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Nowadays, the rivalry between great powers has become intense. The chip wars, the tension in the Southern China Sea and rivalling connectivity and development projects prove the power rivalry between the US and China. After the war in Ukraine, it was understood that connectivity is a key to political power. For this reason, economic corridors that provide connectivity and sub-regional economic integration have become another battle arena for great powers.

In this atmosphere, the US has proposed to build a new corridor called the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) in the previous G-20 Summit. The leaders of the United States (US), India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), France, Germany, Italy and the EU signed a Memorandum of Understanding in order to realize this economic corridor**[1]**. Also, Israel and Jordan are among the countries that the IMEC passes through. It is known that the IMEC will build and develop rail connectivity, shipping lines, high speed data cables and energy pipelines**[2]**. The main motive of this project is to improve the movement of trade and services between the signatory countries of the IMEC**[3]**. In fact, the signatory countries of the IMEC expect to improve efficiencies, reduce costs, provide economic unity, create employment and decrease greenhouse gas emissions in Asia, Europe and the Middle East**[4]**. IMEC was designed to have two different corridors. Those corridors are the East Corridor, which connects India to the Arabian Gulf and the

Northern Corridor, which provides a connection between the Arabian Gulf to Europe**[5]**. Thus, the five ports in the Middle East, which are Fujairah, Jebel Ali and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates and Dammam and Ras Al Khair Ports in Saudi Arabia, will be linked to the Indian ports**[6]**.

There is no doubt that the IMEC is a project to counter the Chinese influence and economic activity. As a matter of fact, the proposal of the IMEC was designed to decrease the influence of the Chinese initiated Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which passes from India claimed territory.

In addition to this, the IMEC, which aligns most with the US interests, is widely backed by the European Union. The Europeans view the Corridor as useful due to its compliance with the EUs Indo-Pacific Strategy, which prioritizes India in the Pacific region**[7]**. As a matter of fact, the war in Ukraine has harmed the supply chains of Europe as well as revealed the fragilities of the European economy. After the war in Ukraine, the EU tended to watch a China policy closer to the US with the hope of creating alternative and resilient supply chains**[8]**. For this reason, the EU supports the IMEC.

Nevertheless, there is scepticism regarding the realization of the proposed economic corridor. First of all, there is still no feasibility study on the IMEC**[9]**. Also, the IMEC member countries, including India, are dependent on China for its high tech exports and it is not possible to provide self sufficiency in critical sectors for the countries joining the IMEC**[10]**. Foreign Minister of Türkiye, also, expressed his pessimism on the proposed economic corridor by saying, ¨experts had doubts that the primary goal of the India-Middle East Corridor was rationality and efficiency and that more geostrategic concerns were at stake**[11]**.¨

Türkiye has strong reservations against this project as the project tends to exclude Türkiye and deter Türkiyes long standing transit hub position for commodities that are exchanged between Asia and Europe. Accordingly, the President of Türkiye stressed that ¨There can be no corridor without Türkiye¨ and ¨the most appropriate route for trade from east to west must pass from Türkiye**[12]**.¨

The IMEC project seeks an alternative to contradicts Türkiyes Trans Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor (the Middle Corridor) Initiative. The Middle Corridor, which was designed to revive the ancient Silk Road and benefit the Central Asian countries from China-Europe trade, passes from Georgia, to Azerbaijan, traverses Central Asia and reaches China**[13]**. The Middle Corridor has proved to be more efficient than the Northern Corridor, or the Trans-Siberian Railway, as it shortens the cargo road by 15 days**[14]**. Also, the Middle Corridor, which bypasses Russian territory, has become more significant as the war in Ukraine and the embargoes imposed on Russia decreased the activity of the Northern Corridor. Furthermore, the Middle Corridor is compatible with Chinas BRI as both of the projects tend to revive the ancient Silk Road. In this sense, the Middle Corridor, which provides Türkiyes position as a hub for commodities circling in the north south trade, is supplementary to the BRI.

The IMEC may also pose a challenge to alter the position of Iraqs Development Road, in

which Türkiye is among the participating countries with Qatar, the UAE and Iraq. The Development Road, which was thought as an alternative to the Suez Canal, is a project designed to connect Türkiye and Iraq through railways, ports and cities**[15]**. The main aim of the Development Road is to shorten the travel time between Asia and Europe through Türkiye with the establishment of the Great Faw Port, which will be completed in 2025 in Iraq**[16]** as the first phase of the Development Road. Besides, a 1,200 km railway will be built in order to increase connection to the Great Faw Port**[17]**. It is expected that the Development Road will increase the flow of trade, employment and connectivity among the participating countries as well as contribute to the east-west connectivity and trade.

In general, it can be concluded that the IMEC is a US design with the active support of India to counter Chinese influence. The US and the EU countries are watching a policy to balance Chinese influence with centring India in the Asia Pacific region. Apparently, the proposed project shows the intention of the Western world to by pass Türkiye with new the economic corridors. However, Türkiye cannot be excluded from the connectivity projects due to its strategic location and existing hub status. Thus, there exists several challenges ahead of the IMEC such as the absence of a feasibility study and high dependency on Chinese imports despite the Western enthusiasm.

And finally, this project has not taken off despite the fact that it was stressed in the previous G20 Summit, on September 2023. However, the emergence of the Israeli-Hamas conflict undermined the realizetion of this project for the time being as the northern part of the IMEC route is no longer available. In this sense, the realization of this project seems to be not in the agenda for some time.

**Picture:* https://slguardian.org/how-the-war-on-gaza-has-stalled-the-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor-imec/

[1] Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, ¨The Geopolitics of the New India-Middle East-Europe Corridor¨, *The Diplomat*, September 19, 2023, https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/the-geopolitics-of-the-new-india-middle-east-europe-corridor/

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid*.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Tiziano Marino, ¨The India-Middle East- Europe Corridor in Europes Inso-Pacific Strategy¨, *The Diplomat*, September 21, 2023, http://https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/the-india-middle-east-europe-corridor-in-europes-indo-pacific-strategy/

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] Bilgay Duman, ¨Küresel Siyasetin Koridorları¨, *ORSAM*, September 20, 2023, https://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/kuresel-siyasetin-koridorlari/

[10] Tiziano Marino, ¨The India-Middle East- Europe Corridor in Europes Inso-Pacific Strategy¨, *The Diplomat*.

[11] ¨Turkey Proposes Alternative to India-Middle East Trade corridor¨, *Money Control*, September 17, 2023, https://www.moneycontrol.com/europe/?url=https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/turkey-proposes-alternative-to-india-middle-east-trade-corridor-11383891.html

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] ¨Türkiyes Multilateral Transportation Policy¨, *Minister of Foreign Ministry of Türkiye*, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa

[14] *Ibid*.

[15] Mehmet Alaca and Haydar Karaalp, ¨Türkiye-Iraq Development Road Project: Enhancing Regional Connectivity¨, *Anadolu Agency*, September 16, 2023, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkiye-iraq-development-road-project-enhancing-regional-connectivity-trade/2993555

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*

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