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Arařtırma Makalesi

TÜRKİYE’S ASIA ANEW INITIATIVE, CONNECTIVITY PROJECTS IN EURASIA AND TÜRKİYE-MONGOLIA RELATIONS*

Türkiye’nin Yeniden Asya Giriřimi, Avrasya’da Baęlantısallık Projeleri ve Türkiye-Moęolistan İliřkileri

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Abstract

This article analyzes Türkiye’s growing engagement with Asia, exploring its recent initiatives and evolving relationships in the region. Beginning with an examination of Türkiye’s Asia Anew Initiative, this article examines Türkiye’s connectivity projects across Eurasia. Furthermore, it delves into the institutionalization of relations within the Organization of Turkic States. The article then focuses on the relations between Türkiye and Mongolia, highlighting their deep-rooted historical and cultural connections. The article discusses Türkiye’s proactive role in promoting the ‘Middle Corridor’, envisioning Türkiye as a pivotal logistics and energy hub linking Europe and Asia. It examines Türkiye’s efforts to enhance connectivity and institutionalize relations in the region. Emphasizing Türkiye’s broader engagement with Asian acountries, the article advocates for strengthened cooperation between Türkiye and Mongolia. This article argues that collaboration between Turks and Mongols holds significant potential in the present context. Strengthening cooperation between Türkiye and Mongolia is crucial, particularly in fostering connectivity projects, bolstering economic ties, and ensuring regional peace and stability.

Keywords: Asia Anew Initiative, Middle Corridor, Connectivity, The Organization of Turkic States, Türkiye, Mongolia.

Öz

Bu makale, Türkiye’nin Asya bölgesindeki son girişimlerini ve Asya’yla gelişen ilişkilerini analiz etmektedir. Türkiye’nin Yeniden Asya Giriřimi’nin incelenmesiyle başlayan bu makale, Türkiye’nin Avrasya genelindeki baęlantısallık projelerini deęerlendirmektedir. Türk Devletleri Teřkilatı içerisindeki ilişkilerin kurumsallařtırılması konusu da makalede incelenmektedir. Makale daha sonra Türkiye ile Moęolistan arasındaki ilişkilere odaklanarak, iki ülke arasındaki köklü tarihi ve kültürel yakınlıklara dikkat çekmektedir. Türkiye’nin ‘Orta Koridor’ projesini tartışan makale, Türkiye’nin kendisini Avrupa ile Asya’yı birbirine baęlayan önemli bir lojistik ve enerji merkezi olarak konumlandırmasını da analiz etmekte ve Türkiye’nin bölgedeki baęlantısallığı artırma ve ilişkileri kurumsallařtırma çabalarını incelemektedir. Türkiye’nin Asya ülkeleriyle geliřtirdięi daha

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geniş kapsamlı ilişkilerinin vurgulandığı makale, Türkiye ile Moğolistan arasındaki iş birliğinin güçlendirilmesini, iki ülke arasındaki iş birliğinin önemli bir potansiyel taşıdığını savunmaktadır. Türkiye ile Moğolistan arasındaki iş birliğinin güçlendirilmesi, özellikle bağlantısallık projelerinin geliştirilmesi, ekonomik bağların güçlendirilmesi, bölgesel barış ve istikrarın sağlanması açısından büyük önem taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yeniden Asya Girişimi, Orta Koridor, Bağlantısallık, Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, Türkiye, Moğolistan.*

Introduction

This article analyzes Türkiye's growing engagement with Asia, exploring its recent initiatives and evolving relationships in the region. Beginning with an examination of Türkiye's Asia Anew Initiative, this article examines Türkiye's connectivity projects across Eurasia. Furthermore, it delves into the institutionalization of relations within the Organization of Turkic States in Asia. The article then focuses on the relations between Türkiye and Mongolia, highlighting their deep-rooted historical and cultural connections.

