

# Elevating Mongolia-Türkiye Relations to a Strategic Partnership: Insights from Political Cooperation

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**Abstract:** This study explores the potential for advancing Mongolia-Türkiye relations to the level of "Strategic Partnership" through a detailed examination of political interactions. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1969, the relationship between the two countries has been characterized by high-level political visits, economic cooperation, and cultural exchanges. Despite these positive developments, there remains a significant gap in research concerning the mechanisms and strategies necessary to elevate the partnership to a fully-fledged strategic level.

The article examines the key drivers of this evolving relationship, including diplomatic missions, mutual cultural interests, with a particular focus on high-level visits and their impact on the bilateral relationship. Through a review of historical milestones, and diplomatic engagements, this study offers insights into the current state of the partnership, challenges such as trade imbalances and economic dependence, and opportunities for future cooperation.

Ultimately, the study concludes that the Mongolia-Türkiye relationship holds significant potential for advancement to a Strategic Partnership. By building on past achievements and leveraging shared cultural ties, trade, and tourism, the relationship could be strengthened, offering long-term mutual benefits for both nations.

**Keywords:** Third Neighbor Policy, Strategic Partnership, Mongolia-Türkiye Relations, International Relations.

## Introduction

In the latter half of the 20th century, Mongolia began establishing diplomatic relations with countries worldwide, including the Republic of Türkiye, with

formal ties established on June 24, 1969. Prior to 1990, the relationship between the two countries remained limited due to their alignment with different political

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systems. However, Türkiye played a role in supporting Mongolia's international aspirations, notably facilitating its membership in the United Nations in 1961 (Ates, 2024). While much has been written on the historical and diplomatic relations between Mongolia and Türkiye, detailed studies on advancing this relationship to a strategic partnership remain scarce. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the potential for elevating the bilateral relationship to a strategic level. It will

examine political relations since 1990, divided into four distinct periods of ten years each, focusing on high-level visits, key diplomatic milestones, and the evolving nature of the relationship. By analyzing Mongolia's experiences with other strategic third neighbor partnerships, the study will explore the lessons learned and the importance of strengthening the partnership with Türkiye.

## **I. A Brief History and Characteristics of the Political Relations between the Two Countries**

Although Mongolia and Türkiye officially established diplomatic relations in 1969, historical connections between the two countries predate this period. Early interactions were influenced by shared Turkic heritage and mutual interest in fostering political relations, with Mongolia expressing interest in strengthening ties with Türkiye as early as 1932 (Khishigt, N., 2019). Türkiye has held a distinctive position in Mongolia's foreign relations, both in terms of historical traditions and contemporary strategic needs (Khaisandai, 2011). Following the end of World War II, Mongolia sought broader international recognition. Between 1946 and 1961, Mongolia made four requests to join the United Nations, with Türkiye providing critical diplomatic support. In 1961, as the presiding member of the UN Security Council, Türkiye played an instrumental

role in facilitating Mongolia's accession to the UN membership, marking the start of steady diplomatic cooperation (Tserennadmid, Ch., 2020).

During the Cold War, Mongolia's relations with Türkiye were limited due to its alignment with the Soviet Union. Despite these constraints, cultural exchanges, such as the 1974 exhibition of Mongolian art in Ankara, laid the groundwork for a more substantial relationship after Mongolia's transition to democracy. Although Mongolia adhered to Soviet policies during this period, it pursued an independent foreign policy in its interactions with Türkiye, bypassing Moscow and engaging through embassies in Belgrade and Sofia. This independence laid the foundation for deeper bilateral ties in the post-Cold War era (Altantugs, N., 2019; Badamdorj, B., 2017).

## **II. Characteristics and Phases of Mongolia-Türkiye Political Relations Since 1990**

### **1. 1990-2000: The Foundation of a New Partnership**

The 1990s marked a transformative period in Mongolia-Türkiye relations,

driven by Mongolia's democratic transition and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Geopolitical shifts allowed Mongolia to position itself as a neutral buffer state between Russia and China, opening new opportunities for international engagement (Dashdorj, B., 2023).

With Türkiye's increasing involvement in Central Asia and its strategic location, it emerged as a key partner for Mongolia in this new global context.

