



Increasing Presence of China in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: An Examination of Greece and Turkey

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Abstract

Key Words:

China
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Peace

This study aims to demonstrate China's increasing presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region by examining Turkey and Greece, which are two competing states of the region, with China. The article envisages that China is following 'peaceful rise' and 'developmental peace' strategies to increase its presence in the region. China's 'peaceful rise' and 'developmental peace' strategies in the Eastern Mediterranean is based on its economic activities in the region. This study claims that China is becoming more powerful actor in the eastern Mediterranean and dispute between Greece and Turkey do not create a threat to its increasing presence since China continues its presence based on economic activities such as the BRI in the region.

Key Words: China, Eastern Mediterranean, Peaceful Rise, Developmental Peace.

Doğu Akdeniz Bölgesinde Çin'in Artan Varlığı:

Yunanistan ve Türkiye Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Özet

Keywords:

Çin,
Doğu Akdeniz,
Barışçıl Yükseliş,
Gelişimsel Barış

Bu çalışma, bölgenin iki rakip devleti olan Türkiye ve Yunanistan'ı Çin ile inceleyerek Çin'in Doğu Akdeniz bölgesinde artan varlığını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Makale, Çin'in bölgedeki varlığını artırmak için 'barışçıl yükseliş' ve 'kalkınma barışı' stratejileri izlediğini öngörmektedir. Çin'in Doğu Akdeniz'deki 'barışçıl yükselişi' ve 'kalkınma barışı' stratejileri, bölgedeki ekonomik faaliyetlerine dayanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Çin'in Doğu Akdeniz'de daha güçlü bir aktör haline geldiğini ve Yunanistan ile Türkiye arasındaki anlaşmazlığın, Çin'in bölgedeki Kuşak ve Yol Projesi gibi ekonomik faaliyetlere dayalı olarak varlığını sürdürmesi nedeniyle artan varlığı için bir tehdit oluşturmadığını iddia etmektedir.

INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Mediterranean region is located at the intersection of the Asian, African, and European continents. With its central location, energy resources and meeting point of major international logistics routes, the region has also become a point of attraction for global powers. In addition to having a vital position in the international trade due to its location between Asia, Africa, and Europe, the region also has the shortest sea route for the trade between Asia and Europe.

Nowadays, geopolitical developments in the region have affected global stability and cause great powers to turn to the region. The USA, China, Russia, and the EU are known as the dominant powers in the Eastern Mediterranean. Global powers make regional arrangements by using regional states as intermediaries instead of

directly accessing the region and resources (Çebi Sınır and Kantar, 2021). What China tries to do in the region is to become visible in important countries in the region (Demir, 2021). To do this, China is using regional states namely Greece and Turkey as intermediaries. This strategy of China has also conformity with China's peaceful rise strategy at global level. Peaceful rise policy of China refers not to be involved in any conflict in the region for economic achievements (Tonchev, 2020). In other words, it could be assumed that China's presence in the region would occur through economic presence not military. Developmental peace policy similarly refers to increase the presence of the host country to influence economic policies in home country.

There are several reasons why China aims to increase its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. First, as mentioned above, the region with its location between Asia, Africa, and Europe is a meeting point of major international logistics routes. Second, China gives an importance to the Eastern Mediterranean due to the region's very significant connection to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's announcement of the BRI by the President Xi Jinping in 2013 has also demonstrated China's intent to increase its international presence through economic means. The BRI is the combination of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives. Therefore, China also sees the Eastern Mediterranean, the destination of the ancient Silk Road, as a bridge between Africa, Europe, and the Middle East to disseminate its policies. According to China, since nature of the BRI is based on the contribution to prosperity and provide alternatives to the cooperation between countries, as President Xi Jinping announced in May 2019, BRI is a challenge to the "clash of civilizations". *'It is committed to strengthening cooperation in infrastructure construction through political mutual trust and policy communication, and deepening exchanges among different peoples and mutual learning and prosperity among different civilizations through promoting investment and trade and economic links among all countries along the route'* (Yu, 2021: 258-259). Thus, via its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, China aims to envisage a new vision for the Eastern Mediterranean overarching different civilizations. Finally, as Putten stated (2016), China wants to become more active in this part of the world now, accompanied by similar factors as the USA, which needed for oil and its competition with the USSR caused it to take place in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East in the mid of the twentieth century.

