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FROM TRADE TO INFLUENCE: NEW ZEALAND'S ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY THROUGH THE CPTPP FRAMEWORK IN THE POST-2010S

Özlem TÜRKOĞLU*

Abstract

Economic diplomacy has become an indispensable dimension of statecraft for small, developed countries that face structural disadvantages in the global economy. For nations such as New Zealand, geographic isolation, demographic constraints, and reliance on primary exports have constrained their capacity to exert influence in global markets. Yet, in the context of deepening globalization and the proliferation of plurilateral trade frameworks, New Zealand has demonstrated a remarkable ability to transcend these constraints through strategic deployment of economic diplomacy. This study applies negotiation theory, drawing on systemic, domestic, and ideational factors to examine how New Zealand has enhanced its global economic engagement in the post-2010s, with particular emphasis on its participation in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Through empirical examination of decision-making processes and trade outcomes, this study demonstrates how negotiation factors such as relative economic power asymmetries, domestic institutional capacity, and commitment to liberal trade norms shaped New Zealand's participation and policy choices. The analysis further evaluates how CPTPP membership mitigated or reinforced structural challenges, including exposure to external shocks and reliance on agricultural exports. The findings reveal that New Zealand used the CPTPP not merely as a market-access mechanism but as a diplomatic tool to embed itself in high-standard trade governance and amplify influence within a plurilateral framework. The study thus contributes to small-state diplomacy literature by showing that strategic negotiation and institutional entrepreneurship can compensate for material constraints, positioning New Zealand as an adaptive and norm-shaping actor in the global economy.

Keywords: *New Zealand, CPTPP, economic diplomacy, negotiation, free trade, small developed states.*

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Özet

Ekonomik diplomasi, küresel ekonomide yapısal dezavantajlarla karşı karşıya kalan küçük ve gelişmiş ülkeler için devlet yönetiminin vazgeçilmez bir boyutu haline gelmiştir. Yeni Zelanda gibi ülkeler için coğrafi izolasyon, demografik kısıtlamalar ve birincil ürün

* Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Üniversitesi, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, ORCID: 0000-0002-6779-4365, turkogluozlem@gmail.com

ihracatına bağımlılık, küresel piyasalarda nüfuz sahibi olma kapasitelerini kısıtlamıştır. Ancak, derinleşen küreselleşme ve çok taraflı ticaret çerçevelerinin yaygınlaşması bağlamında, Yeni Zelanda, ekonomik diplomasinin stratejik kullanımıyla bu kısıtlamaları aşma konusunda dikkate değer bir yetenek sergilemiştir. Bu çalışma, sistemik, yerel ve düşünsel faktörlerden yararlanarak müzakere teorisini uygulayarak, Yeni Zelanda'nın 2010'lardan sonra küresel ekonomik angajmanını nasıl geliştirdiğini, özellikle de Kapsamlı ve İlerici Trans-Pasifik Ortaklığı Anlaşması'na (CPTPP) katılımını incelemektedir. Karar alma süreçleri ve ticaret sonuçlarının ampirik incelemesi yoluyla, bu çalışma, göreceli ekonomik güç asimetrisi, yerel kurumsal kapasite ve liberal ticaret normlarına bağlılık gibi müzakere faktörlerinin Yeni Zelanda'nın katılımını ve politika tercihlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini göstermektedir. Analiz ayrıca, CPTPP üyeliğinin dış şoklara maruz kalma ve tarımsal ihracata bağımlılık gibi yapısal zorlukları nasıl hafiflettiğini veya güçlendirdiğini değerlendirmektedir. Bulgular, Yeni Zelanda'nın CPTPP'yi yalnızca bir pazar erişim mekanizması olarak değil, aynı zamanda yüksek standartlı ticaret yönetişimine yerleşmek ve çok taraflı bir çerçevede etkisini artırmak için diplomatik bir araç olarak kullandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, stratejik müzakere ve kurumsal girişimciliğin maddi kısıtlamaları telafi edebileceğini ve Yeni Zelanda'yı küresel ekonomide uyarlanabilir ve norm şekillendirici bir aktör olarak konumlandırabileceğini göstererek küçük devlet diplomasisi literatürüne katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Yeni Zelanda, CPTPP, ekonomik diplomasi, müzakere, serbest ticaret, küçük gelişmiş devletler.*

