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**NATIONAL EXPORT-PROMOTION PROGRAMS IN TURKEY:  
IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES**

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**Abstract**

Turkey is an emerging economy with vibrant export potential. Hence, the Turkish government assists firms through a wide range of export-promotion programs to pursue and enhance this dynamic structure. However, the efficiency of these programs has recently been subject to much debate. Procedural and environmental obstacles, lack of awareness of promotion tools and weak communication between the firms and the government agencies are some of the barriers blamed for hindering exporters from taking advantage of these programs. Using Turkey as a case study, this paper examines the export-promotion programs offered by the government and discusses the challenges faced by exporters.

**Keywords:** Export-Promotion Programs, Challenges of Export-Promotion Programs, Turkey

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Export marketing is considered the most common way of internationalizing because of its numerous advantages, such as low requirement of resources, fewer risk elements, and high flexibility options (as cited in Leonidou et al., 2011). Notwithstanding managerial skills and capabilities, exporting further enhances the firms' competitiveness in global market, and so in local market. Furthermore, exporting leads to socio-economic development, rise in new business connections and rise in employment in return, so economic growth in general (Phinho and Martins, 2010). Hence, many governments see export marketing as a key element that may compensate for the country's trade deficit and to expand international trade potential (Coughlin and Cartwright, 1987). Consequently, governments have started to offer a wide variety of export-promotion programs to SMES (small and medium sized enterprises) as a part of public policies aimed at encouraging internationalism (Barros, 2011). These assistance programs are geared toward raising awareness about international trade and exporting as an expansion option, overcoming possible challenges and barriers of exporting and providing incentives for potential and actual exporters (Seringhaus and Rosson, 1990). The scope of export promotion programs are also claimed to involve various facts country image, export support services, marketing, market research and publications (Lederman et al., 2010).

Turkey, as a developing country and liberalizing economy, has been conducting outward growth strategies for a number of years (Atayeter & Erol, 2011). As a result of these strategies, globalization and exporting have become crucial to the economy and support for exporters is on the government agenda. Turkey provides several different export incentives to firms. Despite the sharp increase in the number of these government assistance programs, the quantity of firms benefiting from these opportunities is relatively minor (Uner et al., 2013). This fact gives priority to reveal and understand the barriers to use of export support provided through the export assistance programs.

In this context, the purpose of this study is to examine export-promotion programs offered in Turkey and discuss the challenges faced by exporters. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: In Section 2, export-promotion programs in Turkey are presented with a specific focus on their scope and function. Moreover, impacts, efficiency and challenges of these programs are reviewed with reference to the literature. Finally, in Section 3, an overview of the paper and final remarks is provided.

## **2. EXPORT-PROMOTION PROGRAMS IN TURKEY**

### **Short History of Turkish Government Policy of International Trade and Export Promotion**

Although Turkey is a developing country aiming to be one of the biggest economies in the global market in ten years, its international trade history is relatively short. After the

1980s, Turkey started to conduct outward growth strategies and started pursuing reforms to succeed in the export market (Vural, 2008). Within this scope, the government provided financial aid for exporters and some exemptions for public bodies. Moreover, replacement of fixed exchange rates with flexible rates, repealing restrictive controls on imports; the establishment of free trade zones and lessening of bureaucratic procedures are some of the cautions taken by the government to increase Turkey's export market (Durmuşoğlu et. al., 2012). However, the import rate has stayed higher than the export rate despite these efforts (Temiz, 2009). To increase the export rate and to protect trade balance, Turkey began to follow some new strategies and signed several agreements with some international organizations and unions. In 1994, Turkey became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and subsequently the Turkish government implemented European Union Customs Union (EUCU) in 1996 (Atayeter and Erol, 2011). In addition to these agreements, Turkey has also started to attempt regional initiatives. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Developing 8 and Economic Cooperation are some of the significant developments among Turkey's regional integration policies (Vural, 2008).

