Osservatorio TURCHIA CeSPI

Approfondimento n. 45/July 2026

# *Türkiye's Participation in Multilateralism in a Fragmented World:*

## *An Analytical Assessment and Policy-oriented Recommendations*

*Dr. Uğur Yasin Asal*

*With the support of:*

Fondazione CSF

Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo

# TÜRKIYE'S PARTICIPATION IN MULTILATERALISM IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD: AN ANALYTICAL ASSESSMENT AND POLICY-ORIENTED RECOMMENDATIONS

## TABLE OF CONTENT


Executive Summary ..... 3
1. Introduction ..... 4
1.1. Aim, Scope, and Structure ..... 4
1.2. Research Questions ..... 4
1.3. Methodology ..... 5
2. Conceptual and Strategic Concept ..... 5
2.1. Classical and Contemporary Approaches to Multilateralism ..... 5
2.2. Defining Multilateralism in Contemporary International Relations: Challenges and Opportunities ..... 6
2.3. Current Geopolitical Crises and Power Shifts ..... 6
3. Multilateralism and Middle Power Diplomacy ..... 7
3.1. Strategic Autonomy and Institutional Alignment Identity ..... 7
3.2. Türkiye's Evolving Foreign Policy: Analytical Framework ..... 8
3.3. Türkiye's Historical Engagement with Multilateralism ..... 8
3.3.1. The Cold War Period: Security-Oriented Multilateralism ..... 8
3.3.2. Post-Cold War Reorientation and Institutional Diversification ..... 9
3.3.3. The Post-2010 Period: Activism, Assertiveness, and Selective Multilateralism ..... 9
3.4. Continuities and Changes in Türkiye's Multilateralism Approach ..... 10
4. Türkiye in Global Multilateral Institutions ..... 10
4.1. United Nations ..... 10
4.1.1. Türkiye's Voting Behavior, Network Management, and Normative Positioning ..... 11
4.2. NATO ..... 11
4.2.1. The Balance Between Collective Defense and National Security Priorities ..... 11
4.2.2. Burden Sharing, Strategic Disagreements, and Alliance Cohesion ..... 11
4.3. G20 ..... 11
4.3.1. Economic Diplomacy and Development Discourses ..... 12
4.3.2. Türkiye's Bridge Role Between Developed and Emerging Economies ..... 12
4.4. BRICS ..... 12

5. Regional Multilateral Cooperation of Turkish Foreign Policy ..... 13
5.1. European Union: Institutional Fatigue and Functional Cooperation ..... 13
5.1.1. Customs Union, Migration, and Sectoral Engagement ..... 13
5.2. Organization of Turkic States (OTS) ..... 14
5.2.1. Normative Leadership and Political Practices ..... 14
5.3. Black Sea and Middle East ..... 14
5.3.1. Türkiye's Mediating Role in the Context of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine ..... 14
5.3.2. Regional Security and Economic Coordination ..... 14
5.4. Economic-Political Multilateralism and Geo-economic Engagement ..... 15
5.4.1. Geo-economics and the Economic Dimension of Multilateralism in Turkish Foreign Policy ..... 15
5.4.2. The Middle Corridor and Connectivity Diplomacy ..... 15
5.4.3. Energy Security and Multilateral Geo-economic Balancing ..... 15
5.4.4. Supply Chains, Friend-Shoring and Economic Security ..... 16
5.4.5. Sanctions, Financial Vulnerability and Strategic Resilience ..... 16
6. Multilateralism Case Studies ..... 16
6.1. Grain Corridor Agreement ..... 16
6.2. NATO's Enlargement Process ..... 16
6.3. EU Migration Agreement ..... 17
7. The Future of Türkiye's Multilateralism Approach and Policy Recommendations ..... 17
References ..... 20

## Executive Summary

This analysis comprehensively examines Türkiye's multilateralism strategy in the context of increasing geopolitical competition, institutional erosion, and normative fragmentation at the global level. The analysis reveals that Türkiye has adopted a selective, flexible, and instrumental approach to multilateralism over the last decade. While Türkiye adds significant value to mediation in resolving interstate crises, humanitarian diplomacy, and regional crisis management, it faces conjunctural limitations in maintaining institutional and economic capacity, balancing global power, and strategic communication. Multilateralism is the most important condition for the effective functioning of diplomatic mechanisms. Developing as a natural consequence of the rule- and institution-based structure of the international system, multilateralism is critically important in fulfilling the status of sovereign equality among states.

The 21st century, which revealed its complex structure after the September 11, 2001, attacks, presents challenges to multilateralism along with many economic and political crises. Türkiye, located at the center of global and regional geopolitical crises, effectively leverages its flexible, multilateral foreign policy capabilities to navigate them. Türkiye's role as a NATO member in de-escalating and building confidence in Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been strengthened by its recent steps to reduce regional risks and threats in the context of the Iran-US-Israel war.

The analysis highlights three key findings:

1. Türkiye's multilateralism is a strategic construct rather than a normative commitment.

2. Its regional power capacity has deepened in certain areas, but this power has various structural vulnerabilities.

3. Traditional institutional engagement is increasingly giving way to network-based and crisis-based multilateral collaborations.

# 1. Introduction

## *1.1. Aim, Scope, and Structure*

This analysis aims to examine Türkiye's multilateralism strategy at theoretical, historical, and empirical levels and to develop applicable recommendations for analysts and policymakers. The study consists of three main sections: (i) conceptual framework, (ii) institutional and regional analysis, and (iii) policy recommendations.