Introduction

Economic diplomacy has become increasingly critical instrument for small, developed countries, particularly those geographically isolated from major markets with significant challenges in asserting economic influence due to their limited bargaining power and the dominance of larger economies. These constraints manifest in tangible ways such as high transportation and logistics costs, restricted access to major consumer markets, and vulnerability to global commodity price fluctuations (Boulhol et al., 2008; Berthelon & Freund, 2004) that necessitate targeted diplomatic strategies to unlock opportunities in international trade, investment, and plurilateral engagement. The World Bank (2024) estimates that New Zealand's distance-related trade costs reduce its GDP per capita by up to 10 percent compared with more centrally located OECD economies, illustrating the enduring structural handicap of distance. In this environment, small states have increasingly relied on economic diplomacy as a strategic response, using negotiation, coalition-building, and institutional engagement to expand their agency in trade governance. This study explores how New Zealand employs economic diplomacy and negotiation strategies to enhance its global economic engagement within the CPTPP context. It argues that New Zealand's approach demonstrates how small, developed countries can exert influence beyond their material weight by embedding themselves in rules-based trade systems and leveraging ideational and institutional capital. By integrating theoretical insights from negotiation theory by integrating its systemic, domestic factors and ideational elements, to explore the question of

“How can New Zealand enhance its global economic engagement in the post-2010s, particularly through the CPTPP?” and begins with exploring the challenges in the realm of global economic diplomacy. In this context, Negotiation theory provides a valuable analytical framework for understanding how small states like New Zealand navigate such constraints. The theory identifies the interplay between systemic, domestic, and ideational factors in shaping bargaining behavior and outcomes (Keohane, 1969; López & Higgott, 2015). Systemic factors highlight how relative power asymmetries influence negotiation dynamics; domestic factors emphasize the institutional and societal conditions that guide state preferences; and ideational elements capture the role of ideas, norms, and policy orientations in defining a state's strategic posture. Applying this lens to New Zealand's trade diplomacy allows for an assessment of how a small economy converts structural vulnerabilities into sources of leverage through strategic alignment, coalition-building, and institutional engagement.

In the post-2010 era, New Zealand's participation in the CPTPP has exemplified this strategic adaptation. The CPTPP represents nearly 15% of global GDP and accounts for around 17% of New Zealand's total trade value (NZ\$26 billion in 2023) (MFAT, 2024; World Bank, 2024) that offers a unique setting in which negotiation theory can be empirically applied. Then, the focus shifts to New Zealand as a case study, highlighting how this small but advanced island economy has successfully navigated its economic constraints through strategic diplomacy. Despite its geographic isolation and reliance on primary industries, New Zealand has proactively diversified its economy and secured significant trade partnerships, including participation in international organizations like the WTO, reflecting a strategic effort to institutionalize fair trade norms that align with its national interests and export composition, complementing its participation in the CPTPP.

The following section is structured to systemically analyze New Zealand's involvement in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), exemplifying how the country leverages economic diplomacy to secure market access, strengthen its global trade position, while mitigating the challenges posed by its geographical position. It further examines how the CPTPP has become a cornerstone of New Zealand's economic diplomacy, expanding its trade footprint and enhancing its role in the global economy by leveraging negotiation strategies to secure market access, diversify trade partners. Further, it evaluates CPTPP's concrete outcomes for New Zealand's trade and investment performance, drawing on empirical data to assess whether participation in this plurilateral framework has mitigated or reinforced structural challenges such as dependence on primary exports and exposure to external shocks (Henrikson, 2001). Lastly, it will end with concluding remarks, discussing the key findings and their implications for small-state diplomacy and negotiation theory, and suggesting directions for future research on the evolving role of small economies in global economy.

