

# Eurasian Research

## Journal

### ARTICLES

**Fulya AKGUL DURAKCAY**

Hungary's Position on the Russia-Ukraine War and its Implications for Cooperation in the Visegrad Group

**Kubilay ATIK**

Diplomatic Dexterity: Mongol Qaghans of the Yuan Dynasty and the Quest for East Asian Hegemony

**Zhengizkhan ZHANALTAY**

Agricultural Development of Kazakhstan

**Seyit Ali AVCU**

Relations between Türkiye and China in the Context of Belt and Road Initiative: Challenges and Prospects

**Merve Suna OZEL OZCAN**

New Game Changer Power in Eurasia: Shanghai Cooperation Organization

### BOOK REVIEW

**Kanat MAKHANOV**

Climate Change in Central Asia: Decarbonization, Energy Transition and Climate Policy

---

Eurasian Research Journal is a refereed journal of international standards aiming to publish scientific articles in a wide range of fields including economics, finance, energy, international relations, security, transportation, politics and sociology in the Eurasian region that covers the territory from the Balkans to Mongolia with particular focus on Turkic – speaking countries. It is published quarterly in January, April, July and October. Contributions and articles submitted to Eurasian Research Journal are first evaluated by the Editorial Board with regard to their compliance with the publishing principles, and those found acceptable are forwarded to the referees well-known for their scholarship in the relevant field. The names of referees are kept confidential, and their reports are kept in record for a period of five years. The authors are responsible for opinions stated in the articles published in the journal.

---

**Eurasian Research Journal**  
Autumn, 2023 Volume 5 • No. 4

**Owner**

On behalf of  
Akhmet Yassawi University  
Acting Rector  
Peyami BATTAL

**Editor-in-Chief**

Nevzat SIMSEK  
(Dokuz Eylül University, Türkiye)

**Co-Editor**

Suat BEYLUR  
(Akhmet Yassawi University, Kazakhstan)

**Editorial Board**

Suat BEYLUR  
(Akhmet Yassawi University, Kazakhstan)  
Yakur SUMER  
(Seleuk University, Türkiye)  
Gulnar NADIROVA  
(Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan)  
Farkhod AMINJONOV  
(Zayed University, UAE)

**Managing Editor**

Zhengizkhan ZHANALTAY  
(Akhmet Yassawi University, Kazakhstan)

**Technical Redaction**

Azimzhan KHITAKHUNOV  
(Akhmet Yassawi University, Kazakhstan)

**Secretariat**

Kanat MAKHANOV  
(Akhmet Yassawi University, Kazakhstan)

**Management Center**

Almali district, Mametova 48, 050004  
Almaty, Kazakhstan  
**Tel:** +77272799794  
**Fax:** +77272792426

**Website:** [erj.eurasian-research.org](http://erj.eurasian-research.org)  
e-mail: [info@eurasian-research.org](mailto:info@eurasian-research.org)  
subscription: [erj@eurasian-research.org](mailto:erj@eurasian-research.org)

# Eurasian Research Journal



Autumn 2023 Volume 5 • No. 4

EURASIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL

Volume 5, No. 4

ISSN 2519-2442

© Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Turkish-Kazakh University  
Eurasian Research Institute (ERI),  
2023 (print and electronic)

Indexed in



ASOS



Cosmos  
Indexing



Eurasian Scientific  
Journal Index



Index  
Islamicus



Root  
Indexing



Open Archive  
Initiative Repository



International Scientific  
Indexing



Scientific Indexing  
Services

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review this journal, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Distributed by  
Eurasian Research Institute  
Almali district, Mametova 48, 050004,  
Almaty, Kazakhstan

Typeset in Almaty  
Printed and bound in Kazakhstan, Almaty

The views expressed in the articles are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Eurasian Research Institute of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Turkish-Kazakh University.



## SCIENTIFIC BOARD

**Elshan BAGIRZADE**  
Azerbaijan State University of  
Economics/Azerbaijan  
**Vugar BAYRAMOV**  
Center for Economic and Social  
Development/Azerbaijan  
**Sabri CIFTCI**  
Kansas State University/USA  
**Carole FAUCHER**  
Nazarbayev University/Kazakhstan  
**Anastassios GENTZOGLANIS**  
Université de Sherbrooke/Canada  
**Osman HORATA**  
Hacettepe University/Türkiye  
**Lars JOHANSON**  
University of Mainz/Germany  
**Sunatullo JONBOBOEV**  
University of Central Asia/  
Tajikistan  
**Markus KAISER**  
Kazakh-German University/  
Kazakhstan  
**Hasan Ali KARASAR**  
Cappadocia University/Türkiye  
**Ulvi KESER**  
Girne American University/Turkish  
Republic of Northern Cyprus  
**Mehmet Akif KIRECCI**  
Social Sciences University of  
Ankara/Türkiye  
**Recep KOK**  
Dokuz Eylül University/Türkiye  
**Jonathon MAHONEY**  
Kansas State University/USA  
**Erica MARAT**  
National Defence University/USA  
**Firat PURTAS**  
Hacı Bayram Veli University/  
Türkiye  
**Li-Chen SIM**  
Zayed University/UAE  
**Muhittin SIMSEK**  
Marmara University/Türkiye  
**Oktay Firat TANRISEVER**  
Middle East Technical University/  
Türkiye  
**Cengiz TOMAR**  
Akhmet Yassawi University/  
Kazakhstan  
**Kristopher WHITE**  
KIMEP University/Kazakhstan  
**Musa YILDIZ**  
Gazi University/Türkiye  
**Salih YILMAZ**  
Yildirim Beyazit University/Türkiye

## CONTENT

### ARTICLES

- Fulya AKGUL DURAKCAY**  
Hungary's Position on the Russia-Ukraine  
War and its Implications for  
Cooperation in the Visegrad Group 7
- Kubilay ATIK** 27  
Diplomatic Dexterity: Mongol  
Qaghans of the Yuan Dynasty and  
the Quest for East Asian Hegemony
- Zhengizkhan ZHANALTAY** 45  
Agricultural Development of Kazakhstan
- Seyit Ali AVCU**  
Relations Between Türkiye and China  
in the Context of Belt and Road Initiative:  
Challenges and Prospects 59
- Merve Suna OZEL OZCAN** 75  
New Game Changer Power in Eurasia:  
Shanghai Cooperation Organization

### BOOK REVIEW

- Kanat MAKHANOV** 91  
Climate Change in Central Asia:  
Decarbonization, Energy  
Transition and Climate Policy

## ARTICLES

<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2023.4-01>

IRSTI 11.25.91

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Research Article

## **HUNGARY'S POSITION ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR COOPERATION IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP**

Fulya AKGUL DURAKCAY <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dokuz Eylul University, 35210, Izmir, Türkiye

fulya.akgul@deu.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0003-0200-7911

---

Received: 01.09.2023

Accepted: 21.10.2023

---

### **ABSTRACT**

Visegrad Group (V4) composed of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia is a significant subregional partnership that has influenced the European Union's policies particularly in the area of migration policies. Although the group does not always speak with one voice in every policy area, Hungary became particularly estranged from the V4 due to its differing position on the Russia-Ukraine war. This study analyses the implications of Hungary's stance on the Russia-Ukraine war for the V4 cooperation. With this aim, it overviews the importance of the V4 in furthering Hungary's interests, searches for economic and political considerations influencing Hungary's position on the Russia-Ukraine war, and discusses the diverging positions of the rest of the block on the war with its implications for the V4 cooperation. The study benefits from the analysis of primary sources such as the V4 declarations and official statements, Hungarian presidency programs, Orbán's statements as well as the news and the secondary research. The study finds out that Hungary endorses the unified EU stance as long as it does not contradict its core interests among which its energy security prevails. Yet, Hungary's differing position on the war from that of the EU and the V4 by being pro-Russian as a result of being pro-Hungarian stems from its divergent views on security and foreign policy objectives. Although Hungary's stance on the war has affected the V4 cooperation adversely at the beginning, as there is no clear end to the Russia-Ukraine war soon, Hungary's partners shifted their attitudes to focus on their shared interests inside the V4 bloc rather than on what separates them.

**Keywords:** Hungary, Visegrad Group, Russia-Ukraine war, foreign policy, European Union.

## INTRODUCTION

The Visegrad Group (V4) was founded in 1991 by Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia (Czechoslovakia until 1993) to promote state-buildings through the establishment of independent and democratic systems free from the totalitarian elements of the Soviet era, and free market economies (Visegrad Group, 1991). Although collaboration was weak in the 1990s, they supported each other's integration process to the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Griessler, 2018: 146). Cooperation was improved once all four V4 countries were admitted as full members of the EU and NATO. Following that, they expressed a wish to continue their post-enlargement engagement with the EU and NATO on matters of mutual concern. In the Visegrad Declaration of 2004 (Visegrad Group, 2004a) and the Guidelines on the Future Areas of Visegrad Cooperation (Visegrad Group, 2004b), they reaffirmed their commitment to future EU enlargements for a "reunited" Europe and to increased cooperation in the Central European region by contributing to the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the Wider Europe.

Subregional partnerships are of significance to further their interests in EU politics. As a framework for cooperation among the four Central European states, even though it does not have a permanent institutionalized structure, these countries have found ways for regular collaboration both within the V4 and the EU which is their higher priority. It has become a routine for the heads of the V4 governments to come together ahead of the EU summits. There is a wide range of policy areas for collaboration among which energy policy, the Eastern neighbourhood and defence policy prevail. This subregional partnership has proven to be a valuable platform for their common needs and goals to be better represented and articulated. Yet, it is not always the case for the V4 countries to agree on common bargaining positions and speak with one voice (Toro et al., 2014: 368-377).

The Russia-Ukraine war of 2022 has emerged as a significant cleavage among the V4. Since the beginning of the war, the EU has emphasized the necessity of acting with one voice and solidarity in its policies towards Russia to protect the security interests of the Union and the continent against which Russian aggression has been identified as a threat. However, due to several reasons such as economic ties with Russia, Euroscepticism and the rise of populism, Hungary under the rule of Viktor Orbán has been reluctant to join the EU's united front. This study revolves around the question of how Hungary's stance on the Russia-Ukraine war affects the V4 cooperation. Firstly, it searches for Hungary's position on the V4's collaborative initiatives and common interests under the rule of Viktor Orbán since 2010. Then, it ascertains the economic and political considerations influencing Hungary's initial response and evolving stance on the war. Lastly, the study evaluates the diverging positions of the V4 countries on the Russia-Ukraine war as a potential but suppressed area of conflict on the basis of these countries' diverging security approaches. The study benefits from the analysis of primary sources such as the V4 declarations and official statements, Hungarian presidency programs, Orbán's statements as well as the news and the secondary research. This study seeks to contribute to the contemporary literature



by providing an in-depth analysis of Hungary's position on the Russia-Ukraine war and its implications of the V4 cooperation with the inclusion of its populist and Eurosceptic national policies and their reflections on foreign policy.

## **THE VISEGRAD GROUP'S ROLE IN FURTHERING HUNGARY'S INTERESTS**

When Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia have fulfilled their aims of integrating into Euro-Atlantic structures, the V4 has turned into a platform for an opportunity for its members to pursue their national interests at the regional level as well as the EU level with a view to find supporting partners. Hungary acknowledged "to defend Hungarian national interest at all times" while introducing its programme for the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in January 2011. The Orbán government's 2011 strategy named the V4 as a crucial instrument for Hungarian foreign policy (Arato and Koller, 2018: 91). Besides, the V4 has increased its significance for Hungary under the governments of Orbán since Hungary has departed from the notion of liberal democracy and the values that the EU stands for in terms of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. As its democratic backsliding brought about criticisms by the European Commission and the European Parliament as well the actions taken within the context of infringement cases (Akgul Durakcay, 2023), the Hungarian government has demonstrated a tendency to view cooperation within the V4 as a tool to avoid Western isolation and to balance the "dictate" of Brussels (Sadecki, 2014: 33).

In line with this stance, Hungary uploaded its foreign policy priorities to the V4 agenda during its presidencies of the Group. When the Hungarian presidency programs since 2010 are analysed, it is seen that one of the priority issues in Hungary's foreign policy is energy security. Hungary is a country which is both dependent on the import of energy resources and lags behind the EU's energy policy transformation based on environmental concerns and pressures. For these reasons, the V4 platform is crucial for Hungary and the other members of the Group to develop new energy policy directions and solutions that would enable them to sustain national and regional energy security by decreasing the impairing effects of international interdependence (Dyduch and Skorek, 2020: 1-2). In this regard, during the 2013-2014 Hungarian Presidency of the V4, energy as a key policy area was placed under high-level working groups (Arato and Koller, 2018: 95). Energy security was named as a priority of the Hungarian Presidency of 2013-2014 with a view to reduce energy dependency through energy market integration and energy diversification (Visegrad Group, 2013).

Besides, energy security is an issue where the acknowledged common position of the V4 in the report of the Hungarian Presidency diverged from that of the EU concerning nuclear energy. In its report, the Hungarian Presidency pointed to their desire for the EU to consider nuclear energy as one of the supported low-carbon technologies, and to have their rights over national choices of the energy mix as they find most suitable without the EU's discrimination against nuclear energy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2014: 8). During its 2021-2022 Presidency of the V4, Hungary maintained nuclear energy

as one of its key areas for cooperation in its programme (Visegrad Group, 2021). At the meeting of the representatives of the European Affairs Committees of the Visegrad Group countries in April 2022, energy security which is of high significance due to the energy dependencies of the V4 countries on Russia was placed high on the agenda within the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. The V4 countries emphasized the need to gradually end the EU energy dependence on Russia, to diversify energy resources, to include nuclear energy as a green energy, and to take immediate actions to ease the impact of rising energy prices (Visegrad Group, 2022a).

Hungary's foreign policy document of 2011 put forth a value-based composition of national interests emphasizing national belonging that goes beyond the territorial borders of Hungary (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 2011: 4, qtd. in Griessler, 2018: 147). In this regard, promoting good relations with its immediate neighbourhood and regional interests came forward as a priority in Hungary's foreign policy. Since there are Hungarian minorities in the several countries of the neighbourhood, it is in Hungary's national interest to have good relations with and stability in the region. For this reason, cooperation with the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries is prioritized by Hungary and all the V4 countries making the platform crucial for Hungarian foreign policy priorities since Hungary considers the EU membership as the most successful instrument for stability and development of the region (Griessler, 2018: 141-147).

Within this context, during the 2013-2014 Hungarian Presidency of the V4, the Western Balkans and Croatia were included under the V4 plus (V4+) formats in V4+ meetings in 2013 (Arato and Koller, 2018: 95). Hungary during its 2017-2018 Presidency of the V4 composed its programme with the motto of "V4 connects" emphasizing political, economic, historical and cultural connections among the four countries as well as the role of the bloc in the EU. It underlined cooperation with Austria, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria within the V4+ formats, strengthening cooperation in security, defence and migration as a bloc within the EU to represent regional interests, prioritizing the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, and the Eastern Partnership (Visegrad Group, 2017). The main support for the candidacy of the Eastern Partnership countries came after the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 which coincided with the second half of the Hungarian V4 presidency. At the meeting of the representatives of the European Affairs Committees of the Visegrad Group countries in April 2022, the V4 condemned the acts of Russia, held Russia directly responsible for the war against Ukraine, undertaken to support the unified EU measures against Russia and supported European integration of Ukraine in the form of candidacy (Visegrad Group, 2022a).

Another significant area of concern for Hungarian foreign policy is national sovereignty. This has had utmost reflections on its migration policy. With the EU's migration crisis in 2015, Hungary tackled the issue of migration as a security threat requiring Hungary to protect its borders and the nation which brought about a stance that has been Eurosceptic due to contrary attitudes and policies (Canveren and Akgul Durakcay, 2017: 864-866). Arguing in favour of national-level immigration policies, Hungary began to upload its anti-

immigration policy as a new topic of cooperation in the V4 platform. Arato and Koller (2018: 99) point out that the V4 in its statement of the 2015-2016 Czech Presidency included a paragraph at Hungary's request on the insufficiency of the EU's migration policies to deal with the migration problem and their preference for voluntary options regarding resettlement and relocation in June 2015 even before the influx of migrants did not approach their borders. The V4 has turned into a "significant collective actor" (Cabada and Waisova, 2018: 10) influencing the EU's policy direction.

Hungary obtained the support of the V4 countries at the EU meetings for its position on strengthening the border controls, bringing up the security component of the issue and putting the term "migration" in use instead of the term "refugee" preferred by the EU (Arato and Koller, 2018: 99). In addition to diplomatic and political backing, Hungary received security assistance from the V4 countries (Visegrad Group, 2015). As opposed to the EU's shared responsibility and solidarity emphasis, the V4 has long refused the mandatory quota system to redistribute migrants –with a brief shift in Poland's position– and acted as a "unit" at subsequent EU meetings to find a mutual standpoint in defending their interests (Bauerova, 2018: 100-104). Reflecting a sharp division between the V4's "nationalist Europe" and the EU's "open, multicultural and cosmopolitan Europe" visions, the V4's alternative of flexible solidarity that would enable each member state to decide on their contribution to the EU's migration policy showed their sovereigntist and Eurosceptic approach (Strnad, 2022: 73-75). Another common attitude on the area of migration by the V4 was adopted during the second half of the Hungarian V4 presidency which coincided with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. V4 Prime Ministers at their meeting in March 2022 decided to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine and to support Ukrainian refugees especially in the V4 countries through the International Visegrad Fund (Visegrad Group, 2022b).

Hungary's another foreign policy interest is in a strong Europe. For this sake, during its presidencies of the V4, Hungary repeated the importance of defence as a key area of cooperation. In line with this, during Hungary's 2013-2014 Presidency of the V4, Budapest Declaration (Visegrad Group, 2014a) was adopted to further V4 security and defence cooperation and to continue the preparations for the V4 Battleground to establish it as a permanent force as complementary to the European and transatlantic security policies. Hungary uploaded its vision regarding the future of the EU in line with its populist foreign policy emphasizing sovereignty and the interests of the people, and resulting in challenging the EU integration (Visnovitz and Jenne, 2021: 691-693). During its 2017-2018 Presidency of the V4, Hungary projected its vision for Europe as a "strong Europe of strong nations" where the opinion of every member state as well as the "voice" of European "citizens" would be heard more (Visegrad Group, 2017). The V4 countries issued a joint statement titled "Stronger Together" in 2018 and they presented their common position on the future of Europe to tackle the issue of democratic legitimacy by strengthening the role of national parliaments and considering the citizens' wishes (Visegrad Group, 2018). "Recharging Europe" was the motto of Hungary during its 2021-2022 Presidency of the V4. In its programme, Hungary maintained its key areas for cooperation such as nuclear energy, defence, migration and the immediate

neighbourhood. Hungary repeated the V4's interest in the "strong" and efficient EU which is possible through increasing the role of the member states in its decision-making procedures (Visegrad Group, 2021).

## HUNGARY'S STANCE TOWARDS RUSSIA AFTER 2010 AND ITS POSITION ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

As of 2010, "Eastern opening" appeared to play a significant role in Orbán's economic recovery plans to establish closer economic cooperation with the emerging powers of China, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia and Russia in an attempt to diversify Hungary's economic relations as a remedy for the negative effects of the economic crisis experienced by Hungary's Western partners (Sadecki, 2014: 36-37). As Russia became the prominent partner in the Eastern Opening, it was deemed as Hungary's "most important and strategic partner outside of the EU". Their economic partnership was enhanced with the opening of Hungarian trade houses in Russia, supporting the South Stream project and agreeing to build the Paks II in 2014 as a new nuclear power station in collaboration with Rosatom to be financed by Russian banks. This in return increased Hungary's energy and political dependence on Russia (Gyori et al., 2015: 56-57). The development of deeper energy cooperation has gone hand in hand with political, economic, and cultural ties so Prime Minister Orbán has stated his belief in expanding the cooperation of the EU and NATO with Russia (Sadecki, 2014: 38).

Just after these developments, the Ukrainian conflict became a prominent issue in on the agendas of Hungary, the V4 and the EU. Hungary supported Ukraine's European integration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2014: 24), territorial integrity and sovereignty after the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014 in its official statements within the V4 group (Visegrad Group, 2014b). The main issue for Hungary in the Ukrainian conflict was the safety and rights of Hungarian minorities living in Ukraine. Hungarian foreign policy under Orbán placed a much greater emphasis on the national minorities residing in Hungary's bordering countries than before with the state assuming the responsibility for these minorities' fate in a constitutional provision (Sadecki, 2014: 34-36). Therefore, Orbán raised the rights of the ethnic Hungarians living in Ukraine<sup>2</sup> because of their disenfranchisement to adopt Hungarian as the second

---

2 During the nation-building processes of both Hungary and Ukraine, their borders have shifted in accordance with the ends of the two World Wars, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Western region of Ukraine, Transcarpathia bordering Hungary, belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Romania, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Ukraine respectively during these processes (Dunai, 2023). According to the latest Ukrainian census, the Hungarian minority is the largest minority in the region of Transcarpathia, representing the 12.1% of the population and Hungarian language representing the 12.7% of the language structure (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001). The number of Hungarian speakers in Ukraine amounts to around 150.000 (The New York Times, 2018 qtd. in European Parliament, 2019). The issue of Hungarian minority rights has become controversial between the two countries since Ukraine embarked on changes in language, education and minority laws to curb the minority rights of Russians in Ukraine as a response to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the conflicts in the Eastern region. Yet, Hungarian minority rights have been adversely affected by virtue of these changes. In this regard, Ukraine abolished in 2014 the entitlement of minori-

official language due to the abolishment of the language law as main concerns (Feledy, 2015: 75).

While the official statements issued under the V4 and the EU supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Orbán emphasized Hungary's neutrality in the conflict which has shifted towards a pro-Russian stance by virtue of increasing economic cooperation especially in the energy sector between Hungary and Russia (Kusumawardani and Dharmaputra, 2014: 456). Hungary's decision to freeze the reverse flow of gas to Ukraine in September 2014 was judged as to be sided with Gazprom and Russian interests (Feledy, 2015: 76). Although Hungary joined the EU in its sanctions regime against Russia after the annexation of Crimea, Orbán condemned the sanctions by calling them "shooting oneself in the foot" to underline that they harmed the EU economy more than that of Russia (BBC News, 2014) and being "against Hungarian national interests" (Gyori et al., 2015: 57). Apart from this rapprochement between Hungary and Russia, Orbán praised Russia along with other countries such as China and India as for their success without following the Western path of liberal democracy in his speech in 2014. In this regard, Orbán declared his intentions to construct Hungary as "an illiberal state" to compete in "the great global race" (Orbán, 2014, qtd. in Kusumawardani and Dharmaputra, 2014: 458) to signal his further closeness to Putin's Russia. During the first year of the Ukrainian conflict, Orbán maintained his preference for a long-term European security structure where Russia would be a part of it as well as declaring 2015 as "the Hungarian-Russian year of culture" (Feledy, 2015: 73-74).

Yet, Orbán aimed to restore Hungarian sovereignty over its energy policy by reducing its energy dependency on Russia (Feledy, 2015: 72). Hungary is dependent on Russia for natural gas, oil and nuclear fuels. Already in its "National Energy Strategy 2030", Hungary clearly stated that Russia is Hungary's most important energy provider in natural gas and oil sectors but emphasized the importance of energy security of Hungary as a vulnerable country due to its dependence on this highly strategic geopolitical issue. In this regard, staying out of international conflicts was chosen as a path to follow. Besides, with the slogan of "independence from energy dependence", diversification of sources as well as alternative transportation routes were made the pillar of its national energy strategy (Ministry of National Development, 2012: 18-19). However, Hungary became more dependent on Russia especially in natural gas. In 2017, 95% of Hungary's natural gas imports came from Russia while its share was 82.7% in 2009 (Eurostat, 2009, 2017, qtd. in Visnovsky, 2020: 351). Reflecting the energy dependency on Russia, Orbán argued for a reversal of the EU sanctions on Russia and instead supported the idea of a European army that would restrain and balance Russia (Baczynska and Chalmers, 2020). Just before the Russia-Ukraine war of 2022, Russia kept its ranking as the top natural gas provider to

---

ties to make their native tongue the second official language once it is spoken by more than 10% of the region's population (RT News, 2014). In 2017, Ukraine passed a law which again eliminated the existing rights for ethnic minorities by making Ukrainian the only language in secondary education (Euractiv, 2017). Although Hungary has supported Ukraine's membership to the EU in principle, Prime Minister Orbán stated the restoration of the language rights of ethnic Hungarians as a condition for any support in the international arena (Gyori and Than, 2023).

Hungary counting to 95% of Hungary's natural gas imports (Csernus, 2023: 2). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 took place during the 2022 Hungarian national election campaign. For this reason, the war played a significant role in Orbán's election campaign, and Hungary's position on the war was influenced by both economic considerations and a narrative derived from Orbán's "authoritarian populism" consolidated by the emergency regime as a response to the Covid-19 (Adam and Csaba, 2022). By virtue of Orbán's Eastern Opening policy and his Euro-scepticism, he has taken a pro-Russia position but tried to balance it by fulfilling his formal obligations to the EU and NATO (Madlovics and Magyar, 2023: 27). "Hungary must stay out of this military conflict" and objection to sending any weapons and troops to Ukraine (Hungary Today, 2022) became the constant refrain of Orbán during and after the elections to distance Hungary from the war. Hungary announced that it would not provide weapons to Ukraine not to be part of the conflict and would not allow the transit of lethal weapons to Ukraine through its territory over its concerns for the security of Hungary and the Hungarian minorities in Ukraine on the basis of avoiding the risk of making these weapons targets of "hostile military action" (Bayer, 2022).

Orbán justified his position on the war with a discourse of Hungarian national interests by arguing that both sides in the conflict are focused on their own interests, and that "Neither the United States, nor Brussels would think with Hungarians' minds and feel with Hungarians' hearts," so that Hungary would be forced to act similarly to Russia and Ukraine. In this context, Orbán presented the elections as a choice between his party seeking peace, and the opposition taking a pro-European stance to drag the country into a bloody war (Than, 2022). Although Orbán condemned the Russian attack on Ukraine and acknowledged that he would not veto any sanctions against Russia as part of the EU unity (Szakacs, 2022), he emphasized that "Hungarians should not pay the price in the end" (Reuters, 2022).

According to the latest available official data Hungary's energy dependence increased from 53.7% in 2021 to 64.2% in 2022 (Hungarian Central Statistical Office). In this regard, concerns over energy supplies became a prominent issue for Hungary. Just before the emergency regime of the pandemic ended, Orbán announced a new state of emergency justifying it on the grounds of the war posing a constant danger to Hungary not just in physical terms but also in economic terms by threatening Hungarians' access to energy supplies and material security (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 2022). After Orbán's fourth consecutive victory in the April 2022 elections, the EU frozen most of the EU funds under cohesion and Covid recovery funds for Hungary and appealed for the first time against Hungary a rule of law conditionality mechanism that linked unblocking these funds to Hungary's reversing the rule of law erosion (Simon, 2023). Given the high inflation in the country, the lost value of its national currency, and the rising costs of refinancing the public debt as well as the suspension of the EU's development financing, the EU has been chosen as the scapegoat for all the economic difficulties Hungary has been facing with (Adam, 2023: 175).

Since the EU and its sanction regime against Russia were blamed as the reasons for economic turmoil and sharp price hikes in energy, Hungary challenged the

EU solidarity against Russia even more. Orbán not only refused to take part in the sixth sanctions package concerning the progressive ban on Russian oil exports to the EU and got exempted due to its concerns over energy security but also delayed its adoption in May 2022 (Herszenhorn et al., 2022). Orbán criticized the EU for trying to replace energy dependence on Russia with dependence on the USA. Hence, he objected to the EU's ruling out Russia as an option based on political reasons. Orbán approached energy security by emphasizing that Hungary "as a customer" should be independent in deciding from whom to buy its gas and oil whether on the basis of political or economic judgements based on its national interests (Orbán, 2022a).

Orbán continued his critical stance on the EU's sanction regime against Russia as a cause of the EU's economic recession. He judged these sanctions to be "ineffective" and portrayed the EU's solutions to help Ukraine as leading to "our own defeat" (Orbán, 2022b). In November 2022, Orbán stated that he refuses to be a part of any EU financial solution that would turn the EU into "a debt community" regarding the €18 billion aid package to Ukraine and prefers to provide aid to Ukraine on a bilateral basis (Orbán, 2022c). Therefore, Hungary blocked the €18 billion EU package of assistance to Ukraine in December 2022 on the grounds of leading to new common EU debt (Liboreiro, 2022). However, after the EU decided to lower the amount of frozen EU funds to Hungary under the new conditionality mechanism, Orbán decided to lift the veto in return (Tidey and Agence France Press, 2022).

