

# The Catalytic Role of Maritime Trade as a Strategic Component of the Maritimization Policies of the Republic of Türkiye in the 21 st Century

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**Abstract:** Since the advent of civilization, the seas have constituted a primary domain for the execution of profound cultural and commercial exchanges among humankind. This connectivity of the sea has had a positive impact on the welfare levels of societies over time. A historical analysis reveals that nations that have utilized the sea and exercised influence over maritime trade have attained a more effective position in foreign policy compared to other actors. It is widely acknowledged that the capital accumulation that precipitated the Industrial Revolution in the West was facilitated by Great Britain's expansion across continents. Consequently, it is evident that phenomena such as capitalism, modernity, and imperialism, which would profoundly alter the course of world history, are intricately intertwined with trade conducted via maritime routes. It can be posited that a comparable process is occurring in the contemporary era of globalization. The interactions between maritime civilizations or civilizations with coastlines have also resulted in cultural and material accumulation. Throughout history, the role and influence of the sea have increased exponentially. Despite the advent of technological developments and the evolution of communication tools in the 21st century, which have profoundly transformed the manner in which societies interact, a significant portion of the global exchange of needs, which are inherently interdependent in domains such as energy, raw materials, food, and numerous others, continues to occur through maritime routes. In this context, maritime policies and strategies pertaining to maritime trade as an economic factor play a pivotal role in the foreign policy strategies that countries formulate in accordance with their national security, sovereignty rights, and national interests. The geographical reality that the Republic of Türkiye is encircled by bodies of water on three sides underscores the significance of maritime prowess and the seas' integral role in overall power capacity. The objective of this study is to underscore the significance of maritime trade as a component of Turkish maritime power and to provide a comparative assessment of the policies pursued in this regard in light of current global trends. The study aims to reveal the current state of international competitiveness and to present a future projection aimed at increasing this competitiveness. The study commences with an examination of the historical evolution of the Turkish maritime sector. This is followed by a global and regional assessment of the sector's present capacity, which is based on quantitative and qualitative data. At this juncture, the extant

policies that have been implemented, in conjunction with the factors associated with the efficacy of these policies, are identified. These factors are examined under the headings of nationalization of technologies in the maritime sector, creation of a national maritime culture, and development of sustainable policies. In conclusion, the pivotal elements of the forthcoming Turkish maritime policy will be emphasized.

**Keyword:** Maritimization Policy, Sea Power, National Power, Maritime Economy, Foreign Trade

**JEL Classification:** F52, N70, L91, O11

## 1. Introduction

Türkiye, a country surrounded by seas on three sides due to its geographical location, has benefited from the decisive influence of the sea on its security throughout history, as well as from the cultural and economic prosperity it has provided as a result of this natural feature. In the 21st century, the seas have become increasingly important from a strategic and economic perspective. This has led to a fundamental change in maritime policies and strategies worldwide, including in Türkiye. Concurrently, maritime transport, owing to the advantages it offers, is currently preferred in over 80% of global commodity trade, forming the backbone of world trade (UNCTAD, 2024). Türkiye, given its geographical location, conducts a significant portion of its foreign trade transportation by sea. In 2023, this ratio accounted for 87.5% of the total volume and 54.8% of the total value of foreign trade (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2024a). Given these figures, it can be posited that maritime trade is an indispensable carrier for the country's economy.

Nevertheless, it is an indisputable fact that the importance of maritime trade extends beyond its economic significance. Recent developments in world politics and the competitive environment in the first quarter of this century have once again underscored the pivotal role of sea routes in shaping countries' geopolitical positions and international relations. The ability to dominate these routes and derive maximum benefit from them has become a critical factor in the global balance of power. This situation has led to the emergence of the concepts of "Blue Homeland" and "maritimization" in Türkiye. The country has adopted an assertive policy to protect its rights and interests in the 462,000 km<sup>2</sup> sea area that constitutes its exclusive economic zone (Gingeras, 2020). It has been asserted that Türkiye's security, prosperity, and development in the 21st century will be increasingly contingent on seas (Gürdeniz, 2019). From this perspective, maritime trade is not merely an economic activity but also holds a significant position as a strategic component and catalyst of Türkiye's maritime policy.

This study provides a comprehensive evaluation of the catalytic role of maritime trade in the maritime policies of the Republic of Türkiye in the 21st century. The aim of this study is to emphasise the strategic importance of global maritime trade and to explore the potential of Türkiye, in light of its geopolitical position. The research will also assess maritime policies adopted in the 21st century and the impact of maritime trade on economic growth, security, and diplomacy, and logistics reforms within these policies. In this context, the study will examine how maritime trade functions as a "catalyst," i.e., how it triggers other sectors and policy decisions.

The initial segment of this study will address the strategic importance of global maritime trade. This will be followed by an assessment of Türkiye's geopolitical position and maritime trade potential. Subsequently, a broad examination of Türkiye's maritime policies in the 21st century will be conducted, accompanied by a rigorous investigation into the nexus between maritime trade and economic growth, substantiated by empirical data. Subsequently, the role and impact of maritime trade in the context of security, diplomacy, and maritime jurisdiction areas will be discussed. Furthermore, the measures implemented in the domains of port infrastructure and logistics reforms will be subjected to a process of evaluation. Finally, strategic recommendations and future perspectives will be presented in light of the findings, and a general evaluation will be made in the conclusion section. This comprehensive analysis aims to underscore the pivotal role that maritime trade plays in Türkiye's maritime power and policy.

## **2. Global Maritime Trade and Its Strategic Importance**

In the contemporary global context, maritime trade has emerged as a pivotal economic activity, constituting the foundational element of the international economic system and exerting a direct influence on the economic well-being of nations. The preponderance of maritime trade in global commerce, constituting approximately 80% of global trade, serves as the paramount indicator of this phenomenon (Economist Impact, 2023: 9). In essence, the substantial movement of goods and raw materials, which are indispensable to the global economy, across oceans and seas underscores the pivotal role of maritime transport in global supply chains. This underscores the mission of maritime transport to serve as the driving force behind the interdependence between nations (UNCTAD, 2021). This circumstance signifies that sea routes possess not only economic but also geostrategic value.

The strategic importance of maritime trade is also linked to the value historically attributed to naval power. Classical naval supremacy theorists, such as A. Thayer Mahan, posited that states exercising control over critical sea lanes would gain a competitive advantage in the global balance of power. In the contemporary era, this perspective continues to hold validity, albeit within a

different context. Countries that exercise dominance in the realm of maritime trade, leveraging their fleets and ports with efficiency, are witnessing substantial gains in economic growth and foreign policy. In particular, maritime chokepoints such as the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal, the Strait of Malacca, and the Turkish Straits are of critical importance to global trade and have extremely high strategic value. For instance, in 2021, the grounding of the ship "Ever Given" led to the Suez Canal's closure for a period of six days, resulting in billions of dollars in losses for global trade and underscoring the critical importance of such vital maritime routes (Aşkın, 2021).

In addition to its role in promoting global economic growth, maritime trade also exerts an influence on international security and diplomacy. In this regard, it is imperative to ensure the security of sea lanes through international cooperation against potential threats such as piracy, terrorism, and illegal immigration. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is the concerted effort to ensure maritime trade security through the establishment of international maritime task forces against Somali pirates following 2008. In a similar vein, the distribution of maritime jurisdiction and the maintenance of maritime transport routes can be subjects of discord or collaboration among states. This is particularly salient in the context of the transportation of energy resources, including oil and LNG, as well as strategic minerals, due to the significant costs and logistical challenges involved. Consequently, maritime trade has emerged as an integral component of energy security (Evin, 2012: 142–149).

