

TURKEY-CHINA RELATIONS WITHIN THE CONCEPT OF THE NEW SILK ROAD PROJECT*

Yeni İpek Yolu Projesi Kapsamında Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri

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Abstract

After the entry of China into the United Nations Security Council in 1971, relations between Turkey and China officially began. The 2000s was the period of recovery and restructuring for Turkey-China relations. With the One Belt One Road Project announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, Turkey-China relations with a history of about 45 years have entered a new turn. In this study we will evaluate the historical progress and development of relations between Turkey and China within the scope of OBOR Project.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, China-Turkey Relations, China, New Silk Road, Foreign policy of China

Özet

1971 yılında Çin'in Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyi Daimi Üyesi olmasıyla birlikte Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri de resmen başlamıştır. 2000'li yıllar Çin-Türkiye ilişkileri için iyileşme ve yeniden yapılanma dönemi olmuştur. 2013'te Çin Devlet Başkanı Xi Jinping tarafından açıklanan OBOR Projesi ile yaklaşık 45 yıllık geçmişi olan Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri de yeni bir döneme girmiştir. Bu çalışmada OBOR Projesi kapsamında Türkiye ile Çin arasındaki ilişkilerin seyrini değerlendireceğiz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kuşak Yol Girişimi, Çin-Türkiye İlişkileri, Çin, Yeni İpek Yolu, Çin Dış Politikası.

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1. Introduction

In 2014, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$ 10.3 trillion, China surpassed Japan and has become the 2nd largest economy of the World after the United States. Today China is the strongest rival of the USA whether economically, militarily and technologically and is seeking to build intensive relations with the Middle Eastern countries.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the global market share of Chinese export goods raised from 12.3 percent to 13.8 percent in 2015. Only the USA had reached such a large rate in 1968. With the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's leadership in 1978, China implemented more liberal economic policies and became world's largest producer in the last 30 years thanks to its membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Consequently, China is now a weighty energy importer and has become a market seeking country. China is a dependent country in point of energy and it has become the world's second largest oil consuming and importing country on the back of the US since 2014. 52 % of the oil imported by China comes from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq). This imported oil reaches China by sea through the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. As the control of Malacca Strait and the South China Sea is constrained, China is looking for ways to create alternative routes to reach this oil. Moreover, China need to find alternative transportation routes in order to deliver with a secured way the produced goods to the European countries, which are China's largest trading partners. Aware of this, the People's Republic of China declared the New Silk Road Project in 2013, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping.

Turkey is considered as the gateway to the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa so it has a central position for OBOR in terms of land, sea and air transportation. Up to now, several agreements have been signed by China and Turkey within the OBOR project concerning the development of railway infrastructure, the use of ports and the creation of highway connections.

When we look at the route of OBOR it's possible to see how the location of Turkey is important and we can understand that Turkey's

presence is essential for this Project. Turkish officers, who are aware of the strategic importance of this project and the role of Turkey, have started to show more interest to OBOR initiative and are trying to get closer to China due to the deterioration of the relation with the West.

As Western countries didn't maintained a decisive stance against the July 15 military coup attempt and the USA has been getting closer to PYD and YPG in Syria by giving weapon support, Turkey started to approach its relations with the West with suspicion. Recently, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has presented the Shanghai Business Association (SCO) as an alternative to the NATO and the EU and this may be the first sign that Turkey is going to get closer to China and Russia.

The new Silk Road project is crucial because it provides to Turkey the chance to strengthen its economical, social and political relations with China and Middle Asian countries and to find alternative alliances to the EU and the US. Even if the OBOR project has many advantages for Turkey, we should consider the risk that the current commercial deficit can increase.

2. History of Turkey-China relations

After the entry of China into the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1971, relations between Turkey and China officially began. However, relations were at a low level in the early years because, under the socialist system, the Chinese economy was closed to the outside world. After the military coup on September 12, 1980 in Turkey, there was a serious revival on relations between Turkey and China. After the military coup, Turkey was excluded by European Economic Community and started to look for a strong ally with whom it can build a new relationship. Once China became a permanent member of the United Nations and Deng Xiaoping took over the country in 1978, China has abandoned its severe socialist economy. The People's Republic of China, which has opened up to the world by adopting a more liberal economic policy, has become the ideal partner for Turkey, which is looking for new allies.