Hungary's position on the Russia-Ukraine war remains unchanged. Hungarian government became the first EU member state to consult their citizens about the EU sanctions on Russia. According to the results, 97% of Hungarians who participated in the national consultation opposed sanctions that would have a significant negative impact. In this regard, an overwhelming majority of Hungarians opposes sanctions on oil, natural gas and nuclear energy as well as any other measure that would raise food costs or impact European tourism (MTI-Hungary Today, 2023). Orbán argued that the results signal Hungarians' desire to be heard in Brussels where "anti-war voices being suppressed" (Brader, 2023). Hungary is determined to continue economic relations with Russia through a new series of energy deals signed in 2023 based on "the security of Hungary's energy supply" regardless of "political preferences" (Gavin, 2023).

Orbán repeats his "Hungarians first" discourse by confirming that he will continue to veto sanctions against Russia in case they do harm Hungary's interests such as sanctions on Russian oil, natural gas and nuclear energy (Brader, 2023). Lately, Hungary linked the 11<sup>th</sup> package of sanctions against Russia with a separate issue concerning Hungarian companies and delayed its adoption (Moens et al., 2023). Orbán argues that Europe is in an indirect war with Russia because of arms deliveries to Ukraine by the EU members. At NATO's Vilnius Summit in July 2023, Orbán reiterated his calls for peace and ceasefire while objecting to the delivery of weapons to Ukraine due to his concerns over the security of Hungarians living in Transcarpathia, Ukraine. Besides, Orbán referred to the legitimate reason for NATO's existence as to protect its member states rather than performing military actions on the territories of other countries (Orbán, 2023).

## **RUSSIA AS THE GREATEST COMMON DIVISOR? IMPLICATIONS OF HUNGARY'S POSITION ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR FOR THE V4 COOPERATION**

Orbán's foreign policy position on the Russia-Ukraine war has caused disagreements in the V4. Although the V4 does not speak with one voice all the time, the Russia-Ukraine war became the most prominent issue creating diverging voices and diverging policies among the V4 countries. In opposition to Hungary's "neutral" position, the other three V4 countries have embraced a pro-EU, pro-Ukraine and anti-Russia stance on the war. Among the V4 partners, particularly Poland has become one of the biggest proponents of the strictest sanctions against Russia. Poland became the first NATO country to provide Ukraine with fighter jets (AP News, 2023). Apart from supporting Ukraine's EU and NATO memberships, it played a special role in serving as a base for the US deployment of armed forces (Kolozi, 2022). Similarly, the Czech Republic adopted a harsh stance on the Russia-Ukraine war. Apart from supporting the EU sanctions against Russia and being the first NATO country to provide Ukraine with tanks (PBS News 2022), the Czech Senate decided to declare the Russian army's activities in Ukraine to be genocide and large-scale crimes against humanity (Saidel, 2022). Slovakia also strongly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, actively supported the imposition of strong sanctions against Russia, and Ukraine's ambition to join the EU and NATO (Meseznikov and Butorova, 2022: 6-7). Slovakia has emerged as one of the countries taking the lead in supplying military and humanitarian supplies to Ukraine since Russia invaded Ukraine. 35 Russian diplomats were removed from Bratislava, several pro-Russian websites were shut down, and the secret services' pursuit of Russian intelligence cooperation was stepped up (Debiec, 2022). Slovakia became the second NATO member after Poland to send fighter jets to Ukraine (Janicek, 2023).

With having opposite attitudes on the Russia-Ukraine war, the harshest criticism in the V4 came from Poland. Poland's President Andrzej Duda condemned Hungary's position by stating that he finds it difficult to understand its position given the civilian casualties in Ukraine (Huseyinzade, 2022). Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki remarked that "the paths of Poland and Hungary have diverged" (Tilles, 2022) and criticized Orbán for delaying the ratification of Sweden and Finland's application to join NATO (Lopatka, 2022). When Orbán refrained from denouncing Russia directly for the incidents in Bucha, insisting that an inquiry be conducted first, the leader of Poland's ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) Jaroslaw Kaczynski lashed out by saying "When Orbán says that he cannot see what happened in Bucha, he must be advised to see an eye doctor" (Jack, 2022). Poland and the Czech Republic declined to attend a meeting of V4 defence ministers that was scheduled in Hungary during its V4 Presidency because of Hungary's position on Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Euronews, 2022a). Along with these publicly criticisms, there were other indications of estrangement such as Poland's cancellation of the Polish-Hungarian Friendship Day in 2022 (Boyse, 2023).

The Czech Republic took a similar stance with Poland concerning Hungary's position as well as its effects on the V4 cooperation. Its defence minister Jana



Cernochova, in addition to declining to attend the meeting aforementioned, criticized Orbán's pro-Russian stance due to his preference for "cheap Russian oil" over "Ukrainian blood" (Euronews, 2022b). The Czech Republic's Prime Minister Petr Fiala referred to the V4 framework to be not its best times because of Hungary's divergent attitudes prevented the cooperation "to proceed as well as in the past" (Lopatka, 2022). He also expressed that Hungary's decision to pay for the Russian gas supplies in Russian currency is unacceptable for the Czech Republic who is also heavily dependent on Russian gas (Zachova, 2022). The Czech Republic's Foreign Minister Hungary's refusal to support any sanctions against Russian energy exports by referring to Orbán's disregard for European unity (Gencturk, 2022).

The tension caused by Orbán's position on the Russia-Ukraine war stems from the dissimilarities in the perception of security, and foreign policy interests among the V4 countries. Contrary to Hungary, the other three countries see Russian aggression against Ukraine as a threat to their own security. Poland PiS leader Kaczynski back in 2020 suggested for NATO troops to be "combat ready" in Eastern Europe for deterrence against Russian aggression (Rettman, 2020). Poland has a history of having a strong dedication to the transatlantic relationship to provide for its security by also supporting the strengthening NATO's Eastern European defence capabilities (Racz, 2014: 68). Although Poland has been a significant ally for Hungary in their coalition against the EU's Article 7 procedure for violation of its values particularly the rule of law (Holesch and Kyriazi, 2022) and adopted Eurosceptic and nationalist attitudes to reinstate Poland's sovereignty, it embraced a new role for European solidarity and defence of Ukraine with its strategic position on the Eastern border of the EU because of its security concerns over Russia that are feared to expand the conflict beyond Ukraine to reshape Poland (Higgins, 2022).

Russia has long been seen by the Czech Republic as both a partner and a rival as a result of historical Slavic ties and enormous economic potential, as well as a potential threat due to dependence on Russian oil and gas, and Russia's hostile attitude toward the West (Kratochvil and Rihackova, 2015: 19). Although Russia was not mentioned in the security strategy of 2015, Russia was named as a "direct threat" and "fundamental threat" to the Czech Republic's security in the new security strategy following the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Reuters 2023). Similar to the Czech Republic's traditional stance on Russia, Slovakia's security strategy of 2021 considers Russia to be both a partner and a key challenge for security. Because of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Eastern Europe was associated with potential threats including an armed attack against Slovakia (Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic, 2021a: 11-24). However, Slovakia's national defence strategy of 2021 mentioned the deteriorating security environment in Europe due to Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity but the threat of an armed aggression against Slovakia was seen as low risk due to Slovakia's NATO and EU memberships (Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic 2021b: 9-10). Yet, after the Russia-Ukraine War, Slovakia has expressed its security concerns in the case of the eventual defeat of Ukraine, which would embolden Russia to escalate its hostility toward Europe, with Slovakia as one of its first likely targets (Meseznikov and Butorova, 2022: 7).

Given the different security approaches among the V4 partners, Hungary became isolated within the bloc for the first year of the Russia-Ukraine war. Although Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have not changed their attitudes towards Hungary's stance on the Russia-Ukraine war, it appears that particularly Poland shifted its focus to represent their common interests in the EU and the V4 by referring to Hungary as a family member of their Central European "house" (Zgut-Przybylska, 2023). The V4 countries have recently displayed more cohesion with defence ministers attending a meeting in Slovakia in mid-June 2023 in place of the one that they had cancelled in Hungary. This in return was interpreted by Hungary as a sign of the bloc's capability and willingness to cooperate for the security of the region rather than focusing on their differences. The V4 prime ministers gathered once more to talk about several aspects such as regional security, EU defence capabilities and migration as areas that make their collaboration the strongest (Boyse, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

Hungary under the rule of Prime Minister Orbán since 2010 has pursued a nationalist agenda with a view to further its interests on every platform. When the declarations, official statements, and Hungarian presidency programs of the V4 are analysed, it is seen that the V4 has played a significant role as a subregional cooperation for Hungary to upload its foreign policy priorities such as energy security, good relations with neighbours, and a national immigration policy. Recent Hungarian presidencies of the V4 have also exemplified Orbán's Eurosceptic and populist attitudes with his focus on strengthening the role of nation-states in the EU as well as the desire of the Hungarian citizens to be heard more loudly in the EU to shape the EU's future to a more sovereigntist direction. Besides, the V4 cooperation has seemed to be an alternative to refrain from the isolation stemming from Hungary's divergence from the EU norms and values termed as the rule of law crisis.

It is seen in the analysis that since the beginning of the war, Orbán has followed a foreign policy centred on Hungary's actorness as a sovereign nation-state to take its own decisions based on its national interests. Therefore, its support for the EU's sanction regime against Russia as a general discourse shows the lowest common denominator for its support for the Euro-Atlantic integration. Hungary endorses the unified EU stance as long as it does not contradict its vital interests among which its energy security prevails. In this way, arguing against the EU's sanctions against Russia on the energy sector and the transfer of any military assistance to Ukraine under the pretence of "neutrality" render Hungary's position on the war pro-Russian by virtue of being pro-Hungarian as well as anti-Ukrainian by virtue of considering the rights and security of the Hungarian minorities in Ukraine.

As the analysis has shown, the V4 has served as an opportunity to promote Hungarian national interests in the areas where the political agendas of all countries are converged. Energy security and diversification of energy sources with an emphasis on nuclear energy prevails as one of the utmost areas of collaboration. Yet, as the V4 does not always speak with one voice, the Russia-

Ukraine war approved itself to be a divider issue. Contrary to Hungary's position, its V4 partners have followed the EU's united stance on the Russia-Ukraine war despite their own energy dependencies on Russia. Although foreign policy has not constituted a common ground for the V4 cooperation, the divergent voices and divergent policies resulted in the cooperation within the V4 group to be adversely affected at the beginning of the war. The conflict sparked by Orbán's diverging stance from that of the EU based on its populist, sovereigntist and Eurosceptic foreign policy revealed the V4 states' divergent views on security and foreign policy objectives regarding both Russia and the European integration. The other three countries, in contrast to Hungary, associate the Russian aggression towards Ukraine as a danger to their own security while Hungary focuses on the economic considerations and political gains to consolidate his hold on power. Yet, although Hungary's position on the Russia-Ukraine war had negative implications for the V4 cooperation as Hungary was the subject of naming and shaming at the first year of the war, as there is no foreseeable end to the Russia-Ukraine war in the near future, Hungary's V4 partners seem to further their shared interests such as regional security, EU defence capabilities and migration instead of focusing on what divides them.

## REFERENCES

Adam, Zoltan (2023). “Politicizing war: Viktor Orbán’s right-wing authoritarian populist regime and the Russian invasion of Ukraine”, in *The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-Wing Populism in Europe*, Gilles Ivaldi and Emilia Zankina (Eds.), 168-185, Brussels: European Center for Populism Studies.

Adam, Zoltan and Ivan Csaba (2022). “Populism unrestrained: Policy responses of the Orbán regime to the pandemic in 2020–2021”. *European Policy Analysis* 8: 277-296.

Akgul Durakcay, Fulya (2023). “The European Union’s policies to protect the rule of law in the case of democratic backsliding in Hungary”. *Akademik Hassasiyetler* 10(22): 01-28.

AP News (2023). “Poland to be 1<sup>st</sup> NATO member to give Ukraine fighter jets”. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-poland-russia-war-jets-migs-6d843ccbd50fef5f96091a5bff8f3e01/>. Accessed: 13.08.2023.

Arato, Krisztina and Boglarka Koller (2018). “Hungary in the Visegrad Group”, in *Central and Eastern Europe in the EU: Challenges and Perspectives under Crisis Conditions*, Christian Schweiger and Anna Visvizi (Eds.), 90-105, London and New York: Routledge.

Baczynska, Gabriela and John Chalmers (2020). “Hungary’s Orban says EU should reverse Russia sanctions, not push Cyprus on Belarus”. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-orban-russia-belarus-idUSKCN26G2IU/>. Accessed: 31.07.2023.

Bauerova, Helena (2018). “Migration policy of the V4 in the context of Migration Crisis”. *Politics in Central Europe* 14(2): 99-120.

Bayer, Lili (2022). “Hungary refuses to allow weapons transit to Ukraine”. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-foreign-minister-peter-szijjarto-weapon-transit-ukraine/>. Accessed: 15.08.2023.

BBC News (2014). “Hungary PM Orban condemns EU sanctions on Russia”. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28801353/>. Accessed: 28.07.2023.

Boyse, Matt (2023). “Visegrad 4 is limping along”. *GIS*. Retrieved from <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/visegrad-4-political/>. Accessed: 28.08.2023.

Brader, Adam (2023). “Orbán: Hungary must stay out of the war”. *Hungarian Conservative*. Retrieved from [https://www.hungarianconservative.com/articles/current/orban\\_hungary\\_interview\\_sanctions\\_war\\_soros/](https://www.hungarianconservative.com/articles/current/orban_hungary_interview_sanctions_war_soros/). Accessed: 20.08.2023.

Cabada, Ladislav and Sarka Waisova (2018). “The Visegrad Group as an ambitious actor of (Central-)European foreign and security policy”. *Politics in Central Europe* 4(2): 9-20.

Canveren, Onder and Fulya Akgul Durakcay (2017). “The analysis of the Hungarian government’s discourse towards the migrant crisis: A combination of securitization and euroscepticism”. *Yönetim ve Ekonomi* 24(3): 857-876.

Csernus, Dóra (2023). *Country Report Hungary – Energy Without Russia: The*

*Consequences of the Ukraine war and the EU Sanctions on the Energy Sector in Europe*. Budapest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Debiec, Krzysztof (2022). "Slovakia: strategic dilemmas after the Russian invasion of Ukraine". *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*. Retrieved from <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2022-05-10/slovakia-strategic-dilemmas-after-russian-invasion-ukraine/>. Accessed: 10.08.2023.

Dunai, Marton (2023). "Hungarians in Ukraine turn against Viktor Orbán". *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/88d6ffab-5cab-4db1-bf43-d44a7eac00c8>. Accessed: 21.10.2023.

Dyduch, Joanna and Artur Skorek (2020). "Go South! Southern dimension of the V4 states' energy policy strategies – An assessment of viability and prospects". *Energy Policy* 140: 1-11.

Euractiv (2017). "Hungary wants EU to review Ukraine ties over minority languages law". Retrieved from <https://www.euractiv.com/section/languages-culture/news/hungary-wants-eu-to-review-ukraine-ties-over-minority-languages-law/>. Accessed: 21.10.2023.

Euronews (2022a). "Ukraine war: Poland's Kaczynski surprises by slamming Hungarian ally Orban on Ukraine". Retrieved from <https://www.euronews.com/2022/04/08/ukraine-war-poland-s-kaczynski-surprises-by-slamming-hungarian-ally-orban-on-ukraine/>. Accessed: 22.08.2023.

Euronews (2022b). "Ukraine war: Poland and Czech Republic refuse meeting over Hungary's stance on Russia". Retrieved from <https://www.euronews.com/2022/03/29/visegrad-defence-ministers-meeting-cancelled-over-hungary-s-stance-on-russia/>. Accessed: 21.08.2023.

European Parliament (2019). "Situation of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine". *Parliamentary question – E-002218/2019*. Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2019-002218\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2019-002218_EN.html). Accessed: 21.10.2023.

Feledy, Botond (2015). "Hungarian foreign policy and the crisis in Ukraine", in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Meseznikov (Eds.), 69-82, Warsaw: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

Gavin, Gabriel (2023). "Ukraine accuses Hungary of funding Russian war crimes with energy deals". *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-ukraine-russia-gas-deal-urges-eu/>. Accessed: 23.08.2023.

Gencturk, Ahmet (2022). "Czech Republic slams Hungary for refusal to back sanctions on Russian energy". *Anadolu Agency*. Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/czech-republic-slams-hungary-for-refusal-to-back-sanctions-on-russian-energy/2590836/>. Accessed: 26.08.2023.

Griessler, Christina (2018). "The V4 Countries' foreign policy concerning the Western Balkans". *Politics in Central Europe* 14(2): 141-164.

Gyori, Boldizsar and Krisztina Than (2023). "Hungary PM criticized Ukraine, says no rush to ratify Sweden's NATO bid". *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-pm-criticizes-ukraine-says-no-rush-ratify-swedens-nato-bid-2023-09-25/>. Accessed: 21.10.2023.

Gyori, Lorant, Bulcsú Hunyadi, Attila Juhász and Péter Krekó (2015). “Domestic Political Context since 1989: Hungary, Russia, Ukraine”, in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States’ Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Meseznikov (Eds.), 52-68, Warsaw: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

Herszenhorn, David M., Jacopo Barigazzi and Barbara Moens (2022). “After Orbán pipes up, Hungary skips Russian oil ban”. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/orban-hungary-eu-oil-ban-exempt-euco/>. Accessed: 23.08.2023.

Higgins, Andrew (2022). “War in Ukraine prompts a political makeover in Poland”. *NY Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/18/world/europe/poland-jaroslaw-kaczynski-ukraine-eu.html/>. Accessed: 28.08.2023.

Holesch, Adam and Anna Kyriazi (2022). “Democratic backsliding in the European Union: the role of the Hungarian-Polish coalition”. *East European Politics* 38(1): 1-20.

Hungarian Central Statistical Office. “6.1.1.2. Primary energy balance”. Retrieved from [https://www.ksh.hu/stadat\\_files/enc/en/ene0002.html](https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/enc/en/ene0002.html). Accessed: 21.10.2023.

Hungary Today (2022). “PM Orbán: Hungary must stay out of conflict”. Retrieved from <https://hungarytoday.hu/orban-ukraine-conflict-hungary-ukrainian-war/>. Accessed: 02.08.2023.

Huseyinzade, Huseyngulu (2022). “Polish president criticizes Hungary’s policy on Russian attack on Ukraine”. *Anadolu Agency*. Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/polish-president-criticizes-hungary-s-policy-on-russian-attack-on-ukraine/2547937>. Accessed: 20.08.2023.

Jack, Victor (2022). “Poland’s Kaczyński slams Orbán for refusing to condemn Bucha killings”. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-kaczynski-slams-hungary-orban-for-refusing-to-condemn-bucha-killings/>. Accessed: 22.08.2023.

Janicek, Karel (2023). “Slovakia, after Poland, agrees to give Ukraine Soviet jets”. *AP News*. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-mig-slovakia-jets-4d72dfd433950a23bea7655870ce0e24/>. Accessed: 10.08.2023.

Kolozsi, Adam (2022). “The War in Ukraine Drives a Wedge Between Poland and Hungary”. *Visegrad Insight*. Retrieved from <https://visegradinsight.eu/the-war-in-ukraine-drives-a-wedge-between-poland-and-hungary/>. Accessed: 15.08.2023.

Kratochvil, Petr and Vera Rihackova (2015). “Domestic political context since 1989: Russia as a dividing element in Czech society”, in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States’ Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Meseznikov (Eds.), 14-24, Warsaw: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

Kusumawardani, Damar and Radityo Dharmaputra (2014). “Hypocritical policy Viktor Orbán in Crimean annexation 2014”. *Proceedings of Airlangga Conference on International Relations (ACIR 2018) - Politics, Economy, and Security in Changing Indo-Pacific Region*, 455-461.

Liboreiro, Jorge (2022). "Ukraine war: Hungary blocks €18 billion in aid for Kyiv and deepens rift with EU". *Euronews*. Retrieved from <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/12/06/eu-ministers-delay-key-votes-on-tax-deal-and-ukraine-aid-over-hungary-impasse>. Accessed: 07.08.2023.

Lopatka, Jan (2022). "Czechs, Poles criticise Hungary's Orban amid divisions over Ukraine war". *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-easteuropa-idAFL1N32K160>. Accessed: 23.08.2023.

Madlovics, Balint and Balint Magyar (2023). "Kacynski's Poland and Orbán's Hungary: Different forms of autocracy with common right-wing frames in the EU". *Journal of Right-Wing Studies* 1(1): 1-36.

Meseznikov, Grigorij and Zora Butorova (2022). *Russia's war against Ukraine: A view from Slovakia*. Bratislava: Konrad Adaeur Stiftung.

Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic (2021a). "Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic". Retrieved from <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/30297/4638226/security-strategy-of-the-slovak-republic.pdf>. Accessed: 28.08.2023.

Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic (2021b). "Defence strategy of the Slovak Republic". Retrieved from [https://www.mosr.sk/data/files/4291\\_defence-strategy-of-the-slovak-republic-2021.pdf/](https://www.mosr.sk/data/files/4291_defence-strategy-of-the-slovak-republic-2021.pdf/). Accessed: 28.08.2023.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary (2014). "Report of the Hungarian presidency of the Visegrad Group July 2013 – June 2014". Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/annual-reports/>. Accessed: 06.07.2023.

Ministry of National Development (2012). "National Energy Strategy 2030". Retrieved from <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/a/b7/70000/Hungarian%20Energy%20Strategy%202030%20Summary.pdf/>. Accessed: 28.07.2023.

Moens, Barbara, Jacopo Barigazzi and Leonie Kijewski (2023). "New sanctions against Russia stuck in limbo over Greek-Hungarian protest". *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/new-sanctions-against-russia-stuck-limbo-greece-hungary-protest-ukraine-war/>. Accessed: 19.08.2023.

MTI-Hungary Today (2023). "Hungarians reject energy sanctions in national consultation". Retrieved from <https://hungarytoday.hu/hungarians-reject-energy-sanctions-in-national-consultation/>. Accessed: 25.08.2023.

Orbán, Viktor [@PM\_ViktorOrban] (2022a). "What is the European interest? To switch Russian energy dependence to US energy dependence? No. We need energy independence instead." *Twitter*. Retrieved from [https://twitter.com/PM\\_ViktorOrban/status/1580871667785420801/](https://twitter.com/PM_ViktorOrban/status/1580871667785420801/). Accessed: 28.08.2023.

Orbán, Viktor [@PM\_ViktorOrban] (2022b). "It is no help to Ukraine if the European economy goes bankrupt. We are threatened by years of recession due to a primitive and ineffective sanctions regime. A hike in European unemployment will not help. We must aid Ukraine in a way that does not lead to our own defeat." *Twitter*. Retrieved from [https://twitter.com/PM\\_ViktorOrban/status/1580469950774644736/](https://twitter.com/PM_ViktorOrban/status/1580469950774644736/). Accessed: 28.08.2023.

Orbán, Viktor [@PM\_ViktorOrban] (2022c). "Let me be crystal clear: we are

ready to support #Ukraine financially. In fact, we are the first EU country to pledge funds to the 18bn package requested by Ukraine. But we will do this on a bilateral basis. The #EU is not a debt community.” *Twitter*. Retrieved from [https://twitter.com/PM\\_ViktorOrban/status/1596169303329587201/](https://twitter.com/PM_ViktorOrban/status/1596169303329587201/). Accessed: 28.08.2023.

Orbán, Viktor [@PM\_ViktorOrban] (2023). “Instead of shipping weapons to Ukraine we should finally bring peace. Hungary stands firmly on the side of #peace at the #NATOSummitVilnius!” *Twitter*. Retrieved from [https://twitter.com/PM\\_ViktorOrban/status/1678788530200354816/](https://twitter.com/PM_ViktorOrban/status/1678788530200354816/). Accessed: 25.08.2023.

PBS News (2022). “How the Czech Republic is supporting Ukraine’s fight against Russia”. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-the-czech-republic-is-supporting-ukraines-fight-against-russia/>. Accessed: 10.08.2023.

Racz, Andras (2014). “The Visegrad Cooperation: Central Europe divided over Russia”, *L’Europe en Formation* 4(374): 61-76.

RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty (2022). “Orban imposes new state of emergency in Hungary, saying Ukraine war poses ‘constant danger’”. Retrieved from <https://www.rferl.org/a/hungary-orban-state-of-emergency-ukraine-war-russia/31866003.html/>. Accessed: 03.08.2023.

Rettman, Andrew (2020). “Poland calls for ‘NATO’ readiness on Russia”. *Euobserver*. Retrieved from <https://euobserver.com/rule-of-law/147271/>. Accessed: 28.08.2023.

Reuters (2022). “Hungary to stay out of Ukraine-Russia conflict, Orban says”. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-stay-out-ukraine-russia-conflict-orban-says-2022-02-27/>. Accessed: 15.08.2023.

Reuters (2023). “Czechs call Russia a threat, China a systemic challenge in new security strategy”. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/czechs-call-russia-threat-china-systemic-challenge-new-security-strategy-2023-06-28/>. Accessed: 28.08.2023.

RT News (2014). “Canceled language law in Ukraine sparks concern among Russian and EU diplomats”. Retrieved from <https://www.rt.com/news/minority-language-law-ukraine-035/>. Accessed: 21.10.2023.

Sadecki, Andrzej (2014). *In a State of Necessity: How Has Orban Changes Hungary*. Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies.

Saidel, Peter (2022). “The Russia-Ukraine War: May 11, 2022”. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-05-11/card/czech-republic-takes-further-steps-to-support-ukraine-YU9NwDZ1L1hQRtKge360-YU9NwDZ1L1hQRtKge360/>. Accessed: 05.08.2023.

Simon, Zoltan (2023). “How EU is withholding funding to try to rein in Hungary, Poland”. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-eu-is-withholding-funding-to-try-to-rein-in-hungary-poland/2022/12/30/ba3641fc-8818-11ed-b5ac-411280b122ef\\_story.html/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-eu-is-withholding-funding-to-try-to-rein-in-hungary-poland/2022/12/30/ba3641fc-8818-11ed-b5ac-411280b122ef_story.html/). Accessed: 06.08.2023.



State Statistics Committee of Ukraine (2001). "All-Ukrainian population census 2001". Retrieved from [http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/regions/reg\\_zakar/](http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/regions/reg_zakar/). Accessed: 21.10.2023.

Strnad, Vladislav (2022). "Les enfants terribles de l'Europe? The 'Sovereignist' Role of the Visegrád Group in the context of the migration crisis". *Europe-Asia Studies* 74(1): 72-100.

Szakacs, Gergely (2022). "Hungary will not veto EU sanction on Russia – Orban". *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-will-not-veto-eu-sanctions-russia-orban-2022-03-03/>. Accessed: 10.08.2023.

Than, Krisztina (2022). "Hungary will stay out of Ukraine war, PM Orban tells rally". *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/tens-thousands-rally-support-hungarys-orban-election-nears-2022-03-15/>. Accessed: 16.08.2023.

Tidey, Alice and Agence France Press (2022). "Hungary agrees deal and lifts veto on €18bn EU aid package for Ukraine". *Euronews*. Retrieved from <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/12/13/hungary-lifts-vetoes-on-ukraine-aid-and-corporate-tax-to-lower-frozen-eu-funds>. Accessed: 16.08.2023.

Tilles, Daniel (2022). "'The paths of Poland and Hungary have diverged,' says Polish PM". *Notes From Poland*. Retrieved from <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/07/30/the-paths-of-poland-and-hungary-have-diverged-says-polish-pm/>. Accessed: 21.08.2023.

Toro, Csaba, Eamon Butler and Karoly Gruber (2014). "Visegrád: The evolving pattern of coordination and partnership after EU enlargement". *Europe-Asia Studies* 66(3): 364-393.

Visegrad Group (1991). "Visegrad Declaration 1991 - Declaration on Cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in striving for European integration". Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412-2/>. Accessed: 01.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2004a). "Visegrad Declaration 2004 - Declaration of Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries after their accession to the European Union". Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412-1/>. Accessed: 01.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2004b). "Guidelines on the future areas of Visegrad cooperation". Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/cooperation/guidelines-on-the-future-110412/>. Accessed: 01.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2013). "Hungarian Presidency in the Visegrad Group (2013–2014)". Retrieved from [https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/20132014-hungarian#\\_Main%20Priorities/](https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/20132014-hungarian#_Main%20Priorities/). Accessed: 05.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2014a). "Budapest Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation". Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/budapest-declaration-of/>. Accessed: 06.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2014b). “Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries on Ukraine”. Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/statement-of-the-prime/>. Accessed: 20.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2015). “Joint Statement of the Heads of Government of the Visegrad Group Countries”. Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2015/joint-statement-of-the-150904/>. Accessed: 10.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2017). “2017-2018 Hungarian Presidency – V4 Connects”. Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/20172018-hungarian/>. Accessed: 13.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2018). “Stronger Together – Joint Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group”. Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/>. Accessed: 13.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2021). “V4 Recharging Europe – Programme of the Presidency”. Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/>. Accessed: 14.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2022a). “Conclusions of the Meeting of European Affairs Committees of V4 Parliaments”. Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/>. Accessed: 15.07.2023.

Visegrad Group (2022b). “Joint Communiqué on Providing Joint V4 Assistance to Refugees from Ukraine 8 March 2022”. Retrieved from <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/>. Accessed: 15.07.2023.