The article discusses Türkiye's proactive role in promoting the 'Middle Corridor', envisioning Türkiye as a pivotal logistics and energy hub linking Europe and Asia. It examines Türkiye's efforts to enhance connectivity and institutionalize relations in the region. Emphasizing Türkiye's broader engagement with Asian countries, the article advocates for strengthened cooperation between Türkiye and Mongolia. This article argues that collaboration between Turks and Mongols holds significant potential in the present context. Strengthening cooperation between Türkiye and Mongolia is crucial, particularly in fostering connectivity projects, bolstering economic ties, and ensuring regional peace and stability. Against the backdrop of global challenges and a shifting international landscape, including the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the prevailing food and energy crises, and the escalating US-China competition, the article underscores the importance of fostering cooperation and solidarity among nations to address contemporary issues and promote regional stability and prosperity.

Türkiye's Asia Anew Initiative

The Turkish Foreign Ministry, during the eleventh Turkish Ambassadors' Conference in 2019, introduced the Asia Anew diplomatic initiative, outlining its core objective of establishing Türkiye as a connecting link between Asia and Europe, essentially assuming the role of a key actor in the Eurasian context.

Türkiye's growing importance with respect to Asia is evident in various aspects such as increasing trade and diplomatic engagement, expanding tourism, technology transfers, and the rising energy exports to Türkiye. Furthermore, Türkiye holds deep historical, cultural, ethnic, and religious ties with countries in Asia, marking the very roots of Türkiye's history and identity.

In August 2019, Ankara officially launched the 'Asia Anew Initiative' with the intention of capitalizing on the emerging opportunities and potential for collaboration within the Asian region. Government officials highlight the dual European and Asian heritage of Türkiye and frame their interest in Asia as a practical strategic shift. Additionally, Türkiye has been actively promoting the Türkiye's 'Middle Corridor' within its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to establish Türkiye as a pivotal logistics and energy hub connecting Europe and Asia (Akçay and Changgang, 2023). China's President Xi Jinping unveiled the Belt and Road Initiative in Kazakhstan in 2013, and China has since invested more than one trillion US dollars in BRI-related development and infrastructure projects across 149 countries (Haas, 2023).

After the September Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Uzbekistan, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan officially expressed Türkiye's intent to transition from being a dialogue member to obtaining full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The SCO, which is predominantly under China's leadership, functions as an intergovernmental organization focused on addressing political, economic, and security issues in the Eurasian region. Türkiye's decision underscores its expanding influence in the Eurasian region and its broader strategic goals.

President Erdogan has emphasized Türkiye's desire to obtain full membership in the SCO. During the 22nd Council of Heads of State meeting of the SCO in Samarkand in September 2022, Erdogan reaffirmed this commitment. However, he opted to highlight an emphasis on enhanced cooperation rather than explicitly mentioning full membership. Türkiye was originally designated as a "dialogue partner" in 2012 and, in 2017, it assumed the presidency of the SCO Energy Club, marking the first instance of a non-member state taking on such a role within this organization (Baba and Erşen, 2023).

Recently, Turkish businesses have shown a growing interest in Southeast Asia as an attractive destination. The share of Turkish foreign trade with this region has significantly risen to 16%, particularly following the establishment of free trade agreements between Türkiye, Malaysia, and

Singapore from 2015 to 2017. Within the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye (DEİK), a prominent Turkish business association, has launched a collaborative working group with business councils representing Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Singapore. This initiative aims to strengthen connections across various sectors, including energy, sustainable development, tourism, investment, and e-commerce (Baba and Erşen, 2023).

