

# The Idea of Transmitting Central Asian Energy through Afghanistan: TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project

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Orta Asya Enerjisinin Afganistan Üzerinden İletilmesi Düşüncesi: TAPI Doğal Gaz Boru Hattı Projesi

Öz

Enerji çerçevesinde oluşturulan iş birlikleri, bölge politikalarına doğrudan tesir edebilmektedir. Türkmenistan gazını Afganistan üzerinden Güney Asya'ya nakletmek amacıyla oluşturulan TAPI Doğal Gaz Boru Hattı Projesi de bölge devletlerinin ekonomik ve güvenlik beklentileri doğrultusunda şekillenmiştir. TAPI projesinin sürdürülmesi temelde ekonominin ve güvenliğin istikrarına dayalıdır. Afganistan'ın güvenlik sorunları tarafların ekonomik çıkarlarını olumsuz etkilediğinden, bu sorun sadece Afganistan'ın meselesi olmaktan çıkmıştır. Enerji diplomasisi kavramına ilişkin daha geniş bir anlayış sunan bu makale TAPI gibi enerji altyapısının, paydaşlarının sayısını projeye üye ülkelerin ötesine taşıyarak, karşılıklı bağımlılığı teşvik etmek amacıyla nasıl kullanılabileceğini tartışmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** TAPI, Enerji, Güvenlik, İş birliği, Afganistan

**Makale Türü:** Araştırma

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**Abstract**

Collaborations established within the framework of energy can directly affect regional policies. TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project, which was created to transport Turkmenistan gas to South Asia via Afghanistan, was shaped in line with the economic and security expectations of the regional states. The maintenance of the TAPI project is fundamentally based on the stability of the economy and security. Since Afghanistan's security problems negatively affect the economic interests of the parties, this problem is no longer just Afghanistan's issue. This article, which uses a broader understanding of the concept of energy diplomacy, energy infrastructure, such as the TAPI project beyond the member states of interdependence can be used to promote discusses how increasing the number of stakeholders.

**Keywords:** TAPI, Energy, Security, Cooperation, Afghanistan

**Paper Type:** Research

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## **1. Introduction**

Common economic interests constitute one of the most important elements of regional approaches. Economic-based approaches are becoming increasingly common in the international arena today. One of the important pillars of this is cooperation in the energy sector. In this regard, it is seen that oil and gas energy comes to the fore.

With the end of the Cold War, the realization of regional rapprochements in both Europe and Asia has attracted the attention of politicians and scientists to solve the problems of the countries in the region dealing with common threats. It was agreed that these rapprochements are the most appropriate strategy for solving the problems of regional integration. Regional rapprochement is defined as the process of working together state elements in order to ensure a number of interests at the international level. Success in this process is based on joint decisions and cooperation (Quwan, 2008: 250). In this regard, the TAPI energy project, which is being tried to be established in Central Asia, is an important example of this regional cooperation.

In order to ensure the continuity of international cooperation, it is important that security concerns are resolved as well as economic interests. Because without security, it is not possible to sustain economic gain in a stable way. However, the economic cooperation projects created play a positive role in ensuring security. Since no country wants its economic interests to be interrupted, countries are in favor of following a policy that serves the purpose of ensuring the security of their cooperation. The region where the project is located has long lacked a stable security environment. After the fall of the Taliban, political changes in Afghanistan brought about economic and security problems. In addition, the major South Asian economies of India and Pakistan need affordable and reliable energy to sustain their economic growth. At this point, the leaders of both Central Asian and South Asian states agree on securing energy trade agreements (Sadat, 2015: 4,5; Raofi, 2022: 85).

The main purpose of this study is to determine the political, security, and economic effects of the energy and economic cooperation created specifically for the TAPI natural gas project on the countries of the region, and to reveal the expectations and targets developed in this direction. In addition, the obstacles to the success of the project were also discussed. In this way, the study will basically discuss and seek answers to the following main questions:

- What is the impact of regional security on the project?
- What impact is the project expected to have on regional security and the economy?
- Why is Afghanistan important for this project?
- What kind of return will the realization of the project bring to Afghanistan?

This study examines the impacts of the TAPI natural gas pipeline project and addresses topics such as energy diplomacy, international politics, economics, security, and regional cooperation. In this regard, international relations, regional integration, conflict resolution, energy policies, cross-border investments, and regional security theories are discussed.

The methodology of this study is based on a literature review and analysis conducted to analyze the significant outcomes and impacts of the TAPI project from the perspective of regional states and the international community. In this analysis, the economic and security dimensions of the TAPI project were initially focused on, followed by the discussion of regional cooperation and energy diplomacy concepts. In this context, similarities and differences between the TAPI project and other energy projects in Central Asia, as well as international energy policies, were evaluated. In addition, by following a subject-centered method, the compartmentalizations were conceptually addressed. No

similar study has been found directly or indirectly in our literature related to the subject. We think that our work on this issue will eliminate this deficiency.

The TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project is an energy infrastructure project. Therefore, the study discusses the economic, security, and political dimensions of the project, and its significant outcomes and impacts for regional states and the international community. In this regard, the contribution of the study to the literature is providing a comprehensive analysis of the economic, security, and political dimensions of the TAPI project. This analysis may expand the understanding of regional states and the international community about the impact of energy infrastructure projects on regional security and stability. Additionally, by discussing the concept of energy diplomacy and the cooperation potential in the Central Asian region, this study can provide a basis for future work in this field.