In Mongolia's 1994 Foreign Policy Concept, Türkiye was recognized as a "third neighbor" alongside developed nations like the United States, Japan, and Germany (Tserennadmid, Ch., 2020). This policy, reaffirmed in Article 14.2 of the 2011 Foreign Policy Concept, underscores Mongolia's strategic objective to diversify partnerships beyond its immediate neighbors, Russia and China, by strengthening ties with key Western and Eastern countries, including the United States, Japan, the European Union, India, the Republic of Korea, and Türkiye (Mongolia's Foreign Policy Concept, 2011).

During this period, high-level diplomatic visits played a pivotal role

in strengthening ties between the two countries. Mongolian Foreign Minister Ts. Gombosuren's visit to Türkiye in 1992 initiated official diplomatic engagements, and Speaker N. Bagabandi's visit in 1993 established the foundation for interparliamentary cooperation. President Süleyman Demirel's visit to Mongolia in 1995 further solidified bilateral relations across political, economic, and cultural spheres, while President N. Bagabandi's visit in 1998 proposed the elevation of relations to a Comprehensive Partnership, which marked a significant milestone.

The 1990s also saw the launch of the student exchange program and the opening of TİKA's office in Ulaanbaatar in 1994, which played a key role in facilitating cultural diplomacy and development projects, such as the preservation of Turkish-era monuments. These initiatives helped lay the groundwork for the expansion of Mongolia-Türkiye relations in subsequent years.

**Table 1** below summarizes the key diplomatic milestones in Mongolia-Türkiye relations during the 1990s, highlighting major visits that contributed to strengthening bilateral ties.

**Table 1.** Key Milestones in Mongolia-Türkiye Relations (1990-2000)

Year	Event	Significance / Impact
1992	Minister of Foreign Affairs Ts. Gombosuren visits Türkiye	Initiated official diplomatic engagement and laid the foundation for political relations.
1993	Speaker of Parliament N. Bagabandi visits Türkiye	Strengthened interparliamentary cooperation and laid the groundwork for bilateral collaboration.
1995	President Süleyman Demirel visits Mongolia	Enhanced political, social, economic, cultural, and educational cooperation between the two countries.
1996	Opening of the Turkish Embassy in Ulaanbaatar and Mongolian Embassy in Ankara	Formalized diplomatic relations and established official diplomatic missions.
1998	President N. Bagabandi proposes Comprehensive Partnership	Marked the formal proposal to elevate bilateral relations to a strategic partnership.

1992	Student exchange program launched	Promoted cultural exchange and educational collaboration, fostering long-term ties.
1994	TIKA opens a Program Coordination Office in Ulaanbaatar	Facilitated cultural diplomacy and development projects, enhancing bilateral ties through shared cultural heritage.

## 2. Characteristics and Achievements of Bilateral Relations from 2000 to 2010

Several key developments during this period shaped Mongolia-Türkiye relations, marking a significant shift toward deeper cooperation across trade, tourism, education, and regional stability:

### i. Formalizing Parliamentary and Diplomatic Relations:

In 2002, Mongolian Speaker S. Tumor-Ochir's visit to Türkiye led to the signing of a cooperation protocol between the parliaments, laying the foundation for institutional cooperation, particularly in political dialogue. In 1993, the establishment of the Parliamentary Friendship Group further deepened these ties, solidifying interparliamentary cooperation as a core element of the growing bilateral relationship.

### ii. Establishment of the "Comprehensive partnership" in 2004:

In 2004, President N. Bagabandi's visit to Türkiye marked a pivotal moment, formalizing the "Comprehensive Partnership" and elevating bilateral relations to a higher level (Batkhisig, B., & Ankhbayar D., 2014). This partnership encompassed areas such as trade, security, culture, and education, aligning with Mongolia's broader goal of diversifying its foreign relations under the Third Neighbor Policy (See Figure 1). The subsequent visits of Prime Minister M. Enkhbold

(2006) and President Ts. Elbegdorj (2010) reinforced this partnership, focusing on regional security and economic collaboration.

### iii. High-Level Visits and Diplomatic Engagement:

High-level visits were a cornerstone of this decade. President Ahmet N. Sezer's visit in 2002 and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit in 2005 underscored Türkiye's interest in strengthening political ties and opening avenues for economic cooperation. These visits, along with agreements on education, security, and cultural exchange, highlighted the strategic alignment of both countries in promoting regional stability and multilateral cooperation.

