



Immediately after this visit, Prime Minister Erdoğan paid a remarkable visit to China in April 2012. Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit started from Urumqi and then he also visited Beijing and Shanghai.

Turkey-China Relations: Rising Partnership

Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri: Gelişen Ortaklık

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Özet

Türkiye ve Çin arasında 1971 yılında diplomatik ilişkilerin kurulmasından sonra, uluslararası güvenlik ile ilgili kaygılar ve ekonomik işbirliği potansiyeli ikili ilişkileri şekillendiren en önemli unsurlardan olmuştur. Siyasi açıdan Ankara, BM Güvenlik Konseyi'nin daimi üyelerinden biri olan Çin'i, yeni bir açılım alanı ve Türkiye ile ilgili meselelerde destek alabileceği bir ülke olarak görmüştür. Ekonomik açıdan Ankara, muazzam iktisadi fırsatlar vadeden Çin'den yararlanabileceğini düşünmüştür. Ancak Türkiye, Çin ile ilişkilerinde son yirmi yılda beklemediği zorluklarla karşılaşmıştır. Uluslararası alanda Kosova, Bosna-Hersek, Kıbrıs ve Dağlık Karabağ sorunlarında Çin, Türk tezlerinden farklı bir tavır takınmıştır. Ayrıca Tunus, Mısır, Libya, Yemen ve son olarak Suriye'de ortaya çıkan Arap Baharı ile ilgili olaylarda, Türkiye ve Çin birbirlerinden tamamen farklı politikalar benimsemişlerdir. Ekonomik alanda ortaya çıkan en önemli sorun ise 2001 sonrasında Türkiye aleyhine sürekli artan ticaret açığıdır. Diğer taraftan, Türkiye ve Çin arasındaki ilişkiler hızla gelişmektedir. Artık Türk-Çin ilişkileri sadece ikili düzeyde olmaktan çıkmış ve küresel bir nitelik kazanmıştır. Eğer Ankara ve Pekin mevcut sorunların üstesinden gelme noktasında isabetli politikalar geliştirebilirlerse, Türk-Çin ilişkileri "stratejik ortaklık" düzeyine erişecektir.

It is seen that there are two main reasons behind the fact that Turkey has been willing to develop its relations with China since 1971. First of all, Turkey has been supported by China, which is a member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, in the international problems in which Turkey is a part. The second major expectation of Ankara is to get a market share from a huge country such as China which is rapidly developing.

Abstract

Since diplomatic relations between Turkey and PRC were established in 1971, concerns on international security and the economic potentials of each country have been among the factors that shape the Sino-Turkish relations. Politically, Ankara has considered the PRC, as one of the UN Security Council permanent members, as a new political expansion area and getting support for Turkey-related issues. Economically, Ankara has an expectation of benefits from China offering huge economic opportunities. However, Turkey has faced unexpected difficulties relation with China in last two decades. China pursued opposite policies of the Turkish claims in the international arena, including Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh issues. Moreover, Turkey and China have developed completely opposite policies toward the Arab Spring that occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and finally Syria. The most obvious problem that appeared in the field of economy is that there is a trade gap against Turkey's favor has grown gradually since 2001. On the other hand, the relations between Turkey and China have been quite rapidly growing in the recent years. The Turkish-Chinese relations do not only concern the two countries, but also gained a global dimension. If Ankara and Beijing can develop an appropriate policy to overcome the existing issues in a positive manner, it can be possible for Turkish-Chinese relations to achieve the level of "strategic partnership".

Keywords: Foreign Policy Analysis, Turkey, China

Introduction

Turkey's relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) have followed a fluctuating course since 1971, when the relations between the two countries officially started, until today. While the two countries did not have a close relationship in 1970s, a major revival took place in the bilateral relations throughout 1980s. The Central Asia policy that Ankara followed just after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 worried Beijing. In 2000s, on the other hand, it is observed that high-level visits considerably increased as in 1980s.

