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Türkiye’s growing interest in BRICS: Analysis of motivations and implications

Türkiye’s recent bid to join the BRICS group has sparked discussions about the potential implications for the country’s foreign policy direction. Türkiye’s interest in the organization is not new—it dates back to 2018. At the BRICS summit that year, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, attending as a special invitee, expressed the country’s desire for membership. However, there was little follow-up regarding Ankara’s strategy toward the group. [1] Yet, Türkiye’s participation in the BRICS Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Russia on June 11, 2024, revived these discussions. Russian Vice President Yuri Ushakov’s announcement [2] that Türkiye has applied for full membership of BRICS further fueled debates in both domestic and international politics.

BRICS, originally coined in the early 2000s as a term for the emerging nations of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, formally became an international forum in 2009. A year later, South Africa joined, creating the BRICS group. In early 2024, the group expanded further to include Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), significantly increasing its geographic reach and importance in the global arena.

BRICS holds substantial economic and political significance as it brings together emerging powers that challenge the traditional Western-led international system. [3]

Joining BRICS will enhance Türkiye’s role as a bridge

Türkiye’s growing interest in BRICS stems from both political and economic motivations. Politically, BRICS represents the increasing influence of emerging nations, offering a platform for these countries to voice their dissatisfaction with the current global system.

The group positions itself as a counterbalance to the West-dominated international order. As a major regional power, Türkiye's interest in BRICS aligns with its multi-vector and balanced foreign policy. Joining BRICS could enhance Türkiye's role as a bridge between the East and West, increasing its strategic importance to both sides.

In light of East-West tensions, such as the China-US trade war and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, strengthening ties with BRICS could help Türkiye navigate the uncertainties of the global system while pursuing its national interests independently of any single bloc. Another critical aspect of BRICS is its critique of existing international institutions, particularly the unequal distribution of power in organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Emerging economies within BRICS have long expressed frustration with their underrepresentation and limited voting power in these institutions. Despite reforms in 2016, the US retains a dominant position. Türkiye's participation in BRICS could allow it to join forces with other countries in pressing for further reforms in these global organizations.

Furthermore, Türkiye's interest in BRICS fits with its broader strategy of engaging with alternative international and regional organizations. [4] This approach is consistent with its bid to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and its status as a dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). [5] The overarching goal is to collaborate with other emerging economies to shape international affairs and promote a multipolar world order. By engaging with non-Western organizations, Türkiye seeks to improve its strategic autonomy, compartmentalizing its relationships with Western organizations and assessing diverse opportunities on both fronts.

What will joining BRICS bring to the Turkish economy?

Economically, BRICS plays a pivotal role in the global economic system. Since the 1990s, rapid development in Asian economies has shifted the center of economic gravity from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asian region. BRICS members account for 40% of the world's population and 20% of its gross domestic product (GDP). Following the 2024 expansion, BRICS now represents 46% of the global population and 31% of the world economy. [6] Türkiye's engagement with BRICS could help increase its exports to member countries, which is crucial given the dominance of Western markets in its export portfolio. By diversifying its trade relations, Türkiye could reduce its economic vulnerabilities in the long run.

Additionally, improving relations with BRICS members could attract new investments, create job opportunities, and expand the presence of member countries in various sectors of Türkiye's economy. This is particularly significant as the world shifts from a West-centered economic order to an East-centered one. Establishing long-term, stable relationships with BRICS members could help Türkiye navigate the volatility of the global economy, disrupted supply chains, and geopolitical tensions between major powers.

Another key aspect of BRICS is its support for alternative international financial institutions, such as the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB). Türkiye's deepening ties with BRICS could facilitate access to funding from the NDB for renewable energy and infrastructure projects, complementing financing from Western multilateral development banks.

In summary, Türkiye's interest in BRICS is driven by both political and economic factors. Its proactive foreign policy, emphasizing a balanced approach between East and West, forms the political rationale. On the economic side, the growing clout of BRICS countries offers Türkiye opportunities to deepen its trade relations, access new export markets, and attract diversified investment sources for long-term growth.

[1] https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/analiz-turkiye-brics-ve-cok-kutupluluk-jeopolitik-bir-dengeleme/3247499
[2] https://www.bloomberght.com/rusya-turkiye-brics-e-tam-uyelik-basvurusu-yapti-2359582
[3] https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/09/03/turkey-submits-request-to-join-brics-nations
[4] https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/perspektif/murat-yesiltas/2024/09/07/turkiyenin-brics-uyeligi-firsat-mi-risk-mi
[5] https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkiye-aims-to-become-dialogue-partner-of-asean-foreign-minister/3286386
[6] https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/analiz-turkiye-brics-ve-cok-kutupluluk-jeopolitik-bir-dengeleme/3247499

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