### iv. Visa – free Travel and People-to-People Relations (2007):

In 2007, citizens of Mongolia were granted 30-day visa-free entry to the Republic of Türkiye, enhancing people-to-people relations and significantly boosting the history, culture, and tourism industries of both countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Consular Department, 2024). This visa policy directly contributed to the growth of tourism and cultural diplomacy, providing a platform for enhanced mutual understanding.



Source: Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024. ([www.mfa-archives.mn](http://www.mfa-archives.mn))

**Figure 1.** Ahmet N. Sezer, President of the Republic of Türkiye and N. Bagabandi, President of Mongolia. Ankara, 2004

### 3. Characteristics and Achievements of Bilateral Relations between 2010 and 2019

From 2010 onwards, Mongolia and Türkiye's relationship entered a phase of accelerated growth, driven by high-level visits, bilateral agreements, and expanded cooperation in trade, tourism, education, and transportation. This period saw the strengthening of the Comprehensive Partnership, laying the groundwork for a potential Strategic Partnership.

#### i. Expansion of Air Transport and Tourism Cooperation (2012-2019)

One of the key drivers of economic cooperation between the two nations was the expansion of air travel. Since 2012, Turkish Airlines began operating a weekly service on the Istanbul-Bishkek-Ulaanbaatar route, carrying about 500 passengers weekly, boosting tourism and people-to-people relations. By May 2024, 249,600 passengers had traveled on this route, with 47% traveling for tourism, generating an estimated \$126 million for Mongolia's tourism sector and \$187 million in overall economic returns (Batsukh, S.,

2024). This significant increase in tourism-related revenue underscores the economic potential of the growing relationship and highlights the importance of transportation infrastructure as a tool for expanding bilateral cooperation.

#### ii. 2013 Visit by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

A milestone in Mongolia-Türkiye relations occurred in 2013 when Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made his second official visit to Mongolia (See Figure 2). This visit was particularly significant as it provided an opportunity to set new goals for bilateral relations and deepen their strategic partnership. Key outcomes of the visit included:

- **Increased Air Travel Frequency:** Proposals were made to increase the frequency of flights between Ulaanbaatar and Istanbul from three to five times per week, underscoring the growing importance of direct connectivity between the two countries for both tourism and



business exchanges (Mendee, 2013).

▪ **Visa-Free Travel for Turkish Citizens:** Expanding visa-free travel for Turkish citizens to Mongolia, complementing the visa-free access granted to Mongolian citizens in 2007.

▪ **Strategic Partnership Proposal:** In the joint statement issued by the Prime

Ministers of Mongolia and Türkiye, both countries expressed a mutual desire to elevate their relationship to a Strategic Partnership in the future, building on the Comprehensive Partnership that had been established earlier (Badamdorj, B., 2017).



*Source: Anadolu Agency, 2013. (www.aa.com.tr/)*

*Figure 2. Prime Minister of Mongolia N. Altankhuyaa and his wife Kh. Selenge and Prime Minister of the Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his wife Emine Erdoğan. Ulaanbaatar, 2013.*

This visit also led to a 100-student scholarship increase, reflecting the importance of education exchanges. Trade turnover targets were also set, with the goal of reaching \$100 million by 2022, a target surpassed, with \$110 million achieved by 2022.

### iii. **Mutual Visa-Free Travel Agreement (2014)**

The "Agreement on Mutual Travel of Citizens" between the governments of Mongolia and Türkiye, effective April 11, 2014, was a pivotal milestone in people-to-people diplomacy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, 2014). This agreement facilitated visa-free travel for citizens of

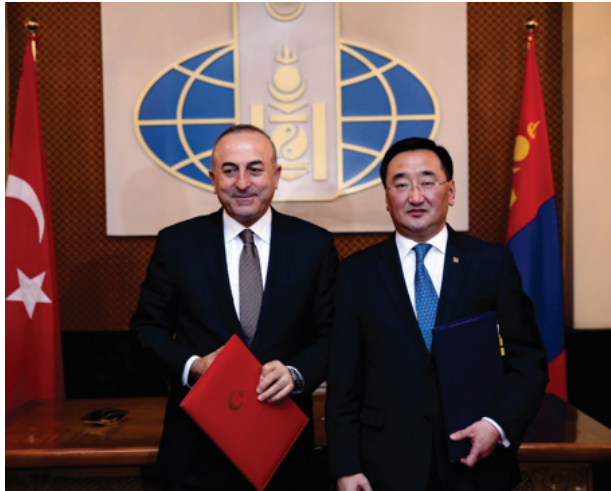
both countries, leading to a significant increase in tourism, trade, and economic exchanges. For example, the number of Mongolian citizens traveling to Türkiye for tourism rose dramatically from 1,180 in 2013 to 13,179 in 2023. The number of Turkish tourists visiting Mongolia increased from 2,930 in 2013 to 6,811 in 2023 (Mongolian Statistical Information Service, 2023).

