

The Arab Spring and its Impact on the Foreign Trade of Turkey

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Abstract: The Arab Spring refers to the stream of events which started in Tunisia, 2010, and then it spread to Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain and also impacted most countries of Middle East and North Africa (MENA). There were various social-cultural, political and economic effects which caused the Arab Spring. However, Arab Spring also affected the relations between the countries with regards to the areas of social-cultural, international politics and economics. In this research, especially the effects of Arab Spring on the foreign trade of Turkey from 2005 to 2015 have been discussed. An analysis of the exports and the imports have been included in this research, it has been observed that the export trend initially depicted an upward trend before the Arab Spring. However, after the outburst of the Arab Spring the trend was adversely affected but later the trend again improved. Generally, the import share showed a similar trend to the export share but the change in the import share was not as dramatic as the export share. The main reason behind the sharp increase in exports was that, Arab Spring adversely impacted the economic status of the countries and the political relations between Turkey and these countries transformed.

Key Words: Arab Spring, Impact of the Arab Spring, Foreign Economic Relations, the Foreign Trade of Turkey, Import and Export.

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1. Introduction:

The word Arab Spring refers to the anti-government protests which started in late 2010. It was initiated in Tunisia on December 17, 2010 when a local Street vendor, Mohammad Bouazizi, a university graduate, set himself on fire in front of a government building because an official confiscated his vegetable cart and insulted him. Actually, the struggle of a poor man from a financially disadvantaged family brought many people on the streets. Public protests over the reaction of Mohammad Bouazizi led to the outburst of other events. Soon afterwards, protests and riots started in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya (Campante and Chor, 2012). Political leaders i.e. Zine el Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Muammar Al-Qaddafi of Libya; started facing opposition from the people. Additionally Syria, Yemen and Bahrain also experienced serious protest movements which questioned the survival of their rulers. The Civil war in Libya and the revolts against the corrupt officers and the ineffective government led to the onset of the phenomenon of Arab Spring in Syria. Arab Spring apparently initiated democratization; the people could freely express their opinion about the government, and fight for the social and economic development (Ataman, 2011: 4).

The international community aimed to improve the social-economic conditions of the countries affected by the Arab Spring. In May 2011, the G8 introduced the Deauville Partnership which included Turkey, four Gulf States and various international financial institutions. The objective of the Deauville Partnership was to inspire the Arab countries to pursue the path of stabilization and to provide them with financial support (Khan, 2014).

The Arab Spring not only affected the countries which faced uprisings but also impacted other countries that had strong socio-cultural,

political and economic relations with these countries. For instance, at the beginning of the Arab Spring the oil prices raised and this adversely impacted the economic status of the prospective oil-importing countries like Turkey. Moreover the exports, imports, tourism movements and the course of capital flows were adversely impacted by the Arab Spring.

In general, Turkey has strong political, social and economic relations with the countries of Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In the last few years, in addition to the crisis regarding the issue of the European Union, Turkey has been pushed towards the quest for new markets (Usul, 2013: 31-39). However, the Arab Spring adversely impacted the foreign trade relations between Turkey and the countries which faced the Arab Spring. That is why the researches regarding the effects of development in these countries on the foreign trade of Turkey holds a significant value.

In this research, in order to interpret the countries whose foreign trade relations with Turkey were affected by the Arab Spring, a brief background of the Arab Spring has been provided and according to that the foreign trade of Turkey with selected countries have been analyzed.

2. A Brief Background of the Arab Spring:

The Arab Spring was sparked by the fruit vendor of Tunisia who burnt himself alive. The president of Tunisia, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, was left with no other option than to flee from the country in January 2011 after ruling for 23 years. Right after Ben Ali's dismissal on January 14, 2011, the interim government dealt with the frustration of people who wanted the replacement of all ministers. On February 27, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi resigned and was replaced by Béji Caïd Essebsi, a statesman from President Habib

Bourguiba's era. Some other ministers also stepped down as an aftermath of the protests. After that the country was handed over to an interim administration by the army which prepared the first free elections. According to a report prepared by the United Nations approximately 300 people were killed in the revolution in Tunisia (United States Department of State, 2011).