The first high-level visit from Turkey to China was carried out by the Minister of Commerce Kemal Cantürk in May 1981, and then, in December 1981, Foreign Affairs Minister Ilter Turkmen visited China. Trade and Foreign Ministers' visits to China were the first signs of the intense interest Turkey will show to China. The visit of Kenan Evren (the Turkish President of that period) to China in December 1982 and the visit of Prime Minister Turgut Özal in July 1985 enabled Turkish businessmen to grasp the importance of the Chinese market. The numerous visits of the Turks to China have resulted to a reciprocated response from the Chinese who have made high-level visits to Turkey in these years. Many Chinese politicians have made return visits to Turkey during these years: The culture Minister Zu Muzhi has visited Turkey in April 1983, Wu Chuochiang in October 1983, The Chinese president Li Xiannian in March 1984 and Zhao Ziyang in July 1986. In the 1990s, when the "Uyghur Problem" in East Turkestan appeared, China-Turkey relations came to a stopping point. Extremely sensitive to separatist movements, Chinese didn't visit Turkey even at ministerial level between 1991 and 2000 due to the intense nationalist feelings and discourses Turkey has shown against the Uighurs in the 90's. In a sense, China gave the message that Turkey should be careful about this subject.

The 2000s was the period of recovery and restructuring for Turkey-China relations. Especially in 2002 with the government of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Party (AKP), more intensive relations have been established with China and efforts have been made to stay away from discourses that can damage the relations. The Increase of the relations between Turkey and China to a "Strategic Partnership" level in 2010 was the result of the active and peaceful foreign policy of this period. Besides the economic and political dimensions, relations with China also tend to increase in cultural terms. 2012 and 2013 were celebrated as the years of China and Turkey, and various events were held in these two countries. While the number of Chinese Confucius Institutes has increased to 5 in Turkey from 2016, the number of students has increased day by day in both countries thanks to various scholarships and incentives.¹ Looking at the reciprocal visits between Turkey and

1 Temiz Kadir, "Türkiye Çin İlişkileri", *Report of Strategic Thinking Institute (SDE)*, No: 196, April 2017, p. 10.

China at the prime ministerial level between 1971 and 2011, it is seen that Turkey visited China once and China visited twice.²

When we look at Turkey-China relations that have a 45 years history we can easily notice that China is much more advantageous. From 2015, there is a trade volume of 27.2 billion dollars between two countries. However in this commercial relationship, Turkey has achieved sales of \$ 2.4 billion to China, while China's exports to Turkey reached \$ 24.8 billion. In the other hand, Turkey sold raw materials (mine products) to China while China sold more manufactured (electronics) goods to Turkey.³ Since the beginning of bilateral trade, Turkey reached a trade surplus against China only in 1993-94 and for all the other years, the trade surplus was for the benefit of China. Besides commercial relations, Turkey didn't obtain the expected attention and benefits in political relations too.

Building good relations with China, which is one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and which is seen as the new superpower candidate, will give Turkey the capacity to expand its maneuvering area. Notwithstanding, since the beginning of the relations, China's political moves had not the sufficiency to be beneficial for Turkey, neither for the Cyprus problem or the other issues.⁴ Particularly, in almost all the decisions that were voted in the United Nations concerning the civil war in Syria, China has made decisions contradictory to Turkey's foreign policy moves.

3. The New Silk Road Project (One Belt One Road Project)

The "One Belt One Road", "Silk Road Economic Belt" and "The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" projects were announced by the Chinese president Xi Jinping in 2013. The goal of these projects is to create

2 Ekrem Erkin, "Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin 40 Yılı (1971-2011)", *Report of Strategic Thinking Institute (SDE)*, <http://sde.org.tr/tr/newsdetail/turkiye-cin-iliskilerinin-40-yili-1971-2011-raporu/2902>, p. 10, (Accessed on 15. 10. 2017).

3 T.C. Ekonomi Bakanlığı, "Türkiye'nin Çin'e İhracatında Başlıca Ürünler", <https://goo.gl/tJwbhg>, (Accessed on 11.10.2017).

