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EVALUATING TÜRKİYE'S ECONOMIC AND TRANSPORTATION POLICIES IN THE CONTEXT OF ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of the Turkish economy, especially after 2018, is not limited to financial parameters but also highlights a significant restructuring in terms of the direction, scope, and meaning of economic policies. In this period, the direction of foreign economic relations changed, investment priorities were updated, and logistics infrastructure projects were strategically emphasized. In particular, the geographical axis of foreign trade, diversification in trade relations, and investments in transportation corridors play a decisive role in Türkiye's economic repositioning. The study focuses on the post-2018 period due to the continuation of existing transportation and infrastructure projects and the new institutional and discursive character that economic and transportation policies assumed within the framework of the New Economic Programs. In this regard, while the Turkish economy has always been in a state of transformation as an emerging economy, the post-2018 period represents a distinct phase shaped by programmatic policy changes and strategic priorities. In this framework, economic and transportation decisions are shaped by rational growth targets and existential security concerns to preserve the state's institutional stability, identity, and continuity. This study aims to examine Türkiye's post-2018 economic and transportation policies in the context of ontological security theory. Ontological security refers to the state's need to protect its physical security and historical continuity, identity, and institutional integrity. In this context, the study examines the changes in foreign trade orientations, the shift in priorities in investment strategies, and the transportation and logistics infrastructure projects that support this process. It evaluates how these policies affect the state's position and identity in the international system. The findings suggest that Türkiye's economic and transportation policies are shaped by a multi-layered security strategy that is not limited to technical rationality but also carries geopolitical and identity significance.

Keywords: Türkiye, Economic Policy, Transportation Policy, Ontological Security
Jel Classification: F50, H54, R42

ONTOLOJİK GÜVENLİK BAĞLAMINDA TÜRKİYE'NİN EKONOMİ VE ULAŞTIRMA POLİTİKALARININ DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

ÖZ

Türkiye ekonomisinde özellikle 2018 sonrasında gözlenen dönüşüm, yalnızca finansal parametrelerle sınırlı kalmayıp, ekonomi politikalarının yönü, kapsamı ve taşıdığı anlam açısından da önemli bir yeniden yapılanmaya dikkat çekmektedir. Bu dönemde dış ekonomik ilişkilerin yönü değişmiş, yatırım öncelikleri güncellenmiş ve lojistik altyapı projelerine stratejik düzeyde ağırlık verilmiştir. Özellikle dış ticaretin coğrafi ekseni ile ticari ilişkilerdeki çeşitlenme ve taşımacılık koridorlarına yapılan yatırımlar, Türkiye'nin ekonomik yeniden konumlanmasında belirleyici rol oynamaktadır. Çalışma, mevcut ulaştırma ve altyapı projelerinin devam etmesi ve 2018'den itibaren ekonomi ve ulaştırma politikalarının Yeni Ekonomi Programları çerçevesinde yeni bir kurumsal ve söylemsel nitelik kazanmış olması nedeniyle 2018 sonrası döneme odaklanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Türkiye ekonomisi gelişmekte olan bir ülke olarak her zaman bir dönüşüm sürecinde bulunmuş olsa da 2018 sonrası dönem programlı politika değişiklikleri ve stratejik önceliklerle şekillenen farklı bir aşamayı temsil etmektedir. Bu çerçevede, alınan ekonomik kararlar ve ulaştırma kararları yalnızca rasyonel büyüme hedefleriyle değil, aynı zamanda devletin kurumsal istikrarını, kimliğini ve sürekliliğini koruma yönündeki varoluşsal güvenlik kaygılarıyla da şekillendiği görülmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin 2018 sonrasında izlediği ekonomi ve ulaştırma politikalarını ontolojik güvenlik kuramı bağlamında incelemektir. Ontolojik güvenlik, devletin

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yalnızca fiziksel güvenliğini değil, tarihsel sürekliliğini, kimliğini ve kurumsal bütünlüğünü koruma ihtiyacını ifade etmektedir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, dış ticaret yönelimlerinde yaşanan değişimleri, yatırım stratejilerindeki öncelik dönüşümünü ve bu süreci destekleyen ulaştırma ve lojistik altyapı projelerini inceleyerek, söz konusu politikaların devletin uluslararası sistemdeki konumu ve kimliğini nasıl etkilediğini değerlendirmektedir. Elde edilen bulgular, Türkiye'nin ekonomi ve ulaştırma politikalarının teknik rasyonalite ile sınırlı olmayan, aynı zamanda jeopolitik ve kimliksel anlam taşıyan çok katmanlı bir güvenlik stratejisi çerçevesinde biçimlendiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Ekonomi Politikası, Ulaştırma Politikası, Ontolojik Güvenlik
Jel Sınıflandırılması: F50, H54, R42

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the globalization process has led to various structural transformations in Türkiye in economic, cultural, and social spheres. In this period, free market principles and limited state intervention became widespread under the influence of neoliberal economic policies. Increasing interaction with Europe since the early 2000s paved the way for raising different demands in the context of citizenship, identity, and governance; this process was supported by various legal and institutional arrangements (Kancı, 2009). At the same time, localization practices, which mean the reconstruction of foreign norms in the local context, have gained importance; norms have taken a unique form by reinterpreting them according to the cultural and institutional structures of local actors (Tabak et al., 2022). Thus, Türkiye's relationship with global norms has been shaped as a multi-layered interaction involving external influence, internal adaptation, selective adoption, and contextual reproduction.