Although all these multinational relations have vital impacts on Turkey's foreign trade, WTO membership and EUCU agreement play decisive roles in the country's economic strategies. This is because most of the international trade is regulated by these two organizations. (Oktay, 2013). As a first reflection of these commitments, Turkey abrogated all financial support programs in 1994 in relation to the agreement with WTO. In 1995, under the regulations of EUCU, all export subventions were cancelled. On the other hand, new export-promotion instruments were initiated according to the regulations of WTO and EUCU (Erol and Atayeter, 2011).

Recent export-promotion programs in Turkey are highly critical to enhance export market and competitiveness of Turkish firms in global industry. The main goal of export-promotion programs in Turkey is to contribute to the international trade operations of firms, especially operations of SMEs, both during manufacturing and marketing processes to overcome obstacles in the international arena. In other words, government assistance programs in Turkey are designed to encourage manufacturers, to contribute to foreign trade and to reinforce SMEs to internationalize (Yakal, 2002). Thus, it is vital to understand the general structure and the frame of export-promotion programs in order to reveal and discuss the general effects of these programs and the barriers that discourage the exporters from using them.

### **The Framework of Export-Promotion Programs in Turkey**

As revealed in several academic research projects export promotion programs typically meet the motivational (ex. advertising local seminars), informational (ex. market reviews, market research), and operational (ex. trade missions, financing) needs of firms.

However, the export involvement level of the firm can diversify the way of benefiting from these services. Active exporting firms are more likely to seek for and benefit from export promotion programs offered by the governments (Ahmed et al., 2002). Besides, Lineman et al. (1987), point out that political, economic and structural drivers of countries shape government support programs in a variety of ways. Further, the drivers of these programs are very crucial since the impact of export promotion programs depends on these drivers and how they are designed. Particularly, these issues have a pivotal role to reveal whether export promotion programs contribute to the firms in three areas of export marketing; increasing the number of goods or countries exported, producing differentiated goods and dealing with information barriers in different export markets (Document of the World Bank, 2014).

In Turkey, export-promotion programs are designed broadly considering the three needs of motivation, information and operation in relation to structural features of export performance and competitiveness. According to World Bank Report 2014, Turkey's export performance has been strong since 2002. The report highlights that merchandise export increased from US\$ 36 billion in 2002 to over US\$ 150 billion in 2012. Moreover, Turkish exporters have significantly increased their destination companies and product diversity. As a result, Turkey's export competitiveness has improved. The country's market share rose from 0.55 percent of global imports in 2002 to 0.82 percent in 2012. Despite high export growth and improved competitiveness, the ratio of exports to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is smaller than relevant competitors. Additionally, there are plenty of challenges that need to be overcome to achieve Turkey's export target. Lack of higher growth products, innovative capacity and adequate work skills are the main obstacles to export performance of the country. Moreover, poor export performance of SMEs, weak performance of the service sectors and problems in trade policy flexibilities are some core deficiencies in international trade operations of Turkey. Therefore, many of the promotion program policies are to defeat these challenges and to meet the necessities of 2023 Export Strategic Plan (Document of the World Bank, 2014).

Some of the recent Turkish export promotion programs are summarized in Table 1. After examining Turkish government export programs, a number of key characteristics can be identified. These characteristics can be summarized as stated below:

- Most of the programs are primarily designed to internationalize SMEs. This is because SMEs in Turkey are weak in export performance and they have negative effect on overall economy and export performance.
- There is not a direct link between the export activities and support programs. Most of them serve as export tools that may affect export performance in a positive way.
- They are provided for a limited number of activities for a limited time.

- All of the programs are provided under the condition that an export related operation or activity is completed. None of the firms applying for the support can get the support before fulfilling the promised activity.

Apart from these programs, there are some export insurance opportunities provided by the state-owned bank EXIM (Export-Import) Bank. The main mission of these export insurances is to protect exporters' earnings from commercial and political risks. Commercial risks are mostly related to the activities of the firms, while political risks are related to the changes in the political dynamics of the export market. The main distinguishing feature of these export insurances is that they are state supported. By the help of these insurances, several exporters' profit rates increase and a clear rise is seen on their export performance (Document of the World Bank, 2014).

The following section will present the impacts of these programs on export performance of the firms in a broader sense.