The analysis primarily focuses on the principles of multilateralism, institutions, and rules established after the Second World War. The transformation of the rule-based international relations system and the crises it has experienced in recent years are increasing the need for multilateralism. Türkiye is located at one of the geopolitical centers of this increasing need for multilateralism. With its sphere of influence in the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Caucasus, Balkans, Middle East, and North Africa, Türkiye fulfills its mission of building peace and stability in these regions.

Türkiye, which links the main foreign policy principle of *'Peace at Home, Peace in the World'* to the effective functioning of multilateral global and regional mechanisms based on dialogue, plays a leading role in resolving geopolitical conflicts and regional wars. Beginning with an analysis of Türkiye's historical background in multilateral mechanisms, this analysis reveals Türkiye's current multilateralism in international crises and institutions and offers recommendations for policymakers.

## *1.2. Research Questions*

The research questions on which the analysis focuses are as follows.

- What is the historical background of Türkiye's multilateralism?
- How is Türkiye positioned in the multilateral system?
- In which areas are Türkiye's middle power capacity concentrated?
- Is multilateralism normative or instrumental for Türkiye?

### *1.3. Methodology*

The analysis was prepared through qualitative research, a comparative foreign policy approach, and secondary data sets (IMF, UN, EU, etc.). Policy documents and official reports were also analyzed.

## 2. Conceptual and Strategic Concept

### *2.1. Classical and Contemporary Approaches to Multilateralism*

Multilateralism is defined in the discipline of international relations as a form of order in which states cooperate within a framework of common rules, norms, and institutions. Classical approaches, particularly those shaped by the liberal international order established after World War II, considered multilateralism a cornerstone of international stability. Institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank emerged as institutional manifestations of multilateralism during this period. According to the liberal institutionalist perspective, such structures reduce uncertainty between states and lower the costs of conflict (Keohane, 1984). Liberal institutionalism defines multilateralism as a structure that enhances international cooperation (Keohane, 1984).

In contrast, the realist approach views institutions as reflections of the distribution of power (Mearsheimer, 2001). Realist theory approaches multilateralism more cautiously than liberal theory and argues that such arrangements are sustainable only insofar as they serve the interests of major powers. Robert Keohane (1984) argues that international institutions legitimize the political goals of great powers by advancing the multilateralism argument. Neorealist thinkers such as Kenneth Waltz, on the other hand, emphasize that states ultimately prioritize their own security due to the anarchic nature of the international system (Waltz, 1979).

In this context, multilateralism is seen as a means rather than an end. Contemporary approaches, however, consider multilateralism as a more complex and multi-layered political process. In particular, the growing influence of rising powers (e.g., the People's Republic of China and India) in the international system is reshaping the existing multilateral order. Furthermore, regional organizations and informal platforms (e.g., the G20) are emerging as alternative or complementary structures to classical multilateral institutions. These developments demonstrate that multilateralism is evolving from an interstate to a multi-actor form of governance (Acharya, 2014).

## *2.2. Defining Multilateralism in Contemporary International Relations: Challenges and Opportunities*

Today, multilateralism is considered not only a mechanism for interstate cooperation but also a fundamental element of the global governance system. However, defining this concept has become increasingly complex due to factors such as growing geopolitical competition, normative differences, and institutional erosion. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, criticisms of the coordination capacity of multilateral institutions increased, and their effectiveness was questioned (WHO, 2021).

One of the most notable challenges is the weakening of multilateral mechanisms due to competition among major powers. The strategic competition between the United States and China has deepened debates about the neutrality and functionality of international institutions. Similarly, the resurgence of emphasis on national sovereignty is reducing states' commitment to binding international rules (Ikenberry, 2020).

In contrast, multilateralism still offers indispensable opportunities in solving global problems. Transnational issues such as climate change, global health crises, and economic instability require collective action. In this context, initiatives such as the Paris Climate Agreement demonstrate the continued effectiveness of multilateralism. Furthermore, digitalization and the increasing role of global civil society enable the inclusion of new actors in multilateral processes, creating a more inclusive governance model (Held & McGrew, 2007).

## *2.3. Current Geopolitical Crises and Power Shifts*

In contemporary international politics, multilateralism has evolved from classical institutional structures to more flexible and functional networks. *"Narrowed multilateralism"* and **"issue/crisis-focused collaborations"** are key components of this transformation (Nye, 2020). For example, US-China rivalry, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and global economic vulnerabilities are reducing the effectiveness of the multilateral system (Allison, 2017).

The international system is characterized by multiple geopolitical crises and simultaneous power shifts. These crises directly affect not only regional security balances but also the global distribution of power. The Russo-Ukrainian War is reshaping the European security architecture, while energy competition in the Eastern Mediterranean issues is also increasing regional tensions.

From the perspective of power shifts, the international system appears to be evolving from unipolar to multipolar. The decline in the United States' relative power and China's economic and military rise are leading to significant changes in the global balance of power. This situation calls into question the assumptions of classical hegemonic stability theory (Gilpin, 1981).

However, the interplay of geopolitical crises has led to the emergence of a new era in the international system, known as the "poly-crisis era." Issues such as energy security, food crises, and supply chain disruptions trigger each other, leading to broader instability. In this context, the role of security alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is regaining importance, while the formation of alternative power centers is accelerating. Among the most important of these power centers is BRICS, comprised of Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China, and South Africa. Increased cooperation among BRICS members, along with the expansion of dialogue mechanisms with third parties, indicates the search for a new balance of power.

In conclusion, power shifts and crises in the contemporary geopolitical environment are driving the international system toward greater uncertainty and competition. This situation both increases the importance of multilateral cooperation and makes its sustainability more difficult.