Visnovitz, Péter and Erin Kristin Jenne (2021). “Populist argumentation in foreign policy: the case of Hungary under Viktor Orbán, 2010–2020”. *Comparative European Politics* 19: 683-702.

Visnovsky, Radovan (2020). “Visegrad Group and Relations with Russia”. *VestnikRUDN. International Relations* 20(2): 347-355.

Zachova, Aneta (2022). “Prague pressures Budapest to change its Russia stance”. *Euractiv*. Retrieved from [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/prague-presses-budapest-to-change-its-russia-stance/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/prague-presses-budapest-to-change-its-russia-stance/). Accessed: 24.08.2023.

Zgut-Przybylska, Edit (2023). “Visegrad shaken to its core, Hungary in isolation”. *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*. Retrieved from <https://cz.boell.org/en/2023/01/09/visegrad-shaken-its-core-hungary-isolation/>. Accessed: 28.08.2023.

**DIPLOMATIC DEXTERITY: MONGOL QAGHANS OF THE YUAN  
DYNASTY AND THE QUEST FOR EAST ASIAN HEGEMONY**

Kubilay ATIK <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nevsehir Haci Bektas Veli University, 50300, Nevsehir, Türkiye

kubilayatik@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-7657-6645

---

Received: 24.10.2023

Accepted: 30.10.2023

---

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the foreign policy and diplomacy pursued by the Mongol Khans during the Yuan Dynasty (1268-1369), who held the titles of both Mongol qaghan and Chinese Emperor. Specifically, Qubilai Qaghan, who received the title of Khan at a qurultai held in the city of Shangdu, located in present-day Beijing, rather than the Orkhon region traditionally used for convening qurultais, and without the participation of all Mongol nobles, had to establish his legitimacy throughout his life both among the Mongols and the people he conquered in Asia. For this purpose, he utilized diplomacy and foreign policy as much as conquests. Within the scope of this study, the rhetoric and legitimacy foundations used in diplomacy are examined, taking into account not only the Goryeo kingdom in Korea, which became a vassal of the Mongol Empire but also regional states such as Japan, which did not acknowledge Mongol superiority and dominion, as well as diplomacy conducted with states in Southeast Asia and Europe. During this period, the Yuan Dynasty successfully blended elements of legitimacy belonging to China with those from the Turkic-Mongol tradition in its foreign policy, thereby leaving a lasting diplomatic legacy, especially in East Asia.

**Keywords:** Yuan Dynasty, Mongol Empire, diplomacy, China, Japan, Korea.

## INTRODUCTION

There is very little debate regarding when the Yuan dynasty ended. The establishment of the Ming Dynasty in China following the Mongols' defeat due to uprisings in China is traditionally assumed as the end of the Yuan dynasty. Although it is known that the Yuan Dynasty continued for a while longer in Mongolia under the name Dayan (Dayuan/大元), the year 1369 is generally accepted as an end date. On the other hand, the founder of the Yuan dynasty is a subject of debate, especially among Chinese historians. While many historians agree that Qubilai Qaghan was the founder of the Yuan dynasty, in Chinese historiography, the Yuan dynasty is sometimes started with Chinggis Qaghan, who, although not claiming to establish a dynasty, is honored in official histories with the title Taizu (太祖: great ancestor) (Zhou and Gu, 2003). Qubilai Qaghan, titled Yuan Shizu (元世祖) in the official history of the dynasty he founded, *Yuanshi* (元史), only finds a place in the fourth order.

However, the Yuan Dynasty is an exception both in the context of Chinese history and world history. Therefore, in this study, instead of the anachronistic viewpoint that sees the Mongols, Uighurs, Tibetans, Manchus, and now-extinct peoples like the Khitan and Tangut as extensions of Chinese history and thus China, an approach is adopted that aligns with the theory of North Asian peoples, which is accepted in Japan and the West (Sugiyama, 2011: 12–17). In this context, it is appropriate to start the foundation of the Yuan Dynasty with Qubilai Qaghan, because only Qubilai and his successors acted as a state with China at the center of their policies. Neither for Chinggis Qaghan nor for the qaghans preceding Qubilai, such as Ögödei and Möngke, was the center of gravity of the empire they ruled China. All three claimed to be the qaghan not of China, but of the Mongols and other nomads (Atik, 2018: 32). Indeed, it is Qubilai Qaghan who gave the dynasty the name 'Yuan,' and he also moved the capital from Karakorum to Shangdu (上都), where Beijing is located today. However, following Möngke's death, Qubilai Qaghan was elected as qaghan in a qurultai held not in the Orkhon region, considered sacred by all Turkic and Mongol tribes except the Kyrgyz (for whom the sacred region is Yenisei), but in Shangdu, where modern-day Beijing is located (Drompp, 1999: 47). This has had irreversible effects both for the Mongol Empire in general and for the Tului Ulus, which will henceforth be referred to as the Yuan Dynasty. After Möngke's death, Qubilai Qaghan convened a qurultai in Shangdu, which most of the Mongol nobles did not attend; his brother Ariq Boke, on the other hand, held a qurultai in Karakorum, the capital of the Mongols (Allsen, 1994: 147). Ultimately, the two brothers engaged in conflict, and although Qubilai Qaghan emerged victorious, from this point onward, the already tense relations among the Mongol ulus, named after the sons of Chinggis Qaghan, became further estranged (Xiao, 2010: 98). From this point onward, the Yuan Dynasty founded by Qubilai Qaghan entered into conflict with the Ilkhanate ruled by his brother Hülegü, as well as with Qaidu, the grandson of Ögödei, and the Chagatai and Golden Horde Khanates. This situation had both direct and indirect effects on Yuan-era foreign policy. From the time of Qubilai Qaghan, one of the main factors shaping the foreign policy of Yuan rulers was to have themselves recognized as the Qaghan of the Mongols.

## THE GRAND STRATEGY OF QUBILAI QAGHAN: A GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MONGOL CONQUEST OF THE SONG DYNASTY

Eurasian  
Research  
Journal  
Autumn 2023  
Vol. 5, No. 4.

In this context, it was necessary for Qubilai Qaghan to establish a position of superiority primarily over his rival, the Song Dynasty, and its allies. The Song Dynasty was the state that had resisted the Mongols the longest, a place that neither Chinggis Qaghan nor his successors could conquer despite multiple campaigns (to this would later be added Egypt and some other East Asian countries). In this regard, conquering the Song Dynasty was a unique opportunity for Qubilai Qaghan to prove his ‘qut’ (Mongolian: *süü*) and establish himself as a genuine Qaghan in the eyes of other Mongol leaders. Among the Turks and Mongols, one of the indicators of having received “qut” was the conquest of new territories (Tao, 2014: 45). Despite its establishment in northern China and its later conquest of the nine southern kingdoms, thereby putting an end to the emerging state system in Asia based on equality, the Song Dynasty lost Northern China to the Jürchen Jin Dynasty. However, Southern China, which during the Tang Dynasty was a place of exile where, according to Confucian rules, state officials were not to be executed but were expected to die in exile, reached a level of development comparable to Northern China during the period of the Five Dynasties. This was due to both northerners who settled there to escape war and the developing economic and trade relations (Clark, 2009: 157). After withdrawing from Northern China, which was first weakened by wars and raids in conflicts with the Khitans and then conquered by the Jürchens, the Song Dynasty focused its economic, social, and political development on the provinces of Southern China. The influence of statesmen from Fujian in the imperial court also played a significant role in this shift (Lim, 2010: 37). With its maritime trade with Southeast and West Asia, dense population, and temperate climate allowing for multiple rice harvests per year, Southern China rapidly developed economically, providing the Song Dynasty with a large population, a strong economy, and the resources to sustain a large army. Indeed, the Song Dynasty alone was larger than the entire Mongol Empire in terms of population and economic capacity (Sugiyama, 2010: 42). However, the real danger that the Song Dynasty posed for Qubilai Qaghan was ideological, despite its army nearing one million and its massive navy, which was likely the largest ever assembled up to that point. The almost machine-like Mongol army was making slow but steady progress in Southern China. Yet the real danger for the Mongols, who were more accustomed to field battles and had never before in their history governed large cities and a sedentary population of this size, was the potential for the local population to rebel against their authority. Qubilai Qaghan wisely knew that he needed to leverage what was known among Turkic and Mongol peoples as “qut/süü” and by the Chinese as “Tianming” (天命) in his favor (Tao, 2014: 72). About seventy years after him, the Mongols were easily expelled from China by a rebel who managed to gain popular support, which vindicates his foresight. The Neo-Confucianism that emerged during the Song period, which became even more fervent after the loss of Northern China, considered the homeland of the Chinese, to the Jürchens, was influential not only in the Song State but also in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, and had become

state ideology (Atik, 2012a: 108). This view, which also regarded the Khitans and Jürchens before the Mongols as barbarians, opposed the assumption of civilizing barbarians and advocated that civilized people should resist nomadic barbarians at all costs, without submitting to them (Atik, 2012b: 102). However, the adoption of such a view among the populace could have been extremely perilous for Mongol sovereignty. While they had successfully conquered China and Korea, the Mongols' dominance in these regions could not be sustained without the cooperation of the local populations. Therefore, after emerging victorious in his struggle against his brother Ariq Böke and gaining relative acceptance among other Mongols, Qubilai Qaghan faced his greatest military and diplomatic challenge in the form of the Song Dynasty and its allies. Diplomatic efforts to persuade Japan, Korea, and Vietnam to abandon their alliances with the Song were unsuccessful, except in the case of Korea. Indeed, until the Mongols captured the Song Dynasty, Qubilai Qaghan knew that he could not secure the southern border militarily from both the north and the south. Nevertheless, during the same period, Qubilai Qaghan initiated a containment operation, venturing westward through Tibet and then moving westward, conquering the small kingdoms in that region. This move effectively cut off the Song Dynasty from Vietnam, Burma, and other Southeast Asian states and placed the Song armies in a pincer between the Mongols from the north and the south.

However, when Möngke Qaghan died during this campaign, Qubilai Qaghan was forced to return, hold a qurultai to consolidate power, and assert his superiority over his brother, Ariq Böke. Ultimately, he entered Hangzhou in his last campaigns against the Song, capturing the majority of the imperial family. However, the last remnants of the Song forces, along with a prince who claimed to be the last Song emperor (as declared by those who had fled Hangzhou), initially took refuge in Fujian. Later, unable to hold their position there, they attempted to escape to Vietnam, but they did not receive the support they had hoped for from the Dai Viet Kingdom in Vietnam. Finally, they were defeated by the Mongol navy off the coast of Hainan Island. The prince who claimed to be the last Song emperor died in this battle. What is significant in terms of diplomacy here is that, up until almost the last moment, both Qubilai Qaghan, who claimed to be both a Mongol Qaghan and a Yuan Emperor, and the Song Dynasty, refrained from recognizing each other's superiority, just as the previous Liao and Jin Dynasties had existed alongside the Song Dynasty. The Song Dynasty resisted this proposal until the very end, only agreeing when the Mongols arrived at Hangzhou, but by then, it was too late.

The reasons for the Song Dynasty's rejection of this offer were mostly related to domestic politics. Jiao Sidao and his supporters, who came to power internally, were staunch Neo-Confucianists. The rival groups held similar views, and no political group in power advocated reconciliation with the Mongols. Furthermore, Jiao Sidao (賈似道) had exaggerated the military situation to the court, even though he had been defeated in Sichuan. Effective politicians in the Song court were not fully aware of the true extent of Mongol military power. However, what is interesting here is that despite his military power, Qubilai Qaghan's

concerns were not primarily military. This is evident because Qubilai Qaghan later sent large armies to Japan, Vietnam, Burma, and Java. The Song Dynasty accepting his superiority willingly, rather than through military force, would have given Qubilai Qaghan a great deal of legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese and other settled subjects. For the Mongols and their nomadic subjects, only conquest would prove his “qut”. This situation is more related to the legitimacy of dynastic changes in China. One of the strongest indicators that the new emperor possessed “tianming” was the voluntary abdication of the last emperor of the previous dynasty in favor of the new emperor, with an announcement that the heavens had blessed this emperor. From the fall of the Han Dynasty onwards, every new dynasty has sought to obtain such a proclamation from the last emperor of the previous dynasty. In this sense, Qubilai Qaghan acted more like a Chinese emperor than a Mongol qaghan. Neither his grandfather Chinggis Qaghan nor his uncle Ögödei or his brother Möngke had such a perception of legitimacy. As a result, the young emperor captured in Hangzhou was respected. The imperial family was kept under surveillance in the palace in Shangdu, with their incomes preserved. The last emperor became a monk in a Tibetan monastery. Thus, although he fulfilled the conditions necessary to be a traditional Chinese emperor (huangdi: 皇帝), at least in appearance, Qubilai Qaghan’s legitimacy concerns persisted. Surrounded by other Mongol khanates in the west and north, during the reign of Qubilai, the Yuan Dynasty saw that it had no opportunity to obtain Central Asia through war, as the wars against Qaidu had shown. In fact, after taking over the Song territories, the Yuan Dynasty did not need to conquer other countries in terms of population, economy, or land size. None of the other countries that were invaded were as large as the territories taken from the Song Dynasty. Nevertheless, during the reign of Qubilai, military campaigns continued to accompany diplomacy.

## **FROM CONQUEST TO KINSHIP: THE MONGOLS’ STRATEGY OF MARITAL ALLIANCES IN EAST ASIA**

The Mongols’ dominance in Korea, which they had conquered relatively early, relied largely on military power. The Mongols had to make several campaigns to suppress rebellions in Korea. The Goryeo Dynasty, which ruled over the Korean Peninsula, and after which the country is named today, claimed to be the continuation of the earlier Goguryeo (高句麗) Dynasty, which had previously ruled in Manchuria and the northern part of Korea. However, the Goryeo Dynasty, which ruled over a slightly larger territory than present-day Korea, was aware that it was not as powerful as Goguryeo had been. Unlike Goguryeo, which had defeated the powerful Tang Dynasty and the Türk Qaghanate and had not been subject to either of them until its demise, the Goryeo Dynasty acknowledged the superiority of the Liao and Jin Dynasties, founded by the Khitans and Jürchens. The strategic importance of the Korean Peninsula, serving as a buffer zone of sorts between Japan, China, and Manchuria, as well as providing the best bases for an attack from any of these three regions, if desired, to attack the others, has long been recognized. Attempting to take the

Goryeo Kingdom under control only militarily or only diplomatically was not feasible. Indeed, when the Japanese tried in the late 16th century with the Joseon Kingdom in Korea which replaced Goryeo, they failed. The Mongols, like the Khitans and Jürchens before them, resorted to a combination of brute force and diplomacy. After defeating the Korean king, the Mongols not only allowed him to remain on the throne but also protected the dynasty. Furthermore, Qubilai Qaghan married his daughter to the Korean crown prince and sent him back to Korea (where he had been held hostage in Beijing and had become close friends with Qubilai Qaghan) with Mongol troops to ensure a smooth transition. Subsequently, all Goryeo kings married Mongol princesses, and political loyalty was further cemented through both maternal and marital relationships. Relations with Korea and the Uighurs were crucial for the Mongols.

Unlike the Chinese, who were reluctant to marry the female members of the dynasty to foreigners and only did so when forced, the Mongols used marriage diplomacy very effectively. Throughout the Yuan Dynasty, many members of the dynasty married women from vassal states (Korean kings, Uighur Idiquts), thus binding these rulers to the dynasty through marriage ties. Additionally, in Southeast Asia, Western Asia, and India, some rulers were married to noble Mongol women. Indeed, the mysterious “Turkic-speaking” Queen of Khimer (Cambodia) mentioned in Ibn Battuta’s travelogue was probably one of them (Ibn Batuta, 2015: 237). However, the Yuan dynasty is an exception both in terms of Chinese history and world history. Therefore, in this study, the theory of North Asian peoples widely accepted in Japan and the West is adopted instead of the anachronistic perspective that considers the Mongols, Uighurs, Tibetans, Manchus, and extinct peoples like the Khitans and Tanguts as extensions of Chinese history, and therefore, as extensions of China.

In this context, it is correct to start the establishment of the Yuan dynasty with Qubilai Qaghan, because only Qubilai and his successors acted as a state that placed China at the center of their policies. Neither Chinggis Qaghan nor Ögödei and Möngke before Qubilai Qaghan considered China as the center of the empire they ruled, and all three claimed to be the qaghans of the Mongols and other nomadic peoples, not of China (Cleaves, 1982: 21). Furthermore, the Mongols did not see any issue in marrying the daughters of smaller states or tribes. Like their predecessors, the Khitans and Jürchens, they selected their chief consorts from specific tribes, especially the Önggüt, but they also had Korean, Uighur, and Chinese wives (there are distinctions between concubines and official wives, and they should not be confused). Unlike the political marriages in the Golden Horde with the Byzantines and Mamluks, in the Yuan Dynasty, no political marriages were arranged with any country that did not submit to the Mongols. This sets the Yuan Dynasty apart, distinguishing it from both other Mongol Khanates and other states (Zhang, 2013: 12). Certainly, in this regard, the Yuan Dynasty’s geographical proximity to only the Mongol Khanates outside of Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, and the fact that none of its neighboring states posed a threat, played a significant role. Although Qubilai Qaghan’s campaigns against Japan, Vietnam, Burma, and Java ended in defeat, none of these states



had the capability to acquire territory from the Yuan Dynasty. In fact, apart from Japan and Java, the others, despite winning battles, recognized Qubilai Qaghan as their superior, realizing that further conflicts with the Mongols would not benefit them (Atik, 2021: 24). In this sense, it can be said that the Yuan rulers primarily used marriage strategies to exert control over their allies.

Korea, compared to Japan, held much greater strategic importance for the Yuan Dynasty. In addition to being a wealthy country, the Korean Peninsula, due to its geographical location, has historically served as a crucial passage and control point between Japan, Manchuria, and China. As mentioned earlier, it is impossible to think of the Mongols' Japanese policy during the Yuan period without considering Korea. For the Mongols, along with Anatolia, one of the most strategically important vassal states was the Goryeo Kingdom in Korea. In fact, despite the challenges they faced in Anatolia due to the resistance of the Turkmen principalities against the Mongols, they assigned some of their most important generals to the task of gaining control over Anatolia (Agirnasli, 2018: 247–249). Similarly, in Korea, the Mongols were not only interested in plunder but also in controlling the Korean Peninsula. The primary reason for this was not just because the Korean Peninsula's geographical location made it suitable for controlling Manchuria, Japan, and Northeast China. The Mongols saw the conquest of Manchuria, the ancestral homeland of the Jürchens who founded the Jin Dynasty, as a safer way to enter China. By doing so, they aimed to prevent the Jurchens and other potential threats, including the Khitans who were still living in Manchuria, from attacking the Mongol army from behind when it was on a campaign or looting Mongol territory.

The Mongols also considered the linguistic, cultural, and lifestyle similarities between the Koreans and certain groups in the region, such as the Tungusic tribes, to be advantageous. These groups had historical ties similar to the Mongols and Turks. The Mohe people, for instance, were a group that lived in Manchuria and founded Balhae, and later, they would take on the names Jürchens and Manchus (Yildirim, 2018: 11–26). These groups shared linguistic and lifestyle similarities with each other and with the Koreans. The Balhae and its successor, the Goryeo Kingdom, ruled over Tungusic tribes in the region, known as Malgal, who would later become the Jürchens and Manchus. When the Khitans conquered Balhae in 927, many Korean and Tungusic refugees sought refuge in the Goryeo Kingdom, which accepted them. In response, the Goryeo Kingdom resisted the Khitans, even imprisoning the Khitan envoys and starving the camels they had offered as gifts by tying them to a bridge known as the Manbu Bridge (Choi, 2014). This led to Khitan campaigns against Goryeo starting in 947. The Goryeo kings had earlier rejected a joint attack proposal by the Song Dynasty against the Khitans and later, in 996, ended the war by marrying a Khitan princess. The conflict ended without a clear victory for either side, but the Khitans ceded the region up to the Yalu River, where some Malgal tribes lived, to Goryeo.

The relationship between Goryeo and the Khitans was complex, involving both conflict and cooperation. It's important to note that while these events

were taking place, the Goryeo Kingdom considered itself a “sibling” state to the Khitans. Later, when the Jürchens founded the Qing Dynasty, they did not heavily pressure Goryeo either. When the Qing Dynasty was first established, it sought to establish a “sibling” relationship with Goryeo. However, the Joseon Dynasty, which existed at the time, remained loyal to the Ming Dynasty and, influenced by Neo-Confucianism, resisted the Qing Dynasty, leading to conflicts.

So, the Mongols’ interest in controlling Korea was not only due to its strategic location but also because of the historical, cultural, and political factors in the region, including its relationships with neighboring states like the Khitans and Jürchens (Atik, 2012b: 203). When viewed in this context, the control of Korea was also important for controlling Manchuria. Since the Song Dynasty had not yet been overthrown by the time of Qubilai Qaghan’s reign, if Korea and Japan allied themselves, they could potentially encircle the Mongols in the northeast. However, the Mongols realized that in both of their invasions of Korea, despite the Korean military being defeated in battles, the guerrilla warfare tactics employed by the Koreans with popular support allowed them to wear down the Mongols in the long run. In 1258, after Choi Ui, who ruled the country on behalf of the king, passed away in Japan, the Goryeo Kingdom negotiated peace with the Mongols and sent Crown Prince Wonjong to the Yuan Dynasty.

In 1260, when Qubilai Qaghan became Qaghan, he not only arranged the marriage between his daughter and Wonjong but also sent this prince, who had grown up in the Yuan court, along with his daughter and the Mongol army to Korea, to ensure his succession after his father’s death. From that point on, all Goryeo kings not only became “küregen,” meaning a son-in-law of the Mongols but also gave their daughters to Mongol Khans in marriage. Like other Inner Asian and Turkic tribes, such as the Önggüts and Uighurs, who had similar relationships, the Koreans were integrated into the hierarchical structure of Mongol nations, and they held an exceptional status above the Chinese in this system.

After defeating the Song Dynasty, Qubilai Qaghan and his successors were determined not to allow the continuation of the Song Dynasty. Despite sparing the last Song Emperor’s life and allowing him to become a Buddhist monk, they eventually executed him. Qubilai Qaghan’s and his successors’ policies towards Korea were undoubtedly influenced not only by affection for the Koreans but also by their desire to control Manchuria and their importance as intermediaries with Japan. The success of the Quda-Küregen diplomacy between the Mongols and Goryeo played a significant role in the central role that Goryeo played in Yuan Dynasty’s foreign policy. This was not only due to the kinship relationships established between the two dynasties through Quda-Küregen diplomacy but also because Goryeo was the first regional state to recognize the Mongols as the possessors of the Tianming or Qut (divine mandate), which was highly significant.

## IMPERIAL SEMANTICS AND MARITIME STRATEGY: UNDERSTANDING THE YUAN DYNASTY'S DIPLOMATIC OVERTURES TOWARD JAPAN

Eurasian  
Research  
Journal  
Autumn 2023  
Vol. 5, No. 4

Japan holds a special place in Yuan dynasty diplomacy. Starting with Qubilai Qaghan, special attention was given to relations with Japan. Although Japan had been influenced culturally, socially, and economically by China from the beginning, it did not adopt the China-centric system. While Chinese emperors used the title “huangdi” (皇帝) for the emperor, the Japanese referred to their rulers as “tennô” (天皇), which means heavenly sovereign. Similar to the diplomatic rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire, neither Chinese emperors agreed to address Japanese rulers as equals nor did Japanese rulers accept the title “wang” (王: king), which is of lower rank than the Chinese emperor.

There were only two instances in history where China and Japan clashed before the modern era. One occurred during the Tang Dynasty when Japan's allies, Baekje and Gaya kingdoms, fought against the Tang Dynasty's ally, Silla, in Korea. The other happened in the 16th century when Toyotomi Hideyoshi invaded Korea, leading to confrontations between Japanese and Chinese forces. In both cases, Japan ended up on the losing side, although during the Imjin Wars that began in 1592, Japanese forces defeated Chinese forces but were unable to advance due to the resistance led by Korean admiral Yi Sun-sin and Korean insurgents. Eventually, they withdrew after Toyotomi Hideyoshi's death. Throughout their history, the Japanese only once acknowledged the superiority of a Chinese emperor, and that was during the Yuan Dynasty (Nagai, 1984: 67). In this context, a state that had never recognized any Chinese dynasty as the Middle Kingdom, considering itself equal to China, to acknowledge the superiority of China would undoubtedly provide the Mongols with a significant political advantage within China (Gulez, 2023: 193). However, Japan was politically tumultuous during this period. The real authority had fallen into the hands of Yoritomo Minamoto, who established his capital in Kamakura, before passing to the Hôjô clan, which served as regents for the Minamoto clan after Yoritomo's death. Additionally, local feudal lords (daimyo) were gaining strength, and both the imperial government in Kyoto and the shogunate government in Kamakura were losing their influence over these feudal lords. Unaware of this complexity, the Mongols unintentionally posed a threat to the shogunate's authority by bypassing the bakufu and establishing direct communication with the emperor, which would later be seen when Emperor Go Daigo rebelled, leading to the downfall of the Kamakura shogunate.

While the emperors may have appeared to lack significant power outside Kyoto and its surroundings for approximately two centuries, they still had the potential to be a threat to the shogunate. Therefore, the Mongols' letter sent to the “King of Japan” had the potential to create a political crisis. Although the emperor had the letter forwarded to the shogunate to avoid antagonizing them, and the Hôjô clan, as the regents, were tasked with handling the matter, they were uncertain about how to approach the situation while also dealing with internal

unrest (Kasamatsu et al., 1981: 97). In Qubilai Qaghan's letter to the Japanese emperor, apart from addressing the Japanese emperor as the "Japanese king," there was nothing objectionable. Unlike their demands from other countries, the Mongols did not request tribute, submission, or the enlistment of Japanese in the Mongol armies, nor did they ask for a population census to be conducted as if Japan were a province of the Mongol Empire. The letter simply expressed the desire to reestablish relations, promote trade, facilitate the exchange of diplomatic envoys, and establish friendship between the two nations. It did not contain any overt threats of war or invasion. This letter was probably the most conciliatory in tone that a Mongol qaghan had ever written to a foreign ruler, excluding those written to the Khwarezmshah Muhammad before the war. Qubilai Qaghan's letters to the Pope or the French King, in contrast, were more assertive, demanding submission and carrying a tone of threat.

However, it should not be inferred from this that the Mongols considered the Japanese as equals or were afraid of them. After their victory over the Khwarezmshahs, the Mongol khans did not consider any ruler their equal. They believed that having received the "qut" (divine grace), they were tasked by God to be the masters of the entire world. Therefore, while the Mongols' initial actions towards the Japanese may have seemed audacious, and the Japanese did not respond to the first letter and later killed Mongol envoys, it is important to explain the diplomatic etiquette that was not extended to rulers of small states like Japan during that period. The original text of the letter is as follows:

“上天眷命大蒙古國皇帝奉書日本國王朕惟自古小國之君境土相接，務講信修睦、況我祖宗受天明命奄有區夏遐方異域畏威懷德者不可悉數朕即位之初以高麗無辜之民久瘁鋒鏑即令罷兵還其疆域反其旄倪高麗君臣感戴來朝義雖君臣歡若父子計王之君臣亦已知之高麗朕之東藩也日本密邇高麗開國以來亦時通中國至於朕躬而無一乘之使以通和好，恐王國知之未審、故特遣使持書布告朕志冀自今以往通問結好以相親睦且聖人以四海，家不相通好豈一家之理哉以至用兵夫孰所好” (Song, 2013).

The translation of the text is as follows:

“By the command of Heaven, the great Mongol Emperor (huangdi) writes this letter to the King of Japan. The rulers of neighboring small countries have long been interested in corresponding with each other and forming friendships. Since the time my ancestor received divine grace, numerous distant lands, too many to enumerate, have feared our power and inquired about our virtues. At the beginning of my reign, the innocent people of Goryeo lived in constant fear of spears and arrows. We made peace and returned their land, and the elderly and young, the ruler and ministers, came to us in gratitude, and we are as happy as father and son. We believe that the King (Japanese Emperor) is already aware of this. Goryeo is our vassal in the east. Japan has also been a secret ally of Goryeo recently. Since the founding of your country, it has had relations with China. However, since our ascension to the throne, it has not sent any envoys. We fear that the King (Japanese Emperor) may not be aware of this. Therefore, we are sending this letter expressing our wishes and an envoy. We hope that

our correspondence in the future will bear good fruit as before, and we can become friends like relatives. As wise people, we believe that the four seas are one family. How can we be a family if we do not understand this? What need is there to use force?”