4 Nüraniye Hidayet Ekrem, "Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Dış Politikası (1950-2000)", Ankara, *ASAM Yayınları*, 2003, p. 177.

a corridor linking East and Southeast Asia with Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa. The New Silk Road Initiative, which was made the topic current issue in for the first time in a speech by Hillary Clinton in July 2011 in Chennai, was designed to make post-war Afghanistan a center of trade between Central Asia and South Asia. Due to lack of economic and political support for the project, the project was abolished by the United States.⁵

China's one-Belt One Road initiative which inspired by the US, will connect China with Europe, Africa and South Asia with Asia. In the scope of the project, ports, roads, railways, airports, power plants, oil and gas pipelines and free trade zones are planned. Projects currently under construction and recently signed on OBOR are worth about \$ 250 billion.⁶ The project is expected to cost 5 trillion dollars in total. Xi Jinping also called for participating countries to support themselves for globalization by announcing a \$ 113 billion additional budget for the project at the opening speech of the Belt and Road forum.⁷

For the funding of the project, The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank⁸ and Shanghai-based BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South America) were established and resource of 40 billion dollars was allocated for the project.⁹

- China aims those five things with OBOR Project:
- Political coordination with the countries under the Project
- Air, land and railways to strengthen the infrastructure of the connected countries

5 Jeffrey Mankoff-Richard Ghiasy, "Central Asia's Future: Three Powers, Three Visions", *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/central-asias-future-three-powers-three-visions/>, (Accessed on 15.10.2017).

6 "China's New Silk Route: The Long and Winding Road, PwC's Growth Markets Centre", *PwC*, February 2016, <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/growth-markets-center/assets/pdf/china-new-silk-route.pdf>, (Accessed on 15.10.2017).

7 Jane Cai, "Xi Jinping rolls out global welcome mat for new Silk Road grand plan", *South China Morning Post*, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2094248/xi-jinping-pledges-us113-billion-he-woos-world-board>, (Accessed on 16.10.2017).

8 The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was proposed by China in 2013, and the initiative of establishing the bank was launched in October 2014 when representatives from 22 countries signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

9 Erdal Tanas Karagöl, "Modern İpek Yolu", *SETA Perspektif*, No: 174, May 2017, p. 6.

- Unrestricted trade with free trade zones that will eliminate the barriers and increase productivity
- To provide financial integration through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
- Linking peoples in terms of cultural, ideas and information

The network that will be created within this project will involve 65 countries and the total economic size of these countries is 21 trillion dollars.¹⁰ The OBOR project aims to recover the historical Silk Road which linked Central Asia, Middle East and Europe in the past. The other goal is to develop strong business relationships with these 65 countries¹¹ which constitute about 60 percent of the world's population. In other respects, the commercial turnover of China and countries participating to OBOR initiative reached 1 trillion dollars in 2015. This amount represents 25 percent of China's total foreign trade. Though there were 65 countries involved in the project, only 20 countries were represented at the presidential level in the Belt and Road forum in Beijing on 15 May 2017. Most of them were economically small Asian countries dependent on China.¹² North Korea and the US were among countries sending representative to the conference; Britain, Germany and France sent low-level representatives. As for that India boycotted the forum because of concerns about the Sino-Pakistan economic corridor and the Kashmir issue.¹³

China has never published a comprehensive list of any project or agreement related with OBOR. Despite this, OBOR's flagship project includes high-speed railway lines linking the \$ 46 billion Sino-Pakistan corridor, 3,000 km of China and Singapore, and natural gas pipelines to Central Asia. The Belt and Road initiative, however, includes areas

10 "İpek Yolu 65 ülkede 'refah kuşağı' oluşturacak", *TRT Haber*, <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/ipek-yolu-65-ulkede-refah-kusagi-olusturacak-183969.html>, (Accessed on 15.10.2017).

11 Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, March 2015.

12 Zheping Huang, "China's summit for its new Silk Road is missing 44 heads of state from the 65 nations involved", *Quartz*, <https://goo.gl/9n6B3R>, (Accessed on 16.10.2017).

13 Rohan Venkataramakrishnan, "Is India trying to convince the world China's One Belt One Road plan is secretly colonial?", *Scroll.in*, <https://scroll.in/article/837601/is-india-trying-to-convince-the-world-chinas-one-belt-one-road-plan-is-secretly-colonial>, (Accessed on 16.10.2017).

such as New Zealand, the UK and the Arctic.¹⁴ For example, Chinese companies hold more than a quarter of Kazakhstan's oil production, more than half of Turkmenistan's gas exports. They recently signed a \$ 15 billion gas and uranium deal with Uzbekistan.¹⁵

When we look at the data, we can notice that this project is extremely important for China because it will probably eliminate China's dependence to maritime transportation and it will also bring China closer to the involved countries, both politically and economically. China has fairly large market shares and capacity surplus in many sectors such as steel or cement and this project will provide more convenient marketing opportunities to the country. It will also ensure diversity on energy purchasing and keep the Chinese economy in a healthier course. The Chinese government; with this project aims to reduce the excessive industrial capacity in the domestic market by raising the cost of goods, which include coal, cement and even solar panels.