Türkiye's Role in Eurasian Connectivity

Currently, we are in a period characterized by significant changes in global trade routes, energy corridors, and methods of resource and goods transportation. Every country is eager to be part of the process that shapes these trade routes and corridors and is determined not to be left out. All countries share a common objective of establishing themselves as pivotal points in the trade and energy connections between Asia and Europe. Countries are highly motivated to participate in these endeavors because not being involved would mean they would miss out on opportunities to invest in infrastructure and draw capital to their regions. These initiatives involve building ports, railways, and moving substantial resources, which are likely to attract significant investments when they pass through a particular country. Maintaining peaceful conditions and fostering stability are crucial components in pursuing this goal. The most appropriate places for investing in railways and ports are those with peace, stability and clearly defined borders.

Türkiye actively seeks to bolster regional and economic connectivity through its involvement in China's Belt and Road Initiative (Hussain, 2021). A pivotal component of this endeavor is Türkiye's own Middle Corridor project, designed to rekindle the ancient Silk Road. This corridor traverses the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, forging a vital link between China, Central Asia, and Europe. Türkiye is enthusiastic about integrating its Middle Corridor with the BRI, envisioning it as a complementary route. According to Türkiye's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this alignment could significantly reduce travel time, facilitating swift transit for Chinese goods. To achieve this, Ankara aims to extend the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, inaugurated in October 2017, further into Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan through the Caspian Sea. Notably, a Turkish company constructed Turkmenistan's Turkmenbashi International Seaport on the Caspian, which commenced operations in 2018 (Köstem, 2019).

The Middle Corridor, also known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), is a complex transportation network that links China to both Türkiye and Europe. This extensive route covers areas such as Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and it's estimated to have an annual capacity for transporting between 75,000 to 100,000 containers. Of particular significance is the BTK railway, sometimes called the "Turkish New Silk Road," which originates from the Alat port in Baku, Azerbaijan, located on the Caspian Sea, passes through Georgia, and eventually reaches Kars, Türkiye, thus providing access to European markets. Türkiye has been actively promoting the development of the Middle Corridor and has formed agreements with Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, and Kazakhstan to improve this crucial transportation route. As a result, there has been a noteworthy increase in the transportation of cargo trains from Türkiye to China via the Middle Corridor (Devonshire-Ellis, 2023).

The Middle Corridor plays a pivotal role in connecting Europe and China. This comprehensive network involves Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Georgia, as well as Central Asian nations such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Central Asian countries can access European markets through this corridor, while Türkiye and Azerbaijan serve as crucial transit hubs. Moreover, the Middle Corridor aligns seamlessly with China's Belt and Road Initiative. Türkiye and China formally acknowledged this synergy by signing a Memorandum of Understanding during the G-20 Leaders Summit in Antalya in November 2015 (Gupta, 2022).

Türkiye's keen interest in participating in the BRI extends beyond the allure of attracting investment from China's substantial program. It is also fueled by the expectation that BRI can drastically reduce transport time for Turkish products and services bound for East and South Asia. President Erdoğan actively engaged in BRI forums in 2017 and 2019 to further these interests. Türkiye has initiated several major infrastructure and transport projects, including the Yavuz Sultan Selim and

Osmangazi Bridges, Eurasia Tunnel, Marmaray commuter rail line, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars and Edirne-Kars railways, and Filyos, Çandarlı, and Mersin container ports. The launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway in October 2017 marked a significant milestone, as the first train successfully transported Turkish goods to China by December 2020 (Baba and Erşen, 2023). The Marmaray tunnel in Istanbul became the first underwater railway in the world, linking Beijing and London via the Bosphorus Strait (Eldem, 2022).

Türkiye places great emphasis on the multimodal method of cargo transportation, facilitating the movement of goods from their source to destination through various modes of transportation under a single contract or bill of lading. This approach offers a range of benefits, such as streamlined service, efficient shipment tracking, and cost-effective logistics coordination. Türkiye actively promotes these advantages through bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral initiatives, capitalizing on its strategic geographical position at the crossroads of the Europe-Asia-Africa trade triangle (Eldem, 2022).

In Ankara's perspective, the Middle Corridor emerges as an appealing trade route, offering both direct access to Eurasia and an opportunity for Turkic states to reduce their dependence on external transit routes. Türkiye champions these initiatives, aiming to play a central role in regional and global trade.