The letter indeed contains two interesting points. Firstly, Qubilai Qaghan begins the letter by addressing himself as the Mongol Emperor. Undoubtedly, the Mongols were not the first foreign conquerors to establish dynasties in China. The Wei Dynasty was founded by Tabgach and Turkic-origin generals, and during the Five Dynasties period, both Turks and, in the period following the fall of the Han Dynasty, the Huns established dynasties. Subsequently, the Liao Dynasty established by the Khitans and the Jin Dynasty established by the Jürchens, which was later overthrown by the Mongols, also ruled over parts or all of northern China despite being founded outside of China. However, once they claimed the mandate of heaven (tianming 天命) in the Chinese style, they used the dynastic names they adopted in the Chinese fashion (Liao and Jin) in their correspondence. Qubilai Qaghan’s letter, on the other hand, starts as a Mongol Khan. On the other hand, Qubilai Qaghan uses the term “middle kingdom” (zhongguo 中國), which is typically associated with China, to express his dissatisfaction with Japan not sending envoys after his ascension to the throne. Moreover, he does not request tribute or submission from the Japanese “king,” unlike the Mongols who demanded tribute from all countries except the Khwarazm Shah. The final veiled threat in the last sentence aside, the letter appears to be quite reasonable. Except for the use of the term “Great Mongol State,” all other expressions are in line with Chinese diplomatic traditions. It is highly likely that Qubilai Qaghan’s Chinese ministers drafted the letter. However, the tone at the beginning and end of the letter is distinctly Mongol in style. The use of “Great Mongol State” emphasizes Qubilai’s status as a Mongol qaghan, and the hope that there will be no need for the use of force at the end of the letter also departs from the Chinese diplomatic style.

In a Confucian style, it assumes that “barbarians” will be influenced by Chinese civilization and the wisdom of the Chinese emperor and will willingly come to the Chinese emperor without the use of weapons, entering into a father-son relationship like a family. This can be seen in the expression “the four seas are one family.” It implies that a foreign ruler will be brought into submission through military force, departing from traditional Chinese diplomacy. In Chinese tradition, an ideal emperor would earn the respect of neighboring countries’ rulers through wisdom and justice, and these rulers would submit to the emperor without the use of force or threat (Gokenc Gulez, 2022: 25–27). The submission of neighboring countries, and more importantly, distant countries, with tribute and envoys demonstrated that the emperor possessed the mandate of heaven (tianming/qut). However, it would be incorrect to say that Qubilai Qaghan was the first Chinese emperor to imply the use of force or the ability to use force. Before the Song Dynasty, which the Mongols conquered, the Tang Dynasty had directly invaded Goguryeo, Baekje, the Türk Qaghaganate, the city-states in Central Asia, and Vietnam with their armies. In fact, Emperor Tang Taizong,

after defeating the first Türk Qaghaganate, proclaimed himself the Qaghan of the Turks at a council he convened (Skaff, 2012: 49). In this context, Qubilai Qaghan's foreign policy resembles the Tang Dynasty more than its predecessor, the Song Dynasty. Qubilai Qaghan, much like Tang Taizong, was not hesitant to use military intervention against states that could challenge his authority during his reign. However, he showed more leniency towards weaker, smaller states. While he conducted campaigns against Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Burma, and Java, his navy sent to Java did not plunder wealthy but vulnerable kingdoms like Singapura (Chen, 2011: 37). Instead, he allowed them to engage in trade with China and even accepted their embassies. This approach reflects a mix of military assertiveness and diplomatic pragmatism, which aligns with the Tang Dynasty's approach to foreign affairs. Tang China, under the leadership of Emperor Taizong, used military force when necessary but also maintained diplomatic relations and trade with neighboring states. This combination of strategies allowed Tang China to expand its influence and maintain stability in the region. Qubilai Qaghan's policies demonstrate a recognition of the benefits of both military power and diplomatic engagement in achieving his foreign policy objectives, similar to the Tang Dynasty's approach to handling foreign relations (Atik, 2020: 25). Indeed when viewed from this perspective, it becomes evident that Qubilai Qaghan considered Japan to be a smaller and more distant country compared to neighboring states like Korea, Vietnam, and Burma. However, the lack of a response to Qubilai Qaghan's initial letter and the killing of his second envoy led to Qubilai Qaghan's decision to launch a military campaign against Japan. This decision eventually culminated in the Yuan Dynasty's significant naval expedition, particularly the campaign against Java, making it one of the two major maritime expeditions during the Yuan Dynasty, as extensively studied by Delgado and others (Delgado, 2008; Yamaguchi, 1988). These military campaigns not only had strategic importance but also contributed to the historical understanding of Yuan Dynasty's foreign relations and naval power. The campaigns against Japan and Java showcased Qubilai Qaghan's determination to maintain control over distant territories and assert Yuan authority in maritime regions. The events surrounding these campaigns provide valuable insights into the political and military dynamics of the time. It's worth noting that maritime expeditions were complex undertakings during this period, involving a combination of military strategy, logistics, diplomacy, and cultural interactions. The study of these expeditions helps shed light on the broader historical context of the Yuan Dynasty's foreign policy and its interactions with neighboring and distant regions (Delgado, 2008: 37–41). However, as Delgado pointed out, these military expeditions were highly risky both economically and politically. Qubilai Qaghan would have needed to genuinely feel politically compelled to undertake these campaigns (Delgado, 2008: 32). The main reason for undertaking two expensive military expeditions to a country like Japan, which posed very little threat to the Mongols, was clearly not economic. During this period, Japan was characterized by a fragmented structure ruled by local feudal lords and had a relatively small economy compared to China. The Mongols were likely informed about Japan's situation through their vassal, the Goryeo king in Korea, who would later be discussed as Qubilai Qaghan's friend and son-in-law.

The real problem for Qubilai Qaghan was not external but internal damage. He had diverged from Mongol tradition by convening a *qurultai* (assembly) and proclaiming himself as the qaghan in his own capital, Shangdu. However, his brother, Ariq Boke, also declared himself as qaghan in Karakorum, leading to a civil war. Although Qubilai Qaghan won this war, the Yuan rulers could no longer fully control other Mongol nations. Therefore, to assert his authority over other Mongol nations, and even his own Mongol subjects, he could not leave an insult from a perceived weak country like Japan unanswered. Additionally, he had to consider the opinions of his Chinese subjects. The Song Dynasty had just been conquered, and Chinese intellectuals, although weakly, were resisting the Yuan Dynasty's rule. While the memory of the Song Dynasty was still fresh, he needed to establish himself as the Chinese emperor. For this purpose, conquering or subduing a country that did not recognize China as the Middle Kingdom would be highly beneficial. However, after both Japan expeditions ended in failure, Qubilai Qaghan shifted his focus to other countries. These expeditions not only affected relations between the Yuan Dynasty and Japan but also influenced the relationship between Korea and Japan. After the Goryeo Dynasty had overthrown the previous Silla Dynasty and started to mend its relationship with neighboring Japan, the Mongols' invasions of Korea during the Ögödei and Möngke periods eventually led to Qubilai Qaghan fully subjugating the Goryeo Kingdom under Mongol sovereignty, even sending his daughter to crown the prince and marry him to strengthen the Mongol influence over Korea (Batu and Jiemusi, 2007: 72). After the death of Qubilai Qaghan, the Kamakura shogunate in Japan rapidly lost its power. Ultimately, they submitted to the Yuan Dynasty, not as a result of military threats but due to their need for trade with China. This submission to the Yuan Dynasty was temporary, but it was driven by economic considerations and the desire for trade relations with China.

## **MONGOL GRAND STRATEGY IN FLUX: THE CASE OF DAI VIET AND THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN FRONTIER**

After the conquest of China and the incorporation of Korea into the Mongol system, Qubilai Qaghan turned his attention to the south and sought to bring Vietnam under Mongol control. However, unlike Japan, the Dai Viet kingdom in Vietnam, which had not yet submitted to Mongol rule, was requested to recognize Mongol suzerainty, assist in conducting censuses and tax collections, and send tribute and troops. The Dai Viet Kingdom, which was originally led by the Chen family from Fujian in southern China, had come to power in 1127 and overthrown the ruling Ly Dynasty in 1226. Therefore, when the Mongols sent this ultimatum to Dai Viet, the Tran Dynasty in Dai Viet was relatively weak and newly established. Although they did not want to take sides in the wars between the Mongols and the Song Dynasty, refugees from the Song Dynasty, both during and after the wars, had taken refuge in Dai Viet and the neighboring Champa Kingdom. Moreover, the last declared Song Emperor, a child, and the Song supporters who had managed to escape with him, including some high-ranking officials, had fled to Dai Viet with a plan to gather strength, sail back to China with a navy after persuading the Muslim governor of Fujian to change sides to the Mongols and take control of the Song Empire again. However, they were intercepted by the Mongol navy off the coast of Hainan Island. Although

these officials initially did not want to take sides in this war, they started to play increasingly important roles in the newly established and Chinese-controlled Dai Viet and Champa, which were ruled by Chinese families (Ceylan, 2016, 2023). While both states were pleased with the well-trained manpower that had come to them, they did not become direct allies of the Song Dynasty. Nevertheless, Dai Viet and Champa continued to provide refuge for those fleeing from the Song Dynasty and resisted direct Mongol control.

The relationship between Dai Viet and the Mongols was complex. The Mongols initially called upon the Champa Kingdom to submit to them peacefully, and the Champa King V. Indravarman agreed to recognize Mongol suzerainty and sent tribute to the Mongols. However, under the influence of Song Dynasty supporters who had taken refuge in the Champa Kingdom, his son Harijit imprisoned Mongol envoys. These envoys were actually sent after Qubilai Qaghan abandoned the idea of launching expeditions in Southeast Asia following the failure of his 1281 Japanese campaigns and instead decided to send envoys to Southeast Asia for diplomatic purposes. These envoys were sent to various kingdoms, including Malabar, in the region. The Mongols' policy in Southeast Asia is particularly notable for its combination of military power and political acumen.

However, the Mongols' military tactics that had made them unbeatable in Asia and Europe did not work in the rainforests, tropical climates, and rivers of Southeast Asia. The Chinese soldiers recruited from the southern regions, especially Fujian, were not successful in this environment. Nevertheless, the Mongols were able to analyze the emerging state system in Southeast Asia very effectively. For example, they supported small kingdoms like Singapura against the rising Majapahit Empire. They also cooperated with the Thai tribes, who had been their allies from the beginning and were allied with the Thai kingdoms, against states like Pagan (Myanmar) and Dai Viet, which did not fully submit to them. Thus, they were able to establish an alternative route through Southeast Asia and India when the routes to Inner and Central Asia were closed, maintaining open communication channels with their allies in Iran, the Ilkhanate.

Overall, the Mongols' interactions with Korea and Southeast Asia were shaped by a complex web of political, strategic, and diplomatic considerations. These interactions illustrate the multifaceted nature of Mongol foreign policy and their ability to adapt their strategies to different regions and circumstances. After the death of Qubilai Qaghan, the last ruler of the Mongol Empire who was elected as qaghan in a qurultai and recognized as Qaghan by other Khans, the empire began to fragment to a large extent. However, in the east, where the empire's main center was located, the Yuan Dynasty largely continued the Mongol tradition. Although the population, economy, and power center of the empire later shifted to China, the Yuan Dynasty continued to base its diplomatic and political legitimacy on its Mongol origins until its downfall in 1369. Until its collapse, the Mongol mentality was maintained, and unlike the previous Chinese dynasties, except for the Tang Dynasty, the Mongol Empire during the Yuan period used both diplomacy and warfare and they often resorted to hostile actions when necessary. However, as seen in examples such as Japan or Southeast Asia, the military option was generally used as a last resort. In this regard, it can be said that the Mongols' Asian policy was different from



their policy in the West. The fundamental reason for this difference lies in the flexibility of the Mongols to adapt to different environments when necessary. In this new geographical context where their military tactics did not work, the Mongol Empire, using diplomacy as a tool, successfully pursued a realistic policy until its dissolution, remaining a key player in a vast region stretching from the Vatican to Japan, from the Kuril Islands to Sumatra.

## CONCLUSION

The Mongol Empire began as a nomadic powerhouse in the steppe. However, it did not remain so. Unlike the Turkic predecessors on the steppe such as the Türk and Uighur Qaghanates, the Mongol Empire was more like the Khitan and Jurchen dynasties in its pursuit of political hegemony with a hybrid approach that blended nomadic, Chinese and Korean and other ideas from Islam, Christianity (Nestorian) and Central Asian civilizations. This in return affected the Yuan Dynasty's political strategy and therefore, contrary to the general ideas on the Mongols, their grand strategy for political hegemony included different tools, rather than being merely limited to military might. This can be seen in the flexibility of Mongol policies in different cases. While the Mongol hegemony over Korea had to be established with military campaigns, the Mongols continued their hegemony on the Mongol court via a web of marriage alliances that not only included marrying of Mongol princesses to the Korean crown princes but also getting Korean spouses whose families back in Korea became tools of control within the Goryeo court. In Japan, the Mongols were in a way forced into military action by the Kamakura Bakufu who killed the Mongol envoys and insulted them to which Qubilai Qaghan had to answer with military campaigns due to his own concerns of legitimacy. But the initial Mongol diplomacy suggests that Qubilai could be quite flexible and his first choice was political maneuvering rather than military action. Similarities can also be drawn with the South East Asian States. Although his approach was more domineering towards the South East Asian States due to his perceived weakness of these states vis-à-vis Japan, Qubilai Qaghan could still be flexible, and although the majority of studies on Mongol policies in South East Asia often concentrate on the military campaigns, the Yuan Dynasty actually also strived to build a web of alliances and a states system in the region with the aim of establishing relations with the region as a political hegemon and to reach their Ilkhanate allies in West Asia via the Indian Ocean due to the complications in Central Asia that prevented the Yuan and the Ilkhanates from direct contact via land routes. Therefore, when taken as a whole, the Yuan strategy during the reign of Qubilai Qaghan went far beyond military conquest, and was more complex than pure employment of military might.

## REFERENCES

Agirnasli, Nilay (2018). “Kosedag savasi sonrasi Anadolu’daki Mogol ilerleyisi karsisinda Kayseri.” In *Uygur Turklerinde Bir Bilge: Prof. Dr. S. Mahmut Kasgarli Armagani*. Istanbul: Kesit Yayinlari.

Allsen, Thomas T. (1994). “The rise of the Mongolian Empire and Mongolian rule in North China.” In *The Cambridge History of China: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368*. Cambridge Histories, eds. Denis C. Twitchett, Herbert Franke, and John King Fairbank. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Atik, Kubilay (2012a). “Japonya, kapali ulke, ideoloji ve din.” *Dogu-Bati* (60): 101–118.

Atik, Kubilay (2012b). “Kore aydinlanmasi: Joseon donemi.” *Dogu Bati* (61): 217–232.

Atik, Kubilay (2018). “Court politics in the Mongol Empire from ogedeı until mongke.” In *Social Sciences Studies in Turkey*. Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 14–28.

Atik, Kubilay (2020). “Singapura kralligi”. In *Turkiye’de Singapur Calismalari*. Eds. A. Merthan Dundar and Cenker Goker. Ankara: Ankara Universitesi.

Atik, Kubilay (2021). “Mogollarin guneydogu Asya devletleri ile siyaseti”. *Dogu Asya Arastirmalari Dergisi* 4(7): 20–34.

Batu, Baqian and Harichi Jiemusi (2007). 忽必烈汗思想研究. [Hubilie Han Sixiang Yanjiu]. Liaoning: Liaoning Minzu Chubanshe.

Ceylan, Fatma Ecem (2016). “Musluman cinli amiral Zheng He’nin aile tarihine genel bir bakis.” *Current Research in Social Sciences* 2(2): 37–45.

Ceylan, Fatma Ecem (2023). “XV ve XVI Yuzyillarda Ming-Osmanli denizciligi uzerine bir inceleme.” *Vakanuvis - Uluslararası Tarih Arastirmalari Dergisi* 8(2): 1195–1238.

Chen, Da (2011). 南洋华侨粤社 (Nanyang Huaqiao Yu Minyue Shehui). Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan.

Choi, Bu (2014). 高麗史 [Goryeosa]. 1st ed. Kunming: Xinan Shifan Daxue Chubanshe.

Clark, Hugh R. (2009). “The Southern Kingdoms between the T’ang and the Sung.” In *The Cambridge History of China: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907-1279*, Cambridge Histories, Ed. Denis Twitchet. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Delgado, James P. (2008). *Khubilai Khan's Lost Fleet: In Search of a Legendary Armada*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Drompp, Michael R. (1999). "Breaking the Orkhon tradition: Kirghiz adherence to the Yenisei region after A.D. 840." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119(3): 390–403.

Gokenc Gulez, Sema (2022). "Cin'in altin Cagi'nda "Imparator Tang Taizong ve yönetim stratejisi." In *Tarihte Diplomasi*, Nevsehir: Nevsehir Universitesi.

Gulez, Sema Gokenc (2023). "Ming donemi Cin memurluk sınav sistemi ve edebî makale turu: 'Baguwen (八股文).'" *Asya Studies* 7(24): 191–202.

Ibn Batuta and Abu Abdullah Muhammet (2015). *Ibn Battuta Seyahatnamesi*. 4th ed. Ed. Koz. Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari.

Kasamatsu, Hiroshi, Shinichi Sato and Kenao Momoi (1981). 2 中世政治社 思想 [Chūsei Seiji Shakai Shisō]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Lim, Ivy Maria (2010). *Lineage Society on the South Eastern Coast of China: The Impact of Japanese Piracy in the 16th Century*. New York: Cambria Press.

Nagai Michiko (1984). 鎌倉: 中世史の風景 [Kamakura: Chūsei-shi no fūkei]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Skaff, Jonathan Karam (2012). *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power, and Connections, 580-800*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Song, Lian (2013). 元史 [Yuanshi]. 10th ed. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.

Sugiyama, Masaaki (2010). クビライの挑: モンゴルによる世界史の大 変革 [Kubirai no Chōsen- Mongoru ni yoru Sekaishi no Daitenkai: Qubilai's Challenge- The Great Change of the World by the Mongols]. 1st ed. Tokyo: Kodansha.

Sugiyama, Masaaki (2011). 遊牧民族から見た世界史 [Yūboku Minzoku Kara Mita Sekaishi]. Tokyo: Nikkei Bijinesu Jinmonko.

Tao, Dali (2014). 蒙元制度と政治文化 [Mengyuan Zhidu Yu Zhengzhi Wenhua]. Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe.

The Secret History of the Mongols (1982). 1 New York: Harvard University Press.

Xiao, Qiqing (2010). 1 北 外 中 蒙元史 研究 [Neibeiguo Erwai Zhongguo Mengyuanshi Yanjiu]. 2nd ed. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.

Yamaguchi, Osamu (1988). 蒙古襲「元寇の史」の解明 [Môko Shûrai-Genkôno Shijitsu no Kamei: Mongol Invasions- Explanation about the Historical Facts on Mongol Invaders]. Tokyo: Kofusha.

Yildirim, Kursat (2018). “Tunguz halki uzerine arastirmalarli: Curcen’ler.” *Turk Dunyasi Arastirmalari* 118(233): 11–26.

Zhang, Bangwei (2013). 宋代婚姻家族史「 [Songdai Hunyin Jiazhu Shilun]. Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe.

Zhou, Liangxiao and Juying Gu (2003). 元史 [Yuanshi]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.

<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2023.4-03>

*IRSTI 06.71.07*

*ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN*

*Research Article*

**AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF KAZAKHSTAN**

Zhengizkhan ZHANALTAY <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Turkish-Kazakh University,  
050004 Almaty, Kazakhstan  
cengizhancnlt@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-5781-7105

---

Received: 24.10.2023

Accepted: 30.10.2023

---

**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to analyze the dynamics of key indicators and reveal challenges for Kazakhstan's agricultural sector. In so doing, the paper applies statistical and comparative methods. The paper shows a significant transformation in Kazakhstan's agriculture. At the same time, many important issues such as low levels of investment and development of agricultural technologies, changing production patterns, and policy inefficiencies. Climate change and water deficit also pose significant threats to the agricultural sector. The government of Kazakhstan develops policies to strengthen the agricultural capacities of the country. The paper provides policy recommendations, that can complement the developed programs and contribute to competitiveness improvement. These policy recommendations cover both domestic and international directions.

**Keywords:** Kazakhstan, Agriculture, Agricultural investments, Agricultural technologies, Agricultural policy.

## INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan is a resource-abundant country with substantial stocks of crude oil, natural gas and metals. Resource abundance significantly affects the country's production and trade specialization. Reliance on mineral resources exports led to low diversification of Kazakhstan's economy and caused substantial decline and transformation of manufacturing and agricultural sectors. The variability of oil prices and high dependence on exports of the limited number of products put Kazakhstan's economy at risk. The government recognizes the priority of the agricultural sector and develops programs to support producers and exporters. However, many agricultural indicators of Kazakhstan show a declining trend. According to World Bank (2023) data, employment in agriculture (as % of total employment) declined from 36% in 1991 to 15% in 2021. Despite these changes, Kazakhstan still has a high share of rural population, which equaled 42% in 2022 (44% in 1991). The contribution of agriculture to gross domestic product (GDP) also shows a substantial reduction. In particular, the share of value-added agriculture in Kazakhstan's GDP decreased from 23.3% in 1992 to 5.2% in 2022. However, it is worth mentioning that global trends in agriculture show the same declining tendency in terms of declining employment and contribution to GDP. For instance, global employment in agriculture decreased from 43% in 1991 to 26% in 2021. Alvarez-Cuadrado and Poschke (2011) argue that changes in agricultural employment were caused by both technological improvements in agriculture and industry, which attracted labor out of agriculture.

Despite a significant reduction in employment, global production of agricultural products increased substantially. According to the statistics of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAOSTAT, 2023) of the United Nations, in 1961, the world produced \$945 billion worth of agricultural products. In 2021, the global production amounted to \$4.1 trillion. During the reported period, the global population increased from 3 billion to almost 8 billion. This shows that global demand for agricultural products increased substantially, creating opportunities for food producers.

Agriculture in Kazakhstan remains one of the frequently discussed sectors in terms of policymaking and the future of diversification. The government considers agriculture as a key to the transformation of Kazakhstan's resource-dependent economy. However, the situation in agriculture is different and the stock of its problems, accumulated since independence, doesn't allow the sector to become a driving force of the economy. The government of Kazakhstan, understanding all the challenges of the resource-based development model, tries to make the agricultural sector a priority one. The President of Kazakhstan pays a special attention for the development of the sector. In September 2019, the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev had a meeting with agricultural producers devoted to the development of the rural areas and agro-industrial complex. President emphasized that labor productivity in Kazakhstan's agriculture is low, encouraged agricultural producers to diversify their products from traditional wheat to highly profitable ones, in particular, lentils, flax and soy, and recommended China's market as one of the most prospective direction. Moreover, he set a plan to increase labor productivity in agriculture by 2.5 times by 2022 (Forbes, 2019).

Thus, the purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it analyzes key agricultural indicators of Kazakhstan and reveals progress in the country's agricultural development. Secondly, it shows key issues in Kazakhstan's agriculture. In so

doing, the paper applies statistical and comparative analysis using data from Kazakhstan’s Bureau of National Statistics, World Bank and FAO. Finally, it provides policy recommendations for the improvement of the competitiveness of Kazakhstan’s agriculture.

### AGRICULTURAL INDICATORS OF KAZAKHSTAN

Agriculture of Kazakhstan had a difficult transition period, which is well presented by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2013). In the early periods of independence, the state was unable to support the sector given the deep economic crisis following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the early 2000s, the government started a stabilization and support policy. Khitakhunov (2021) argues that the resource boom of the 2000s significantly influenced Kazakhstan’s agriculture.

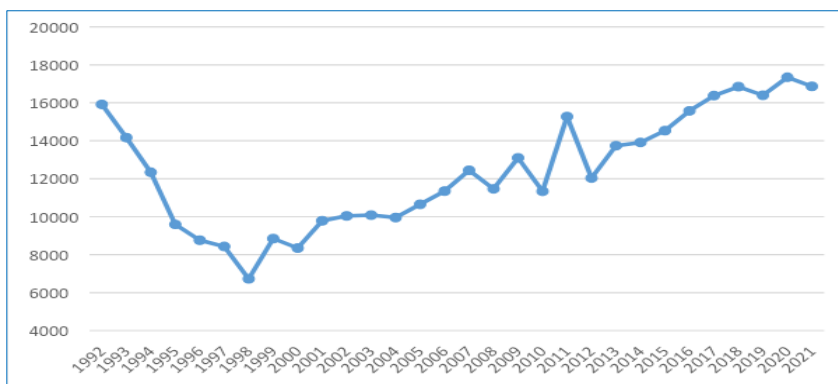
Nominal production (in current prices and exchange rate) of agricultural products increased substantially since independence. If in 1993 the total production equaled \$1.2 billion, in 2022 this number increased to approximately \$21 billion. In the same period, production of plant growing increased from \$674 million to \$12.6 billion (almost 19 times growth), and livestock – from \$363 million to \$7.9 billion (22 times growth). The share of livestock in total production increased from 32% to 39%, while the share of plant growing changed from 59% to 61% (Table 1). The share of agricultural services is negligible. Agricultural producers benefited from the favorable price changes. According to the FAO statistics, per ton producer prices of Kazakhstan for wheat decreased from \$104.5 in 1994 to \$50.5 in 1999, then started to increase gradually. A rapid increase since 2006 led to the highest level of prices, which in 2008 equaled \$224.3 per ton. Before 2015, prices were comparatively high and plummeted in 2016 with the following gradual growth. Nominal production slightly decreased in 2009, following the global financial crisis shock, which had a short-term impact. Economic slowdown, which started in 2013 and drop in oil prices, which led to significant currency devaluation, negatively affected the level of production. It decreased from \$19.4 billion in 2013 to \$10.8 billion in 2016, gradually increasing afterward. Thus, in 2022 Kazakhstan’s agricultural output achieved a historically high level. As nominal production is sensitive to price and exchange rate fluctuations, Figure 1 shows agricultural production at constant prices.

**Table 1.** *Agricultural Production in Kazakhstan*

	1993	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2022
<b>Total output</b>								
million tenge	6046	208919	404146	749078	1822074	3307010	6334669	9481180
million USD	1150	3428	2843	5637	12366	14915	15340	20590
<b>Plant growing</b>								
million tenge	3541	107410	223503	389527	895425	1825237	3687310	5808260
million USD	674	1762	1573	2931	6077	8232	8929	12613
<i>Share in total</i>	59%	51%	55%	52%	49%	55%	58%	61%
<b>Livestock</b>								
million tenge	1907	91681	178543	355786	920777	1469923	2637461	3658758
million USD	363	1504	1256	2678	6249	6629	6387	7946
<i>Share in total</i>	32%	44%	44%	47%	51%	44%	42%	39%

Source: The author’s calculations based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2023)

**Figure 1.** *Gross Production Value of Agricultural Products, Constant 2014-2016 million USD*



Source: The author’s compilation based on FAOSTAT (2023) data

As data from Figure 1 shows, between 1992 and 1998 agricultural production in Kazakhstan dropped from almost \$16 billion to \$6.7 billion. In the following period, the indicator started to recover. In 2021, agricultural output reached almost \$16.9 billion. Thus, the value of agricultural production in 2021 didn’t insignificantly exceed the initial 1992 level showing limited success of Kazakhstan’s agricultural policy.

Table 2 shows changes in total cultivated area and output by-products. Total cultivated area, which initially (in 1990) equaled 35.2 million hectares started to decrease, reaching 16.2 million hectares in 2000. In the following period, with the support of government policies, the cultivated area started to increase and in 2022 amounted to almost 23.2 million hectares. Patterns of production were also changed. The share of cereals cultivation area (as % of the total cultivated area) started to increase from 66.4% in 1990 to 80.5% in 2005. Afterward, this share decreased and in 2022 equaled 69.6%. As a result, cereals production decreased from 28.5 million tons in 1990 to more than 20 million tons in 2022.

**Table 2.** *Cultivated Area (thousands of hectares) and Total Production (thousand tons)*

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2022
<b>Cultivated area</b>							
Total	35182.1	28679.6	16195.3	18445.2	21438.7	21022.9	23162.1
Cereals	23355.9	18877.7	12438.2	14841.9	16619.1	14982.2	16114.4
Oilseeds	266.5	548.6	448.2	669.7	1748.1	2009.7	3461.8
of which: sunflower seeds	136.9	346.2	313.9	454.5	869.3	740.7	1094.6
Potato	205.9	205.9	160.3	168.2	179.5	190.6	199.5
Vegetables	70.8	76.1	102.6	110.8	120.3	139.5	170.2
Gourds	35.8	27.7	38.8	43.4	63.3	94.7	100.3
Sugar beet	43.6	40.8	22.5	17.5	11.2	9.2	10.2
Forage crops	11065.5	8788.9	2823.7	2380.6	2555.6	3497.1	2978
<b>Total production</b>							
Cereals	28487.7	9505.5	11565.0	13781.4	12185.2	18672.8	22030.5
Oilseeds	229.8	162.0	140.1	439.7	775.4	1547.5	3051.3
of which: sunflower seeds	126.3	98.7	104.6	267.3	328.9	534.0	1304.3
Potato	2324.3	1719.7	1692.6	2520.8	2554.6	3521.0	4080.5
Vegetables	1136.4	779.7	1543.6	2168.7	2576.9	3564.9	4792.6
Gourds	301.5	162.3	421.6	683.8	1118.2	2087.6	2560.3
Sugar beet	1043.7	371.0	272.7	310.8	152.0	174.1	305.7

Source: The author’s compilation based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2023)



This fact shows a diversification of production as cereals production has been substituted by oilseeds. In 1990, the share of the oilseeds area was low and equaled 0.8%, later on with gathered experience of growing them their share increased to almost 15% in 2022. Cultivation of forage crops also decreased significantly from 1990 to 2009: if in 1990 the share of forage crops cultivation area was 31.5%, in 2022, this indicator equaled 12.9%, which shows that livestock production also was negatively affected by the transition period. Both cultivated area and production of vegetables and gourds increased, while for sugar beet both indicators decreased.

