

## The Geopolitics of CRMs: Türkiye, the Overlooked Pillar of the EU Strategy

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Critical Raw Materials (CRMs) are becoming more indispensable than ever, as the green transition, digitalization, increasing defence procurement and the transformation of the automotive industry rapidly drive-up demand. This shift highlights the need for new capital investment and signals that those who act early will gain strategic advantage. Securing essential resources is now central to geoeconomic competition and fundamental to the intensifying race for technological supremacy.

China dominates this market—[providing 66% of mined supply, 88% of refined supply](#), and nearly half of global reserves. Brazil, India, Australia, and Vietnam together supply around [40%](#) of reserves, while the U.S. accounts for only [2%](#). Outside China, processing capabilities are concentrated in Malaysia, Japan, and the EU. The EU aims to expand its domestic processing capacity and has begun [designating strategic projects under the Critical Raw Materials Act](#) to advance that effort.

Before Covid-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, supply-chain chokepoints and geoeconomic vulnerabilities were not perceived as critically as they are today. Since 2022, however, the urgency of deepening cooperation among Western allies has become increasingly hard to ignore. Europe's overdependence on China represents its biggest strategic risk—demonstrated vividly [when Beijing halted graphite exports, a key input for lithium-ion batteries, to Sweden in the early 2020s](#).

There are opportunities for the EU to develop more CRM cooperation with allies on its doorstep. While Türkiye offers obvious opportunities, the EU has been slow to seize the moment - and risks falling behind the U.S. - as we explore here.

### *Multilateral Cooperation Efforts and Türkiye's involvement*

Growing competition over CRMs has pushed both the EU and the U.S. to build platforms that bring like-minded states together. One important example is the Mineral Security Partnership (MSP) Forum, whose members include Argentina, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Greenland, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Namibia, Peru, Philippines, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Zambia. The MSP focuses on securing supply chains for minerals essential to modern technology, defense, energy, and industry—such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, graphite, rare earths, gallium, germanium, antimony, and copper.

Meanwhile, China continues expanding its own partnerships across the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Africa, developing ties with Kazakhstan, DRC, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mali, and others.

Türkiye, situated between these competing blocs, signed a 2024 MoU with China on cooperation in natural resources and mining—including critical minerals. But this partnership has not been advantageous to date, given the lack of meaningful pathways for domestic capability-building. Concerns emerged due to limited prospects for technology transfer and insufficient opportunities for Türkiye to develop value-added refining capacity.

In contrast, U.S.–Türkiye discussions on CRMs, especially concerning reserves in Beylikova–Eskişehir, Manisa, and Gördes, have attracted both domestic and international attention. The Beylikova Eskişehir field is reported as the [second-largest rare earth element deposit in the world](#) and [Manisa is known for nickel-laterite deposits](#) and other rare earth elements (REEs).

The U.S.–Türkiye joint statement, on 8 May 2024, [reaffirmed](#) a strategic clean-tech relationship. After this statement, Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan [Bayraktar](#) made a reference to minerals in relation to bilateral energy cooperation between the US and Türkiye in his speech at the 39th

American - Turkish Conference in Washington. A year later in April 2025 U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Türkiye Thomas J. Barrack stressed that “[Türkiye also has untapped critical mineral reserves and could become a strategic partner as we diversify from Chinese supply chains.](#)” In his Senate hearing”. The [U.S. Department of Energy’s](#) \$1 billion funding framework for mining, processing, and manufacturing further reinforces this opening.

For Türkiye, alignment with Washington offers access to advanced processing technology and investment that could accelerate the development of the Beylikova deposit. Türkiye seeks not only local refining capacity, but also technology transfer, training, skills development, and the creation of a full value chain—from mining to finished products. In recent discussions, U.S. officials have increasingly framed Türkiye as a strategic alternative to Chinese-dominated critical raw material supply chains. Yet, for such cooperation to be viable, it must move beyond extraction and ensure value-added production—encompassing processing, separation, and the development of human capital. While the details of an agreement are still being shaped, both sides appear to view it as a high-level, mutually beneficial framework rather than a simple commodity transaction.