In addition China has pledged hundreds of billions dollars in investment to modernize the transportation infrastructure of the countries involved in the initiative, to strengthen links with the country's economy in Asia, and to create new markets for Chinese companies. The promise of development aid to many countries by China is interpretation of the project to be resurrection of the Marshall plan by analysts. In fact, the OBOR project has emerged as a collaborative plan just as it was in Marshall's plan. While the US is trying to get the Marshall plan and development aid countries away from the Soviet ceiling, China wants to prevent the countries on the line from getting closer to the US with the OBOR project. We can say that China is trying to dominate in Central Asia and in the Middle East both politically and economically with this project, although China says that the initiative is a win-win project and that the purpose of the initiative is to build a community of common destiny.¹⁶

14 Heidar Gudjonsson-Egill Thor Nielsson, "China's Belt and Road Enters the Arctic", *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/chinas-belt-and-road-enters-the-arctic/>, (Accessed on 15.10.2017).

15 William T. Wilson, "China's Huge 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative Is Sweeping Central Asia", *Heritage.org*, <http://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/chinas-huge-one-belt-one-road-initiative-sweeping-central-asia>, (Accessed on 15.10.2017).

16 Community of common destiny: It describes a new world of mutual cooperation. It emphasizes

By the way, Turkish analysts has compared OBOR with the Marshall plan. Professor Ali Ercan who made a statement to Odatv likened the \$ 900 billion investment program China has launched to the three continents to the famous Marshall economic aid to the European countries in the devastated aftermath of World War II.¹⁷

On the other hand, the OBOR project has some important risks in terms of applicability. The OBOR project, one of the greatest challenges to break US hegemony in the regions where China has crossed the line, may fail due to problems such as the instability of the region and the US's attempt to interrupt the project. For instance, instability in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan, hostility between Iran and Saudi Arabia and disagreements between Israel and the Arab states are the biggest risks in front of the project. We can also associate US's destablization policy in the Middle East as a counter policy aganist OBOR.

4. Turkey's role on the project

Turkey, which is the 17th largest economy of the World, has become an increasingly important country for the Chinese investor companies. Turkey is considered as the gateway to the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa so it has a central position for OBOR in terms of land, sea and air transportation. Up to now, several agreements have been signed by China and Turkey within the OBOR project concerning the development of railway infrastructure, the use of ports and the creation of highway connections. Regarding "The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" project, even if the major partner of China in Mediterranean region is Greece, Chinese companies have also been investing in Turkish ports since 2015. İn this context, Kumport, Çandarlı and Mersin port were the most interesting ports for the Chinese.¹⁸

a new order that emphasizes equality and justice.

17 Yusuf Yavuz, "Çin'in İpek Yolu Projesi İkinci Marshall Yardımı mı?", *Odatv*, <http://odatv.com/cinin-ipek-yolu-projesi-ikinci-marshall-yardimi-mi-1605171200.html>, (Accessed on 09.10.2017).

18 Altay Atlı, "Turkey Seeking its Place in the Maritime Silk Road", *Asiatimes*, <http://www.atimes.com/turkey-seeking-place-maritime-silk-road/>, (Accessed on 02.10.2017).

5. Projects Carried Out in Turkey Within The Scope of Obor Project

Turkey is among the most important countries of the Modern Silk Road project. Turkey will play a key role in the Modern Silk Road with its recently attracting mega investments like Marmaray, Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, Eurasia Tunnel, Çanakkale 1915 Bridge, 3rd Airport. The Edirne-Kars High-Speed Railway line, which is carried out together with the Chinese, is one of the important steps taken within the scope of the project.

Today, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Line can be shown as the biggest infrastructure project on the agenda of the OBOR Initiative in Turkey. When this line is completed, the necessary infrastructure for arriving in Turkey from a train to China will be completed.