Livestock also significantly decreased compared to the initial period (Table 3). The numbers of cattle (1.1 times), sheep (1.6 times), pigs (4.2 times) and poultry (1.2 times) in 2022 were significantly lower than in 1991. Only the horse number exceeded the initial indicator: it increased from 1.7 million to 3.9 million (2.3 times).

**Table 3.** *Number of Livestock (thousands) and Poultry (millions)*

	1991	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018	2022
Cattle	9592.4	6859.9	4106.6	5457.4	6175.3	6183.9	7150.9	8538.1
Sheep	34555.7	19583.9	9981.1	14334.5	17988.1	18015.5	18699.1	21786
Pigs	2976.1	1622.7	1076.0	1281.9	1344.0	887.6	798.7	705
Horses	1666.4	1556.9	976.0	1163.5	1528.3	2070.3	2646.5	3856
Poultry	59.9	20.8	19.7	26.2	32.8	35.6	44.3	49.8

It is worth mentioning that the Northern part of Kazakhstan mainly specializes Source: The author's compilation based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2023)

in the production of cereals, the eastern part in livestock production, and the agricultural south is the home to horticultural products. The OECD (2013) shows that agriculture in Northern Kazakhstan is capital intensive, while in the south it is more labor intensive.

## CHALLENGES FOR KAZAKHSTAN'S AGRICULTURE

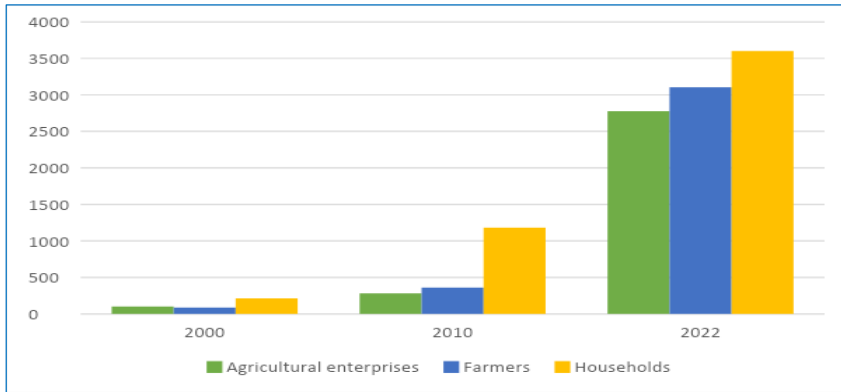
There are significant barriers to agricultural production and exports in Kazakhstan. These factors include subsistence-oriented production, low levels of investment and productivity due to technological underdevelopment, insufficient infrastructure, indebted agricultural development institutions, and inefficient subsidies.<sup>2</sup> According to Tokbergenova et al. (2018), Kazakhstan's

<sup>2</sup> Duflo et al. (2008) conducted a study devoted to the identification of the impact of fertilizers on agricultural yields in rural Kenya. The study shows that depending on the quantity of fertilizers used, increases in yield vary between 28% and 63%. However, while fertilizers can be very profitable when used correctly, one reason why farmers may not use them is that the official recommendations are not adapted to many farmers in the region. This study raises the problem of underuse and overuse of fertilizers. In the former case, yields can be lower which decreases profits for the farmers. The latter case can lead to environmental degradation and a reduction of the quality of harvested products.

agriculture functions in the conditions of severe degradation of agricultural lands, depletion and degradation of soil due to past state programs, erosion, secondary salinization and flooding, degradation of pastures caused by overgrazing and incomplete use of more remote pastures, soil contamination with chemicals, and the use of physically and morally outdated equipment and technology. OECD (2022) argues adverse weather conditions, pests and diseases, and price volatility pose challenges for farmers and agribusiness firms and can strain government finances. It is worth mentioning that support to producers in Kazakhstan fell from 8.5% of gross farm receipts in 2000-02 to 6.4% in 2019-21. Moreover, total support for agriculture declined from 1.6% of GDP in the early 2000s to 1.1% in 2019-21.

The following Figure 2 shows the production of agricultural products by agricultural enterprises, farmers and households.

**Figure 2.** *Agricultural Output by Producer Types, billion tenge*



Source: The author’s compilation based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2023)

Households dominate the production of agricultural goods. It is worth mentioning that households and smallholders provide themselves with necessary food and contribute to food security by trading their goods in local markets. However, it is difficult for them to penetrate international markets and export their products. Moreover, they cannot provide higher value-added production, insignificantly contribute to job creation, and have a limited impact on productivity and export. This indicator also raises the issue of the efficiency of the distribution of subsidies. This fact remains one of the important challenges for Kazakhstan’s agriculture. At the same time, it is important to mention that the output of agricultural enterprises shows substantial growth.

Investment in agriculture remains extremely low (Table 4). If in 2005 foreign direct investment (FDI) in agriculture equaled \$1.3 million (0.017% of total

Duflo et al. (2011) show that small, time-limited subsidies can increase fertilizer use and thus presumably be environmentally more attractive than heavy subsidies and would be less likely to encourage heavy rent-seeking. They would have no impact if fertilizer had low returns.

FDI), in 2015 it peaked and amounted to almost \$72 million (0.467% of total FDI). In the following period, the indicator decreased significantly dropping to \$9.5 million in 2020. It should be noted that FDI is important due to its spillover effects. In addition to investment, recipient countries obtain foreign technology, knowledge, expertise, and management that contribute to agricultural productivity. Thus, underinvestment is also an important problem, restricting the development of agriculture in Kazakhstan.

**Table 4.** *FDI Inflow by Sectors, million \$US*

Sectors	2005	2010	2015	2020	2022
Agriculture	1.3	6.0	71.8	9.5	32.5
Share of agriculture in total, %	0.017	0.027	0.467	0.0006	0.001
Extractive industries	1930.1	5982.2	3455.1	8226.5	12075.9
Manufacturing	346.6	2243.8	2588.5	3175.8	5427.6
Total	7916	22246	15368	17155	28028

Source: The author's compilation and calculations based on the National Bank (2023) data

Another important problem is the education and research gap. According to the Program of Agro-industrial Development of Kazakhstan for 2017-2021, agricultural specialists are prepared in 23 universities, including 3 agricultural, 9 with specialized agricultural faculties and 11 non-core universities, in which training is being carried out on agricultural specialties. Despite the significantly increased number of university grants, agriculture experiences a high deficit of professionals. There are high shortages of professionals in specializations like agronomists, veterinarians, zoo engineers, mechanical engineers of agricultural production, and agricultural process engineers. Local administrations report that 80% of agricultural business needs additional specialists. Of the graduates in agricultural specialties, only 55% were employed in the profile. Moreover, total volume of financing of agricultural research in average 10 times lower than in technologically advanced countries (FAO, 2023). Additionally, higher education facilities show low level of innovation (Sabzalieva, 2019).

Underfinanced agricultural technologies cause low level of productivity. Employment in agriculture is low in high-income countries; however, productivity of the agricultural sector is high. Canada has the highest productivity and the lowest level of employment in agriculture (1% of total employment). In 2019, value-added per worker in agriculture (constant 2015 USD) exceeded \$113 thousand in Canada and \$72 thousand in the Netherlands. In the same year, Kazakhstan's indicator was equal to \$7.6 thousand. The success of Canada can be explained by its well-developed technological and innovation systems. Despite Kazakhstan having the lowest employment in agriculture in Central Asia, Uzbekistan's value-added per worker in agriculture is the highest in the region (\$7.8 thousand in 2019). Moreover, in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) Kazakhstan's agriculture remains less competitive as Russia's indicator in 2019 was equal to \$14.2 thousand. Thus, Kazakhstan has higher values of agriculture in GDP and its agriculture is labor intensive. Developed countries have more capital and technology-intensive agricultural sectors with low levels of agricultural employment.

Climate change and water resources shortages also put Kazakhstan's agriculture at risk. According to the "Concept for the development of the agro-industrial complex of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2021 – 2030", these two factors can cause a reduction of the yield of some crops by 2030 by 9-47% to the current level, which directly affects food security issues. According to Islyami et al. (2020), higher temperatures and precipitation will hurt spring crop yields such as wheat and barley, increase rice yields and adversely affect yields of potatoes. Thus, climate change will affect agricultural productivity, household welfare, and food security. In 2023, farmers in Kazakhstan appealed to the President for urgent assistance following a difficult intense heat summer, which reduced the size of the grain crop. As a result, the yield is expected to be lower than not only last year but also the long-term average. According to estimates by producers, rains have caused damage to about 20 percent of this year's crop, making it unsuitable for use even as livestock feed. Farmers asked the President to set fixed prices for grain purchases above market rates, protectionist measures and defer loan repayments (Kumenov, 2023). Hence, key priorities of Kazakhstan's agricultural policy include transition to export of processed products, diversification of production, ensuring the country's food independence through the implementation of import-substituting investment projects for main types of food products, industrialization of agricultural production, and development of modern infrastructure. The efficiency of the state support system will be increased, an effective system of knowledge dissemination will be created, and digital technologies will be introduced. Target indicators of the Concept include increasing labor productivity, wheat yield, application of mineral fertilizers, export promotion, import substitution, self-sufficiency in basic food products, attracting investments in agriculture and food production, etc. (Adilet, 2023).

According to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Kazakhstan needs to increase the share of processed products in the agro-industrial complex to 70% within three years. President emphasized that a qualitative breakthrough in the industry requires a critical mass of large players. To retain its markets and increase exports, the country must have enterprises capable of ensuring volume, quality, and regularity of supplies. The example of the North Kazakhstan region, where more than 100 large dairy farms are being built, illustrates this point well. President also mentioned that the deterioration of machinery and the tractor fleet has become a serious problem; this indicator currently stands at 80%. President instructed to transform the National Agricultural Research and Education Centre into a vertically integrated agro-technological hub as modern agriculture is a high-tech industry (Akorda, 2023). At the same time, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev announced that the government would allocate one trillion tenge in the next three years for the development of agricultural cooperation (KazTAG, 2023). These support measures should take into consideration the attitudes of farmers. Kaliyeva et al. (2020) conducted a study on the attitudes of dairy households to participate in cooperatives in the Akmola region of Kazakhstan. According to their findings rural households which hold positive views towards cooperatives, have a relatively high production capacity, are aware of cooperatives, and do not have a dairy business as a source of household income. Hence, to increase milk production through cooperatives, the authorities need to develop a policy that supports rural households that have the capacity to produce. The policy needs to be attractive to rural households that consider dairy as a source of income. Moreover, it should be well explained to the targeted rural households.

Thus, reliance on research findings and consideration of them will increase the efficiency of government programs.

### **Discussion and Policy Recommendations**

As the government of Kazakhstan has intentions for economic diversification, it should primarily focus on agriculture. Firstly, the implementation of any development programs needs time for markets to be adjusted, and the government's comprehensive strategy should target the above-mentioned problems. As subsistence-oriented production dominates Kazakhstan's agriculture, the government should prioritize policy towards its transformation. In the villages, despite claims of local administrations, support for agriculture is very limited. This is not the case that can be solved by subsidies or low-rate credits. The basic problem of rural agriculture is a lack of knowledge and education on how to do agricultural business. For instance, in personal interviews, small farmers recognized that they had never thought about exporting their products, even to neighboring countries. The basic goal of rural agriculture is to provide and keep subsistence levels. Despite this basic explanation, other classical problems of the agricultural sector remain, including lack of capital investment, land and water shortage, mismanagement of water resources, lack of technology, marketing practices and vet services. Small farmers and households cannot be considered valuable contributors to productivity as their main goal is to provide subsistence and satisfy their own needs. They cannot participate in international trade. Their positive contribution links with satisfying local demands in bazaars and creating seasonal employment. The rural population tries to self-organize all of these activities by learning by doing. Subsidies are rare and it is difficult to receive them. For instance, according to Khabar 24 (2023), farmers in the Kostanay region cannot receive agricultural subsidies on time due to lack of specialists in the relevant department. This year, 12.5 thousand applications were accepted from agricultural producers and more than 7.5 thousand requests remained unconsidered so far. Nursultan Kابدelov, head of the subsidies department of the Department of Agriculture mentions that 1 specialist and the head of the department check about 5 thousand applications for fertilizers and pesticides. To address these issues, 4 additional specialists have been allocated. EIDala Media (2023) reported that 90% of farmers couldn't receive subsidies due to problems with the work of the Unified State Information System for Subsidies.

When citizens have no information about government programs, including subsidies' advantages and benefits, then these programs and information about them transform into exclusive ones and are distributed unevenly, making opportunities unequal and economic costs higher. All of these factors create a situation when any kind of government policies or initiatives are perceived with skepticism by the public.

Secondly, the government should attract FDI in agriculture and stimulate domestic investment. Agricultural development should be based on a bottom-up scheme rather than an up-down one. If the government sets goals without considering market capacities, the probability of success will be minimal. For instance, an increase in productivity initially needs more capital expenditure and a better-educated labor force. Afterward, the demand for innovation will gradually be increased if the sector is market-driven. Additional needs for better agricultural performance include lower taxes, government services, stable internal and

international markets and certainty in macroeconomic policy. If sectoral growth can be achieved only by high subsidies and minimal participation of the private sector, this will cause market inefficiency. Government policy should also take into account features of the agriculture of Kazakhstan.

The government should also focus on education reforms to train better-educated professionals and conduct research projects to increase the productivity of the sector. The roles of agricultural universities and research institutes should be strengthened. Moreover, research in agriculture should become a priority and fundamental and applied research should be financed by the government, and the funding should be increased significantly. The government should also focus on the provision of high-quality services, and financing the sector based on market principles. There is a need for intensification of internal competition and exports of high-value-added products to the neighboring countries and regions with potentially high demand for agricultural products. Moreover, it is important to create agriculture-centered regional/global production/value chains with technologically advanced developed countries.

Thirdly, it is important to implement programs and policies to develop agricultural technologies. All programs and policies must be transparent and fair. Moreover, they also should be carefully assessed, efficient and evidence-based.

At the international level, two basic policies may affect the agriculture of Kazakhstan and both of them are connected with Kazakhstan's multi-vector diplomacy. The first policy is regionalism and membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. The second option is active participation and involvement in the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Regionalism opens new opportunities for the regional producers. However, competition may increase and, in this case, Kazakhstan has more disadvantages due to higher productivity in Russia as well as higher public support in its partner countries.

The BRI should be considered not only as a transition potential of China's products to Russia and Europe but also as an opportunity to increase agricultural exports to China. Kazakhstan is the key player in this initiative, which gives it leverage to receive preferences from China for Kazakhstan's agricultural exports. The key factor here is the improvement of standards of production. If this criterion fits the global standards, then exports to China, the Middle East and Europe can be increased substantially.

To achieve this goal, further steps (except improvement of production standards) should be taken. These include a forecast of demand in the promising markets (EU, Russia, and China), promotion of free trade in agricultural products while negotiating new FTAs, unification of agricultural support in the EAEU, and increase in the level of agricultural services. The regionalism schemes should be used to form the Eurasian value chains using the potential of all EAEU members as well as non-participating Central Asian countries.

Production and export of high-value-added products to the markets of developing countries. These measures can help to increase production standards via *learning through exporting* schemes. It should be noted that higher incomes and rising wages affect the diets of people and will require diversity in their nutrition. High-income countries are a good destination for Kazakhstan, so

production standards should be improved significantly. The government should give tax exemptions to private agricultural companies, which run their research centers or cooperate with universities or institutes. Market research programs in particular export markets should be implemented by economists. Support of research and development, and special programs to educate farmers also should be taken into consideration.

The government should also work on the strengthening of the following links. These should include higher levels of cooperation between government, agricultural businesses, universities, and research centers, between universities and agricultural business. Moreover, there is a need for improvement of rural governance. According to the findings of Kosec and Wantchekon (2020), the provision of information about government policy is not sufficient. They show that to make programs successful, information should be relevant and individuals must have the power and must be incentivized.

Pomfret (2016) recommends transferring technical knowledge and technology, shifting from controlling agriculture to an environment that facilitates farmers' access to knowledge, resetting agricultural policy from control to facilitation, funding agricultural research, extension services, and provision of information to farmers. Moreover, it is necessary to reform land tenure, improve rural infrastructure, devise institutions and policies to improve water use and provide countrywide and regional reforms and cooperation.

Thus, all support instruments should carefully be assessed. Inefficient policy instruments should be abolished, and support for rent-seekers should be stopped. In general, the government should work on policies to increase competition within the economy of Kazakhstan, which, in turn, can stimulate innovation and productivity growth. Otherwise, inefficient subsidies and other government instruments will transform, reduce food security and discourage competitiveness.

The Government should understand that agricultural development is not only about making producers and farmers work, it is also about how to make local administrations work. Moreover, it is about how to make them cooperate and increase their efficiency.

## CONCLUSION

Agriculture of Kazakhstan remains a key sector, that the country's government is trying to transform and develop. It had a difficult transition period during which output plummeted and the government had no reliable instruments to support it. After the stabilization period, Kazakhstan started to transform the sector providing subsidies and services support. Support measures resulted in higher output of agricultural and food products. However, gross production insignificantly exceeded the initial levels, meaning that the sector needs further reforms and state support.

There are important challenges for Kazakhstan's agriculture. These include the dominant role of smallholders, low level of investments, lack of specialists, outdated equipment, low technological capacity, and management issues. Agriculture in Kazakhstan remains labor intensive. Moreover, climate change

and water shortages pose additional threats to Kazakhstan. These challenges and problems affect the productivity and competitiveness of the country's agriculture. To overcome these problems, the state develops different support programs aimed at improving the competitiveness of the sector.

This paper also provides policy recommendations, covering the improvement of domestic regulation and penetration of international markets through trade policy. Achievement of progress in agricultural development will require a strong collaboration between the state, private sector and academia. If efficient links between government, agricultural business and universities are created, then the production and trade capacities of Kazakhstan can be increased, which will result in diversification and higher competitiveness.



## REFERENCES

Adilet (2023). On approval of the Concept for the development of the agro-industrial complex of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2021 – 2030. Retrieved from <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P2100000960#z399>. Accessed: 23.09.2023.

Akorda (2023). President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's State of the Nation Address "Economic course of a Just Kazakhstan". Retrieved from <https://www.akorda.kz/ru/poslanie-glavy-gosudarstva-kasym-zhomarta-tokaeva-narodu-kazahstana-ekonomicheskii-kurs-spravedlivogo-kazahstana-18588>. Accessed: 15.09.2023.

Alvarez-Cuadrado, Francisco and Markus Poschke (2011). "Structural change out of agriculture: Labor push versus labor pull". *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics* 3: 127–158.

Bureau of National Statistics (2023). Industry statistics. Statistics of agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing. Retrieved from <https://stat.gov.kz/ru/industries/business-statistics/stat-forrest-village-hunt-fish/>. Accessed: 01.09.2023.

Duflo, Esther, Michael Kremer and Jonathan Robinson (2008). "How high are rates of return to fertilizer? Evidence from field experiments in Kenya". *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings* 98(2): 482–488.

Duflo, Esther, Kremer, Michael, and Jonathan Robinson (2011). "Nudging farmers to use fertilizer: Theory and experimental evidence from Kenya". *American Economic Review* 101: 2350–2390.

Eldala Media (2023). 90% of Kazakhstani farmers were unable to receive subsidies. Retrieved from <https://eldala.kz/specproekty/14179-poluchit-subsidii-ne-smogli-90-kazahstanskih-fermerov>. Accessed: 01.10.2023.

FAO (2023). State program for the development of agro-industrial complex for 2017-2021. Retrieved from <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/kaz200797.pdf>. Accessed: 16.08.2023.

FAOSTAT (2023). Data. Retrieved from <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data>. Accessed: 01.09.2023.

Forbes (2019). Tokayev: In 2022, labor productivity and exports in agriculture should increase by 2.5 times. Retrieved from [https://forbes.kz/process/economy/tokaev\\_v\\_2022\\_proizvoditelnost\\_truda\\_i\\_eksport\\_v\\_selskom\\_hozyaystve\\_doljniy\\_vyirastiv\\_25\\_raza/](https://forbes.kz/process/economy/tokaev_v_2022_proizvoditelnost_truda_i_eksport_v_selskom_hozyaystve_doljniy_vyirastiv_25_raza/). Accessed: 15.09.2023.

Islyami, Aidan, Alisher Aldashev, Timothy S. Thomas and Shahnila Dunston (2020). "Impact of climate change on agriculture in Kazakhstan". *Silk Road: A Journal of Eurasian Development* 2(1): 66–88.

Kaliyeva, Samal, Francisco Jose Areal and Yiorgos Gadanakis (2020). "Attitudes of Kazakh rural households towards joining and creating cooperatives". *Agriculture* 10(11): 2-20. doi:10.3390/agriculture10110568.

KazTAG (2023). Tokayev: We will allocate T1 trillion for the development of cooperation in agriculture. Retrieved from <https://kaztag.info/ru/news/tokaev->

my-vydelim-t1-trln-na-razvitie-kooperatsii-v-selskom-khozyaystve. Accessed: 01.10.2023.

Khabar 24 (2023). Farmers cannot receive subsidies on time in Kostanay region. Retrieved from <https://24.kz/ru/news/social/item/607240-fermery-ne-mogut-poluchit-subsidii-vovremya-v-kostanajskoj-oblasti>. Accessed: 29.09.2023.

Khitakhunov, Azimzhan (2021). “Agriculture in Central Asia: Current state and development perspectives”. *The Journal of Economic Research & Business Administration* 4(138): 59-70.

Kosec, Katrina and Leonard Wantchekon (2018). “Can information improve rural governance and service delivery?” *World Development* 125: 104376.

Kumenov, Almaz (2023). Kazakhstan: Farmers plead for president’s help in overcoming grain harvest woes. Retrieved from <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-farmers-plead-for-presidents-help-in-overcoming-grain-harvest-woes>. Accessed: 10.09.2023.

National Bank of Kazakhstan (2023). Direct investments by direction of investment. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalbank.kz/ru/news/pryamye-investicii-po-napravleniyu-vlozheniya>. Accessed: 01.10.2023.

OECD (2013), OECD review of agricultural policies: Kazakhstan 2013, OECD publishing. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264191761-en>. Accessed: 15.06.2020.

OECD (2022). Agricultural policy monitoring and evaluation 2022: Reforming agricultural policies for climate change mitigation. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5d9e929e-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5d9e929e-en>. Accessed: 10.10.2023.

Pomfret, Richard (2016). “Modernizing agriculture in Central Asia”. *Global Journal of Emerging Market Economies* 8(2): 104–125.

Sabzalieva Emma (2019). Higher education policy in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The University of Central Asia Working Paper № 51: 1-42.

Tokbergenova, Aigul, Lazzat Kiyassova and Shnar Kairova (2018). “Sustainable development agriculture in the Republic of Kazakhstan”. *Polish Journal of Environmental Studies* 27(5): 1923-1933.

World Bank (2023). World Bank Open Data. Agriculture. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/>. Accessed: 10.09.2023.

<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2023.4-04>

*IRSTI 11.25.91*

*ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN*

*Research Article*

**RELATIONS BETWEEN TÜRKİYE AND CHINA IN THE CON-  
TEXT OF BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: CHALLENGES AND  
PROSPECTS**

Seyit Ali AVCU <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, 06760 Ankara, Türkiye

avcuseyt@hotmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-6890-9139

---

Received: 24.10.2023

Accepted: 30.10.2023

---

**ABSTRACT**

The China Dream articulated by President Xi Jinping when he took office in 2012 guides China's new Global Strategy, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) announced in 2013. Türkiye is also interested in this initiative and embraces it politically, with the idea that it will strengthen regional connectivity and thus increase commercial and economic gains. As a result, it completed many transportation projects on its route. However, Türkiye still faces a number of problems such as regional instability, security risks, lack of mutual trust and lack of robust guarantee mechanisms. On the other hand, Chinese businesses in Türkiye also face higher financing risk, strong competition and operational risks. In addition, there are other non-economic risks arising from politics, security and cultural differences. In this article, using SWOT analysis, the strengths and opportunities for Türkiye will be analyzed while the weaknesses and threats for BRI will be examined.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road Initiative, China, Türkiye.

## INTRODUCTION

With Deng Xiaoping's coming to power as paramount leader, China initiated the Reform and Opening Up in 1978 termed Socialism with Chinese characteristics. These reforms introduced market principles and were carried out in two stages. The first stage, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, involved the de-collectivization of agriculture, the opening up of the country to foreign investment, and permission for entrepreneurs to start businesses. However, most industries remained state-owned. The second stage of reform, in the late 1980s and 1990s, involved the privatization and contracting out of many state-owned industries and the lifting of price controls, protectionist policies, and regulations, although state monopolies in sectors such as banking and petroleum remained. The private sector grew remarkably, accounting for as much as 70 percent of China's gross domestic product by 2005.

As a result, unprecedented growth occurred, with the economy increasing by 9.5 percent a year since 1978. China industrialized and grew steadily and became the number two economy surpassing Japan in 2015. China is projected to become the number one economy outdoing the USA in 2030 in terms of nominal GDP. However, according to the IMF, China is already the largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity; the GDP(PPP) of China is predicted \$30.17 trillion while the GDP (PPP) of the USA is predicted \$25,34 trillion in 2022 (International Monetary Fund, 2022). With all these developments, mainly highly skilled and cheap labour, good infrastructure, and favourable business conditions, China became the factory of the world. Most of its goods are going to richer countries of the West, North America, and Europe. In a highly globalized world, delivering goods faster has become very important. For the rest of the world as well as for Chinese, transportation via maritime roads has become cheaper over the years, but it has not become faster. China solved this problem partially by creating factory ships and assembling the goods on the way to the destination. Another problem is that the Malacca Strait which has been used for the import of raw materials such as oil and to transfer goods to Europe, the Middle East, and Africa became one of the most congested straights in the world making it dangerous and dependent on Malaysia. Chinese leadership has long been aware of this problem and Chinese President Hu Jintao called it the Malacca Dilemma in 2003, which means the potential factors that could hamper China's economic development by blocking oil and other raw material imports (Diplomatist, 2020). On the other hand, Chinese development has been uneven, making the eastern and south-eastern parts of the country develop while the western and north-western parts of the country lagged. These areas are home to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Tibet Autonomous Region where the secessionist movements are strong.

All of these problems stated above forced China to look for alternative routes to deliver goods to the rest of the world faster and cheaper. Not long after China began to search for various other options, an old concept came to help. The Silk Road, a trade route that has been used for centuries between China and Europe, came to mind. Old Silk Road became weaker with the Portuguese reaching the Cape of Good Hope and entering the Indian Ocean in 1488 starting a maritime route from Portugal to India. Because moving goods through sea has been much faster, cheaper, and safer compared to land roads, maritime

routes have been used for centuries. The idea of reviving the Silk Road emerged because of technological advances, mainly the railroads became much faster though still not cheaper; maritime routes are still the cheapest.

In September and October 2013, during his visit to Central Asia and Southeast Asian countries, Chinese President Xi Jinping successively proposed major initiatives to jointly build the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, drawing great attention from the international community. Chinese General Consul in Istanbul, Qian Bo said “The principle of “One Belt and One Road” is “jointly negotiating, building and sharing” and is a popular project, a cooperative project and a reciprocal project that is “public, inclusive, balanced and wide-ranging.” The initiative put forward that over the past three years or so it has become the most popular international public product hitherto and is also the best prospect platform for international cooperation and early results have been achieved in various fields. 34 countries and international organizations signed an agreement on cooperation with China in building the “One Belt and One Road”; 40 billion U.S. dollars Silk Road Fund has been set up and 100 billion U.S. dollars has been set up by the Investment Bank; the Middle East, the Trans-Asian Railway Network, etc. have all started to be built” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2017).

BRI, a Silk Road project, is a major transportation network and economic initiative that includes Asia, Europe, and Africa. This large-scale all-in-one investment plan can be seen as an economic move by China to Europe on land and sea. The modern Silk Road is devoted to extending it through two arcs. The first line to be built will connect China to Asia, Russia, and Europe over land and be called the “Silk Road Economic Belt.” The second line connects China to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean through the Indian Ocean, which is called the “Maritime Silk Road.”

The plan, which will set the direction for a balanced global economy, will rejuvenate trade and investment in countries along the way. In addition, through this program, capital investment, economic growth, and welfare increase will also be realized in these countries. The modern Silk Road is planned to be interconnected by 65 countries along land, ports, and railways, as well as by air, which will increase regional trade flows and create a direct trade network between these countries (TRT, 2017). All the countries between China and Western Europe want to be part of this project.