#### *The EU’s Limited Engagement with Türkiye*

The EU has shown interest in Türkiye’s rare earth elements in the past, particularly through the 2022 project “[Enhancing Turkey’s Research and Innovation Capacity for Rare Earth Elements.](#)” Funded with nearly 12 million under the Competitiveness and Innovation Sector Programme, the project aimed to improve research and development capacities in relation to rare earth elements. The initiative successfully completed a series of technical workshops and developed laboratory infrastructure including units dedicated to e-waste dismantling and preparation, metal separation, chemical purification and mineral processing. However, despite these achievements, industrial-scale commercialization—such as large-scale product manufacturing and the establishment of a fully functional circular recovery system—has not yet materialized.

In March 2024, the Council adopted the European Critical Raw Materials Act ([CRMA](#)), designed to mitigate supply risks amid rapidly increasing demand for rare earths. The act sets clear 2030 targets, including specific goals for extraction, processing, recycling, and limits on dependence on any single non-EU supplier. These measures form part of a broader strategy built on three pillars: enhancing the EU’s own capabilities across mineral supply chains, diversifying imports from abroad, and deepening international partnerships. Within this framework, Türkiye is [recognized](#) as a major borates supplier, and the EU has generally signalled its intention to pursue mutually advantageous cooperation with third countries as part of its broader critical raw materials strategy.

Despite this, the EU remains [heavily dependent](#) on China for heavy rare earth elements, on Türkiye for borates, and on South Africa for platinum.

The recent U.S.–Türkiye agreement further strengthens Türkiye’s relevance within the broader Western critical raw material architecture. Yet the absence of a parallel EU–Türkiye framework raises concerns, as it risks undermining the EU’s own diversification objectives and weakens the coherence of Western supply-chain strategies.

This issue becomes even more evident in light of the European Commission’s decision not to include Türkiye to the [13 Strategic Projects](#) announced in June 2025, despite acknowledging Türkiye as one of the major global and regional producers of critical raw materials. Given the geopolitical context, such an omission is increasingly difficult to justify.

### *Strategic Blind Spots: The Global Gateway, Horizon Europe and Geoeconomic Competition*

The gap in EU–Türkiye cooperation is even more striking when considered in relation to the EU’s Global Gateway Initiative.

China’s Belt and Road Initiative passes directly through Türkiye, granting Beijing considerable geoeconomic leverage across a corridor that the EU itself seeks to shape. By failing to prioritize Türkiye within its own connectivity and supply-chain agenda, the EU inadvertently weakens its geostrategic position and limits its capacity to counterbalance China’s influence.

The recently announced EU Critical Raw Materials Facility—intended to support early-stage equity investments and strengthen CRM exploration—illustrates the EU’s attempt to bolster strategic partnerships, yet on its own it is insufficient, especially given the absence of a fully fledged Global Gateway–backed CRM framework with Türkiye. Strengthening CRM collaboration will also require close coordination on research and innovation, and Türkiye’s existing association with Horizon Europe provides an underused platform for joint R&D that could accelerate cooperation but has not been meaningfully leveraged.

Türkiye’s unique position as a junction between East and West—and its potential to align more closely with Western CRM strategies—could significantly strengthen Europe’s collective ability to reduce exposure to supply-chain disruptions and geopolitical manipulation. A deeper and more structured EU–Türkiye partnership in critical raw materials would improve the resilience of Western supply chains, support ongoing U.S.–EU coordination efforts, and expand processing capabilities that operate independently of Chinese technology, thereby enhancing the robustness of the entire value chain.

#### *Türkiye Is Not Optional—It is Essential*

China’s extensive state support for its mineral and technology sectors—[on a scale Western governments cannot easily replicate](#)—underscores the need for closer coordination among Western partners. For Türkiye, however, China is not viewed as an especially attractive partner, due to insufficient opportunities to develop value-added production capacity, whereas the EU’s emphasis on mutually beneficial cooperation, clearer governance standards, and support for technology transfer could present a compelling alternative.

If the West is to remain competitive in the global race for critical raw materials, it must strengthen internal cohesion, pool resources, and align investment strategies rather than acting independently. In this context, integrating Türkiye into the broader strategic framework is not simply advantageous; it is essential.