This study aims to demonstrate China's increasing presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region by examining Turkey and Greece, which are two competing states of the region with China. The article envisages that China is following 'peaceful rise' and 'developmental peace' strategies to increase its presence in the region. Basically, China's 'peaceful rise' and 'developmental peace' strategies in the Eastern Mediterranean is based on its economic activities in the Eastern the Mediterranean. After the brief introduction, the second part of the paper mentions the conceptual framework which is China's 'Peaceful Rise' and 'Developmental Peace' strategies. The third part of the paper discusses how China becomes viable in the Eastern Mediterranean region in general fourth part focuses on China's port diplomacy and other investments in Greece. In the next part, the significance of Turkey for China in the Eastern Mediterranean will be examined with focus on Turkey's Middle Corridor Initiative, China's investments in Turkey and China's Cooperation Initiatives in Turkey. After final part combines the conceptual framework with the examination of Greece and Turkey based on Turkish- Greek Dispute as a challenge to China's 'peaceful rise' and 'developmental peace' strategies, this paper finishes by claiming that China is becoming more powerful actor in the eastern Mediterranean and dispute between Greece and Turkey do not create a threat to its increasing presence since China continues its presence based on economic activities such as the BRI in the region.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: CHINA'S 'PEACEFUL RISE' AND 'DEVELOPMENTAL PEACE' STRATEGIES

'Peaceful rise' concept was first mentioned in Zheng Bijian's article in Foreign Affairs in 2005. Bijian (2005) in his article defined China as a developing country aiming to increase its presence via peaceful means. 'Peaceful rise' policy of China refers not to be involved in any conflict in the region for economic achievements (Tonchev, 2020). In other words, it could be assumed that China's presence in the region would occur through trade not military presence. What China tries to do in the region is to become visible in important countries in the region (Demir, 2021).

On one hand, Cooley (2015) defines Chinese rise as rise of illiberal authoritarian actors in international politics. In other words, Cooley claims traditional tools of democracy promotion like conditionality are losing ground.

On the other hand, Alden and Large (2015) asserts that China's aim is a status quo actor in peace and development.

Regarding the concept of the 'developmental peace', it was formulated by Yin He in 2014. He (2019) divided the 'developmental peace' into two parts: economic development started by a powerful central government and aid with no political conditionality. 'Developmental peace' aims to increase the presence of the host country to influence economic policies in home country. 'Developmental peace' is an alternative to 'democratic peace' or 'liberal peace' of the West (He, 2019). After host country engaged with the home country in the region, 'developmental peace' process starts. The reason why China chose the 'developmental peace' is China's experience about underdevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, leaders of China chose economic development (Wang 2017). By taking the experiences into an account, China wants to help other developing countries to address the main problem of underdevelopment. According to Givens (2011), liberal norms such as democracy and human rights are not in China's area of interest. However, it does not mean that China aims to reduce these norms. Instead, China's developmental peace policy via aid and investment does not support any kind of ideology (Dreher and Fuchs, 2015). In other words, China defines the underdevelopment as one of the most important reasons of conflicts and a threat to the peace. In this sense, China's increasing presence in the eastern Mediterranean could be defined as a 'developmental peace' rather than a 'democratic peace' or 'liberal peace' which is used by the West (Lons et. al., 2019). China's area of expertise is infrastructure while West's specialty is the promotion of norms. Their expertise is complimentary not contradictory (Yuan, 2022). Finally, the most advantageous side of the 'developmental peace' is keeping China inside of the economic developmental but outside of the fragile political and security issues of the eastern Mediterranean region.