## 3. Multilateralism and Middle Power Diplomacy

In the international relations literature, the concept of "middle power" describes states positioned between major powers and smaller states, which generally seek to exert influence through normative foreign policy, mediation, and multilateralism. Countries such as Türkiye, Canada, and Australia are frequently included in this category. One of the fundamental behavioral patterns of middle powers is their attempt to expand their spheres of influence through international institutions (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993).

Institutional engagement is a strategic tool that middle powers employ to compensate for their limited material capacity. In this context, platforms such as the United Nations, NATO, and the G20 allow middle powers to increase their visibility and diplomatic influence. Normative entrepreneurship and multilateral diplomacy are among the distinguishing elements of middle power behavior (Acharya, 2014).

However, increasing geopolitical competition and institutional weakening in recent years are narrowing the maneuvering space of middle powers. In a system where rivalry between great powers intensifies, the balancing role of middle powers becomes more complex, and these actors often face pressure to choose sides. This situation leads middle powers to become more pragmatic and flexible.

### *3.1. Strategic Autonomy and Institutional Alignment Identity*

Strategic autonomy refers to a state's capacity to make foreign policy and security decisions independently of external pressures. In contrast, institutional alignment refers to states producing identities and policies by acting within the framework of specific international institutions and alliances. These two concepts often appear as intertwined dynamics rather than opposing forces in contemporary international relations (Smith, 2018).

Particularly in the context of the European Union, discussions on strategic autonomy have gained significant momentum in recent years. The EU's efforts to act more independently in defense and security have prompted a search for a new balance in its relations with NATO. This situation allows for a redefinition of transatlantic relations (Howorth, 2019).

The tension between strategic autonomy and institutional alignment creates a critical policy dilemma, particularly for middle powers. While integration into international institutions provides legitimacy and security, excessive reliance on these institutions can limit policy flexibility. Therefore, many states pursue a strategy of *"selective engagement,"* seeking to maintain their autonomy while benefiting from institutional advantages.

## *3.2. Türkiye's Evolving Foreign Policy: Analytical Framework*

Türkiye's foreign policy has undergone a significant transformation in the post-Cold War era. Initially shaped primarily by the European Union's full membership process and integration with the West in the early 2000s, its foreign policy has gradually become more active.

Increased engagement, particularly in regions such as the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Caucasus, has strengthened Türkiye's regional power capacity. Türkiye's mediating role in crises such as the Syrian Civil War and the Russia-Ukraine War are concrete examples of its multi-dimensional foreign policy.

However, Turkish foreign policy is also defined as a "balancing act" due to elements such as tensions in relations with the Western alliance and pragmatic collaborations developed with Russia. While NATO membership remains a strong element, relations developed with Russia in the fields of energy and defense are considered an indicator of Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy (Kardaş, 2013).

A multi-dimensional analytical framework is needed to analyze Turkish foreign policy. This framework combines middle power theory, the strategic autonomy approach, and the multilateralism perspective. In this context, Türkiye both develops institutional engagement strategies as a middle power and pursues policies to increase its strategic autonomy.

Analytically, Turkish foreign policy can be examined along three main axes: (1) level of institutional participation, (2) regional power projection, and (3) relations with great powers. For example, G20 membership strengthens Türkiye's role in global governance, while its position within NATO forms the basis of its security policies.

This framework also helps explain the fluctuations in Turkish foreign policy. Geopolitical crises, domestic political dynamics, and economic factors play a decisive role in foreign policy choices. Therefore, Türkiye's foreign policy exhibits a situational and adaptive structure rather than a fixed strategy.

In conclusion, Türkiye presents an important case study demonstrating how middle-power behavior and the pursuit of strategic autonomy are intertwined. This situation creates a rich area of study for understanding state behavior in contemporary international relations.

## *3.3. Türkiye's Historical Engagement with Multilateralism*

### 3.3.1. The Cold War Period: Security-Oriented Multilateralism

The Cold War period was marked by a bipolar international system and largely institutionalized multilateralism on security grounds. In this context, military alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact are the most prominent examples of multilateralism. During this period, multilateralism was mainly based on the logic of collective defense and deterrence and became a tool of competition between ideological blocs (Waltz, 1979).

From Türkiye's perspective, Cold War-era foreign policy was largely shaped by integration into the Western bloc and security concerns. Türkiye's 1952 NATO membership was one of the key turning points that determined its position within the multilateral security architecture. In this

context, Türkiye adopted multilateralism not as a foreign policy choice but as a **security necessity** (Oran, 2001).

During this period, multilateral institutions functioned more as tools for strategic balance than as platforms for normative cooperation. Therefore, multilateralism had a more military and security-oriented content, while its economic and political dimensions remained relatively limited. This situation also prepared the ground for the transformations that would take place in the post-Cold War era.

### 3.3.2. Post-Cold War Reorientation and Institutional Diversification

The power vacuum and new opportunities that emerged in the international system with the end of the Cold War led to significant changes, including the rise of multilateralism. The disappearance of bipolarity diversified states' foreign policy options and transformed their approach to multilateral institutions (Ikenberry, 2001).

During this period, Türkiye restructured its foreign policy and became more active in a wider geographical area. Increased diplomatic and economic engagement in regions such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia diversified Türkiye's role in multilateral platforms. At the same time, relations with the European Union became one of the main axes of foreign policy during this period. Institutional diversification has increased Türkiye's interaction not only with traditional Western institutions but also with new regional and global platforms. Structures such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have begun to play an important role in Türkiye's multilateral foreign policy (Robins, 2003).

During this period, multilateralism has expanded from a security-focused framework to areas such as economic cooperation, regional integration, and normative diplomacy. In parallel with this expansion, Türkiye's foreign policy has also become more multidimensional and flexible.