It is seen that there are two main reasons behind the fact that Turkey has been willing to develop its relations with China since 1971. First of all, Turkey has been supported by China, which is a member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, in the international problems in which Turkey is a part. The second major expectation of Ankara is to get a market share from a huge country such as China which is rapidly developing.

Pursuits of Developing the Relations with China

The relations between the two countries from 1971, when diplomatic relations were estab-

lished, followed a quite low course until 1980. Ankara, which was marginalized by the European Economic Community (EEC) after the 1980 coup d'état, embarked on a quest of new balances in political terms. The PRC, one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council and which opened up to capitalist economy, was considered as a new political center of balance for Ankara. In this period, first senior-level talks started between Turkey and China, and a great number of mutual visits took place between the two countries.

Minister of Trade Kemal Cantürk paid the first high-level visit from Turkey to China on May 1981. Foreign Minister İlder Türkmen's visit to China in December 1981 is quite important in terms of the bilateral relations. During the aforesaid visit, it was understood that the Beijing administration leaned towards the 1980 coup d'état on the ground that it provided a political stability against the Soviet expansion. China wanted a diplomatic solution for the Aegean Sea disputes between Turkey and Greece, and Cyprus issue between the parties. In this visit, economic and technical cooperation agreement, which paved the way for commercial cooperation, was signed between Turkey and China.¹

The President of Turkey Kenan Evren made a kind of Asian initiative in early 1980s. President Evren paid visits to China, South Korea, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan in December 1983.² While each of the aforesaid visits carries a great importance, the visit to China is a milestone in bilateral relations for being a senior-level visit between Turkey and China.³ Following the aforementioned visit of Evren, the Minister of Culture Zhu Muzhi paid a visit to Turkey on April 1983⁴, while the Foreign Minister Wu Chuochiang visited Turkey in October 1983.⁵

Chinese President Li Xiannian made a return visit to Turkey in March 1984.⁶ During the visit of President Li, China praised Turkey's stable attitude in the Iran-Iraq War, and highlighted that the Cyprus issue should be solved through international talks. As a result of the talks, Turkey and China reached an agreement on adopting a joint

attitude in the international platform. President Li's visit was followed by Foreign Minister Vahit Halefoğlu's visit to China in October 1984.⁷

Prime Minister Turgut Özal, on the other hand, paid a visit to PRC in July 1985.⁸ The Chinese government encouraged Turkey to invest in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in 1980s. Chairman of the Xinjiang government İsmail Amat visited various cities of Turkey along with a committee in July 1985.⁹

Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang, on the other hand, paid a visit to Turkey in July 1986. As in former high-level visits, talks were held during the prime ministerial summit on improving political and especially economic relations between the two countries.¹⁰ Deputy Foreign Minister Ci Huai Yuan stated in an interview, made in October 1987, that it is necessary to solve the problems of in the Aegean Sea, Cyprus, and the Turkish minority issues in Bulgaria through diplomatic channels.¹¹

China continued the high-level visits until 1991. The Minister of Culture Wang Meng paid a visit to Turkey on March 1988¹², and the vice-chairman of the National People's Congress of the PRC visited Turkey in April 1990.¹³ Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, on the other hand, came to visit Turkey on September 1990 in order to assess the developments regarding the Gulf crisis which started with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.¹⁴

While the relations between the two countries were going quite well at high level, a development which increased the tension took place. Muhammed Niyazi, Commercial Attaché of the Chinese Embassy in Ankara, was granted political asylum in Turkey on September 1986 for not having a life security.¹⁵ This development was the sign of the end of Chinese policy to use the Xinjiang area in establishing closer relations with Turkey. In 1980's, the actions of the Uyghur opposition leader Isa Yusuf Alptekin started to pose problem between Turkey and China.¹⁶

Following the Tiananmen Square Protests in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991,

the fact that Central Asian republics gained independence, led China to reconsider its minority policies in 1990s. In this respect, the fact that China which paid lots of high-level visits to Turkey in 1980s did not make even a ministerial visit to the country between 1991 and 2000 points out a negative development in Ankara perception of Beijing.