The social media ignited the fire which led to the overthrow of President Ben Ali of Tunisia and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt (Lynch, 2011: 301). Unemployment, dissatisfaction and inflation exacerbated the feeling of misery among the people. The revolutionary content created by different networks and shared on the digital media became easily accessible to all. This digital revolutionary content also started being aired on the satellite channels e.g Al-Jazeera, which played a significant role in distributing information to people who had limited access to the digital media (Allagyi and Kuebler, 2011).

Egypt had been under military rule since 1952 and Hosni Mubarak's government was unable to provide basic infrastructure facilities to the Egyptians which led to unemployment and poverty. Major protests were held in the country but the level of discipline showed by the Egyptian protestors deserved appreciation. The campaign to honour Khaled Said, a blogger who was killed was an example of the discipline showed by the protestors of Egypt in comparison to the Tunisian protestors who were far more violent (Anderson, 2011).

In countries like Tunisia and Egypt the public was successful in overthrowing the government but the scenario in Libya was a bit different. Due to the unsuccessful efforts for four decades by the Libyan leader Muammar Al-Qaddafi to establish his government resulted in a civil war in Tripoli. As Muammar Al-Qaddafi banned free press and converted the civil service into a military leadership. The people of Libya lost trust in the rulers and people separated into different

tribes (Anderson, 2011). The monarch governments of Jordan and Morocco also went through political changes even though the rulers maintained their power.

Syria is a country that has suffered for almost fifty years of emergency rule, high rates of unemployment and abuse to human rights. The Syrian state was controlled by President Bashar-al-Assad's Ba'ath Party. By late March 2011, the protests became more intense and the brave people of Syria joined together and formed the Free Syrian Army against President Assad's rule. The international community's response was different to the situation in Syria. Saudi Arabia and Qatar supported the opposition movement because they regarded President Assad as a threat to their regional influence. However, a resolution was brought to the United Nations Security Council; and was vetoed by China and Russia. As the United States and the European Union feared that the adverse situation in Syria would lead to sectarian violence (Nepstad, 2013). The Alawite officers were in support of the Assad government but the Sunni recruits had no feelings of loyalty for the Assad regime because they were aware that they would continue to face social discrimination. Moreover, the Syrian people are massacring their own people. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 3 million Syrians have fled to Syria's immediate neighbours Turkey³, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq and 6,5 million people are internally displaced within Syria (www1, 2013).

The revolutionary movement in Yemen on February 2012 exposed the moral bankruptcy of the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The authorities tried to control the protests but when traditional methods failed to control the situation, on Friday 18th of March

3. As of November 2014, registered 1,645 million people and unregistered 2 million Syrians have fled to Turkey (Orhan and Gündoğar, 2015: 10).

which is also called the ‘Friday of Democracy’ peaceful demonstrators were harmed. The economic consequences have been devastating on Yemen and the security problems have worsened. Many people in Yemen face a lack of infrastructural needs. The Real GDP of Yemen contracted by 7.8 percent in 2011 and Conservative inflation estimates for 2011 range from 20 to 30 percent (Thiel, 2012).

In addition to social and political issues there must be some economical reasons of the Spring to a certain extent, as well. The economy of the Arab countries was jolted by the Arab Spring. There was an increase in the level of unemployment and a decrease in foreign direct investment in almost all the Arab Spring countries with the exception of Morocco. In Egypt the rate of unemployment reached about 13 percent in 2012 and in Yemen it reached about 35 percent (Campante and Chor, 2012). The real problem underlies in the high rate of youth unemployment. For instance, the Tunisian government focused on higher education but the jobs were insufficient for the number of graduates (Alimi and Meyer, 2011). Even in countries like Morocco the growth rate did not fall by a significant rate but the unemployment rate for people of thirty-four years and younger was approximately thirty percent. There was a major mismatch between education and the economic opportunities because the educational opportunities increased but this was unfortunately coupled with weak labour market conditions.

Governments of the Arab countries were more concerned about politics and security as compared to the more severe problem of unemployment. Actually jobs have to be created by enforcing favourable economic reforms. For example, a lot of strategically planning is involved to eliminate the gap. The only way to create jobs for people in the short run is to increase the rate of government jobs. Following this approach in 2011-2012 Egypt created approximately 400,000

jobs in the government sector (Khan, 2014).