Following the Azerbaijani victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, a pivotal development emerged with the agreement that marked the war's conclusion: the establishment of the "Zangezur Corridor." This corridor is set to forge a vital link between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, facilitating the seamless transportation of goods between Nakhchivan—an Azerbaijani exclave nestled alongside Türkiye—and the mainland of Azerbaijan. In doing so, it will inaugurate an uninterrupted trans-Caspian trade route, effectively shortening existing trade routes. This strategic passage will create a direct avenue to the Caspian basin and Central Asia, contributing significantly to regional economic connectivity, transcontinental integration, and assuming a crucial role in facilitating transportation between Europe and Asia (Baba and Erşen, 2023).

The Organization of Turkic States

Türkiye has firmly established itself as one of the world's top 20 economies, assuming a significant role in its region while fostering substantial capacities for collaboration with Central Asia. The rapport between Türkiye and Central Asian nations is multifaceted, motivated by the desire to nurture close ties, cultivate new markets, boost trade, expand exports, secure energy resources, attract foreign investments, and address geopolitical and security concerns.

The evolving global landscape, characterized by a transition towards a multipolar world, coupled with shifts in both economic and geopolitical power dynamics, has spurred Ankara to reorient its focus toward Central Asia. Ankara's renewed emphasis on this region is underscored by its strategic aim to position Türkiye as a strategic nexus for logistics and energy, effectively bridging Europe and Asia. Türkiye's historical and linguistic affinities have created an enduring kinship with Central Asia, prompting a pragmatic approach to bolster bilateral relations with the Central Asian countries through commercial, economic, and developmental partnerships (Kahveci and Kuşçu, 2023).

Over recent years, Türkiye has significantly bolstered its economic and commercial engagement with Central Asian nations. These nations, in turn, view Türkiye as a trustworthy economic and geopolitical partner. Türkiye's persistent quest for strategic autonomy, changing global power dynamics, and the Central Asian governments' aspiration to pursue multi-vector foreign policies have collectively fueled Türkiye's growing involvement in Central Asia. Since the 1990s, Türkiye's active presence in Central Asia has strengthened cultural, trade, and diplomatic ties. Notably, the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, Türkiye's multilateral coordinating body, is progressing toward full institutionalization as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) (Alaranta and Silvan, 2022).

Analyzing Türkiye's relations with Central Asian states is especially pertinent in light of the "Eurasian shift" in Turkish foreign policy. Crucially, Türkiye's drive for enhanced regional and economic connectivity is a key facet of its strategy. Ankara aspires to extend its influence and role in both Eurasian and global markets by connecting China, Central Asia, and Europe. Türkiye's endeavors to enhance East-West connectivity in the South Caucasus and Central Asia have garnered a positive reception in Beijing as well.

Türkiye continues to execute a regional policy that encompasses the expansion of trade and economic cooperation, the improvement of connectivity, and the pursuit of markets in Central Asia and beyond. Türkiye's diplomatic and military engagements, underscored by trade and defense agreements, have witnessed a notable upswing since 2020, making it a significant partner for all Central Asian states. Since their independence in 1991, the Central Asian republics have been committed to a multi-vector foreign policy to balance relations with major powers, with Türkiye emerging as a key partner in this pursuit, which also has good relations with Russia and China in the region.

Türkiye, together with Central Asian nations, is actively working to augment energy supplies from the region and ensure seamless transit and access to markets in both Asia and Europe. Türkiye's objectives in Central Asia center on expanding trade and economic cooperation, enhancing connectivity routes, and accessing Central Asian markets. Türkiye is not just an economic partner but also a strategic collaborator.