This background demonstrates that global maritime trade is at the nexus of both economic development and geopolitical competition in the 21st century. The security, openness, and efficiency of sea lanes are considered critical to the stability of the international system. This general framework highlights the strategic importance of maritime trade for a country like Türkiye, which is surrounded by seas and strategically positioned along waterways. The ensuing sections will methodically examine Türkiye's stance and the policies it has implemented within this global context.

### **3. Trends in Global Maritime Transport and Outlook for 2024–2025**

As of 2024, the global maritime trade volume exhibited an annual increase of 2.2%, reaching 12.6 billion tons. Ships diverting to longer routes to avoid the Red Sea led to a 6.1% increase in ton-mile transportation, reaching 66.3 trillion ton-miles. This surge in transportation represents the fastest growth recorded since the 8.8% increase observed in 2010. Projections for 2025 anticipate that global maritime transport will reach a new peak of 12.8 billion tons, representing an increase of 1.4%. Conversely, there is an emerging expectation that the ongoing tensions in the Red Sea will be mitigated following the declaration of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in January.

Assuming a gradual return to normalcy in transportation routes, a growth in ton-miles is projected to be constrained to 0.9% in 2025. The year 2024 proved to be a remarkable one for the domain of container shipping. Container trade volumes experienced an augmentation of 5.6% in TEU terms, while annual growth in TEU-mile terms attained a noteworthy 17.8%, a development that can be attributed, at least in part, to the repercussions of the Red Sea issues. Current projections indicate that container ships will resume their Red Sea crossings at some point in the future, although this is not expected to occur in the immediate term. In this context, a 3% increase is projected for 2025 in terms of TEU; however, no significant change is expected in terms of TEU-mile (IMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025: 31).

An examination of pertinent data reveals a 3.3% increase in dry bulk cargo transportation in terms of tonnage and a 5% increase in terms of ton-miles in 2024. These figures can be attributed to a robust demand from China and India. However, forecasts for 2025 indicate that growth in this segment will slow significantly due to potential disruptions in global trade, including China's high stock levels and reactions to additional customs tariffs imposed by the US. In this context, a modest expansion of 0.6% in tonnage and 0.7% in ton-mileage is projected for dry bulk cargo transportation in 2025. The global oil trade demonstrated stagnancy in 2024, attributable to OPEC's production cuts and China's subdued demand. This phenomenon exhibited no substantial deviation from the preceding year. In 2025, China's demand trends are expected to persist, contributing to a 1.6% recovery in oil transportation in terms of tons. While 88% of world trade was carried out by sea in 2024, the latest estimates indicate that this figure will decline to 86% in 2025. This image is a poignant reminder of the pivotal role maritime transport plays in both economic and geopolitical dynamics, underscoring its significance in ensuring the stability of global trade. (IMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025: 31).

**Table 1 . World Trade and World Maritime Transportation**

World Trade and Maritime Transport	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024(a)	2025(e)	2026(e)	10 Year Trend	5 Year Trend
<b>Maritime Trade Per Capita</b>											
World Maritime Trade (Billion Tons)	12,02	12,07	11,66	12,06	12,02	12,33	12,60	12,87	13,01	1,6%	1,8%
World Population (Million People)	7,69	7,77	7,80	7,88	7,95	8,03	8,11	8,18	8,27	1,1%	1,0%
Trade Tonnage (Per Capita)	1,56	1,55	1,49	1,52	1,51	1,53	1,55	1,56	1,57	0,6%	1,0%

World Trade and Maritime Transport	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024(a)	2025(e)	2026(e)	10 Year Trend	5 Year Trend
Bulk Cargo (Per Capita)	1,11	1,09	1,04	1,05	1,05	1,07	1,08	1,08	1,08	0,2%	0,8%
Container Cargo (Per Capita)	0,23	0,23	0,23	0,24	0,23	0,23	0,24	0,24	0,25	1,5%	1,2%
<b>Maritime Transport Multipliers</b>											
World Maritime Transport Development	3,0%	0,4%	-3,1%	3,2%	-0,3%	2,6%	2,2%	1,4%	1,6%	1,7%	1,8%
World GDP Development	3,6%	2,8%	-2,8%	6,3%	3,5%	3,3%	3,2%	3,3%	3,3%	3,0%	3,9%
Maritime Transport. /GDP Multiplier	0,84	0,13	1,10	0,51	-0,08	0,78	0,7	0,42	0,48	0,55	0,47
<b>World Trade (Billion Tons)</b>											
World Maritime Transportation	12,02	12,07	11,70	12,08	12,04	12,35	12,63	12,80	13,01	1,6%	1,8%
World Trade Volume (All Modes)	13,99	14,00	13,3	14,04	14,09	13,97	14,35	14,85	15,37	1,5%	2,3%
World Transportation Maritime Ratio	86%	86%	88%	86%	86%	88%	88%	86%	85%	87%	87%

(a)=approximate, (e)=estimates  
(İMEAK Chamber of Shipping 2025; p.32)

As of the beginning of 2024, the world merchant fleet consisted of 61,811 ships with a capacity of 300 GT and above, a number that increased to 63,914 by the beginning of 2025. These vessels had a total carrying capacity of 2.242 billion DWT in 2024, which increased to 2.329 billion DWT in 2025. (İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2024: 38-40; 2025: 35).

When evaluating the world's merchant fleets of 300 GT and above according to national flags, Liberia ranks first with 17.9% of the global fleet based on DWT. Following Liberia are Panama with 15.8% and the Marshall Islands with 12.8%. Türkiye ranks 32nd with 6,379 million DWT and a 0.3% share, which is a 6.1% decrease compared to the previous year. (İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025: 104).

At the regional level, Türkiye ranks fifth among neighboring countries, behind Greece (53.3 million DWT), the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GCASC) (33.5 million DWT), Iran (20.8 million DWT), and Russia (12.7 million DWT). Türkiye has 6.4 million DWT. (İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025: 104).

**Table 2.** DWT Development of the World Merchant Fleet by Ship Types (300 GT and above)

Years	Tanker	Bulk	Container	Dry Cargo	Passenger	Total	Total Change
1987	257.233	223.186	21.105	108.174	3.445	613.143	–
1988	256.925	222.258	22.212	105.545	3.478	610.418	–0,4%
1989	261.168	223.212	23.735	103.355	3.589	615.059	0,8%
1990	264.875	228.601	25.026	100.622	3.620	622.744	1,2%
1991	273.342	236.574	26.992	101.966	3.774	642.648	3,2%
1992	282.211	240.590	29.595	100.840	3.875	657.111	2,3%
1993	287.141	237.423	31.578	102.430	3.980	662.552	0,8%
1994	294.425	238.432	33.964	103.721	4.193	674.735	1,8%
1995	292.801	245.787	38.851	100.020	4.342	681.801	1,0%
1996	296.695	257.355	43.234	100.414	4.646	702.344	3,0%
1997	303.417	265.993	48.250	100.028	4.877	722.565	2,9%
1998	309.314	275.949	55.068	98.338	4.940	743.609	2,9%
1999	313.950	271.568	60.709	99.484	5.079	750.790	1,0%
2000	321.626	271.682	63.296	100.061	5.245	761.910	1,50%
2001	327.455	278.084	68.715	99.174	5.330	778.758	2,2%
2002	330.718	291.175	76.131	96.128	5.611	799.763	2,7%
2003	333.176	296.855	83.744	96.754	5.856	816.385	2,1%
2004	347.453	301.617	90.214	95.187	5.884	840.355	2,9%
2005	368.399	319.167	99.190	95.346	5.933	888.035	5,7%