The process of globalization has affected economic structures and the perceptions of security of individuals and communities. Global crises, uncertainties, and institutional instability have weakened individuals' sense of ontological security; this situation has increased the tendency toward collective identities that are believed to provide meaning and stability. In this framework, identity structures based on religious and cultural references can offer a firm ground of belonging, especially in times of rapid social change and uncertainty (Kinnvall, 2004). This tendency restructures individuals' search for belonging; the role of collective identities in constructing ontological security affects individual perceptions and the overall dynamics of the social structure. Therefore, ontological security also manifests itself in economic behavior patterns and consumption preferences. This situation can be regarded as playing an important role in supporting economic stability and fostering a safe environment for international trade, particularly during periods of crisis and uncertainty. The fact that individuals and institutions seek confidence in the face of uncertainty leads to a rise in protectionist tendencies in international trade policies and an increased interest in local production. It also paves the way for strengthening regional trade and logistics networks against the fragility of global supply chains.

In the pre-globalization period, security was mainly constructed through belonging to political communities defined by geographical borders, and the state was considered not only as a structure that provides physical security but also as an element that supports the ontological security of individuals (Shani, 2017). In this framework, while some theoretical approaches criticize that states do not have a "self" and therefore cannot act with an ontological security motive, these views also open the assumption that "the state is a unitary and rational actor," which is common in the IR literature, to a re-evaluation (Wendt, 1999; Zarakol, 2017, p. 49). Ontological security is ensured through the routinization of actors' relations with meaningful "others"; in this

respect, it is considered a continuous and fundamental need like physical security. States' adherence level to these routines may vary; in some cases, it may be rigid and stable, while in others, it may take a more flexible and reflexive form. Differences in this form of commitment directly shape the direction and content of security pursuits (Mitzen, 2006, p. 341). In cases where ontological security is not achieved, the self may have difficulty defining its boundaries and the basic foundations of its existence, leading to uncertainty.

The concept of ontological security has received increasing attention in the IR literature over the past two decades. This concept refers to the individual's need to experience themselves as a coherent and continuous being overtime; it is associated with a state of being that emphasizes stability rather than constant change and is essential for the realization of agency (Giddens, 1991). Ontological security is not limited to individuals; it also offers a valuable framework for explaining state behavior. In this context, ontological security provides a theoretical basis for studies that evaluate state behavior regarding physical security needs and the quest to preserve the continuity of identity. It is argued in the literature that when faced with situations that threaten biographical continuity, states tend to maintain a stable and distinctive sense of identity, sometimes putting their physical security on the back burner (Anderson & Roy, 2011; Gülseven, 2024; Riemer, 2024). Similarly, critical security studies and conflict analysis show that conflicts are increasingly defined by fear and anxiety-based discourses. Such existential frameworks increase uncertainties about processes and deepen the sense of ontological insecurity. In this context, conflict resolution initiatives may be perceived as affecting physical security and self-perception at the individual or collective level, which may lead to a more rigid reproduction of the boundaries between self and others (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2018). In this framework, it is seen that ontological security is not limited to conflict and security policies but can also be an effective guiding factor in areas such as economic policies, foreign trade strategies, and logistical investments. While the state's search for identity and stability shapes economic orientations, these preferences also play a decisive role in terms of continuity, predictability, and meaning production in relations with the outside world.

Various developments in Türkiye's recent history have evoked strong emotional reactions in individuals, revealing that economic policies are associated with technical choices and with identity and existential security needs. Focusing on such moments of rupture allows us to understand the relationship between economics and ontological security at the individual level. It provides theoretical depth in analyzing how economic decisions are reflected at the social level (Sofuoğlu et al., 2024). This study aims to explore Türkiye's economic policies, especially its foreign trade strategies and logistics infrastructure investments after 2018, from an ontological security perspective. It is assumed that economic decisions are shaped not only by growth and welfare goals but also by the search for identity continuity, institutional stability, and integrity in the face of uncertainty. Therefore, it can be argued that changes in foreign trade relations, diversity of economic partners, logistics investments, and economic policies are also related to identity-based security concerns. In this context, the study aims to analyze these relationships, demonstrate the applicability of ontological security theory in the political economy context, and make a theoretical contribution to the literature in this field. In this context, the second section of the study addresses the concept of ontological security and provides a summary of existing research on Türkiye's ontological security. The third section examines Türkiye's post-2018

economic and transportation policies from the perspective of ontological security, with a particular focus on the transformations realized through logistics investments and transportation corridors. In the final section, the findings are discussed, and Türkiye's economic and transportation policies are evaluated in terms of economic development and with regard to identity continuity and the construction of ontological security.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Giddens (1991) states that the concepts of trust and risk have different significance in situations of uncertainty and multiple options. In this context, ontological security shows the individual's need for continuity and stability in making sense of the world. Giddens (1991) emphasizes that trust is linked to an individual's feeling of ontological security early in life. Individuals lay the foundation for a sense of trust through the stable relationship they establish with their parents in childhood. This helps individuals recognize themselves and form a stable stance towards the outside world.

