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# The Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between the Republic of Turkey and the People's Republic of China (1960-1971)\*



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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the process leading to the establishment of relations between Turkey and China on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of this development. One could argue that the relationship between the two ancient countries of Asia and their people was established through a very difficult process shaped by the Cold War environment. Establishing a diplomatic relationship between the two countries, which were in different ideological camps, was an extremely challenging task in a Cold War climate. It is important to point out that opposition to communism, which used to dominate Turkish politics and society, constitutes the main obstacle to the establishment of connections between the two countries in this period. Therefore, this article focuses on ideological and political dynamics. Undoubtedly, the political climate created by the 1971 military memorandum was an important landmark in this process. On the other hand, China's membership in the United Nations and Taiwan's (Nationalist China) removal from the United Nations –alongside Turkey's stance in this process– played an important role in the establishment of relations between the two countries.

**Keywords:** China, Cyprus, Taiwan, the USA, Turkey

## Introduction

THIS STUDY EXAMINES THE PROCESS leading to the establishment of relations between Turkey and China on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of this development. One could argue that the relationship between the two ancient countries of Asia and their people was established through a very difficult process shaped by the Cold War environment. Establishing a diplomatic relationship between the two countries, which were in different ideological camps, was an extremely challenging task in a Cold War climate. It is important to point out that opposition to communism, which used to dominate Turkish politics and society, constitutes the main obstacle to the establishment of connections between the two countries in this period. Therefore, this article focuses on ideological and political dynamics.

The reunion of the two former neighbors in the westernmost and the easternmost parts of Asia on the political plane actually meant the end of the Cold War between the two countries. This was a time when China's relations, not only with Turkey but also with the rest of the world, began to normalize. Moreover, Turkey was witnessing the beginning of a new era in its foreign policy since the 1970s. The first fruits of this new era were born with the normalization of relations with China and the Cyprus Peace Operation. To understand this process of normalization in the 1970s, it is necessary to consider Turkey's changing stance in international politics since the Menderes period. From 1950 to 1971, Turkey faced military intervention twice. The first generated a military coup, whereas the second resulted in a memorandum that led to a new civilian government. However, these interventions did not cause an axis shift in



Dış İşleri Bakanımız Hasan Saka ve Amerikan Büyük Elçisi Mr. Edwin C. Wilson dün öğle üstü anlaşmayı imzalarlarken  
(Bu resim Ankara Foto muhabirimiz Cemal İkişel tarafından uçakla yollanmıştır.)

# Amerikan yardımı anlaşması imzalandı

*Bizim dün imzaladığımız anlaşma,  
Yunanlıların imzaladıklarından bariz  
şekilde farklı bulunuyor*

Menderes period - American aid agreement signed in 1947 (July 13, 1947, Cumhuriyet).

Turkey's foreign policy.

China and Turkey came to the stage of establishing diplomatic relations in 1971 by going through a very difficult ordeal. After the Second World War, Turkey preferred the Western Bloc and established closer relations with this camp in the 1950s. Similarly, the People's Republic of China was established in 1949 and became an important member of the Eastern Bloc. The first encounter between Turkey and China in the Cold War climate was observed in the Korean War, the first and last hot conflict of this period. Turkey participated

in the Korean War as a combatant among the countries led by the USA, called the "Free World", and fought alongside the USA against North Korean troops and Chinese volunteers. While the war was still going on, Turkey was also accepted into NATO, the military pact of the Western Bloc.

## The Menderes Period

The experience of Turkey's multi-party political system, which started in 1946, exerted a significant influence on Turkish foreign policy

characterized by the establishment of closer relations with the United States of America (USA). The signing of 4 bilateral agreements in the military field between Turkey and the USA (Common Security Agreement-1951, NATO Status of Forces Agreement-1952, Military Facilities Agreement-1954, Tax Exemptions Agreement-1954) is a strong indication of this development in the first half of the 1950s (Oran, 2001: 555-559). In this period, the Menderes government followed the example of the USA and recognized the government of Chiang Kai-shek, namely the Republic of China, located in the island of Taiwan, instead of the communist government established on the mainland.

Between 1950 and 1960, the Menderes government adopted all the policies of the Western Bloc, especially its Middle Eastern policy. In this context, Turkey took part in all the Atlantic initiatives geared towards the US policy of encircling the Soviet Union, such as the Baghdad Pact (later named Central Treaty

**The negative experiences in relation to economic issues with the USA were actually the first breaking point in Turkey-US relations. This break led Menderes to development its commercial relations with the Soviet Union.**

Organization, CENTO). In this period, the USA was seen as an important security pillar of Turkey against the Soviet Union, as well as the main financial pillar and source of the Menderes government's economic and social policies aimed at transforming Turkey into a "Little America".

In 1955, Turkey was invited as the guest of honor to the Bandung Conference. However, due to Turkey's defense of the USA and the Western Bloc, this caused a great disappointment for other countries participating in the congress, especially for India which had great sympathy for Turkey. In addition, the Turkish delegation made its first contact ever with the Chinese communists led by Zhou Enlai at this conference (Bağcı, 1990: 61-63). However, despite these developments, the Menderes government continued to evaluate China as part of the so-called "red threat", a concept that was prevalent in the Western Bloc. During this period, Menderes supported Chinese Taiwan and South Korea, visited these countries and gave a speech in their parliaments. Although Mao and his friends had a deep respect for Turkey and the Turkish people, they did not hesitate to criticize the Menderes government. In many instances, especially in the Middle East, both countries took opposing positions. For example, in 1957, as tensions rose between Turkey and Syria, China took a position against Turkey, which was supported by the USA. Syria was supported by the Soviet Union (Adıbelli, 2016:194-197).

