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**THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE AND THE OPPORTUNITIES AND
CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING SINO-TURKISH RELATIONS**

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Abstract

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a concept of revitalization of the ancient ‘Silk Road’, it has large economic and infrastructure dimension both based on land and sea transportation. BRI is necessary for China to maintain its economic growth and it also creates important opportunities both for Turkey and other related countries. Turkey is one of the most important countries on the land belt, not just for its geo-strategical position, but also for its important role in the Middle East and Central Asia politics. This article researches the developing relations between Turkey and China, the potential of strategic cooperation of the BRI and opportunities and challenges of Sino-Turkish relations. In recent years, Sino-Turkish relations have gained a great momentum. Turkey became a dialog member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and a founder member of Asian Infrastructure Bank (AIIB). China and Turkey have closer strategic and economic targets, they need mutual cooperation both strategically and economically. On the other hand, both sides have some challenges for a full-fledged cooperation. While, bilateral and multilateral relations of China and Turkey are essential for their short and long term interests.

Key Words: Turkey, China, BRI, Economic Cooperation, Strategic partnership.

**BİR KUŞAK BİR YOL GİRİŞİMİ VE GELİŞEN TÜRK-ÇİN İLİŞKİLERİNDEKİ
FIRSATLAR VE ZORLUKLAR**

Özet

Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Girişimi, hem deniz hem de karaya dayalı, ekonomik ve altyapı boyutları olan, eski ‘İpek Yolu’nu canlandırma konseptidir. Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Girişimi, Çin’in ekonomik büyümesini sürdürmesi için gerekli iken, Türkiye ve diğer ilgili ülkeler için de büyük fırsatlar sunmaktadır. Türkiye,

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yalnızca jeostratejik konumu sayesinde değil, aynı zamanda Ortadoğu ve Orta Asya siyasetindeki önemli rolü sayesinde de Kuşak üzerindeki en önemli ülkelerden biridir. Bu makale, Türkiye ile Çin arasında gelişen ilişkileri, BRI'nin stratejik işbirliği potansiyelini ve Türkiye-Çin ilişkilerindeki fırsatları ve zorlukları araştırmaktadır. Son yıllarda, Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri büyük bir ivme kazanmıştır. Türkiye, Şangay İşbirliği Teşkilatı'nın (SCO) Diyalog Ortağı ve Asya Altyapı Yatırım Bankası'nın (AIIB) Kurucu Üyesi olmayı başarmıştır. Türkiye ile Çin birbirine yakın stratejik ve ekonomik hedeflere sahiptir, Bu iki ülkenin hem stratejik hem de ekonomik işbirliğine ihtiyacı vardır. Türkiye ile Çin arasında ikili ve çok taraflı, kısa ve uzun vadeli çıkarlar için işbirliği gerekli olmasına karşın , tam teşekküllü bir işbirliği için bir takım zorluklar söz konusu olmaya devam etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Çin, Bir Kuşak Bir Yol, Ekonomik İşbirliği, Stratejik Ortaklık.

I. Introduction

China is currently one of the fastest growing economies in the world. With its large economy and population, China is also one of the most active actors in shaping world agenda as well. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is considered to be a full-fledged strategy of political, financial, social and cultural development for China and related countries. this is also an economic integration of China with Asia, Europe, Middle East and Africa.

There are various descriptions for BRI. One of the interesting of these descriptions has done by Jiun Bang. He claims that BRI is based on Normative Power policies, and Normative Power arises with the dialogue of a state when it can engage many countries to each other with the preferences rather than enforcing them. By doing so, a country can inserts its influence and simplifies the recognition process.¹ While some other researchers claim that China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti and many of the ports and transportation infrastructure projects built both for commercial and military purposes. Thus the expansion of BRI may give China more ascendancy based on China's economic imperialism over smaller and poorer countries.²

Turkey is one of the most important countries on the land belt. Its geopolitical position gives it a connecting-bridge role and energy center between Asia and Europe. With the cooperation of Turkey, BRI land belt can be built faster and reach Europe easily. In this sense, China-Turkey political and economic cooperation is crucial for the accomplishment of BRI. However, there are some challenges

¹ Juin Bang "Why So Many Layers? China's "State-Speak" and Its Classification of Partnerships" Foreign Policy Analysis, University of Michigan, 2017, 13, p.386.

² Lily Kuo and Niko Kommenda, "What is China's Belt and Road Initiative?", July 30 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/jul/30/what-china-belt-road-initiative-silk-road-explainer>, (last visited 28 November 2018).

between two countries' relations such as Uyghur issue, trade deficit, inefficient trust between two sides, the lack of mutual comprehension of these two countries' people, the ambiguous of accurate intention of BRI. Some Chinese scholars argue that Turkish and Chinese people do not have enough communication, inasmuch as not enough people can speak both Turkish and Chinese in both countries. Chinese and Turkish news are translated from western media rather than the original language. This directly creates a misunderstanding problem. Although Uyghurs have cultural language and historical common values with Turkey, but Chinese and Turkish people have ethnical and religion challenges (Xinjiang issue), this is an obstacle for two countries' strategical cooperation.³ However, with the help of BRI and effective cultural and educational activities, China and Turkey can improve people to people communication and promote two countries' bilateral relations, minimize trade deficit and build a strategical cooperation.