### iv. **Strengthening Parliamentary and Diplomatic Engagement (2014–2015)**

The 2014 visit of Cemil Çiçek, Speaker of Türkiye's Grand National Assembly, and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's

visit in 2015 marked significant steps in parliamentary diplomacy and the strengthening of bilateral ties (see Figure

3). These visits enhanced educational exchanges and cultural diplomacy, helping institutionalize the growing partnership.



Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, 2015 ([www.mfa.gov.tr](http://www.mfa.gov.tr))

**Figure 3.** L. Purevsuren, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, Ulaanbaatar, 2015.

#### v. **Advancements in Trade and Economic Cooperation (2018–2019)**

The 2018 visit by Binali Yıldırım, Prime Minister of Türkiye, and Mustafa Şentop's 2019 visit focused on expanding trade, economic collaboration, and

regional stability. This period saw increasing interest in agriculture, light industry, and tourism as key economic areas of cooperation.

### **4. Post-COVID developments in Mongolia-Türkiye Relations**

The post-COVID era has brought several distinct changes to Mongolia-Türkiye relations, marked by enhanced transportation links, diplomatic engagements, and the continued development of their Comprehensive Partnership. The pandemic underscored the importance of strategic connectivity and economic diversification, and both countries have used this opportunity to strengthen their ties in key areas, including trade, tourism, and diplomatic cooperation.

#### **i. Transportation Developments**

Transportation advancements have played a transformative role in the post-COVID era, with the launch of direct flights between Istanbul and Ulaanbaatar in 2020 marking a critical milestone in bilateral relations. Prior to 2020, Turkish Airlines operated flights on the Istanbul-Bishkek-Ulaanbaatar route. The establishment of direct flights in 2020, followed by the expansion to daily flights in 2022, has greatly enhanced mobility between the two countries, facilitating tourism, business exchanges, and economic diversification

(Turkish Directorate General of Civil Aviation, 2022). This development not only opened a gateway for Mongolia to access European markets but also contributed to tourism development and cultural exchanges. These changes emphasize the importance of connectivity in advancing Mongolia's Third Neighbor Policy, further linking Mongolia to the broader Eurasian region through Türkiye's strategic position as a transit hub.

## ii. Diplomatic Engagements and High-Level Visits

The post-COVID period has seen a resurgence in high-level diplomatic

visits, signaling both nations' commitment to further strengthening their bilateral relationship. In 2023, Mongolian Foreign Minister B. Battsetseg's visit to Türkiye marked a historic milestone, as it was the 31st anniversary of Foreign Minister Ts. Gombosuren's visit in 1992 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, 2023). This visit served as an important opportunity to reaffirm the shared foreign policy agendas of both nations and reaffirm their mutual strategic goals, as illustrated in **Figure 4** and **Figure 5**.



Source: Anadolu Agency, 2023. ([www.aa.com.tr/](http://www.aa.com.tr/))

**Figure 4.** B. Battsetseg, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. Ankara, 2023



Source: Parliament.mn, 2022 ([www.parliament.mn](http://www.parliament.mn))

**Figure 5.** G. Zandanshatar, Speaker of the State Great Khural and Mustafa Şentop, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of the Republic of Türkiye. Ankara, 2022



In addition, visits by the Chairman of the National Assembly in 2013, 2018, and 2022, as well as the Speaker of the Turkish National Assembly in 2014 and 2019, emphasize the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in strengthening bilateral ties.

The 2018 Prime Ministerial visit highlighted the significance of economic cooperation, while the 2023 foreign minister visit further solidified the strategic importance of these diplomatic engagements.