Starting from the mid-1950s, however, Turkey's economic policies took a sharp turn. The Menderes government no long received the loans expected from the USA, and this situation pushed the government to look for new sources of funding. In this context, Japan, South Korea, Chinese Taiwan and even later the European Economic Community were seen as new sources of economic support for the Menderes government. The negative experiences in relation to economic issues with the USA were actually the first breaking point in Turkey-US relations. This break led Menderes to development its commercial relations with the



Soviet Union. On April 11, 1960, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Prime Minister Menderes would visit Moscow upon Khrushchev's invitation. According to the statement, Menderes' visit should have been held in July, and Khrushchev would visit Turkey after this visit (Cumhuriyet, 12 April 1960:1). While Prime Minister Menderes was preparing to visit the Soviet Union, he was overthrown by a military coup on 27 May 1960. He was executed on 17 September 1961. One of the general opinions regarding the causes of the May 27 military coup is that there was a US conspiracy against Menderes' efforts to

normalize Turkish-Soviet relations.

### Turkish-Chinese Relations after the May 27 Coup

As the May 27, 1960 coup started a new era in Turkey, there were also important developments in the Eastern Bloc. The 1960s were seen as a period of détente between the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc. In the meantime, this period was also characterized by growing disagreements and disintegration within the Eastern Bloc. The Sino-Soviet conflict, which began in 1956 with Khrushchev's criticism of

Stalin, became more pronounced in the 1960s. In the border conflict between China and India in 1962 (Hillam, 1966: 95-102), the Soviet Union openly supported India. The border disputes that broke out in 1969 between China and the Soviet Union was the last straw between the two countries (Robinson, 1972: 1175-1202).

While this was happening in the Eastern Bloc, there were also important developments in Turkey. Between 1950 and 1960, Turkey, which acted together with the USA in the policy of containing the Soviet Union, took active part in international and regional organizations and attempted to pursue an effective foreign policy in the Middle East region, giving greater importance to its own foreign policy priorities. In this context, Turkey adopted a more introverted but non-aggressive, more defensive foreign policy approach.

**In Johnson's letter, the USA openly threatened Turkey, contrary to the spirit of alliance between the two countries, and stated that the USA and NATO would not help Turkey against a possible Soviet attack.**

Although the easing of hostility between the blocks started in this period, this tendency was not reflected in Turkey. In fact, this period in Turkey was the most affected by the rivalry between the blocks. It faced the indirect threat of the Soviet leader Khrushchev due to the U-2 spy plane incident which first took off at Incirlik base and then was shot down on Soviet soil. It became the subject of bargaining outside of

Turkey, and as a result of this negotiation, Jupiter missiles were removed from Turkey in 1963 (Hale, 2003: 135-139).

While all this was going on, there occurred an important development in Cyprus. Ankara increasingly grew concerned about the frequent violation of the rights of the Turkish community in the island and increasing Greek interventionism in the island since 1960. The Cyprus problem quickly became an international problem. The international community stood with the Greek Cypriot theses, and while Turkey devoted its efforts to bringing the rights of the Turkish Cypriots to the forefront on almost every platform, which eventually failed. Moreover, during this process, violent attacks against the Turkish community in Cyprus had already begun. These developments brought along discussions about intervening on the island within the scope of Turkey's rights arising from the guarantor agreement (Bölükbaşı, 2001: 57-142).

Finally, what happened in Cyprus started a process in which a possible Turkish intervention in the island became a necessity in 1964. Prime Minister İnönü's intention to intervene found an echo in the White House shortly, and then US President Johnson sent his famous letter, which went down in history as the Johnson Letter warning Turkey against intervention, on 5 June 1964. In the letter, the USA openly threatened Turkey, contrary to the spirit of alliance between the two countries, and stated that the USA and NATO would not help Turkey against a possible Soviet attack. At the same time, the letter made it clear that Turkey could not use American weapons in a possible conflict (Johnson & İnönü, 1966: 386-388).

The letter caused a great reaction against the USA on the part of Turkey. In response to the

US attitude, Turkey considered to recognize the People's Republic of China and the development of relations with the Soviet Union. In this context, on October 30, 1964, after 23 years, Foreign Minister Erkin became the highest-level Turkish official who visited the Soviet Union (Cumhuriyet, October 31, 1964:1). In addition, after a long hiatus in 1964, the cocktail party held at the Turkish embassy in Moscow on 29 October Republic Day included the Soviet side. As a result, Johnson's letter caused Turkey to seriously reconsider its relations with the United States for the first time and crossed an important threshold in recognizing China. At the same time, 1964 was the year when Turkey adopted a multi-faceted foreign policy.

**The main concern of Turkish journalists was the Cyprus problem, and China's point of view on this issue was a matter of curiosity. Chinese Prime Minister Zhou said that the problem merged as a result of imperialist policies followed by Western countries.**

In fact, one should also note that "attempts to recognize China were conceived by the State Department bureaucracy in 1963–64. The coalition government headed by İsmet İnönü was preparing for this issue. Suat Hayri Ürgüplü's government, which came after him, also made serious preparations on this path. However, the Justice Party under the leadership of Süleyman Demirel, which came to power alone in 1965 and was seeing itself as the continuation of the Democratic Party, undermined the recogniti-

on of China due to its policies in line with the USA" (Cumhuriyet, August 6, 1971: 1).

### **Statements by Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai about Turkey**

While these changes were taking place in Turkey, China was also closely followed the developments in Turkey. Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai made a surprise statement to Turkish journalists he received in Beijing on April 13, 1965, stating that China wants to establish relations with Turkey. Zhou Enlai told Turkish journalists the following about the relations between Turkey and China:

There is no problem for us in establishing relations between Turkey and China. First, we can establish scientific and economic relations. Then we can start semi-official contacts. Both China and Turkey are Asian countries. There is a very old and deep connection between them in terms of history and culture. We know that the Turkish and Chinese peoples have established a traditional friendship. Relations between China and Turkey should be established by considering the principles of the Bandung Conference, such as territorial integrity, equality and living in peace. With this visit of yours, the first step of the friendship to be established between the two countries has been taken (Statement by Zhou Enlai to Akşam, 1965: 82).

