

Turkiye emerges as key link in Eurasian trade

Strategic rail corridors, growing tourism and strengthening partnerships reshaping regional connectivity and cooperation

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The synergy between the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and the Turkish Middle Corridor plan is making significant progress, with China-Europe freight trains through Türkiye now operating regularly.

In early August, two trains that departed from Chongqing and Chengdu, respectively, transited through Istanbul and headed toward Lodz, Poland, and Budapest, Hungary.

Due to factors such as customs clearance efficiency and Caspian Sea weather, the journey of China-Europe freight trains from China to Türkiye via the Middle Corridor would often take more than 20 days. Thanks to concerted efforts, freight efficiency along the Middle Corridor has steadily improved in recent years.

Enver Iskurt, Türkiye's deputy minister of transport and infrastructure, said at a departure ceremony held on Aug 4 in Istanbul that the travel time for China-Europe freight trains via the Middle Corridor from China to Türkiye has been reduced to 15 days.

This not only strengthens Türkiye's role as a hub in the international railway transport network but highlights the strategic advantages brought to his country by the BRI, Iskurt said.

The Middle Corridor, also known as the Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative, starts from China and passes through Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan and Georgia, with extensions to Türkiye and European countries. This corridor significantly reduces the land and sea transportation time between China and Europe.

Deepening connectivity

Since the signing of a connectivity memorandum of understanding between China and Türkiye in 2015, trade, transportation infrastructure and connectivity between the two



Hot-air balloons glide over the town of Goreme, which is home to Goreme National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Türkiye.

BEHCET ALKAN/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

countries have rapidly deepened.

Data from the Chinese customs show that the bilateral trade volume reached approximately \$42.89 billion in 2024, enabling China to become a major trading partner of Türkiye.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently said at the Global Transport Connectivity Forum that the synergy between Türkiye's Middle Corridor plan and the high-quality development of the BRI are key to safer and more efficient connection between Asia and Europe.

The forum was held in Istanbul in late June, where participants discussed topics such as more efficient integration of global transport networks, infrastructure investment, and strengthening multilateral cooperation.

To promote the alignment of the BRI with the Middle Corridor initiative, China State Railway Group and

Turkish logistics company Pasifik Eurasia signed an agreement earlier this year for joint operation of scheduled trains. In the first phase, they plan to operate 10 pilot trains, with the goal of gradually expanding to 1,000 trains per year.

China-proposed measures, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, have been helping the world break down barriers that have historically led to misunderstandings and conflicts, Akkan Suver, head of the Istanbul-based Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation, told Xinhua News Agency recently.

By promoting people-to-people ties, these initiatives encourage dialogue across languages, religions, and cultures, helping societies “get to know each other”, which “matters the most”, Suver said.

Noting the importance of this kind of mutual understanding in resolving conflicts and building lasting peace,

he said open dialogue and cultural diversity are paving the way for cooperation that transcends politics and economics.

Chinese Ambassador to Türkiye Jiang Xuebin told Anadolu Agency, Türkiye's official news agency, that the two countries are maintaining positive momentum in their relationship, with a continuous expansion in exchanges and significant progress in practical cooperation across various fields. China will continue to encourage and support Chinese companies to boost investments in Türkiye, promote high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, and assist Türkiye in achieving green development and climb up the global value chain.

Flourishing tourism

Jiang also emphasized that tourism cooperation is becoming a highlight of China-Türkiye relations. The two countries have signed a memo-

randum of understanding on tourism cooperation and have made significant progress in areas such as tourism facilitation, increases in flight routes, online promotional platforms and cultural performances.

In May 2025, China and Türkiye signed a new memorandum of understanding on air services, increasing the bilateral passenger flight capacity from 21 to 49 flights per week, marking the first significant expansion in 15 years.

Data from Türkiye's Ministry of Culture and Tourism show that the country received some 409,000 tourist visits from China in 2024 — an increase of 65.1 percent year-on-year, making China the fastest-growing source of international tourists.

Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, Turkish minister of culture and tourism, told Xinhua that China is a highly valued and strategically cultivated market

for Türkiye, which has been making continuous efforts to attract more Chinese tourists.

Türkiye aims to enhance services for Chinese visitors, with the goal of attracting 1 million tourists from China by 2025, according to the minister.

Turkish cultural and tourism authorities, considering Chinese tourists' preference for planning trips through online platforms, are placing importance on localized promotional activities and maintain accounts on Chinese social media platforms such as Douyin, Weibo and Xiaohongshu, Ersoy said.

He said that Türkiye is dedicated to integrating its cultural and tourism resources, focusing on promoting Turkish cuisine, beach holidays, and health and wellness tourism products to Chinese tourists.

The Turkish tourism authorities announced plans to launch Silk Road-themed travel routes, covering classic destinations such as Cappadocia, Istanbul and Pamukkale. Nighttime museum visits and authentic culinary routes are becoming new attractions for Chinese tourists.

With its diverse and rich tourism products, Türkiye's appeal is steadily growing in the Chinese market, he said.

Tourism is an important link connecting the peoples of both countries. In recent years, Türkiye has conducted various cultural exchange activities with institutions like Confucius Institutes in Türkiye, fostering cultural exchanges and facilitating practical cooperation in other fields between the two countries.

Currently, Türkiye has more than 20 sites on the World Heritage List. Ersoy noted that these historical sites, reflecting their rich historical heritage, will offer Chinese tourists a unique and unforgettable cultural experience.

He said his team looks forward to welcoming more Chinese friends to Türkiye to personally experience its rich culture and hospitality.

By YUAN SHENGGAO

EMBA Electricity Production, a Turkish subsidiary company of State Power Investment Corporation's Shanghai Electric Power, also known as SEP, initiated the Hunutlu Power Plant Project in Türkiye in 2013. Site preparation began in July 2018, and the first batch of concrete was poured for the main factory building in September 2019.