### 3.3.3. The Post-2010 Period: Activism, Assertiveness, and Selective Multilateralism

The post-2010 period is considered a process in which more proactive, assertive, and at times confrontational elements have come to the fore in Türkiye's foreign policy. During this period, Türkiye became a more visible actor in regional and global crises and began to selectively use multilateral platforms in line with its strategic goals (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016).

The Arab Spring process has been one of the most prominent examples of Türkiye's foreign policy activism. Increased foreign policy engagement, especially in the Middle East, has strengthened Türkiye's claim to regional leadership. However, crises such as the Syrian Civil War have made Türkiye's multilateral approach more selective and security-oriented.

Selective multilateralism means that Türkiye can maintain cooperation with some international institutions while pursuing more independent and unilateral policies in other areas. The continuation of NATO membership, while developing strategic relations with Russia, is a concrete indicator of this approach. During this period, Türkiye's foreign policy is considered a hybrid model combining middle-power behavior with the pursuit of strategic autonomy. This situation demonstrates a reinterpretation of multilateralism as instrumental and pragmatic.

### *3.4. Continuities and Changes in Türkiye's Multilateralism Approach*

In Türkiye's multilateralism approach, significant transformations are observed alongside certain continuities. The most striking element in terms of continuities is the strategic importance Türkiye attaches to international institutions. NATO membership and active participation in multilateral platforms are key indicators of this continuity.

However, in terms of change, Türkiye's approach to multilateralism has become more flexible, selective, and national-interest-oriented. Especially since 2010, increasing geopolitical risks and regional crises have led Türkiye to diversify its foreign policy tools (Kirişci, 2017).

The joint evaluation of continuity and change dynamics reveals that Türkiye's foreign policy has an adaptive structure rather than a static one. In this context, Türkiye maintains its relations with traditional multilateral institutions while developing new forms of cooperation. Türkiye's multilateral approach is evolving in parallel with transformations in the international system, and both structural constraints and strategic choices play a decisive role in this process. This makes Türkiye a dynamic case study that warrants examination in contemporary international relations.

## 4. Türkiye in Global Multilateral Institutions

### *4.1. United Nations*

Türkiye adopted a policy of 'Active Neutrality' during World War II, which lasted from 1939 to 1945 (Oran, 2001). According to this policy, Türkiye maintained diplomatic dialogue with the parties to the war but pursued an active neutrality to avoid involvement. Undoubtedly, the importance of multilateral diplomatic practices, such as World War I, the War of Independence, the Treaty of Lausanne, and the Montreux Straits Convention, in preventing Türkiye's involvement in the war is significant. Türkiye participated in the San Francisco Conference, which convened on June 26, 1945, and is considered the beginning of the process of establishing the United Nations (UN). Since its inclusion in the UN, Türkiye has been at the center of multilateral political mechanisms.

Contemporarily, Türkiye actively contributes to UN peacekeeping operations (UN, 2023). It is also among the countries that contribute the most to humanitarian aid as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Türkiye stands out as an actor seeking to increase its visibility within the United Nations system, particularly in mediation, peacekeeping, and humanitarian diplomacy. Türkiye's strategy in this area is consistent with a **"human-centered foreign policy"** approach (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

Türkiye's contributions to the UN structure can be summarized under three main headings:

1. Mediation initiatives: Playing an active role, especially in regional crises (e.g., the grain corridor initiative in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war),

2. Peacekeeping operations: Providing strategic contributions to UN missions,

3. Humanitarian aid: Türkiye is one of the top humanitarian aid providers globally (OECD, 2024).

In this context, Türkiye is moving towards a "soft power-focused peacebuilding" model rather than classical military contributions. However, the literature also emphasizes that Türkiye's contribution to UN peacekeeping operations remains relatively limited, which restricts its global visibility (Bellamy & Williams, 2021).

#### 4.1.1. Türkiye's Voting Behavior, Network Management, and Normative Positioning

An examination of Türkiye's voting behavior in the UN General Assembly reveals a partial divergence from the Western bloc and a more autonomous stance in recent years (Voeten, 2023). This can be explained by three trends: the pursuit of strategic autonomy, rapprochement with the Global South, and normative flexibility. Türkiye also manages a multi-layered diplomatic network within the UN through organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and developing country groups. From a normative perspective, Türkiye exhibits selective norm advocacy on issues of sovereignty, humanitarian intervention, and global justice. This places Türkiye in a hybrid position between a "norm entrepreneur" and a "norm pragmatist."

### *4.2. NATO*

Türkiye joined NATO in 1952 and has the second-largest army in NATO today. However, developments such as the S-400 crisis have led to trust issues within the alliance (NATO, 2022).

#### 4.2.1. The Balance Between Collective Defense and National Security Priorities

Türkiye is a critical actor within NATO due to its geostrategic location. However, in recent years, Türkiye's role within the alliance has been shaped by divergent bilateral relations with the US and by tensions between collective defense obligations and national security priorities. Key examples of this tension include its Syria policy and border security, its perception of the threat posed by terrorist organizations, and its relations with Russia. While contributing to NATO's deterrence capacity, Türkiye also develops autonomous defense policies. This situation is defined in the literature as **"intra-alliance autonomy"** (Yost, 2022). As a result, Türkiye is positioned within NATO as an indispensable, integrated, but autonomous actor.

#### 4.2.2. Burden Sharing, Strategic Disagreements, and Alliance Cohesion

Türkiye evaluates burden sharing within NATO in terms of both military contributions and geopolitical value. Türkiye is trying to fulfill its responsibilities within the alliance by increasing its defense spending (NATO, 2024). However, disagreements continue within the alliance in the following areas: the S-400 air defense system crisis, the F-35 fighter jet production project, and differences in security policy with the US. Nevertheless, NATO's renewed importance after the Ukraine war has increased Türkiye's strategic value within the alliance.