The main concern of Turkish journalists was the Cyprus problem, and China's point of view on this issue was a matter of curiosity. Chinese Prime Minister Zhou said that the problem merged as a result of imperialist policies followed by Western countries and said, "In



order to find a solution to this issue, the aims of imperialism should be eliminated and peaceful negotiations should be held, taking into account the interests of the nations involved (Turkish and Greek communities)” (Statement by Zhou Enlai to Akşam, 1965:83). The Chinese Prime Minister also asserted that he would do his best to improve the negotiations at the Conference of Asian-African Countries, which was seen as a continuation of the Bandung Conference, the first step of which was planned to be held in Algeria as a solution to the problem:

I learned that Turkish State Representatives will come to the Asia-African Countries Summit Conference to be held in Algeria this summer. I will meet with Turkish representatives at this Conference. Makarios is coming to this conference. I am sure that it will be beneficial for me to see the Turkish representatives there and learn their views on the Cyprus issue. As I said before, the Cyprus issue should be resolved peacefully, taking into account the interests of the communities. (Statement by Zhou Enlai to Akşam, 1965).

In addition, Zhou Enlai saw the conference in Algeria as a platform where he could meet and exchange views with the Turkish delegation. However, this meeting did not take place because the Conference of Asian-African States was postponed indefinitely and later cancelled. The Chinese Premier pointed out that the relations between the two countries should be normalized primarily through semi-official contacts between the peoples, journalists, scientists, and economists. The Chinese Prime Minister, in his response to the question of what kind of results would be achieved in the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Turkey, said the following:

Both China and Turkey are Asian countries. There is a traditional friendship between the Turkish and Chinese nations. Both of our countries have suffered from imperialist rape and oppression. We both now face the common task of reinforcing our national independence and increasing Asian-African cooperation. We believe that Turkey and China will be founded on the “Five Principles” (respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual acceptance of non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefits, living together in peace) and the Ten Principles of the Bandung Conference. Normal relations will be in accordance with the interests of both the two nations and the Asian nations. We recently learned that: “The Turkish government leaders and the public have expressed their desire to improve relations with our country. In our view, this shows that they respect the facts and value the cohesion between Asian countries. We welcome this indication. (Statement by Zhou Enlai to Akşam, 1965: 84).

In the statements made so far, Zhou never voiced inter-bloc politics, any stance or policy against the Soviet Union or the USA, or even Turkey’s position within the Western bloc. For example, while talking about the development of economic and cultural ties between the two countries, emphasizing that this situation would be beneficial for the two countries, he stated, “(...) mutual aid should be strengthened with other Asian-African countries and engaged in the struggle for knowledge and experience.” He referred to the Third World policy of China at



Former Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Enlai. (CGTN, 2017)

that time, and in a way tried to encourage Turkey to support this Third World policy. Therefore, he stressed China's intention to establish and develop relations with Turkey on new grounds, not within the bipolar blocks and ideological polarization of the Cold War.

In this period, Turkey's establishment of relations with China also affected the academic world. In this context, opinions began to emerge about the need for Turkey to recognize China. One of them is Fahir Armaoğlu's comment published on 11 September 1964. Armaoğlu stated that he believes Turkey's recognition will have significant results for both Ankara, and stated that such recognition would have some important consequences for Beijing, especially

in its conflict with Moscow, its struggle with Washington, and its relations with the newly independent states of Asia and Africa (Armaoğlu, 1964: 2).

In addition, Armaoğlu stated that as a result of this recognition, Turkey would take part in Asian politics, develop its relations with the newly-independent African countries and also have the opportunity to develop relations with some countries within the Soviet Bloc, as well as some Latin American countries. However, Armaoğlu also voiced a caution: "An important factor that Turkey should consider in recognizing Beijing is the development of relations between Turkey and Japan. For Turkey, this [relations with Japan] is necessary both economically and politically."

(Armaoğlu, 1964: 2). In fact, Armaoğlu advocated for the further development of relations with Japan in order to counter-balance China. In other words, there still remained a feeling of distrust towards China in the background. In terms of the stereotyped threats of the Cold War era, this is not surprising. Still, in his assessment, Armaoğlu sees Pakistan, Japan and China as the main pillars of Turkey's foreign policy towards Asia (Armaoğlu, 1964: 2).

### **Statements by Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi on Turkey**

Exactly one year after Zhou Enlai's statement, on March 21, 1965, Foreign Minister Hasan Işık's statement that Turkey desires to achieve better relations with China gave a new impetus to rapprochement efforts between the two countries (Chronology March-May-1965, 1965:199). After this statement by Foreign Minister Işık, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Marshal Chen Yi, who was visiting Pakistan, delivered a speech to Turkish journalists. President Eyüp Khan of Pakistan and Foreign Minister Zülfikar Ali Bhutto stated that they wanted to act as a mediator for the recognition of the People's Republic of China by Turkey, just like Pakistan, and that the response of the Turkish Government was still expected (Acar, 1965: 1).

In addition, Chen Yi stated that he first told the Turkish Ambassador during his visit to Afghanistan in 1960 that China wanted to normalize its relations with Turkey and that China had a positive opinion on this issue. He stated that it is the natural role of the Turkish Government to determine what needs to be done for this, and that Turkey is a country whose past is rooted in Asia. He went to say that

China is an ancient Asian nation, and therefore they are waiting for the decision of Turkey with interest (Acar, 1965:1). In addition, Chen Yi emphasized that Turkey has difficulties in its relations with the great powers and China is also suffering from this situation; therefore, it is necessary for the two countries to cooperate, saying, "They should live in friendship. There is no disagreement, no conflict of interest between them. No harm has touched Turkey. We have not seen any harm from Turkey. I hope that a solution can be found to normalize our relations." (Acar, 1965: 1).