In the event of specific conditions that prevent or change the individual's ability to maintain routine behaviors, the individual may lose the sense of continuity regarding their existence and environment. This situation causes the individual to feel existential anxiety. Routine disruptions and anxiety in an individual's life are defined as ontological insecurity (Rumelili & Adısönmez, 2020). In cases where ontological insecurity occurs, individuals act with a sense of security and turn to routines that will provide stability and move away from uncertainties that they see as threats (Sarı Ertem & Düzgün, 2021). In this context, like individuals, countries can use various diplomatic tools and economic policies to ensure ontological security to survive and eliminate problems that may prevent their continuity (Taşçı, 2023). In situations of uncertainty or risk, states may shape their diplomatic relations and economic policies accordingly to preserve their continuity and stability. In this respect, the literature summary in Table 1 provides a different perspective on ontological security. It offers valuable contributions in analyzing the relationship between ontological security and economic and political practices.

A general review of the literature reveals that the ontological security theory is discussed chiefly within the framework of foreign policy, identity construction, and diplomatic strategies in the Turkish context (Bölükbaşi & Yücel, 2021; Gülbak, 2023; Kumek, 2022). These studies reveal that the state's efforts to preserve its identity and continuity are intertwined with economic policies. In particular, Gülbak (2023) and Bölükbaşı and Yücel (2021) focus on the importance of economic strategies implemented in the early Republican period in terms of identity security, while Taşçı (2023) makes an important contribution to the literature by emphasizing this function of foreign trade diplomacy in the contemporary period. Sofuoğlu et al. (2024) and Şahin (2022) address ontological security at the individual level through individuals' reactions to foreign policy and economy-based developments, while Barbak (2025) shows that Türkiye's public policies in combating the pandemic are also important in terms of ensuring both health security and economic and identity-based ontological security. In this context, the existing literature has focused chiefly on the early Republican period in Türkiye, the COVID-19 health crisis, and diplomatic relations. After 2018, the effects of the macroeconomic policies adopted by Türkiye in the context of ontological security have not been evaluated. In this context, Türkiye's national and international trade policies and transformations in production processes, as well as its investments in transportation infrastructure and projects, have not been subjected to an analysis

within the framework of ontological security. Therefore, this study aims to make a complementary contribution to this gap in the literature. It is believed that evaluating the relationship between economic and transportation policies and ontological security in Türkiye through the direction of trade, partner diversity, and logistics investments will offer a different perspective to the theoretical explanations in this field. Table 1 provides a summary of the related studies.

Table 1: Literature Summary Regarding the Ontological Security of Türkiye

No.	Author(s)	Name of the Study	Objective and Method	Key Findings
1	Barbak (2025)	An analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic response policy in Türkiye from an ontological security perspective	This study aims to evaluate Türkiye's public policies during the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2024 within the framework of ontological security theory. In this context, the qualitative content analysis method was used in the study.	The analyses conducted in the study show that the sense of trust between citizens and public administration has been damaged due to reasons such as anti-vaccination, information transparency, economic inequalities, and job anxiety. Economic decisions and policies during the pandemic played an important role in restoring ontological security. Accordingly, public-private partnerships were established to reduce external dependency in the supply of medicines and vaccines, and the TURKOVAC domestic vaccine project reinforced the power and competence of the state in the country. Investments and scientific studies related to the production of the local vaccine aim to strengthen the sense of security based on national identity as well as health security in the country.
2	Sofuoğlu et al. (2024)	The self and the other: Individual emotions and ontological security in Turkish foreign policy	This study aims to evaluate the impact of Turkish foreign policy since the 2000s on ontological security at the individual level. In this context, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted using the Critical Discourse Analysis method. It was analyzed how individuals' perceived foreign policy decisions affect their sense of security.	The analyses show that foreign policy decisions can create ontological security or insecurity in individuals. It has been determined that individuals expect a better economic future during the EU accession process. It was concluded that some participants viewed Türkiye's economic relations with Russia, China, and BRICS countries positively, while others interpreted these initiatives as Türkiye's loss of direction and identity crisis.
3	Gülseven (2024)	Ontological security-seeking in Turkish–Israeli relations: Prospects and challenges of normalisation	The study aims to examine tensions in Turkish–Israeli relations during the 2010s and to evaluate the prospects and challenges of normalization through the lens of ontological security. It employs a qualitative discourse analysis of political narratives, historical identity constructions, and policy routines.	The study finds that frictions with Israel and attachment to the Palestinian issue serve the ontological security needs of Türkiye's political elites by reinforcing identity and legitimacy. It shows that normalization efforts remain fragile and uncertain, as they may generate ontological insecurity for both Türkiye and Israel and trigger backlash toward hostile identities. The article concludes that while material interests push for normalization, entrenched identity narratives and ontological concerns make the process highly unstable.
4	Alp (2024)	An ontological security analysis of Americanism in Turkish foreign policy, 1945–1960	The study aims to analyze Turkish foreign policy in the early Cold War period through Ontological Security Theory. It uses a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach, relying on primary and secondary sources about policymakers and foreign policy orientations.	The study results show that Americanism in Turkish foreign policy was influenced by security and political interests, as well as ontological security concerns. Türkiye sought to secure its identity as part of Western civilization, often aligning with the U.S. even against its own national interests. The pursuit of ontological security was thus a key driver in foreign policy between 1945–1960.