The economies of the Arab countries were generally in a better shape before the uprisings. For instance, the security situation led to uncertainty for the foreign and domestic investors. Factors like higher oil prices, regional spill over especially contributed to the adverse impact on the economy. Only in Morocco the Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) did not fall. Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen actually experienced negative growth rates which is something very rarely seen in the developed countries. In Libya, the real GDP increased by over one hundred percent in 2012 before falling again by 5 percent in 2013 as the oil prices fell due to strikes and political instability. Due to the revolutions taking place in the Arab countries the tourism receipts and the worker's remittances also decreased which led to a widening of the current account deficits and a loss of international reserves (Khan, 2014).

3. Impact of Arab Spring on the Foreign Trade of Turkey with Selected Countries

The Arab Spring was defined by a political crisis which effected a number of countries. There was an overall economic loss but the trend towards the political liberalization boosted the prospects of Turkish trade and diplomatic ties with other Arab countries. The new foreign policy of Turkey was focused on zero-problems with the neighbours.⁴ The policy of zero problems with the neighbouring countries has actually helped Turkey to provide support to the Arab countries (Öniş, 2012). After the Arab Spring, Turkey has become

4. Zero problems with neighbour's means to minimize the problems with other neighbouring countries. This is the main purpose of the foreign policy. Turkey wants to accomplish this goal to ensure stability in the zone. (For further information you can read, Yeşiltaş and Balcı, 2011: 17-18).

more successful on the democratic front. On the international front Turkey's prospective of attaining the European Union membership improved (Kaya, 2012).

According to some researchers, Turkey has actually benefitted from the events that occurred in the Arab Spring. Due to its robust economic growth, Turkey has always tried to help out the Arab countries. This has expanded friendly relations with the Arab countries. The Arab countries considered Turkey as a model of Islamic liberalism. Also, economic liberalization was initiated in the Turkish economy in January, 1980 which focused on export-growth strategy (Tür, 2011: 590). However, since there were problems in Syria which is a neighbouring country of Turkey which resulted in the revision of Turkey are zero problems with the neighbours (Nader, 2011).

Turkey and Iran have been regional competitors since the last decade. Turkey and Iran had a difference in opinions with regard to the Arab Spring. According to Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu (the Prime Minister of Turkey) democracy was a major factor that contributed to the attainment of democracy in the Middle Eastern countries. Turkey was of the opinion; the Arab Spring was a result of internal factors caused by undemocratic and corrupt government. However, Iranian perspective states that, Arab Spring was a result of foreign intervention in the protests of the opposition groups within the country. It seems that Arab Spring not only highlighted the ideological differences between Iran and Turkey but also contributed to their competitive geo-political interests of Turkey and Iran throughout the Middle East (Uzun, 2013).

Turkey's reaction to the events in the Middle East was not properly defined. For instance, Prime Minister of Turkey, Tayyip Erdogan was of the opinion that Hosni Mubarak should step down from his seat. This was also due to the fact that Egypt did not have strong social in-

terests with Turkey. However, Libya has strong economic interests with Turkey because approximately 30,000 Turkish people work in Libya. Therefore, President of Turkey, Tayyip Erdogan defended the opinion that Qaddafi should resign from power but at the same time he opposed to the NATO involvement in Libya (Nader, 2011).

Table 1. Total Exports and Imports of Turkey with Selected Countries

Years	Turkey Export (Total)	Turkey Import (Total)	Export T+L+E+S+B+Y	Import T+L+E+S+B+Y
2005	73.476.408.143	116.774.150.907	2.156.986.952	743.754.037
2006	85.534.675.518	139.576.174.148	2.366.096.225	1.016.589.006
2007	107.271.749.904	170.062.714.501	3.224.836.085	1.522.324.901
2008	132.027.195.626	201.963.574.109	5.055.676.247	2.007.860.012
2009	102.142.612.603	140.928.421.211	6.954.443.012	1.480.002.289
2010	113.883.219.184	185.544.331.852	7.243.599.624	2.158.068.639
2011	134.906.868.830	240.841.676.274	6.352.254.920	2.220.333.785
2012	152.461.736.556	236.545.140.909	7.807.789.492	2.180.565.320
2013	151.802.637.087	251.661.250.110	8.674.366.870	2.479.686.647
2014	157.627.673.709	242.182.567.968	8.922.339.702	2.295.200.334
2015	24.587.209.735	33.563.131.918	1.191.717.403	265.248.637