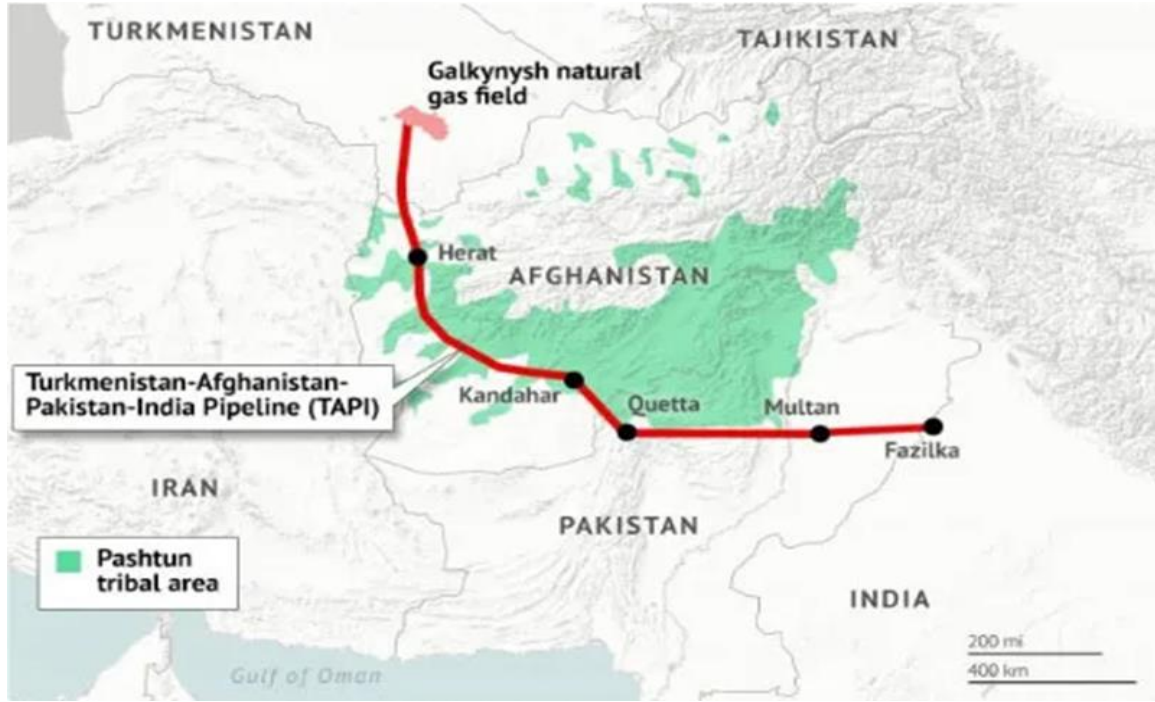
As it stands, this study shows parallels with other studies on the impact of energy infrastructure projects on regional security and stability. However, the originality of the study lies in its focus on the TAPI project, specifically the factors that led to the creation of the project idea and the cooperation potential among the regional states. Therefore, the study emphasizes the unique features of the TAPI project, offering a different perspective from other works in the literature.

## **2. Review of the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Route**

The Caspian Basin is in a very important position due to the energy resources it has. However, the geographical structure of the region brings with it several obstacles to the transmission of energy resources. The fact that Turkmenistan is located in this region has revealed the issue of transferring energy resources as a fundamental problem. This situation poses a major problem for energy transit and makes the countries of the region dependent on each other. As a result of this, new partnerships and agreements have been formed in the region. The TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project also emerged in this way (Meryem and İzzetullah, 1393: 5).

The TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project could not be realized for a long time due to the lack of clarification of export policies in Turkmenistan, as well as due to several political and security problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, thanks to Turkmenistan's new gas policies, the project has come back on the agenda. Overcoming the financial problems in a short time accelerated the process and the project was activated thanks to the support of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (Akyener, 2016: 4).

The project, called TAPI, is a natural gas project with routes to Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, and is also known as the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline. The project, which is aimed to supply natural gas to Southeast Asia, is planned to start from Turkmenistan and reach Fazilka in India via Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although there is no clear information about how much the pipeline in question, the total length of which is about 2000 kilometers, will cost, it is estimated that the daily transport capacity of the project will be about 1 million cubic meters (Sadat, 2015: 5,6).



**Figure 1:** Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline map. (Ellis, 2021).

The most important limitation of the project is the security problems. At the beginning of these is the issue of the security of Afghanistan. Although it was thought that security would be ensured by the arrival of international forces in the region, the situation has shown the opposite for the last ten years. Another important limitation of the project is geography. In particular, the fact that Afghanistan has a rugged structure increases pipeline costs (Akyener, 2016: 10).

Rumors that India will withdraw from the natural gas transfer project planned to take place through Afghanistan have raised new reservations about the fate of the project. Because the increase in the number of participants in such projects also brings with it the perception of trust. Another important issue is whether China should be involved in this big project. However, if China is included in the project, it is expected that India-China relations will take a positive shape (Azam, 2020; Raofi, 2022: 86).

The TAPI project is of great importance for Turkmenistan both strategically and economically. Because Turkmenistan does not want to depend on a buyer. A single buyer can monopolize the country where he is the buyer, both in terms of price and in terms of the policy to be followed on energy. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, opposes such an economic commitment. Currently, Russia is the only buyer of Turkmen gas. Turkmenistan claims that Russia is using this situation against itself (Azam, 2020). For this reason, Turkmenistan needs the TAPI project more than any other country, hoping to diversify its energy exports and market share (Reyaz, 2018: 48).

### **3. A Brief History of the Energy Transfer Route and the Security of the Region**

Regional energy security is a phrase that consists of the energy-related interactions of two or more governments in a given geographical area. These energy interactions include connections such as energy imports, exports, and transit. Theorists Bausan and Weaver said on the subject: "In the theory of regional security complexity, the threats posed by mutual energy Decisiveness between governments can also be observed geographically at the level of neighboring regions". In other words,

the transmission of thousands of kilometers of oil and gas pipelines to energy-dependent countries could create new dependencies and some threats. Because regional resources, regional energy dependencies, and distribution in political security complexes proceed in parallel with military power. In this regard, the question of whether energy security actors and political security actors are in the same direction becomes important (Bernal, 1397: 18).

The foundations of the TAPI Pipeline Project date back to the mid-90s, before the first Taliban administration. During this period, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the major oil companies of the West turned their attention to the territory of Central Asia. In particular, the United States intervened in the Central Asian countries under the pretext of ensuring stability, and this situation allowed American companies to operate comfortably in this region. In April 1995, the US State Department, together with the CIA, conducted research to collect information about Caspian energy resources and realized that the region is very productive in terms of natural gas. Thus, large companies affiliated with the United States have sought to open Central Asian energy to the world market (Ansari, 2006: 49).