Central Asia has assumed a paramount position in Türkiye's foreign and economic policy, evident in numerous high-level visits by politicians and officials to Turkic nations, an expanding web of economic connections, and the institutionalization of both bilateral and multilateral relations. This robust multilateral collaboration has propelled Türkiye into a prominent political force in Eurasia.

Asia's significance for Türkiye is ever-increasing, as evidenced by burgeoning trade and diplomatic ties, surging tourism, technology transfers, and escalating energy exports. Türkiye's profound cultural, ethnic, and religious ties to Central Asia, in particular, serve as the bedrock of its historical identity and the starting point for its rich heritage.

In the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, Ankara took the initiative to strengthen cultural and economic bonds, leading to the establishment of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) in 1991. A pivotal moment arrived in 2009 when the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, known as the Turkic Council, was formally instituted. On November 12, 2021, during the 8th summit in Istanbul, the Council underwent a significant transformation, renaming itself the Organization of Turkic States. This evolution marked a substantial step in bolstering cooperation between Türkiye and Central Asia. The Council comprises five member nations: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan, alongside two observer states, Hungary and Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan joined the group in 2019, while Turkmenistan assumed an observer status in 2021, signaling its increased engagement. Furthermore, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus joined as an observer in 2022, and Ukraine and Afghanistan submitted applications for observer status in 2020 and 2021, respectively (Aydın, 2022).

Collectively, these states encompass around 170 million inhabitants, boasting a combined gross domestic product (GDP) nearing 1.5 trillion US dollars, and their trade volume reaches an estimated 16 billion dollars. Hungary, with a population of 9.7 million, holds a GDP of 176 billion US dollars, while Turkmenistan, with a population of 5.85 million, boasts a GDP of 54 billion US dollars as of 2022 (Aydın, 2022). The change of the Turkic Council's name emerged as a direct outcome of the eighth summit, signifying its shift from an informal cultural association to a political and economic organization. Türkiye's increasingly active role in Central Asia has drawn keen interest from the region's governments.

Ankara is strategically positioning itself as a pivotal energy transit hub with a focus on receiving gas from the region and Turkmenistan via the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP). Furthermore, the agreement between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to collaboratively exploit the Dostluk gas field beneath the Caspian Sea and jointly develop the Kepez/Serdar field represents a significant milestone in the trilateral cooperation for exploring, developing, and implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline (Konarzewska, 2021). Ashgabat and Baku are currently exploring the possibility of the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline, a project designed to link Turkmenistan on the eastern coast with Azerbaijan on the western coast. Additionally, Ankara is actively seeking to augment the transportation of Kazakh oil through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. The scale of Türkiye's investment in Central Asia has now exceeded US\$85 billion, encompassing substantial projects such as the redevelopment of the Turkmenbashi Caspian Seaport (Konarzewska, 2021).

During the most recent Organization of Turkic States summit held in Samarkand in November 2022, a notable topic of conversation was the proposed TURANCEZ free trade zone. In addition to this, there have been other propositions, including the establishment of a Turkic Common Market and the creation of a regional Turkic Development & Investment Bank. If these come to fruition, it will significantly enhance the economic integration of Central Asia with Türkiye (Konarzewska, 2021).

Türkiye is actively working to expand and diversify its cooperative endeavors in the region through various mechanisms, including high-level reciprocal visits, joint economic commissions, trade councils, and strategic cooperation at the highest levels. Türkiye has elevated its relationships with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan to the level of strategic partnerships, while its ties with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are progressively advancing.

The Turkic organization's appeal to the Central Asian nations lies in its potential to enhance trade, stimulate economic growth, and expand transportation infrastructure. Consequently, the countries of Central Asia have proactively embraced this regional alliance to deepen their ties with Türkiye. The organization has made significant strides in the past few years, with over fifteen nations expressing their desire to obtain observer status within the Organization of Turkic States, highlighting the attention and significance it has garnered (Gupta, 2022).