HOW CHINA BECOMES VIABLE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The Eastern Mediterranean, the intersection of Europe and the Middle East, constitutes the focus of China's strategic goals and regional interests. China's approach to the Eastern Mediterranean is part of its foreign policy framework as an extension of the BRI. In the Eastern Mediterranean, China's national priorities and increasing activism draw attention. These active policies of China are observed in three areas: investments in transportation, energy and telecommunications infrastructure, military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean as a general initiative of China's naval presence, and the creation of regional cooperation forums (Ekman, 2018).

First, China holds investments in transportation, energy and telecommunications infrastructure via the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which provides financing for infrastructure projects, also aims to provide cooperation in infrastructure projects aimed at improving land and sea transportation (Çebi Sınır and Kantar, 2021). Second, in terms of military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean, China's naval ships visit to the port of Piraeus symbolically as peaceful visits could be mentioned. Third, China's infrastructure-based activities to strengthen its bilateral relations in the Eastern Mediterranean will ultimately serve China's trade, investment, and transportation interests, as well as invest in its security and geostrategic ideals.

The Eastern Mediterranean is one of the regions most affected by the investments within the scope of BRI. Since 2009, China has increased its investment projects in the region and eventually increased its tendency towards the region with the BRI. As part of the initiative, China has increased its connections in Asia, Africa and Europe with new infrastructure and economic corridors. Due to its geographical location, the Eastern Mediterranean essentially plays a central role in the BRI.

Moreover, China has increased its interest in ports located in the Eastern Mediterranean region, especially in Turkey and Greece, and expanded its port investments on sea routes to Europe. These investments aim to connect the BRI to the sea and thus reach Europe from Mediterranean ports by sea and rail.

BRI has three different subproject groups in the Asia-Europe belt. The first is a rail corridor already in operation, connecting Chinese main production facilities to Western Europe. This corridor includes a fast and safe entry into the European market by connecting the Greek port of Piraeus to Budapest. The second is a land corridor currently under development and planned to pass through Turkey and Iran. The third is the Asia-Europe

Sea corridor, which will intensify the flow between Chinese and European ports (Ferrari and Tei, 2020:8-9). Therefore, for Chinese goods to reach Europe safely in this corridor, China invests heavily in ports in the region.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GREECE FOR CHINA IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Since China and Greece has signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2006, Chinese investments in Greece have been increasing. However, Greece comes to the forefront in investments made in the Eastern Mediterranean within the scope of the BRI. China, which has purchased most of the Piraeus Port, wants to make the region the largest transit center with the railway network. Not only port projects, but also technology and communication collaborations continue to increase. Especially renewable energy is one of the most important issues for China recently. All these investments and cooperation initiatives reflect China's growing power and influence in the region.

China's Port Diplomacy in Greece

The largest port in Greece and the seventh largest in Europe, the Port of Piraeus is in a very important strategic position. In 2016, the Chinese shipping company COSCO acquired most of the shares of Piraeus Port (Amaro, 2019). In particular, the Greek port of Piraeus is at the center of China's strategic involvement in the region. The acquisition of Piraeus Port by COSCO accelerated the process of the port becoming the leading logistics center of the Mediterranean. Today, the port of Piraeus is not only emerging hub for China's Maritime Silk Road in the Eastern Mediterranean but also still an important hub for Greece's maritime and economic power. Besides, the Port of Piraeus became the only major port in Europe managed entirely by a Chinese company (Putten, 2016). Xu Lirong, President of COSCO, also stated that Piraeus Port would promote Greece's integration into global markets and that Greece could significantly benefit from China's increasing influence and power in global markets (Bellos, 2016).