TAPI and similar projects allow the region to export and transfer its energy to the outside. The project partnerships formed in this way strive to guarantee the security of the region in the provision of energy transfers. The TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project was first discussed between the US Unical company and the Argentine Bidas company during the first Taliban administration and the details of the project were proposed to Afghanistan. However, the human rights crimes committed by the Taliban regime and by al-Qaeda in 1998 the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania caused the reprieve of this pipeline project. After the fall of the Taliban regime, the project was revived and the first agreements were signed by the four countries between 2002 and 2008 (Huda and Ali, 2017: 202).

However, issues such as economic problems, civil war, drug trafficking, and fundamentalism in Afghanistan cause concern for Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and India. The security problems in Afghanistan have raised new discussions regarding the transit of the natural gas pipeline through Afghanistan. Elimination of these problems is among the prerequisites for resuming negotiations for the passage of the pipeline through Afghanistan (Bernal, 1397: 25).

Scientists believe that the United States wants to pass the pipeline through Afghanistan to reduce the influence of the Russians and Iranians in the region. For this reason, it has been suggested that the pipeline project was designed jointly by an American company and Turkmenistan. Some authors believe that this bill serves a political purpose, which is to realize the partnership between America and Pakistan. Ansari stated that the United States cooperated with Pakistan to seize the energy of Central Asia and formed the Taliban organization. In this way, he claimed that the United States had created a puppet government affiliated with Pakistan and that they could eliminate the Mujahideen Government, which was trying to block the pipeline in this way. He claimed that the United States and Pakistan had achieved their goal with the Taliban Government taking over the administration. However, the Taliban later created the biggest obstacle to the realization of this project (Ansari, 2006: 49).

Advocates of a multi-stakeholder approximation to energy diplomacy highlight the significance of state and non-state actors and comment on how stakeholders' interests can be ensured. Accordingly, planning transnational cooperation projects such as TAPI is seen as one of the most important strategies for the provision of these interests. Economy and security are at the heart of these interests (Huda and Ali, 2017: 205).

How to restore political stability and security in Afghanistan is always an important question. In this regard, economic cooperation seems to be the most important tool for solving the problem of Afghanistan today. On the other hand, it is predicted that the need for security and stability in Afghanistan will be overcome by creating job employment for young people and implementing major economic projects for the development of the country. But there is a kind of decoupling between security and the economy. Due to the scarcity of resources and security problems in Afghanistan, the solution to issues such as the difficulty of making economic investments in infrastructure and large projects is only possible through regional cooperation. But even in the event of cooperation, these security problems should not be ignored decisively (Benval, 1397: 27).

Each of the countries in the region is trying to manage the developments following their wishes, regardless of their national interests and national security. The emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the support of this group by some countries in the region is proof of this claim. However, the globalization trend of the economy and the growing needs of the countries of the region have forced them to turn to regional economic cooperation, despite political, military, and ideological differences and tensions. Afghanistan also has a very important role in this project, and if these projects are implemented, they will undoubtedly have a great impact on the economic growth and development process, as well as on the regional and national security of other project countries, including Afghanistan. In this regard, the energy transfer from Central Asia to South Asia and its impact on Afghanistan's national security plan in the form of this cooperation is an important effort to address the link between interdependence and regional (Benval, 1397: 27).

After the fall of the Taliban, it was assumed that the situation in Afghanistan would lead to political calm and stability, but the Taliban and al-Qaeda continued their activities in Afghanistan and even in Pakistan. For this reason, the concerns of the United States and its allies about the issue have resurfaced. After the first Taliban period, militants, factional leaders, and new figures in power have been seriously weakened. Constitutional processes have begun, and parliamentary, presidential, and provincial elections have entered into force. Thus, a way for a more stable system has been opened (Şifaî, 1393: 176,177).

The protocols related to the start of the TAPI project process were signed for the first time in Ashgabat in 2002. Many major oil and natural gas companies in the region and around the world have shown interest in the project. The American Yunikal Company, the Arabian Delta Oil Company, and the Japanese, Korean, Pakistani and Turkmenistan natural gas companies have even formed several partnerships in this regard. However, due to the bad and unstable political situation in Afghanistan, Yunikal Company later left this project. After September 11 incident, the leaders of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan met intending to decommission this project. On May 30, 2002, they reached an agreement in Islamabad for the technical and economic development of this project. At this meeting, they decided that the pipeline will pass through Devletabad, Kandahar, and Guvadard (Nabiev, 2004: 219).

TAPI countries (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India) signed two primary documents on the implementation of the TAPI project on December 11, 2010. GSPA (The TAPI Gas Sales and Purchase Agreement) was first signed in May 2012. The 22nd edition of the TAPI project was held in Ashgabat on August 6, 2015. At the Steering Committee Meeting, Turkmenistan offered to lead the consortium. During the meeting, a "Shareholders Agreement" was reached between the parties and India agreed to take a 5% stake in the project. Dec.PI project on 11 December 2010. The TAPI Gas Sale and Purchase Agreement (GSPA) was first signed in May 2012. At the 22nd Steering Committee Meeting of the TAPI project held in Ashgabat on 6 August 2015, Turkmenistan offered to manage the consortium. During the meeting, a

“Shareholders Agreement” was signed between the parties and India agreed to buy 5% of the project (Embassy of India, 2022).

#### **4. Security and Economic Prospects of Afghanistan as an Energy Route**

According to the traditional definition of security, the concept of security first brings to mind the absence of a military threat or the possibility of a military threat. New approaches, on the other hand, introduce a broader definition of security that includes civilian threats. Because, like other human-related concepts, security can vary according to conditions and needs. In the past, simple communities had fewer needs, and the greatest threat in these societies was felt by physical factors. As the complexity of society and the diversity of needs have increased over time, the number and variety of threats have also increased, and environmental, economic and communication threats have emerged in addition to military threats. Therefore, in the new definitions, security is interpreted as “a measure of confidence in the ability of one country to resist another country and defend itself against threats from others”. This definition refers to various aspects of security. The ability to resist is recognized given the current situation within the military, economic and cultural aspects. It also highlights the vulnerability aspect, which means identifying areas where the enemy can inflict damage. Threats are not purely military but may include political, economic, social, and cultural threats and the like. In short, attention should be paid not only to the formal aspects of threats and security but also to their content (Bernal, 1397: 16).