The Organization of Turkic States has established a cooperation protocol focused on transportation development and, in 2013, formed a coordination council aimed at enhancing regional connectivity. Subsequently, the organization introduced the Turkic World Vision-2040, a strategy designed to integrate member states into regional and global supply and value chains via the Middle Corridor (Eldem, 2022).

Good Governance in the Organization of Turkic States

The 2040 vision document of the Organization of the Turkic States underscores key principles such as good governance, pluralism, inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency. Given that five of the member countries are former Soviet republics, addressing democratic challenges has remained a focal point for the past three decades. Moreover, discussions surrounding democracy enhancement and system reform often evoke perceptions of Western-centric interventions.

While the 2040 vision document does not overlook these issues and defers to the national processes of member states, it also highlights the supportive role that the Organization of Turkic States can play. For instance, the document includes statements such as "supporting member states' social and institutional reforms" and "promoting democratic governance as a general principle." Similarly, the emphasis on "strengthening all aspects of good governance, including human rights, the rule of law, inclusive institutions, transparency, efficiency, accountability, and the fight against corruption" is noteworthy in this regard (Sarıkaya, 2021).

The document underscores the significance of good governance, pluralism, inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency. It emphasizes the support for economic, social, and institutional reforms within member states to foster prosperity. Additionally, there is a call to promote democratic governance for the socio-economic development and welfare of citizens. The document stresses the need to strengthen all aspects of good governance, including human rights, the rule of law, inclusive institutions, transparency, efficiency, accountability, and the fight against corruption. It advocates for supporting programs aimed at enhancing the capacity of public institutions to provide good governance and public services, as well as bolstering the rule of law, judicial systems, legal infrastructure, and institutional capacities within member states (Turkic World Vision 2040).

Russia and China

Türkiye has also fostered positive relations with other significant regional players, notably Russia and China. In recent years, Türkiye and Russia have not only deepened their economic and political bonds but Türkiye has also refrained from imposing sanctions on Russia. Beyond their political ties, the two nations have strengthened their economic connections, with Russia standing as one of Türkiye's major energy suppliers. Notably, Türkiye's inaugural nuclear power plant is being constructed by Russia's state atomic energy company, Rosatom. In the case of Türkiye and China, their robust bilateral relationship aligns with their respective foreign policy objectives. China values Türkiye's strategic

location, positioned along a pivotal route for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and serving as a crossroads between Eurasia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean (Donnellon-May, 2022).

Following the formal enhancement of bilateral relations in 2010, China has increasingly played a prominent role in Türkiye's foreign policy landscape, leading to bolstered political, economic, military, and security ties between the two nations. China has demonstrated keen interest in trade and military equipment, making it one of Türkiye's foremost import partners among individual countries. In 2021, the bilateral trade volume between Türkiye and China amounted to a substantial \$32 billion, marking a remarkable increase from the \$1 billion recorded in 2001. Subsequent to a strategic cooperation agreement in 2010, both countries also inked a memorandum regarding the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), which is designed to complement the Belt and Road Initiative. Furthermore, President Erdogan has made multiple visits to Beijing, including attending the opening ceremony of the 2017 BRI Forum (Donnellon-May, 2022).

Mongolia and Türkiye Relations

Geopolitically, Mongolia stands as a landlocked country situated at the heart of the Asian continent, sharing borders with two major powers, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. This strategic positioning renders Mongolia a pivotal juncture, bridging Northeast Asia to Central Asia and facilitating direct connectivity from East Asia to Europe via the shortest routes. Consequently, Mongolia serves as a crucial nexus for air travel, railway networks, transportation routes, and communication channels, akin to a bridge linking the East with the West (Chuluunbaatar, 2021).

Given Mongolia's geographical location between Russia and China, coupled with its landlocked nature, connectivity initiatives emerge as appealing prospects for the country. Mongolia itself actively seeks participation in such projects, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Mongolia can also connect to Central Asia and then reach European markets via Türkiye. This strategic move holds the promise of expanding Mongolia's international trade avenues and diversifying its economic base (Mendee, 2020).

