

Introduction to the Special Issue “Turkey, Asia, and the EU in a Changing Global Order”

Abstract: The special issue “Turkey, Asia, and the EU in a Changing Global Order” explores Turkey’s pivot towards Asia amidst a slowdown in its EU accession. It delves into Turkey’s increasing relations with Asia and its consequences for Turkey-EU relations. The issue also examines how Turkey’s growing ties with Asian actors affect its relationship with the EU, pondering whether these developments are competitive or complementary to Western interests within the framework of global capitalism, providing critical insights into the evolving geopolitical landscape.

Ever since the Democratic Party came to power in 1950, Turkey has traditionally been seen as an ally of the Western world. Nevertheless, a recent shift in the axis of Turkish foreign policy towards Asia is being increasingly discussed among scholars and in the media¹. During the first years of AKP rule in the 2000s, Turkey was celebrated by the West as a fast-growing free market economy, with a mostly Islamic population, and a Western-friendly attitude. However, now in the early 2020s, although the same party is still in government, Turkey has significantly increased its contacts with countries in Asia. It has bought the S-400 missile defense system from Russia despite Western opposition, has pledged to become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and has launched development initiatives, such as the “Asia Anew Initiative” and the “Middle Corridor”. This has all happened at the same time Turkey’s European Union (EU) accession process has slowed.

As global capital has flown speedily from West to East with the aim of exploiting cheaper labor and less-tightly regulated environmental resources, the center of world manufacturing has also changed. An unexpected consequence of this is that the liberal international order as promoted by the West is also being modified². The debate about whether China's rise is a challenge to or further consolidation of neoliberal hegemony on a global scale continues³. In fact, Asia has been an important region in respect of the distribution of global power since the Cold War era. Several proxy wars that marked the ideological boundaries of the Cold War camps took place in East Asia. The term "Asia-Pacific" was coined to create a new political-economic region composed of the Pacific Rim allies of the US and to isolate China as the historical regional power of East Asia. While the diplomatic isolation of China was relatively successful, the regional equivalent of NATO in East Asia, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), never fully functioned as a US-led regional security organization in Southeast Asia owing to the influence of the non-alignment movement in the region.

Asian developmental states, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, made the Asia-Pacific area an industrial development hub of Western capitalism during the Cold War. However, when China decided to end its decades-long economic isolation in the early 1980s and reintegrate into global capitalism, the epicenter of the global economy shifted to Asia. The rise of China brought the attention of the US, which had focused on the greater European regions and Middle East in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, back to East Asia. The US government has been following Obama's Asia Pivot through a series of policies, such as US-China trade wars, escalations of the Straits crisis, confrontations over the South China Sea, alternative trade pacts, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and security pacts, such as AUKUS (between the US, the UK, and Australia). A new political-economic region called the "Indo-Pacific" was also proposed to shift the regional center of gravity away from China. However, the middle and small powers of East Asia have repeatedly demonstrated their intention to avoid a Cold War-like polarization in the region and instead pursue a balancing act between China and the US.

The increasing level of activity by Asian actors has also led them to seek engagements in other regions, such as Africa and the Mediterranean⁴. For instance, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) stands as the most concrete example of China's understanding and practice of South-South cooperation. While the resurgence of such cooperation has led some to hope for a transformation in global political and economic structures, there are also those who remain more pessimist that Southern actors are being subsumed within the existing capitalist development approach⁵. Russian relations with Africa and the Middle East have been mostly shaped by the market-logic and energy-issues of the Post-Cold War era. Its policy has been shaped mostly as a reaction to Western actions⁶.

All these shifting global dynamics are certainly also leaving their imprint on Turkey-Asia and Turkey-EU relations. This special issue brings together articles examining Turkey's shifting foreign policy in the light of these changing global conditions and altering domestic dynamics. Are global structural factors precipitating these changes in Turkish foreign policy, or is it rather shifts in domestic conditions that are impacting foreign policy? Do Turkey's increasing relations with Asian actors developing at the expense of the West? Alternatively, are they complementary to Western interests in Turkey too, since they are also subsumed within global capitalism? Moreover, how do Turkey's developing relations with the East impact its relationship with the EU?

In the special issue, Wang and Sun's article investigates the causes of the hitherto relatively low level of cooperation between China and Turkey. They analyze China and Türkiye's relationship in relation to three layers: bilateral, regional, and global roles. They argue Beijing and Ankara perceive each other as a mix of economic partners, political competitors, and security rivals simultaneously.

Shlykov's article explores the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy from the 2000s to the 2020s by analyzing Russian official, expert, and media discourses. He finds that in the late 2010s, Russian official discourse started to mention Turkey as a more reliable partner than the West, while experts and the media noted the increasing diversification of Ankara's foreign policy.

Cerami's study examines the role of Italy and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean region, with a focus on energy issues and the refugee crisis. The article also explores China's growing interest in the Eastern Mediterranean within the framework of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as Chinese connections with Italy and Turkey.