This paper attempts to explore the BRI and the strategic cooperation of Turkey and China. This paper also aims to contribute to the developing strategic relations between China and Turkey. In this paper I focus on what factors can explain the developing strategical cooperation between china and Turkey? How Turkey and China can cooperate better? China and Turkey have developing relations. However, a full-fledged strategical cooperation between china and Turkey is not likely, unless the solving of political issues, trade deficit problem and enhanced people to people relations. This article is composed of five sections. The first section is introduction. The second section examines The BRI and the process of two countries recent developing relations in the context of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB Bank) and energy infrastructure project. The third section explains Turkey's SCO status and its implications in China-Turkey Cooperation. The fourth section analyzes the opportunities and challenges of Sino-Turkish cooperation based on Uyghur issue and trade deficit problem. And the last section concludes this paper.

II. The BRI and two countries developing relations

In 2013, Chinese President, Xi Jinping proposed establishing a modern equivalent, creating a network of railways, roads, sea ways and pipelines, that would connect China to the other related countries. By the means of this project, China hopes to revive ancient 'Silk Road' and create the

³ Xue Jingjing, (薛晶晶) "Chinese Turkish relations in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative" 《一带一路背景下中国与土耳其的关系》, *Law and Society*, 法制与社会, Political Forum, 政法论坛, 2017, 7(中), 第 144 也. p.144.

world's largest platform for economic cooperation, including political coordination, energy and border security, strategic partnerships, social and cultural cooperation.⁴

In recent years, China has changed its foreign policy decision-making and China does not want to be shaped by the changing world. On the contrary, China wants to reshape the world without ignoring its non-intervention policy towards other countries domestic issues. Recently, Chinese foreign policy is more centralized and proactive, even a bit aggressive than before. Chinese leader Xi Jinping does not want to maintain China's long-held 'keeping low profile' in the international affairs adhered by previous leader Deng Xiaoping since 1980s.⁵ President Xi wants to build his own political and economic policies to fulfill Chinese Dream which was depicted by himself as a great national rejuvenation of China.

The BRI strategy forms key element of China's foreign policy. China have long-term political and socio-economic implications both at home and abroad for the coming years. China wants to use BRI to establish close economic cooperation with ancient 'Silk Road' Countries, increase their trade and investment opportunities and shape their economic growth by improving their infrastructure and investment connectivity.⁶ For all that, China is attaching great importance to the development of the countries on the new 'Silk Road' line and economical engagement of related regions for keeping on generate new markets for Chinese products.

The reviving of the modern 'Silk Road' is thought to be a historical requirement for China and Turkey, and it is also expected to help Central Asia to be more developed and stable. In fact, in the beginning of 2008 the revival of the modern 'Silk Road' came on the agenda as a development of the trade relations between Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In April, 2012 when Turkish then Prime Minister Erdogan visited China. Erdogan and Chinese President Xi Jinping both emphasized the importance of the modern 'Silk Road' and Sino-Turkish cooperation.⁷ from that time on, China-Turkey relations have been developing with reciprocal visits.

It is almost 40 years that China has launched economic reforms. From that time on, Chinese economy has had lots of changes, these changes both brought a series of opportunities and challenges. However, the rise of China fundamentally developed under the strategic targets of Communist Party of

⁴ Tian Jinchun, "One Belt and One Road: Connecting China and the world", *Global Infrastructure Initiative, Voices on infrastructure*, June 2016, p.2.

⁵ Hong Yu, "Motivation behind China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiatives and Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank", *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2017 Vol. 26, no. 105, P. 353-360.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Xue Li, *Belt and Road Initiative: The Analysis of Chinese and Foreigners*, Chinese Social Science Press, Beijing, 2017.1. ISBN 978-7-5161-9725-7. P.290.

China (CPC) which promised to lift Chinese nation out of poverty and international humiliation. Chinese Government kept the majority of these promises from 40 years on. Although, Chinese economy continues to grow up, but it was the first time that Chinese economy began to slowdown and its growth rate fell below 7% in 2014.⁸

Currently China is approximately dominating 10% share of the world economy. With the help of its BRI, (which is also described to be China's second opening to the global market) China aims to enhance the connectivity of countries infrastructure chain by allowing cultural, academic exchanges. with the help of this strategy China hopes to be more effective in the international stage both politically and economically.⁹ China put the BRI concept forward as a new strategical concept for involving China's soft power influence. Furthermore, this initiative is expected to give important economical and development opportunities to 65 countries and approximately 4.4 billion people. its economical range is expected to reach 21 trillion dollars and it is 12 times bigger than Marshall Plan which was planned to rebuild Europe after World War II. However, for China, the BRI is a bold and a new strategy, which is still evolving.¹⁰

The BRI is based on existing and planned linkages from different regions of China towards the outside world which supported by large political, financial contributions and a huge economic market.¹¹ This is a great opportunity for expanding China-Turkey domestic markets, regional development and strategical cooperation.

China has undertaken the locomotive role for this initiative. The diversity and different economic and political situations of the countries along the routes inevitably make these countries have interest based relations with China in the context of 'Win Win' offer. China seems not to give any obligation to related countries to be a part of BRI, China offers a wide economical and commercial alternative to the partners of the BRI and make them benefit together. In any case , China will get the lion share of this benefits, while the other related countries seem agree with China's large portion.