Despite the historical and cultural bonds shared between Türkiye and Mongolia, economic relations between the two countries have yet to reach their full potential. The current level of economic engagement falls short of expectations, underscoring the need to bolster economic ties. Increasing bilateral trade emerges as a key imperative in enhancing economic cooperation between Türkiye and Mongolia, thereby maximizing mutual benefits and fostering sustained growth (Chuluunbaatar, 2021).

The historical and cultural bonds between the Turkish and Mongolian nations trace back to antiquity, forming a rich shared heritage and state tradition. A notable example of this unity is evident in the Great Hun Empire, which brought together the Turks and the Mongols under a single flag for the first time in history. The capitals of the Hun Empire, Gokturk and Uyghur Khanates, were situated within the territory of Mongolia, serving as focal points of this enduring alliance. This tradition of collaboration persisted through subsequent epochs, encompassing the European Huns, Gokturk, and Uyghur Khanates, and reached its zenith with the emergence of the Mongol Empire under the leadership of Genghis Khan. The significant contribution of Turkic tribes to the Mongol Empire's ascent to global prominence solidified the cultural affinity and commonalities shared between the Turks and Mongols. Consequently, Western literature has often portrayed Turks and Mongols as the same people, reflecting the deep-rooted connections between these two peoples. The dissolution of the Mongol Empire gave rise to successor states such as the Chagatai Khanate, the Golden Horde, and the Ilkhanid State, where individuals from Turkic tribes assumed pivotal roles across various spheres of military, government, bureaucracy, commerce, and academia, underscoring the enduring legacy of Turkish-Mongol cooperation and influence (Uyar, 2020).

Today, as in historical epochs, collaboration between Turks and Mongols holds the potential to yield successful alliances. Therefore, it would be prudent for Mongolia to consider joining the Organization of Turkic States, even if as an observer member. Mongolia and Türkiye share a longstanding tradition of good relations, characterized by mutual support within the framework of international organizations and bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Türkiye has consistently advocated for Mongolia's involvement in organizations such as the OSCE and its partnership with NATO, underscoring the depth of bilateral cooperation. This tradition of successful collaboration

extends to the United Nations, where both countries continue to work in tandem to address global challenges and advance shared interests.

The deep-rooted historical and cultural connections between Türkiye and Mongolia have instilled a profound significance in their bilateral relations, prompting concerted efforts to fortify cooperation between the two nations. Indeed, in a testament to the importance Mongolia places on its relationship with Türkiye, the Mongolian parliament updated its foreign policy concept on February 10, 2011, designating Türkiye as its “third neighbor”, alongside prominent countries such as the United States, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, and India. This inclusion underscores Mongolia's recognition of Türkiye as an important partner and serves as a tangible indicator of the strategic value the country attributes to its ties with Türkiye.

Mongolia stands out as the sole Eurasian nation to have undergone a comprehensive and peaceful transformation across its political, economic, and social spheres in the post-Cold War era. This remarkable transition encompasses the establishment of a democratic system, fostering harmonious civil-military relations, maintaining a balance of power within democracy, implementing inclusive power-sharing mechanisms, conducting transparent elections, empowering local governance structures, and upholding important freedoms such as freedom of the press and freedom of the internet. These achievements collectively underscore Mongolia's commitment to democratic principles and its resilience in navigating complex transitions with peace and stability.

Mongolia actively engages in international politics, exemplified by its longstanding membership in prominent global organizations. Since 1961, Mongolia has been a member of the United Nations, contributing to discussions and initiatives on the world stage. Additionally, Mongolia holds membership in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), where it serves as the furthest country in Northeast Asia. Furthermore, Mongolia holds observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, facilitating diplomatic dialogue and collaboration with member states. Notably, Mongolia is a global partner of NATO, reflecting its commitment to fostering international security and cooperation. Through its balanced foreign policy approach, Mongolia effectively navigates complex geopolitical dynamics, earning recognition for its diplomatic acumen and constructive engagement on the global stage (Kalan, 2018).