The concept of security has been used synonymously with national security for a long time. In other words, it has been described as the continuity of state-based independent political authority. To ensure this continuity, more military elements were put forward. Although "state sovereignty" preserves its place in terms of the concept of security today; It is observed that common interests among states are increasing in finding solutions against current threats (Ergüven, 2016: 771).

Today, Afghanistan is located between three regions: Central Asia, South Asia, and West Asia (Middle East) in terms of natural political geography and regional divisions of countries. The geographical location of Afghanistan has enabled it to act as a bridge between East-West and North-South since distant ages. Although Afghanistan lost its importance and economic status over time, due to its geopolitical and geo-strategic importance, it turned into an area of rivalry and conflict between the Russian and British colonial powers in the nineteenth century. With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the end of the Cold War, Afghanistan's economic and commercial importance has increased, and a new opportunity has emerged for Afghanistan and the countries of the region to take great steps in the field of trade and economy. However, insecurity has hindered any progress in this area. As stated, Afghanistan has historically been affected by the developments and trends in these three areas, and the changes and transformations in Afghanistan have also affected the destiny and development of countries and nations in these three areas. This interaction between Afghanistan and the countries of the region has become more important in the fields of trade, economy, politics, and security in the era of globalization. However, the interaction between Afghanistan and the countries of the region has not been very positive so far. For example, the conflicts of interest of the countries in the region have led to competition and this competition has gone to the extreme of intervening in Afghanistan's national security (Bernal, 1397: 26).

Considering the importance and impacts of the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project on the entire region, it could bring a major change in economic and political conditions to create a safe environment in distressed areas in Afghanistan. Afghanistan should make an extreme effort to implement all these economic and development projects that have deteriorated over the past four decades (Saqib, 2019: 300). The security instability that emerged in the region after the end of the war in Afghanistan, the Pakistan-India conflict and the tension in the US-Iran relations can be counted as the three main

obstacles preventing the emergence of this energy corridor so far. However, if the process is taken into account in Afghanistan, Afghanistan has welcomed all plans for this project. Because this attitude of Afghanistan is very important for the continuation of the project. That is why Afghanistan is the most important transit pillar of this project. A large part of the said line is planned to pass through these lands. Considering the security problems in the region, the importance of the region for the project increases even more. In addition, Afghanistan inhabits a strategic position connecting landlocked Central Asia to South Asia and the Middle East. With better security and improved infrastructure, Afghanistan can transport natural gas and electricity from Central Asia to South Asia, export mineral resources to China, and act as an international hub for land trade from ports in Iran and Pakistan (Rad and Moradi, 2012: 92; Raofi, 2022: 86).

In the TAPI project, the position of Afghanistan gains independent importance rather than a security issue. Of course, the completion of the energy flow depends on the provision of security. However, considering the benefits of the project and Afghanistan's strategic position in the project, it seems essential for the Afghan Government to make an effort to complete this project.

With the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project, Afghans aim to earn millions of dollars from the line passing through their region. This income is estimated to be 400 million dollars per year and the project is expected to create thousands of jobs. Afghanistan also hopes that this will solve the energy shortage problem. From the American perspective, the situation in Afghanistan today is different from that of the nineteenth century. Because at that time, England had to maintain its policies in the region by taking into account Russia's actions and reactions due to competition with Russia. In the absence of competition with any other major country in the process, the hegemonic power can design and implement its policies solely based on its defined interests, without worrying about the reaction of other working Powers (Şifaî, 1393: 177,178). Thus, Afghanistan can pursue a policy that is partially in line with its interests, without being a battleground between the two powers.

According to the agreement reached between the countries implementing the TAPI project, Afghanistan companies will be able to participate in the side applications of this big project. Because many companies have expressed their interest in this project. Afghanistan Mining and Petroleum Minister Davud Shah Saba stated that Total France and Russian and Chinese companies offered to participate in the project (Benal, 1397: 25-26; Raofi, 2022: 87).

The President of Afghanistan at the time, Eşref Ghani, conveyed his satisfaction to all countries that supported the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project and thanked everyone who contributed to the realization of the project. Stating that Afghanistan wants to be in contact with all its neighbors and develop healthy communication, Ghani emphasized that Afghanistan wants to create a platform for economic cooperation. Afterward, Ghani said, "We should all understand that with the policy of cooperation, both our people and we are winners. In this way, we can achieve economic prosperity, stability, and social security." (Demirci and Sadat, 2018).

Energy infrastructure stands out as a recurring source of international tension in contemporary global politics. In this regard, the river conflicts in South Asia, especially in the field of hydroelectricity, and the nuclear energy targets of India and Pakistan came to the fore. Projects with neglected energy infrastructure, such as oil and natural gas pipelines, were dismissed as "empty dreams", so to speak. However, recent breakthroughs in South Asian energy cooperation raise the question of how such projects can help move cooperation to higher international diplomacy politics (Huda and Ali, 2017: 202). The step that needs to be carried out essentially is the preservation of the principle of common interests. Such projects, which provide important expansions in terms of both security and diplomatic rapprochement, bring along important steps that shape regional relations based on the principle of mutual dependence.



Energy security complexes with regional resources, energy, and regional energy dependencies; political security complexes are parallel to military power. In this case, the question arises whether the actors and regions of energy security complexes and political security complexes are the same. Of course, to answer this question, it is necessary to examine the dependence on energy according to factors such as the number of resources, domestic energy, and the possibility of diversifying energy entry points. In addition, the energy-security relationship should also be considered. This can be seen, for example, in the former Soviet Republics' dependence on Russian oil, gas, and electricity imports for their ability to diversify their energy and resource imports, alternatives or increase their domestic energy production. Of course, in many cases, there may be annual fluctuations in the degree of dependency. But in long-term trends, the degree of dependency usually doesn't change much. These fluctuations show that the structures of energy security complexes are generally more dynamic than the structures of political security complexes. On the other hand, energy security requirements of resources vary according to transmission capabilities and market structure. Crude oil can be easily transported from one part of the world to another in huge tankers. Therefore, in the real sense, the market and the oil price act together, that is, it is global. Natural gas trade is mainly carried out through pipelines. This is the most important reason why the price of natural gas is determined mostly regionally, not globally. If the issue of energy dependency is linked to other conflicts and conflicts between governments, it can easily bring about security or political problems. These hostilities can lead to negative dependence (Bernal, 1397: 18).