No.	Author(s)	Name of the Study	Objective and Method	Key Findings
5	Tasçı (2023)	The impact of commercial relations in Turkish foreign policy, the role of commercial diplomacy in addressing domestic ontological security concerns: The case of Northern Iraq.	This study examines how Türkiye has positioned commercial diplomacy in its foreign policy. Accordingly, it evaluates how effective diplomacy can address ontological security concerns. Based on relations with the Regional Government of Northern Iraq, the study aims to determine how trade is integrated with security and identity-based concerns by conducting a literature review.	The study results show that trade is an effective tool in Northern Iraq, with high ontological security concerns. However, when factors that threaten physical security, such as the threat of terrorism, come into play, trade takes a back seat. It has been determined that commercial diplomacy is occasionally valuable for softening bilateral relations and alleviating identity-based concerns. However, this situation is not permanent, and realism comes to the fore again in military operations such as Operation Olive Branch. Türkiye's export-oriented growth strategy has influenced its foreign policy steps, and economic relations with Northern Iraq have continued despite political crises.
6	Gülbak (2023)	Searching for ontological security: Biographical narrative of "New Türkiye" in the early Turkish Republic period.	This study analyzes Türkiye in the early Republican period (1920s-1930s) within the framework of ontological security and biographical narrative. The study presents a conceptual framework and evaluates foreign policy behavior and internal organization processes.	According to this assessment, the newly established Republic of Türkiye has endeavored to ensure its physical and ontological security. The state's foreign policy and internal structural arrangements were organized to construct a stable identity. The "New Türkiye" discourse of Atatürk and İnönü revealed the state's desire to create a coherent identity narrative for the past, present, and future. Economic independence was one of the most important issues in Türkiye's internal organization and the quest for ontological security. The realization of nationalization policies in areas such as railway transportation, mines, sugar, and textile industries, as well as the avoidance of borrowing, stood out as strategies to ensure Türkiye's self-sufficiency and economic ontological security.
7	Şahin (2022)	COVID-19 pandemic in the context of ontological security	This study examines how COVID-19 affects the ontological security structure of modern society through conceptual research on individuals' identities and social and psychological vulnerabilities.	The study determined that the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 process harm individuals' routines and social role continuity, thus creating an environment of ontological insecurity. It has been determined that financial globalization has made countries vulnerable to economic crises, thus creating a sense of ontological insecurity in individuals.
8	Kumek (2022)	Seeking status in Turkish foreign policy: Temporary membership in the United Nations Security Council (1951-52, 1954-55, 1961, 2009-2010).	This study evaluates Türkiye's temporary membership in the UN Security Council in 1951-52, 1954-55, 1961, and 2009-2010 as a quest for status. Using a conceptual framework, the study aims to evaluate the reasons for these attempts within the framework of ontological security and recognition practices.	The study results show that Türkiye's attempts to secure status through these memberships reflect the country's ontological security needs. During the 2009-2010 membership period, Türkiye was a visible actor in multilateral issues. Türkiye has effectively used instruments such as humanitarian aid, development aid, and economic support to legitimize its status, identity, and demand for recognition. During this period, trade diplomacy and development aid were prominent among the foreign policy instruments. This shows that Türkiye pursued a foreign policy line that combines diplomatic and economic capacity. It was concluded that Türkiye's abstention from sanctions against Iran was due to Türkiye's policy of protecting its energy and trade relations with Iran.
9	Kayhan Pusane and Ilgıt (2022)	Ontological insecurity, anxiety, and hubris: an affective account of Türkiye–KRG relations	The study aims to analyze Türkiye–KRG relations through the lens of ontological security, focusing on how emotions such as anxiety and hubris shape foreign policy change. It employs a discourse analysis of political speeches and statements between 2008 and 2017, highlighting	The study demonstrates that Türkiye's relations with the KRG have been highly affectively charged, shaped not only by strategic and economic concerns but also by ontological insecurity. Deep-rooted anxiety about Kurdish independence and a sense of hubris (big brother discourse) prevented the formation of a trust-based partnership. Instead, the relationship was confined to a fragile rapprochement, which broke down after the 2017 independence referendum.