The emergence of Turkic countries in Central Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 caused to excitement in Turkey. Those developments created a misperception in the Turkish public regarding that the PRC, considered as a multinational empire, would collapse just like the Soviet Union.¹⁷

During this period, officials at various levels talked to the leaders of the Uyghur opposition in Turkey. In November 1991¹⁸, a week before Süleyman Demirel took office as Prime Minister, and in February 1992 when President Turgut Özal talked to Uyghur opposition leader Isa Yusuf Alptekin.¹⁹ Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was protested by Chinese Ambassador to Ankara Wu Keming in August 1995 for naming a park after İsa Yusuf Alptekin.²⁰

Turkey, which could not be successful enough in terms of the initiative on the Central Asia on its own, developed a strategy attaching more importance to cooperation with Russia and China in the region as from mid-1990s. Political, economic and military motives lied behind Turkey's strategy to establish closer relations with China. Turkey considered China as a cheap arms manufacturer as an alternative to the West in military terms. In economic terms, on the other hand, Ankara wanted to get a share of the cake in the great economy of China, which was growing rapidly and becoming a large market. Therefore, Turkey strived to rapidly increase its economic cooperation with China. In political terms, Ankara would be able to enlarge its maneuvering space in foreign policy thanks to the good relations to be established with China, one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.²¹ During this period, Turkey wanted to re-



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duce its dependence on the United States (U.S.) and the European Union (EU) by developing its relations with other great powers like China and Russia.

It was important also for China to establish close relations with Turkey. Even though Turkey was not as influential as China in world politics and economy, Turkey had a considerable importance in terms of the geopolitics of West Asia, the Balkans and North Africa. Therefore, China needed to receive the support of regional powers such as Turkey in order to be able to pursue its Eurasian policies.

President Süleyman Demirel began its Asia tour, including visits to China, Hong-Kong and Indonesia, in May 1995 in such an environment. During Demirel's visit to China, it was aimed at increasing economic cooperation, as well as seeking support in Turkey's arguments on the issues of Cyprus, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Nagorno-Karabakh.²² The State Minister Ayfer Yılmaz also went to visit China in September 1996 in order to increase the economic cooperation.²³ Ankara made major changes in Xinjiang to improve its relations with Beijing, and this issue started to be completely considered as China's internal affairs.

Turkey's main concern at this point was to be isolated in an environment where none of the countries in the world wanted to give damage to its relations with China due to the Urumqi incidents. In addition, any problem between Turkey and China could make it difficult for Turkey to take initiatives for the Uyghurs later on.

Meanwhile high-level military visits also increased. During Chief of General Staff Ismail Hakki Karadayi's visit to China on February 1997, he talked to President Jiang Zemin and Minister of Defense Chi Haotian. During the talks, Turkey's purchasing arms from China was also brought up to the agenda.²⁴ Chinese Ambassador to Ankara Wu Keming stated in February 1997 that the Sino-Turkish relations were going very well in the recent period.²⁵

Deputy-Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit also talked to the President Jiang Zemin in Beijing in May 1998. During the meeting, where mostly economic cooperation was talked, Ecevit highlighted the importance Turkey attached to the territorial integrity of China when China expressed their disturbance about the demonstrations staged in Turkey.²⁶

Through the circular letter that then-Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz issued in December 1998, the activities of East Turkestani foundations in Turkey were imposed severe restrictions.²⁷ After the aforesaid circular letter, many East Turkestani organizations in Turkey moved to the U.S. and West European countries where they could operate more freely. So, the Uyghur opposition turned from Turkey towards Western countries.²⁸

Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Turkey in April 2000 positively affected bilateral relations in 2000s. During the groundbreaking visit, agreements on economic, energy and political cooperation were signed. In joint declaration, on the other hand, both parties reached

an agreement on issues such as; "respect to human rights, territorial integrity and internal affairs; contribution to preventing crises in terms of globalization and political polarization; weapons control; coordination in disarmament; fight against terrorism, separatism and religious extremism."²⁹