For all reasons, energy security complexes will likely follow the paths of interdependence with security already existing in the region. Thus, it is expected that the cooperation to be established in the regional sense will bring solutions to the economic and security problems in the national sense. This seems possible with the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project (Saqib, 2019: 301).

The annual natural gas capacity of the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project is estimated to be 33 billion cubic meters. This situation is seen as the gateway to the sustainable development of the region, social, economic, and energy security (Kırveli, 2020: 1). Pointing out that the current project will bring business opportunities in many fields, the authorities agree that Turkmenistan will become a bridge between Europe and Southeast Asia with the realization of this project. In addition, it is estimated that Afghanistan can open up to the Asia Pacific market thanks to the planned railway between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedov stated that many countries are willing to partner with them in this regard, just like in the field of electricity, and that the cooperation between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan in the field of energy will gradually increase. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, who stated that the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project was an energy and communication corridor, stated that this project would bring the peoples of the region closer and that the social and economic progress to be achieved through the project would ensure stability in the region. The then-India Minister of State for Foreign Relations emphasized the importance of the TAPI project and stated that the project was a new beginning for the countries in the region. Emphasizing that TAPI is in an important position for India's energy security, the Minister pointed out that the project will open new opportunities (Demirci and Sadat, 2018).

Many energy experts believe that the TAPI project has the potential to expand relations between member states. Former British Energy Minister Charles Hendry stated that such large-scale joint projects would unite the member states politically and for their common interests. The then UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres emphasized that the cultural ties between Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries had great potential for the implementation of joint and beneficial projects between them. Afghan government officials of the Ashraf Ghani era stated that with the passage of this gas transmission line, the power transmission line, railway, road, and fiber optics will turn Afghanistan into a regional crossroads (Bernal, 1397: 18,19).

The length of the line, which will be approximately 2000 kilometers, is planned to pass through Turkmenistan for 214 kilometers, Afghanistan for 774 kilometers, Pakistan for 826 kilometers, and terminate in India. The power line project, which will progress in parallel with the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project, was also opened. It is estimated that the existing countries will act together in the construction of a 500-kilowatt section on the Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan lines through the power line project (Demirci and Sadat, 2018). However, despite numerous negotiations and agreements, the construction of both the pipeline and the power line has been delayed due to conflict and violence in Afghanistan and problems between India and Pakistan. This situation is currently being overcome. Because other TAPI member countries, including Afghanistan, see it as more than a project. Many experts believe that this cooperation is an important step for Afghanistan's prosperity and the socio-economic development of the region. Expectations are that there will be a radical change in Afghanistan's national security once the TAPI project becomes operational. In this way, it is thought that the income to be obtained will increase even more and employment opportunities will be created (Bernal, 1397: 21, 22, 28).

Politicians and energy experts in South Asia believe that security perceptions regarding the TAPI Gas Pipeline Project not only include these four member countries, but also regional countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal and multilateral organizations such as the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SAARC), but also the USA, China, and to include external stakeholders such as Russia. The hypothesis here is that linking the interests of a wider stakeholder group will help overcome security barriers to the TAPI project (Huda and Ali, 2017: 203; Raofi, 2020: 87).

It is emphasized that the healthy operation of the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project mainly depends on ensuring security. In particular, the fact that a large part of the pipeline route is located in Afghanistan has mutually increased security concerns. Since the Taliban took over the administration in Afghanistan, the region has experienced significant security problems and this situation has taken a different dimension after September 11. In Afghanistan, where a kind of civil war was experienced, the security problems did not decrease, although the US interventions were over. However, the terrorist activities carried out by the Taliban in the country cause both unrest and hinder economic development. However, it is planned to eliminate these problems to a large extent with the TAPI Natural Gas Project.

##### **5. The Effects of the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project on the Political Interests of the Countries in the Region**

Regional security is a set of all concepts and interpretations related to national security (the idea of getting rid of external threats) that members of a regional system use at a given time. Regional security is linked to the category of dependency and cooperation. That is, the security of countries in a given geographic region is interconnected in terms of threats and vulnerabilities. This interdependence creates the need for cooperation. The need for cooperation during the Cold War led to the formation of the political and security institutions of the regimes. Due to the emergence of new threats after the end of the Cold War, regional cooperation was introduced as a new way and concept under the name of security. Accordingly, it is planned to ensure and encourage interdependence, thus increasing the standard of military security, and securing trade and economic interaction mechanisms with deterrent diplomacy. In the collaborative security space, governments partner rather than compete and seek means to counter permanent or temporary threats. As can be seen, trust constitutes the basic elements of interdependence, economic partnership, and regional cooperation (Bernal, 1397: 17).

Since the TAPI project is expected to support regional development in countries where the natural gas pipeline will transit, it is thought that it will also help improve relations between countries such as India-Pakistan and Pakistan-Afghanistan by reducing the tension at the borders (Rad and Moradi, 2012:

92). In this regard, there are reports in the Afghan press that the TAPI Project forces Pakistan to be loyal to its collaborators. In this way, it is stated that the environment of trust is strengthened (Behzad, 2015).

Since Turkmenistan is highly dependent on China for natural gas exports, it welcomes the idea of expanding its gas market. China's participation in the project and the acceleration of the implementation of the project are also welcomed by Afghanistan. Because in this way, Afghanistan will not only get gas at a reasonable price but also increase the gas transit tax. Pakistan, on the other hand, will benefit from the project in many ways. First, a large part of the country's energy demand, including the liquefied natural gas that Pakistan imports from abroad every year, will be met through the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project. It is also on the agenda that some companies from TAPI member countries will form a consortium to transport some of the Turkmenistan gas to South Korea and European countries as liquefied natural gas via Pakistan's Gwadar port. In this way, Pakistan can gain an important place in the export of liquefied natural gas (Azam, 2020; Raofi, 2022: 88).