No.	Author(s)	Name of the Study	Objective and Method	Key Findings
			the emotional content of Türkiye's policy narratives.	
10	Küçük (2021)	Turkish-Greek conflict in the context of ontological security	The study aims to examine the recurring conflict in Turkish–Greek relations from an ontological security perspective. It adopts a conceptual and literature-based analysis, drawing particularly on Rumelili's framework of ontological security and conflict resolution.	The study shows that Turkish–Greek relations treat conflict as a routine condition. Issues such as minorities, Cyprus, and the Aegean disputes are tied to identity and the construction of the "Other." Ontological security explains why both sides prioritize identity preservation over compromise, leading peace initiatives to fail and preventing conflict resolution from becoming institutionalized.
11	Bölükbaşı and Yücel (2021)	Turkish ontological security in the early Republic era: Identity, regime, and state	This study evaluates the factors within the framework of ontological security in Türkiye during the period 1923-1940 through historical analysis. In this context, historical events, documents, political texts, and the discourses of the actors of the period were analyzed and interpreted.	The results of the study show that the statist policy in the early Republican period was implemented to ensure both social stability and economic development. The closed, autonomous economic system implemented in this period reflected Türkiye's modern nation-state identity and the principle of complete independence.
12	Tutan (2020)	Political psychology and ontological security approach: Appearances of images in Turkish foreign policy.	This study aims to evaluate the impact of the images developed in Türkiye's relations with Azerbaijan, Greece, and Syria on foreign policy behaviors by taking ontological security theory and political psychology together. In this context, the discourse analysis method was used in this study.	The analyses have shown that states, like individuals, follow foreign policy strategies and behavior patterns that do not threaten their identities. Türkiye's "friend and brother" image towards Azerbaijan and "enemy" image towards Greece result from past experiences with these countries and the effort to create a national identity and have a decisive role in the country's foreign policy. After 2008, due to the rapprochement between Türkiye and Armenia, Azerbaijan tripled the prices of its natural gas exports to Türkiye, and Türkiye maintained friendly relations despite the increase.
13	Bilgin and Ince (2014)	Ontological (in)security of 'included' citizens: The case of early Republican Türkiye (1923-1946)	This study evaluates the ontological insecurity experienced by individuals formally naturalized between 1923 and 1946 in the Republic of Türkiye through historical analysis and critical security theory.	The study results show that the economic policies carried out in 1923-1946 were used as part of ontological security strategies. With the 1926 Civil Servant Law, non-Muslims were dismissed from the civil service, and the Wealth Tax enacted in 1942 imposed a significant tax burden on non-Muslim citizens, which were also part of the state's efforts to protect its identity and existential security.
14	Özdemir (2006)	Identity fragmentation and identity governance in the triangle of globalization, the European Union, and Türkiye	This study evaluates the transformations caused by globalization in states' identity and sovereignty structures. In this direction, it is explained through a conceptual evaluation of how Türkiye's EU accession process provides a framework for identity fragmentation and ontological security concerns.	In the evaluation made in the study, it was determined that Türkiye's EU membership process was seen as a solution to the identity fragmentation and ontological insecurity brought about by globalization. It was explained that Türkiye's EU accession process was also important in coping with global economic competition, and the EU process was seen as a means of attracting foreign capital.

3. ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC AND TRANSPORTATION POLICIES IN TÜRKİYE FROM AN ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

The methodology followed in this study is based on a qualitative and descriptive framework. Ontological security approaches found in the literature have been linked to Türkiye's

post-2018 economic and transportation policies; relevant policy documents, official reports, and secondary academic sources have been examined through content analysis. The analysis is exploratory in nature and aims to reveal how the ontological security perspective is reflected in the shaping of economic and transportation policies. In this context, the study provides an assessment based on discourse, policy orientation, and implementation examples rather than statistical measurement.

In this section, Türkiye's economic policies, especially in the post-2018 period, are analyzed not only in terms of growth and development goals but also within the framework of security-based approaches to protect the state's identity, strengthen its position in the international system, and ensure its institutional continuity. Türkiye's new economic orientation considers economic decision-making processes as an extension of ontological security and associates these policies with strategic asset sustainability and economic independence. In this process, the transportation sector and infrastructure investments have become technical modernization tools and critical elements for producing economic subjectivity, restructuring foreign trade, and repositioning the state in the global system.

3.1. Türkiye's Economic and Transportation Policy Transformation from an Ontological Security Perspective

Since its foundation, Türkiye has shaped its foreign policy in relation to strategic communication and interaction elements as a public diplomacy tool. The understanding of domestic and foreign policy based on national unity and national economy practiced during Atatürk's era forms the basis of public diplomacy today. Public diplomacy encompasses the promotion of national achievements and the investments, policies, and steps behind these achievements (Karakoç Dora, 2021). This approach is considered as an important tool in strengthening the international perception of the state.

Countries aim to provide their societies with a higher quality of life through sustainable economic growth and development (Kartal & Depren, 2023). This goal is not only limited to economic indicators but is also strategically important in increasing social welfare and stability. Türkiye's New Economic Program, announced in 2018, presented a framework to reduce import dependency and promote exports (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Treasury and Finance, 2018). Türkiye's post-2018 economic transformation is a model based on industrialization and production, and a vision to ensure economic independence. In this process, the understanding of domestic and national economy was combined with the goals of reducing foreign dependency and strengthening national security (Akan, 2019; Kutlay & Öniş, 2021).

In order to become an economically self-sufficient country, it is important to ensure independence in the energy sector. Ensuring energy supply security is closely related to increasing industrial competitiveness and ensuring economic independence. In this context, Türkiye's recent natural gas discoveries in the Black Sea, investments such as the Sakarya Gas Field Development Project and Filyos Coastal Logistics Center stand out (Turan & Çelikoğlu, 2023). In addition, Türkiye is also increasing its investments in alternative energy sources. In this framework, incentives such as the renewable energy resources support mechanism (YEKDEM) and domestic component support are implemented to increase the share and diversity of renewable energy resources in total energy resources. As of 2023, 55.53% of Türkiye's total installed electricity capacity will be supplied by renewable energy sources, and their share in generation will exceed

42% (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, 2024). This transformation process is supported by mechanisms such as YEKDEM and Domestic Component Support. Thus, domestic production and technology transfer are encouraged in the energy sector. In this respect, it can be stated that Türkiye pursues its energy policies in line with both environmental sustainability and economic independence goals. In addition, Türkiye has made significant breakthroughs by focusing on technology and innovation-oriented investments that align with its goals of becoming an economically self-sufficient country. The number of technoparks reached 101 as of 2024, and more than 10 thousand R&D companies are important indicators of this transformation (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Industry and Technology, 2024). These developments also support domestic production in high-tech sectors such as defense. These studies are expected to contribute to Türkiye becoming a country that can produce and develop new technologies and attract foreign investments.