President Demirel emphasized that the Uyghur people should build a friendship bridge in the relations between the two countries. Considering the aforesaid sensitivity of Turkey, President Jiang Zemin stated that they would not like to be the part creating problems and that they made initiatives to raise the living standards of the Turkic people living in Xinjiang, and invited Turkish investors to this region.³⁰

During Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan's visit to Turkey in January 2001, Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem requested his Chinese counterpart to support Turkey's Cyprus policy, but China avoided using a binding statement on this issue.³¹

The first concrete step on defense industry between Turkey and China was taken in 1996. Turkey and China signed an agreement on purchasing medium-range WS-1 missiles which cost 150 million dollars and on joint production in Turkey.³² Turkish Chief of General Staff Hüseyin Kivrikoğlu paid a visit to Beijing in June 2001 within the scope of the military cooperation projects between Turkey and China. Kivrikoğlu paid official visits in which he stated that problems in military projects conducted with China should be eliminated and that the current coop-

eration should be maintained by further developing it.³³

Primier Zhu Rongji paid a visit to Turkey in April 2002, and signed four agreements on economy. During the official talks, Prime Minister Ecevit consulted with his Chinese counterpart on some regional and international issues such as the Cyprus problem in particular. However, the open diplomatic support expected from China on the Cyprus issue could not have been received again.³⁴

Deputy-Prime Minister Devlet Bahçeli visited China between 27 May 2002 and 1 June 2002. Bahçeli, who also paid visits to Urumqi and Kashgar, was also the highest-level official visit to Xinjiang thus far.³⁵ The fact that Chinese authorities let Turkish Deputy-Prime Minister Bahçeli visit Xinjiang can be considered as a gesture stemming from the good bilateral relations in political terms in those periods.

In January 2003, when the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power alone, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as “Chairman of the Party” paid a visit to China. Erdoğan held official talks to develop political and commercial cooperation between the two countries.³⁶ The Chinese press praised Erdoğan’s statements against the separatist movement in Xinjiang.³⁷ The fact that Minister of Treasury Ali Babacan and Minister of Foreign Trade Kürşat Tüzmen accompanied Chairman Erdoğan during the aforesaid visit shows that the priority of Turkish part was economy.³⁸

Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, on the other hand, paid an official visit to China in February 2005. During Gül’s visit, mainly economic issues were put on the agenda, and particularly Chinese companies’ high-speed train project between Ankara and Istanbul, as well as their investments in the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) were assessed.³⁹

The fact that the demand of rusty-looking Varyag aircraft carrier, sold by the Ukraine to China, to pass through the Turkish Straits was delayed

from 1998 to 2001 created problems in bilateral relations in that period. China gave lots of guarantees in political, legal and economic aspects, and thus the battleship Varyag could pass through the Turkish Straits.⁴⁰

Turkey did not pay attention to warnings of Japan and the U.S. regarding that China would turn Varyag into an aircraft carrier and that Turkey should not let Varyag pass through Turkish Straits.⁴¹ China’s turning Varyag into an aircraft carrier in 2008 did not only put Turkey in a difficult position in the international arena, but also it set a precedent weakening Ankara’s position in terms of violating the Montreux Convention restricting the pass of battleships of the third party countries not having a coast to the Black Sea.⁴² Even though the engine of Varyag had been removed during its pass through the Turkish Straits, it is highly likely that it would put Turkey into trouble in case of similar passage demands in the future.