Note: The values for 2015 are for the first three months. The values are in Dollars. In this Table; T: Tunisia, L: Libya, E: Egypt, S: Syria, B: Bahrain and Y: Yemen

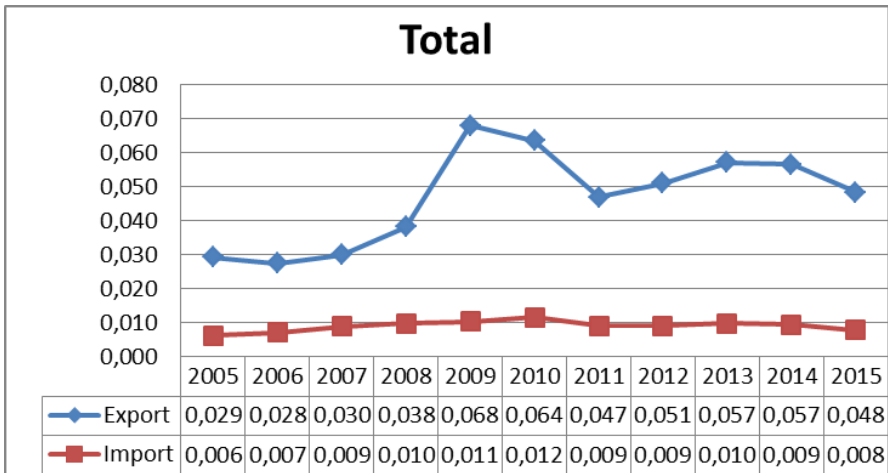
Source: Calculated values from TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute)

Data and Analysis:⁵ The countries that have been adversely affected by the Arab Spring till nowadays are especially Libya, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Tunisia and Bahrain. Graph1 aims to illustrate the for-

5. Only the official values have been used as the off-the-record values could not be accessed.

foreign trade situation for five years before the Arab Spring (2005-2010) and five years after the Arab Spring (2010-2015). Graph1 and Table1 show the total amount of exports and imports between Turkey and the Arab countries which were affected by the Arab Spring. Excluding the Global Economic Crisis period (2008-2012) the total exports and imports of Turkey remained high (Table1).

Graph 1. Share of the Selected Countries in the Turkey's Foreign Trade



As Graph 1 illustrates that the overall import and export share of Turkey with other countries increased before the outburst of the Arab Spring but right after the break out of the Arab Spring there was a fall in the import and export share of Turkey. Furthermore, after a few years the total exports from Turkey to other Arab countries again started to increase. Moreover, in spite of a decrease in the export demand due to the protest movements in the Arab countries, the export share increased because Turkey sought to provide support to coun-

tries which were being affected by the Arab Spring. In some countries, Turkey supported the protest movements and even included the term ‘zero problems with its neighbours’ in its foreign policy (Şahin and Şahin, 2014).

**Table 2. Selected Countries’
Share in the Exports of Turkey**

Years	Tunisia	Libya	Egypt	Syria	Bahrain	Yemen
2005	0.0040	0.0052	0.0094	0.0075	0.0006	0.0027
2006	0.0038	0.0057	0.0083	0.0071	0.0004	0.0023
2007	0.0049	0.0060	0.0084	0.0074	0.0007	0.0026
2008	0.0059	0.0081	0.0108	0.0084	0.0023	0.0027
2009	0.0063	0.0176	0.0254	0.0139	0.0011	0.0037
2010	0.0063	0.0170	0.0198	0.0162	0.0015	0.0029
2011	0.0059	0.0055	0.0205	0.0119	0.0012	0.0020
2012	0.0052	0.0140	0.0241	0.0033	0.0014	0.0032
2013	0.0059	0.0181	0.0211	0.0067	0.0013	0.0040
2014	0.0058	0.0131	0.0209	0.0114	0.0013	0.0041
2015	0.0051	0.0094	0.0169	0.0105	0.0012	0.0054