5.1. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Line

Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line is also called as iron silk road. The BTK railway line is one of the most important components of the part that is referred to as the middle corridor in the project of the resurrection of the Silk Road. The railway line will go through the capital city of Baku in Azerbaijan and the cities of Tbilisi and Ahilkelek in Georgia and go to the city of Kars in Turkey. This railway line aims to unite Azerbaijan and Turkey. The total length of the railway is 838.6 km and the total cost is 450 million dollars. 76 km of the railway will pass from Turkey, 259 km from Georgia and 503 km from Azerbaijan.

All the cargo going from China to Europe was providing only by the railways passing over Russia. However, with the activation of this line, a burden in China will be able to transport via Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan, then through Georgia and Turkey to Europe. Thanks to this project, which is the most important milestone of the Middle Corridor, previously, the cargoes leaving China had reached to Europe within two months while it will be able to reach to Europe within two weeks together with the new line. Thanks to the total length of 838 km, the BTK line shortens the transportation route between Asia and Europe by approximately 7 thousand kilometers.

The railway line, which has 1 million passengers per year and a load capacity of 6.5 million tons, will carry 3 million passengers and 17 million tons of cargo in 2034. Rail travel between Europe and Asia will decrease to 15 days. The railway line is the third largest project jointly implemented by Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia after the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline projects.

According to the data of Azerbaijan State Railways, the total length of the railway is 838 kilometers, 76 kilometers from Turkey, 259 kilometers from Georgia and 503 kilometers from Azerbaijan is passing. In the Turkey section of the project, 4 stations, 3 bridges and 76 kilometers of railway were built. Border crossing between Turkey and Georgia was provided with tunnel. 2 thousand 375 meters of tunnel in Turkey, 2 thousand 70 meters of Georgia is located. For BTK in Georgia, 105 km of new railway line was built, 154 km of rail was renewed. In Azerbaijan, 503 km of railway line was made suitable for the project. With the opening of the line, it will be possible to reach Beijing from London by uninterrupted rail. It is foreseen that the freight coming from China will be delivered to the Caspian sea and Baku Alat port via Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and then to Europe via Georgia and Turkey.

When the BTK line, which was decided to be constructed in 2004, is completed, a seamless railway connection will be established between Turkey and Georgia, Azerbaijan and the Central Asian Turkic Republics, Beijing and London. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Project is scheduled to open this summer.

5.2. Marmaray

Marmaray is a railway project that connects the railway lines of Istanbul's European and Asian sides with a tube tunnel passing under the Bosphorus. With the Marmaray and the 3rd Bridge being designed as part of the Iron Silk Road, Turkey will make a significant contribution to the Iron Silk Road by completing the middle line of the Beijing-London line.

The first stage of the Marmaray project, which was started in 2004, was opened in 2013. The project will be completed in 2018 with all

stages. When the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Project is passed along with the Marmaray project, it will be possible to carry uninterrupted freight from Europe to China by rail.

5.3. The Edirne-Kars High-Speed Railway line

It is estimated that the planned line to be made from China will cost 30 billion dollars. The project has not been implemented yet. The project will link the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line to Europe. Negotiations for the realization of the project with China are still going on.

Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge which entered service on August 26, 2016, Eurasia Tunnel which opened on December 20, 2016 and Çanakkale Bridge, which started construction in Istanbul, are other important steps in terms of transportation infrastructure of the OBOR project.

6. The Doubts of Turkey

There are many columnists and journalists writing about China's One Belt and One Road initiative within Turkish Media and these numbers increase day by day. Especially after support of the USA to Kurdish forces for Raqqa operation in Syria, many scholars and columnist in Turkey have begun to write that Turkey should get closer to side of Russia and China because they believe that Turkey needs to find new allies. Also after One belt One Road Forum in Beijing in May 2017 that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan joined, almost all of newspapers and journalists have started to begin more concentrate to the OBOR initiative. After support of USA to Kurdish forces, as well as mainstream newspapers in Turkey, even like Hurriyet and Sozcu known as opponent media organs have supported the convergence of Turkish government to China. Many newspapers in Turkey have supported to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) of Turkey.

In addition to this, although Turkey tries to become a member of the European Union since 1963, negotiations have not been successful. Thus, Turkey is looking for new options and OBOR initiatives have been seen as an alternative to the EU. For instance, in the column of

Sinan Burhan published on Yeni Akit newspaper has been mentioned to this topic.

