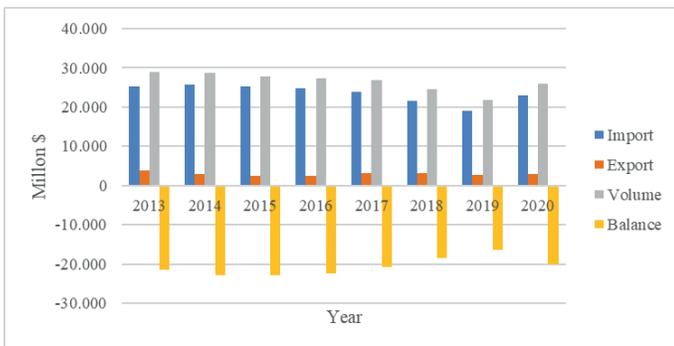


Figure 1: Turkey-China Trade Figures (Million \$).

Source: Turkstat 2021

Although Turkey’s import and export figures differ over the years, the figures for 2020 were not realized at the expected level due to Covid-19. The disruption of transportation programs around the world caused trade to take place outside its normal course. The Turkish economy has not been able to establish a trade balance since 2015. This situation shows that macro problems may be experienced in the country’s economy, which is fragile. The trade deficit, which was \$ 30 billion in 2019, increased to \$ 50 billion in 2020; imports increased by \$ 9 billion compared to the previous year, while exports decreased by \$ 11 billion (Figure 2).

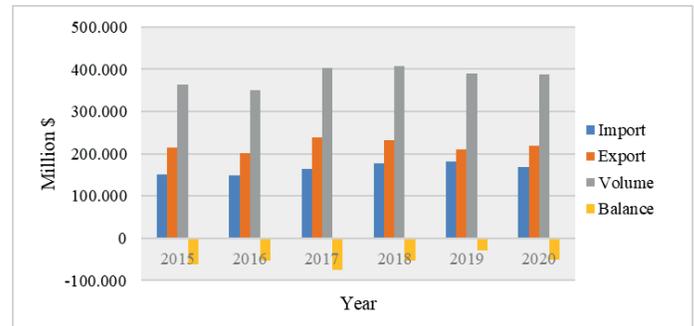


Figure 2: Turkey's Foreign Trade by Years (Million \$).

Source: Turkstat 2021

It can be said that some countries are dominant in Turkey’s imports and exports. The share of the first five countries in Turkish foreign trade in 2020 is quite high. China, Germany, Russia, USA, and Italy are the top five countries in terms of imports, while Germany, England, the USA, Iraq, and Italy are the top five countries in exports. Looking at the general country profile, all but the USA are located in Europe and Asia. These countries, which have a significant share in the foreign trade of the country, represent 37.9% of imports and 32.2% of exports. Therefore, European, and Asian countries take the first ranks in exports as well as in imports (Figure 3).

Turkey realizes 81.3% of its imports and 81.7% of its exports with European and Asian countries. This shows that both TEN-T and OBOR / BRI projects are of vital value. Turkey’s commercial relations with the Turkic Republics have always been at low levels. In 2013, 4.6% of exports (\$ 7.437 million) and 1.6% of imports (\$ 4.120 million) were made with Turkic republics; in 2020, the figures were 3.2% for exports (\$ 5.421 million) and 1.4% for imports (\$ 2.972 million). With the transportation corridors, Turkey has gained the opportunity to further increase its commercial relations with these countries.

DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION

This article aims to perform a situation analysis by emphasizing the function and potential of Turkey in a world changing economically, politically, and commercially.