The shaping of energy, industrial, and economic policies in Türkiye in this way reflects the state's effort to preserve its identity and continuity within the framework of ontological security. Economic choices ensure not only growth but also social and institutional security.

Transportation has been a fundamental element in shaping economic, political, military, and cultural structures throughout history. With the function of transporting goods, news, and energy, transportation systems transcend national borders and pave the way for global cooperation (Çelikok & Talih, 2023). The transportation sector has a multi-stakeholder structure shaped by environmental, historical, technological, and economic factors. While infrastructure investments contribute directly to economic growth, the efficiency of transportation services creates indirect macroeconomic effects (Çelikok & Talih, 2023). While inefficient transportation and trade infrastructure systems can weaken a country's international competitiveness, strong performance in these areas offers significant advantages, such as opening up to new markets, increasing foreign trade, and encouraging businesses (Göçer et al., 2022). Transportation policies offer important economic development and regional integration opportunities in this framework. From this perspective, it can be said that transportation infrastructure is both a physical and a strategic development tool.

In conclusion, Türkiye's economic and foreign trade policies reflect financial development and an effort to preserve the state's identity, independence, and international influence. From an ontological security perspective, these policies ensure social security and state continuity.

3.2. Strategic Role of Transportation and Infrastructure in Türkiye's Development Strategies

Türkiye has displayed a remarkable economic performance by achieving above-average growth rates for approximately five years each. However, regarding sustainable development, this growth has remained at the level of middle-income countries and has been insufficient to reach a meaningful convergence with developed countries. When the increase in per capita income is considered together with population growth, it is seen that Türkiye's growth quality has not reached the desired level. Compared to "newly industrializing countries" in East Asia, such as South Korea and Taiwan, Türkiye has struggled to build a stable, high-income success story (Öniş, 2003, p. 2). This comparison reveals Türkiye's need for structural transformation more clearly.

Transportation policies and logistics infrastructure investments are part of economic independence goals. Large-scale investments such as the New Airport and High-Speed Rail projects have reinforced Türkiye's strategic position in the global trade system (Gabrielyan, 2022; Şahan & Tuna, 2021). While these projects directly contribute to economic growth, they also aim to increase economic and logistical independence in a way that serves to reinforce national security. In this respect, development projects are considered as infrastructure and strategic defense mechanisms (Mevlutoglu, 2021). In this framework, transportation investments increase physical accessibility and strengthen Türkiye's functional role in global supply chains, enabling it to build an integrated strategy between economic autonomy and geopolitical efficiency.

New economic programs aim to restructure foreign trade with more diverse partners and strengthen Türkiye's logistics networks. Foreign trade strategies and digital transformation initiatives, focusing on Asian and African markets, stand out as steps toward achieving economic independence (Eldem, 2025; Enwere & Yılmaz, 2014). This strategic orientation aims to redefine Türkiye's place in the global value chain while ensuring long-term economic sustainability. From an ontological security perspective, these policies are not limited to producing economic independence; they also reinforce Türkiye's institutional security and aim to preserve its identity in the international system. The state's economic decisions are shaped by growth and stability, identity continuity, and existential security. This repositions the economy within the existential framework of the state.

3.3. Türkiye's Emerging Role in the Context of Transportation Corridors

With the globalization process, the world has entered a period in which supply chains are reshaped, and geopolitical balances are rapidly changing. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic, which spread worldwide in 2020, rapidly transformed from a health crisis into an economic and logistics crisis, revealing the importance of transportation networks in ensuring the continuity of production, consumption, and international trade. Türkiye is assuming an increasingly strategic role in terms of transportation corridors. In addition to its strategically important position as a bridge between Asia, Europe, and Africa, Türkiye's transportation infrastructure and logistics investments in recent years have also attracted attention. China's "Belt and Road Initiative," the European Union's Global Gateway Project (EU Global Gateway) (UTIKAD, 2022), and the policies of Central Asian countries to diversify the east-west connection are developments that directly affect Türkiye both geographically and in terms of economic and logistics activities. In this framework, Türkiye, which is located at the center of the Central Corridor, is going beyond being only a transit country with large-scale investments such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, Marmaray, Istanbul Airport, and port integration projects, reinforcing its goal of becoming a logistics hub on a regional and global scale. Türkiye's growing role in global transportation corridors positions the country as a global intermediate power in trade and logistics activities. This positioning can also be expressed as a means of ensuring the ontological continuity of Türkiye's national identity.

China's "One Belt One Road" initiative, launched in 2013, has emerged as a global infrastructure and transportation initiative that aims to strengthen commercial and strategic ties between Asia and Europe (Johnston, 2019, p. 41). The Central Corridor (Figure 1), one of the three main routes of this project, has made Türkiye a key country in establishing a direct land connection between China and Europe (Günay et al., 2019, p. 165).