In the 1960s, it had become a custom for the Chinese to refer to the Cyprus problem in almost any statement about Turkey. However, it should be noted that all Chinese officials have adopted a routine, diplomatic and neutral stance on the Cyprus issue in a specific pattern. In his speech to Turkish journalists, Chen Yi expressed his belief that the principle of the federal state would not resolve the Cyprus conflict unless the principles of equality of nations and mutual respect are respected in addressing the Cyprus issue (Acar, 1965:1). Meanwhile, the Beijing administration responded positively to the World Red Cross Organization's call for help to the Turkish Cypriots and provided 70 thousand liras in aid. Instead of sending the money to the Red Cross account in Switzerland, China sent the money directly to Turkey. He made a gesture against Turkey by sending it to the Turkish Red Crescent via the Central Bank (Cumhuriyet, March 28, 1965:1).

Despite the positive statements of the People's Republic of China and Turkey regarding the establishment of relations between the two countries, some parliamentarians also visited Chinese Taiwan and made important statements there. One of them was Lebit Yurdoğlu, the former Minister of Rural Affairs. In July 1965,

he made an 11-day visit to Chinese Taiwan, where he was received by the country's prime minister. In his statement at the airport in Chinese Taiwan's capital Taipei, Yurdođlu said that 90 percent of the Turkish people are hostile to communism (Cumhuriyet, July 8, 1965:3).

Senator Sami Kūçük gave a speech in the Parliamentary Senate of the Republic during the 1965 Budget negotiations. During the visit of the President of the Senate of the Republic

**As it is understood from the statements in the 1960s, both countries used careful language in order not to alienate each other and tried to approach each other through common issues rather than political and ideological differences.**

Enver Aka to Pakistan in November 1964, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan told him that China supported Turkey's Cyprus cause and that the Soviet Union also supported this case. He said that China also made an attempt to support his position. Therefore, Sami Kūçük pointed out that the People's Republic of China, which wanted to stand by Turkey in this just cause, should be recognized as a balancing factor in Turkey's foreign policy, as Pakistan had done (Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi, February 1, 1965:1023).

Within the framework of all these developments, efforts were undertaken to prepare a trade agreement between Turkey and China in November 1965. To establish commercial relationships between the two countries, the Turkish representative of the

Leipzig Fair, Şadi Atagöksel, was invited to China by the Beijing Export Development Center, and said on his return that "A new and large marketplace has been opened to Turkey" (Cumhuriyet, November 26, 1965: 5). On December 6, 1966, this time a trade delegation from China came to Izmir and met with Turkish businessmen at the Izmir Chamber of Commerce. Hsiao Fang Chou, head of the Chinese trade delegation and vice-chairman of the International Trade Promotion Council, said in a statement; "This is the first time we are going on such a trip. Today, China is on the way to develop its foreign trade. We are facing many challenges in the development of our foreign trade. The difficulties come from countries that claim to be so-called socialists rather than imperialist countries. In this context, we want to do business under equal conditions. Developing relations will be very beneficial for both countries" (Cumhuriyet, December 7, 1966: 7).

As it is understood from the statements in the 1960s, both countries used careful language in order not to alienate each other and tried to approach each other through common issues rather than political and ideological differences. Within the scope of the Third World policy, China's support for the Palestinians in the Arab-Israeli conflict and its refusal to recognize imperialist Israeli Zionism attracted attention in Turkey. This was especially as China considers bilateral relations within the scope of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which is the basis of its foreign policy. The fact that Chinese Taiwan, which represents China in the UN Security Council, did not stand by Turkey's side in some issues such as Cyprus at the UN, and that the USA followed suit, was also effective in

Turkey bringing the China card to the table. In addition, China's successful participation in the nuclear club in 1964 by carrying out the atomic bomb test also increased China's position vis-à-vis Turkey.

### Sino-Turkish Relations in the 1970s

By the 1970s, the issue of China's representation in the UN had long exceeded a dimension that could no longer be ignored. Since 1950, the problem of China's representation in the UN had always been the main agenda item for the UN and international politics. China's first serious attempt for UN membership was in 1960. However, the USA started to stall the process by arguing that the representation problem was an important one and should be negotiated.

While the USA argued that Chinese Taiwan should represent the Chinese society, many countries also sided with the People's Republic of China. However, Turkey, following the path of the USA, voted against China's membership to the UN and caused criticism from various quarters. Cumhuriyet newspaper's lead writer, Nadir Nadi, criticized Turkey's follow-up to the United States on China in his column in the newspaper:

In terms of international relations, it is obvious that the situation is far from serious. As a matter of fact, some NATO member states, especially England and France, have officially recognized the People's Republic of China, and these states have re-established their relations. As for our stance, the fact that we are following a policy that has made it a principle not to stray from the yoke of the USA for a moment has been conspicuous once again. As a result of the pressure of the events, America will eventually officially recognize

the People's Republic of China, do we have to walk behind it? (Nadi, 1970:1)

Haluk Bayülken, Turkey's permanent representative at the UN, explained the reason for Turkey's game against China in the UN as follows:

Keeping the principles and objectives of the UN law and the development of the United Nations in constant consideration, we followed this meeting with full attention and listened to various views with great interest and contemplation. On this occasion, I would like to express once again the commitment of my government to the principle of universality. This view has been expressed many times from this podium. Indeed, from its inception we have recognized the United Nations Organization as a world organization in which all nations, within the understanding of the law, can achieve their rightful place in the community, regardless of their size or their political, social and economic beliefs. We have always been driven by the desire to make this belief a viable reality. I would like to add that we are still willing to act in this direction today. However, unfortunately, since the draft resolution in document no. a / 1.605 does not fully meet these stipulated issues, it is not considered possible to be approved. Therefore, we must cast our vote against this proposal. My government stands ready to carefully consider any proposal for the representation of the People's Republic of China at the United Nations. (The draft resolution in the aforementioned document recommends the expulsion of the Nationalist Chinese Government from the United Nations with the acceptance of the representatives of Mainland China) (Dışişleri Bakanlığı Belleteni, 1970:72).