In this direction, evaluations have been made by considering the position, importance, and contributions of Turkey to the OBOR project. The short and long-term effects of China’s economic and political attitude on the Turkish economy have been evaluated. China’s desire to open economically, politically, and culturally and its win-win formula through financial support to countries attracted the attention of developing countries. The

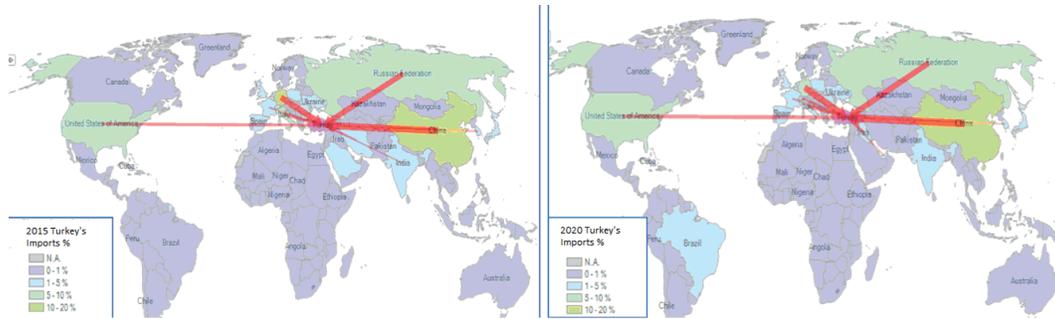


Figure 3: Top-importer countries of Turkey in 2015-2020 period Trade Map. Created from the data on the Trade statistics for international business development page.

international relations and economic system that China wants to redesign will take Turkey on very different paths in the future in terms of its position. China will face many obstacles from the USA in this way that it has embarked with its economic power. In contrast to soft power, the US will resort to means of controlling the process from within. Situated between the USA, Europe and China, Turkey can gain colossal economic advantages by using its geopolitical and balanced position in this process.

If both sides can manage the process successfully, the OBOR initiative can offer considerable opportunities to countries and their surroundings. The high foreign debt and trade deficit push the country into an economic crisis. In this way, financial, political and security problems can be mitigated or resolved.

Turkey is at a critical point for the OBOR and TEN transportation corridors. In addition to its production potential, its suitability for multimodal freight transportation and its convenient connection to Asian, European, and Eurasian markets make Turkey outstanding among other countries. The active functioning of the Turkish wing of the OBOR project depends on the development of the railway. In Turkey, first of all, it is

necessary to eliminate the imbalance in the communication and transportation sector, increase railway investments, renew electrification processes, and use the planned and under-construction LCs at full capacity.

Within the scope of OBOR, two of the risks Turkey is facing are very important because the control of these risk factors is in the hands of other countries. The first of these is the Georgian Anaklia Port, and the second is the Greek Piraeus Port. Both ports are financed by China and now operate like a Chinese trade base. Anaklia Port is a strategic place where goods coming from China by rail are stored and transported to the ports of Romania and Ukraine via the Black Sea. Therefore, the intensive use of this line may cause BTK and other lines to fail to operate at full capacity. This situation, which may arise as the bypassing of Turkey, may result in her failure to benefit from infrastructure investments at full capacity (Table 1).

Piraeus Port is an important harbor for the use of China for the Maritime Silk Road to reach the European market. The port will be able to transport passenger (cruise) and cargo

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of OBOR Project from Turkey's Perspective

| Strengths (S) | Weaknesses (W) |
|---|---|
| Its position of being at the center of continents /its geopolitical and strategic location Most suitable transit route between Asia and Europe Convenience of railroad for intermodal transport Developed railroad network Integration of railway, roads and seaway TEN-T, TRACECA, OBOR transport corridors being a common area | Being late in the development of the railway network Inadequate equity capital in investments Discrepancy of priorities in planning Safety gaps due to the fast construction processes |
| Opportunities (O) | Threats (T) |
| Participation in OBOR Making improvements in container ports Construction of new ports Being able to integrate railroad and seaway Being able to create routes according to all transport systems Financing and investments of international finance institutions | Financial problems in the sustainability of investment and construction works China's port constructions / rentals in Georgia and Greece for maritime transport Increase in logistics prices Failure to share the process with the public adequately Consumption being higher than production Increasing trade deficit / balance becoming more difficult |

transportation to the interior of Europe through the line built with the TER project. Using the port as a station on the Maritime Silk Road may cause Turkey to fail to gain the desired share from the corridor. Turkey is preparing the Çandarlı port against Piraeus Port. In addition, Bandırma, Tekirdağ and Ambarlı Ports are important ports that have the potential to undertake the cargo of the region. Today, the continuation of OBOR corridor studies, the unclear routes and changes at short intervals is a risk factors for all corridor countries.