Years	Tanker	Bulk	Container	Dry Cargo	Passenger	Total	Total Change
2006	387.707	341.720	111.663	97.417	5.991	944.498	6,4%
2007	411.319	363.646	128.174	100.322	6.062	1.009.523	6,9%
2008	439.291	386.650	144.552	102.784	6.062	1.079.339	6,9%
2009	463.287	414.431	161.945	106.820	6.062	1.152.545	6,8%
2010	501.573	451.223	169.514	105.781	6.062	1.234.153	7,1%
2011	523.608	528.126	183.722	107.049	6.062	1.348.567	9,3%
2012	547.390	605.757	196.885	105.284	6.442	1.461.758	8,4%
2013	555.181	666.861	206.409	104.531	6.282	1.539.264	5,3%
2014	567.933	705.826	216.275	107.983	6.358	1.604.375	4,2%
2015	579.205	738.612	227.674	109.139	6.378	1.661.008	3,5%
2016	600.130	752.936	244.186	112.306	6.530	1.716.088	3,3%
2017	636.364	771.086	245.555	112.773	6.659	1.772.437	3,3%
2018	668.696	791.691	252.692	113.626	6.842	1.833.547	3,4%
2019	680.185	813.197	265.094	116.035	7.078	1.881.589	2,6%
2020	720.645	849.314	274.659	118.583	7.325	1.970.526	4,7%
2021	743.332	881.717	281.440	119.665	7.472	2.033.626	3,2%
2022	759.763	913.822	293.016	122.043	7.602	2.096.246	3,1%
2023	786.720	940.065	305.220	126.610	7.895	2.166.510	3,4%
2024	806.103	969.226	328.604	130.616	8.124	2.242.673	7,0%
2025	822.371	997.478	363.438	137.975	8.272	2.329.534	7,5%

(İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025; p. 35)

As shown in Table 2, the global merchant fleet of 300 GT and above has steadily and remarkably increased since 1987. This growth is an important indicator of the relationship between the expanding global economy and maritime trade.



Overall, it is evident that global maritime trade is at the center of economic development and geopolitical competition. In this context, ensuring the security and functionality of maritime routes is critical to the global economy.

Considering Türkiye's geostrategic location and its maritime routes, it is evident that the country should prioritize maritime trade. The following sections will examine Türkiye's position within this global landscape and its pursued policies in detail.

#### **4. Türkiye's Geopolitical Position and Maritime Trade Potential**

Türkiye is located at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, giving it an important geopolitical advantage. At the same time, its sovereignty over the Istanbul and Çanakkale Straits (Turkish Straits), the only waterway connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, gives Türkiye a critical strategic role. In this context, Türkiye has control over the main trade route for Black Sea coastal countries to access world markets.

The Turkish Straits see an average of 50,000 ships passing through annually and are among the world's most important narrow waterways (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d. a). In addition to transporting approximately 3% of the world's oil demand through these straits, they also play a key role in the shipment of other energy products from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d. b). According to 2023 data, 44,892 ships passed through the Çanakkale Strait, and 186 million tons of the total 549 million tons of cargo transported consisted of hazardous materials. In the same year, 39,000 ships passed through the Istanbul Strait, and approximately 164 million tons of the 419 million tons of cargo transported consisted of hazardous cargo such as oil (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure–Directorate General of Maritime Affairs, 2024: 54, 56). These figures clearly demonstrate the central role of the Turkish Straits in global maritime trade and the strategic responsibility that Türkiye has assumed in this context.

Alternative energy transmission line projects play an important role in alleviating the strategic responsibility of ensuring energy supply security over the straits. Thanks to its location between Europe, which depends on foreign energy, and the Middle East, the Caspian Basin, and Russia, which possess a significant portion of the world's energy reserves, Türkiye stands out as a critical route for energy transfer. In this context, the Turkish Stream Natural Gas Pipeline (TÜRKAKIM) and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), which pass through Türkiye by land, are important projects for east-west energy transmission. In addition to these natural gas pipeline

projects, Türkiye is a strategic energy transportation corridor in terms of ensuring energy supply security and resource diversity thanks to crude oil pipelines that open up to global markets via the Ceyhan Marine Terminal. There are two important crude oil pipelines passing through Turkish territory. The first is the Kirkuk–Yumurtalık Oil Pipeline, also known as the Iraq–Türkiye Crude Oil Pipeline, which began operating in 1976. It transports oil extracted from the Kirkuk region in northern Iraq to the Yumurtalık district of Adana. The second is the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) crude oil pipeline, which began operating in 2006. This pipeline ensures the safe and economic transportation of crude oil produced in the Caspian Basin, primarily from Azerbaijan, to the Mediterranean coast and, from there, to global energy markets (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, n.d.). Currently, the Ceyhan Marine Terminal occupies a critical geostrategic position in Türkiye's energy supply and transmission strategies, serving as an important energy distribution center. These energy transfer pipeline projects alleviate congestion and associated risks on the Turkish Straits.

Türkiye's geostrategic potential extends beyond the straits. The country's peninsular character is reflected in its extensive 8,333-kilometer coastline, which is almost three times longer than its 2,875-kilometer total land border. This expanse is further complicated by the presence of maritime zones along three sides (Erdoğan & Çetin, 2021: 1). Türkiye's maritime zones in the Black Sea, Marmara Sea, Aegean Sea, and Mediterranean Sea span 462,000 km<sup>2</sup>, providing abundant resources and opportunities for maritime trade (Yaycı, 2022: 260; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, 2020: 15). Due to its geographical advantages, position as a trade bridge and energy corridor between Asia and Europe, and location at the intersection of the Middle Corridor route, which combines the historical Silk Road with maritime transportation, Türkiye's ports and transportation infrastructure hold additional strategic importance (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2024a).

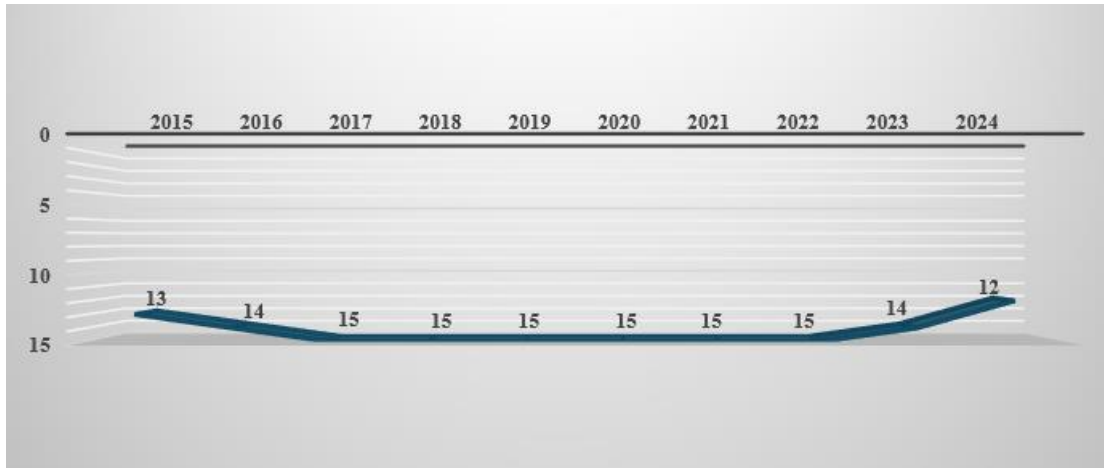
Türkiye's maritime trade potential is increased by its large number of ports and port facilities. There are 193 ports of various sizes that serve as regional and global transshipment centers. Additionally, approximately 90% of Türkiye's foreign trade is conducted through these ports (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, Directorate General of Maritime Affairs, n.d.). In 2024, the total volume of foreign trade handled at Turkish ports increased by 2% compared to the previous year, reaching 531,737,358 tons. During the same period, the volume of containers handled increased by 7.8%, reaching 13,529,729 TEU. The port region directorates with the highest cargo handling volumes were Aliğa, Kocaeli, and İskenderun, respectively (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2025).