It is seen that high-level military visits continued on a regular basis during that period. Air Force Commander General İbrahim Firtına paid a visit to China in May 2005. During the visits, Turkey demanded to cooperate with China on medium-range air defense systems and space technology. Turkey also put an emphasis on their desire to install ground stations in the space, and to develop their cooperation on launching satellite and reconnaissance.⁴³

During Chinese Air Forces Commander General Qiao Qingchen’s Turkey visit on October 2006, the parties talked on Turkish Air Forces’ air defense tender and the cooperation on space technologies.⁴⁴ Air Forces Commander General Aydoğan Babaoğlu paid a return visit to China in April 2008. During the talk with Babaoğlu, Chinese Minister of Defense Liang Guanglie extended his thanks to Turkish government’s efforts to maintain the territorial integrity of China.⁴⁵

In April 2007, Deputy-Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Şahin took part in the signing ceremony held in Beijing to extend the term of contract that had been signed in 2002 for regulating the co-



The restrictions on religious freedoms still continue in Xinjiang. Mosques entrance and exits are strictly controlled by the intelligence agents in the crowd.

operation to improve public administration and human resources.⁴⁶ Minister of Foreign Trade Kürşad Tüzmen paid official visits to China in 2006, 2007 and 2008. During those visits, the primary agenda of the Turkish delegation was to balance the increasing gap in bilateral trade against Turkey, and to provide more active participation of Turkish businessmen in Chinese market.⁴⁷ During the talks held in September 2007, two parties held consultations on cooperation in the field of technology and on operating Turkey's boron reserves.⁴⁸ China's bid on nuclear power plant in Turkey left its mark on the talks held in September 2008. Again, during the aforesaid visit, Minister Tüzmen attended the Urumqi International Trade Fair.⁴⁹ State Minister Mehmet Şimşek also visited China in November 2007 to inaugurate the Beijing office of TÜSİAD, a Turkish Business Chamber.⁵⁰

Chinese Parliamentary Committee paid a visit to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) on November 9th, 2009.⁵¹ The Turkish

committee led by the Secretary-General of the Turkish Presidency attended the ceremony held in Mahmud al-Kashgari's mausoleum in Upal village of Kashgar located in Xinjiang on November 28th, 2009. Lots of conferences and symposiums were held in various parts of the world as UNESCO declared 2008 the year of Mahmud al-Kashgari.⁵²

Despite all those visits, Turkey could not receive any support from China on most of the problems related to Turkey. In fact China acted quite the opposite way against Turkey's arguments on the Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabagh problems.⁵³

During a period when Turkey went through problems with North Iraq, the fact that Chinese administration established very close relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government just after the Iraqi invasion of the U.S. in 2003, caused to trust issues in bilateral relations.⁵⁴ Beijing clearly stated that it was against the military

action of the Turkish Armed Forces in North Iraq in June 2007 on the grounds of preventing terrorist actions of PKK.⁵⁵

The fact that China adopted a negative attitude upon Turkey's becoming a full, or at least, observer member to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) also grabs the attention. Even though Russia, the other major member of the SCO, leaned towards Turkey's becoming an observer member,⁵⁶ China adopted a negative attitude on the issue for a long time.⁵⁷ This problem was partly overcome upon the fact that Turkey was accepted as the Dialogue Partner in the SCO Summit held on June 2012.⁵⁸

During President Abdullah Gül's visit to China in June 2009, the economic and political relations were brought to the table as a whole. In economic terms, Ankara asked for balancing the foreign trade deficit through China's investments to be made in Turkey, through directing Chinese tourists to Turkey, and through the Turkish-Chinese joint-ventures in third countries.⁵⁹ In political terms, on the other hand, two countries' being in cooperation on regional and international issues as much as possible was a priority agenda of the Turkish committee. At this point, the emphasis on the necessity of Uyghur's role as a friendship bridge was highlighted during President Gül's visits both to Beijing and to Urumqi.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the outbreak of the Urumqi riot on July 5th, 2009, just after the President Gül's delegation left Urumqi on 29 June 2009, led the relations between Turkey and China to be damaged. Turkey has been the most reactive country against the Urumqi riot both at social and state levels. Prime Minister Erdoğan expressed his harsh reaction against the Urumqi riot, and he was the top-level statesman showing the strongest reaction against China in the world.⁶¹