Thanks to the project, it seems that each of the countries in the region will create its markets and areas of economic interest. If the project in question is completed, the member countries and the countries fed by the pipeline will not be able to afford to disrupt this system. Thus, stability based on interdependence will be created in the region.

Regional security threats are one of the most important obstacles to the realization of the TAPI project. The transit passage to be provided by the said pipeline from Afghanistan worries the project collaborators. Because the consequences that may arise due to a security weakness in a single country will adversely affect all collaborators. For this reason, the member states of the project are focused on the security barriers to the pipeline. It has been argued that the solution to these obstacles is greatly restricted by a reductionist approach rather than a multi-stakeholder approach. However, there are also arguments that energy infrastructure such as TAPI can be used to promote interdependence by expanding the number of stakeholders beyond the member states of the project. In this regard, it is necessary to include the interests of foreign countries and institutions in the project, to provide consensus on political issues, to determine the conditions in which social interests can be addressed, etc. elements can reduce concerns about the physical safety of the pipeline. The cumulative effect of such an approach could create a shift in the perception of energy projects from the realm of security to inclusive cooperation (Huda and Ali, 2017: 202).

Neighboring and regional countries contributing to the internal turmoil in Afghanistan will take steps to ensure security and stability in Afghanistan and try not to endanger their interests in this area, to ensure the continuity of the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project. This situation will operate the principle of interdependence between Afghanistan and the countries of the region. The most important advantage of the interdependence arising from the TAPI project for Afghanistan is the understanding that Afghanistan's security comes before the needs of the countries in the region. In other words, as Afghanistan was affected by others, it was also possible for others to be affected by Afghanistan to the same extent. For example, Pakistan, which has always used its power as a trump card against Afghanistan, will no longer be able to use this tactic. Because it is well known that Afghanistan has a tactic to cut gas or cause problems in transportation. It will be an important factor in ensuring Afghanistan's security in transmitting gas to Pakistan (Benval, 1397: 28).

Iran is against the project as it is not included in the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project. For this reason, Iran expresses its opinion that the project will not be realized at every opportunity. He claims that the biggest reason for this is that India and Pakistan cannot reconcile due to the problems between them. In addition, Iran emphasizes that it does not believe in Saudi Arabia's promise to invest financially in the project. It is thought that Iran's negative attitude towards the TAPI project can only

be overcome with the involvement of China in the project. Because China has a considerable influence on the Iranian Government, thanks to its large investments in Iran. This situation brings with it the idea of Iran being included in the project later on. However, this situation was not welcomed by the other partner countries in the project. For this reason, other partners have expressed their opinion in favor of India staying in the TAPI project (Reyaz, 2018: 50,51; Azam, 2020; Raofi, 2022: 88).

Understanding the interests of regional countries and external powers can foster interest in securing the pipeline and create an understanding of how to make policy interventions to promote inclusive cooperation. On the other hand, identifying ways in which stakeholders' interests can be addressed through socio-economic programs can reduce the overt emphasis on the physical security of the pipeline by incorporating human security concerns into the project's plan. Thus, the focus of the discourse on the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project may shift from defense and security to inclusive cooperation (Huda and Ali, 2017: 203).

The TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project, which has been trying to be completed for a long time, could not be realized for almost a quarter of a century due to problems such as disputes between India and Pakistan over the ownership of the Kashmir region, tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and internal security problems in Afghanistan (Tepealti, 2009: 86). However, it is obvious that the region, which is rich in energy resources and hosts almost half of the world's population, has great economic potential. For this reason, it is hoped that the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project will contribute to protecting the strategic interests of conflicting neighbors, overcoming obstacles by uniting the states of the region, and ensuring lasting peace in the region, if necessary, conditions arise (Reyaz, 2018: 47).

## **6. Evaluation of the Economic Dimension of the Project**

In 2010, a final framework agreement for the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project was signed by the four countries following the definition of partnership and regional cooperation. Thanks to this cooperation, Pakistan first became a new trade and energy corridor potential for China through the port of Gwadar. This situation can be considered an opportunity for Pakistan to meet China's developing energy needs in the future. In this context, Pakistan's Gwadar seaport holds promise for becoming a regional trade and energy transport hub. Thus, Pakistan can remain in the energy circle in the region. This activity is of great importance in enriching the states of the region, large or small, and ensuring that billions of people live in perpetual peace (Rad and Moradi, 2012: 92; Raofi, 2022: 87).

With the project, it is planned that it will make it easier for India and Pakistan to overcome their energy deficits. Afghanistan will provide millions of dollars in tolls and Turkmenistan will find a permanent gas export market in the energy-scarce South Asian part. In Afghanistan, it is believed that the project will make positive contributions to security, promote economic growth and improve people's lifestyles (Bernal, 1397: 28). Additionally, this project holds both geopolitical and economic benefits for Turkmenistan. The pipeline is estimated to supply 60 to 90 million cubic meters of natural gas per day. It is expected that 42% of the supplied natural gas will be purchased by India, 42% by Pakistan, and the remaining portion by Afghanistan. Furthermore, upon the realization of the project, Turkmenistan will emerge as a crucial energy export hub in the region (Mommayev, 2022).

However, TAPI provides an unprecedented opportunity for regional cooperation, connecting the economies of four countries. The regional cooperation strategy in the energy sector defines TAPI as a link in the energy inter-relationships among the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) countries. TAPI's objectives are aligned with CAREC's goals of ensuring energy security through balanced development of regional infrastructure and institutions, stronger market integration, and enhanced economic growth through advanced energy trade. TAPI is a high-priority flagship project in the energy sector under CAREC 2020. The South Asia Regional Cooperation Strategy and Programs for India prioritize the energy sector from 2011 to 2015 (Koh, 2018: 1). This major project is not only an

economic priority for the energy supplier, but also for transit countries and consumers. It will provide a strong driving force for sustainable development and peace-building (Lemoine, 2016).

**Table 1:** Energy Production and Consumption Data for 2021 of the TAPI countries (Quadrillion Btu/British Thermal Units). (<https://www.eia.gov/tools/a-z/>, 2021).