## 5. Discussion

The Mongolia-Türkiye relationship has evolved significantly, transitioning from a comprehensive partnership to a potential strategic partnership. High-level visits, economic cooperation, and cultural exchanges have been the key drivers of this progression. The institutional contributions of diplomatic missions and ambassadors have been pivotal, particularly

in facilitating high-level engagements and fostering trade agreements and cultural diplomacy. Early diplomacy under B. Altangerel (1997-2002) and later efforts by P.Khaliun (2003-2008), O.Ochirjav (2008-2012), B. Batkhishig (2013-2017) and R.Bold (2017-2021) helped deepen the relationship and expand economic and cultural collaboration.

### Comparison with Other Strategic Partnerships

To understand the unique nature of the **Mongolia-Türkiye** relationship, it is useful to compare it with Mongolia's ties to **the United States** and **Japan**. These comparisons highlight the strategic dimensions of Mongolia's cooperation with each country.

- **Mongolia and the United States:** Focuses on **security cooperation, democracy promotion, and economic engagement**. The **U.S.-Mongolia Strategic Partnership relations** deepen cooperation in **defense and human rights** (Kim, 2019).
- **Mongolia and Japan:** Aims at economic cooperation and cultural exchanges, with Japan playing a

crucial role in Mongolia's economic diversification, especially through development assistance and technology transfer (Bayarkhuu, D., 2020). For instance, Mongolia's trade with Japan reached nearly \$730 million in 2023 while U.S. was about \$317 million (Mongolian Customs Service, 2023).

**Mongolia and Türkiye:** Stands out for its shared cultural heritage, geopolitical interests, and economic cooperation in manufacturing and agriculture. There is significant untapped potential for deepening economic ties between Mongolia and Turkey, which can enhance Mongolia's "Third Neighbor" policy (Makhanov, 2021; Bishku, 2021).

**Table 2.** Comparative Contributions of Mongolia’s Bilateral Relations with Türkiye, the U.S., and Japan

Aspect	Mongolia-Türkiye	Mongolia-U.S.	Mongolia-Japan
Economic cooperation	Trade, tourism, and business forums	Investment and mining cooperation	ODA, technology exchange, and infrastructure development
Cultural Diplomacy	Turkic heritage and cultural exchanges	Democracy promotion and education exchanges	Educational exchanges and cultural diplomacy
Security Cooperation	Peacekeeping and regional security	Joint military exercises and peacekeeping	Peacekeeping missions and regional stability
Lessons for Mongolia	Leverage cultural diplomacy, trade, and tourism	Diversify into technological sectors and security cooperation	Focus on education and economic diversification

### Economic Opportunities and Challenges

Mongolia has learned from the United States and Japan that economic diversification is essential for long-term stability. While natural resources have driven growth, foreign investment, technological expertise, and infrastructure development have proved critical for economic resilience. From Türkiye, Mongolia can learn to leverage cultural diplomacy to create economic opportunities, particularly in tourism and small-medium enterprises (SMEs).

Mongolia’s partnerships with Japan and Türkiye underscore the importance of people-to-people diplomacy, which builds mutual trust and strengthens long-term cooperation in science, technology, and governance.

Mongolia’s relationship with the United States has been pivotal in demonstrating the importance of security cooperation. Through joint military exercises and peacekeeping missions, Mongolia has built strong ties with the U.S. and other international partners, which is valuable in the context of Central Asian

security. The relationship with Türkiye offers similar opportunities for security cooperation in Central Asia, where both nations have shared interests in regional stability and conflict resolution.

**Economic Opportunities:** With Türkiye’s expanding global trade networks and Mongolia’s efforts to diversify its economy, enhancing bilateral trade and investment can unlock new economic opportunities. The growing number of Turkish companies operating in Mongolia and the increased flow of Turkish tourists to Mongolia demonstrate the mutual economic benefits. The direct flights between Ulaanbaatar and Istanbul also play a crucial role in enhancing trade, tourism, and business cooperation.