The port of Piraeus, which is planned to become the largest transit center in China, is connected not only to the Maritime Silk Road, but also to the Euro-Asia railway line, by providing the railway infrastructure that will connect Piraeus to Budapest (Ferrari and Tei, 2020). Moreover, COSCO's investment in the cruise sector could attract tourists from Asia to Athens and then to other Mediterranean countries by boat via Piraeus (Tzogopoulos, 2019). In addition, the Chinese government sees Greece as a gateway to increase its regional and global integration and the connections to be provided by the Port of Piraeus. President Xi Jinping stated that they would also strengthen land links to strengthen Piraeus' chain of activities and increase China's production capacity with Europe (Reuters , 2019). Piraeus not only increases Greece's economic mobility, but also creates a new corridor for China's export traffic.

Since COSCO is a strong freight forwarder on the China-Europe route, it could make the Port of Piraeus an important player for Chinese shipping companies on this route. After purchasing the port of Piraeus, COSCO made it the fastest growing container port in Europe by 2012 through varied infrastructure improvements. Therefore, China established economic and political influence in Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean by purchasing the majority of the port of Piraeus. China sees its relationship with Greece as a good example of Silk Road diplomacy in the field of maritime (Rhode, 2021). The central function of the port goes beyond the China-EU trade relationship, significantly influencing regional shipping patterns in the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

China's Other Investments in Greece

Besides port diplomacy in Greece, China has also increased its investments in the country. First of all, as the world's 2nd most efficient wind power producer and having one-third of the world's solar power generation capacity, the energy issue came to the fore during Xi Jinping's visit to Greece in 2019 (O'Meara, 2020). Moreover, renewable projects have been announced in Crete, including a 50 MW solar power plant and a €995m high-voltage transmission line to connect the island to the national grid (China Dialogue, 2020).

China's interest in Greece does not only consist of investments, but China also makes its influence felt in the region through the purchase of property by its citizens. In this context, as of 2019, 850 Chinese citizens have acquired a 'Golden Visa' by purchasing properties worth 310 million dollars in total, thus obtaining visa-free travel to EU members. The public economic development agency Enterprise Greece reported that Greece has earned over \$500 million in revenue thanks to the Golden Visas. The two countries also signed a 3-year action plan in May 2019 to determine the course of investment and trade cooperation (Ağaçlı, 2019).

17+1 Initiative

Following the BRI, which is an economic activity, Greece also joined the 16 + 1 group of Central and Eastern European Countries and China in 2019 as a part of political activity. However, the aim of China is also economic. With the inclusion of Greece, it has been renamed to '17+1'. The aim of 17+1 initiative is to facilitate closer economic collaboration between China and Central and Eastern European Countries including Greece as well as increasing connectivity in implementing the BRI (Tzogopoulos, 2019). Rhode (2021) adds that COSCO's investment in Greece's Piraeus port also demonstrates Greece's importance for the 17+1 initiative as well as China's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TURKEY FOR CHINA IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Turkey's connection to the Middle East, Asia and North Africa has made China willing for the infrastructure projects. In this location, Turkey acts as a land bridge connecting the continents of Europe and Asia.

China's interest in Turkey is also related with China's strategy in the Middle East. China prefers to establish close relations with significant countries in the region having anti-western sentiments. Besides, Turkey is important for China, since it is a candidate to the EU, member of NATO and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as well (Marketos, 2021).

Turkey officially became a BRI member country in 2015 (Parlar Dal, 2017). After Turkey's participation in the BRI, there has been a significant increase in the trade volume between China and Turkey and infrastructure activities for transit railway transportation have been started (İkiz, 2019). Since Turkey's regional potential and its impact on the completion of the terrestrial route puts it into very strategic position for China, Turkey has become a significant part of the BRI (Yu, 2021). Another reason why Turkey is significant for the BRI is that China could use Turkey's strategic position between Europe and Asia in terms of making the hub for the freight transport and trade routes via the Middle Corridor (Druzbacka, 2021). Finally, China prefers cooperation with Turkey via the connection of China's BRI and Turkey's Middle Corridor initiative since making Turkey an energy center for EU- China trade helps China to connect with Europe, Central and Western Asia, North Africa and Caspian Sea at shorter and cheaper routes (Yu, 2021).