Figure 1: Routes of the Belt and Road Initiative



Source: 21st Century Türkiye Institute (2021).

Türkiye has also supported its geographical advantage with strategic transportation projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway, Marmaray, Istanbul Airport, and Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge (Kopuk & Bayraç, 2021; Özkan & Ay, 2020; Yılmaz, 2020). With the Europe - Caucasus - Asia Transport Corridor (TRACECA) project planned to connect Europe and China, transporting goods and people from China to Europe will be reduced to 15 days by rail (Uslu, 2021). In this respect, Türkiye stands out as a transit center for east-west trade, a logistics bridge, and geostrategic power between Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe. In this context, Table 2 provides information on the Central Corridor railway and logistics projects planned to be realized in Türkiye.

Table 2: Middle Corridor Railway and Logistics Projects in Türkiye

Project Name	Length/Capacity	Completion Status
Dogancay Ripage 1	14 km	Completed (2022)
Ankara-Sivas High-Speed Railway Project	405 km	Completed
Marmaray (Pipe Transition-Gebeze-Halkalı)	76 km	Completed
Ankara-İstanbul High-Speed Railway Project	534 km	Completed
Bakü-Tbilisi-Kars	76 km	Completed
Erzincan-Erzurum Railway Project	173 km	Under Construction
Erzurum-Kars Railway Project	206 km	Under Construction
Sivas-Zara Railway Project	19 km	Under Construction
Zara-Erzincan Railway Project	228 km	Under Construction
T26 Tunnel (Ankara-Istanbul Line)	8 km	Under Construction
Dogancay Ripage 2 (Ankara-Istanbul Line)	12 km	Under Construction
Gebze-Sabiha Gökçen-YSS Bridge-Istanbul Airport-Halkalı	120 km	In Planning Phase
Halkalı-Çerkezköy Railway Project	76 km	Under Construction
Cerkezkoy-Kapikule Railway Project	153 km	Under Construction
Yerköy-Kayseri High-Speed Railway Project	142 km	Under Construction
Sivas-Çetinkaya-Malatya High-Speed Railway Project	224 km	In Planning Phase
Kars Logistics Center	412 thousand tons / 400 thousand m²	Completed
Kars-Aralık-Iğdır-Dilucu Railway Project	224 km	In Planning Phase

Source: TCDD General Directorate (2022, p. 17; 2024, p. 20).

The transportation infrastructure projects in Table 2 demonstrate Türkiye's importance in the Central Corridor. At a time when global supply chains are being reshaped, Türkiye is trying to gain a competitive advantage through its investments. These projects, which are under construction, completed, or planned, serve to build Türkiye's identity continuity within the framework of consolidating its transportation infrastructure. Due to the increasing freight capacity in the world, these investments in transportation infrastructure reinforce Türkiye's role as the backbone of the Central Corridor.

Türkiye is also a prominent Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) country. Due to its geographical location, access from the EU to the Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia, and China is realized through Türkiye, increasing the country's importance in EU logistics chains. Türkiye cooperates with EU countries with intensive social, political, and trade relations to ensure more effortless movement of passengers, goods, and services (Ayhan, 2024). The updates and negotiations on extending the TEN-T Comprehensive and Core Networks to Türkiye enable Türkiye to coordinate with EU transport policies. The implementation of TEN-T core network standards (e.g., 1435 mm track gauge, 740 m train length, electrification, and digital systems such as ERTMS) in Türkiye contributes to a high-speed, efficient, and environmentally friendly transport system in the country (TCDD General Directorate, 2022). In this context, Türkiye is seen as a transportation partner that connects global logistics networks and supports the EU's regional integration.

The Filyos Valley Project is another comprehensive transportation investment in Türkiye. This project is defined as a geostrategic and geo-economically critical initiative that includes various transportation infrastructures such as ports, railways, airports, and an important industrial zone (General Directorate of Infrastructure Investments, 2020). With the project's completion, it is aimed to strengthen trade relations with the countries bordering the Black Sea. Türkiye is expected to be a strategic trade bridge between Central Asia and Europe.

Three priority routes identified under the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Railway Network Development Plan pass through Turkish territory, making Türkiye a hub of transport and logistics integration in the ECO region. Providing direct access to Iran and Pakistan via Route 1, Central Asia and China via Route 2A, and Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan via Route 2B, Türkiye connects the logistics networks within the ECO, thus leading the way in ensuring commercial cooperation in the region (TCDD General Directorate, 2022). This project also makes Türkiye an important factor in ensuring logistics activities and regional development.

The Zangezur Corridor, which has an important place for Türkiye, is a transportation project that came to the agenda in 2020 and aims to establish a direct road and rail connection between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (Gasimova & Erçin Yurcu, 2023, p. 13). This corridor is complementary to the Central Corridor, which also includes Türkiye. It stands out as an alternative route bypassing Iran in the trade route from China to Europe (Alkış & Aslan, 2022). Thanks to this corridor, Türkiye will expand its geopolitical sphere of influence with Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus. Therefore, the completion of the corridor makes Türkiye an important country in the conduct of economic and logistical activities in Eurasia's east-west and north-south axes.