<b>COUNTRIES:</b>	<b>Turkmenistan</b>	<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>India</b>	
<b>Natural Gas</b>	<b>Production:</b>	3.217	0.003	1.022	1.194
	<b>Consumption:</b>	1.613	0.003	1.283	2.468
<b>Petroleum &amp; other liquids</b>	<b>Production:</b>	0.479	0	0.203	1.466
	<b>Consumption:</b>	0.293	0.048	0.911	9.529
<b>Coal</b>	<b>Production:</b>	0	0.032	0.131	12.819
	<b>Consumption:</b>	0	0.018	0.58	16.432
<b>Nuclear, renewables, &amp; other</b>	<b>Production:</b>	(s)	0.006	0.571	3.508
	<b>Consumption:</b>	-0.011	0.024	0.576	3.533
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Production:</b>	<b>3.696</b>	<b>0.041</b>	<b>1.927</b>	<b>18.988</b>
	<b>Consumption:</b>	<b>1.895</b>	<b>0.093</b>	<b>3.35</b>	<b>31.963</b>

Notwithstanding Turkmenistan's substantial natural gas reserves, which are the sixth largest in the world, the country is limited to accessing the markets of Russia, Iran, and China. However, neighboring countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, which face a shortage of gas resources, could serve as significant potential markets. Afghanistan, for instance, requires a secure energy source to increase its electricity generation capacity and its current electrification rate from 20% to 33%. Meanwhile, Pakistan is facing a critical power shortage of over 5,000 megawatts, driven by several factors such as a depletion of domestic gas supplies, increased competition for gas, and a lack of affordable and dependable alternative energy sources. Similarly, in 2011, northern India experienced a power deficit of approximately 3,000 megawatts. This regional cooperation project aims to spur economic growth by increasing investments and trade, and aligning the interests of all parties, which would in turn promote regional stability and security. Greater reliance on natural gas to generate electricity would also reduce environmental damage, as natural gas emits 43% fewer carbon emissions per unit of energy delivered compared to coal, which is commonly used in India (Koh, 2018: 1).

The TAPI project signifies a new era in regional economic cooperation. The TAPI pipeline is a true game-changer, a historic initiative that will meet the energy needs of the region and contribute to development, peace, security, and thus prosperity. Also TAPI is an example of the key role that ADB has played in promoting regional cooperation and integration over the past 20 years. This project will unlock economic opportunities, transform infrastructure, diversify the energy market for Turkmenistan, and enhance energy security for the region (Lemoine, 2016).

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimated the cost of the TAPI project to be \$7.6 billion in 2008, which was more than three times the initial estimate of \$2.6 billion in 2002. The increase in the projected cost can be attributed to persistent delays and changes in technical designs that have

occurred over time. Although there have been recent indications of progress in the project, it coincides with the emergence of alternative gas producers that may compete with Turkmenistan, coupled with a declining global energy demand. This highlights the importance of time in energy development projects and emphasizes the need to continuously update the validity of initial assumptions to assess the feasibility of the project (Koh, 2018: 4).

The TAPI project is the largest and most significant economic project in the region, providing significant benefits to all member countries. This is a mutual project, with Turkmenistan being the original gas exporter, and the gas pipeline passing through Afghanistan to southern Asian countries, with all four countries being responsible for the construction and security of the project. Afghanistan is expected to earn millions of dollars from the construction of this project, creating job opportunities for thousands of unemployed individuals in the country, as well as recruitment for thousands of people in the security sector of the project (Mehrzaei and Safai, 2019: 1). In fact Mir Ahmed Jawid Sadat, Afghanistan's Deputy Minister of Mines and Petroleum, has stated that the TAPI project will provide a sustainable source of energy for Afghanistan when completed, helping to accelerate investments and create local job opportunities. This will provide opportunities for the economic development of the region, ensuring stability and peace in security (Lemoine, 2016).

Afghanistan will initially earn \$200,000,000 as transit fees over a period of ten years. This is of great significance as it would lead to the recruitment of a significant number of our young population, thereby significantly reducing the unemployment rate in the country. Furthermore, the project would enable us to meet our gas needs for the next thirty years, at a low cost, making it the second most important resource after electricity. Over the course of the project, we expect to produce 55 million cubic meters of gas in the first decade, followed by 1 billion cubic meters in the second decade, and finally reaching 1.5 billion cubic meters in the third decade. This development could contribute to Afghanistan becoming one of the secure and peaceful countries in the region. Afghanistan, unfortunately, remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with a majority of the population still struggling with poverty. Although poverty is a global issue affecting many nations, Afghanistan has been particularly hard hit. Nevertheless, the TAPI Project, which is expected to transfer gas throughout Afghanistan, has the potential to provide job opportunities for thousands of Afghan workers. During the construction of the pipeline, it is anticipated that more than 50,000 Afghan workers will be employed, and in the long term, the project will provide job opportunities for an estimated 9,000 to 11,000 workers for the next 30 years to ensure the security and safety of the pipeline. (Mehrzaei and Safai, 2019: 7-10).

Following that, Afghanistan would receive annual transit fees of \$500 million from Turkmenistan, India, and Pakistan. Additionally, there is potential for a significant shift towards utilizing gas in the transportation sector, resulting in lower expenses compared to oil and leading to cost savings. Apart from the TAPI Project, the transmission of electricity lines to India and Pakistan would bring the four countries closer together. This enhanced connectivity could expand their economic cooperation and foster mutual development, rather than engaging in destructive behaviors towards one another (Mehrzaei and Safai, 2019: 10).

Energy corridors have emerged as key drivers of sustainable development worldwide. These corridors, also known as pipeline diplomacy, promote and facilitate greater economic integration, particularly among different regions. In the context of economic liberalization, energy plays a central role, as increased energy supply leads to greater socio-economic prosperity, regional connectivity, significant industrial growth, and job creation (Khan, Energy Corridors, 2023). From this perspective, the TAPI Project has the potential to strengthen Afghanistan's economic and political ties with the member countries, transforming existing distrust into a more friendly relationship. Afghanistan would be able to maintain its political relationships while also enhancing its economic ties with the member

countries, thus ensuring a stable and comfortable political environment that aligns with its strategically important location (Mehrzai and Safai, 2019: 12).

