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Turkey and Regional Connectivity



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Introduction:

Turkey, situated at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, serves as a bridge connecting the two continents. It is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, and the Aegean Sea on three sides. The capital and largest city, Istanbul, straddle the Bosphorus seaway, with parts of the city extending into both the Asian and European sides.



Turkey's crucial geographical positioning, linking Europe and Asia, exerts significant influence in the region and holds control over access to the Black Sea. Its strategic location plays a vital role in the implementation of transportation development projects, contributing to enhanced trade. Consequently, Turkey actively fosters economic, commercial, and investment relations while simultaneously seeking to bolster political and cultural ties with neighbouring regions.

This article aims to delve into the developmental initiatives and diverse corridors in Turkey that contribute to regional connectivity between Asia, Central Asia, and Europe. Additionally, the study will uncover the significance of these projects in promoting regional development through enhanced trade.

Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative:

This Corridor Initiative, commonly referred to as "The Middle Corridor," is an initiative aimed at revitalizing the ancient Silk route. Originating in Turkey, this initiative establishes a connection from Turkey to China through the Caucasus region, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Caspian Sea, traversing Central Asia en-route to China.



Transportation along "The Middle Corridor," begin in Turkey, utilizing railways and roads to travel through Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Caspian Sea. It passes through the Caspian transit corridors and, by taking the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan- Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan route, reaches China. This trade route involves the utilization of several key sea ports along the Caspian transit route, including Azerbaijan's Alat port in Baku, Kazakhstan's Kuryk port in Aktau, and Turkmenistan's Turkmenbashi international seaport, all of which play a crucial role in facilitating this multimodal transport.

The Middle Corridor proves to be both more cost-effective and faster when compared to the Northern Corridor and sea routes linking China to Europe. It boasts a significantly shorter travel time, approximately one-third of that through sea routes, and benefits from more favorable climatic conditions. By leveraging port connections in Turkey, the Middle Corridor presents more advantageous trade opportunities, particularly for



commerce extending from Asia to the Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean regions.

The Middle Corridor has the potential to facilitate trade amounting to \$600 billion annually. In 2022, trade along the Middle Corridor exceeded 3.2 million tons, with the capacity to potentially reach 10 million tons in the near future.

Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway:

The BTK railway project, a crucial element of the Modern Corridor (MC) initiative, was successfully completed in 2017. This railway venture establishes a seamless trade route connecting China and Europe. In its initial phase, the project boasts a capacity to transport cargo of 6.50 million tons and accommodate 1 million passengers. These numbers are projected to escalate significantly, reaching 17 million tons of cargo and 3 million passengers annually by the year 2034.

Turkey has undertaken several transport initiatives that link Asia and Europe, such as the the undersea railway project known as "Marmaray", the construction of Istanbul's Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, the Eurasia Tunnel, and the establishment of Istanbul Airport. Other significant projects include the Three-story tube tunnel project, Edirne-Kars high-speed railway project, Northern Marmara and Gebze-Orhangazi-izmir Motorway, and the Mersin, Candarli, and Filyos ports. These projects are anticipated to play a crucial role in enhancing regional connectivity and enhance economic and trade cooperation between Asia and Europe.

Turkey's role in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):

Turkey has officially joined the initiative in 2015, two years after the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative

(BRI) by Chinese President Xi Jinping. Turkey has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China to harmonize the BRI



with its Middle Corridor. The collaboration between Turkey and China includes the construction of a new railway spanning from East Turkey to West Turkey, aligning it with the critical Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway of the Middle Corridor. Turkey's active involvement in regional connectivity is instrumental in facilitating China's access to the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and Europe.

Furthermore, Turkey has fostered strong political, economic, and strategic ties not only with China but also with other Asian countries. Turkey attained full Dialogue partner status in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and became founding member in the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). These developments underscore Turkey's significant role in regional connectivity, enhancing opportunities for interaction between Asian and European nations.

The Middle Corridor and BRI have opened up significant possibilities for China, the world's second-largest economy, and Turkey, a G20 member, to strengthen their investment ties and bilateral trade. These initiatives serve to advance regional cooperation as well as global connectivity.



Conclusion:

Turkey, strategically located at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, plays a crucial role in connecting the two continents. The country's proactive approach to transportation development projects, such as the Middle Corridor and various other initiatives, enhances regional connectivity and facilitates trade.

The Middle Corridor, revitalizes the ancient Silk Road by connecting Turkey to China through the Caucasus region, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Caspian Sea. These initiatives will provide new business prospects, strengthening trade and diplomatic ties between regional economies such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, and Turkey.

The Middle Corridor along with BRI establishes connections between diverse economies, creating a conducive environment that expands market access and increase trade activities, thereby promoting economic growth. The advantages of these trade opportunities extend beyond few countries, with the potential to positively impact additional nations in Europe, Central Asia, and Asia in the near future.