### *4.3. G20*

Türkiye plays a bridging role between developing countries and developed economies within the G20 (IMF, 2024).

#### 4.3.1. Economic Diplomacy and Development Discourses

Türkiye is developing an active discourse within the G20, especially on development, inclusivity, and global inequalities. Türkiye's approach on the G20 platform focuses on increasing the representation of developing countries, inclusive growth, infrastructure, and development finance (G20, 2023). The themes of "inclusiveness, investment, and implementation" emphasized by Türkiye during its 2015 G20 presidency form the basis of this approach. In this context, Türkiye uses economic diplomacy not only for commercial interests but also to produce a global development discourse.

#### 4.3.2. Türkiye's Bridge Role Between Developed and Emerging Economies

Türkiye is positioned as a "bridge country" between developed economies and emerging markets, given its geographic location and economic ties. This role manifests itself at three levels: (i) financial integration (strong ties with Western financial systems), (ii) trade diversification (a broad trade network with Europe, Asia, and the Middle East), and (iii) political mediation (an active role in North-South dialogue). However, this bridge role is sometimes constrained by Türkiye's economic vulnerabilities (IMF, 2024). Most particularly, factors such as inflation, exchange rate volatility, and external financing needs limit Türkiye's influence in global economic governance.

### *4.4. BRICS*

Türkiye effectively employs its multidimensional foreign policy approach within alternative mechanisms of the evolving global balance of power. Among these alternative platforms, BRICS occupies a particularly significant position. The grouping was initially formed in 2006 through the cooperation of Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, and the People's Republic of China. It acquired its current designation in 2011 with the accession of the Republic of South Africa. At the BRICS Summit held in South Africa in 2023, it was announced that Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Ethiopia, and Argentina had been invited to join the bloc as new members. However, following his election as President of Argentina, Javier Milei declared that his country would not participate in the grouping (Britannica, 2026). With Indonesia's accession in 2025, the total number of member states increased to eleven (Anadolu Agency, 2025). Following these enlargements, the grouping has increasingly been referred to as BRICS+.

The founding members of BRICS emerged from the 2008 global economic and financial crisis with comparatively less damage than many advanced economies. Their strong macroeconomic performance in the years following the crisis led to expectations that the grouping could contribute to the emergence of a new geopolitical equilibrium. Initially built upon the argument that it could serve as an alternative economic center of gravity to the economies of the Global North, BRICS has in recent years gained greater prominence within a new global political landscape increasingly shaped by opposition to U.S. dominance.

Türkiye actively utilizes its multidimensional foreign policy approach in addressing numerous geopolitical challenges across its region. In particular, the deterioration of relations with the United States, especially in the context of the Syrian conflict, has encouraged Ankara to pursue engagement with alternative global platforms and partnerships. Türkiye's relations with BRICS are significant both in terms of strengthening cooperation with China, Russia, and India and in demonstrating the country's geopolitical leverage. Nevertheless, **Türkiye's engagement with**

**BRICS+ should not be interpreted as an alternative to its NATO membership or its European Union accession process.** Rather, it should be viewed as a complementary component of a broader multidimensional diplomatic strategy.

Turkish foreign policy is characterized by a multi-vector orientation. This multidimensional approach demonstrates that, as a NATO member, Türkiye can play a balancing and geographically connective role in its relations with countries of the Global South. Türkiye participated in the BRICS+ Summit held in the Russian Federation in 2024, thereby signaling its close interest in the evolving dynamics of the platform. Although Türkiye is not a member of BRICS+, the bloc's approach toward Ankara reflects a potential "partner country" perspective. Türkiye is expected to continue monitoring the BRICS+ platform closely; however, as emphasized above, it is likely to perceive its engagement with the grouping not as a direct alternative to the Global North, but rather as a complementary dimension of its broader geopolitical and geostrategic advantages.

# 5. Regional Multilateral Cooperation of Turkish Foreign Policy

## *5.1. European Union: Institutional Fatigue and Functional Cooperation*

Relations between Türkiye and the European Union have entered a period of significant institutional fatigue in recent years. The weakening of the full membership perspective, the *de facto* freezing of negotiation chapters, and mutual political distrust have limited the normative and strategic depth of relations (European Commission, 2023). However, relations have not completely broken down; on the contrary, they have shifted towards areas of functional cooperation. This situation shows that the parties continue their cooperation in low-politics areas rather than high-politics areas. The prominent areas are trade, energy, and migration management. In this context, Türkiye-EU relations are evolving from the classical membership process to a *"sectoral and pragmatic partnership"* model. However, the sustainability of this model depends on the parties' reconstruction of political will.

### 5.1.1. Customs Union, Migration, and Sectoral Engagement

The strongest dimension of Türkiye-EU relations remains the Customs Union. This structure, in effect since 1996, has enabled Türkiye to partially integrate into the EU internal market and significantly increased trade volume (World Bank, 2024). However, the current Customs Union needs updating because it does not cover areas such as the services sector, agriculture, and public procurement. In the field of migration, Türkiye has become a critical "buffer country" and "cooperation partner" for the EU. The 2016 Türkiye-EU Migration Agreement forms the basic framework of this relationship (Council of Europe, 2024). Sectoral engagement, on the other hand, has the potential to deepen, especially in green transformation, digital diplomacy, digital economy, and energy security.

## *5.2. Organization of Turkic States (OTS)*

### 5.2.1. Normative Leadership and Political Practices

The Organization of Turkic States is increasingly important to Türkiye's multilateral foreign policy. Türkiye assumes a normative leadership role in this platform.