Türkiye, historically was the most important part of the Silk Road. Türkiye is considered one of the emerging economies in the world with a high growth rate, which was recorded as 7.5% in 2017, again 11% in 2021, and 5.6% in 2022 after slowing down during COVID-19 (World Bank, 2023). With recent developments in the Middle East since especially 2011, Türkiye has lost trade with the Middle East. Therefore, Türkiye would like to expand to the rest of the world, as apparent in Africa and Latin America openings. China has become the second largest trading partner of Türkiye. With the steady development of economic and trade cooperation between China and Türkiye, the bilateral import and export of goods between China and Türkiye in 2016 reached \$27.76 billion U.S. dollars, and \$35.9 billion in 2021 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Türkiye has expressed strong interest in the BRI since its

initiation in 2013. However, despite having strong interests and will, Türkiye has issues originating from the political and economic environment of the country itself and of the region. In this article, using the SWOT analysis I will analyse strengths and opportunities for Türkiye while examining the weaknesses and threats in terms of BRI.

I organized the article into three sections. It starts with the relations between China and Türkiye since the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye. In the second section, I analyse the economic relations between the two countries. In the third section, I will examine Türkiye's role and involvement in the BRI project using SWOT analysis. I conclude with the projections of the relationship in the coming years in the frame of the BRI.

## **TURKISH-CHINESE RELATIONS**

The perception of Chinese in the eyes of the Turks goes back to the seventh century when Turks and Chinese were neighbours. Turks believe that the Great Wall was raised against Turks while Turks were in Central Asia. Turks also believe that the Chinese used tricks to divide them and destroy their states. Although the Turks and Chinese stopped interacting directly since the Turks moved to Anatolia, nevertheless these negative perceptions remained in the psyche of the Turks. These historical perceptions are still important in terms of how Turkish people perceive Chinese since there has not been a confrontation for a long time

When the Republic of Türkiye was established in 1923, Türkiye and Nationalist China started official relations. When the Cold War started Türkiye sided with the United States and sent soldiers to Korea to be accepted into NATO. Turkish soldiers and Chinese soldiers fought against each other. Even after the end of the Civil war in China, Türkiye continued diplomatic relations with the Kuomintang's Taiwan till the 1970s. During the height of Communism in China, the Chinese also supported leftist movements in Türkiye.

When the US and the Chinese rapprochement started in the 1970s, Türkiye and the People's Republic of China began to have official relations as well. Republic of Türkiye's Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website states: "Diplomatic relations between Türkiye and People's Republic of China (PRC) were established in 1971. Türkiye follows the "One China" policy and recognizes the PRC as the sole legitimate representative of China. Türkiye-PRC relations started gradually developing from the 1980s with the opening-up of both countries" (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). However, the relationship remained at a very low level till the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. Since then the relationship picked up speed, improving in every aspect as both China and Türkiye have been developing rapidly thanks to reciprocal high-level visits. The visit of the 11<sup>th</sup> President Abdullah Gül to China on 24-29 June 2009 constituted the first visit at the presidential level after 14 years.

Especially since 2010, the relationship reached a new level, when bilateral relations were elevated to the level of "strategic cooperation". The relationship between the two nations entered a new phase. The high-level exchanges between the two countries have been frequent and their political mutual trust has been increasingly consolidated. When Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao

visited Türkiye in October 2010 and in 2012, Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping paid a visit to Türkiye in February and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited China on April 8-11, 2012, which constituted the first visit at the prime ministerial level after 27 years. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the President of China Xi Jinping had four bilateral meetings in the 2015-2017 period. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a visit to China on July 29-30, 2015. President Xi Jinping visited Türkiye on November 14-16, 2015 to attend the G20 Antalya Summit and had a bilateral meeting with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. President Erdoğan met President Xi Jinping at the margins of other G20 Summits in Hangzhou in 2016.

After the attempted military coup took place in Türkiye on July 15, 2016, the Chinese government first stated its support for the Turkish government and people and sent Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Ming to visit Türkiye. In September 2016, President Xi Jinping and Erdoğan met again during the G20 Hangzhou Summit to exchange in-depth views and reach an important consensus on issues concerning bilateral cooperation, pointing out the direction for the development of bilateral relations. In November 2016, Vice Premier Wang Yang and Vice Premier Khim Shek successfully presided over the first meeting of the mechanism for inter-governmental cooperation between the Chinese and Turkish vice premiers and coordinated and promoted cooperation in the four areas of politics, economy, trade, security, and culture. Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Foreign Minister Cavusoglu held the first meeting of the consultation mechanism between China and Türkiye on foreign ministers. Both sides exchanged in-depth views and reached a broad consensus on bilateral relations and international and regional issues of common concern, and continued to push forward the sustained and in-depth development of the strategic cooperative relations between the two countries. From April 17 to April 19, 2017, Vice Foreign Minister Liu Yandong paid an official visit to Türkiye and injected strong impetus into the deepening of cultural exchanges between China and Türkiye (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2017).

Lastly, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a visit to China on May 13-15 2017 to attend the Belt and Road Forum and had a bilateral meeting with H.E. Xi Jinping (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). China hosted the "One Belt and Road" summit on international cooperation in Beijing from May 14 to 15 2017. The Propaganda Department of the Modern Silk Road Project held the summit where President Erdoğan also participated. During the summit, Türkiye reached a consensus on some specific issues with the world's second-largest economy. Following the meeting, three agreements were signed between Türkiye and China on the extradition of criminals, international highway transportation, and reciprocal establishment of cultural centres in the two countries (Daily Sabah, 2017). At the summit, they sent out a signal to explore the new stage of cooperation with China (TRT, 2017). It was believed that the resumption of the summit would surely speed up the development of all-round relations between the two countries. Both presidents met again at G20 summits in Buenos Aires in 2018 and in Osaka in 2019, the CICA Summit in 2019, and the BRICS summit in 2018 in Pretoria, South Africa. Following the G20 Summit in Osaka, President Erdoğan paid an official visit to China on 2 July 2019. Foreign Minister Wang Yi paid a visit to Türkiye on 25 March 2021, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations. Foreign Minister

Cavusoglu paid a visit to China on 12 January 2022 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Türkiye and China are also in close cooperation with multilateral platforms such as the United Nations (UN), Group of 20 (G20), Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO). Türkiye handed over the G20 Presidency to China and attended many meetings at the deputy prime ministerial and ministerial level organized by the Chinese side in 2016. Furthermore, Türkiye worked closely with China as part of the G20 Troika. China also took over the CICA Presidency from Türkiye (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Türkiye joined the SCO as a “dialogue partner” in 2012. Türkiye was elected to chair the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Energy Club in 2017, being the first non-SCO country to chair a club in the organization without full membership status. This strengthened Türkiye’s position to become a gas and oil hub through which trade can be carried out by pipelines and liquefied natural gas, both with Europe and at the regional-Eurasian level (Yenikeeff, 2023).

Chinese defence firm CPMIEC won a Turkish tender to co-produce a long-range air and missile defence system in September 2013 (Reuters, 2013). However, in 2015 Türkiye cancelled a \$3.4 billion tender provisionally awarded to China to develop a long-range missile defence system, a project that had stirred the concern of Ankara’s NATO allies. An official from Türkiye’s Défense Industry Under secretariat, which ran the technical negotiations with China, said in July 2015 that a major stumbling block had been China’s reluctance to make a technology transfer that could give Türkiye the knowledge to operate the system and eventually replicate it (Reuters, 2015). Under pressure from the U.S., Türkiye gave up an earlier plan to buy a similar missile-defence system from a state-run Chinese company Precision Machinery Import-Export Corp (CPMIEC), which had been sanctioned by the U.S. for alleged missile sales to Iran (Bloomberg, 2017). Although the deal fell through, it showed Türkiye’s will to work with China in every aspect even as sensitive as the defence field.

China and Türkiye, however, do not see eye to eye on many international issues. Two such issues are especially prominent: First is the Uyghur problem. The second is the Syrian problem. Human rights groups have long accused China of oppressing its roughly 10 million Uyghurs with severe restrictions on language, culture, and religion and inflaming a cycle of resentment and radicalization. Hundreds have died in Xinjiang in violent clashes in recent years, and China now keeps the region, with a land area comparable in size to that of Iran, under a constant lockdown with massive policing and surveillance efforts that activists say are rife with abuse. Thousands of Uyghurs have fled China in recent years to seek asylum in Türkiye, with many traveling on to Syria to join Islamic militant groups or simply to escape persecution and find a new home. “Relations between Ankara and Beijing have been strained by Türkiye’s support for groups fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad — a China ally — and its sheltering of Uyghur refugees. “Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had positioned himself as a champion of Turkic peoples and in 2009 accused Beijing of committing “genocide” toward Uyghurs, attracting a flurry of headlines and infuriating Beijing. The two governments clashed again in 2015 when Türkiye offered



asylum to Uyghur refugees detained in Thailand whom China had demanded back. “But even then, Erdogan withdrew his remarks, and quite recently Ankara has cracked down on Uyghurs residing in Türkiye, demonstrating Türkiye’s readiness to compartmentalize its rhetoric to bolster its relationship with China” (Brodie, 2017).

Türkiye has reconsidered its Syrian policy and Uyghur policies since 2016. However, the Turkish government increasingly agreed to comply with the demands of China on the Uyghur problem, angering the Uyghur diaspora in Türkiye: “Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told reporters during a visit to Beijing that his government would treat threats to China’s security as threats to itself and would not allow any “anti-China activity inside Türkiye or territory controlled by Türkiye.” Türkiye also agreed to designate the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, a decades-old Uyghur separatist movement with links to al-Qaida as a terror group. The Turkish government will also seek to restrict negative reporting about China in its media. As the economic relations improved between the two countries, political issues are becoming less important. Erdogan has strong support from a nationalist base due to the war against terror, the Uyghur issue has not damaged his voter alliance. Ankara is also broadening its military cooperation with China. The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army had a high-level meeting in Ankara in 2018.

## **ECONOMIC INDICATORS OF BILATERAL COOPERATION ON BRI**

### **The Economy of Türkiye**

Türkiye has many good qualities in terms of its geopolitical positions, and good infrastructure and economy; the fastest economic development among Middle Eastern countries. Türkiye’s GDP reached \$905.716 billion (Nominal, 2018) and \$2.249 trillion (PPP, 2018) making it the 17<sup>th</sup> (13<sup>th</sup> PPP) largest economy in the world. In 2021, the nominal GDP actualized \$806.804 billion while PPP GDP became \$2.943 trillion. Turkish Economy expanded by 2.9 percent in 2016 despite having a military coup attempt. The mean annual growth rate between 2002 and 2016 was 5.6 percent, and 6.7 percent between 2010-2016. It bounced back from the recession after the coup and registered 11.1 percent in the third quarter of 2017. Since 2002, GDP per capita has nearly tripled from \$3,581 to \$9,527.6 (Nominal, 2021) and \$34,755.2 (PPT 2021) (International Monetary Fund, 2022). The country is among the world’s leading producers of agricultural products; textiles; motor vehicles, ships, and other transportation equipment; construction materials; consumer electronics, and home appliances.

Besides its promising domestic potential, Türkiye is such a country that it can be defined as a gateway to several regional markets. Türkiye is a very important trade partner on the way of reaching crucial regional markets such as the EU, Middle East, North Africa, and CIS because of its geographic location. One can reach a group of countries with 1.5 billion people with \$23 trillion GDP at a 4-hour flight distance from Türkiye. Besides, Türkiye offers investors preferential access opportunity to the EU and Türkiye’s FTA partners. On the other hand, Türkiye has an important role in its region as an energy corridor

and an important bridge between energy suppliers and consumers. Türkiye has been involved in a lot of important projects on energy and has more potential to maintain this trend in the future. Furthermore, Türkiye has an important position regarding logistics. Türkiye acts as an important hub between the developing Middle Eastern Countries, Turkic Republics, and Europe.

### Trade between Türkiye and China

People's Republic of China is Türkiye's second trade partner globally after Germany and the first trade partner in East Asia. China is Türkiye's nineteenth export country, while China occupies the first place in the list of Türkiye's import partners. In terms of imports, China is the main trade partner of Türkiye. Import from China surpassed the imports from Germany in 2012 and has been increasing ever since. The imports from China constitute 10 percent of all imports of Türkiye.

When we look at the evolution of Turkish-Chinese trade relations, we see that till the beginning of the 2000s, China was a remote trade partner for Türkiye. The total volume was only around \$1.5 billion. As of 2005, we observe that Türkiye started to discover China, and the trade figures entered into an ever-increasing trend. When we came to 2010, China turned into one of the main trade partners of Türkiye. In 2017, Turkish exports to China were recorded as \$2.9 billion, while its imports from China as \$23.3 billion, making total trade volume \$26.3 billion. From 2002 to 2017, total trade volume increased 16 times in 15 years. However, imports from China increased 17 times while exports to China increased only 10 times. As seen in the table, the gap between imports and exports became even wider as the imports increased by almost 30% just in 4 years (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2022).

**Table 1.** *China- Türkiye Foreign Trade (Value: Thousand USD)*

	2002	2007	2012	2017	2021
Export	268 229	1 039 523	2 833 255	2 936 041	3 662 747
Import	1 368 317	13 234 092	21 295 242	23 370 849	32 238 051
Total trade	1 636 546	14 273 615	24 128 497	26 306 890	35 898 798

As seen in these figures, there is a remarkable and ever-increasing asymmetry in bilateral trade relations which should be overcome urgently. This asymmetry has been acknowledged also by the decision-makers of both countries on every occasion. Both the Chinese and Turkish governing elite aim to put the bilateral trade on a more balanced track. When we look at the main items traded between the parties, we see that China imports from Türkiye mainly raw materials and chemicals such as marble and travertine, chrome ore, copper, lead ore, natural borate ores, boric oxide, and boric acid. On the other hand, China mainly exports to Türkiye Automatic data processing machines, wireless telephone devices, toys, audio-visual devices, and cruise/ merchant ships (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Türkiye and China signed a 10-billion-yuan (\$1.59 billion) currency swap

agreement in February 2012 and it was extended by three years in 2015. The central banks of Türkiye and China concluded their first Turkish lira-renminbi swap deal worth 450 million Turkish liras (\$132 million) on Nov 30, 2016. ICBC Türkiye, the first Chinese bank that started operations in Türkiye in 2015, became the first bank to use the currencies swap agreement that was inked between the two countries (China Daily, 2016).

### **Chinese investment in Türkiye**

In 2010, when China and Türkiye became strategic partners, collaboration in the areas of energy, transportation, and infrastructure increased gradually. Türkiye wants Chinese investment to balance trade between the two countries and advocates Türkiye to be China's headquarters for running business in Europe and the Middle East. Chinese direct investment in Türkiye in terms of capital flow and savings is larger than in Western Asia and Africa. In 2007, Chinese non-financial investment in Türkiye was only \$1.61 million; in 2009 \$290 million; in 2012 \$100 million; in 2013 \$170 million; in 2015 \$628 million. By 2015 China's construction contracts with Türkiye reached \$1.342 billion; the completed contracts reached \$1.339 billion. From January to November 2016, the Chinese non-financial investment in Türkiye reached \$1.342 billion, and sales volume for construction reached \$1.898 billion, a 66.4 percent increase as compared to the previous year in the same period (Zou, 2017).

Since Türkiye expects China to invest more in Türkiye, China's BRI is Türkiye's greatest opportunity. China needs Türkiye as an important force to be the bridge in the construction of the BRI. On the other hand, Türkiye feels the same way about BRI, and advocates being the "middle corridor". In 2015, Türkiye and China signed a basic transportation infrastructure agreement. In 2015, Türkiye and China signed a Memorandum of Execution (MOE) for BRI and the "middle corridor", which gives guidance and protection to increasing investment on both sides and economic and trade cooperation. Chinese-funded enterprises flourished in Istanbul and nearly 60 Chinese-funded enterprises such as Huawei and ZTE took root in the Turkish city and made important contributions to the development of the local economy and the BRI project. In 2014, the second phase of the Ankara-Istanbul High-Speed Rail Project by Chinese and Turkish enterprises was completed and opened. Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) acquired the Turkish Textile Bank, China Merchants Group, COSCO, and CIC to acquire the Port of Kumport, and the Bank of China is preparing to set up a subsidiary in Istanbul to invest in the two countries, with smooth trade and the construction of facilities in full swing" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2017).

When the BRI operates fully, it is hoped that the trade imbalance between Türkiye and China will decrease: "China, with annual exports of more than 2\$ trillion, exported Türkiye with 25\$ billion in 2016 while importing only \$2.3

billion from Türkiye. In this bilateral relationship that has lost its balance of trade, the modern Silk Road may play an important role in promoting the balance between the two sides. The normal 30-day transit period between Türkiye and China is expected to be reduced to 10 days within the scope of the Modern Silk Road. Accordingly, among the trends of trade relations between the two countries, the Silk Road project is even more important from the perspective of Türkiye. In addition, depending on this plan, the emerging markets to be opened up in Türkiye will also make a positive contribution to the increase of Türkiye's export potential." (TRT, 2017).

### **Characteristics of investment and productivity cooperation between China and Türkiye**

The scale of cooperation keeps on expanding, but the volume is still limited, hardly reaching the investment potential and expectations of both sides. "Ankara signed up for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2015 and became the 23<sup>rd</sup> biggest recipient of Chinese investment among those states that joined the initiative. As of 2022, China had 1148 registered businesses in Türkiye with a total investment of just over \$1 billion" (Avdaliani, 2023). Chinese investment in Türkiye is increasing but still far behind the volume of Chinese investment in Europe, which went down to EUR \$10.6 billion in 2021, after peaking at EUR 47.4 in 2016 (Rhodium Group, 2021); and still a very small amount as compared to European investment in Türkiye. The EU's share of Türkiye's total FDI inflow portfolio was, on average, 67.4% annually between 2008 and 2015 (Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye, 2023), with \$3.3 billion in 2020, hardly meeting Türkiye's potential and expectations.

The area of cooperation is expanding, but the investment items, categories, and projects are still small and cannot cover all related fields and industrial links. The area of Chinese investment in Türkiye is mainly in telecom, finance, transportation, energy, mining, production and agriculture. Overall, the projects of categories are few, and high-end manufacturing and high-value-added industries are also few and insufficient. For instance, in the area of energy, the investment is in traditional coal-burning power plants, and investment in smart electricity that Türkiye plans to develop greatly awaits expansion.

Investment is increasing, but largely in big national and government-owned industries or a few renowned privately owned enterprises. Türkiye's investment threshold is high, so very few reputable Chinese industries invest in Türkiye. If so, their production does not target the Turkish domestic market. China is not familiar with Turkish culture enough. The exported goods to Türkiye are largely OEM which are big-name brand products manufactured by contractors rather than the company's plant products. Turkish consumers do not know Chinese brands well, so the Turkish market considers Chinese goods to be cheap and of lower quality. However, this has been changing recently as Chinese smartphone

companies became well-known in Türkiye.

Modes of cooperation are becoming more diverse, but mainly through construction contracts, buyouts, stock buying, or financing. The ownership is a small percentage and the profit is low. Exported goods by different Chinese companies to Türkiye are combined in a single container. Still awaits high-level technology standard export type to expand. Cooperation risks are still very prominent, facing financing difficulties, a low degree of mutual trust, security risks originating from the Caucasus and the Middle East, potential terrorist attacks on Chinese investments in Türkiye, and a warranty mechanism that is not sound. Chinese enterprises in Türkiye face higher risk of financing, policies, and operation risks. The pressure of competition is huge. Also, there are non-economic risks from politics, safety, and cultural differences (Zou, 2017).

### **PROSPECTS FOR TÜRKİYE'S ROLE IN BRI**

In 2016, Chinese non-financial investment in countries along the route of One Belt One Road was \$14.53 billion. Contracts from overseas are \$126.03 billion, which is 51 percent of Chinese contracts signed in foreign countries. The total volume of sales is \$75.97 billion, which is 47.7 percent of the same period. Türkiye is one of the key countries along the construction route of One Belt One Road. Türkiye was also the first customer country of a Chinese high-speed rail construction project. It is China's important partner in terms of moving along international production capacity and investment cooperation. The Chinese passion for investing in Türkiye is also rising continuously. Chinese-Turkish investment and cooperation are at the top of countries along the One Belt One Road route. However, the cooperation also faces some fairly obvious problems and risks. China must explore more effective cooperation methods, mechanisms, and routes to have Türkiye become China's most important destination for Chinese production and investment outside of China (Zou, 2017).

The most concrete examples are various types of investment cooperation that are being implemented in Türkiye within the framework of the railway project that is devoted to extending from Beijing to London. The Marmaray project, which started operations in 2013, the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge which was completed in 2016, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK), or Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway (BTAK), became operational on October 30, 2017, show that Türkiye has adopted the modern Silk Road Coordinated pace of action. Another prominent issue highlighted in the plan is energy trading. Türkiye has a significant presence in the region with its ongoing TANAP project and the Turkish-Greek gas pipeline project planned. Türkiye, as the energy trade hub between Asia and Europe, will make an important contribution to the modern Silk Road through the flow of things.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

In this section, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of cooperation between Türkiye and China in terms of BRI will be analysed. The cooperation has many strengths: Both countries have political will to bring the relationship to another level. China has the economic power and technological advantage to move forward with the plan. Türkiye, on the other hand, is in the G20 and has a fast-developing economy. China has had the highest trade surplus in the world; therefore China has the means to finance joint projects in Türkiye.

However, there are also many weaknesses: Chinese development depends on the demand from the rest of the world, especially Western countries. Chinese growth decreases if the demand from the West declines. Although Türkiye is a fast-developing country, its economic structure presents some weaknesses such as financial vulnerability. The Lira depreciated 103 % against the dollar between June 2001- June 2002 which makes the highest in the world (The Global Economy, 2022). There are structural problems that haunt the Turkish economy: “The Turkish lira continued to weaken to a new record low of 27.5 per USD after the central bank raised interest rates by 500bps to 30% in its September meeting. The decision came in line with market expectations and marks a fourth straight increase, aiming to address high inflation as part of a broader policy U-turn. The annual inflation rate in Türkiye quickened for the third consecutive month to 61.5% in September 2023, up from 58.9% in August, and broadly in line with market forecasts of 61.7% amid tax rate hikes and the depreciation of lira. Traders are currently betting interest rates will reach 35% by the year-end.”

Türkiye has been experiencing a trade deficit constantly and needs to borrow funds to finance imports and other projects. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute “According to the provisional data, produced with the cooperation of the Turkish Statistical Institute and the Ministry of Trade, in July 2022; exports were 18 billion 551 million dollars with a 13.4% increase and imports were 29 billion 240 million dollars with a 41.4% increase compared with July 2021. In the January-July 2022 period, exports were 144 billion 331 million dollars with a 19.1% increase and imports were 206 billion 508 million dollars with a 40.7% increase compared with January-July 2021” (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2022). The trade deficit between Türkiye and China has been on the rise. This might give an impression to the Turkish public and officials that the BRI is only beneficial to China; therefore, China needs to import more Turkish goods.

Recent developments have created opportunities for both countries Ukrainian war put the northern route in danger because the EU declared sanctions against Russia. Türkiye, which is located in the middle corridor, became more viable for China to reach the European market.

Türkiye can be a real hub between Central Asia and Europe. The Ukrainian war proved once again that Türkiye is an important player in the world as an impartial mediator to solve international problems. Since Türkiye has good relations with Turkic States in Central Asia and the Caucasus, it can use its influence to help China in Central Asia. “In particular, Türkiye is looking to position itself as a viable alternative to Russia’s role along China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which ferries goods from western China through Central Asia and Russia to European markets. With sanctions against Russia now cutting off that route, Türkiye could become a convenient way to bypass Russia” (Standish 2022). With the opening up to China, Türkiye will not be dependent on the West and EU for its exports and finances.

Nonetheless, many existing and new problems threaten the cooperation between the two countries. Some of the political problems originated from the recent developments in the international system. With the Trump administration declaring a trade war against China, the world has been increasingly entering another cold war between the West, Russia, and China. NATO has declared Russia and China as security threats mentioning them in strategic documents (NATO, 2022). On the other hand, Türkiye has been trying to be neutral and impartial in the emerging Cold War by not taking sides openly. However, as a NATO member, Türkiye has responsibilities in the security arena. Moreover, as a member of the EU Customs Union, Türkiye has responsibilities in trade. The West has been reminding Türkiye of its responsibilities; therefore, it is a matter of time for Türkiye to be forced to take a side.

Chinese prejudice among the Turkish public is prevalent although it is not as strong as among Central Asian countries (Jones, 2014). If it is not remedied, this has the potential to interrupt the BRI projects. Uyghurs experiencing problems in China has contributed to the Chinese xenophobia. Turkish goods have been competing with Chinese goods in Russia, Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Türkiye has been losing market share in these areas because of political disputes, wars, ethnic conflicts, and new economic unions such as the Eurasian Economic Union, while the market share of China has been on the rise.

## **CONCLUSION**

President Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream, stated in 2012 when he moved into office, guides China’s new Going Global strategy, notably the Belt and Road Initiative announced in 2013. The Belt and Road Initiative is Chinese but more global. Türkiye is an important hub for the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”. Both China and Türkiye are big developing economies and important emerging countries; both have common interests in all fields of development. China welcomes Türkiye’s participation in the BRI and sees it as an important cooperative partner for building the BRI. It is willing to strengthen its strategic cooperation with Türkiye and tap the potentials of each

other through building the BRI to utilize their respective advantages for both countries' national development and national rejuvenation.

China and Türkiye have jointly achieved the “Belt and Road Initiative” with initial success. Relevant departments of both sides are stepping up negotiations and pushing forward cooperation in large projects such as the High-Speed Rail and the Third Nuclear Power Station to achieve early harvest. The economic and trade departments of the two countries also tried to innovate their trade methods, expand investment cooperation, and strive to achieve balanced and sustainable bilateral trade growth through comprehensive measures. Countries on the Silk Road route along the route Türkiye is located in the middle corridor of this route extending from China to Europe. With its strategic location, Türkiye is in a key position to invest in many of the infrastructure, transport, and energy sectors to be implemented within the context of the Silk Road project.



## REFERENCES

Avdaliani, Emil (2023). "China's 2023 trade and investment with Türkiye: Development Trends." *Silk Road Briefing*. Retrieved from <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/01/25/chinas-2023-trade-and-investment-with-turkiye-trends/>. Accessed: 14.09.2023.

Bloomberg (2017). Türkiye Chooses Russia Over NATO for Missile Defense. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-07-13/Türkiye-is-said-to-agree-to-pay-2-5b-for-4-russian-s-400-sams>. Accessed: 03.09.2021.

Brodie, Nicol (2017). "Why is Türkiye so eager to be led down the Belt and Road?" *East Asia Forum*. Retrieved from <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/10/28/why-is-Türkiye-so-eager-to-be-led-down-the-belt-and-road/>. Accessed: 13.09.2022.

China Daily (2016). Türkiye, China Conclude First Lira-Yuan Swap Deal. Retrieved from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-12/09/content\\_27621638.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-12/09/content_27621638.htm). Accessed: 03.09.2021.

Daily Sabah (2017). Erdoğan Meets China's Xi, World Leaders on the Sidelines of OBOR Summit. Retrieved from <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/05/13/erdogan-meets-chinas-xi-world-leaders-on-the-sidelines-of-obor-summit>. Accessed: 03.09.2021.

Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye (2023). Bilateral Trade & Investment Overview. Retrieved from <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/bilateral-trade-investment-overview-investments-49>. Accessed: 24.08.2022.

Diplomatist (2020). The Malacca Dilemma and Chinese Ambitions: Two Sides of a Coin. Retrieved from <https://diplomatist.com/2020/07/07/the-malacca-dilemma-and-chinese-ambitions-two-sides-of-a-coin/>. Accessed: 18.09.2023.

International Monetary Fund (2022). Report for Selected Countries and Subjects. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2022/April/weo-report>. Accessed: 18.09.2023.

Jones, Dorian (2014). "Turkey Sees Surge in Xenophobia." *Voice of America*. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/a/Türkiye-sees-surge-in-xenophobia/2523416.html>. Accessed: 13.09.2022.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2017). Interview with Chinese General Consul in Istanbul, Qian Bo. Retrieved from [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/dszlsjt\\_673036/t1457079.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/dszlsjt_673036/t1457079.shtml). Accessed: 03.09.2021.

NATO (2022). Strategic Concepts. Retrieved from <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/>

natohq/topics\_56626.htm. Accessed: 06.11.2021.

Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023). Relations between Türkiye and the People's Republic of China. Retrieved from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-china.en.mfa>. Accessed: 18.09.2023.

Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023). Türkiye-People's Republic of China Economic and Trade Relations. Retrieved from [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/Turkiye\\_s-commercial-and-economic-relations-with-china.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/Turkiye_s-commercial-and-economic-relations-with-china.en.mfa). Accessed: 18.09.2023.