Meanwhile, the United States had also started to make attempts to improve relations with China since 1969, and a few attempts by the Nixon administration failed. Despite this, in 1970, Nixon instructed his then national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, to prioritize relationships with China. Nixon had already begun to express at every opportunity that they could no longer ignore the increasing importance of China.

The issue of the recognition of China had now become the number one topic of foreign policy agenda in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. While the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was discussed in the 1971 Budget negotiations, the discussions in the context of China focused on two main topics: firstly,

why Turkey did not vote positively in China's membership process to the UN and secondly, China should be recognized as soon as possible. Salih Tanyeri, speaking on behalf of the CHP group in the meetings pointed out that China's entry into the United Nations was no longer a matter of time; he said that the need of the United Nations for China outweighed China's needs for the UN. After all, China had 800 million people and nuclear power. In addition, Salih Tanyeri states that "Turkey's attitude and vote towards China, although they recognize Britain, Italy, France, Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway from the states included in NATO, is in line with the attitude and vote of the United States." (Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi,1971:347).



US President Nixon shakes hands with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai on his visit to China, February 21-28, 1972. (Shou, 2020)

Speaking on behalf of the National Unity group, Ahmet Yıldız, on the other hand, said, “We cannot find any rational aspect to our policy regarding China, with which we have had no bad relations in the past,” and then Yıldız directed a number of questions to the government:

Why did we oppose the recognition of this giant country at the United Nations, which NATO members Italy and Canada want to recognize, England and France maintain advanced relations with, and even the United States has indirect talks and affirmed it will recognize conditionally? Even though recognizing China is not considered contrary to NATO membership, we find the hostility we stubbornly maintain to be very strange. Is there a reason we do not know about the unrealistic policy pursued by the Government against China, with which we can establish beneficial political and economic relations? Is there any intention to change this wrong policy? We would like to learn. (Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi, 1971:359)

Kasım Gülek (Senator of CHP) also emphasized that China is a state that was about to become a superpower, referring to the policy of China's increasing influence in the Middle East and Africa, and continued: “We have been saying for years, it is time for Turkey to recognize Continental China. We believe that with the Canadian formula, it is possible for Chinese Taiwan to remain in the United Nations and for the Mainland China to be recognized.” (Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi, 1971:373). Kasım Gülek made the following observations on China's attitude towards the Cyprus issue: “It would have been necessary to make this recognition a few years ago, when

Mainland China said that “federation gives birth” to Cyprus. At that time, Mainland China was in great need of these recognitions. We have missed the full point of this; it would be appropriate not to miss it even more.” (Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi, 1971:374).

After all these speeches, Minister of Foreign Affairs İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil came to the podium and explained the foreign policy of his government, and in this context, he mentioned the most important agenda of the day: the China issue. Çağlayangil, like other speakers, said that with its 800 million population, China had now become a reality in international politics and a factor that should be taken into account without wasting any time, adding that the People's Republic of China was gaining weight and making its presence felt day by day due to its population and potential. On the other hand, he emphasized that Turkey's realistic attitude towards Mainland China should be evaluated in the light of the international conjuncture and the basic principles that every state, big and small, justifies its representation at the UN (Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi, 1971:383).

After these discussions took place in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Chinese Taiwan (Republic of China) hastily sent its deputy foreign minister to Ankara. On February 25, 1971, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs held meetings with Orhan Eralp, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and focused on Turkey's future relations with the Republic of China. He also delivered the message sent by Taiwan President Chiang Kai-shek to President Sunay and the Secretary General Eralp, calling for the further development of Taiwan's bilateral relations with Turkey in all

fields, especially in trade and culture. During these meetings, Taiwan's deputy foreign minister insisted Foreign Minister Çağlayangil to visit Chinese Taiwan (Cumhuriyet, 26 Şubat 1971: 1).

**China and Turkey maintained confidentiality on the subject of establishing relations, because there was the danger of preventing or delaying the establishment of new relations due to ongoing rivalries in the Cold War climate.**

By March, important developments were observed in Turkey's domestic politics. Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel resigned from the government as a result of the memorandum given by the Turkish Armed Forces to the Demirel government on March 12, 1971. Osman Olcay, one of the senior diplomats of the ministry, was brought to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On March 26, 1971, Prime Minister Nihat Erim, under the foreign policy title of his government's program, made a statement regarding China, "We are seriously examining the problem of establishing political and economic relations with Mainland China, on which our public has recently focused, in terms of whether it is in line with our national interests." (Neziroğlu and Yılmaz, 2013: 3280). For the first time, a statement about establishing relations with the People's Republic of China was included in a government program.

Exactly one month after the new government mentioned the establishment of relations with China in its program, Foreign Minister Olcay

announced to the public that direct contacts had begun between Turkey and the People's Republic of China with the aim of establishing diplomatic relations (Cumhuriyet, April 26, 1971:1).

During this period, both China and Turkey maintained confidentiality on the subject of establishing relations, because there was the danger of preventing or delaying the establishment of new relations due to ongoing rivalries in the Cold War climate. The government of the People's Republic announced that they agreed to start negotiations for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Turkey and both countries appointed their ambassadors in France to carry out these negotiations (Cumhuriyet, May 9, 1971:1).