1. Literature Review

The literature on economic diplomacy, regarding small, developed countries, often emphasizes the tension between a country's size and its ability to exert influence in the global economy. Early

scholars, including Keohane (1969), emphasized the vulnerability of small states in an anarchic international system dominated by larger powers. More recent research, however, challenges the view of small states as passive actors, highlighting their capacity to act as norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998) and coalition-builders in multilateral settings (Thorhallsson, 2012). In this regard, small, developed countries face challenges engaging in the global economy due to their limited size, resource constraints, geographic isolation and the disproportionate power wielded by larger countries (Baldacchino, 2012). To overcome these obstacles and thrive in the international arena, they employ economic diplomacy as a strategic tool through exerting considerable influence by forming alliances and focusing on niche markets where they have specific advantages (Keohane, 1969). Small, developed countries, lacking the bargaining power of larger states, often rely on international partnerships, and participation in multilateral organizations, and they tend to prioritize trade liberalization, investment flows, and foreign policy strategies aligned with their specific economic needs. López and Higgott (2015) further support this by noting that small countries can use economic diplomacy not only to secure market access but also to cultivate soft power through the promotion of their values and norms in international economic policies, and they often engage in multilateral diplomacy to secure preferential trade agreements and emphasize their role in global governance. Comparative scholars also shed lights on parallels with other small, developed economies such as Singapore, Chile, and Switzerland. These states, like New Zealand employ strategies of small statecraft by embedding themselves in dense networks of agreements and institutions, thereby amplifying their influence beyond material power (Henrikson, 2001). This perspective is valuable in contextualizing New Zealand's role in CPTPP as part of a broader small-state strategy of leveraging multilateralism to enhance economic resilience. Overall, small, developed countries face challenges in the global economy arising from their limited size, resource constraints, and geographic isolation. In scholarly literature, small states are generally defined as countries with modest material capabilities, limited domestic markets and constrained bargaining power relative to larger economies, yet possessing advanced governance structures, high human development, and diversified economies (Thorhallsson, 2012; Baldacchino, 2012). These are the states that are economically advanced but structurally vulnerable due to dependence on external markets and exposure to external shocks.

To overcome these obstacles, ensure their prosperity and thrive in the international arena, such countries employ economic diplomacy as a strategic instrument, seeking to expand influence by aligning with larger economies, fostering competitiveness, and embedding themselves in multilateral trade frameworks. This is particularly evident in the case of New Zealand, a small, developed island economy in the South Pacific that has built a dynamic and resilient economy, dependent on trade with the rest of the world despite being distant from larger markets (Simmons, 2002; Rochford, 2010). With a population of around five million and an export-dependent structure, New Zealand's economy exemplifies the characteristics of a modern small state which is agile, open, and highly integrated into global supply chains. Its success in international trade stems from strategic engagement in economic diplomacy to mitigate the disadvantages of size and geography. Boulhol et al. (2008) further found that distance has a considerable impact on

GDP per capita. In New Zealand where it is indicated that distance from and access to markets may reduce GDP per capita up to 10%. Indeed, the distance related costs of exports have remained constant (Berthelon and Freund, 2004). In this regard, New Zealand is referred as unique among OECD members in facing both size and distance related problems. These challenges have led to the engagement in multilateral and regional economic organizations such as the WTO and APEC, and the pursuit of free trade agreements with key partners, in which New Zealand has leveraged negotiation and coalition-building to enhance its access to global markets and strengthen its economic resilience (New Zealand Treasury, 2014).

Despite its small size, New Zealand has successfully engaged in economic diplomacy to ensure its economic interests are advanced on the world stage (Azevedo, 2014). Its strategy combines diplomatic methods with economic diplomacy tools, reflecting its need for adapting global economic shifts. Its strategic location, abundant natural resources, and skilled workforce have contributed to its economic prosperity. While traditionally reliant on primary industries such as agriculture and tourism, New Zealand has successfully diversified its economy to include advanced manufacturing, information technology, and financial service in terms of economic growth. In a broad sense, NZ is a small domestic but highly competitive market, characterized by open and export-oriented economy, following free market principles. The country's GDP accounts for approximately 30% of overall GDP (New Zealand Now, 2012), turns out to be relatively high to reflect the country's economic output. Its GDP was valued at NZ\$85.34 billion in the year 2003 and increased to NZ\$211.67 billion in the year 2013 (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, 2013). It has a population of around 5 million people, making it a relatively small domestic, and diverse market with a combination of key sectors within agricultural commodities (Evans, 2004), manufacturing, tourism, services, technology and innovation.