Reuters (2013). Chinese Firm Wins Türkiye's Missile Defense System Tender. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-Turkiye-china-defence/chinese-firm-wins-Turkiyes-missile-defense-system-tender-idUSBRE98P10620130926/>. Accessed: 13.09.2022.

Reuters (2015). Türkiye Confirms Cancellation of \$3.4 Billion Missile Defence. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-Turkiye-china-missile/Turkiye-confirms-cancellation-of-3-4-billion-missile-defence-project-awarded-to-china-idUSKCN0T61OV20151118>. Accessed: 03.09.2021.

Rhodium Group (2021). Chinese FDI in Europe: 2021 Update. Retrieved from <https://rhg.com/research/chinese-fdi-in-europe-2021-update/>. Accessed: 23.10.2022.

The Global Economy (2022). Exchange Rate to USD Around the World. Retrieved from [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/Dollar\\_exchange\\_rate/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/Dollar_exchange_rate/). Accessed: 18.04.2023.

TRT (2017). World Economy 21: Belt and Road and Türkiye. Retrieved from <https://www.trt.net.tr/chinese/zhuan-ti-jie-mu/2017/05/29/shi-jie-jing-ji-21-dai-lu-yu-tu-er-qi-741618>. Accessed: 03.09.2021.

Turkish Statistical Institute (2022). Foreign Trade Statistics. Retrieved from <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Foreign-Trade-Statistics-July-2022-45542>. Accessed: 18.04.2023.

World Bank (2023). Türkiye GDP Growth. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2021&locations=TR&start=2000&view=chart>. Accessed: 18.09.2023.

Yenikeyeff, Shamil (2023). *The SCO Energy Club in the Changing Global Energy Order*. Valdai Club. Retrieved from <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-sco-energy-club-in-the-changing-global-energy/>. Accessed: 18.09.2023.

Zou, Zhiqiang (2017). "Production Cooperation between China and Türkiye under the Background of the Belt and the Road." *Journal of Northwest Minzu University* 6: 131–139.

**EURASIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL**  
**ERJ, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp.75-90, Autumn 2023**

Eurasian  
Research  
Journal  
Autumn 2023  
Vol. 5, No. 4.

<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2023.4-05>

IRSTI 11.25.47

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Research Article

**NEW GAME CHANGER POWER IN EURASIA:  
SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION**

Merve Suna OZEL OZCAN <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kırıkkale University, 71450, Kırıkkale, Türkiye

mervesuna@kku.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0001-9027-3990

---

Received: 15.09.2023

Accepted: 27.10.2023

---

**ABSTRACT**

The Eurasian geography is a strategic intersection for great powers which are currently interested in the region. After the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation seemed to slow down politically between 1990 and 2000 to regain its lost power and maintain its influence in the region. Geography continues to impact states' survival and foreign policies in the Eurasian region. After the Cold War, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization became one of the critical organizations in the Eurasian region. The paper discusses the organization's influence and power in the region's geopolitical significance. Its methodology will be a comparative literature interpretation on the axis of qualitative data. The study assumes that this region remains a game-changer where great powers focus. The paper also evaluates the latest situation based on regional and global developments.

**Keywords:** SCO, Russia, Central Asia, Great Powers, Iran, China.

## INTRODUCTION

After the end of the Cold War, while the Russian Federation became the successor country of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), many new states in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Baltic regions were integrated into the international system. Although power has become a fundamental element in the existing structure of the international arena, countries and regions reinforce this power with cooperation and make partnerships meaningful. Eurasia is a large continental area covering the continents of Europe and Asia, but it is also the centre of the oldest settlements historically. The region's rich historical and geopolitical significance results from a complex tapestry of events and processes. Its importance cannot be overstated, as it has played a vital role in shaping the contemporary world. The geography of Eurasia, which is the centre and crossroad of many commercial networks, especially the Silk Road and Route, has also been at the centre of many geopolitical theories. Undoubtedly, the most critical work on the region was embodied in *The Geographical Pivot of History* by the English geographer Sir Halford John Mackinder (1904), in which he presented the Heartland Theory. Mackinder famously said, those who dominate the region dominate the world politics. In this context, the Shanghai Five was transformed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and became an international security organization.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable organizations in Eurasian geography. The SCO, which one can interpret as an intergovernmental alliance consisting of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russian Federation (RF), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan, represents a large part of the world's population, territories and resources. This power is also the background of Asia's becoming an essential player in regional power dynamics. Following the disintegration of the USSR, the Russian Federation underwent a period of political stagnation from 1990-2000 to regain its lost power and maintain control. However, this period saw the emergence of regional organizations, that also included Russia. In this context, the "Shanghai Five" was established among the former Soviet countries, mainly the members of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the PRC in 1996. It is crucial to recognize that the influence and reach of the SCO should not be confined to any particular geographic region. Also, during the period between 1990 and 2000, Russia focused on its internal problems; therefore, its foreign policy was limited, particularly in Central Asia. In 2005, China and Moscow signed a statement to oppose the unipolar world order and the domination of one superpower. Russia aimed to push the US out of Central Asia, evident from the closure of US military bases in the region. The US's support of Color Revolutions and regional crises, such as the Russian attack on Georgia and the annexation of Crimea, increased tensions between the US and Russia. It became crucial for Russia to expel US forces from the region.

Many countries recognize the organization as a critical centre of attraction, with several participating as observers or dialogue partners. Iran, India and Pakistan are among these exemplary countries. The relationships between actors have become increasingly important and influential in today's world that has to be viewed through a lens of interdependence, as each actor's actions can greatly

impact the others. In addition, the functional scope of the organization have been increasing since its establishment. Regional security, a crucial aspect within this axis, is further emphasized by the fact that member states share borders with Afghanistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia and other regions prone to conflict. Within the scope of the SCO, which constitutes the case study of this study, security and its impact in the region constitute the main research focus. This paper methodologically focuses on the descriptive aspect of the SCO within the Eurasian geography. The main objective of the study is to highlight the SCO's ability to expand its area of influence quickly by adapting to changes and cyclical developments. The SCO is primarily focused on Asia, but it has continually evolved since its inception to address international and regional issues. In this respect, as a qualitative method, the case study focuses on SCO as a single case. Thus, this paper takes a qualitative case study approach to explore SCO in Eurasia. Firstly, a brief geopolitical and strategic definition of Eurasian geography will be provided. Secondly, it will provide historical context by explaining the power dynamics and primary strategies employed by the great powers in the region. Lastly, the emergence of the SCO in the international arena and the factors in its evaluation as an actor will be discussed. This article will examine the security measures that the SCO implements within its member states and regional activities. Hence, it will examine whether the SCO can be considered a significant actor capable of influencing the geopolitical dynamics within the context of recent developments in the region.

## EURASIA AND GREAT POWERS

To fully grasp the significance of the Eurasian region in the global landscape, it is crucial to approach it from a conceptual standpoint. In this respect, the effect of geography on international relations is an essential factor in terms of its effects on states' survival and foreign policies. When we look at the region's power, two issues draw attention; the first is its geopolitical position and the effect of its strategic importance in the context of power. In this respect, when we say geography, the concept of power creates a phenomenon that comes to mind simultaneously. An actor's behaviour in the global stage is shaped by geographical factors and the dynamics of power. As Yves Lacoste (2000) emphasizes, this situation highlights the role of geography in altering the contextual boundaries and even contributing to the ontological dimension of conflict. With Lacoste's words, is it enough to read geography, power and war, with the logic that "geography, above all else, serves to make war"? It is essential to consider that starting with certain assumptions may create conflict zones in certain areas. In his work, Lacoste (2000) contends that geography serves not only as a tool for warfare but also plays a crucial role in the development of strategic knowledge, which is closely linked to a range of political and military practices. So, by recognizing the military applications of geography from the outset and utilizing it to gain a competitive advantage in various fields.

The Eurasian region, owing to its geographical positioning, has historically been a pivotal area for different civilizations and nations, (Walton, 2007; Jackson et al., 2008) The demographic structure of this region deserves secondary consideration. Demographics significantly impact political power, similar to how water shapes rocks or wind wears them down. Besides the existing geopolitical

position of the region, it also shows how dramatically populations can change over time, according to historian Kulischer. E.M. Kulischer once highlighted the significant displacement of populations over time. In the year 900 A.D., Berlin had no Germans, Moscow had no Russians, Budapest had no Hungarians, Madrid was a settlement of Moors, and Constantinople had hardly any Turk (Jackson et al., 2008: 15). Thus, the impact of demographic mobility on the power of this region and its reading with migration movements over the centuries embodies the impact of Eurasian geography on the international system.

Although it may seem like a fact of ancient times that historical experience has contributed to the rise and fall of nations and empires (Keneddy, 1989), the region still has great demographic potential. We examine the perspectives of societies on the relationship between population and power, followed by an investigation into any lessons that history may have taught us on their interconnectedness. In this case, the demographic power of the SCO should also be kept in mind. The SCO's scope covers a region that boasts unparalleled geopolitical and demographic strength. We must include this region in our considerations. Despite China and Russia being the major global players in the region, it is essential to acknowledge the position and potential of the regional actors. Historically, 13th-century roads and transit routes passed through the Eurasian and Central Asian regions encompassing a long line in the later. This line indicates that in addition to the "Silk Road" route, the Russian steppes constitute a vital trade area in terms of northern trade. In particular, the trade routes between China and Central Asia stretch from the south of the Caspian Sea to India, Iran, the Arabian Peninsula, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

**Figure 1.** *SCO and Growing Across Eurasia*



Source: Sputnik, 2023

Given its significant geopolitical and demographic strength, the region under the SCO's scope must be included (Map I). We must acknowledge and leverage the potential of this strategic location. During the 19th century, the approach of the great powers to the Central Asian region played an important role in world politics with its power struggle-oriented effect. The Russians and the British clas-

hed in Central Asia when the British began thinking about their plans to invade India in 1801. British agents closely monitored Russia's activities in the region during this period. As Russia's activities in the region increased, British agents watched their every move. Through careful monitoring, the British could gather crucial intelligence and stay one step ahead of their rivals. At the same time, the British realized the potential of the Central Asian region and used the available opportunities to hinder the activities of their Russian rivals. The rivalry between the British and Russian Empires for influence in Central Asia, extending up to the Aral and Caspian Seas, was famously known as the "Great Game." Although the Great Game ended with the agreement signed between the Russians and the British in 1907, this struggle continued in the background (Ozel Ozcan, 2022). The region did not lose its global importance during the collapse of the Russian Empire and the two major world wars in which the world was hit hard on a global scale.

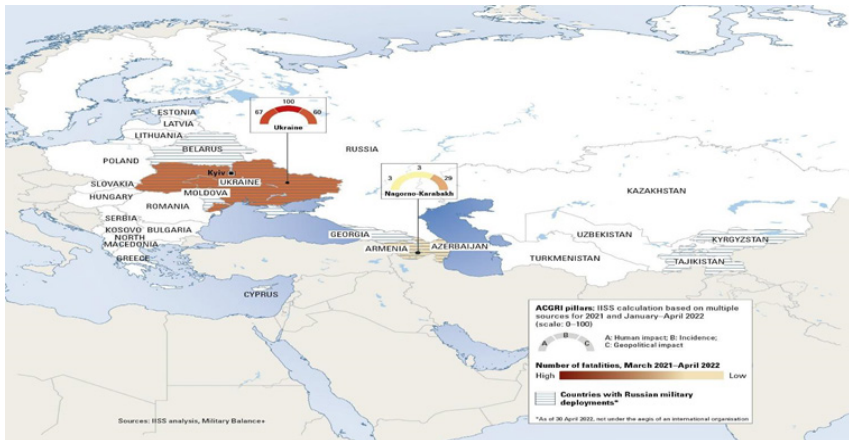
The Cold War era played a pivotal role in intelligence warfare, and its significance cannot be overstated. The tactics, strategies, and technologies developed during this time shaped the modern landscape of espionage and counterespionage. Hence, during the Cold War period, it was seen to be crucial in intelligence wars. During the Cold War period, within the scope of espionage, the U-2 plane belonging to the United States was shot down based on espionage activities in the Eurasian region. Pilot Francis Gary Powers demonstrated the region's importance during his fateful flight to the Soviet Union in 1960. At the time, there was a conflict between the USA and the USSR that also involved Türkiye, a buffer state with a high potential for conflict.

Eurasia's geography and potential have consistently made it a region of enduring significance, continually attracting the attention of major world powers. The approach of the great powers to the Eurasian region has always created an area of competition. However, the most critical issue here is that it is one of the central regions of international relations. Europe became the central world politics region after the 1648 Westphalian order. The presence of the dominant forces of the international system in Europe, the new geographical discoveries, and the Enlightenment period enabled Europe to move to a more advanced position than the rest of the world while simultaneously creating an area where this geopolitical activity was the primary centre. Today, while states struggle for regional dominance and, ultimately, global power, Eurasia is the most crucial economic, geographic and strategic region of the world (Walton, 2007: 7). According to Walton (2007), the Eurasian region is one of the three global geographic power centres. Two other centres of the world's economic and political power are emerging i.e. an area dominated by the USA, the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the European Union (EU) institutions increasingly dominating Europe.

On the other hand, According to Unaldilar Kocamaz (2019) Russia views the US presence in the region with suspicion, particularly after NATO's eastward expansion. Moreover, the US's support for Color Revolutions in the region, which were seen by the Kremlin as a regime change strategy promoted by the West to destabilize Russia, has further heightened tensions between the two nations. Russia aims to push the US out of Central Asia, highlighted by the closure of US military bases in the region. Despite claiming the bases were to help stabili-

ze Afghanistan, China and Russia have called for immediate withdrawal of US troops from the region. In 2009, Kyrgyzstan's Almaz Atambayev declared that the lease for the only US Central Asian air base in Manas would not be renewed. Consequently, the US closed the base, marking the resurgence of Russian influence in the region. Kyrgyzstan joined the Eurasian Economic Union, while Uzbekistan rescinded US base rights. Although the US's relationship with Central Asian countries has changed over time, Russia's influence remains permanent and challenges US influence in the region (Unaldilar Kocamaz, 2019: 131-132).

**Figure 2.** Major Conflict Zones in Eurasia



Source: IISS, 2022

Ultimately, after the collapse of the USSR, many post-Soviet countries opposed regional reintegration. However, one organization, especially in the economic field, draws attention when viewed from the regional perspective. Russian President of the Eurasian Economic Union, Vladimir Putin, called for a new regional initiative called the “Eurasian Union”, which aims to promote close economic integration and freedom of labour and capital movement, which is primarily based on the European Union. It offers a framework inspired by this context, and this New Union would be “open to the world”. Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan decided to establish the Customs Union in 2006 and agreed on a standard code in 2009. The Customs Union officially started in 2010 (International Crisis Group, 2016: 2). This way, the Eurasian Economic Union came into existence. It is essential to distinguish this union from the SCO. Due to its economic foundations, the Eurasian region experiences many conflicts in the international system. According to Map II, recent conflicts have occurred in the region, including the Ukraine-Russian War and the Azerbaijan-Armenia War.

Various conflicts have plagued Central Asia, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has been a significant source of concern. These developments have



resulted in a surge of casualties in 2022. These challenges have been a cause of increasing concern in the business and academic communities alike. The militarist spirit in the region is gradually increasing. In this respect, the problems centred around the war zone involve the rest of Europe and northern Eurasia. The instability of many European governments has emerged in connection with the war in Ukraine, with the governmental turmoil in the UK being just one of the most striking examples. According to Minakov (2022), the region has three military rings. The first local ring is the spillover effect of the war launched against Ukraine, which has spread to neighbouring countries. In the second ring, frozen conflicts are thawing, while in the third ring, covering Northern Eurasia, new risks and challenges are emerging around countries reacting to or participating in the deepening and protracted Russia-West hostility.

## **SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION AND ITS POSITION IN EURASIA**

The SCO was established in 1996 by the PRC, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan under the name “Shanghai Five”. In 1996 and 1997, the heads of state of the five countries met in Shanghai and Moscow. They signed agreements on “Increasing Military Confidence in Border Areas” and “Reducing Military Forces in Border Areas”. The purpose of the Shanghai Five has been defined as increasing trust between member states, ensuring the demilitarization of border areas and promoting regional cooperation. This system was named SCO with the participation of Uzbekistan in 2001. Considering this organization’s capacity and regional scope, it covers a territory with a population of 1.5 billion, constituting three-fifths of the Eurasian continent and representing a quarter of the world’s population. In addition to India and Pakistan, four observer countries and six dialogue partners have joined the organization. The summit meetings, which took place between 1998 and 2000, were held in Almaty, Bishkek and Dushanbe, respectively. In these meetings, the member countries exchanged ideas on issues such as increasing confidence in border regions and areas such as politics, economy and security. This process indicates the SCO’s efforts to deepen and strengthen regional cooperation (Albert, 2015).

In addition, the documents signed in 2005 regarding the establishment and legal status of the SCO are crucial. The union’s extensive network of collaborations with various regional organizations is a testament to its immense power and authority (See Table I). The SCO also focuses on cooperation in solving regional problems. In addition to these documents, the purpose of the organization and the actions it takes are also essential. In this context, although the SCO focuses on cooperation with international and regional organizations, the organization aims to strengthen mutual trust and good neighbourly and friendly relations among the member countries at the first stage. In the second preference, the

issue of regional peace and security includes joint efforts to maintain regional stability, and fight terrorism, fundamentalism, separatism, organized crime and illegal immigration.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1.** Documents of Cooperation with International and Regional Organizations<sup>2</sup>

Documents	Date and Place
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States	Beijing, 12 April 2005
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations	Jakarta, 21 April 2005
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation	Dushanbe, 5 October 2007
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organisation	Ashgabat, 11 December 2007
Joint Declaration on Cooperation between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the United Nations Organisation	Tashkent, 5 April 2010
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime	Astana, 14 June 2011
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	Zhengzhou, 15 December 2015
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia	Shanghai, 20 May 2014
Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Astana, 9 June 2017

When the structure of the SCO is examined, the Council of Heads of State and the Council of Heads of Government, which meet regularly, appear in the first stage. In addition, structures such as the secretariat, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure and the Council of Foreign Ministers are essential system elements. While the organisation's secretariat is in Beijing, the "Regional Anti-Terrorist Organization" is in Tashkent (Bilgici, 2022). After 2014, as the SCO expanded its mandate to include joint security and economic development programs, China hosted the Peace Mission, the bloc's largest military exercise with more than seven thousand troops and advanced weapons deployed. In addition to security, establishing a development bank and deepening economic and energy cooperation are essential objectives. Indeed, when it comes to trade, it's important to bear

1. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dış İşleri Bakanlığı "Şanghay İşbirliği Teşkilatı (ŞİÖ)" <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sanghay-isbirligi-orgutu.tr.mfa>. Accessed: 11.07.2023

2. The author created this table based on the information provided on the website SCO, General information, <http://eng.sectsco.org/cooperation/20170110/192193.html>. Accessed: 11.06.2023

in mind that the Eurasian Economic Union plays a significant role in enhancing regional relationships within the SCO's framework. The union has made Free Trade agreements with Cambodia, Singapore and Vietnam in ASEAN, but FTA tariff concessions have yet to be agreed with China (Devonshire-Ellis, 2020).

Although the emergence of the SCO as a political bloc has been overlooked, considering the potential of the Eurasian Economic Union, it has become an essential power in terms of trade. Establishing the SCO as a regional organization operating in security, economic and political fields is crucial. Douhan (2013) explains that this is due to implementing a comprehensive legal framework. This framework addresses new challenges and threats, such as international terrorism, extremism, crime, and the arms trade. However, the extent and effectiveness of this organization rely on the willingness of member states to collaborate. Finally, in 2023, the main areas of cooperation have been determined for international cooperation between blocs called "Integration Dialogue" organized between the CIS, EAB, SCO and BRICS. It is critical to wait for a step toward a comprehensive economic partnership where these four structures will be united with further developing the specified partnership areas (Russia Briefing, 2023).

## SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION AND GAME CHANGER ROLE

Eurasia has been a crucial region for Putin to enhance Russia's foreign policy and expand its sphere of influence since 2000. In 2011, Putin proposed the concept of the "Eurasian Union" in the *Izvestia* newspaper, which is a supranational model to establish strong ties with the Asia-Pacific and European Union regions. He announced that the formation of the Eurasian Union would be based on the principles of freedom, democracy, and market laws of Greater Europe (Lenta.ru, 2011). So, Central Asia is a region where the strategic interests of great powers intersect, resulting in active policies pursued by Russia, China and the West. In the context of regional development, evaluating the role of SCO in security is crucial. The SCO was established for long-term border negotiations between China and the Former Soviet Republics. Therefore, the initial focus of the organization was to address issues related to borders and security. Secondly, as per Akihiro, it's important to note that all SCO members grapple with significant ethnic challenges to their central governments. This underscores the SCO's fundamental purpose as an organization that provides mutual security guarantees and upholds the national integrity of each member. Another situation is that the SCO has a complex dual structure. In other words, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are in the middle power position in the axis of the asymmetrical Central Asian countries with Russia and China, which are the two great powers (Akihiro 2005). It is thought-provoking how this situation creates a difference in equality and practices. However, the formation of the SCO in the post-Cold War period has created a new security image for the Eurasian states by guaranteeing security among the member countries.

On the other hand, regional security cooperation requires shared interests among members without limiting individual pursuits. Diversity among members can be a starting point for finding common ground and avoiding conflicts that may obstruct joint gains or encourage outsiders to manipulate the region (Bailes et

al., 2007: 9). The SCO and the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership have a “multipolar world” approach. At the extraordinary Foreign Ministry meeting of the SCO in Beijing in January 2002, the member states expressed their concerns about its hegemony in Afghanistan and the world (Akihiro, 2005). SCO’s security cooperation has significantly impacted China’s security and stability, especially in the northwestern region, which was the target of more than 200 terrorist attacks by the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement” between 1990 and 2001 (Lei, 2018). This situation should be considered in terms of regional stability, resolution of problems, and its global dimension. At this point, the SCO has become an essential platform for cooperation in the fight against terrorism, intelligence sharing and military exercises. The Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) is vital in joint counter-terrorism operations between member states (CABAR, 2023). Also, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Charter, adopted in June 2002, establishes several fundamental principles of international law as the basis for the organization. According to Bailes and Dunay these principles include the sovereign equality of states and the rejection of hegemony and coercion in international affairs (Bailes et al., 2007: 6).

We must urgently confront global risks, such as drug trafficking, cybercrime, and cross-border offenses, with determination. Neglecting to take necessary actions would lead to disastrous outcomes from exploiting human beings. In this regard, the SCO must engage in a collaborative endeavor to combat terrorism, extremism, and separatism, which are commonly acknowledged as the “three forces of evil” in security, and prioritize the promotion of peace, security, and stability in the region. Member states signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism in June 2001, while the organization developed a comprehensive and multi-layered approach to security cooperation and established effective mechanisms to achieve this goal (Lei, 2018). In this respect, it plays a vital role in resolving regional problems. The decision to include India and Pakistan as SCO members substantially expanded the organization’s geographical scope. It included essential security issues of South Asia, such as the Kashmir conflict, into the already expansive agenda of the SCO (Lanteigne, 2018: 124). In addition to its role in Afghanistan, the SCO called for the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan to be resolved through negotiations. According to Lanteigne (2018), while Moscow sees India’s membership as a step to control Beijing’s tremendous influence within the group, the same cannot be said for China. Because, unlike the cordial India-Russia relations under the governments of Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, China-India relations have been more strained over the past decade. Russia played a crucial role in facilitating a peaceful solution to the Ladakh impasse between China and India at the SCO meeting in Moscow. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov mediated the dialogue between Subrahmanyam Jaishankar from India and Wang Yi from China. Hence, there is an effort to expedite the process of adopting resolutions and mediating in negotiations to promote stability and find regional solutions swiftly. In addition, Lavrov emphasized the organisation’s potential in political, security, economic and humanitarian issues, drawing attention to new risks and threats, including the perception of the SCO that the US is using sanctions as an aggressor (Chris, 2020). Hence, Russia primarily conducts its business with the Central Asian states on a bilateral basis. The SCO serves as a supplementary and consolidating platform for their relations. Additionally, Russia has the option of utilizing the frameworks of the CIS and the CSTO for organizing the region’s multilateral security relations (Bailes et al., 2007: 10).

On the other hand, the “Shanghai Spirit” emerges with the SCO’s approaches of mutual trust, equality, consultation, and respect for different civilizations in ensuring regional peace and stability and enhancing economic growth. It is crucial to maintain regional stability by upholding this spirit. Although there are different historical backgrounds and conditions among SCO members, it is seen that efforts are made for cooperation with consensus (Xiudong, 2018). The difference in security perceptions between member countries and the point organization’s origin has sometimes led to difficulties in determining common areas of action and targets. The SCO’s approach is also notable during colour revolutions to ensure regional stability. Beijing knew Moscow’s discomfort with ‘colour revolutions’. It was concerned of Western attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the communist government and a process often denounced as “peaceful evolution” in Chinese policy circles. According to Lanteigne (2018), the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan caused a critical internal debate on regional security in China. Beijing was not as willing to use complicated military tools as Moscow. The most unambiguous indication of this at the time was during the SCO Summit in Ufa, Russia, in July 2015, against the recommendation of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu that the organization had to consider a more formal alliance that could serve to prevent any future “colour revolution” in Eurasia (Lanteigne, 2018: 128; Kukeyeva, 2006).

With the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Wuhan province in China at the end of 2019, all countries took drastic measures, and there was a shutdown. Meanwhile, with the effect of Covid-19, Russia was among the first countries to test a vaccine. It cooperated with China, India and other SCO members in the Third Stage tests, which included hundreds of thousands of people. According to Devonshire-Ellis (2020), the creation of a space where countries can act together in the environment of insecurity created by the pandemic and Russia taking the step of sharing technology with SCO members was a step that would make Russia a reliable regional strategic partner at that time.

The Balance of Power is based on competition by the realist school, involving Great Powers and superpowers. Here, in terms of classical power balance theory, it is seen that the concept of balance between actors has been tried to be provided for a long time. According to Klieman (2015), from a global perspective, alliances with changing competitive structures with imperial rivalries setting up buffer zones include all diplomatic activities from normalization to hostility and rapprochement (Klieman, 2015: 14-15). Therefore, when we consider its impact on international politics in terms of harmony, cooperation and power scales in the context of the SCO, the war between Russia and Ukraine comes to the fore. In another case, there have been explanations about the Russian-Ukrainian War process, which reflects the separation of the West and East in terms of its ongoing global effects in the Eurasian geography, namely the insecure reality of the new Cold War. Sanctions against Russia continue in this process, which we left behind for almost 500 days. Putin expressed that Russia stands against Western pressure, sanctions and “provocations” and wanted to show that Russia continues despite sanctions. Also, sanctions imposed on Russia, especially in the energy field, are tried to be bypassed by increasing trade relations with regional actors such as India, China and Pakistan, that are members of the SCO. In addition, the 23rd Summit of the SCO took place after the Wagner Rebellion and its suppression in June 2023 in the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin’s statements were

aimed at the SCO and global public opinion. He interpreted the Wagner trial as a sign of the Russian political circles and society's unity against armed rebellion. Putin demonstrated his solidarity and sense of responsibility toward the homeland's fate (Pasricha, 2023). The other event that will affect the geopolitical balance is Iran, whose application for full membership was accepted in 2021. Its admission made it a key member of the SCO as the ninth member (SCO, 2023). Steps were also taken to strengthen Russia's geopolitical position against Western sanctions. The first is the defence of the continuity of regional trade with their currencies against the dollar. In this case, Russia would have made a new decision, especially regarding sanctions. Likewise, this commercial point is crucial not only for Russia but also for other members of the SCO. Considering the issue in the US's aim of isolating the economies of China, Russia and Iran, the economic potential of the SCO, which constitutes approximately 20% of the global GDP and a quarter of the world's population, should be reconsidered (Ritter 2023). In addition, the SCO and BRICS can act as a shield against the efforts of the US and the West to isolate these three actors in the global system. The second situation is undoubtedly the position of Belarus, which has applied for SCO membership. Putin called for full membership in Belarus and stated that the membership of Belarus would be positive for the functions of the organization. Undoubtedly, this call for the membership of Belarus has historical ties and the partnership of Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, which has existed since the past. However, this call is of particular importance after the Wagner Revolt. The mediation role played by Lukashenko is vital in resolving the process between Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigojin and the Russian Federation without a conflict. If Belarus is also a member, the organization will extend to Europe and fully realize its regional Eurasian identity. At the same time, Belarus, with its prospective SCO membership, will gain regional prestige and a better position, especially in terms of economic cooperation.

## CONCLUSION

Comprehending cooperation and competition in Eurasia is crucial due to the presence of many global and local organizations. This situation has not lost its importance throughout history. When the region's coverage of a wide geographical area and its spheres of influence on the axis of member states are considered, the entire membership of the SCO reveals an area extending from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean and covering most of the territory of the Eurasian continent. China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have been full members of the SCO since its establishment in 2001. The SCO also welcomed India, Pakistan, Iran, and Mongolia as official observer states, only for them to become full members except the later. In 2009, a new category of 'associate member' was introduced, alongside the existing "partner member" status. With this status, Sri Lanka and Belarus were considered official "dialogue partners". The SCO's agenda covers security, economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation among its members, and the primary focus agreed upon here has been to develop cooperation among members to target transnational security issues and contribute to regional stability (Aris, 2011: 4).