Turkey's Middle Corridor Initiative

The G-20 summit in Antalya in 2015, witnessed the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between Turkey and China on Aligning the BRI and the Middle Corridor Initiative, which aims to connect Europe with the Middle East, Asia and then China via Anatolia (Hamilton, Ünver-Noi and Altay, 2019). Turkey's Middle Corridor initiative and China's BRI aim to increase regional economic cooperation in Asia by connecting Asia and Europe.

Turkey's land connection with the BRI, which is also a part of the Middle Corridor Project, in other words the Trans-Caspian Corridor that connects Europe and Asia, consists of the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (BTK) and the modernization of all the railway systems in Turkey to allow for high-speed freight transit. The first is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Line (BTK), also called the Iron Silk Road, was planned under the BRI and the Middle Corridor (Aydin, 2017). Bakü-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Line (BTK) is a railway link connecting Tbilisi in Georgia, Bakü in Azerbaijan and Kars in Turkey. The construction started in 2017 (Jardine, 2017). Built without funding from China, BTK was opened on 30 October 2017 to secure the rail link

between Asia and Europe. BTK is the shortest route between the three countries and between Asia and Europe. Within this structure, Turkey aims to become a new global trade hub in the region (Yu, 2021). The BTK aims to open the New Silk Road, which transports the goods from China to London through Kazakhstan, Bakü and Turkey. In 2020, first export train from Turkey to China arrived in Xi'an, China (Druzbacka, 2021).

The second is the modernization of Turkey's railway system and turn it into compatible with high-speed railway system that could be built from Turkey's eastern border Georgia to its western border Bulgaria, and crosses Kars and Edirne. Moreover, the Chang'an', the China- Europe rail train, crossed the Caspian Sea via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (BTK) in 2019 and arrived at the Czech Republic from Turkey. Therefore, the length of the transport of goods from China to Turkey was reduced. Even, Chinese goods could be shipped to Europe in 18 days (Daily Sabah, 2018). Economic cooperation between China and Turkey under the framework of the BRI has therefore led to infrastructure connectivity via the geographical connection of BRI and the Middle Corridor. Besides the Chang'an' train, the Ankara-İstanbul High-Speed Train Project Phase II is another project. Finally, the construction of airport, port, subsea tunnel, and railway system are another example for infrastructure connectivity between China and Turkey are (Yu, 2021).

China's Other Investments in Turkey

Obviously, China has very good relations with Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, China also has good relations with Turkey. COSCO purchased 65 per cent of the Kumport container terminal, which is Turkey's third largest port. The significance of Kumport comes from its being a section of the Ambarlı port in Istanbul on the Marmara Sea (Knowler, 2015). Although Kumport's capacity is less than half of Piraeus, it makes Turkey a significant participant of the BRI. China preferred Kumport with both strategic dimension and economic reasons since Turkey's Kumport is also a bridge to the eastern Mediterranean via the Bosphorus Strait (Atli, 2020).

Turkey and China also established cooperation in energy, equipment manufacturing and technology-based projects. First, Turkey's largest telecommunications service brand Turkcell and China's largest information and communication technology brand Huawei decided to work together to import Huawei's and the Chinese government's experience in software development and innovative solutions (Druzbacka, 2021).

Second, Emba Hunutlu thermal power plant, which is the largest direct investment of China in Turkey started to be constructed in 2019 in Adana (Xinhua, 2019). Emba Hunutlu thermal power plant is the first imported coal-fired power project. China Energy Construction Group drawn it up and the plant was started up in 2022 (NS Energy, 2022). Another direct investment of China in Turkey is also planned to be a coal power plant. In this point, both locals and EU criticize that China focuses on the construction of the coal-based power plants (Druzbacka, 2021).

Another initiative is Turkey's Eğirdir 1 GW pumped-storage hydro plant, which is planned to be Turkey's first pumped storage power station. Eğirdir 1 GW pumped-storage hydro plant is a Chinese company's initiative and very significant for China's aim to be known in hydropower business (Power-Technology, 2021). China also invested the Kazan trona comprehensive development project and the Salt Lake underground natural gas storage project in Turkey (Yu, 2021).