“Ever since the foundation of the Republic, our direction has always been the West. In fact, since the Tanzimat¹⁹, we have always cooperated with the West. Of course, we also had serious gains in our relations with the West. We have conducted projects in many areas of the economic, social and cultural. However, in the last period our relations with the EU started to deteriorate. This process can oblige our country to be alone both economically and diplomatically”,

said Sinan Burhan. In the next part of his article, he is explaining that while the relation of Turkey with the West continues, at the same time Turkey should be open to the new options.

Burhan said that one of these options is China. He said

“China, Russia and India are the growing countries. China is among the world’s strongest economies and populations. We should develop a strong relationship with these countries. Our country is the heart of both Asia and Europe because of its strategic position. This position is the biggest strategic element for us. For this reason, it is beneficial for our country to keep good relations with both the West and the East.”²⁰

Also, Turkish scholars have begun to express frankly that the EU have lost their importance for Turkey. Turkish academician Mehmet Seyfettin Erol related with this topic stated that, Relations in the dimension of the European Union, in a sense, have already begun to lose their former meaning and importance in terms of Turkey. EU option is not essential position for Turkey. The EU process is not a goal for Turkey, it is a just tool.²¹

19 Tanzimat: The political reforms made in the Ottoman State in 1839.

20 Sinan Burhan, “Yeni İpek Yolu AB’nin Alternatifi mi?”, *Yeni Akit*, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sinan-burhan/yeni-ipek-yolu-abnin-alternatifi-mi-19469.html>, (Accessed on 07.10.2017).

21 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, “11 Eylül Sonrası Türk Dış Politikasında Vizyon Arayışları ve ‘Dört Tarz-ı Siyaset’”, *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, Volume: 1, No: 1, 2007, p. 50.

On the other hand, Turkey has concerns about China's historic project. Especially, Turkey is emphasizing the possibility that this project will further deepen the export-import balance, which is already at odds with China.

Since the bilateral intercourses started, the trade relations between Turkey and China have been increasingly for the benefit of China, which has led to the need to focus on economic and commercial relations at the government level. Turkey's highest foreign trade deficit is with China (excluding oil) with a share of 26 percent.

Year	Export	Import	Balance	Volume
2009	1.599	12.677	-11.077	14.276
2010	2.260	17.180	14.920	19.440
2011	2.467	21.692	19.225	24.159
2012	2.833	21.295	-18.462	24.128
2013	3.600,9	24.685,9	-21.085	28.286,8
2014	2.862	24.918,2	-22.056,3	27.780,2
2015	2.415	24.864,3	-22.449,3	27.279,3

Turkey-China foreign trade values (millions dollars)²²

Informations received from the Turkish Economy Ministry confirm the arguments of Turkish writers. The trade balance between Turkey and China is against Turkey. According to data provided by the Turkish

²² T.C. Ekonomi Bakanlığı, "Türkiye-Çin Dış Ticaret Değerleri", <https://goo.gl/26djmN>, (Accessed on 18.10.2017).

Statistical Institute (TUIK), Turkey's largest import partner in January-September 2016 is China. While Turkey imports 19.3 billion dollars from China, exports amount to 1.5 billion dollars.

According to Turkish officials, 10-fold difference between exports and imports is not sustainable, and it is necessary to make an agreement between two countries in order to increase exports at least to the half of imports and to open China's market more to Turkish products. Likewise, it is observed that, as other European allies of Turkey have stated, it is expected that a China advocating globalization and liberalization in the economy will abolish restrictions on foreign investors in its domestic market and abandon the rules that make their domestic companies more advantageous.²³

While there is significant supporting to the OBOR initiative, sometimes have occurred opposed voices in Turkish media. For example, another news in Hurriyet has been written that Turkey will be disabled from the OBOR project. The news has included views of the member of board of Citrus Promotion Group of Turkey. Member of board Ahmet Hamdi Gürdoğan said,

“China is trying to bypass Turkey by crossing the Black Sea via Georgia and using the Greek Cypriot side in the South. China has built a port in South Cyprus, Turkey is bypassed from two sides. We need to act immediately for the region that will become an alternative market to European Union.”²⁴

In addition to that, in Dünya newspaper that is known as an economical newspaper in Turkey, An article entitled *“Although the name is ‘Silk’, it is road-stoned”* has highlighted the reduction of China's credit note from AA3 to A1 by Moody's and the impacts of this situation on the future of New Silk Road project will be negative:

23 “Emel Parlar Dal, ‘Kuşak ve Yol’ projesi, Çin’in yeni vizyonu ve Türkiye”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, <http://aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/-kusak-ve-yol-projesi-cin-in-yeni-vizyonu-ve-turkiye/960778>, (Accessed on 17.11.2017).