This leadership manifests itself in three dimensions. These are (1) emphasizing common identity and cultural ties, (2) economic and institutional integration initiatives, and (3) regional political coordination. Türkiye's aim within this framework is to create an institutionalized regional cooperation architecture in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Kembayev, 2022). However, the organization's main challenges are differing foreign policy orientations among member states, limited institutional capacity, and low economic integration. Therefore, the OTS remains a developing multilateral platform rather than a regional organization with significant global influence.

## *5.3. Black Sea and Middle East*

### 5.3.1. Türkiye's Mediating Role in the Context of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Türkiye has emerged as a mediating actor following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In particular, the Istanbul and Antalya meetings, along with the Grain Corridor Agreement, demonstrate Türkiye's active role in crisis management (United Nations, 2023). This role is explained by Türkiye being one of the rare actors capable of communicating with the parties, pursuing a balanced foreign policy, and possessing diplomatic flexibility. However, this mediation role has been limited to crisis management and the production of temporary solutions, rather than producing sustainable peace, due to Russia's stance.

### 5.3.2. Regional Security and Economic Coordination

The Black Sea and Middle East regions are critically important for Türkiye in terms of both security and economy. In the Black Sea, energy pipelines, maritime security, and the NATO-Russia balance are prominent, while in the Middle East, counterterrorism, energy supply security, and regional competition are decisive. Türkiye seeks to ensure regional coordination through multilateral platforms. However, regional competition and the intervention of major powers limit these efforts (ICG, 2024). The fundamental characteristic of Türkiye's regional policy is its balanced, flexible multilateralism. This model is based on conducting simultaneous relations with different actors, establishing a balance between blocs, and developing pragmatic cooperation. For example, Türkiye, as a NATO member, maintains relations with the West while simultaneously cooperating with Russia in energy and security and engaging with various actors in the Middle East.

## *5.4. Economic-Political Multilateralism and Geo-economic Engagement*

### 5.4.1. Geo-economics and the Economic Dimension of Multilateralism in Turkish Foreign Policy

The growing use of economic tools in power competition in international politics makes geo-economics a fundamental component of contemporary multilateralism. Regional trade corridors, sanctions, energy security, supply chains, and financial networks are now considered not only economic but also strategic tools for power projection (Blackwill & Harris, 2016).

This transformation, for Türkiye, shifts multilateralism from a merely diplomatic and security-oriented tool to a mechanism for producing economic resilience and ***strategic connectivity.*** Most particularly in recent times, Türkiye's multilateral engagement is deepening along three geo-economic axes:

1. Connectivity diplomacy
2. Energy and transit geopolitics
3. Supply chain and economic security governance

In this context, Türkiye can be analyzed not only as a "middle power" but also as a "geo-economic hub state" (Luttwak, 1990; Farrell & Newman, 2019).

### 5.4.2. The Middle Corridor and Connectivity Diplomacy

One of the most important pillars of Türkiye's multilateral economic and political strategy is the Middle Corridor initiative. This corridor, which offers an alternative trade and transportation route between China's 'Belt and Road' initiative and Europe, has the potential to transform Türkiye not only into a transit country but also into a norm-producing and logistics hub. The fragility of the Northern Corridor following the Russia-Ukraine war has increased the strategic importance of the Central Corridor (World Bank, 2023). In this context, Türkiye's multilateral role is strengthening in the following dimensions: (i) infrastructure coordination within the Organization of Turkic States, (ii) supply chain diversification with Europe, (iii) mediating the economic integration of the Caucasus-Central Asia, and (iv) considering energy, transportation, and digital corridors together.

These developments are taking Türkiye's multilateralism to the dimension of "infrastructure diplomacy" in addition to normative diplomacy.

### 5.4.3. Energy Security and Multilateral Geo-economic Balancing

Energy security is central to Türkiye's multilateral economic and political approach. Natural gas transit lines, LNG infrastructure, renewable energy collaborations, and Eastern Mediterranean energy competition are strategic tools in this context. Projects such as the Southern Gas Corridor and TANAP have positioned Türkiye not only as a consumer but also as a regional energy hub (IEA, 2024). In this context, Türkiye's energy multilateralism is based on resource diversification, its strategy to become a transit hub, and the use of energy diplomacy to balance geopolitics. This situation creates additional strategic leverage for Türkiye, especially between Russia, the EU, and the Middle East.

#### 5.4.4. Supply Chains, Friend-Shoring and Economic Security

In the post-COVID-19 environment of global production network restructuring, the concepts of "friend-shoring," "nearshoring," and economic security have come to the forefront (IMF, 2024; OECD, 2024). Türkiye has the potential to benefit from this transformation for three reasons: its proximity to Europe as a production hub, its Customs Union infrastructure, and its industrial and logistical capacity. This makes Türkiye a potential "near-shoring partner" for Europe. Especially in critical sectors, the automotive, defense industry, semiconductor sub-supply, and green transformation supply chains are expanding Türkiye's multilateral economic and political role. These developments show that multilateralism should now be measured not only by institutional memberships but also by embeddedness in economic networks (Farrell & Newman, 2019).

#### 5.4.5. Sanctions, Financial Vulnerability and Strategic Resilience

In today's geo-economy, sanctions have become a fundamental tool of foreign policy. Especially after the sanctions against Russia, Türkiye's balancing policy has brought the challenges of economic multilateralism into sharper focus. In this context, three vulnerabilities stand out. These are dependence on external financing, exchange rate volatility, macroeconomic sensitivity, and the narrowing of the policy space in the face of sanctions regimes. This situation requires not only a diplomatic but also a financial resilience strategy for Türkiye (Tooze, 2022). Therefore, economic stability should be considered as a prerequisite for multilateral capacity.