The reason why energy cooperation becomes vital part of China- Turkey relations is that Turkey needs energy and China has technological and financial superiority in terms of energy. Therefore, Turkey and China submitted several projects in mining, nuclear energy, coal power and renewable energy (Yu, 2021). In March 2020, Turkey Wealth Fund (TWF) signed a memorandum of understanding with Sinosure of China for insurance support to use in financing BRI projects (Şahin, 2020).

Finally, During the pandemic, China sent medical equipment regularly and Chinese SinoVac COVID-19 vaccines to Turkey (Druzbacka, 2021). A photovoltaic industrial park was built in 2020 by China and Turkey (EE- Paper, 2021).

Turkish- Greek Dispute as a challenge to China's 'peaceful rise' and 'developmental peace' strategies

In relation with China's 'peaceful rise' and 'developmental peace' strategies, this article focuses on the economic presence of China in the eastern Mediterranean region. In this sense, China is using regional states namely Greece and Turkey as intermediaries which is also a strategy of China having conformity with China's 'peaceful rise' strategy at global level.

China's rising power started with economic increase which made China a global power and a significant change in international relations. Since China needs long-lasting peace and cooperation for being a leading global power in the world, China claims that it does not prefer to export its communist ideology to the world. Therefore, with the aim to follow peace in the world and the development, China has joined most of institutions under United Nations other international organizations. Although China supports peaceful coexistence, liberal, and democratic West is skeptical towards China's rise and sees threat to itself (Zhang, 2022).

Regional cooperation is a good start for creating cooperative spirit in the world. China sees BRI as an opportunity to increase the cooperation in the region (Zhang, 2022). The BRI, as an economic initiative, is at the top of China's 'peaceful rise' and 'developmental peace' agenda (Wong, 2021). The BRI aims to connect Asia, Europe and Africa continents via land and maritime links. In this context, China gives an importance to the Eastern Mediterranean ports since it needs energy supply and wants to increase economic relationships in the region. The most visible investment of China in the region is also its largest and most strategically important infrastructure project in the region: the Port of Piraeus in Greece (Putten, 2016). Besides, both in Turkey and Greece, China hosts various infrastructure activities in the region and operates in sectors other than logistics.

Based on its developmental peace strategy, China's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean is increasing as parallel to its economic power which is also increasing. Moreover, in the region, China's policy is to avoid the conflicts in the region based on its peaceful rise strategy. Therefore, China is collaborating with both Turkey and Greece in the region aims to realize, the institutionalization of its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean through the BRI. Due to political dispute unsolved for decades between Turkey and Greece along with the Cyprus Problem, this is not an easy process.

In the 2000s, the competition between Turkey and Greece gained momentum with the hydrocarbon discoveries made in the sea areas of the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition to the problems of sovereignty in the Aegean Sea, the situation of the Aegean Islands and the Cyprus problem, which remained unresolved between Turkey and Greece, Greece took the advantage of the support of the EU in its activities in the region since Greece is also member of the Union. The activities carried out by Turkey in the region are presented as illegal and they are trying to deprive the Eastern Mediterranean from the opportunity created by energy resources (Baykara, 2020). The gas territorial dispute between Turkey and Greece is also directly related with Cyprus Island in the region. Due to the Cyprus problem between the Southern Cyprus and Northern Cyprus also could make issues harder in the region. Besides, it is also important to note that Greece and Cyprus are the members of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EastMed Forum), which is an international organization formed by Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine. The aim of the EastMed Forum, which was founded in 2019, is to gather suppliers, buyers and transit states in the region and develop an infrastructure for gas trade (EMGF, 2022)

Although the dispute between Greece and Turkey in the region leads to an instability and becomes a threat to the Chinese presence and the future of the BRI as well, the China does not have a clear policy towards the Cyprus issue and continues to establish good relations with both Greece and Turkey (Aydın and Kahraman, 2019),