**Table 1.** Export-promotion programs in Turkey

Type of support	Eligible firms	Scope	Implementing institution
Improving international competitiveness	Firms practicing industrial and/or trading activities or software firms and their collaborators	Providing support for needs assessment, training, business consultancy and project expenditures.	Ministry of Economy/IGEME (International Export Development Center)
Market research and market access activities	Firms practicing industrial and/or trading activities or software firms and their collaborators	Providing support to develop systematic market research by the SMEs to penetrate into new export markets. Some activities supported in this scope are; site visits, documentation and consultancy services, advertising and expenditures of e-trade memberships.	Ministry of Economy/IGEME
Market access license	Firms practicing industrial and/or trading activities	Providing support for SMEs during the certification of their	Ministry of Economy/Exporters'

		quality assurance, environmental management systems and CE marking.	Association General Secretariat
Branding and Turquality support	Exporters unions, Manufacturers unions and associations, firms practicing industrial and/or trading activities	Providing support for all activities promoting Turkish products' brand image, and establishing a brand name abroad. Some of the activities supported are brand creating and positioning, marketing activities.	Ministry of Economy
Design Support	Design companies, design unions and associations	Providing support for marketing, advertising, employment, consultancy and new branch establishment in foreign countries activities	Ministry of Economy/Exporters Unions
Foreign branch, brand and advertising activities	Firms practicing industrial and/or trading activities or their collaborators	Providing support for marketing and advertising activities in the foreign market including brand registry and establishing foreign trade units.	Ministry of Economy/Exporters Unions
Overseas trade fair participation	Firms, corporations, and manufacturing organizations	Providing support for SMEs to increase their participation in international fairs and promoting Turkish export products in international arena.	Ministry of Economy/KOSGEP (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Development Organization)

Export refunds in agricultural products	Firms exporting agricultural products, or in some exceptional cases firms manufacturing agricultural products	Export refunding for some specific agricultural products	Ministry of Economy
Employment support	Foreign trade firms	Providing support for hiring experienced and qualified staff responsible for export activities of firms	Ministry of Economy
Inward processing license	Export firms	Providing tax exemption for the import of raw materials, semi processed goods, packaging, operational materials	Ministry of Economy
Local sectoral international fairs support	Fair organizers	Funding some of the expenditures of advertising activities of local international fairs in foreign countries	Ministry of Economy

Adapted from: <http://www.ekonomi.gov.tr/portal/faces/home/ihracat/ihracatDestek>

### 3. IMPACTS OF EXPORT-PROMOTION PROGRAMS ON EXPORT PERFORMANCE IN TURKEY

Export-promotion programs are generally conducted to enhance firm's capabilities, resources, strategies and competitiveness, and in return to promote export performance (Czinkota, 1996). There are several studies that demonstrate export-promotion programs have been applied to overcome the general export deficit and increase market share of them (Czinkota, 1996; Francis and Collins-Dodd, 2004; Martincus and Carballo, 2010; Leonidou et al., 2011; Durmuşoğlu et al., 2012; Üner et al., 2013). However, a number of leading researches claim that information about the effectiveness of these programs is limited (Kotabe and Czinkota, 1992, Serringhaus and Rosson, 1990). In the same vein, some studies state that an inadequate amount of empirical research has been conducted investigating the efficiency of export-promotion programs in developing countries (Durmuşoğlu et al., 2012). Another issue mentioned in these studies is export performance measures. Most of the studies investigating the effects of these programs on export performance depend on

financial data of these firms. However, there are multiple drivers and criteria identifying export performance (Durmuşoğlu et al., 2012). In other words, effectiveness of these government assistance programs on export performance is cloudy in the related literature. Yet, some recent empirical studies permit researchers to discuss on the contribution of these programs to the export market and barriers that the firms have encountered.