These figures indicate steady growth in cargo and container transportation at Turkish ports. This growth is believed to strengthen the country's position in global maritime trade. Strategic ports such as Aliğa, Kocaeli, and İskenderun have become centers of regional trade, thereby increasing Türkiye's competitiveness.

Another issue of strategic importance is Türkiye's control of the international legal framework governing the Straits under the Montreux Convention of 1936. The convention recognizes the principle of free passage for merchant ships, while granting Türkiye significant authority over security and management of the straits (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d. a). Consequently, Türkiye has become a stabilizing factor in the Black Sea region. For instance, during the 2022 Russia–Ukraine war, Türkiye closed the straits to warships by invoking Article 19 of the convention, which prevented the conflict from escalating. Through this action, Türkiye sought to safeguard its own security and that of the Black Sea region. Developments in the Black Sea have resulted in an important strategic gain for Türkiye. After Russia withdrew from the Grain Corridor Agreement in July 2023, ships leaving Ukraine began using the territorial waters of Romania and Bulgaria to reach the Bosphorus Strait. This limited the effectiveness of the Russian navy, which threatened them. Together with its NATO allies, Romania and Bulgaria, Türkiye has carried out mine clearance operations in the Black Sea through the task force it established (Ersavcı, 2024). Looking at it as a whole, Türkiye's geopolitical location offers tremendous potential for maritime trade. Thanks to its location at the crossroads of global maritime trade routes, the country has the opportunity to become a transit trade and logistics hub. While playing a critical role in international trade through the straits, Türkiye also engages in foreign trade and provides services to neighboring countries via its developing ports along its extensive coastline. Recognizing this potential, Türkiye has begun shaping its maritime policies accordingly in recent years. Now is the time to examine the general framework of Türkiye's 21st-century maritime policies.

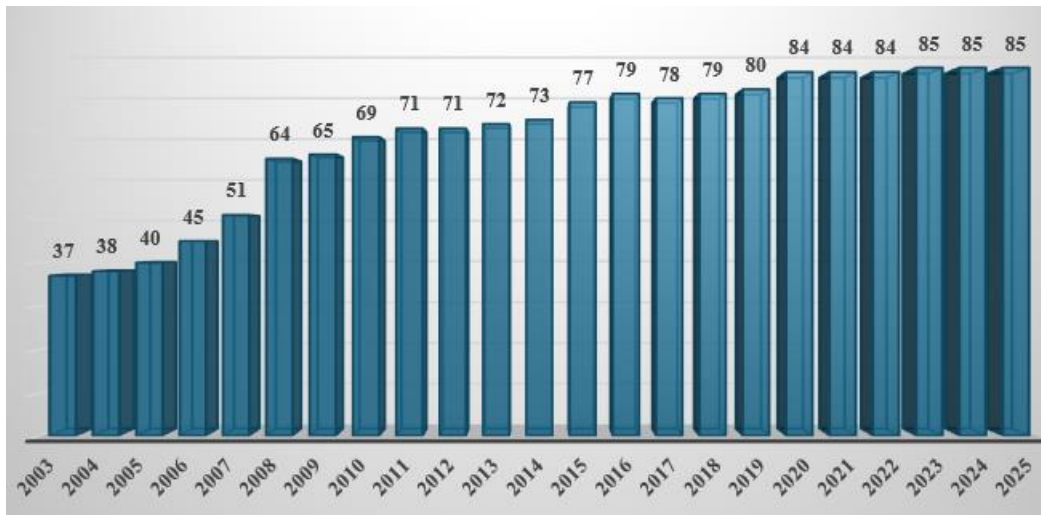
## 5. Türkiye's Maritime Policies in the 21st Century

Since the early 2000s, Türkiye has implemented comprehensive policies aimed at making strategic advances in the maritime sector. These policies include the following: strengthening its merchant fleet, modernizing port infrastructure, supporting shipbuilding and ship repair industries, and protecting maritime law and sovereignty rights. The country continues to pursue initiatives consistent with these policies.



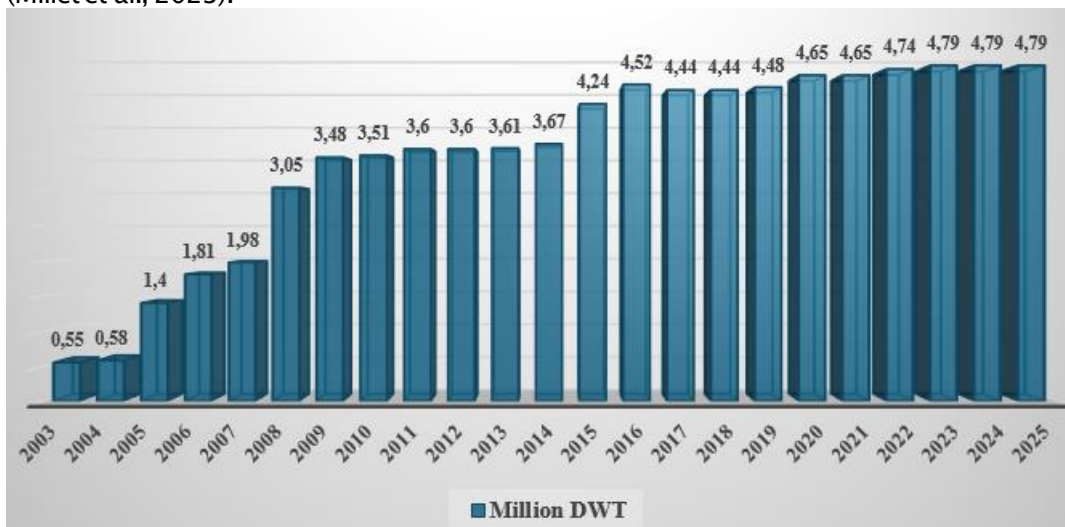
**Figure 1 .** Position of Turkish Owned Merchant Fleet in World Rankings by Years  
(denizcilik.uab.gov.tr, 2024; p. 5)

According to data from the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, the number of commercial vessels over 1,000 gross tons in Türkiye has increased significantly since the early 2000s. In this context, the total capacity of the merchant fleet has reached 48.9 million DWT, placing Türkiye 12th in the world rankings. As of 2024, the Turkish-owned merchant fleet constituted approximately 52.7 million DWT, representing 2% of the global merchant fleet and positioning Türkiye 11th globally (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2024a; 2024b). This development indicates that Türkiye has taken strategic steps to gradually nationalize its foreign trade transportation, which it has largely conducted through foreign-flagged ships for many years. This advancement is widely regarded as a tangible manifestation of the nation's strategic initiatives aimed at augmenting its domestic maritime capacity.