The recent rapid economic growth in Pakistan and India has increased their energy demands. However, the energy supply deficit in these countries has resulted in significant electricity shortages. However, the sustained growth has been hampered by frequent power outages, which hinder the manufacturing sector from operating at full capacity, in addition to dealing with fuel energy scarcity. Insufficient energy supply has adversely affected Pakistan's economic growth. The government of Pakistan is focused on curbing power outages and creating new energy alternatives by promoting natural gas consumption. Natural gas plays a particularly crucial role in electricity generation in Pakistan, accounting for 45.08% of the country's thermal power production. Natural gas has traditionally dominated Pakistan's thermal energy production, and access to natural gas has become a matter of great importance both domestically and internationally. For these reasons, the TAPI project is one of the most significant initiatives for Pakistan. TAPI offers an alternative solution to Pakistan's energy scarcity issue. The TAPI pipeline presents an opportunity for Pakistan to import 14 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas annually. The reinforcements from TAPI to the industrial and energy units planned along the route will enhance the country's energy security. Overall, the TAPI project holds great importance for Pakistan as it offers a potential solution to address the energy shortage problem and contributes to enhancing the country's energy security (Mommayev, 2022).

This project will not only provide a certain level of energy stability to Afghanistan and Pakistan but also assist in meeting the high energy demands of the Indian economy. India, due to its large population and growing economy, faces challenges related to energy shortages (Qonunov, 2016). Since 1990, rapid economic growth in India has significantly increased its energy demand and imports. This increase in energy demand is expected to continue alongside India's economic growth. This circumstance explains India's interest in the TAPI project and highlights its importance for the country. Furthermore, the project has the special advantage of providing an entry point to Central Asia and enabling future energy agreements or similar pipeline projects in the energy-rich region. This is a crucial factor for a large economy like India, which has a substantial population. Additionally, the pipeline could facilitate the formation of a trade corridor extending to Kazakhstan among the four countries (Mommayev, 2022).

This regional cooperation project is expected to not only stimulate economic growth through increased investments and trade, but also to alleviate energy shortages in the participating countries. Furthermore, the project is anticipated to contribute to the alignment of interests among the four countries, which could help enhance regional stability and security. The increased utilization of natural gas for electricity generation could also mitigate environmental damage, as natural gas emits 43 percent less carbon emissions than coal, which is commonly used in India, per unit of energy produced (Khetran, 2017: 3).

The anticipated benefits from the TAPI pipeline are viewed as an opportunity to establish a mutually beneficial agreement among local and regional stakeholders in Afghanistan by creating an integrative economic framework that binds the "warring" factions. Building on Afghanistan's role as an "energy bridge" between energy-rich Central Asia and energy-poor South Asia presents the possibility of integrating the conflict-ridden country, primarily driven by regional power competition, into a framework of mutually dependent cooperation. The TAPI pipeline is projected to increase economic interdependence among competing regional powers, thus rendering the costs of conflict prohibitively high and the benefits of cooperation lucrative (D'Souza, 2011: 1). Such projects will lead to the economic development and prosperity of the region. And so regional cooperation will be easier (Khetran, 2016: 68).

## **7. Conclusion**

The main goal to be achieved with the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project is to safely transport Turkmenistan gas to the South Asian region. However, due to the fact that Turkmenistan does not have a coast on the open seas, some alliances were needed to achieve this goal and the TAPI project was created.

In order for the TAPI project to meet the expectations, we see that the issue of ensuring security comes to the fore. The internal turmoil and terrorist activities that have been going on in Afghanistan for many years seem to be the primary limitations for the completion of this project. Achieving this security may be possible with some changes in Afghanistan's domestic politics. However, it cannot be foreseen that this will happen in the short term. This has increased the concerns about the realization of the TAPI project. In addition, Pakistan-India, and Afghanistan-Pakistan tensions are also counted among these problems. However, in order to overcome this situation, we see that the countries in the region have taken positive steps by considering the amount of profit to be obtained from the project.

In the completion of the TAPI project, the unstable internal security policy in Afghanistan, the Pakistan-India conflict, and the tension in the US-Iran relations were among the main factors preventing the emergence of this energy corridor. However, despite all kinds of security weaknesses and threats, Afghanistan welcomed all plans for this project. This attitude of Afghanistan is very important for the healthy continuation of the project. Because Afghanistan is the most important transit leg of this project.

Afghanistan is an important connection bridge in the project, which was created to transfer Turkmen gas to the Indian Ocean. This role of Afghanistan has led other partner countries to make some efforts to ensure Afghanistan's security. In today's world, where global interests are at the forefront, it is aimed to eliminate the problems as a unity with the definition of a common enemy and common goals. For this reason, the countries of the region have started to approach the problems with a realistic perspective and to act by recognizing the potential cooperation areas and capacities in the region.

As with other transnational cooperation agreements, the TAPI project is fundamentally based on the stability of the economy and security. Since Afghanistan's security problems negatively affect the economic interests of the parties, this problem is no longer just Afghanistan's issue. For this reason, the issue is tried to be overcome in the direction of the principle of interdependence. If these efforts are successful, it is expected that the profit of the project in question will far outweigh the damage caused by the general security problems so far. The project has been shaped in line with the economic and security expectations of the regional states. Although there were some limitations, the common interests of the countries involved in the project have been the most important factor in the continuation of the project.

As a result of the realization of the TAPI Natural Gas Pipeline Project, the economic and security status of the countries in the region will change. In this way, conflicts between the countries of the region will be replaced by cooperation. On the other hand, with the security of the region, foreign investments in these regions will increase, the economic and political face of the region will change and the door of development and progress will be opened for these countries.



Alper YILDIRIM

**Arařtırma ve Yayın Etięi Beyanı**

Bu alıřma iin etik kurul izni alma gereklilięi yoktur. Etik kurul izni bulunmamaktadır.

**Yazarların Makaleye Olan Katkıları**

Yazar alıřmaya %100 oranda katkı saęlamıřtır.

**Destek Beyanı**

Arařtırma herhangi bir kurum ve kuruluř tarafından desteklenmemiřtir.

**ıkar Beyanı**

Herhangi bir ıkar atıřması yoktur.

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