The revitalization of the ancient 'Silk Road' is basically a long-term mutual wining concept. It is supposed to keep on shape the world trade once again in the name of the BRI. In such an advanced

⁸ Heike Holbig, "Whose New Normal? Framing the Economic Slowdown Under Xi Jinping", *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 26 February 2018, P. 344-357.

⁹ M.S. Siddiqui. "OBOR to propel China to global leadership" *Financial Express*, Dhaka, 27 May 2017, vol. 24. No:192, Regd. No: 1589.

¹⁰ Ajay Chhibber, "China's One Belt One Road Strategy: The New Financial Institutions and India's Options", *Institute for International Economic Policy, Working Paper Series*, Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University, IIEP-WP-2017-7, March 2017, P. 3-9.

¹¹ Irina Ionela Pop, "Strengths and Challenges of China's "One belt, One road" Initiative", *Centre for Geopolitics & Security, Realism Studies*, 9 February 2016, P. 1-2.

technology and communication era, its influence likely will not be limited with its region. Thus, as a fast developing country Turkey is supposed to play a crucial role in the development and transportation of this Initiative and build more multilateral and bilateral relation with China and Central Asia. Chinese President Xi welcomes Turkey's supports and its active role for developing of the BRI, President Xi stated that "China is ready to steadily advance major projects of cooperation with Turkey under the BRI. These two countries should better align their strategies according to the principle of equality and mutual benefits".¹² China is in a struggle for preparing 30-40 years long term economic policies. As President Xi declared "China aims to reach its middle class welfare society by the 2021 which is the Chinese Communist Party's 100th anniversary; and by 2049, China aims to be powerful, democratic, civilized and modern socialist country which is the 100th anniversary of the New China".¹³ In this sense, China aims to provide some funds for transportation, commerce and infrastructure investment; taking away the obstacles in front of the free trade and engage all the countries on the line of the BRI and benefit of developing opportunities. Thus China wants to develop China's less developed inner and western regions, consolidate its economic sovereign in the world trade and maintain its economy growth. In the context of these purposes, China seeks for new strategies and new strategic partners. China's long term objections are moving forward similar to Turkish economic policies , such as the economic integration of Turkey and Asian Countries, Turkey's economic targets of 2023, 2053,2071and its other long term political and economic objections.

¹² Liu Yue, "Turkey to strengthen cooperation under B&R Initiative", 2017-05-14, *Xinhua News Agency*, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/13223.htm>, (last visited 20 November 2018).

¹³ Cem Okan Tuncel, "Bir Kuşak Bir Yol: 21. Yüzyılın En Büyük Kalkınma Projesi", *Uludağ Üniversitesi*, 15.05.2017, <http://www.criturk.com/haber/ozel-haber/bir-kusak-bir-yol-21-yuzyilin-en-buyuk-kalkinma-projesi-25859>, (last visited 18 February 2018).

Table I, Infrastructure projects being planned and undertaken in China's Belt and Road Initiative.



Source: Mercator Institute for Chinese Studies, 15 February 2018

The BRI is supposed to start from the Eastern Asia to reach the Western Europe and Northern Africa, it needs large infrastructure, transportation, communication, commercial and cultural networks. Accordingly, Turkey has extended a great length to increase its diplomatic and economic efficiency both regionally and globally. Recently, Turkey is giving more priority to the bilateral and multilateral relations with China, Central Asia and neighbor countries,¹⁴ Both have enhanced economic relations with western and eastern.

Energy

Beijing is utilizing the BRI as a mechanism to establish and extend political linkages with related countries. Some states have agreed to increase political coordination with China, deepening political trust and aligning strategic political interests under the BRI framework.¹⁵ Currently, many significant project are being done with these countries, and some different projects are on the way, such as including a railway connection between Eastern China, Central Asia, Turkey and Europe, the see way projects which started form China to African and European countries and several other energy projects

¹⁴ Sadık Ünay, "Bir Kuşak Bir yol ve Stratejik Açından Türkiye- Çin İlişkileri", Türk Dış Politikası, *Kriter Dergisi*, Haziran 2017, <http://kriterdergi.com/bir-kusak-bir-yol-ve-stratejik-acidan-turkiye-cin-iliskileri/> 4/10- (last visited 16 February 2018).

¹⁵ Jeffrey Reeves, "China's Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative: Network and Influence Formation in Central Asia", *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19 Feb 2018. P.6

which are vital for China's energy demand. China-Turkey energy based relation is another crucial topic for two countries' strategic cooperation.¹⁶ Turkey is located in the 'Middle Corridor' of the BRI which is a critical direction of the Belt and Road Economic Belt, this project is thought to decrease the transportation time between Turkey and China from 30 days to 10 days. This will give Turkey another chance to strengthen its economic relations with the other countries on the economical stripe of the BRI. Turkey is an important actor for its role in 'Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project' (TANAP) and 'Turkish Current' projects, Turkey has held many important precautions for energy security to connect the BRI to the 'Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia' (TRACECA) which was established in 1998 as a corridor of Euro-Caucasia-Asia, with the connection of this corridor to Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railways and Marmaray Tunnel, through which reach Europe. This is very important for China and other related countries' energy requirements and energy transformation.¹⁷ In addition, it carries a great potential to support Turkey to be a logistic center for energy and commercial goods which is essential for the development of Interior and Eastern regions of Turkey and the decreasing unemployment of young people.