**Figure 2. Number of Shipyards**  
(tkygmistatistikleri.uab.gov.tr , 2025, p. )

A salient indicator of Türkiye's capacity within the shipbuilding industry is the number of shipyards, which has undergone a substantial increase over the past two decades. The number of shipyards, which stood at only 37 in 2003, gained significant momentum in subsequent years and reached 80 by 2019. This increase has persisted in subsequent years, with the total number of shipyards in Türkiye rising to 85 as of 2023 (see Fig. 2). This development can be regarded as a significant indicator of sustainable growth in shipbuilding capacity and ongoing infrastructure investments (Millet et al., 2023).



**Figure 3. Shipyard Capacity**  
(tkygmistatistikleri.uab.gov.tr , 2025, p. 2)

From 2003 to 2023, there has been a consistent increase in the operational capacity of shipyards in Türkiye (see Fig. 3). Given that over 80% of global trade is conducted by sea, it is imperative to enhance the capacity and infrastructure of ports and shipyards. This will bolster the competitiveness of the Turkish merchant fleet at both the global and regional levels, enabling it to distinguish itself from its competitors in the maritime transport sector. These issues also constitute an important pillar for strengthening the economic dimension of maritime power.

**Table 3.** Turkish Shipowners' National and Foreign Flag Vessels (1000 GT and Above)

Years	National Flag			Foreign Flag			Total Fleet		Annual DWT Change %
	Number	1000 DWT	%	Number	1000 DWT	%	Number	1000 DWT	
1999	448	8.697	90,5	69	915	9,5	517	9.612	
2000	456	8.269	90,6	96	855	9,4	552	9.124	-5,1
2001	445	7.321	82	107	1.607	18	552	8.928	-2,1
2002	451	7.815	83,8	117	1.514	16,2	568	9.329	4,5
2003	432	7.045	79,9	147	1.772	20,1	579	8.817	-5,5
2004	408	6.556	75,2	163	2.159	24,8	571	8.715	-1,2
2005	420	6.427	70,2	237	2.725	29,8	657	9.152	5,0
2006	432	6.844	65,5	353	3.609	34,5	785	10.453	14,2
2007	446	6.464	58,2	424	4.650	41,8	870	11.114	6,3
2008	490	6.592	50	513	6.591	50	1.003	13.183	18,6
2009	520	6.736	43,9	636	8.592	56,1	1.156	15.328	16,3
2010	560	7.246	42,1	665	9.954	57,9	1.225	17.201	12,2
2011	547	7.797	39,7	672	11.863	60,3	1.219	19.660	14,3
2012	523	8.479	37,6	642	14.093	62,4	1.165	22.572	14,8
2013	627	9.488	31,3	842	20.838	68,7	1.469	30.326	34,4
2014	599	8.580	28,2	890	21.846	71,8	1.489	30.427	0,3

Years	National Flag			Foreign Flag			Total Fleet		Annual DWT Change %
	Number	1000 DWT	%	Number	1000 DWT	%	Number	1000 DWT	
2015	564	8.297	30,2	834	19.209	69,8	1.398	27.507	-9,6
2016	551	8.272	28,4	984	20.879	71,6	1.535	29.151	6,0
2017	525	7.800	26,7	1.022	21.465	73,3	1.547	29.265	0,4
2018	483	7.288	25,5	1.028	21.323	74,5	1.511	28.611	-2,2
2019	457	6.831	23,9	1.027	21.758	76,1	1.484	28.589	-0,1
2020	410	6.194	21,1	1.074	23.157	78,9	1.484	29.352	2,7
2021	384	5.432	18,8	1.108	23.497	81,2	1.492	28.929	-1,4
2022	353	5.157	16,8	1.164	25.523	83,2	1.517	30.680	6,1
2023	345	5.447	14,3	1.352	32.649	85,7	1.697	38.096	24,2
2024	348	6.026	12,6	1.614	41.950	87,4	1.962	47.976	25,9
2025	343	5.564	10,7	1.749	46.380	89,3	2.092	51.943	8,3

(İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025; p. 100)

As illustrated in Table 3, the data set encompasses the development of Turkish-flagged ships with a gross tonnage of 1,000 GT and above, as well as foreign-flagged ships owned by Turkish shipowners. This data span the period from 1999 to 2025. In 1999, the total fleet size under the control of Turkish shipowners was 9.6 million DWT, of which 90.5% were Turkish-flagged vessels and 9.5% were foreign-flagged vessels. As of the beginning of 2025, the total fleet size of 1,000 GT and above under the control of Turkish shipowners reached 52.0 million DWT. Of this fleet, 10.7% consisted of Turkish-flagged vessels, while 89.3% consisted of foreign-flagged vessels.

Moreover, as of January 1, 2025, the aggregate number of vessels owned by Turkish shipowners within this group exhibited an 8.3% increase compared to the beginning of 2024 (İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025: 100). This increase signifies an augmentation in investments directed towards the maritime sector, which in turn indicates an expansion in Türkiye's role within the domain of maritime transportation. Additionally, it points to an enhancement in the international competitiveness of the Turkish maritime fleet.

**Table 4.** 2015–2024 Maritime Transportation Development (Tons)

Years	Seaway Foreign Trade	Seaway Export	Seaway Import	NF (%)	FF (%)
2015	300.478.930	92.152.622	208.326.308	12	88
2016	309.937.639	94.805.120	215.132.519	12	88
2017	347.348.092	113.692.068	233.656.024	11	89
2018	328.969.455	110.424.635	218.544.820	11	89
2019	353.081.390	131.676.578	221.404.812	8	92
2020	365.442.296	138.902.823	226.539.473	8	92
2021	386.396.718	153.763.658	232.633.060	8	92
2022	394.090.021	150.172.902	243.917.119	7	93
2023	391.717.308	135.510.681	256.206.627	7	93
2024	399.414.557	142.278.137	257.136.420	8	92

(İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025; p. 120)

In 2024, Türkiye's import volume by sea was recorded at 257,136,420 tons, while its export volume was 142,278,137 tons. According to the data presented in Table 4, Türkiye's maritime export shipments exhibited an increase from 92 million tons in 2015 to 142 million tons in 2024, while its import shipments rose from 208 million tons to 257 million tons during the same period. This increase indicates a persistent and substantial enhancement in maritime transport's role in foreign trade. Conversely, as of 2024, the proportion of Turkish-flagged vessels in these transports has reached 8% (İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025: 120).