Gökay's article analyzes Turkey in the last 20 years in two sub-periods, from 2002-2010, and from 2010-onward. Analyzing these periods as two interlinked nodes on the spectrum of an inherently authoritarian neoliberal conservative system of governance, Gökay asserts that in the second period, there were a lot of serious economic problems and increasingly authoritarian governance.

Güney and İşeri examine how domestic and international factors interact in shaping the foreign policy preferences of authoritarian leaders. They conclude that in the 2010s, Turkey's foreign policy indeed shifted away from the West in general, and from the EU in particular, towards Eurasia.

Ergenç and Yu aim to better understand the transnational relations of China's local governments. Through analyzing three Turkish companies investing in east China as case studies, the article investigates the role of local governments in China in the sustainability of foreign direct investment from developing countries.

Talani studies the extent to which Turkey has integrated into the global political economy, both technologically as well as economically. She concludes that contrary to widespread belief, promoted by the IMF and the World Bank, Turkey did not experience good economic performance in the 2000s. It has failed to integrate into the global political economy and the

country lags behind the West in terms of educational and technological achievements. In fact, its marginalization has increased, which still incentivizes Turkish citizens to emigrate.

Altunışık analyzes the importance of changing global and regional contexts and the shifting interests of the AKP government in determining the main causes of Turkey's return to Central Asia. She illustrates that despite certain continuities, Turkey's new engagement with the region differs from its previous engagements in important ways.

Evrensel, Gönenç, and Ünlüsoy examine different political parties' policies on Asia through interviews with political party representative and an analysis of party programs. They investigate their varying stances with regard to Asia, relations with Asian actors, Asian foreign direct investment in Turkey and their environmental impact, the Uyghur issue, and the potential alliance between Russia-Turkey-China following the Ukraine-Russia war.

Duan and Aydın compare how China and Türkiye have tended to use empire legacies to legitimize domestic economic reform and external geopolitical behaviors. Based on such a comparison, they suggest potential fields of cooperation between China and Türkiye in the post-hegemonic multipolar order and outline possible limitations.

¹ A. Ö. Atmaca and Z. Torun, 'Geopolitical Visions in Turkish Foreign Policy,' *Journal of Balkan and Near Studies*, 24 (1), 2022, pp. 114-127; C. Tuğal, 'Turkey at Crossroads?' *New Left Review*, 127, January-February 2021; Ç. Üngör, 'Heading Towards the East? Sino-Turkish Relations after the July 15 Coup Attempt,' in E. Erşen and S. Köstem (eds.), *Turkey's Pivot to Asia*, Oxon, Routledge, 2019, pp. 64-78; E. Erşen and S. Köstem, *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia Geopolitics and Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order*. London, Routledge, 2021; K. Kutlay and Z. Öniş, 'Turkish Foreign Policy in a Post-western Order: Strategic Autonomy or New Forms of Independence,' *International Affairs*, 97 (4), 2021, pp. 1085-1104; Ö. Aslan, 'A Déjà Vu All over Again? Identifying and Explaining "Change" in Turkey's Asia Policy,' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 24 (6), 2022, pp. 954-973.

² Fouskas, V., S. Roy-Mukherjee, Q. Huang & E. Udeogu, *China & the USA: Globalisation and the Decline of America's Supremacy*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

³ Arrighi, G., *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge, Verso, 2007; de Graaff, N., T. ten Brink, and I. Parmar, China's Rise in a Liberal World Order in Transition – Introduction to the FORUM, *Review of International Political Economy*, 27 (2), pp. 191-207, 2020; Harvey, D. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005; S. Gerard, China's Post-Listian Rise: Beyond Radical Globalisation Theory and the Political Economy of Neoliberal Hegemony, *New Political Economy*, 16 (5), 2011, pp. 539-559; Taylor, I. and Z. Cheng, China as a 'Rising Power': Why the Status Quo Matters, *Third World Quarterly*, 43 (1), 244-258, 2022.

⁴ Gönenç, D., E. İşeri, and Q. Huang, 'Editorial to the special issue on "Asian Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean,"' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25 (1), pp. 40-47.

⁵ Gray, K., and B. K. Gills, 'South-South cooperation and the rise of the Global South,' *Third World Quarterly*, 37 (4), pp. 557-574, 2016; Gülseven, Y. 'China's Belt and Road Initiative and South-South Cooperation,' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25 (1), pp. 102-117, 2023; Mawdsley, E., 'South-South Cooperation 3.0? Managing the consequences of success in the decade ahead,' *Oxford Development Studies*, 47 (3), pp. 259-274, 2019.

⁶ Issaev, L. 'Russia and the New Middle East,' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23 (3), pp. 423-442, 2021; Shlykov, P., and E. Koldunova, 'Russia and China in the Eastern Mediterranean: On Parallel Tracks?', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25 (1), 48-64, 2023.