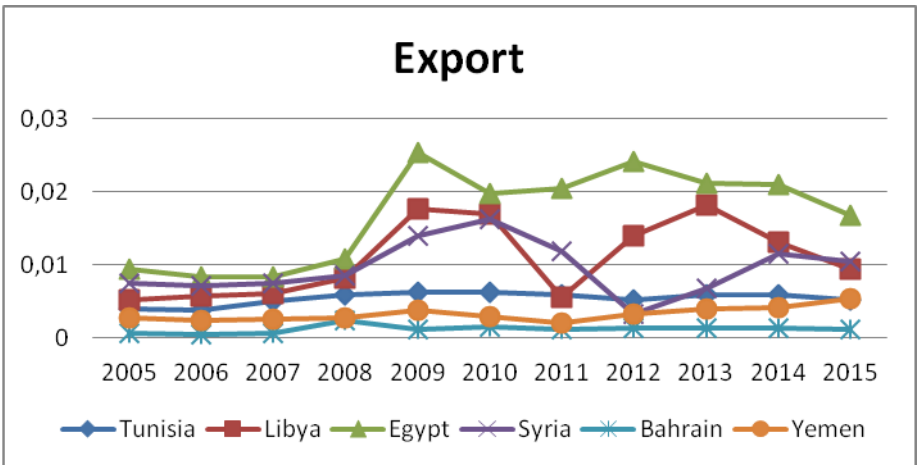
Note: The values for 2015 are for the first three months.

Source: Calculated values from TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute)

Turkey aimed to maintain peace with other Muslim countries. Therefore, in this section, on an individual export share of countries with Turkey are analysed. The change in foreign policy created improved economic interdependence between Turkey and Tunisia (Kaya, 2012). The Export share of Turkey with Tunisia was 0.0059 in 2011 as can be seen from Table 2. The export share decreased again in 2012 to 0.0052 and then kept on increasing till 2014. In 2015, the export share of Turkey in Tunisia has predicted to show a

downward trend and is estimated to be 0.005. Analysing the import shares of Turkey in Tunisia it can be seen that it showed an increase from 2006 to 2008. Generally, the import share of Turkey in Tunisia has been high but after the outbreak of the Arab Spring the trend showed a decreasing pattern because the supply of exports from Tunisia was decreased.

Graph 2. Selected Countries' Share in the Exports of Turkey



The countries whose foreign trade was most affected by the Arab Spring were Libya, Egypt and Syria. These countries are important for the foreign trade of Turkey. The export share of Turkey in Libya has been low till 2008 after which it increased to a value of 0.0176 in 2009. Then there was a sudden decrease in 2011 primarily due to the outbreak of the Arab Spring which fell to 0.0055 as can be seen from Table 2. The export share showed an upward trend till 2013 because many Turkish people work in Libya. However, the trend decreased

from 2013 onwards because of the intensity of the civil war in Libya. The import share of Turkey in Libya showed a somewhat similar trend to the export share. The import share of Turkey in Libya has remained low which showed a significant increase only in 2009 because in this year the overall economy of Libya was strong which resulted in an increase of imports and exports. The start of the Arab Spring led to a drop in the import share to 0.0006.

**Table 3. Selected Countries’
Share in the Imports of Turkey**

Years	Tunisia	Libya	Egypt	Syria	Bahrain	Yemen
2005	0,0010	0,0017	0,0023	0,0012	0,0002	0,00003
2006	0,0011	0,0017	0,0028	0,0013	0,0003	0,00000
2007	0,0014	0,0015	0,0038	0,0015	0,0007	0,00000
2008	0,0018	0,0017	0,0044	0,0016	0,0005	0,00000
2009	0,0017	0,0025	0,0046	0,0016	0,0002	0,00000
2010	0,0015	0,0023	0,0050	0,0024	0,0004	0,00001
2011	0,0010	0,0006	0,0057	0,0014	0,0005	0,00000
2012	0,0008	0,0018	0,0057	0,0003	0,0007	0,00000
2013	0,0011	0,0012	0,0065	0,0003	0,0007	0,00000
2014	0,0008	0,0010	0,0059	0,0005	0,0012	0,00002
2015	0,0005	0,0004	0,0063	0,0003	0,0004	0,00000