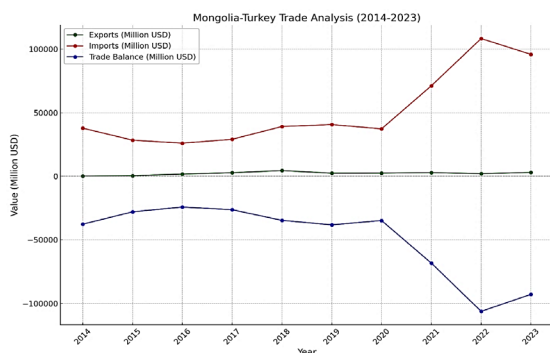
**Cultural Diplomacy:** The shared **Turkic heritage** provides a strong foundation for deeper diplomatic ties. Increasing **academic collaboration**—especially in **Turkic studies**—can promote shared history and strengthen **cultural diplomacy**.

**Trade imbalance:** The trade imbalance between Mongolia and Türkiye remains a key challenge. While imports from Türkiye have consistently risen, particularly in consumer goods, machinery, and textiles, exports to Türkiye remain limited and are mainly focused on raw materials. This imbalance has weakened Mongolia’s economic bargaining power and highlights the need for export diversification. Despite growth in Mongolian exports to Türkiye, the trade deficit has worsened over the years, growing from -37.7 million USD in 2014 to -106.3 billion USD in 2022 shown in **Table 3, Figure 6**. To address this imbalance, Mongolia should look to leverage Turkish expertise in manufacturing, particularly leather production, and agriculture, to

transition from raw material exports to more value-added products. Türkiye’s leadership in leather goods manufacturing offers Mongolia an opportunity to develop its own manufacturing base, transitioning from a reliance on raw material exports to becoming a regional hub for value-added production. Additionally, Türkiye’s expertise in agricultural technology can support Mongolia in modernizing its agriculture sector, improving food security, and diversifying its export base. Beyond these sectors, Mongolia should also aim to expand its trade portfolio to include manufacturing and technology, with Turkish investment playing a pivotal role in areas such as renewable energy, construction, and digital technologies.

**Table 3.** Trade turnover between Mongolia and Turkey /million USD/

Year	Exports	Imports	Total turnover (Million USD)	Trade Balance
2014	169.7	37858.2	38027.9	-37688.5
2015	419	28398.1	28817.1	-27979.1
2016	1758.7	26000.5	27759.2	-24241.8
2017	2777.1	29095.8	31872.9	-26318.7
2018	4474.8	39155	43629.8	-34680.2
2019	2421.3	40657.7	43079	-38236.4
2020	2516.7	37321.6	39838.3	-34804.9
2021	2864.5	71204.1	74068.6	-68339.6
2022	2087	108345	110432	-106258
2023	2996.4	95906.5	98902.9	-92910.1



**Figure 6.** Bilateral trade turnover between Mongolia and Turkey / Million USD/

## **Conclusions**

Mongolia and Türkiye share a deep historical connection, marked by similar cultural and linguistic ties. This longstanding relationship was further solidified in 1961 when Türkiye played a pivotal role in Mongolia's accession to the United Nations, demonstrating early and ongoing mutual support in international political arenas. Since 1990, the frequency and significance of high-level visits between the two countries have strengthened cooperation, with key discussions and resolutions contributing to the growing bond between their respective parliaments. Over time, this has evolved into a Comprehensive Partnership with substantial progress in political, economic, educational, cultural, and defense relations, benefiting both nations in numerous ways.

Among Mongolia's Third Neighbor countries, Türkiye holds a unique and special position due to its historical, cultural, and geopolitical significance. The continued interactions between the governments of both countries underline a solid foundation for future cooperation, emphasizing the strategic importance of this partnership. The consistency and productivity of these engagements offer a strong basis for expanding bilateral relations to even greater heights.

Key milestones, such as the high-level visits from Türkiye's Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers, have played a crucial role in enhancing the relationship. The 2004 transition to a Comprehensive Partnership marked a significant turning point, leading to direct flights and visa-free travel between the two countries, which have greatly facilitated trade, economic exchanges, tourism, and people-to-people ties. By 2022, the target of \$100 million in trade turnover—initially set for 2013—was not only achieved but surpassed, further underscoring the success of this collaboration.

In conclusion, the relationship between Mongolia and Türkiye shows clear potential for advancing to the level of a Strategic Partnership in the future. Building on past achievements, sustained high-level engagements, and a shared commitment to mutual goals, there are ample opportunities to enhance the bilateral relationship. Continued cooperation in sectors such as business, tourism, and cultural exchange will provide a strong foundation for future growth, ultimately ensuring long-term mutual benefits for both Mongolia and Türkiye.

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