In this regard, primary sector-based exports, consisting of agricultural commodities remain important sources of the country's export receipts, while export of services, manufacturing, tourism, technology and innovation also provide significant contribution. This, together with dependence on imports of raw materials and capital equipment for industry, makes NZ strongly trade oriented, and its success hinges on its ability to navigate the complexities of the global marketplace.

New Zealand is highly oriented toward securing free trade agreements (FTAs) with major trading partners (Manning, 2016), aiming to secure broader market access, promote trade liberalization, and strengthen its position in the global economy within successful trade negotiations, highlighting New Zealand's ability to navigate a highly competitive global trade landscape (Hirsch & Smith, 2020). In this context, New Zealand has prioritized establishing its place in the global economy. This approach, known as open regionalism, involving New Zealand's participation in economic diplomacy through regional and international organizations such as APEC and the World Trade Organization, allows NZ to influence global trade rules and ensure that it has a seat at table with its interests recognized in global trade negotiations, and for promoting trade liberalization (Jiang, 2014). In sum, New Zealand's experience exemplifies how a small, developed country can use economic diplomacy as an essential tool to secure its economic well-being.

2. Leveraging the CPTPP: New Zealand's Strategic Adaptation to Small-State Constraints in Global Trade

New Zealand's geographically isolated position that is far from major global markets continues to impose significant structural constraints on its trade competitiveness. This distance increases logistics costs by approximately 10 % of GDP compared to centrally located OECD economies (World Bank, 2024). Combined with a small domestic market of around five million people, these constraints make New Zealand highly dependent on international trade to sustain growth. Its export structure remains dominated by primary sector products (Gonuguntla, 2019), including dairy, meat, and horticulture, which together account for over 60% of merchandise exports (Stats NZ, 2024) and remain important sources of the country's export receipts. Despite these vulnerabilities, New Zealand has sought to mitigate its small-state disadvantages through an active and sophisticated strategy of economic diplomacy, emphasizing trade diversification, plurilateral engagement, and negotiation-driven adaptation.

The country has specialized in high-quality agricultural products and integrated itself into global supply chains by leveraging Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), technological innovation, and partnerships with multinational firms (MFAT, 2024). These specialized exports enhance competitiveness beyond signaling New Zealand's reputation as a high-standard producer in the global economy.

In terms of trade, New Zealand's economic diplomacy contends with the trade barriers in key markets. Although it is considered a relatively open economy with low tariffs, and easy to trade, some non-tariff barriers do exist. For example, the agriculture sector could limit New Zealand's ability to expand market access in high-growth emerging markets. In this case, New Zealand's economic diplomacy is centered on several key objectives, such as trade liberalization, facilitation, and market access through participating in regional and global free trade agreements to secure access to foreign markets for its goods and services. Indeed, NZ aims to diversify its market to reduce reliance on traditional partners like Australia and expand to high-value sectors in global economy. Additionally, New Zealand seeks to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) to stimulate economic growth, support innovation, and create jobs. This includes promoting sectors of agriculture, technology, manufacturing, and building favorable conditions for investment, particularly in high-tech industries, infrastructure, and green technologies by attracting technology and innovation.

In a sense, NZ can leverage trade agreements to enter new markets and increase exports of specialized products, highlighting its ability to navigate a highly competitive global trade environment. As a strategy of small, developed countries increasing their influence by aligning with the larger economies to advance their interests, New Zealand has benefited from this strategy and remains well-positioned to engage in the changing global and regional landscape through plurilateral discussions as part of its strategy moving forward open regionalism to plurilateral discussions through agreements to gain economic clout.