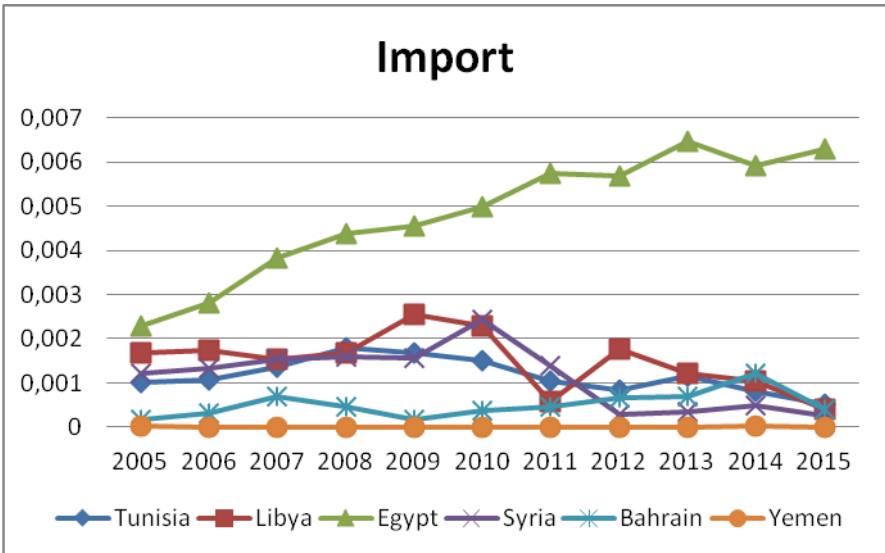
Note: The values for 2015 are for the first three months.

Source: Calculated values from TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute)

The export share of Turkey with Egypt remained approximately constant from 2005 to 2008 but there was a sharp increase in the export share of Egypt in 2009 and reached 0.0254 as can be seen in Table 2. However, generally the level of export share of Turkey with

Egypt was low because the relations have been strained between Turkey and Egypt (Leber, 2014). The drastic rise in export share of Turkey with Egypt in 2009 was primarily due to the global economic crisis. In 2012, increase in export share of Turkey with Egypt can be attributed to inflation. Moreover, after the Arab Spring, the president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan supported the idea that Hosni Mubarak should leave the government which further weakened the economic interests between Turkey and Egypt which prevented the export shares from showing an increase.

**Graph 3. Selected Countries’
Share in the Imports of Turkey**



Now analysing the import share of Turkey with Egypt it can be seen that there was a continuous increasing trend with a slight fall only in 2014 which reached a value of 0.0059 as seen in Graph 3 and

Table 3. The import share of Turkey has remained the highest as compared to other Arab countries as illustrated in Graph 3. The imports to Turkey from Egypt basically include petroleum oil, chemicals, carbon, garments and cotton yarn (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy, 2015). That is primarily the reason that even during the Arab Spring there was not a major decrease in the imports.

The export share of Turkey in Syria was constant within the time period of 2005 to 2008 but there was a sharp increase in the export share of Syria from 2008 onwards. This trend decreased from 2010 because the civil war in Syria had been initiated but after 2012, the trend slightly increased. The import share of Turkey in Syria remained approximately constant from 2005 to 2009 as seen from Graph 3. However, there was a major increase in 2010 and after that the import share fell to 0.0003 as seen from Table 3. The Arab Spring caused total devastation to the economy of Syria. Graph 3 shows that after the outbreak of the Arab Spring the import share of Turkey in Syria continued to remain low.

Lastly, Bahrain and Yemen have minimum foreign trade shares in Turkey. There was not any major change in the export share of Bahrain in Turkey during the Arab Spring but the import share showed a slight increase. The export share of Turkey in Yemen remained low and the import share of Turkey in Yemen had been in a negligible quantity.