Throughout the project, SEP consistently integrated environmental, safety and corporate governance concepts into every stage, from preliminary design to construction and then to commercial operation. Despite challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and international geopolitical problems, EMBA promoted the project to high standards and quality.

The two ultrasupercritical coal-fired units, each with a capacity of 660 megawatts, went into operation in June and October 2022, respectively. More than 90 percent of the equipment was supplied by Chinese manufacturers. The power plant generates more than 10 billion kilowatt-hours per year, accounting for approximately 3 percent of Türkiye's annual power generation. In addition, the project incorporates solar utility by making use of rooftops, slopes and empty lands to create a hybrid power station, combining thermal power and renewable energy.

The project's total investment is about \$1.6 billion, making it not only the largest direct investment by Chinese companies in Türkiye since the establishment of diplomatic relations, but a flagship project for the connection between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Middle Corridor Initiative. Since its commercial operation, Hunutlu Power Plant has achieved good production performance and has contributed to energy security, earthquake relief, and social responsibility, receiving high praise from the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources and the local community.

Environment first

To protect marine animal habitats and the marine ecological environment from the beginning, Hunutlu Power Plant optimized its construction plan and took a series of protective measures.

SEP extensively applied the most advanced environmental protection

SEP EMBA Electricity Production: driving BRI-related high-quality energy development



The Hunutlu Power Plant Project in Türkiye is initiated by EMBA Electricity Production, a Turkish subsidiary company of State Power Investment Corporation's Shanghai Electric Power. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



technologies, investing more than \$100 million in ecological conservation. Considering the local summer conditions — average relative humidity below 80 percent and average temperatures under 32 C — SEP, after multiple design optimizations with the institute, upgraded the original once-through cooling water system to a “combined flue gas and cooling tower” circulating cooling water system.

Through the innovative application of “combined flue gas and cooling tower” technology, Hunutlu Power Plant became the first overseas power plant of State Power Investment Corporation without a traditional chimney, receiving praise from the Turkish Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, local environmental organizations and the public.

Hunutlu Power Plant innovatively designed the coal conveyor bridge and access road as a large-span truss bridge, directly crossing the beach areas classified as first- and second-category sea turtle protection zones,



Hunutlu Power Plant organized an open day to introduce endangered green turtles' living habits and environmental protection measures to children from nearby villages.

ensuring the nest areas of turtles were protected. During the sea turtle nesting season, the power plant used long-wavelength light sources, controlled brightness and scattering, halted on-site construction, and mobilized volunteers to clean up debris on the beach, which helps hatchlings return to the sea.

During the nesting season of 2021, local experts checked the site and discovered a total of 61 sea turtle nests on the beach, which could potentially produce around 3,500 hatchlings, showing that the environment at the project site was well protected. The measures taken by

the power plant received praise from experts and were widely reported by mainstream media outlets such as the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation, shaping a responsible brand for SEP and EMBA.

Hybrid power expansion

During the construction of Hunutlu Power Plant, SEP adhered to the strategic vision of SPIC to build a world-class clean energy enterprise. Considering the local conditions and solar resources, SEP advanced the thermal power project to include solar generation utilities.

This led to the successful creation of a large-scale integrated energy base combining thermal power with renewable energy, making it the country's largest hybrid power station project in terms of installed capacity.

The first phase of the 21 MW photovoltaic project was connected to the grid for commercial operation in May 2023, and the second phase of the 25 MW photovoltaic project started commercial operation in November 2023. This demonstrates the successful implementation of Chinese technology, solutions and equipment in Türkiye, enhancing local energy supply security while driving the transformation of the local energy structure.

Since the start of construction, Hunutlu Power Plant has fulfilled its social responsibilities, such as improving the employment rate and serving the community. The power plant maintained a workforce of between 600 and 850 Turkish employees during the construction period. Furthermore, through mentorship and training programs, the power plant has continuously developed local talent and specialists, promoting the “export” of Chinese energy and power standards, technologies and experiences. To date, more than 350 local power industry

professionals are working in important technical and management positions, which may significantly contribute to the future development of the local power industry.

Undertaking responsibility

On Feb 6, 2023, two major earthquakes of magnitude 7.8 and 7.6 struck Kahramanmaraş Province in southeastern Türkiye, causing significant loss of life and property. Hunutlu Power Plant was located only 110 kilometers from the epicenter. After the earthquakes, SEP assigned technical experts from China to provide support. At the same time, the power plant promptly conducted safety inspections and emergency repairs, quickly addressing issues with the hydrogen system, unloading machinery, and other systems, ensuring the continuous safe operation of the facilities. It became the only power plant in the Adana region to maintain uninterrupted operation, meeting the energy needs of the affected areas after the earthquakes.

While ensuring stable power supply, Hunutlu Power Plant also provided earthquake relief efforts. When the Chinese national rescue team arrived at Adana Airport but could not bring a large quantity of rescue supplies due to logistical constraints, the power plant organized employees to contact local timber merchants and processing workshops to prepare rescue logs and medical splints, later completing the cutting and loading of all the rescue logs and delivering the supplies to the front lines alongside the rescue team.

Hunutlu Power Plant also assisted its employees whose families were affected by the earthquake. For instance, when some employees' homes were rendered uninhabitable, the power plant transformed existing employee dormitories and staff sports rooms into temporary accommodation. The power plant provided meals, medical supplies and basic necessities, helping them through the difficult times.

Looking to the future, SEP and EMBA will focus on the Belt and Road Initiative, implement ESG actions, and vigorously develop clean energy projects. The company is committed to global climate change mitigation, promoting clean energy transitions, and driving the development of the energy industry.