The SCO's geopolitical position and demographic influence make it a significant factor in recent developments, fundamentally altering the landscape. The commercial potential and impact of the region should be added to this. However, besides every advantage, disadvantages should not be forgotten. There are lots of issue areas and frozen conflicts in the region. The strength and vulnerability of the SCO are closely linked in this matter. The organization is progressing in this direction, becoming increasingly important in response to the changing international environment. At the same time, the SCO is strengthening the bonds of trust and neighbourliness among its member states. In the structure here, the positions and powers of Russia and China make themselves felt in the organization. Especially for Russia, the organization creates an alternative to the West. In this respect, SCO members encourage cooperation in several fields, such as politics, trade, culture and economic energy. In terms of security, the most essential structure is undoubtedly RATS. The SCO's aim started as the member states' border stability. In the current process, assuming the title and role of an essential actor in creating a regional security space has become more vital. Likewise, the SCO emphasizes the need for awareness and resolution of regional problems, emphasizing security and stability against international terrorism, separatism and extremism. Therefore, establishing this organization, which started with the solution of border problems and the development of mutual friendship, has the potential to carry its regional power to different areas with Belarus and Iran in the upcoming period.

Finally, the structural and expansion dimension of the SCO is noteworthy, as it is sensitive to cyclical developments. When evaluating the organization, it is essential to consider its influence in the Eurasian region. Still, the impact of its global dimensions in the future, if not in the near term, should be felt. Especially in the context of BRICS and other organizations, the organization's future can expand into a global arena where its regional security or commercial dimension will expand. In the future, the SCO has the potential to expand globally, particularly in the context of BRICS and other organizations.

## REFERENCES

Abu-Lughod, Janet (1989). *Before European hegemony: The world system A.D. 1250-1350*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Akihiro, Iwashita (2005). "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its implications for Eurasian security: A new dimension of "Partnership" after the post-Cold War period." Retrieved from: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Shanghai-Cooperation-Organization-and-Its-for-%3A-Akihiro/7d1b97803621b4863df678ee934da7729c7b9cdb>. Accessed: 30.07.2023.

Albert, Eleanor (2023). "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization" council on foreign relations, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/shanghai-cooperation-organization>.

Aris, Stephen (2011). *Eurasian regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation UK*. Palgrave Macmillan, UK.

Bailes, Alyson J. K and Pal Dunay (2007). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a regional security institution. In "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization". Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19208.7>.

Bilgici, Candan (2023). Ittifak profili: Sanghay Is Birligi Orgutu (SIO). TRT. Retrieved from: <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/ittifak-profil-sanghay-is-birligi-orgutu-sio-690921.html>. Accessed: 01.04.2023.

CABAR (2023). SIO Bolgesel Terorle Mucadele Yapisi (RATS) Konseyi 34. Toplantisi Taskent'te yapildi. Retrieved from: <http://tr.kabar.kg/news/i-o-bolgesel-terorle-mucadele-yap-s-rats-konseyi-34-toplant-s-ta-kentte-yap-ld/>. Accessed: 30.07.2023.

Devonshire-Ellis, Chris (2020). Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Moscow summit implies a new Eastern Bloc. Retrieved from: <https://www.russia-briefing.com/news/russia-the-pragmatic-dealmaker-as-shanghai-cooperation-organisation-moscow-summit-implies-a-new-eastern-bloc.html/>. Accessed: 22.04.2023.

Douhan, Alena F. (2013). "Evolution, status and main fields of activity of SCO". Ed. Anatoliy A. Rozanov, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Central Asia's Security Challenges*. Geneva: DCAF Regional Programmes.

IISS. (2022). The armed conflict survey 2022: Europe and Eurasia regional analysis. Retrieved from: <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2022/11/acs-2022-europe-and-eurasia/>. Accessed: 01.03.2023.

International Crisis Group (2016). *The Eurasian Economic Union: Power, politics and trade*. Belgium. Retrieved from: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/578f659b4.pdf>. Accessed: 07.04.2023.

Klieman, Aharon (2015). "Pushing back: The balance and balancing of power". Ed. Aharon Klieman, *Great Powers and Geopolitics International Airls in a Rebalancing World*. U.S.: Springer.

Kukeyava, Fatima (2006). "Color revolutions in the Central Asia and the U.S. position". *Taiwan International Studies Quarterly* 2(2): 81-96.



Lanteigne, Marc (2018). “Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the ‘Crimea Effect’”. Ed. Blakkisrud, Helge and Rowe Wilson. *Russia’s Turn to the East. Global Reordering*. UK: Palgrave Pivot.

Lei, Wang (2018). Qingdao Summit: Four reasons why China needs the SCO. Retrieved from: [https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d774e-7849544f77457a6333566d54/share\\_p.html](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d774e-7849544f77457a6333566d54/share_p.html). Accessed: 01.04.2023.

Lacoste, Yves (2000). *Cografya Her Seyden Once Savas Yapmaya Yarar* (Trans. S. Sezer). Istanbul: Ayrinti Yayinlari.

Mackinder, Harold (1904) “The geographical pivot of history.” *The Geographical Journal* 4(23): 421–437. Doi: doi.org/10.2307/1775498.

Minakov, Mykhailo (2022). The militarist remapping of Europe and Northern Eurasia. Wilson Center. Retrieved from: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/militarist-remapping-europe-and-northern-eurasia>. Accessed: 13.07.2023.

Ozel Ozcan and Merve Suna (2023). *Imparatorluklar: Gecmisten Bugune Buyuk Gucler ve Rusya Ornegi*. Ankara: Orion.

Lenta.ru (2011) Putin napisal stat’yu o “novom integratsionnom projekte dlya Yevrazii. Retrieved from: <https://lenta.ru/news/2011/10/04/article/>. Accessed: 13.07.2023.

Pasricha, Anjana (2023). “Putin assures Asian allies of Russia’s unity. Retrieved from: <https://www.voanews.com/a/putin-assures-asian-allies-of-russia-s-unity-/7166593.html>. Accessed: 13.07.2023.

Ritter, Scott (2023). “Iran’s SCO membership as game changer. Retrieved from: <https://www.energyintel.com/00000189-77bb-dc99-afbd-f7fbf5050000>. Accessed: 13.07.2023.

Russia Briefing (2023). Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Economic Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the BRICS discuss an economic partnership. Retrieved from: <https://www.russia-briefing.com/news/commonwealth-of-independent-states-eurasian-economic-union-shanghai-cooperation-organisation-and-the-brics-discuss-an-economic-partnership.html/>. Accessed: 13.07.2023.

SCO, General information. Retrieved from: <http://eng.sectsco.org/cooperation/20170110/192193.html>. Accessed: 11.06.2023.

SCO (2023). State flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran hoisted in front of the SCO Secretariat building. Retrieved from: <http://eng.sectsco.org/politics/20230706/949184/State-flag-of-the-Islamic-Republic-of-Iran-hoisted-in-front-of-the-SCO-Secretariat-building.html>. Accessed: 07.04.2023.

Sputnik (2023). Growing across Eurasia: Which countries want to join SCO? Retrieved from: <https://sputnikglobe.com/20230704/growing-across-eurasia-which-countries-want-to-join-sco-1111665310.html>. Accessed: 07.04.2023.

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı “Sanhay Isbirligi Teskilati (SIO)” Retrieved from: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sanghay-isbirligi-orgutu.tr.mfa>. Accessed: 11.06.2023.

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Disisleri Bakanligi “Sanghay Isbirligi Teskilati (SIO)”

Retrieved from: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sanghay-isbirligi-orgutu.tr.mfa>. Accessed: 11.06.2023.

Unaldilar Kocamaz, Sinem. “The rise of new powers in world politics: Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.” *Uluslararası İlişkiler / International Relations* 16(61): 127–141.

Xiudong, Jia (2018). “Opinion: What can we expect from the SCO summit in Qingdao?”. Retrieved from: [https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674d776b-444f77457a6333566d54/share\\_p.html](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674d776b-444f77457a6333566d54/share_p.html) Accessed:17.06.2023.

## **BOOK REVIEW**

**EURASIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL**  
**ERJ, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 92-95, Autumn 2023**

<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2023.4-06>

*IRSTI 87.15.91*

*ISBN: 978-1-912179-58-9*

*Book Review*

**CLIMATE CHANGE IN CENTRAL ASIA: DECARBONIZATION,  
ENERGY TRANSITION AND CLIMATE POLICY**

Kanat Makhanov<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD candidate at University of Debrecen, H-4032, Debrecen, Hungary

<sup>2</sup> Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Turkish-Kazakh University, 050004 Almaty,  
Kazakhstan

kanat.makhanov@eurasian-research.org

ORCID: 0000-0001-6019-0772

---

Received: 08.10.2023

Accepted: 29.10.2023

---

**Rahat Sabyrbekov, Indra Overland, Roman Vakulchuk (eds.).** Climate Change in Central Asia Decarbonization, Energy Transition and Climate Policy. Springer: Briefs in Climate Studies, 2023, pp. 170.

Edited by Rahat Sabyrbekov, Indra Overland, and Roman Vakulchuk, the book “Climate Change in Central Asia: Decarbonization, Energy Transition, and Climate Policy” offers a comprehensive interdisciplinary overview of the climate change and green energy issue within the context of the Central Asian region. The contributors approach climate change-related issues from diverse perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the problem to the readers and offering valuable guidance for regional policymaking.

In the opening two chapters of the book, the authors have framed fairly well the overall scope and conveyed a comprehensive understanding of the impact of climate change in Central Asia. They thoroughly outline the region’s vulnerabilities, and risks within the context of climate change while providing good insights into the relevant features of the physical geography, topography, and climate of all five countries of the region which are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Moreover, the authors emphasize the most relevant threats posed by climate change to the region, such as recurrent extreme weather events like droughts, heatwaves, and floods, which pose substantial potential risks to the populations inhabiting river valleys and mountainous regions, particularly those reliant on agriculture as their primary source of income. This introductory information offers a coherent and accessible foundation for readers from diverse fields of study as they embark on the book’s journey.

In the chapters titled “Climate Change Science and Policy in Central Asia: Current Situation and Future Perspectives” and “Energy Transition in Central Asia: A Systematic Literature Review,” which are the third and sixth chapters of the book, the authors offer a well-framed analysis of climate change and energy transition research in Central Asia based on the analysis of academic literature. Many of the findings presented in these chapters are indeed peculiar. For example, the authors reveal a noteworthy surge in both the number of academic publications and citations of these publications in recent years, signifying a growing interest in this field. Furthermore, their examination notes an evident increase in international collaboration in scientific research, with China prominently leading this collaborative effort over the past few years. Despite the burgeoning activity in scientific research related to climate change, the Authors point out that a majority of the leading journals in this field are based in foreign regions, outside of Central Asia.

Chapters four and five of the book offer a thorough analysis of Central Asian states’ climate policies and their advancements in reducing carbon emissions. The authors highlight key takeaways from these sections. Despite the fact that Central Asian states contribute less than 1% to global greenhouse gas emissions, they have made limited progress in decarbonization and energy transition since the collapse of the USSR. The region remains heavily dependent on fossil fuels, with hydrocarbons, for instance, accounting for about 70% of Kazakhstan’s total energy production. Furthermore, countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have even seen an increase in coal and oil consumption as their renewable energy sources struggle to meet the growing energy demand. Although the region, on the whole, emits fewer greenhouse gases than during the late Soviet era, the progress in decarbonization within these countries is quite modest. The authors’ compelling analysis provides reasons to conclude that the fulfillment of these countries’ international commitments concerning energy transition and decarbonization is being challenged by several factors, including the region’s expanding population and growing industries, as well as the limited effectiveness of current policy tools.

Chapters seven and eight offer valuable insights into the political dimensions and geopolitics of energy transition and climate change in Central Asia. One of the most noteworthy arguments presented by the authors in these chapters is that in Central Asian petro-states, energy transition is perceived as a significant threat by the elites. This perception arises because over the years of independence, the fossil fuel-based energy sector has become a cornerstone of the political elites in these petro-states. Consequently, any deviation from the status quo and the diminishing role of fossil fuels in the global market is generally viewed as a potential catalyst for political destabilization. Moreover, the Authors demonstrate the expanding geopolitical influence of China, which also encompasses the realm of renewable energy initiatives in Central Asia.

Chapters 9-13 of the book tackle a very wide array of issues of social dimension related to climate change such as human mobility, gender issues, social resilience, eco-activism, recycling culture, etc. While the central arguments presented in these chapters may initially appear as normative statements, the authors complement them with highly valuable real-world case studies. These examples serve to enhance the comprehension of climate change's impact on a micro-level especially for international readers. From an academic standpoint, these insights provide diverse perspectives and open up opportunities for localized and micro-level research.

The book offers a commendable analysis of how countries in the Central Asian region address the challenges posed by climate change. Nevertheless, it falls a bit short in providing adequate references to global standards and practices employed in countries beyond Central Asia. This omission may make it a bit difficult for readers to assess the region's climate change efforts in comparison to more successful cases in other parts of the world. Similarly, the book does not provide abundant statistical information in tables and graphs, hindering readers from forming their own assessments of critical environmental and climate change indicators. Such data would be highly relevant for evaluating the performance of Central Asian states and comparing them with other regions and global average indicators in specific aspects. The book also seems to give minimal attention to the concerning issue of increasing authoritarianism, the erosion of democratic values, and the deterioration of human rights in the region's five countries in recent years and underlines the relevance of good governance for effective policymaking within the climate agenda. The authors missed an opportunity to underscore the correlation between the growing autocratization trends and the region's struggles in effectively addressing the consequences of climate change. Emphasizing the pivotal roles of such concepts as transparency, accountability, the rule of law, civil society etc. in addressing the challenges posed by climate change would make a valuable addition to the book.

It should be noted that the authors have effectively presented a comprehensive overview of climate change and energy transition in the region, emphasizing the most critical and significant aspects of the issue. The book can also be helpful for research purposes as it contains references to the best, most relevant and up to date relevant academic literature. At the same time, the book can serve as a valuable source of information for a general audience from various fields, especially for readers from outside Central Asia.

## Editorial Principles

*Eurasian Research Journal* focuses on the history and current political, social and economic affairs of the countries of the Eurasian space. The journal also explores the economic, political and social transformation of the countries of Central Asia and the Turkic world.

*Eurasian Research Journal* publishes original research articles, review articles and book reviews.

An article to be published in *Eurasian Research Journal* should not have been previously published or accepted for publication elsewhere. Papers presented at a conference or symposium may be accepted for publication if this is clearly indicated.

*Eurasian Research Journal* is published quarterly. Each issue is forwarded to subscribers, libraries and international indexing institutions within one month after its publication.

### Review of Articles

Articles submitted to *Eurasian Research Journal* are first reviewed by the Editorial Board in terms of the journal's editorial principles. Those found unsuitable are returned to their authors for revision. Academic objectivity and scientific quality are considered of paramount importance. Submissions found suitable are referred to two referees working in relevant fields. The names of the referees are kept confidential and referee reports are archived for five years. If one of the referee reports is positive and the other negative, the article may be forwarded to a third referee for further assessment or alternatively, the Editorial Board may make a final decision based on the nature of the two reports. The authors are responsible for revising their articles in line with the criticism and suggestions made by the referees and the Editorial Board. If they disagree with any issues, they may make an objection by providing clearly-stated reasons. Submissions which are not accepted for publication are not returned to their authors.

The royalty rights of the articles accepted for publication are considered transferred to Eurasian Research Institute of Akhmet Yassawi University. Authors have full responsibility for the views expressed in their articles and for their stylistic preferences. Quotations from other articles and duplication of photographs are permitted as long as they are fully referenced and cited.

### Language of Publication

The language of the journal is English.

## GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING RESEARCH ARTICLES

**Please follow the steps listed below in order to register in the system:**

1. Click the "Manuscript Handling System". Select "New User" and register in the system by filling in your title, name, surname and other information.
2. Log into the system by entering your user name and password. Then click

“Edit” under “My Profile”. On the page that appears fill in your personal information, and area of research (for associate professorship or tenure). Do not forget to click “Save” for each section.

3. If you would like to serve as a reviewer for our journal, click “Yes” for the relevant question found at the bottom of the screen. Then “Save” your answer.

4. In case of a malfunction of the system or you simply cannot submit the article through the system for any reason, you can send your article directly to [erj@eurasian-research.org](mailto:erj@eurasian-research.org) after making it comply with the style guidelines below.

#### **Please follow the steps listed below to submit an article:**

1. Log into the system by entering your user name and password. Then click “Author” on the upper menu.

2. Click “New Submission”.

3. Fill in all the required information concerning your submission and then upload the word file of your article to the system. **Make sure** that the word file you upload **does not** include an author name.

4. Once you make sure that all the required areas have been filled in, click “Send”.

5. After submitting your article, make sure you see this statement on the screen: “Your data have been successfully entered.”

6. Check to see if your article has been submitted from “My Submissions”.

#### **NOTES:**

1. You will receive automatically generated emails when your article has been received and at every stage of the evaluation process.

2. Enter the information on your area of research even if you are not an Associate Professor or have not received tenure. It is essential that you fill in this information since articles are assigned to reviewers by using this information.

3. Please email [info@eurasian-research.org](mailto:info@eurasian-research.org) regarding any queries regarding the system.

#### **Publication fees**

There are no submission fees, publication fees or page charges for this journal.

### **Style Guidelines**

The following rules should be observed while preparing an article for submission to *Eurasian Research Journal*:

**1. Title of the article:** The title should suit the content and express it in the best way, and should be written in **bold** letters. The title should consist of no more than 10-12 words.

**2. Name(s) and address(es) of the author(s):** The name(s) and surname(s) of the author(s) should be written in **bold** characters, and addresses should be in normal font and italicized; the institution(s) the author(s) is/are affiliated with, their contact and e-mail addresses should also be specified.

**3. Abstract:** The article should include an abstract in English at the beginning. The abstract should explain the topic clearly and concisely in a minimum of 75 and a maximum of 150 words. The abstract should not include references to



sources, figures and charts. Keywords of 5 to 8 words should be placed at the end of the abstract. There should be a single space between the body of the abstract and the keywords. The keywords should be comprehensive and suitable to the content of the article. The English and Russian versions of the title, abstract and keywords should be placed at the end of the article. In case the Russian abstract is not submitted, it will be added later by the journal.

**4. Body Text:** The body of the article should be typed on A4 (29/7x21cm) paper on MS Word in Size 12 Times New Roman or a similar font using 1,5 line spacing. Margins of 2,5 cm should be left on all sides and the pages should be numbered. Articles should not exceed 8.000 words excluding the abstract and bibliography. Passages that need to be emphasized in the text should not be bold but italicized. Double emphases like using both italics and quotation marks should be avoided.

**5. Section Titles:** The article may contain main and sub-titles to enable a smoother flow of information. The main titles (main sections, bibliography and apedices) should be fully capitalized while the sub-titles should have only their first letters capitalized and should be written in bold characters.

**6. Tables and Figures:** Tables should have numbers and captions. In tables vertical lines should not be used. Horizontal lines should be used only to separate the subtitles within the table. The table number should be written at the top, fully aligned to the left, and should not be in italics. The caption should be written in italics, and the first letter of each word in the caption should be capitalized. Tables should be placed where they are most appropriate in the text. Figures should be prepared in line with black-and-white printing. The numbers and captions of the figures should be centered right below the figures. The figure numbers should be written in italics followed by a full-stop. The caption should immediately follow the number. The caption should not be written in italics, and the first letter of each word should be capitalized. Below is an example table.

**Table 1.** *Information Concerning Publications in Eurasian Research Journal*

Publication type	Number of publication	Number of pages			Number of references		
		N	X	SS	N	X	SS
Article	96	2,042	21.3	7.5	2,646	27.6	15.8
Book review	4	30	7.5	4.4	31	7.8	8.3
Total	100	2,072	20.7	7.9	2,677	26.8	16.1

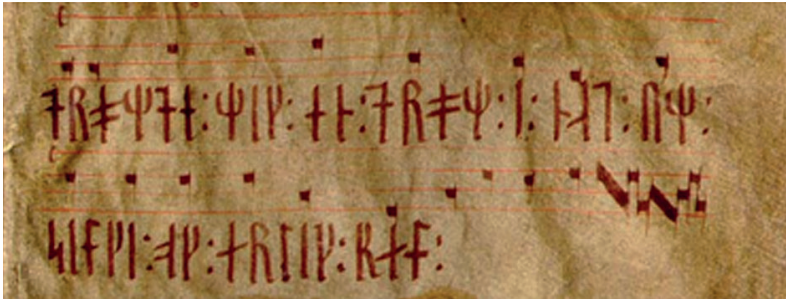
Source: Statistical Country Profiles

**7. Pictures:** Pictures should be attached to the articles scanned in high-resolution print quality. The same rules for figures and tables apply in naming pictures.

The number of pages for figures, tables and pictures should not exceed 10 pages (one-third of the article). Authors having the necessary technical equipment and software may themselves insert their figures, drawings and pictures into the text provided these are ready for printing.

Below is an example of a picture.

**Picture 1.** *Ancient Rune script*



Source: en.wiktionary.org

**8. Quotations and Citations:** Direct quotations should be placed in quotation marks. Quotations shorter than 2.5 lines should be placed within the flowing text. If the quotation is longer than 2.5 lines, it should be turned into a block quote with a 1.5 cm indentation on the right and left, and the font size should be 1 point smaller. Footnotes and endnotes should be avoided as much as possible. They should only be used for essential explanations and should be numbered automatically.

Citations within the text should be given in parentheses as follows:

(Koprulu 1944: 15)

When sources with several authors are cited, the surname of the first author is given and 'et. al' is added.

(Gokay et al. 2002: 18)

If the text already includes the name of the author, only the date should be given:

In this respect, Tanpinar (1976: 131) says ...

In sources and manuscripts with no publication date, only the surname of the author should be written; in encyclopedias and other sources without authors, only the name of the source should be written.

While quoting from a quotation, the original source should also be specified:

Koprulu (1926, qtd. in Celik 1998).

Personal interviews should be cited within the text by giving the surnames and dates; they should also be cited in the bibliography. Internet references should always include date of access and be cited in the bibliography.

[www.turkedebiyatilisimlersozlugu.com](http://www.turkedebiyatilisimlersozlugu.com) [Accessed: 15.12.2014]

### **9. Transliteration of Ukrainian to English**

Transliteration from the Ukrainian to the Latin alphabet should follow the system officially approved by the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers in 2010 ([https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/docs/26th-gegn-docs/WP/WP21\\_Roma\\_system\\_Ukraine%20\\_engl\\_.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/docs/26th-gegn-docs/WP/WP21_Roma_system_Ukraine%20_engl_.pdf)). When transliterating place names, Ukrainian names are preferred to Russian equivalents: for example, Mykolaiv rather than Nikolaev, Kyiv rather than Kiev. However, for historical references to Ukrainian cities, it may be appropriate to use Russian names if they were in wide use at the time.

Please, use UK English in your manuscript.

**10. References:** References should be placed at the end of the text, the surnames of authors in alphabetical order. The work cited should be entered with the surname of the author placed at the beginning:

Example:

Isen, Mustafa (2010). *Tezkireden Biyografiye*. Istanbul: Kapi Yay.

Koprulu, Mehmet Fuat (1961). *Azeri Edebiyatının Tekamulu*. Istanbul: MEB Yay.

If a source has two authors, the surname of the first author should be placed first; it is not functional to place the surname of the other authors first in alphabetical order.

Example:

Taner, Refika and Asim Bezirci (1981). *Edebiyatımızda Secme Hikayeler*. Basvuru Kitaplari. Istanbul: Gozlem Yay.

If a source has more than three authors, the surname and name of the first author should be written, and the other authors should be indicated by et.al.

Example:

Akyuz, Kenan et al. (1958). *Fuzuli Turkce Divan*. Ankara: Is Bankasi Yay.

**The titles of books and journals** should be italicized; article titles and book chapters should be placed in quotation marks. Page numbers need not be indicated for books. Shorter works like journals, encyclopedia entries and book chapters, however, require the indication of page numbers.

Example:

Berk, İlhan (1997). *Poetika*. Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yay.

Demir, Nurettin (2012). "Turkcede Evidensiyel". *Eurasian Research Journal, Turk Dunyasi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 62(2): 97-117. doi: <https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2021.2-01>.

Translator's, compiler's and editor's names (if there are any) should follow the author and title of the work:

Example:

Shaw, Stanford (1982). *Osmanli Imparatorlugu*. Trans. Mehmet Harmanci. Istanbul: Sermet Matb.

If several references by the same author need to be cited, then the name and surname of the author need not be repeated for subsequent entries following the first entry. A long dash may be used instead. Several references by the same author should be listed according to the alphabetical order of work titles.

Example:

Develi, Hayati (2002). *Evlıya Celebi Seyahatnamesine Gore 17. Yuzyil Osmanli Turkcesinde Ses Benzesmesi ve Uyumlar*. Ankara: TDK Yay.

\_\_\_\_\_ (2003). *XVIII. Yuzyil Istanbul Hayatina Dair Risale-i Garibe*. Istanbul: Kitabevi.

If **more than one work by the same author of the same date** need to be cited, they should be indicated by (a, b).

Example:

Develi, Hayati (2002a). *Evliya Celebi Seyahatnamesine Gore 17. Yuzyil Osmanli Turkcesinde Ses Benzesmesi ve Uyumlar*. Ankara: TDK Yay.

Develi, Hayati (2002b). *XVIII. Yuzyil Istanbul Hayatina Dair Risale-i Garibe*. Istanbul: Kitabevi

For **encyclopedia entries**, if the author of the encyclopedia entry is known, the author's surname and name are written first. These are followed by the date of the entry, the title of the entry in quotation marks, the full name of the encyclopedia, its volume number, place of publication, publisher and page numbers:

Example:

Ipekten, Haluk (1991). "Azmi-zâde Mustafa Haleti". *İslam Ansiklopedisi*. C. 4. Istanbul: Turkiye Diyanet Vakfi Yay. 348-349.

For **theses and dissertations**, the following order should be followed: surname and name of the author, date, full title of thesis in italics, thesis type, city where the university is located, and the name of the university:

Example:

Karakaya, Burcu (2012). *Garibi'nin Yusuf u Zuleyha'si: Inceleme-Tenkitletli Metin-Dizin*. Master's Thesis. Kirsehir: Ahi Evran Universitesi.

**Handwritten manuscripts** should be cited in the following way: Author. Title of Work. Library. Collection. Catalogue number. sheet.

Example:

Asım. *Zeyl-i Zubdetu'l-Es'ar*. Millet Kutuphanesi. A. Emiri Efendi. No. 1326. vr. 45a.

To cite **a study found on the Internet**, the following order should be followed: Author surname, Author name. "Title of message". Internet address. (Date of Access)

Example:

Turkiye Cumhuriyet Merkez Bankasi. "Gecinme Endeksi (Ucretliler)" Elektronik Veri Dagitim Sistemi. <http://evds.tcmb.gov.tr/> (Accessed: 04.02.2009).

**An article accepted for publication but not yet published** can be cited in the following way:

Example:

Atilim, Murat ve Ekin Tokat (2008). "Forecasting Oil Price Movements with Crack Spread Futures". *Energy Economics*. In print (doi:10.1016/j.eneco.2008.07.008).

## GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING BOOK REVIEWS

Apart from Academic Articles, the Eurasian Research Journal (ERJ) publishes Book Reviews. Usually, there are two Book Reviews published in each issue of the journal. The following rules should be observed while preparing a Book Review for submission to the ERJ:

1. The topic of the book should match with the scope of the ERJ.
2. Only reviews on recently published books are accepted. The book that is to be reviewed must be published within less than a year before the intended date of the publication of ERJ.

3. A Book Review should contain a concise description, critical view, and/or evaluation of the meaning and significance of a book. A normal Book Review should contain approximately 800-1000 words.

4. Name(s) and address(es) of the author(s): The name(s) and surname(s) of the author(s) should be written in bold characters, and addresses should be in normal font and italicized; the institution(s) the author(s) is/are affiliated with, their contact and e-mail addresses should also be specified.

5. The text of a Book Review should be typed on A4 (29/7x21cm) paper on MS Word in Size 12 Times New Roman or a similar font using 1.5 line spacing. Margins of 2.5 cm should be left on all sides and the pages should be numbered.

6. Tables and Figures should not be used in a Book Review.

7. All Author(s) should refrain from using contractions, first or second person viewpoints, incomplete sentences, ambiguous terminology, and slang, informal style as well as wordy phrases.

8. Author(s) are recommended to proofread and copyedit their Book Review prior to submitting.

Book Reviews should be submitted using the Manuscript Handling System option at <http://erj.eurasian-research.org/yonetim/login/index.php>