### **Turkey Establishes Contact with China**

In the first days of August 1971, it was announced that Turkey would recognize China in a few days. It was understood that the parties reached an agreement on diplomatic recognition in July and working on a confirmation date. At that time, according to the leaked news from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the announcement was firstly set for the end of July, but this date was postponed for various reasons such as the Taiwan's ambassador departure from Turkey. In addition, Turkey's ambassador to Chinese Taiwan was instructed to start preparations for his return to Turkey (Cumhuriyet, August 3, 1971:7). Meanwhile, at a secret meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly on August 2, Foreign Minister Olcay shared information on the ongoing efforts to establish diplomatic relations with China (Cumhuriyet, August 3, 1971:7).

## Turkey's Recognition of the People's Republic of China

Turkey and China came together in Paris to conclude the establishment of diplomatic relations that they had been negotiating for a long time. On June 4, Turkey's Ambassador to Paris Hasan Esat Işık and China's Ambassador to Paris Huang Chen announced the following statement to the public.

### Declaration on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Turkey

The Governments of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Turkey have decided to establish diplomatic relations on the basis of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, respect for the principles of equality of rights and reciprocity of interests.

The Turkish Government recognizes that the Government of the People's Republic of China is the only legal Government of China. The Chinese and Turkish Governments decided to exchange ambassadors as soon as the administrative formalities and practical arrangements were completed and agreed to provide each other with all necessary assistance for the establishment of diplomatic missions in their respective capitals and to facilitate their fulfillment of their duties in accordance with international principles and practices.

Hasan Esat Işık

Huang Chen

(Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of diplomatic relations Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Turkey, 1971:6)

Following Turkey's official recognition, the following congratulatory article was published as an editorial in the People's Daily (Renmin Ribao) in China on 7 August:

After the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Turkey announced on August 5 that diplomatic relations were established at the embassy level on the basis of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, reciprocity of interests, and respect for the principles of rights and equality, we offer our sincere congratulations on this issue.

There is a long tradition of friendship between the Chinese and Turkish peoples. The friendly relations of our two peoples go back to ancient times. The historically famous "silk road" stretches from China's Gansu and Xinjiang via Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia to Turkey. Friendly relations between China and Turkey were interrupted only by the obstacles of imperialism and colonialism. The declaration that China and Turkey have now established diplomatic relations is in full harmony with the common aspirations of the two peoples and the common interests of the two sides. The Turkish people have a glorious tradition of revolutionary struggle. The Chinese and Turkish peoples, who were once subjected to imperialist attacks and oppression, have always sympathized and supported each other in the joint struggle against imperialism. We strongly support the Turkish people in their struggle to protect national independence and defend state sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The government of the People's Republic of China is the only legal government representing the entire Chinese people, and



Taiwan Province is an integral part of China's holy land. Whether "two Chinas", "one China, one Taiwan" or "Taiwan independence" or "Taiwan's status to be determined", any plan aimed at separating Taiwan from China will certainly fail. Chairman Mao, the great leader of the Chinese people, said, "We should strive to establish normal diplomatic relations with all countries that wish to live in peace with us, based on territorial integrity and sovereignty and equality and mutual respect for mutual benefit."

The Chinese Government firmly advocates that all countries, regardless of their size and different social systems, should be equal and live in peace. We have constantly sought to establish and develop friendly relations with all countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, and mutual respect for their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The current agreement on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the governments of China and Turkey is the result of the joint efforts of the two sides. The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Turkey opened wide horizons for friendship and cooperation between the two countries. We firmly believe that the friendship between the Chinese and Turkish peoples will definitely grow day by day.

**Renmin Ribao, 7 Ağustos 1971**

(Greeting the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between China and Turkey, 1971:6,11).

Turkey's initiation of a new era with China aroused satisfaction in Turkey, although not as much as in China, and it was reported as news on the front pages of the newspapers. Haluk Sayınsoy, General Director of Foreign Affairs and Administrative Affairs, explained the task of

establishing relations with China, and announced to the Turkish public that the relationship would be established at the press conference on 5 August. In addition, Sayınsoy stated at this press conference that there would be an exchange of ambassadors between the two countries in 1972 (Cumhuriyet, August 6, 1972:7).

The first support from politicians came from Kasım Gülek in the Senate of the Republic. Gülek said that it was a good move for Turkey to recognize China, and that all Turkey's friends recognized China, so Turkey had to recognize it as well, adding that "We have peaceful relations with many countries whose regimes we do not adopt, it is even late to recognize China." (Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi, 1971:461). In addition, Gülek made a statement supporting China and Turkey in the most difficult period of the Cyprus problem, declaring his stance. At that time, he stated that maybe it would be more advantageous for us to know China, and the government's direction was correct. (Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi, 1971:461).

With Turkey's recognition of China, one of the first reactions that appeared in the public was the claim that this diplomatic step was made under the influence of the USA. aid Koçaş, Deputy Prime Minister, responded to these allegations on 6 August at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, saying, "This decision was taken exclusively by considering the interests of Turkey. Our decision has not been influenced or even suggested by any foreign state." (Cumhuriyet, August 7, 1971:1). In his speech, Koçaş said the following about the recognition of China:

We have not had diplomatic relations with



the People's Republic of China, which is the largest state in the world with a population of 750 million. Our government, which mainly dealt with these investigations and made a situation judgment, was decided and the case was announced to the whole world's public opinion. This decision has been taken exclusively by considering Turkey's interstate interests. No foreign state influence in our decision; In fact, there was no suggestion, the events quickly showed that our country took this decision just in time, and some other countries took action after we started the negotiations (Cumhuriyet, August 7, 1971:7).

In his speech at the National Assembly, Deputy Prime Minister Koçuş also touched upon the situation and future of Taiwan, which was another issue that emerged with the recognition of China and received much criticism. He said that Turkey would not be a supporter of secession, but as a natural result of our relations, Turkey would support the membership of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations.