24 “Türkiye devre dışı... Çin’in çizdiği yeni ipek yolunda Türkiye yok”, *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkiye-devre-disi-cinin-cizdigi-yeni-ipek-yolunda-turkiye-yok-40297204>, (Accessed on 08.10.2017).

“This will not be a serious problem for a large economy like China, which is not high in type of foreign currency debt. Of course, in terms of Chinese companies that owe to international markets, it means higher costs in theory, but it is hard to say that things will get mixed up tomorrow. Up to this point, the financial markets are right. But it would not be right to say that Moody’s determinations are completely out of place.”²⁵

In other respects, in another article published in Turkey the OBOR initiative has been considered as a “hegemony project”. In the article, the author said:

“It is clear that while global capitalism is moving from a new threshold, particularly in the Trump period, the attempt to ensure Western protectionism and economy, is being tried to reverse by China from its historical centers of capitalist exploitation. However, China’s project failed to achieve the expectation in Central Asia; it remained at the limited level in Russia. In the ASEAN side (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), Southern China Sea tensions dominate. Moreover, bureaucratic obstacles, corruption, disputes in China have already set the agenda. In fact, it reflects the effort of not being colonized by a new country’s hegemony project.”

Actually, Turkish media show that in addition to Turkey, other nations are also preoccupied with the Chinese attempt.²⁶

7. Opinion of the Turkish politicians

In recently, Turkish politicians have given great importance to the OBOR initiative. Turkey showed its interest to this project by participating with their major actors to the “Belt and Road Forum” in China in 15 May 2017. During this meeting, Turkey was represented

25 Şant Manukyan, “Adı ‘İpek’ Olsa da Yol Taşlı”, *Dünya*, <https://www.dunya.com/kose-yazisi/adi-ipek-olsa-da-yol-tasli/364437>, (Accessed on 15.10.2017).

26 Mühdan Sağlam, “Tek Yol Tek Kuşak: Yeni Bir Hegemonyaya Doğru”, *Gazete Duvar*, <http://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2017/05/17/tek-yol-tek-kusak-yeni-bir-hegemonyaya-dogru/>, (Accessed on 09.10.2017).

by the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu, Turkish Energy Minister Berat Albayrak and Turkish high-level officers.

Erdogan made a speech showing give importance to the project in this meeting, he said that “*I believe that this project will leave a mark to the future*”. The Turkish president showed his support for OBOR with these words:

*“I believe there is a win-win project to serve peace and stability in the future. Therefore, this initiative of the People’s Republic of China is over all kinds of admiration. I think this cooperation model will benefit for everyone. This initiative, especially against the emerging terrorism in the world, will be an attempt to destroy terrorism. As Turkey we are ready to give all kinds of support for this.”*²⁷

On the other hand, Turkish energy minister Berat Albayrak has compared the OBOR initiative with Geographical Discoveries. In November 2016, in a speech Albayrak expressed that:

*“There is a project called ‘One Belt, One Road’, China has a project to shake the 500-year order in the world’s ecosystem. This project is rebuilding the modern Silk Road from Beijing to London with its high-speed railway infrastructure. There is such a preparation for this that the infrastructure is a product of planning for more than 15-20 years. Five hundred years ago, due to the Geographical Discoveries and the use of sea roads, the 500-year political and economic balance and power shifted towards the West. Will this course of events change with the modern Silk Road? Will the 21st century reveal interesting things?”*²⁸

27 “Erdoğan: Yeni İpek Yolu’ terörü yerle yeksan edecek bir girişimdir”, *Sabah*, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2017/05/14/erdogan-yeni-ipek-yolu-teroru-yerle-yeksan-edecek-bir-girisimdir>, (Accessed on 23.10.2017).

28 “Berat Albayrak: Dünya çok büyük krizlerin içinde”, *Haber Türk*, <http://www.haberturk.com/ekonomi/enerji/haber/1328617-berat-albayrak-dunya-cok-buyuk-krizlerin-icinde>, (Accessed on 23.10.2017).