4. Conclusion

Turkey has strong political, social and economic relations with countries which faced the Arab Spring. As a result, the Arab Spring positively and negatively affected the foreign trade of Turkey. For instance, the Syrian refugees in Turkey on one hand provide cheap labour but on the other hand this is a burden on the economy of Turkey

(Şahin and Şahin, 2014).

The Arab Spring affected the pattern of foreign trade of Turkey. The uprisings of 2011 should be considered as a catalyst for a long term change whose final outcome is yet undefined (Manfreda, 2011). If we make a general analysis, it has been observed that the export trend initially depicted an upward trend before the Arab Spring like in the year 2005 the export share of Turkey was 0.029 but by the year 2009 this number increased to 0.068. However, after the outburst of the Arab Spring the trend was adversely affected as the trend again started towards an increasing direction. For instance, in 2011, export share was 0.047 but by the year 2014 the export share became 0.057. Generally, the imports showed a similar trend to the exports between Turkey and the countries which were affected by the Arab Spring.

When we analyse the Arab Spring with respect to the countries, it can be concluded that foreign trade of Turkey with Libya and Syria were most affected by the Arab Spring because these countries majorly suffered the consequences of the war. For instance, the export share of Turkey in Libya has been low till 2008 after which it increased to a value of 0.0176 in 2009. Then there was a sudden decrease in 2011 primarily due to the outbreak of the Arab Spring which fell to 0.0055. With reference to Syria, in the year 2006 the export share was 0.0071, in 2010 the export share increased to 0.0162 but after the outburst of the Arab Spring it drastically declined to 0.003 in 2012.

In the recent years, the political crisis in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been expected to prolong. Countries like Turkey who aspire for new markets can probably be affected by the prevailing political crisis. So policies should be made according to the political situation of the countries. The challenge for the Arab countries is that the youth transition should be transformed into a productive

transition. Merely a political reform is not sufficient to bring about a positive change, appropriate economic reforms should also be introduced (Malik and Awadallah, 2011: 27).

The advancement in technology had a deep impact on the political, social and economic structures of a country. People are becoming more conscious so policies should be introduced for the accomplishment of national and international goals. Therefore, it is vital that Turkey should be prepared to face any crisis like the Arab Spring. In order to solve such problems, Turkey should carry out appropriate policies to decrease the tension of regional issues. If Turkey manages the long-run process, Turkey can turn such crises like the Arab Spring into opportunities.

‘Arap Baharı’ ve Türkiye'nin Dış Ticaretine Etkileri

Özet: Arap Baharı, Aralık 2010’da Tunus’ta başlayıp, başta Mısır, Libya, Suriye, Yemen ve Bahreyn olmak üzere birçok Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika ülkesine yayılmış olayların genel adıdır. Bu olayların ortaya çıkmasında birçok sosyo-kültürel, politik ve ekonomik neden etkili olmuştur. Ancak Arap Baharı sadece patlak verdiği ülkeleri değil de aynı zamanda bu ülkelerle ilişkilerde bulunan diğer ülkeleri de sosyo-kültürel, uluslararası politika ve ekonomik anlamda etkilemiştir. Bu çalışmada Arap Baharı’nın sadece dış ticaret üzerindeki etkileri Türkiye özelinde tartışılmaktadır. 2005-15 periyodunu kapsayan analizde Türkiye’nin söz konusu ülkelere gerçekleştirdiği ihracatın toplam ihracat içerisindeki payının Arap Baharı öncesinde yükselme trendindeyken, Arap baharıyla birlikte hızla azalma trendine girdiği ve daha sonra tekrar bir toparlanma süreci yaşadığı gözlenmektedir. İthalat açısından genel bir değerlendirme yapılırsa, her ne kadar ihracat kadar sert hareketler yaşanmamışsa da benzer bir eğilimin ithalatın gelişimi için de söz konusu olduğu görülmektedir. İhracatta bu denli sert hareketlerin yaşanmasında etkili olan nedenlerin başında, Arap Baharı’nın gerçekleştiği ülkelerin ekonomik durumlarında meydana gelen kötüleşme ve Türkiye’nin bu

ülkelerle siyasi ilişkilerinin değişim göstermesi yer almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Baharı, Arap Baharının Etkileri, Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler, Türkiye'nin Dış Ticareti, İthalat ve İhracat.

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