As the ambassador of China in Ankara Yu Hongyang stated that: "Turkey is located at the center point of connecting Asia and Europe which is very important for reviving of ancient 'Silk Road' Turkey is a natural member of BRI. Having cooperation with Turkey in every field is very important for China. The aims of the BRI is to enhance international cooperation and make the international trade free".¹⁸

China and Turkey have established friendship and carried out all-round cooperation, bringing tangible benefits to the peoples of the two countries and promoting regional peace, stability and development. Turkey has also declared its strong interest in the BRI and two countries signed a memorandum in 2015. On aligning the BRI with the 'Middle Corridor' and the 'Caravanserai Project'. Turkey's then Ambassador in Beijing Ali Murat Ersoy has affirmed that 'Caravanserai Project' that was introduced as a concept in 2008, is supposed to increase the cooperation among customs along with the BRI. This Project aims to facilitate trade and transportation in Asia. In the context of the BRI, Turkey's mega projects like the third bridge on the Istanbul Strait, Eurasia Tunnel, Marmaray Tunnel is supposed create more bilateral opportunities for the cooperation of Turkey, EU, Turkey-Asia and Turkey-Eurasia. Turkey is one of the fastest growing energy markets in the world. Therefore, investment opportunities

¹⁶ Erdal Tanas Karagöl, "Modern İpek Yolu Projesi", *Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı* (SETA), Perspective, Sayı: 174, Mayıs 2017. p. 2-5.

¹⁷ IBID,

¹⁸ Hong Yang, "Bir Kuşak Bir Yol" Zirvesinin Detaylarını Paylaştı", *Milliyet Gazetesi*, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/cin-buyukelcisi-hongyang-bir-kusak-bir-ankara-yerelhaber-2028150/>, (last visited 6 November 2017).

in mining and energy are important and these sectors can be explored. Turkey wants to work with China in the fields of green technologies and nuclear power”.¹⁹ In addition, Turkey and China also need to cooperate with global issues like, energy, food, safety, social and liberal political changes, terrorism, international and domestic risks, environmental problems, climate changes etc.²⁰

Turkey and China can have long term cooperation based on mutual respect and mutual benefits of bilateral relations. Enhanced Turkish and Chinese relations is supposed to make Central Asia and Middle East more stable. It is clear that for the security of the BRI one the most important factors is the regional key countries’ cooperation. for these purposes, the projects such as: BRI and The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) made China cooperate with many countries. Turkey, as a founder member of AIIB and a dialog partner of SCO, with its important geographical position has the key country role between Asia, Europe and Middle East. Turkey`s economical and historical relations with Central Asia plays an important partnership role and long-term economic benefits both for Turkey and China.

AIIB

From 2014 on, in the context of its general strategy China has played leadership role for 3 economic initiatives. These initiatives are: BRICS Development Bank, BRI infrastructure fund and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB Bank). Several reasons made China undertake these initiatives: The lack of the efforts to reform the world economic system; The surplus infrastructure demands of Asian countries; The needs of new infrastructure demands for Asian countries, the strong expectation for the slowdown of economic growth of China and the reluctance of the other powerful countries’ sharing economical and strategical superiority with developing countries. For these reasons, in accordance with the BRI, on 24th of November 2014, AIIB was established in Beijing with the participation of 21 countries. In 2016 China became the biggest shareholder of the bank with the 26% share. India is the second biggest shareholder with the 7.5% share and Turkey is the 11th biggest shareholder of the bank with the 2.5% share.²¹

According to the Asian Development Bank, from 2010 to 2020, 8.2 trillion dollars needed for Asian countries’ infrastructure expenses and China wants to undertake these expenses with its BRI

¹⁹ Lily Wang, “China & Turkey, Strong Cooperation under the “Belt and Road” Initiative”, An exclusive interview with Ali Murat Ersoy, Ambassador of The Republic of Turkey, *China’s Foreign Trade*, 2017, No: 3. P.61-64.

²⁰ Kerem Alkin, “Türkiye’ye ‘Bir Yol, Bir Kuşak’ Çağrısı”, *Sabah Gazetesi*, 24.03.2017, https://www.Sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/kerem-alkin/2017/03/24/turkiyeye-bir-yol-bir-kusak-cagrisi_ (last visited 17 February 2018).