Noting that the Taiwanese Embassy would leave our country after the beginning of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, and that China would establish an embassy of 15 people in Turkey in accordance with the agreement, Koçuş later said:

All transactions will take place in mutually equal rights. While presenting this issue to your supreme delegation and our noble nation, I would like to specifically state that regardless of their regimes, both sides will never interfere in each other's internal affairs, but that it will be natural for our economic relations to develop rapidly along with diplomatic relations. While I present this decision, which is the product of a

unifying and constructive thought on all kinds of domestic policy problems, to be welcomed by all parties and esteemed members, as a new manifestation of the unity and solidarity that our nation has shown throughout history in foreign policy, I wish that it will be beneficial for our nation, our country and world peace (Cumhuriyet, August 7, 1971:7).

Meanwhile, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate of the Republic held a special meeting on the recognition of the People's Republic of China, upon the request of Fethi Tevetođlu, senator of the Adalet Party and member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. In this secret meeting, Sadi Koçuş, Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, and the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained the purpose and reasons for the decision taken by the government on the recognition of the People's Republic of China (Cumhuriyet, August 7, 1971:7). As a continuation of this process in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the government also informed political party leaders about the issue. Prime Minister Nihat Erim also met with the leaders of the parties in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and gave information about the relations established with China. In this context, Prime Minister Erim met with Turhan Feyziođlu, Chairman of the National Trust Party, and Ferruh Bozbeyli, Chairman of the Democrat Party, at the Parliament on August 9, and evaluated his meeting with the Prime Minister from Bozbey as follows:

We had discussions about the recognition of the People's Republic of China, which is



Meeting where the People's Republic of China was officially recognized at the United Nations. (United Press International, 1971)

today's issue. As you know, the work of the old and new governments has finally come to a conclusion... The positive results of this decision for our country, especially in terms of our economic relations and defense policy, should be clearly revealed. I am not convinced that the efforts are sufficient to ensure the continuation of our close relations with nationalist China (Cumhuriyet, August 10, 1971:7).

The main reaction against the recognition of China came from the Adalet Party. Adalet Party Chairman Süleyman Demirel severely criticized the recognition of China and turning its back on Taiwan in his statement to the press on 8 August. In his speech, Demirel stated:

The recognition of Red China by Turkey takes place in our press and radios as the topic of the day. It is said that Red China is a world-class power, recognized by many countries as the reason for the recognition. It is also claimed that establishing relations with Red China will bring many benefits to our country. In other words, it is stated that the interests of the country are taken into consideration without this recognition. The issue of which interests of Turkey are taken into consideration by recognizing China and what Turkey will gain by embarking on such a path is not clearly expressed; it is even being avoided. If everyone knew Red China! ... If those in charge claim that recognizing Red China is in the interests of the country, they also have to explain

to the public what these interests are. In my opinion, in today's environment and at this time, recognizing Red China is not beneficial for Turkey. You didn't recognize them for 23 years, but what damage have we received? While Turkey has so many issues, it is surprising that recognizing Red China is presented to the Turkish public as a very important achievement. Turkey does not currently have any crops to sell to Red China, nor does it have anything to buy from Red China. In this respect, it is not possible to claim that there will be great benefits in terms of economic relations (Cumhuriyet, August 9, 1971:7).

Demirel made the following assessment regarding the status and future of Turkey's relations with Taiwan:

In recognition of Red China, it is regrettable that the condition of severing relations with Nationalist China (Taiwan), which had fought for nearly 25 years against the communist spread in Southeast Asia, was accepted. Those in charge, while recognizing Red China, should explain to the Turkish public to what extent they accept the conditions put forward by Red China, what conditions are put forward by us and to what extent the other party accepts them. Thus, the public will have an opinion on whether Turkey's interests are protected or not. In summary, hastily recognizing Red China will not benefit Turkey. I also declare that we regret the discontinuation of our relations with the nationalist China, which is an anti-communist country with friendly feelings (Cumhuriyet, August 9, 1971:7).

Deputy Prime Minister Sadi Koçuş responded to the harsh criticisms of the Adalet Party and its Chairman Demirel on Turkey's recognition of China with an off-the-topic speech in the National Assembly. In his talk, he criticized the statement of Adalet Party leader Süleyman Demirel opposing the recognition of the People's Republic of China and explained with documents that attempts to establish relations with Mainland China started during the Adalet Party's rule. Deputy Prime Minister Koçuş said, "Mr. Demirel, under his presidency, cannot have forgotten the answers given by the relevant and authorized authorities in the Senate and the National Assembly, in the commissions of a government that has responsibility for nearly six years, and also the answers he gave to a written question. For reasons we cannot understand, he has abandoned his old view." (Cumhuriyet, August 10, 1971:7). On the other hand, Koçuş stated that they accepted Demirel's statement as a personal statement of the government, and said, "We understand the most obvious characteristic of being a government as continuity in words and actions unless there are major changes." (Cumhuriyet, August 10, 1971:7).

In the continuation of his speech, Koçuş presented the views of the Adalet Party on China by giving examples from the recent past, and cited the 1971 statements of Foreign Minister Çağlayangil of the Adalet Party government regarding the recognition of China. Most importantly, on February 20, 1971, Deputy Chairman of Foreign Affairs, Hasan Dinçer,

said in his speech at the National Assembly that the People's Republic of China with its 800 million population is an indisputable fact, and that efforts would be made for both their recognition and their membership to the United Nations (Cumhuriyet, August 10, 1971:7).

### **Eventually, Liu Chun was appointed as the Ankara Ambassador of the People's Republic of China on May 26, 1972.**

Süleyman Demirel, the leader of the Adalet Party, who had not taken the rostrum since the day he left the Prime Ministry with the 12 March memorandum, responded from the rostrum of the Parliament on the allegations of Koçuş regarding the recognition of China. Demirel pointed out that governments should explain their policy decisions with their own justifications. Concluding his speech, Demirel stated that for the same reason, Turkey may as well request the recognition of North Korea (Cumhuriyet, August 10, 1971:7).