Another project that supports Türkiye's critical role in global transportation networks is the Development Road Project. This project was signed on April 22, 2024, between Iraq, Türkiye, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates to revitalize the countries' trade (Akgüngör et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the project undertakes the task of creating a new international trade and logistics corridor starting from Basra Port in the south of Iraq and extending to Europe through Türkiye. Al Faw Port, the project's starting point, is planned to be the largest and most functional container port in the Middle East when completed (Baz, 2024). In this context, Türkiye is expected to increase the level of road, rail, air, and maritime integration to become a key country in the transportation of cargo from Al Faw Port to Europe and have a stronger position in global supply chains (Çamaş, 2024). Increasing infrastructure investments for this purpose is thought to contribute to Türkiye's economic development goals.

Within the scope of the projects in which Türkiye is involved, it becomes evident that the country's role in global transportation networks is not limited to the efficient management of international trade and logistics activities. As highlighted in the study by Dihlmann and Helbrecht (2025), which points to the connection between transportation infrastructure and a collective sense of security, transportation and infrastructure projects can be regarded as instruments that reinforce the sustainability of national identity and enhance international visibility. These projects reflect the acquisition of ontological security by individuals through infrastructural autonomy and the state's effort to ensure institutional stability and identity continuity on a global scale. In the context of ontological security theory, Türkiye's role in global transportation networks is linked to its strategy of strengthening existential integrity, geopolitical positioning, and international identity. Therefore, through its active role in transportation corridors and its investments in infrastructure, Türkiye is progressing toward becoming a country that shapes global logistics networks.

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Logistics infrastructure investments and transportation policies directly relate to Türkiye's goals of increasing its foreign trade capacity, deepening regional integration, and achieving a strategic position in global supply chains. When evaluated within the framework of ontological security theory, Türkiye's transportation policies and trade integration strategies reflect an orientation towards protecting national existence and building a coherent identity in the international system. The primary purpose of this study is to evaluate Türkiye's economic and transportation policies, especially after 2018, within the framework of ontological security theory. The study's focus on the period after 2018 stems not only from the continuity of existing transportation and infrastructure projects, but also from the fact that, starting from this date, economic and transportation policies have taken on a different institutional and discursive dimension within the framework of the New Economic Programs. Therefore, the analysis conducted from an ontological security perspective reveals that this period presents a unique area of study. The evaluations show that development strategies serve economic growth and the state's effort to preserve its identity, secure its institutional continuity, and redefine its position in the international system. Large-scale projects such as Marmaray, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway, Istanbul Airport, and Filyos Valley Project have modernized infrastructure, expanded Türkiye's economic reach, and strengthened its role as a connector in global logistics systems. Accordingly, beyond their technical functions, transportation investments contribute to producing economic subjectivity and reconstructing international identity.

On the other hand, Türkiye's energy policies, technology investments, and steps to strengthen its production infrastructure contribute to economic independence, strategic resilience,

and economic development goals. In this framework, practices such as Black Sea natural gas discoveries, renewable energy-based transformation, and incentive mechanisms have increased resource diversity and made Türkiye an actor that reduces external dependence, develops its own technology, and attracts investment. The study by Bölükbaşı ve Yücel (2021) also shows that the understanding of an autonomous economic system and the principle of complete independence, which were emphasized in the early Republican period, were reflected in the economic policies of the country. The studies by Şahin (2022) and Barbak (2025) evaluating the effects of COVID-19 in the context of ontological security also show that the economic decisions taken during the pandemic, the practices related to the production of the domestic vaccine, and the policies implemented have critical importance in restoring ontological security. In this context, Türkiye's policies towards domestic production, the development of advanced technologies, and attracting foreign capital can be considered important to ensure the country's ontological security.

In terms of transportation strategies, through the Central Corridor, Zengezur Corridor, Development Road Project, and TEN-T extensions, Türkiye is reinforcing its goal of becoming a transit country and a regional connector, commercial actor, and geostrategic hub. Taşçı (2023) argues in his study that Türkiye's export-oriented growth strategy has been decisive in its foreign policy practices. In this context, these projects can be considered as elements of a hybrid strategy that combines Türkiye's goal of strengthening its position as an economic actor in the fields of transportation and foreign trade with security-based foreign policy approaches.

In conclusion, Türkiye's economic and transportation policies in the post-2018 period are elements of a multidimensional strategy that serves sustainable development goals and the state's quest to strengthen its position in the international system, ensure institutional continuity, and stand out as a unique actor in geopolitical competition. This shows that development policies are an economic, existential, and identity issue. Thus, transportation and trade policies become strategic instruments that secure the economic interests of the state and its ontological existence and international visibility. In this context, the theoretical contribution of the study is to link ontological security theory with economic and transportation policies to show how the state's quest for existential security is reflected in economic and logistical fields. On a practical level, the study reveals that transportation infrastructures should be considered as technical, identity, and strategic elements for policymakers.

On the other hand, the study has certain limitations. First, the analysis was conducted within a qualitative and descriptive framework, relying primarily on official policy documents and secondary sources. Therefore, the effects of transportation and economic policies on ontological security have not been tested through empirical measurement or quantitative data analysis. Future studies would benefit from conducting comparative analyses of different periods, interviewing policy actors, and examining the ontological security dimension more systematically through quantitative indicators. Furthermore, comparative studies with other countries that implement similar economic and transportation policies, in addition to the Turkish example, would increase the generalizability of the findings.

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