**Table 5.** Merchant Fleets of Türkiye and Neighboring Countries (300 GT and Above)

World Ranking	Country	Number of Ships	1000 DWT	World DWT%	Annual DWT Change %
9	Greece	794	53.329	2,3	–5,2
12	GASC	833	33.518	1,4	12,5
17	Iran	514	20.819	0,9	1,4



World Ranking	Country	Number of Ships	1000 DWT	World DWT%	Annual DWT Change %
22	Russia	1.642	12.741	0,5	23,5
32	Türkiye	659	6.379	0,3	-6,1
59	Egypt	102	1.733	0,1	5,4
93	Ukraine	87	238	0	-11,6
105	Bulgaria	24	131	0	36,5
126	Romania	15	29	0	-29,2
133	Georgia	6	16	0	444,3
145	Syria	5	6	0	-95,8

(İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025; p. 105)

According to data from the Turkish Chamber of Shipping for 2025 (see Table 5), when comparing the capacities of the merchant fleets of Türkiye and its neighboring and nearby countries in terms of ships of 300 GT and above, Türkiye ranks fifth with a total of 6.4 million DWT, following Greece, Cyprus, Iran, and Russia (İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2025: 104).

In the context of Türkiye's maritime policies, significant progress has been made in terms of institutional structure and legislation through the implementation of various regulations. Within this framework, the Undersecretariat for Maritime Affairs' authority and capacity increased in 2004. In 2011, the maritime sector was integrated into the transportation management system under the auspices of the Ministry of Transportation, Maritime Affairs, and Communications. In 2018, another institutional transformation restructured the Directorate General for Maritime Affairs under the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, thereby rendering maritime policies more visible and effective within the state apparatus. Concurrent with these developments, Türkiye has maintained its membership in the IMO Council since 1999, playing an active role in shaping global maritime policies (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, n.d.). As a signatory to nearly all of the IMO's conventions, Türkiye has formally endorsed the SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea), MARPOL (Prevention of Pollution from Ships), and STCW (Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers) treaties. Moreover, Türkiye has incorporated these pivotal international regulations concerning maritime safety and environmental preservation into its

domestic legislation, thereby demonstrating a commitment to their effective implementation (Istanbul Bilgi University Marine Law and Policy Research Center, 2022).

A foundational element of Türkiye's maritime strategy in the 21st century is the concept of "Blue Homeland". This concept, which began to gain traction in national sovereignty discourse in 2006, has become an expression of strategic vision, frequently mentioned in maritime-focused symposiums and military naval exercises. "Blue Homeland... was the name given to the homeland encompassing our maritime jurisdiction areas (territorial waters, continental shelf, and exclusive economic zone) in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and Aegean Sea, surrounded by living and non-living resources" (trans. by bsy) (Gürdeniz, 2017: 35). According to expert opinions, the "Blue Homeland" concept has been widely accepted by the Turkish public and has gained social support. Türkiye's resolute position regarding its rights in maritime jurisdiction areas signifies a unequivocal declaration of intent, indicating that it is unwilling to concede any territory in these domains. While the natural resources and economic wealth within the Blue Homeland's borders are of great importance, the primary priority is ensuring and protecting the maritime border security of these areas (Vision Center for Political Development, 2021).

In this context, policies pursued in line with the Blue Homeland concept are being implemented through concrete measures in the military, energy, and foreign policy spheres. At this juncture, the Blue Homeland concept has assumed a symbolic function in Türkiye's "(re)maritimeization" process, evolving into a pivotal vision within the national maritime strategy (BBC News Türkçe, 2020). This strategy also plays a pivotal role in the development of national identity, strategic culture, and normative approaches grounded in maritime power. Due to its geopolitical position, Türkiye has become an active actor in various maritime basins, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean, in terms of economic, military, and diplomatic dimensions. Accordingly, it has adopted a more effective, multifaceted, and autonomous stance in foreign policy (Yaycı, 2022: ix). Consequently, the maritime orientation strategy has contributed to Türkiye gaining a more visible and effective profile in the international arena by institutionalizing the maritime dimension of its foreign policy.

In accordance with the strategic objectives of Türkiye, the Memorandum of Understanding on the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction Areas was signed during the visit of the Libyan Presidential Council President Fayez al-Sarraj, Foreign Minister Siyala, and Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha, along with their delegation, to Türkiye at the invitation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on November 26–28, 2019. The memorandum was subsequently ratified by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) on December 5, 2019. This step represents a strategic initiative on the part of both countries to secure their continental shelf and potential Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

areas. The memorandum has been regarded as a diplomatic maneuver that underscores Türkiye's resolve in the face of Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA)'s claims in the region (City News, 2019). Conversely, the "casus belli" (cause for war) determination made by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1995 concerning Greece's endeavors to extend its territorial waters beyond 6 miles in the Aegean Sea remains legally valid. Türkiye's uncompromising stance on this issue has been shaped by concrete concerns related to maritime trade, namely that the expansion of territorial waters in the Aegean Sea would restrict Turkish ports' access to open seas.

The Republic of Türkiye has implemented numerous projects to strengthen its naval forces, which constitute the military wing of its maritime power and are another important element of its maritime policy in the competitive geopolitical environment of the 21st century. Among these, the National Ship (MİLGEM) project has led to the construction of modern corvettes and frigates, the modernization of the submarine fleet (NDU Naval Petty Officer Vocational School, n.d.), and the addition of the TCG Anadolu, the first LHD-class (Landing Helicopter Dock) warship in Turkish naval history, to the fleet (ASELSAN, 2023, p. 44). At this juncture, the operations aimed at fortifying the naval forces, executed in consideration of the complementary functions of the components that comprise naval power, are directed towards ensuring the security of maritime trade routes and the safeguarding of maritime jurisdiction areas. These endeavors also serve to demonstrate the presence of the Turkish flag in the open seas. In this context, the Turkish Naval Forces have participated in missions to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden, contributed to regional maritime security in the Mediterranean with the Mediterranean Shield operation (Anadolu Agency, 2025a), and supported regional stability in the Black Sea with the Black Sea Harmony operation (Demir, 2012: 41). These operations and exercises are of significance in that they demonstrate the correlation between the protection of Türkiye's strategic interests at sea and the support of its economic interests, such as the safe passage of commercial vessels. In this regard, mechanisms for public-private partnerships and sectoral strategies are being developed to enhance the combined effect of civil and military maritime power. For instance, incentive mechanisms such as tax exemptions, financial incentives, and investment site allocations are being implemented for shipbuilding investments, investments in sea freight or passenger transport, shipyard investments, port and port service investments, etc., with the objective of supporting the maritime sector and increasing Türkiye's share of world maritime trade and its weight in all areas of maritime affairs (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2024c). These efforts function as catalysts, shaping Türkiye's maritime vision and formulating policy recommendations. Türkiye has established a target to augment the share and efficacy of maritime transport within the framework of the 2053 Transportation and Logistics Master Plan, which was unveiled in 2021 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2022: 69, 70).