Francis and Collins-Dodd (2004) evaluated the impact of export-promotion programs on export performance in their study. They accepted previous researchers' measures of impact while conducting their own study. These measures mentioned in their study cover both economic measures such as; sales, profits, market share, and non-economic measures such as number of countries exported to or diversification of exported products. Additionally, Francis and Collins-Dodd (2004) highlight the importance of knowledge of practices and opportunities of export on the level of performance. The level of export involvement is another determiner that can vary the impact of government support. One of the most outstanding results of their study and further attested in earlier research is that the greatest impact of government assistance programs are seen on firms at the beginning or developing stages of their export activities. Another study conducted by Leonidou et al. (2011) reveals that the association between the use of these programs and export performance is not direct, but benefiting from these programs reflect firms' resources and capabilities in a positive way. Their study also suggests that if these programs are used in a proper way, they enhance firms' organizational processes like relationship building and marketing adaptation. On the other hand, Lederman et al. (2010) question whether export-promotion agencies are effective and work properly. They worked on a sample consisting 88 agencies around the world. The results show that today's export-promotion agencies are effective in terms of having an impact on national exports.

As for Turkey, there are very few studies investigating the impacts of export-promotion programs on export performance. Most of them have been carried out in specific regions and their results vary. Şimşek and Yazıcı (2004) examined the Bilecik-Eskişehir region as a case to inquire into efficiency of export-promotion programs and illustrated that awareness level of the government assistance programs is significantly high. Furthermore, their impacts are enhancing and strong. Likewise, Durman et al. (2007) worked with a sample of firms in the Kütahya region. They implied that the most significant factor that affects the frequency of use and efficiency of support programs is the firm's organizational visions. According to their study, the majority of the sampled firms do not feel themselves competent enough to be in the international market. Hence, export-promotion programs should target management and provide them with training programs to increase their export related capabilities. Two other researchers that work on a region specific sample are Ersungur and Yalman (2009). They explored the impacts of export-promotion programs on regional development. Their study highlighted that the majority of the firms have enough knowledge about assistance programs and benefits from them. Tax exemption, local sectoral

international fairs, EximBank credits and inward processing license are the most preferred programs. Başer and Tekelliğolu (2013) conducted another study focusing on a specific region. They observed that SMEs in the capital city of Turkey, Ankara, are not able to benefit from export-promotion programs due to lack of adequate work skills. Further, management of the firms in the region believe that inadequate government support is one of the causes of weak export performance.

One of the very few and outstanding studies that investigated a large and heterogeneous sample was carried out by Durmuşoğlu et. al. (2012). They investigated the effects of government-designed export-promotion programs on export performance. Unlike former studies, they focused on all of the country. Their study included not only firms from different regions of the country but also different manufacturing industries. Thus, the results of this study are very enlightening. Durmuşoğlu et al. (2012) affirm that the use of export-promotion programs significantly promote export performance in a variety of ways. Particularly, they found export-promotion programs have affirmative impacts on financial performance, stakeholder relationships, management skills and organizational learning. Durmuşoğlu et al. (2012) define these benefits as short-term, mid-term and long-term goal achievements. In addition, they underline the drivers measuring export performance. They reaffirm that export performance measures are not limited to financial goal achievement, rather some other capabilities related to internationalization. They claim that although there are challenges for exporters to benefit from these programs, the indirect or mid-term (ex. establishing good relationships) and long-term (ex. gaining new management and competitive skills) benefits of these programs should not be underestimated.

Despite the positive implications of export promotion programs in several studies, each of these studies also mention that there are barriers to using them. Since these programs are included in precaution policies to compensate the country's export deficit, it is vital to discuss these barriers to suggest alternative ways to expand export performance and increase efficiency of these supports.

#### **4. BARRIERS TO EXPORT-PROMOTION PROGRAMS IN TURKEY**

Since the 1980s export promotion policies have been applied to reinforce international trade and contribution of these policies have been vivid. Yet, the efficiency of some of these policies, particularly export-promotion programs has been subject to much debate as discussed in previous sections. This is mainly due to low level of export-promotion use. The vast bulk of the literature claims that the number of SMEs applying and benefiting from these programs are small (Şimşek and Yazıcı, 2004; Durman et al. 2007; Onaran and Öztürk, 2008; Kalkan and Başdaş, 2009; Atayeter and Erol, 2011; Durmuşoğlu et al. 2012).