²¹ Cengiz Yavilioğlu, “Çin Öncülüğünde Yeni Bölgesel Finansal Mimari Oluşturma Çabaları: Tek Kuşak-Tek Yol Projesi” *Maliye Dergisi*, Sayı 170, Ocak-Haziran 2016, P. 5.

members in the context of economic integration. President Xi also pointed that, “China’s benefits based on peace, welfare, clarity, innovation and civilization in the coordination of all of the world’s benefits. in the BRI form”.²² BRI is the first and foremost about China’s domestic economical inequalities rather than Chinese potential spreading its influence around the world and regions.²³ As President Xi stated above, peace and stability based political and economic cooperation can attract all parties interest. In this sense, a strong China-Turkey cooperation is possible. In the light of this cooperation, Turkey is modernizing its railways from the very East to the very West, adding new railways and high speed trains to be major port cities of Turkey, and also modernizing and increasing the capacities of its ports. These important infrastructure improvements can also encourage two countries’ investors have long term investment goals in the context of China-Turkey long term cooperation

III. SCO and its implications in Sino-Turkish Cooperation

The end of the Cold War was also the end of geopolitical tensions between East and West. It begets many innovations for Eurasia as well. One of the most specific changes is the rising of Turkey as an important country in the Eurasia politics. Turkey has developed relations with Central Asia and got a significant advantage of being both regional and international political actor.²⁴ As a result of the political and economic dynamics, Turkey has adopted its own political and economic strategies both in domestic and international politics.²⁵ Since 1990 on, Turkey has recognized itself as a key potential country for energy transportation between Asia, Europe and Middle East.²⁶ Turkey’s this potential motivated Turkey to have multilateral policies not just limited with regional states, but also made Turkey establish important relations with international organizations.

Since 2005, Turkey has interested in the accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This was mentioned several times by Turkish President Erdoğan. While Turkey’s first application for the SCO as an observer country status was not successful; but Turkey’s

²² Ümit Alperen, “Bir Kuşak Bir Yol: Çin karakteristiği ile küreselleşme”, Karar, 20.05.2017, <http://www.karar.com/gorusler/bir-kusak-bir-yol-cin-karakteristigi-ile-kuresellesme-487431#>, (last visited 10 November 2017).

²³ Jacob L. Shapiro, “One Belt, One Road, No Dice, China’s ambitious infrastructure plans have a long way to go to become a game-changer”, *Geopolitical Futures*, Reality check, 12 January 2017, p. 1-5.

²⁴ Ünal Çeviköz, “Turkey in a Reconnecting Eurasia, Foreign Economic and Security Interests”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies* (CSIS), APRIL 2016. P.1.

²⁵ Güneş, Murat Tezcür and Alexandru Grigorescu, “Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy: Balancing European and Regional Interests” *International Studies Perspectives*, Loyola University Chicago, 2014, 15. P. 274.

²⁶ Camilla Wuensch, “Turkish Stream: Ankara Trying to Balance East and West”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies* (CSIS) July 10, 2015. P1.

application for the SCO's Dialogue Partner Status on 23rd March 2011 was accepted on 7th of June 2012.²⁷

Turkey is one of the strategic depth country and also a crucial country on the 'China-Central-West Asia Economic Corridor'(CCWAEC). For China, Turkey is an essential security actor, it is not just a dialog partner of SCO, an important member of Islamic Cooperation Organization(ICO), But also Turkey has an important role in Eurasia politics. In addition, China-Turkey Cooperation can have a constructive role on the stability of Xinjiang which is vital for the succession of the BRI. Thus China and other SCO members are expected support Turkey's present position in SCO and its full membership process.

In 2001, in SCO Convention, it was declared in the first article that SCO was established to fight against 'three evils': 'Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism'.²⁸ Turkey is currently Fighting against these 'three evils', in addition, Turkey has intimate religious, cultural or ethnical relations with China's Western neighbor countries such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Thus Turkey's SCO membership may make Central Asia more stable, which is essential for China's 'One China' policy and for the security of the BRI. In 2012, when Chinese President Xi visited Turkey, he towards Turkish President Erdoğan has stated that: "Mister President! You obviously stated that, you will not allow any activity be organized in Turkey which may be considered as a threat towards China's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We are very content with your this idea".²⁹ Moreover, Turkey has stable and developing relations with Pakistan and Iran (Recently Pakistan bought 30 Turkish made helicopters).³⁰ Currently, Iran has an observer country status in SCO, while Pakistan became a full member of SCO in 2017 with India. A large and a comprehensive SCO is much more likely to facilitate the BRI implementation process, enhance the relations between Turkey – China, Turkey-Central Asia and Turkey-SCO members.

Turkish foreign policy is still going ahead parallel to Turkish then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, when he described Turkish Foreign Policy during his Minister of Foreign Affairs time. He stated that: "Our aim is to make Turkey be a more powerful country and get its historical mission on the geo-strategical position at the center of Europe and Eurasia, to be a pacifist actor both regionally and

²⁷ Erdem Eren, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Future Perspective in Turkish Foreign Policy" *Strategic Public Management Journal*, ISSN 2149-9543, Volume 3, Issue 5, May 2017, P. 87

²⁸ Roy Allison "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and CSTO" *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Oxford Uni. 2018, Vol. 0, No. 0.P.19-30.

²⁹ Erkin Ekrem, "Türkiye Çin ilişkileri", *Stratejik Düşünce Dergisi*, Mayıs 2012, S.67-68.

³⁰ Pakistan Defence Forum: <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/turkey-and-pakistan-ink-deal-for-the-sale-of-30-atak-helicopters.567559/> July 13, 2018, (last visited 18 October 2018).

globally, and Turkey will work very hard for global peace”.³¹ In this sense, Turkey is willing to keep its NATO membership, and also wants to be a member of SCO. By doing this, Turkey hopes to have a more powerful role both in Western and Eastern politics and also to have more contributions to the global peace and development.