While Turkey showed such a strong criticism despite the fact that almost none of the other countries showed a major reaction the world, China gave a low-level and a low-tone response. Chinese Deputy-Foreign Minister Zhai Jun criticized the expressions such as "massacre"

and "genocide" that had been used by the Turkish public for the incidents in Urumqi, and he described those expressions as "irresponsible statements"; and underlined that they attached importance to put the harmed relations with Turkey back on the rails.⁶²

Turkey's main concern at this point was to be isolated in an environment where none of the countries in the world wanted to give damage to its relations with China due to the Urumqi incidents. In addition, any problem between Turkey and China could make it difficult for Turkey to take initiatives for the Uyghurs later on.⁶³ The Turkish Ambassador to Beijing Murat Esenli emphasized for plenty of times the fact that Turkey's intention was not to intervene in domestic affairs of China and that they supported the development of relations between the two countries. Besides, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu also called Chinese Counterpart Yang Jiechi and talked to him about the renormalization of the tensed relations between the two countries.⁶⁴

The normalization process between the countries restarted over the economic relations. Minister of Foreign Trade Zafer Çağlayan talked to the Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in Beijing as the special envoy of the Prime Minister Erdoğan between the dates 29 August and 1 September 2010. Then he passed to Urumqi, where the riots took place, to attend the International Urumqi Trade Fair.⁶⁵

Minister Çağlayan, who paid another visit to China in order to attend the Turkey-China Joint Economic Council in September 2009, signed various agreements with the Minister of Trade Chen Deming. Also during his talk with Deputy-Prime Minister Wang Qishan, Minister Çağlayan emphasized that Turkish government would always follow a "One China" policy and would not interfere in China's internal affairs.⁶⁶

Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, who came to Istanbul in January 2010 to attend the Afghanistan conference, held official talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu. Two ministers, who

signed a joint strategic cooperation agreement on issues such as Afghanistan, the Middle East, Iraq, global economic crisis and climate change, also reached an agreement on the fact that it is required to carry out more comprehensive studies on economic issues.⁶⁷ Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism Ertuğrul Günay and Chinese Minister of Culture Li Hong Feng attended the opening ceremony of the Shanghai Expo 2010 Fair on 15 June 2010. During the visit, an agreement was signed envisaging that Turkey will host the China Culture Year in 2012 and that China will host the Turkey Culture Year in 2013.⁶⁸

Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, who came to Turkey in September 2010, signed agreements that would carry the bilateral relations to a “strategic partnership”. Accordingly, it was envisaged that Turkey and China would cooperate in the field of energy, and particularly in nuclear field, and that bilateral foreign trade would be carried out over Yuan and Turkish Lira. It was aimed at increasing the bilateral trade volume to 50 billion dollars by 2015, and to 100 billion dollars by 2020.⁶⁹ In the agreements, it was decided to build Silk Railroad to be composed of high-speed trains between Edirne and Kars in Turkey which would be jointly constructed by Turkish and Chinese companies.⁷⁰

During Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao’s visit to İstanbul, he was protested by Uyghur diasporas members. Making a statement here, Vice President of World Uyghur Congress Seyit Tümtürk argued that Prime Minister Wen was the main responsible of the Urumqi incidents in 2009.⁷¹

Foreign Minister Davutoğlu made a follow-up visit to China between 28 October-2 November 2010. The fact that Davutoğlu also visited Beijing, Shanghai and Xian, in addition to Urumqi and Kashgar was considered as the gesture of China.⁷²

During Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping’s visit to Turkey in February 2012, big projects such as nuclear energy and railways in particular were at the top of the agenda between the two coun-

tries. Turkey plans to establish an approximately 5.000 km of railway network, including high-speed train projects, with Chinese companies. The “Modern Silk Road” project which could not have been put into practice for the last two decades is also extremely important for Turkey’s trade with China, Caucasus and Central Asian countries.⁷³

Immediately after this visit, Prime Minister Erdoğan paid a remarkable visit to China in April 2012. Prime Minister Erdoğan’s visit started from Urumqi and then he also visited Beijing and Shanghai. In the delegation which also included Taner Yıldız, Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, one of the primary issues was the nuclear power plant which was planned to be built in Sinop.⁷⁴ During the visit, the two countries made an assessment of the differences of opinion on the issues such as the Arab Spring, and the Syrian issue in particular. Although the parties could not reach an agreement on the issue, they agreed not to reflect the developments in the Middle East on the bilateral relations.