Speaking on behalf of the CHP group, the group's vice chairman, Necdet Uğur, criticized Demirel's words and said, "Wouldn't it be necessary for someone who has been responsible for the government of the Republic of Turkey for 5 years to rise above such an important foreign policy issue? Demirel says national interests are not an enigma, and the government should explain it.

448 people have the right to say such a word; two people do not. One is Demirel and the other is Çağlayangil. Does Demirel not know about Mainland China, the American-Russian relations, Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)? If he doesn't know, it's a shame for this country. How can Demirel, who served as the Prime Minister for 5 years, not know this?" (Cumhuriyet, August 10, 1971:7).

Deputy Prime Minister Koçuş, who came back to the podium to respond to the criticisms on behalf of the government, stated that they were always ready to answer Demirel's questions in a secret session, and that the Adalet Party government had also initiatives for the recognition of the People's Republic of China (Cumhuriyet, August 10, 1971:7).

Eventually, Liu Chun, who was appointed as the Ankara Ambassador of the People's Republic of China on May 26, 1972, approximately 10 months after Turkey's recognition of China, started his duty by presenting his letter of credence to President Cevdet Sunay. Before being appointed as ambassador to Turkey, Liu Chun had served as the Asian Affairs Desk Manager at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In August, Nuri Eren, Turkey's senior diplomat at the United Nations representation, was appointed as Turkey's Ambassador to Beijing. Nuri Eren started his duty in Beijing on October 31, 1972.

### **Review and Discussion**

Turkey's establishment of diplomatic relations with China is a by-product of Turkey's changing foreign policy. Although the period

between 1950 and 1960 was a period in which Turkish foreign policy was on the axis of the West, and particularly that of the United States, the period of 1960-1980 is called a period of relative autonomy, according to writers such as Mehmet Gönülbol (1996) and Baskın Oran (2001). Indeed, when we look at foreign policy developments of this period, it is seen that Turkey had started to follow its own national interests rather than following a bloc policy. The most important foreign policy problem of this period was disagreements with the USA, especially due to the Cyprus problem. This difference of opinion led Turkey to revise its policy of balance, a traditional foreign policy strategy. Therefore, relations with the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union were reviewed.

**Since the 1960s, the increasing influence of China in international politics, which attracted attention all over the world, had also shown its effect in Turkey so that the**

Since the 1960s, the increasing influence of China in international politics, which attracted attention all over the world, had also shown its effect in Turkey so that the establishment of relations with China had come to the agenda. China had become a controversial issue in the press, politics and academic world in Turkey. Although in the 1960s, as a reaction to the US attitude towards Cyprus, especially in 1964, Turkey was warned aga-

inst the Cyprus issue in a harsh way and the political figures of the period brought up the recognition of China as a response to the threatening Johnson Letter, this could not go beyond being a weak bluff against the USA. Despite this, the issue of recognizing China was on Turkey's agenda. However, this issue remained bound to the Turkish-American relations, and their position over the Cyprus issue. Undoubtedly, this problem did not arise as a one-sided request. In the 1960s, positive messages came from China as well. The statements made by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Chen Yi showed that the Beijing administration was also willing to establish relations with Turkey.

The issue of recognizing China had also been a domestic policy issue and discussion in Turkey. In particular, one dimension of the political fight between the Adalet Party, which had to leave power as a result of the military memorandum in 1971, and the Erim government that replaced it, was the issue of recognizing China. Members of the Adalet Party carried out their criticism against the Erim government, both in the press and in their speeches in Parliament, regarding the recognition of China. On the other hand, the Erim government argued that the Adalet Party started the process of recognizing China and would eventually complete it.


The most important point of the discussions in the process of the recognition of China was the accusations that Turkey was following the path of the USA's stance with China, espe-



cially in the UN. Both the Adalet Party and the Erim government faced such accusations. Turkey's stance with the USA in voting on China's membership in the UN further increased the reactions against the USA in the Turkish public opinion.

A number of technical issues also arose throughout the process of Turkey's recognition of China. In particular, the situation of Chinese Taiwan, which represented China at the UN, had been the subject of much debate. Turkey's thesis from the very beginning was that both Chinas should stay in the UN, which in this respect was already the thesis of the USA. However, China opposed the inclusion of Chinese Taiwan in the UN, citing the "one China principle". China stated that the countries that would establish diplomatic relations with him should also comply with this one-China principle, otherwise, China would not establish diplomatic relations. Another issue was the discussion about Turkey discontinuing its good relations with Taiwan, which had lasted for years, which would be against the principle of Pacta Sunt Servanda, that is, the principle of pact and fidelity, and that there should be an intermediate formula for this. Particularly, the Adalet Party made great efforts in this regard. On the other hand, Chinese Taiwan did not provide support in the UN Security Council on important issues of Turkey. For example, Chinese Taiwan gave almost no support for Cyprus. Taiwan is a country that has completely followed the helm of the USA. However, China's assessments of the Cyprus problem since the 1960s are closer

to Turkey's theses and Turkey has interpreted this as a supportive gesture. In addition, the fact that China, unlike Chinese Taiwan, would have its own agenda at the UN, meant that an alternative friend and supporter for Turkey would be in the UN Security Council in the future.

In the shadow of all these discussions, Turkey recognized the People's Republic of China on August 4, 1971. In 1972, the embassies of both countries were opened and ambassadors were appointed. Since that day, the relations between the two ancient peoples of Asia have continued to develop for 50 years. Although 17 years of these relations occurred the influence of the Cold War climate, official presidential visits were made to China for the first time in the 1980s, and more visits were made from China to Turkey. In the 1970s, Süleyman Demirel, who was vehemently opposed to the recognition of China, gave the Order of Merit to the Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Ankara in 2000, exactly 30 years later, guided by his own motto that "yesterday is yesterday, today is today" once again. 

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