Consequently, Türkiye's maritime policies in the 21st century have been oriented towards the development of a comprehensive maritime power. The development of maritime trade is a central tenet of these policies, with the overarching objective of positioning Türkiye as a regional maritime trade nexus, in addition to its economic benefits. The repercussions of these policies on the economy and the catalytic role of maritime trade can be more concretely observed in the context of the maritime trade–economic growth relationship, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

## 6. The Relationship Between Maritime Trade and Economic Growth in Türkiye

Maritime trade is a salient factor that directly affects the degree of openness and growth performance of the Turkish economy. The contribution of maritime trade to economic growth is realized through various dimensions, including an increase in foreign trade volume, utilization of economies of scale, increased efficiency in logistics processes, growth in investment and employment, and regional development and urban economic growth. In an economy such as Türkiye's, which relies heavily on foreign trade for economic growth, the ability to transport goods at reasonable costs is of critical importance for maintaining export competitiveness. Maritime shipping is an indispensable mode of transport for moving large volumes of cargo over long distances at a lower cost compared to air and land transport (Saban & Güğərçin, 2009: 2). Therefore, the effective use of sea transport has played an important role in Türkiye's export growth in recent years. To provide a quantitative context, Türkiye's exports, which amounted to \$47.3 billion in 2003 (Melemen, 2006: 193), exhibited a substantial increase to \$255.809 billion in 2023 (İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2024: 7). Concurrently, the tonnage of exports transported by sea experienced a proportional rise, increasing from 88.5 million tons to 135.5 million tons (İMEAK Chamber of Shipping, 2024: 124). These figures are a striking indication that the volume of maritime transport has grown in parallel with the increase in foreign trade volume and that maritime trade has supported economic expansion. While approximately 86% of foreign trade in Türkiye is carried out by sea, 88% of global freight transport was carried out by sea in 2023. The global maritime cargo traffic demonstrated a 2.4% increase, reaching 12 billion 643 million tons (Anadolu Agency, 2025b). In this context, it is reasonable to assert that maritime transport plays a pivotal role in facilitating global trade.

Academic studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between maritime transport and macroeconomic indicators, indicating a mutually beneficial relationship between these two sectors. A study published in 2021 utilized econometric analysis to demonstrate a positive short– and long–term relationship between maritime container transportation data and gross domestic product (GDP) in Türkiye between 1991 and 2016. The findings of this study indicate a statistically

parallel relationship between the growth of container shipping by sea during the specified period and the nation's economic development (Özer, Canbay, and Kırca, 2021). In light of these findings, it is possible to posit that developments in maritime trade have a positive, effective, and powerful impact on the Turkish economy.

Concurrent academic studies conducted in various countries have yielded analogous results, thereby confirming the positive impact of maritime transport development on economic growth. For instance, an analysis conducted at the European level for the period 2008–2020 revealed a causal relationship between the maritime transport sector and the national economy in the United Kingdom. The same study reached analogous conclusions in Türkiye reached analogous conclusions, demonstrating that advancements in maritime transport have a positive effect on related sectors and GDP, acting as a catalyst for economic growth (Canbay and Kırca, 2025).

When discussing the mechanisms through which the relationship between maritime trade and economic growth is realized, it is possible to summarize these mechanisms under several headings. Firstly, the decline in logistics costs, which is a natural consequence of the development of maritime transport, has enabled domestic producers to enter distant markets and increase their competitiveness in foreign markets. Moreover, the availability of cost-effective maritime transportation facilitates the reduction of production costs for sectors that are reliant on foreign markets for raw materials and intermediate goods. This dynamic fosters economic growth and heightened production levels. Secondly, the capacity to transport substantial volumes of cargo via maritime routes fosters economies of scale in production and distribution. The aforementioned factors contribute to price stability and consumer welfare by reducing unit costs in production. Furthermore, from a logistics infrastructure perspective, the advantages provided by these improvements are significant in terms of Türkiye becoming a preferred center for maritime transport and gaining an important position in the sector against its competitors.

Thirdly, investments aimed at developing port infrastructure, increasing and expanding shipyard capacity, and strengthening ancillary sectors such as ship operation, logistics, storage, and fuel supply have a multiplier effect on the economy and make significant contributions. The expansion in the maritime sector is creating new employment opportunities, and this situation is generating high employment potential in sectors related to maritime activities. Indeed, there are currently approximately 65,000 Turkish seafarers working in the global maritime sector, and an increase in this number would mean significant foreign exchange earnings for Türkiye (Marine Insight, 2025). In this regard, it is highly probable that the growth in the sector will have positive repercussions for the country's economy.

Port cities that are prominent hubs of maritime trade are undergoing substantial developments, concurrent with the regional advancement and economic flourishing that this sector engenders. Cities such as İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, Kocaeli, Samsun, and İskenderun, where the maritime sector is prominent in Türkiye, and the economic vitality observed in the regions where these cities are located, are concrete indicators of this relationship. The establishment of logistics centers in the hinterlands of these cities has been demonstrated to facilitate the export processes of agricultural and industrial products. In this context, the Port of Mersin holds a strategic position in transporting agricultural products produced in Central Anatolia to foreign markets, while the Port of Aliğa plays a critical role as a gateway for the petrochemical industry based in İzmir Aliğa to access global markets.

An examination of extant academic studies conducted on the maritime sector of the Republic of Türkiye reveals a consensus that this sector exerts a multifaceted, positive influence on the Turkish economy. It is important to acknowledge that the added value generated by the maritime sector is not confined to its own sphere of influence. Instead, it is disseminated to all commercial activities, thereby offering a direct contribution to the broader economy. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Türkiye's extensive coastline, the concentration of its industrial activities along coastal regions, and the substantial population density in these areas are indicative of the considerable potential for maritime utilization. Given the indispensable role of maritime transport in facilitating foreign trade, it can be posited that this mode of transportation serves as a catalyst for economic dynamism and growth.

Consequently, maritime trade functions as a significant catalyst for trade and, consequently, the economy in Türkiye, as it does globally. A comprehensive review of academic studies and historical data indicates that maritime transport is among the most effective factors in the liberalization of international trade and the development of economies. In this context, the sustainability and uninterrupted continuity of maritime transport's strategic mission is directly linked to the security of maritime trade routes. The security of these routes is not confined to economic activities but is also closely related to maritime security policies and diplomatic strategies. The collaborations undertaken by states, both within the framework of regional security policies and on the international stage, to ensure the uninterrupted operation of maritime trade routes play a critical role in maintaining the continuity of this system. The subsequent section will provide a concise overview of the scope and impact of these collaborative efforts.

## 7. Security, Diplomacy, and Maritime Jurisdiction Areas

The maritime policies of the Republic of Türkiye are not solely shaped by economic considerations. Türkiye must address the sea as both a matter of national security and a diplomatic arena, given its geographical location. The ongoing disputes between Türkiye and Greece concerning territorial waters, continental shelf, and airspace in the Aegean Sea have consistently been a primary concern on Türkiye's political agenda. The scope of these issues extends beyond Türkiye's sovereignty rights, encompassing strategic elements such as the security of maritime trade routes and the uninterrupted continuation of trade in this basin.

The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) establishes a 12-nautical-mile limit on territorial waters. However, it also stipulates that, in certain exceptional circumstances, the delineation of boundaries must be guided by the principles of good faith and equity (United Nations, 1982: P. II/Art: 3, 15). In this context, the ongoing dispute between Türkiye and Greece concerning territorial waters in the Aegean Sea has persisted for an extended period, with Türkiye proposing the acceptance of 6 nautical miles and Greece maintaining its insistence on 12 nautical miles. The extension of Greece's territorial waters from 6 to 12 nautical miles would result in an increase in the proportion of territorial waters in the Aegean Sea from 40% to 70%. This would imply that Türkiye's territorial waters would encompass less than 10% of the Aegean Sea (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d. c). Such a scenario would impose significant restrictions on Türkiye's access to the open seas via the Aegean Sea, a development that is regarded as a red line in diplomatic discourse. In addition, in line with its national interests, Türkiye is pursuing an active policy of protecting and expanding its maritime jurisdiction areas, conceptualized as the "Blue Homeland," with the aim of protecting its rights and interests in the Eastern Mediterranean in terms of both energy resources and geostrategic dimensions. Moreover, Türkiye is implementing a series of counter-geostrategic and diplomatic maneuvers to prevent the formation of a power center in this basin from which it is excluded. In accordance with the established continental shelf and potential Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundaries, as delineated with the TRNC, the memorandum of understanding signed with Libya on November 27, 2019, and the subsequent seismic research and drilling activities, Turkey's diplomatic and military engagement in the maritime domain is substantiated (Bulut & Bulut, 2021: 36–40). These developments suggest that Türkiye is pursuing a proactive strategy in maritime jurisdiction areas to ensure the security of its maritime trade routes and protect its access to energy resources.