The minister of transport, maritime affairs and communications Ahmet Arslan believes that the One Belt and Road Initiative will link countries, economies and people together like the historical Silk Road and that Turkey will be an important part of this path. Arslan also stated that Turkey is at the intersection point of emerging economies, raw material resources, energy corridors, trade centers and densely populated consumer markets.”²⁹ In addition to these Turkish Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekçi described OBOR as a one of the most important project of world history and expressed that OBOR project is very important for Turkey and Turkey have to give necessary importance to the OBOR.³⁰

When we look at the route of OBOR it’s possible to see how the location of Turkey is important and we can understand that Turkey’s presence is essential for this Project. Turkish officers, who are aware of the strategic importance of this project and the role of Turkey, have started to show more interest to OBOR initiative and are trying to get closer to China due to the deterioration of the relation with the West.

As Western countries didn’t maintained a decisive stance against the July 15 military coup attempt and the USA has been getting closer to PYD and YPG in Syria by giving weapon support, Turkey started to approach its relations with the West with suspicion. Recently, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has presented the Shanghai Business Association (SCO) as an alternative to the NATO and the EU and this may be the first sign that Turkey is going to get closer to China and Russia. Especially, the participation of Erdoğan to the “Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation” which took place in China’s capital city Beijing in May 2017 has increased the Turkish public opinion’s interest for the OBOR project.

The participation of Erdoğan to the OBOR Forum is really significant because it shows that Turkey wants to enhance its economical profits in Asia by cooperating with China:

29 “İpek Yolu’na ‘Kervan Projesi’ hazırlığı”, *Yeni Şafak*, <http://www.yenisafak.com/ekonomi/ipek-yoluna-kervan-projesi-hazirligi-2660123>, (Accessed on 23.10.2017).

30 “Ekonomi Bakanı Nihat Zeybekci, Amerika Ve Çin Ziyareti İle İlgili Açıklamalarda Bulundu”, *Milliyet*, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/ekonomi-bakani-nihat-zeybekci-amerika-istanbul-yerelhaber-2050998/>, (Accessed on 26.07.2017).

“China’s Silk Road economic corridor initiative integrates with the ‘Middle Corridor’ project, which aims to connect our country to Europe through Anatolia to Central Asia and then to China. As it is known, the Middle Corridor is a trade route project that goes from Turkey to Azerbaijan and Georgia, then to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan through the Caspian Sea and finally come to end in China. In this context, we want to act in unison with China and the other countries involved in OBOR project. The memorandum of understanding that we signed with China during the G20 Antalya Summit in 2015 was an important step in terms of bilateral cooperation between our countries. Thanks to various projects carried out in our country and in our region, we are trying to make real the Common Corridor t and we hope that this project is going to be one of the main and complementary elements of the OBOR initiative. I believe that this initiative is a win-win project that will serve peace and stability. Therefore, this initiative of the People’s Republic of China deserves all kinds of appreciation. Especially concerning the emerging terrorism in the world, this project will be an attempt to destroy terrorism. I think this cooperation, that will be beneficial for everyone, will succeed. As Turkey, we are ready to give all kinds of support for this project.”³¹

8. Conclusion

With the beginning of the relationship between China and Turkey in 1971, bilateral relations have followed a fluctuating course due to some reasons such as Uyghur problem. After the announcement of the One Road One Belt initiative by Chinese president Xi Jinping in 2013, more important relations were developed between Turkey and China. Especially when Turkey has started to search for new allies due to the events in Syria and the 15 July coup attempt, the relation with China

31 “Dünya ticaretinin orta koridoru”, *Sabah*, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/ekonomi/2017/05/15/dunya-ticaretinin-orta-koridoru>, (Accessed on 26.07.2017).

have been considerably improved. Although it is evident that Turkey will get many advantages from this project thanks to its strategic position, the rise of the commercial deficit that already exists is among the apprehensions of the Turkish side.

The new Silk Road project is crucial because it provides to Turkey the chance to strengthen its economical, social and political relations with China and Middle Asian countries and to find alternative alliances to the EU and the US. Even if the OBOR project has many advantages for Turkey, we should consider the risk that the current commercial deficit can increase. On the other hand, we should admit that even if OBOR is presented as a “win-win” project, China is much more advantageous than the other countries.

As a result, when we see the discourses of the Turkish media and politicians generally we can see that they have an optimistic point of view to OBOR which will bring economic, political, commercial and social advantages to Turkey. However, some newspapers have mentioned that this project can bring some disadvantages to Turkey like the increase of trade gap of Turkey, China’s colonialist purposes, By-pass of Turkey and the difficulty of the process.

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