Table II, The Significance of the Strategic Partnership of Turkey and China in the Central Asia and Belt and Road Initiative



Recourse: China and Turkey: A Partnership to Reshape the World, RiskWatch Dog, 25 October 2010

Turkish President Erdoğan declared that “SCO is more powerful and better than European Union, we have common values with SCO members”.³² By mentioning this, President Erdoğan pointed out that the developing relations of Turkey with Central Asia and China are very important, and these relations encloses a large scale of economic opportunity as well. China is also content with having close relations with Turkey. When Turkish President Erdoğan visited China, President Xi said “The development of China-Turkey strategic and cooperative relations is in the fundamental interests of the two nations and their people. The two sides should respect and accommodate with each other’s core concerns and deepen security and anti-terrorism cooperation”.³³

Turkey and China also have common interests in geo-politic and security of the Middle East and

³¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Rekabet Değil İşbirliği Coğrafyası İstiyoruz”, *Stratejik Düşünce Dergisi*, Kasım 2010, S.14-18.

³² Lina Wang, “Will Turkey Join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Instead of the EU? ”, *The Diplomat*, November 24, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/will-turkey-join-the-shanghai-cooperation-organization-instead-of-the-eu/>, (last visited 6 January 2019).

³³ Liu Yue, “Turkey to strengthen cooperation under B&R Initiative”, 2017-05-14, *Xinhua News Agency*, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/13223.htm>, (last visited 20 November 2018).

Central Asia. As raising energy requirement and increased terrorist actions taken into account, the assurance of safety and peace is getting more important for Turkish and Chinese interests. For China, Turkey is considered to be a gate to open Europe and Balkans, and also a good partner in the Middle East and Central Asia; and for Turkey, China is an important partner that Turkey should cooperate with politically, economically and strategically. Turkey has a big significance in controlling Eurasia's strategic passages and BRI's materially and morally potential objections. Recently, Turkey is trying to enhance its Asia Politics, balance its Western-Eastern relations and to be more active in the global politics.

The Middle East and Central Asia are relatively unstable regions, the worse these regions situation go, the more possible other stable countries face to incursion of refugees and mushrooming of terrorism.³⁴ These possible issues can be avoided with a full-fledged cooperation of regional states, international organizations such as SCO and non-governmental institutions. Along with this, financial educational investments are also essential for the employment and stable future of these regions. As president Erdogan stated that "The projects like BRI will provide infrastructure developments and bring the end of terrorism".³⁵ The prosperity of Central Asia and Middle East is belong to the regional and international collaboration. The development of underdeveloped states is more likely to make them safer and have them get rid of the threat of terrorism and make them be more stable.

IV. The opportunities and challenges of Sino-Turkish cooperation

Uygur (Xinjiang) Issue

From 2000s on, China is keeping an effective public policy in order to have prestige based an affirmative image in the international relations. By doing this, China wants to prevail the world upon China has 'Peaceful Rising', 'Peaceful Development' and 'Harmonious Society'.³⁶ China has a peaceful foreign policy and progressing well. However, sometimes China's this effort is not enough to persuade some analysts because of emergence of some unpleasant events in China, in particular, involved with Xinjiang Issue.

Turkish-Chinese relations have witnessed quite a busy diplomatic period, in 2018, one vice prime minister; the president of Turkish Grand National Assembly and 10 ministers have visited China. These visits were not just done for trade and tourism purposes, and also done for political issue. Chinese

³⁴ Rıza Kadılar, Erkin Ergüney, "One Belt One Road Initiative: Perks and Challenges for Turkey" *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Summer 2017, Vol. 16-No.2. P. 87-90.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Mustafa Yagci, "Rethinking Soft Power in Light of China's Belt and Road Initiative" *International Relations/ Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol.15, No, 57, 2018. P. 72.

Government also had some strict policies against terrorism especially in Xinjiang after ISIS terrorist activities. Some Turkish analysts think that there are some humanitarian uncomfortable events happen in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. But Chinese government argues that the government is protecting Xinjiang people from the terrorism. Thus Chinese government is training them. However, these scholars claim that , no matter what is said, it is hard to believe that there is not uncomfortable events happening involved with humanitarian issues, and also it is hard to believe some other exaggerated allegations have claimed by other groups against Chinese Government. When the president of Turkish Grand National Assembly Binali Yıldırım met the Chairman of China's National People's Congress Standing Committee Li Zhanshu, Yıldırım stated that: Turkey admits the groups who have ties with ISIS are terrorists, and Turkey insists on fighting against them. For all that, Yıldırım has emphasized that the Uyghur People who both have lineage and kinship relations with Turkish people , they should be keeping apart from terrorists and they should not be faced non-humanitarian treatments in China. ³⁷

Uyghur issue creates inconvenience for Turkey-China relations from time to time. Beijing gives utterance to its displeased for Uyghur Issue based anti-China activities held in Turkey and Turkish Passports issued for Uyghur asylums. However , Turkish Government has declared that Turkey looks at these kind of actions within the framework of Turkish Government's humanitarian responsibilities, rather than anti-China attitudes. Thus , on August 3, 2017, Turkish foreign minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu met China's foreign minister Wang Yi in Beijing. Çavuşoğlu assured that Turkey will not allow any activities take out targeting or opposing Chinese Government. In addition, in the context of strengthening ties with Chinese Government, and Turkish President Erdogan participated Silk Road Form in Beijing in 2017 with a large number of committee. Turkey and China have signed agreements on the extradition of criminals, international highway transportation and establishment of cultural centers. These two countries may solve these issues by straightening people to people relations, supporting exchange programs for students, simplify Chinese visa for Turkish People make Chinese and Turkish people have more chance to know each other. These all are essential both for understanding two countries real position and promoting two countries economic and cultural relations.