## 6. Multilateralism Case Studies

### *6.1. Grain Corridor Agreement*

The Black Sea Grain Corridor Agreement is considered one of the most concrete examples of Türkiye's mediation capacity and strategic flexibility within its multilateralism policy. This initiative aimed to mitigate the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on global food security and demonstrated Türkiye's capacity to conduct simultaneous diplomatic relations with both the West and Russia (United Nations, 2023). In this process, Türkiye acted in coordination with the UN, assumed the role of a logistical and security guarantor in the Black Sea, and positioned itself as a "facilitator" building trust between the parties. This case shows that Türkiye adopted a crisis-based, functional, and results-oriented model of multilateralism rather than classical alliance-based diplomacy. However, the inability to ensure the agreement's continuity due to Russia's approach also revealed the highly dependent and fragile nature of such initiatives.

### *6.2. NATO's Enlargement Process*

The NATO enlargement process is an important example of Türkiye using its veto power as strategic leverage in its multilateral policy. Particularly during the membership applications of Sweden and Finland, Türkiye conditioned the process within the framework of its security concerns and counter-terrorism policies. Türkiye's behavior in this process can be analyzed in three strategic

dimensions: (i) conditional approval policy (integration of security demands into the negotiation process), (ii) maximization of bargaining power (use of intra-alliance decision-making mechanisms), and (iii) demonstration of strategic autonomy (taking an active but independent position within NATO). This shows that Türkiye views NATO membership not only as a security umbrella but also as a multilateral negotiation platform (Yost, 2022).

### *6.3. EU Migration Agreement*

The Türkiye-EU Migration Agreement is one of the most prominent examples of functional and results-oriented pragmatism in Türkiye's multilateral approach. This agreement includes mutual obligations between Türkiye and the European Union to manage irregular migration flows (European Council, 2024).

In this process, Türkiye has become a key country controlling irregular migration flows, undertaking humanitarian responsibility by hosting millions of Syrian refugees, and developing financial and technical cooperation with the EU. This case demonstrates that Türkiye uses multilateralism not as a normative goal but as a pragmatic, instrumental policy tool. In particular, the inclusion of security, humanitarian aid, and financial support within the same framework confirms Türkiye's "functional multilateralism" model. However, the fact that the agreement has become open to political debates over time also shows that such arrangements can produce asymmetrical dependency relationships (European Commission, 2023).

When these three cases are considered together, Türkiye's multilateralism policy exhibits three fundamental characteristics:

1. Flexible mediation capacity (Grain Corridor)

2. Use of strategic leverage (NATO enlargement)

3. Pragmatic functionalism. (EU Migration Compact)

This framework distinguishes Türkiye from classic normative multilateral actors, placing it in the category of a "flexible, selective, and results-oriented middle power."

## 7. The Future of Türkiye's Multilateralism Approach and Policy Recommendations

Türkiye faces two main strategic options in the coming period. These are: deepening institutional relations with the West and continuing a multilateral balancing policy. The current trend indicates that the second option, namely balancing multilateralism, will continue. Türkiye's geographical location and strong diplomatic network make it a strong regional leadership candidate in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, the Black Sea, and North Africa. Türkiye's diplomatic experience and mobility, particularly in crisis management and mediation, are a significant advantage.

Türkiye's current multilateralism approach may yield three outcomes in the long term. These are, respectively, a positive scenario (increased influence in the global system as a flexible middle power), a negative scenario (institutional insecurity and isolation), and an intermediate scenario (limited but stable regional power position). In this context, the determining variables will be economic stability, institutional credibility, and strategic consistency.

Türkiye's discourse on multilateralism has recently evolved from the classic "Western-centric institutional integration" approach to a more flexible, pragmatic, and multi-vector structure. This transformation is directly related to the increasing asymmetric multipolarity and global governance crises in the international system (Balta, 2024). Türkiye now uses multilateralism as an instrumental and strategic foreign policy tool rather than a normative commitment. The "The world is bigger than five" discourse emphasizes the need for reform in existing global governance structures in this context (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This recalibration can be interpreted in three dimensions:

1. Normative challenge: Calls for UN and global system reform
2. Pragmatic engagement: Active participation in platforms such as the G20 and OECD
3. Multi-axis balancing: Turning to alternative platforms while maintaining relations with the West

This situation moves Türkiye away from the classic "middle power" definition and closer to the "flexible middle power" category. An increasingly prominent element in Türkiye's multilateral engagement has been institutional selectivity. This approach means differentiating the intensity of participation based on national interests, rather than equal commitment to all institutions. Examples include high-level technical participation within the OECD (300+ committees) (OECD, 2024), cooperation with NATO in the field of security, and the pursuit of outreach to BRICS and Asian platforms. This selectivity indicates that Türkiye is employing a "hedging strategy" in its foreign policy. However, the literature emphasizes that this approach may erode institutional trust and create long-term predictability problems (Pierini, 2024).

Türkiye has significantly expanded its diplomatic capacity in recent years. With over 260 foreign missions, it possesses one of the world's largest diplomatic networks (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This expansion serves three strategic purposes: geographical diversification (opening to Africa and Asia), economic diplomacy (trade, energy, investment), and crisis management and mediation capacity. However, quantitative expansion does not always parallel qualitative expertise. There is a need for a more institutionalized structure in technical negotiation capacity, international law expertise, and data-driven policymaking. Modern multilateralism now operates not only between states but also within a framework of multi-stakeholder governance.