The relations between Turkey and China, both of which are G-20 members, have been quite rapidly growing in the recent years. The Turkish-Chinese relations do not only concern the two countries, but also gained a global dimension. Therefore, even Western media organizations now have an extensive coverage on the news regarding Turkish-Chinese relations. On the other hand, Turkey and China need to take certain major steps in political and economic fields in order to establish a “strategic partnership”.⁷⁵

Problematic Issues in Bilateral Relations:

1. Growing Trade Deficit

One of the major reasons of Turkey’s convergence with China is the fact that Turkish businessmen also benefited from the economic opportunities in China. Nevertheless, the imbalance in bilateral trade against Turkey, which started upon China’s entering in World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, increasingly grew in years. Looking at trade figures of 2011, it would be seen that 21.7

billion dollar of the total trade volume of 24.2 billion dollars is composed of Turkey's import from China (see. Table-1). As a good objective as it is to increase the bilateral relations up to 50 billion dollars by 2015, to what extent this trade will be balanced is at equal importance. Besides, China's WTO membership also negatively affects Turkey's export to the third countries.⁷⁶

Therefore, the most important agenda of the bilateral relations in recent years has been the trade imbalance. At this point, Ankara expects Chinese companies to make direct investments in Turkey, to evaluate the trade surplus capital in Turkish finance sector, to make Turkish-Chinese joint ventures in the third countries and to encourage Chinese tourist to go to Turkey.

Table 1: Turkey's Trade with China (million \$)

Years	Export	Import	Total
1990	37	246	283
1995	67	539	606
2000	96	1,345	1,441
2005	550	6,885	7,435
2011	2,467	21,693	24,160

Source: Ministry of Economy of Turkey

Turkey cannot meet its expectation from China in the field of tourism either. Among more than 30 million foreign tourists visiting Turkey in 2011, the number of Chinese travellers was only around 100 thousand. Ankara could not obtain the benefit it expected from the defense cooperation with Beijing in recent years. At this point, Turkey's expectation was to reduce its dependence on the West through a Turkish-Chinese military cooperation to embody some technology transfers as well.⁷⁷

Another economic problem is the cutthroat competition between Turkish and Chinese companies in the Middle East and Africa. This keen competition especially in the construction sector decreases the profit rates of Chinese and Turkish companies. Therefore, Turkish and Chinese companies should increase their profitability through cooperation to be established in those regions.

2. The Impact of Xinjiang on the Relations

In political field, Xinjiang still constitutes a sensitive issue in bilateral relations. Turkey con-

stantly states its requests to Chinese authorities on preserving political and cultural rights of the Uyghurs living in the XUAR. Ankara wants the Uyghurs to assume a cohesive role between China and Turkey, just like Bulgarian Turks created a friendship bridge between Turkey and Bulgaria in the post-1990s. The fact that the Hainan Airlines opened the Shanghai-Urumqi-Istanbul flight route in 2011 was an important development in terms of Xinjiang's opening up to Turkey more easily. Again, Turkish companies make investments in Urumqi. The solution to the problems of the Uyghurs through similar steps to be taken which would fulfill the Turkish public opinion is quite important in terms of further improving the bilateral relations.

On the other hand, in order for the XUAR to establish a friendship bridge in bilateral relations in line with the desires of Ankara, Beijing should not hesitate in terms of granting the fundamental human rights of the Uyghurs and preserving the Uyghur identity.

