


Chapter 2

Türkiye and the Belt and Road Initiative: Focusing on Trade Deficit Reduction With China or Integration With the Global South?

M. Nergis Ataçay

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9723-0536>

Kastamonu University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is an extensive transportation and infrastructure project, connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe is also seen as one of the important tools of South-South cooperation. Türkiye as one of the important members of the BRI has had several expectations, mainly improving Sino-Turkish relations through increasing Chinese investments in Türkiye and reducing the pressure of the trade deficit of Türkiye given to China. In addition, it was anticipated that the BRI would have improved trade and investment relations of Türkiye with the other members, so that the initiative would also play a role in Türkiye's rapprochement to the rising Global South. On the other hand, Chinese investments in Türkiye have been insufficient since its inclusion in the BRI in 2015, and the two countries would mutually put efforts to realize the potential benefits of the BRI.

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INTRODUCTION

Alongside its objectives of fostering prosperity in developing countries and supporting global development, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been one of the most important instruments of South-South cooperation (SSC). Since its establishment, the number of BRI members has more than doubled. Such an expansion has certainly brought about an increase in the complexities and challenges that must be addressed for the initiative to bring about successful outcomes. Türkiye, which became a part of the BRI in 2015, has been viewed to be one of the important countries involved in the project.

The BRI marked the beginning of a new era in Sino-Turkish relations, which dated back to 1971. Bilateral relations between the two countries had developed through various phases because of several causes and it is possible to argue that they had not reached their full potential. Specifically, economic relations have been dominated by Türkiye's trade deficit with China and the relatively low levels of Chinese investment, so that the BRI was perceived as a significant opportunity for Türkiye to address these issues. On the other side, Türkiye's geopolitical importance was considered to position it as one of the key players in the project. Consequently, it gains significance to understand the impacts of the BRI in Türkiye and its role within the project as more than a decade have passed since its announcement. The engagement of Türkiye to the BRI have played an important role not only in Sino-Turkish relations but also in Türkiye's approach to the Global South, with which has not been historically close. Within this context, this chapter purposes to explore the critical question of whether the BRI, which has been one of the most important instruments of SSC, have played a role in increasing Chinese investments in Türkiye.

There is no clear consensus on which countries precisely constitute the Global South; however, it is evident that the region has gained considerable political and economic influence globally. SSC has been significant in increasing this influence. Post-development theory, which challenges the Western conception of development, also aligns with the rise of the Global South and the increasing relevance of SSC, as it contributes to the broader discourse surrounding the post-Western world. Western economic policies have historically been ill-suited to the different economic, social, political, and cultural contexts of non-Western countries. Türkiye, despite not being a former colony and maintaining historically close ties with the West, also exemplifies this mismatch. Therefore, Türkiye can be considered part of the Global South, as Western development models have failed to generate long-term economic progress, in addition to its efforts of approaching the Global South as a strategic complement to the West in its foreign policy. Such an approach could offer Türkiye a more advantageous role in the evolving post-Western global order, assigning more significance to the initiatives such as the BRI. In line with this perspective,

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