In Türkiye, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), other public diplomacy institutions, civil society organizations, and the business world (DEİK, TİM, Exporters' Associations, etc.) have become instruments of foreign policy. This structure has enabled Türkiye to maintain a high operational capacity, especially in humanitarian aid and development. Türkiye's position as one of the world's largest humanitarian aid providers is an outcome of this model (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

However, coordination deficiencies can undermine policy consistency, message integrity, and resource effectiveness. Therefore, institutionalizing the **"whole-of-government approach"** is

critical. One of Türkiye's prominent strategies in recent times has been issue-based coalitions, including mediation in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the grain corridor agreement, and energy and transportation corridors. Unlike classical alliance systems, this approach relies on flexible, temporary, and functional collaborations. In the literature, this model is defined as "functional multilateralism." Advantages of this approach include rapid action in foreign policy, low-cost diplomacy, and high visibility. Disadvantages include a lack of institutional sustainability and limited capacity to build long-term trust.

Turkish-Western relations have experienced a serious trust crisis in the last decade. Despite NATO membership, the S-400 crisis and the deadlock in the EU membership process have weakened relations (CFR, 2023). However, recent steps such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the conflict between Iran, the US, and Israel, along with the recalibration of Türkiye's role within NATO, the normalization of economic policy, and pragmatic cooperation with the West, are signaling a rebuilding of trust (IMF, 2024).

However, lasting trust requires institutional and mutual commitment, as well as normative alignment. One of Türkiye's strongest areas in foreign policy is humanitarian diplomacy and public diplomacy. Prominent tools include humanitarian aid (Syria, Africa), education and cultural diplomacy in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and North Africa, and the effective use of media and communication tools over the past few years. Türkiye's "human-centered foreign policy" approach creates a capacity to generate normative power within this framework (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). However, the sustainability of this capacity depends on strong economic resources and effective institutional coordination.

*Dr. Ugur Yasin Asal, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Head of Political Science and IR Department and EU Research Center at Istanbul Ticaret University.*

## References


Acharya, A. (2014). *The end of the American world order*. Polity.

Allison, G. (2017). *Destined for war: Can America and China escape Thucydides's trap?* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Anadolu Agency. (2025). *https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/endonezya-bricse-tam-uye-oldu/3443533*

Balta, E. (2024). *Normalizing transactionalism: Turkish foreign policy after 2023 elections*. Middle East Institute.

Bellamy, A. J., & Williams, P. D. (2021). *Understanding peacekeeping* (3rd ed.). Polity.

Blackwill, R. D., & Harris, J. M. (2016). *War by other means: Geoeconomics and statecraft.* Harvard University Press.

Britannica. (2026). *https://www.britannica.com/topic/BRICS*

Cooper, A. F., Higgott, R. A., & Nossal, K. R. (1993). *Relocating middle powers*. UBC Press.

Council on Foreign Relations. (2023). *Turkey's growing foreign policy ambitions.*

European Commission. (2023). *Türkiye report.*

European Council. (2024). *EU–Turkey statement on migration.*

Farrell, H., & Newman, A. L. (2019). Weaponized interdependence. *International Security, 44*(1), 42–79.

G20. (2023). *G20 leaders' declaration.*

Gilpin, R. (1981). *War and change in world politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Held, D., & McGrew, A. (2007). *Globalization/anti-globalization*. Polity.

Howorth, J. (2019). *Strategic autonomy in European defense*. Routledge.

Ikenberry, G. J. (2001). *After victory*. Princeton University Press.

Ikenberry, G. J. (2020). *A world safe for democracy*. Yale University Press.

IMF. (2024a). *World Economic Outlook.*

IMF. (2024b). *Türkiye Article IV consultation report.*

International Crisis Group. (2024). *Black Sea and Middle East security dynamics.*

International Energy Agency. (2024). *World Energy Outlook.*

International Monetary Fund. (2024). *Geo-economic fragmentation and the future of trade.*

Kardaş, Ş. (2013). Turkey: A regional power facing a changing international system. *International Affairs, 89*(3), 637–660.

Kembayev, Z. (2022). Legal framework of Turkic cooperation.

Keohane, R. O. (1984). *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy*. Princeton University Press.

Kirişci, K. (2017). *Turkey and the West: Fault lines in a troubled alliance.* Brookings Institution.

Luttwak, E. (1990). From geopolitics to geoeconomics. *The National Interest, 20,* 17–23.

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics.* Norton.

NATO. (2022). *NATO strategic documents.*

NATO. (2024). *Defense expenditure report.*

Nye, J. S. (2020). *Do morals matter? Presidents and foreign policy from FDR to Trump.* Oxford University Press.

OECD. (2024). *Economic security and resilient supply chains.*

OECD. (2024a). *Development co-operation report.*

OECD. (2024b). *Türkiye–OECD relations.*

Öniş, Z., & Yılmaz, Ş. (2016). Turkey and the post-2011 Middle East. *Third World Quarterly, 37*(1), 71–87.

Oran, B. (2001). *Türk Dış Politikası.* İletişim.

Pierini, M. (2024). *Turkey's foreign policy ambitions meet reality.* Carnegie Europe.

Robins, P. (2003). *Suits and uniforms.* Hurst.

Smith, M. (2018). *International relations and the European Union.* Oxford University Press.

T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı. (2024). *Türk dış politikasının genel görünümü.*

Tooze, A. (2022). *Shutdown: How Covid shook the world's economy.* Viking.

United Nations. (2023). *Black Sea Grain Initiative documentation.*

United Nations. (2023). *Black Sea Grain Initiative reports.*

Voeten, E. (2023). *UN voting data and analysis.*

Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics.* McGraw-Hill.

World Bank. (2023). *Middle Corridor trade and transport study.*

World Bank. (2024). *EU–Turkey Customs Union evaluation.*

World Health Organization. (2021). *Global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Yost, D. S. (2022). *NATO and international security.*