Uzay and Uzay (2004) point out that majority of manufacturing firms hesitate when applying for government assistance to export since they are not functional in Kayseri. Kayseri is a notable city in export performance with a sharp rise in furniture manufacturing. According to their study, %40 of Turkish manufacturing of furniture takes place in Kayseri and %78 of these firms are active exporters. Nonetheless, the use of export promotion rate is %50. The study underlines the importance of conducting a needs analysis while designing promotion programs. Participants of the study (representatives of furniture manufacturing firms) state that their most costly expenditure is transportation activities, but there is no government assistant program that meets this need. Moreover, design and Research and Development (R&D) promotion programs are very important in this instance, however, they cannot apply for these programs due to the requirements of high quality and procedural obstacles. Similarly, Çelik (2002) notes that the export refund for agricultural products is the single export promotion program in Karaman because other incentives do not meet the needs of exporters. In addition, there are very complicated bureaucratic processes involved in this procedure. Ersungur and Yalman (2009) also imply that complicated bureaucratic processes and the need for long correspondences discourage exporters from using government assistance programs. Another study stresses the low rate of export-promotion program use was conducted by Başer and Tekelioğlu (2013). Their research restates that the mechanical industry in Ankara, holding majority of SMEs and %40 of manufacturing industry in the city, cannot practice international trade in spite of its potential due to insufficient government incentives. Consequently, the most preferred assistance program is tax refund and EXIM Bank loans. Further, executives particularly complain about insufficient market research, lack of export experience and financial sources. In a wider scope, Üner et al. (2013) reaffirm that the export involvement levels vary the barriers that firms have to overcome. This result is very important for Turkish firms because % 98.6 of industrial manufacturing firms are SMEs and their export performance is relatively low (Durman et al., 2007). Üner et al. (2013) illustrate that the major barriers faced by the exporters are bureaucratic barriers as most of the Turkish SMEs are new in the international market or they are non-exporters. Another significant finding is that as export practices increase, information barriers implying market research and knowledge about foreign markets decrease. This result proves that despite the common complaints about insufficient incentives and over bureaucratic processes, the firms' major need of the firms is training programs and informative seminars. Thus, export-promotion programs need to be rearranged by considering experiences and capabilities of the firms.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Most countries see exporting as an opportunity to promote socio-economic development, increase employment, and correspondingly societal prosperity and support for local industries to increase their productivity. Consequently, export policies have gained

importance and improved. Export-promotion programs have been designed and examined as a part of these policies.

There are few studies investigating the impacts and efficiency of export-promotion programs. Despite positive implications about the effects of government assistant programs, it is not possible to say that export-promotion programs represent a sufficient degree of efficiency. Many parameters have to be reconsidered varying from financial performance to managerial capabilities in order to uncover the impacts of these programs. Moreover, the challenges that the firms struggle with are also changing depending on several different factors. Export-involvement is the major factor that determines the type of barrier firms are faced with (Üner et al., 2013).

Turkey as a growing liberal economy and a developing country has seen increased attention from the global economy. The country has expanded its export performance and its export markets heterogeneity (Document of the World Bank, 2014). However, a more meticulously planned export policy agenda is necessary to pave the way for the government's ambitious 2023-export target.

Results of local studies focusing on export performance and the efficiency of export-promotion programs illustrate that main barriers in achieving this are over-bureaucratic processes and lack of information hindering exporters from using export-promotion programs. Another issue is high standard requirements to benefit from R&D assistance. Although R&D is a high priority area to develop in Turkey since most of the technology is imported, it is very challenging to invest on R&D and use export-promotion programs. At this point, collaboration between industries and universities is vital. Studies also underline that training programs need to be extended to increase the use of export-promotion programs since most of the firms are small and medium-sized enterprises and inexperienced in international trade. More important than that severe regional and industrial changes vary the needs of exporters and make the use of the export-promotion programs demanding (Ersungur and Yalman, 2009; Başer and Tekelioğlu, 2013; Durman et al., 2007; Üner et al. 2013). In conclusion, policy makers should recognize varying needs that depend on the real experiences, capabilities, and resources of the firms. To achieve this goal, empirical studies are required.

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