As previously mentioned, Türkiye exercises control over the transit regime in the straits in accordance with the provisions of the Montreux Convention. While commercial ships are granted free passage in times of peace, Türkiye has the authority to restrict such passage in times of war

or threat (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d. a). In the 2008 Russia–Georgia and 2022 Russia–Ukraine wars, Türkiye made significant contributions to the stability of the Black Sea by applying the straits regime based on the Montreux Straits Convention (Ersavcı, 2024). Türkiye has taken measures to ensure its own security and regional stability by exercising its rights under the convention. Concurrently, it has facilitated the continued free commercial passage through the straits and imposed restrictions on warships to enhance the safety of merchant ships. This approach can be regarded as a successful example of maritime diplomacy.

Furthermore, Türkiye has assumed a mediating role in facilitating maritime trade between the two warring countries, serving as the architect of the Grain Corridor Agreement, which was signed between Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea. In this process, Türkiye has assumed a peacekeeping mission and has prevented the disruption of trade routes. In a similar vein, the geopolitical dynamics of the Red Sea, particularly the ongoing crisis in Yemen, and the evolving situation in the Indian Ocean have the potential to impact Türkiye's extensive maritime trade routes. Consequently, Türkiye's maritime security strategy encompasses not only its proximate waters but also extends to distant seas, where collective security initiatives are deemed essential. In alignment with this approach, Türkiye has assumed the responsibility to ensure the security of its own fleet and that of international merchant ships. It has been actively conducting patrols in the Gulf of Aden and along the Somali coastline. These measures are aimed at safeguarding the unimpeded passage of merchant ships and protecting them from threats such as piracy and maritime banditry (Bayilloğlu, 2011: 150–155).

In this context, Türkiye's maritime security and diplomatic policies play a vital role in the security and continuity of maritime trade. The implementation of measures in accordance with security and diplomatic policies has a direct impact on the evolution of maritime trade. Aware of this reality, Türkiye is increasing its maritime power and playing an active role in international security cooperation to ensure the security of maritime trade routes. Concurrently, it is undertaking intensive diplomatic endeavors to safeguard maritime jurisdiction areas and sovereignty rights. When the situation demands, it demonstrates its resolve through deterrent military activities, within the framework of gunboat diplomacy, against threats to these rights.

It is evident that the development of maritime trade is contingent upon the presence of security and diplomacy, and the protection of maritime rights and interests is predicated on the robust foundation of maritime trade. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge that security, diplomacy, and trade must be regarded as an inseparable component of Türkiye's maritime policy.



## 8. Conclusion

The Republic of Türkiye has established maritime policies as a national priority, following a delineated roadmap that envisions a 21st-century orientation towards maritime expansion. As thoroughly delineated in this study, maritime trade constitutes a pivotal component and catalyst of these policies. Given the importance of maritime trade in the global economy and Türkiye's geopolitical potential in this regard, investments made to develop maritime trade serve as a motor that accelerates economic growth and supports Türkiye's international power projection. In Türkiye, a substantial proportion of foreign trade activities, which are pivotal to the economy, are conducted via maritime transportation. Consequently, advancements in maritime transportation directly impact Türkiye's economic standing. However, the stability of developments in maritime trade is closely related to many factors, including security, the environment, infrastructure, and diplomacy. Aware of this, Türkiye has taken significant steps in recent years to assert its maritime sovereignty rights, while also making notable strides in areas such as marine environmental protection, digital port operations, and logistics integration. This multifaceted endeavor can be regarded as a component of Türkiye's ongoing process of redefining its maritime identity.

The accelerated transformations occurring in various domains during the 21st century have also exerted a considerable influence on the maritime sector. Developments at the global and regional levels exert a direct influence on the operation of maritime trade routes. Dynamics such as the closure of strategic transit points for various reasons or regional conflicts are leading to the emergence of alternative routes. In this process, fleets are not only increasing their capacity but also undergoing multifaceted technical transformations, including the integration of autonomous technologies, adaptation to climate change, and digital transformation (Yılmaz & Öz, 2023). These developments have also led to an escalation in competition within the sector. In this context, it is imperative for Türkiye to closely monitor these transformations and implement the necessary strategic moves in a timely and effective manner in line with projections related to them. In accordance with the objective of functioning as a conduit in the global maritime trade and consolidating its standing as a regional hegemony, the implementation of proactive and adaptable strategies is of paramount importance. The policies put forth in this study have been formulated as a reflection of this comprehensive and strategic perspective.

In evaluating the significance of maritime trade within the broader context of Türkiye's 21st-century vision, it is imperative to acknowledge its pivotal role in catalyzing the nation's economic growth and development. In consideration of the data and findings obtained, maritime trade is identified as a multidimensional factor that is directly and positively related to economic growth, supports industrial production, and also feeds diplomatic and military capacity. In this context,

Türkiye is poised to assume a more prominent and influential role within the global competition system, contingent upon its capacity to enhance the economic returns and strategic advantages it gleans from maritime domains. When we consider the role that maritime dominance played in the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire, we can draw important lessons for today's Türkiye. The revitalization of the "Devlet-i Bahriye" tradition in a manner consistent with contemporary demands will yield substantial economic benefits and geopolitical influence for Türkiye. Consequently, maritime policies ought to be addressed with the gravity befitting state policy, transcending the confines of quotidian political discourse, and implemented within the framework of the principles of continuity, integrity, and determination.

The policies pursued by the Republic of Türkiye in accordance with its vision of "Maritime Nation, Maritime Country" have begun to demonstrate concrete results in a relatively brief period. Consequently, Turkish ports in the Marmara and Mediterranean regions have emerged as prominent regional trade hubs, leading to a substantial increase in the visibility of the Turkish flag in international waters. Türkiye is implementing significant structural reforms to achieve its objective of becoming a dominant player in the maritime sector, thereby fortifying its strategic capabilities in this domain. In the face of the various obstacles and challenges encountered during this process, it is of great importance to act with determination and to maintain the necessary will and strategic stance to achieve long-term gains. The data and evaluations presented in this study demonstrate that Türkiye is on the right track in its maritime policies and that maritime trade has truly become a catalyst for the country's economy.

Ultimately, it is the historical responsibility of the Turkish nation to make the best use of the economic, political, and cultural potential of the Blue Homeland in 21st-century Türkiye. Advancements in the realm of maritime development hold immense strategic significance, not merely in terms of contemporary economic indicators but also in the context of forging a prosperous and sustainable nation for posterity. Consequently, the interest and investment in maritime development policies must be sustained with a long-term vision and as a strategic priority. Throughout history, nations that have been part of maritime civilizations have left a lasting mark on the world stage. It is evident that as Türkiye enhances its maritime capabilities, it will become a more formidable, affluent, and influential entity on the global stage. In this context, maritime affairs should be regarded not only as the cornerstone of economic development but also as the foundation of national sovereignty, diplomatic power, and cultural expansion.

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