The fact that Uyghur language has increasingly been trivialized in the region is the biggest prob-

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lem that the Uyghurs have been facing. Within the scope of the “bilingual education” campaign, Beijing made Mandarin compulsory in all minority schools. Beijing states that they developed the aforesaid policy for the integration of minorities to entire China and for providing equal economic opportunities to minorities.⁷⁸ However, the Uyghur people who oppose to this policy assert that the bilingual education system was reformed to encourage more use of Mandarin and turned minority languages into a symbolic form and that Mandarin became the main language of education.⁷⁹

It is reported that the restrictions on religious freedoms still continue in Xinjiang. There are notices in the entrances of mosques all across the XUAR on which it says civil servants, students, and party members cannot enter; and besides, entrance and exits are strictly controlled by the intelligence agents in the crowd. In addition, it is forbidden to give religious courses to children, the Quran courses in particular.⁸⁰ On the other hand, there has been favorable development on the education of Chinese Muslim clergy. China and Turkey have signed a protocol on the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs for the training of Chinese Muslim clergy, both Uyghur and Hui, in Turkey.⁸¹

3. The Taiwan Issue

Another political issue between Turkey and China is about Taiwan. The lack of direct flights between Turkey and Taiwan, and the visa barrier between the two countries have been mak-

ing the mutual trade and touristic visits difficult. Even though this kind of steps doesn't mean an appeasement in terms of the One-China policy, Beijing warns Ankara not to go any further on Taiwan.⁸² China's setting conditions, not demanded from countries such as the U.S., Germany, Japan, and South Korea to Turkey would not be acceptable in current state of the bilateral relations.

Turkey should by all means overcome China's objections on abolishing visa requirement and on the start of direct flights. As the 26th largest economy of the world, Taiwan is a member of APEC under the name of “Chinese Taipei”, and it is officially represented in lots of international activities such as the Olympic Games. Hong Kong, which is a part of China, also has an autonomous government, a separate flag and currency unit under the policy of “one country, two systems”. In this respect, Turkey should be improving its economic and trade relations with Taiwan just like Hong Kong does.⁸³

Concluding Remarks: A New Road Map Should Be Developed in Relations with China

Turkey wanted to establish closer relations with China in terms of two main expectations in economic and political terms during last three decades. The first one was Ankara's expectation to receive support from China on the international issues related to Turkey. Nevertheless, China by no means supported Turkish arguments as of 1980s, when the relations with China started to

get closer, on the Cyprus issue, the Aegean Sea disputes, the PKK case; and on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, the Bosnian civil war and the Kosovo issue that broke out in 1990s. In addition, Ankara and Beijing have recently disagreed on the Arab Spring and especially on Syrian case that emerged in the post-2011 period. China continued to support the Ba'ath regime in Syria along with Russia and Iran. Therefore, whether Turkey will develop a common strategic objective with China or not should be reconsidered.

The Ankara's economic goal to take a share from the large China market developed in an opposite way to its expectations. Especially during 2000s, the bilateral trade turned into a unilateral trade in favor of China. It grabs attention that there is such a trade deficit by purchasing only consumer goods and intermediate products from China. The fact that Turkey has a constant deficit in trade with East Asian countries, and especially with China, at the rate of 80 per cent points out

a structural problem. The trade with China and other East Asian countries should be analyzed in detail at every level, and a strategy that would reduce our trade deficit should be developed.

Projects such as Chinese companies' investment in high-speed train, nuclear power plant and mining sectors in Turkey, which are considered to balance the trade deficit, should be developed well. Primarily, it is of great importance for technology-based Chinese investments to be transferred to Turkey and for them to make joint production.

As a result, Turkey and China have had the opportunity to become closely acquainted with each other in recent years. If Ankara and Beijing can develop an appropriate policy to overcome the existing issues in a positive manner, it can be possible for Turkish-Chinese relations to achieve the level of "strategic partnership."

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- Ben görüşümü aldurdum !