On one hand, China continues negotiations with Turkey on its strategic ports for the future of the BRI. Therefore, China aware that Turkey is a regional power in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, Turkey is not content with China's stance towards Turkey's dispute with Southern Cyprus over the use of natural resources since it is ambiguous (Tonchev, 2020). Turkey and China as a part of the BRI is working on the realization of

the Middle Corridor Initiative, which could increase Turkey's strategic position between Asia, Middle East, and Europe; and make it the center of the trade (Demir, 2021). Besides, China is aware that as an EU candidate country and a member of both NATO and SCO, Turkey could be a mediator between China and the West. For China, Turkey is significant for the New Silk Road due to the Middle East Corridor and NATO technologies it acquired. EU's exclusion efforts of Turkey from the region's parameters allow China and Russia to infiltrate to the eastern Mediterranean (Marketos, 2021). However, it is important to note that human rights violations claim on the Uighurs in western China remains as a problem between China and Turkey (Kinling, 2019).

On the other hand, China gives an importance to the Eastern Mediterranean ports since it needs energy supply and wants to increase economic relationships in the region. The most visible investment of China in the region is also its largest and most strategically important infrastructure project in the region: the Port of Piraeus in Greece (Putten, 2016). Since 2009, starting from Piraeus, China has been building its existence in the region. Within two decades, EU and the US has started to define China's increasing presence in the region as a 'systemic rival'. Although China defines its presence in economic dimension and its naval visits to the port of Piraeus in 2010, 2015, and 2017 as peaceful visits, it is obvious that the port of Piraeus could be the port China builds its political and security power in Europe (Albert, 2019). Besides, China hosts various infrastructure activities in Greece and operates in sectors other than logistics.

Through economic investments, China aims that the BRI could contribute to China's interests in the eastern Mediterranean which hosts competing interests (Trt World, 2019). However, for the EU, beyond China's increasing investments, the concern that the ports in the region could be turned into naval bases in the future also comes to the fore (Pekcan and Uygun, 2021). China believes that if the EastMed Forum includes Turkey, that would contribute to the security in the eastern Mediterranean (Marketos, 2021).

In sum, considering that China's Eastern Mediterranean strategy is shaped based on commercial and economic interests, it is not directly involved in the political instability in the region. It is also observed that China is trying to develop good relations with all regional actors, even if they conflict each other (Koç, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the Eastern Mediterranean has become a point of attraction for global powers thanks to its central location, energy resources and meeting point of major international logistics routes. Besides, geopolitical developments in the region have affected global stability and cause great powers to turn to the region. The USA, China, Russia, and the EU are known as the dominant powers in the Eastern Mediterranean. Amongst them, China tries to become more visible in important countries in the region. Besides being a significant trading partner in the region via the relationships it created with ports, China has increased its presence in the region with the help of globalized network BRI created between China and the countries on the BRI route. Therefore, after the BRI was announced in 2013, China's presence in the eastern Mediterranean was strengthened.

Today, although China seems that it is collecting commercial projects in the eastern Mediterranean with geo-economic reasons, geostrategic reasons could be observed as well. China's investments both in Greece and Turkey demonstrate that China is increasing its presence in the eastern Mediterranean. BRI serves China in the region to combine its geo-economical and geopolitical intentions.

In conclusion, this study aims to demonstrate that China's 'peaceful rise' and 'developmental peace' strategies in the Eastern Mediterranean is based on its economic activities in the Eastern the Mediterranean. This conclusion could also be deprived from Chia's stance towards two competing countries of the region: Turkey and Greece. China is using these countries as its intermediaries in the region. Therefore, it could be concluded that China is becoming more powerful actor in the eastern Mediterranean and because of its successful peaceful rise and developmental peace strategies in the region, dispute between Greece and Turkey do not create a threat to its increasing presence since China continues its presence based on economic activities such as the BRI in the region.

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