Furthermore, Mongolia's relations with the USA, Japan, Germany, and South Korea are evolving positively. Since 1990, Mongolia has made significant strides in establishing a multi-party, pluralist, and democratic system. In its foreign policy approach, Mongolia emphasizes maintaining balanced relations with its two powerful neighbors, China and Russia (Ulagpan, 2021).

Enhancing cooperation between Türkiye and Mongolia is imperative across various fronts, including connectivity projects, economic and commercial relations, and the maintenance of peace and security. In today's evolving international landscape, characterized by the emergence of a multipolar system, several pressing global challenges demand concerted action. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the global food and energy crises, and the escalating competition between the United States and China underscore the complexities of the current international order. The post-World War II framework is increasingly strained, signaling the need for a major reconfiguration. In such a milieu, fostering cooperation and solidarity among friendly nations becomes all the more crucial in navigating these turbulent times and forging a path towards a more stable and equitable global order.

Conclusion

In the short term, Ankara's regional strategy will maintain its focus on enhancing connectivity, energy projects, and the Organization of Turkic States. Key developments to monitor in the near future include the Turkmenistan's potential involvement in the Southern Gas Corridor, and China's Belt and Road Initiative projects in the region and the Organization of Turkic States (Köstem, 2019).

Türkiye's existing affiliations with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a dialogue partner, its enthusiastic embrace of a substantial role in China's Belt and Road Initiative through the Middle Corridor endeavor, and its strong ties with Central Asian countries, efforts to improve relations with other Asian countries within the framework of the Asia Anew Initiative highlight its importance in the region. Türkiye's leadership role in the Organization of the Turkic States can play a crucial part in linking

this regional organization with larger European and Asian projects, underscoring Türkiye's potential as a pivotal regional power located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. Ankara sees its strategic position between these two continents as a valuable asset, positioning it as a central "hub" for logistics and production (Adar, 2022).

As Türkiye works to enhance its presence in Central Asia and Asia in general, aiming to foster greater regional connectivity and economic collaboration, the country is actively working on establishing viable alternative trade routes. This effort to create new trade pathways and elevate Türkiye's involvement in Asia is in line with its cultural and economic outreach in the region. Türkiye is reinforcing its foreign policy objectives and positioning itself as a vital "link" between Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Türkiye's ascent as a Eurasian power is poised to create new trade opportunities and regional connectivity for Asian countries, facilitating the transportation of goods and potentially people across the region. Simultaneously, Türkiye's involvement offers increased access to European and global markets for Asian countries, allowing them to advance their own interests as well.

Within this broader context, Türkiye's pursuit of greater geopolitical influence on the world stage aligns with its desire to pursue autonomous foreign policy objectives that serve its own geopolitical goals. The quest for increased strategic autonomy by Türkiye, coupled with many Asian states' preference for a multi-vector foreign policy to resist dominance by any single power, serves as a crucial long-term factor drawing Türkiye and the region's states into closer cooperation.

Ankara's deep cultural ties with the Asian countries, combined with their eagerness to diversify their foreign relations, afford Türkiye increased leverage in the region. Türkiye's interest in enhancing Eurasian connectivity stems from its commitment to promoting peace and prosperity, improving commercial access to countries in the region, bolstering supply chain resilience, and diversifying energy sources.

Given the current geopolitical climate, there is a growing need for new alternative routes connecting Asia and Europe, making connectivity a strategically vital area of mutual interest for further cooperation. The economic benefits that the Middle Corridor's inclusion could bring may contribute to long-term stability and prosperity in the region. The enhanced connectivity, economic relations, and energy cooperation presents an opportunity for collaborative efforts aimed at promoting peace, stability and development in the region.

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