China-Turkey relations are getting better day by day, and striking in the international community. Turkish President Erdoğan before attending to the BRI summit in Beijing in may 2016, he emphasized

³⁷ Muharem Sarıkaya, "Binali Yıldırım ile Pekin gezisi/Uygur hassasiyeti," 05.12.2018, <https://www.haberturk.com/herbolgeden-bir-belediye-mhpye-2248291>, (last visited 10 December 2018).

that “Turkey’s getting closer to China will create a different impression in the world”³⁸ It is Obvious Obvious that President Erdoğan’s expectation from the summit was to promote the economic cooperation between Turkey and China, balance two countries trade, change it partially in favor of Turkey and get more capital access to Turkish economy.

Trade

In this advanced technology era, multi-dimensional cooperation forms an extraordinary competitive environment both politically and economically. This competition has both positive and negative consequences for international cooperation. One of the biggest challenges for China-Turkey relations is the imbalance of international trade, and two countries trade gap is getting bigger and bigger for the benefits of China, China’s exportation takes almost 90% of the bilateral trade.

Although the economic relations between Turkey and China are not satisfied, however they are developing their trade, cultural and social relations day by day. Turkish then Vice Prime Minister Mehmet Şimsek and China’s Vice prime minister Wang Yang attended the first Turkey and China inter-governmental cooperation committee. Şimsek stated that “Now Turkey and China have 28 billion dollars volume of trade. This volume should be increased and at the same time should decrease Turkey’s trade deficiency.”³⁹ In spite of developing economic relations, the trade volume between China and Turkey is still far from 100 billion dollars, the amount that was anticipated by both parties for the near future.

³⁸ Erdoğan: Virgül değil nokta mesabesinde, 12 Mayıs 2017, <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/erdogan-virgul-degil-nokta-mesabesinde-2656900>, 09.01.2019. (last visited 25 December 2018).

³⁹ Dünya Gazetesi, “Türkiye ile Çin arasındaki ticaret hacmi arttırılacak”, 04 Kasım 2016 <https://www.dunya.com/ekonomi/turkiye-ile-cin-arasindaki-ticaret-hacmi-arttirilacak-haberi-336648>, (last visited 8 February 2017).

Table III, Foreign Trade Values of Turkey - China (Billion USD)

Y EARS	EXP ORT	IMP ORT	VOLU ME	BALANC E
2012	2,83	21,29	24,128	-18,462
2013	3,601	24,686	28,287	-21,085
2014	2,861	24,918	27,779	-22,057
2015	2,41	24,87	27,288	-22,459
2016	2,32	25,44	27,769	-23,113
2017	2,93	23,37	26,307	-20,435

Source: Trade Map 2018

As it is shown in table III, the economic and trade relations of two countries are going up in the favor of China, and Turkey's trade deficiency is getting up day by day. This can be balanced positively when China allows more Turkish products enter China or more Turkish exporters explore Chinese market and export more Turkish products to China, or with the supports of Chinese and Turkish governments more Chinese tourists visit Turkey. Although, it is not likely that Turkish trade deficiency can be solved in the near future. However, for Turkey much more essential one is increasing volume of bilateral trade along with decreasing this huge gap of trade imbalance.

BRI has a big capacity of labor and China has an overcapacity problem for Chinese products. BRI is very important both for the activation of the world economy, solving China's economic problems and China-Turkey economic relations. China and Turkey can benefit these opportunities by multidimensional cooperation. In order to increase the volume of bilateral trade reach at 100 billion dollars in the near future. The strengthening of cultural and economic exchanges , public interest activities, education, health care, poverty reduction, biodiversity and ecological protection and interaction of cultures is expected to receive the highest priority for these two countries.⁴⁰ Inasmuch as the BRI is an economical engagement of Asian, European and African countries. Beyond its economic

⁴⁰ Dipankar Banerjee, "China's One Belt One Road Initiative – An Indian Perspective", *Yusuf Ishak Institute*, (ISEAS), Singapore, ISSN 2335-6677, 31 March 2016 ISSUE: 2016, No: 14, p.8.

integration, it is an integration of cultures and communities.⁴¹

Turkish Ambassador of Beijing Abdulkadir Emin Önen affirmed that “the one of the important components of the ‘Middle Corridor’ which is also known ‘Iron Silk Road’, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railroad Project has started operation last year. This railroad not only connects Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia, but also allows a train from London to reach at Beijing within two weeks. The negotiations with our Chinese friends over the joint construction of the Edirne-Kars fast track, which will connect Turkey’s easternmost and westernmost cities. Increasing cooperation between our countries due to the ‘Middle Corridor’ and the BRI, and the strengthening trust-based relations between the presidents of the two countries have greatly boosted bilateral relations”. (President Erdogan and President Xi have met five times in the last two years).⁴²

