

## The Role of the New Silk Road (One Belt, One Road Initiative) in Connecting the Free Zones of Iran and Turkey: A Case Study of the Free Zones of Sarakhs and Maku to Anatolia and Europe

**Authors :** Morteza Ghourchi, Meraj Jafari, Atena Soheilazizi

**Abstract :** Today, with the globalization of communications and the connection of countries within the framework of the global economy, free zones play the most important role as the engine of global economic development and globalization of countries. In this regard, corridors have a fundamental role in linking countries and free zones physically with each other. One of these corridors is the New Silk Road corridor (One Belt, One Road initiative), which is being built by China to connect with European countries. In connecting this corridor to European countries, Iran and Turkey are among the countries that play an important role in linking China to European countries through this corridor. The New Silk Road corridor, by connecting Iran's free zones (Sarakhs and Maku) and Turkey's free zones (Anatolia and Europe), can provide the best opportunity for expanding economic cooperation and regional development between Iran and Turkey. It can also provide economic links between Iran and Turkey with Central Asian countries and especially the port of Khorgos. On the other hand, it can expand Iran-Turkey economic relations more than ever before with Europe in a vast economic network. The research method was descriptive-analytical, using library resources, documents of Iranian free zones, and the Internet. In an interview with Fars News Agency, Mohammad Reza Kalaei, CEO of Sarakhs Free Zone, said that the main goal of Sarakhs Special Economic Zone is to connect Iran with the Middle East and create a transit corridor towards East Asian countries, including Turkey. Also, according to an interview with Hussein Gharousi, CEO of Maku Free Zone, the importance of this region is due to the fact that Maku Free Zone, due to its geographical location and its position on the China-Europe trade route, the East-West corridor, which is the closest point to the European Union through railway and transit routes, and also due to its proximity to Eurasian countries, is an ideal opportunity for industrial and technological companies. Creating a transit corridor towards East Asian countries, including Turkey, is one of the goals of this project. Free zones between Iran and Turkey can sign an agreement within the framework of the New Silk Road to expand joint investments and economic cooperation towards regional convergence. The purpose of this research is to develop economic links between Iranian and Turkish free zones along the New Silk Road, which will lead to the expansion and development of regional cooperation between the two countries within the framework of neighboring policies. The findings of this research include the development of economic diplomacy between the Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Free Zones of Iran and the General Directorate of Free Zones of Turkey, the agreement to expand cooperation between the free zones of Sarakhs, Maku, Anatolia, and Europe, holding biennial conferences between Iranian free zones along the New Silk Road with Turkish free zones, creating a joint investment fund between Iran and Turkey in the field of developing free zones along the Silk Road, helping to attract tourism between Iranian and Turkish free zones located along the New Silk Road, improving transit infrastructure and transportation to better connect Iranian free zones to Turkish free zones, communicating with China, and creating joint collaborations between China's dry ports and its free zones with Iranian and Turkish free zones.

**Keywords :** network economy, new silk road (one belt, one road initiative), free zones (Sarakhs, Maku, Anatolia, Europe), regional development, neighborhood policies

**Conference Title :** ICGS 2024 : International Conference on Geographical Sciences

**Conference Location :** Istanbul, Türkiye

**Conference Dates :** December 23-24, 2024