When planning transportation corridors, China has chosen to implement a policy not to fall under the domination of any country. It has created an alternative station for transportation routes between countries. In other words, it pulls every country into the system by obliging them to implement a “win-win” political approach. Anaklia and Piraeus Port remain the two important trump cards that China will hold against Turkey.

RESULT

The main purpose of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, announced in 2013, was to establish a multi-directional uninterrupted network between Asia and Europe. In the face of similar projects planned by the EU, Russia, USA, and Turkey before the project, OBOR gained a global dimension in a short time. While the project develops China, it is also important in terms of being a transportation network that will connect Russia, Asian (south, southeast, west, east) countries, Europe (Middle and East), Turkey and Africa. Turkey is in a direct relationship with the middle and south corridors and indirectly with the north corridor due to its location. This project has given Turkey strength and flexibility in many different areas such as economic, commercial, political, tourism and transportation.

The central and southern corridors that pass directly through Turkey form both a trade and transportation network. Through this corridor, the flow of goods, culture, and information circulates between countries. The sea corridor of the project, which operates on two different routes land and sea, is also of interest to Turkey.

The corridor countries of the project are generally developing countries. As the main source of financing, China is the most active country in the project. This project should not only make significant contributions to the affiliated countries and economic communities but also need to be careful in terms of dragging them into a huge debt quagmire. The loans provided to the countries by the different financial institutions created are used

in investments in many different areas such as highways, railways, tunnels, fiber-optic networks, ports, shipyards, oil, natural gas, and electricity generation plants, smart cities, tourism, and culture. In this way, China has cooperated with different states and entered into great commercial relations as never before in history. One of them is Turkey.

Especially within the middle corridor of the OBOR project, China makes investments in different areas such as highways, railways, bridges, airports, subways, e-commerce, ports, and financial institutions in Turkey. In addition, China considers Turkey among the priority countries as it knows the strong regional potential for these projects to continue. Turkey is an indispensable country in the middle corridor in an uninterrupted network between Europe and Asia. Especially the Russia-Ukraine war and the deactivation of the Nord Streamline have increased the importance of Turkey. Today, Turkey is an obligatory corridor country for the transportation of products produced in China, which is the production center of the world. The density of the ports and the inadequacy of air transportation have shifted a significant part of the trade to the Iron Silk Road. In this direction, Turkey has been the most important route country in the middle and south corridors where trains from China to Europe pass. In this way, loads started to be transported to Europe more quickly. The fact that the north and south corridors are insecure due to political obstacles has increased the importance of the middle corridor. This project, which connects more than half of the world's population, will transform Turkey into an important business and tourism center in the coming years. In this context, Turkey will become one of the most attractive centers in transportation between China and Europe with the high-speed train lines that are being built in Turkey.

Turkey is one of the important routes on the sea route as it is on the highway. The Maritime Silk Road continues between different ports from China to the Suez Canal. In the Mediterranean, China wants to make this a base, especially with the purchase of the Pireus Port. In Turkey, with the acquisition of Kumport Port, it has established important container centers for itself. In addition, Turkey continues the Çandarlı Port project as an alternative to the Pireus Port. In this way, a new route to the Maritime Silk Road is being tried to be created.

Finally, it is a fact that China has distributed its huge wealth, which it has accumulated over a long period, in the form of investments, especially in developing countries. It can be a good advantage for these countries, and it can also be described as a

boron trap. Turkey should look at this issue from this perspective and a long-term perspective. Even if it is a win-win principle, more care should be taken in the ports, important railway networks, IT, airports, security, and agriculture sectors. In addition, in this project, which creates an important cultural contact area, attention should be paid to centers active in the field of cynophobia, such as Confucius.

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