China and Turkey both are raising economies, their global importance is getting higher day by day and also their economic growth rate is in the top five in the world. Turkish then Vice prime minister Mehmet Şimşek, in the “BRI and its possible implications for Turkey” panel discussion pointed out that Turkey is in the process of establishing good relations with China. The BRI will let Turkey have stronger relations with Central Asia, as well as it will have implications on the world economy in the next 50 and 100 years, this can also be considered as a geopolitical center shift. Chinese economy has grown around 10% in the last 40 years, and this is a miracle. In 2049, Asian infrastructure is likely to be better than Europe’s.⁴³

Tourism

Another important point for two countries cooperation is tourism. Turkey is a new and an undiscovered destination for Chinese tourists. Many Chinese tourists should come and visit Turkey. 2018 was Turkish tourism year in China, it was an opportunity for two countries developing social and cultural relations and stabilization of bilateral relations. About Turkish tourism year Chinese President Xi declared that “China welcomes the Turkish side to hold a Turkey tourism year in China in 2018, and China is ready to boost bilateral people-to-people exchanges with the country, taking the opportunity of an agreement to set up cultural centers on both sides”.⁴⁴ In 2018, half million Chinese tourists were

⁴¹ Irina Ionela Pop, “Strengths and Challenges of China’s “One belt, One road” Initiative”, *Centre for Geopolitics & Security in Realism Studies (CGSRS)*, 9 February 2016, P. 3.

⁴² Abdulkadir Emin Onen, “China and Turkey seek to build a common future”, 2018-08-06 09:55:09, *China Daily*, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/ghsl/wksl/61956.htm>, (last visited 20 December 2018).

⁴³ Sozcu Gazetesi, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2018/ekonomi/simsek-dunyada-ciddi-bir-demokratik-durgunluk-var-2431134/> (last visited 20 June 2018).

⁴⁴ Liu Yue, “Turkey to strengthen cooperation under B&R Initiative”, 2017-05-14, *Xinhua News Agency*, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/13223.htm>, (last visited 20 November 2018).

expected to visit Turkey. When it is compared to the last a few years, in 2018, Chinese tourists have increased almost 6 times than before. When it is compared to China's population, half million is still very less, however it is a chance to increase the number of Chinese tourists in the near future. For better relations, Chinese government is also supposed to simplify visa application for Turkish people.

In 2015 when Turkish President Erdogan visited China, he mentioned the importance of the economical, infrastructure and technologic cooperation with China. China has 2021 targets and Turkey has 2023 targets, two countries short term development strategies are also similar, all these make these two countries cooperate easier.⁴⁵ It is worth to mention that the using of National Currencies is mostly recommended by Turkey for bilateral and multilateral international trade with China and neighbor countries. In 2017, Bank of China opened in Istanbul which is expected to facilitate Turkish and Chinese commercial relations and make two countries come closer to use Yuan - Lira in the banking transactions.

V. Conclusion

Turkish Government supports BRI with its superior geo-politic position on the BRI Economic Belt. As a founder member of AIIB and a Dialogue Partner of SCO Turkey has an important role both in Central Asia, Eurasia and Middle East. Chinese-Turkish relations are developing fast and BRI is expected to play a very important role in the process of China-Turkish strategical relations. Turkey has improved its Highways, Railways, ports and commercial centers. In recent years, Turkey and China have quite stable economic developments, they both need more economic and strategic partners, they need foreign investments for reaching their long term objections (Turkey's 2023 and 2071 targets; China's) 2021 and 2049 targets). Uyghur issue is possible to be solved with diplomacy and people to people strong connection. According to the recent political and economic dynamics, one of the most important issue between Turkey and China is the trade deficit issue which is almost 90% in the favor of China. While China takes the 1st place in Turkey's importation and 17th place in Turkey's exportation. Although 2018 was the Turkish Tourism Year in China and in 2018, 500.000 Chinese tourists were expected to visit Turkey, however this number is still far from solving Turkey's economical discontent. By improving two countries relations, two countries should enlarge their trade policies, organize social and cultural activities, straighten exchange programs for students, prepare more opportunities to both parties' entrepreneurs, encourage their investments and advertisements. Chinese government is

⁴⁵ Özlem Zerrin Keyvan. "Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Girişimi Çerçevesinde Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri", 15. 17. 2017, <https://ankasam.org/bir-kusak-bir-yol-girisimi-cercevesinde-turkiye-cin-iliskileri/> (last visited 4 November 2017).

expected to reduce the tariffs on Turkish products and allow more Turkish products enter Chinese market (most notably Xinjiang market). Another important point is Turkey should be more active in the SCO with the support of China. China and Turkey have a historic opportunity to collaborate against the present and possible future threats of terrorism which may both harm BRI and the stability of Central Asia and other regions, impair both countries' political and economic interests. Turkey and China are establishing effective strategic policies in order to maintain their long term interest in the multi-dimensional forming regions and world, Turkey and China are also expected to incline mutual deep structural cooperation, not just based on political and strategical cooperation, militaristic and cultural dimensions are also very important for two countries long term cooperation.

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