The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) stands as one of the major plurilateral free trade agreements with advanced provisions across a range

of areas, covering services, non-tariff barriers, and investment, involving 11 countries including Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam (Groser, 2024), covers nearly 15 % of global GDP and accounts for about 17 % New Zealand's total trade value (NZD 26 billion in 2023) (MFAT, 2024). It has become a cornerstone for New Zealand's economy, particularly for trade policy, in which New Zealand has been a key player in its formation and ongoing implementation. By joining the CPTPP, NZ secured preferential access to diverse markets across Asia and the Americas, reinforcing its traditional trade diplomacy objective of diversification beyond Australia, China, and the United States. Besides, throughout the CPTPP New Zealand has become an active advocate of free trade and plurilateral agreements (Hirsch & Smith, 2020). The agreement is particularly significant for New Zealand, ensuring preferential access to a network of key markets in Asia-Pacific. It also emerged as the successor to the original Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) after the withdrawal of the United States, exemplifying New Zealand's strategy of engaging with like-minded nations to secure open markets and trade opportunities and prompting a fresh round of discussions. It seems possible that NZ can effectively engage in the global economy by using global trade frameworks like CPTPP to expand its economic footprint. However, the CPTPP's effects are not uniformly positive, and a more critical assessment reveals that while it has partly mitigated some structural constraints, it has magnified others. Since New Zealand is a small, export-dependent domestic market, the CPTPP creates a free-trade zone by reducing tariff barriers for NZ's agricultural exports to key economies such as Japan, Canada, and Mexico, which were previously protected markets. This has helped buffer the economy against overreliance on the Chinese market, where nearly 30 % of exports were concentrated as of 2022 (New Zealand Treasury, 2023). The CPTPP thus functions as a risk-diversification mechanism, enabling more balanced exposure across multiple economies. On the other, NZ's continued dependence on the primary sector underscores the limited transformative effect of the CPTPP on its overall economic structure. While the agreement opened markets for agricultural goods, it has done less to stimulate value-added exports, digital trade, or innovation-driven industries, sectors that are critical for long-term resilience. While the CPTPP participation has improved market access, it has not substantially diversified the export base away from commodities (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2024), as part of a key strategic goal of NZ's economic diplomacy. Further, the dominance of larger economies within the CPTPP, particularly Japan and Canada, means that New Zealand's bargaining power remains constrained in rule-making and regulatory standard-setting. As a small state, NZ often aligns itself with like-minded partners to amplify its influence, but the asymmetry in negotiation capacity persists. The country's success within the CPTPP therefore lies not in its material leverage but in its institutional entrepreneurship, using diplomacy to embed itself in high-standard trade frameworks and shape norms consistent with open, transparent trade governance (Lopez & Higgott, 2015). Overall, the agreement ensures that New Zealand products can compete on a more equal footing with those of other countries, enhancing competitiveness of its exports globally. It would be indicated as the boost to agriculture and primary industries, since it is particularly advantageous to New Zealand's agricultural sector, which is the cornerstone of its economy.

Tariff reductions on dairy, meat, and other agricultural exports to major markets such as Japan, Canada, and Mexico have strengthened New Zealand's position in these global markets.

For instance, New Zealand's agricultural exporters benefit from greater access to these countries' markets without facing prohibitive tariffs. In addition to goods, CPTPP also facilitates the free flow of services. New Zealand's services sector, including tourism, finance, and technology, stands to benefit from easier market access across member countries, further helping trade. In conclusion, while CPTPP has clearly expanded New Zealand's trade opportunities and reduced dependence on a few markets, it has not yet fully transformed the structural vulnerabilities associated with its economic geography and export composition. The agreement mitigates risks through diversification and institutional integration but simultaneously magnifies exposure to global demand shocks in commodity sectors. Therefore, for New Zealand, the CPTPP membership is best understood as a strategic adaptation mechanism that enhances agency within constraints, but does not eliminate the limitations of size, distance, or primary sector dependence.

Conclusion

New Zealand's experience in navigating economic diplomacy provides crucial insights into how small, developed countries can leverage strategic frameworks to mitigate challenges and enhance their global economic engagement. As outlined in this paper, New Zealand's geographic isolation, reliance on primary sector-based exports, and small domestic market have hampered its global economic integration. However, through a well-balanced approach to economic diplomacy, including the participation in plurilateral trade agreements like the CPTPP, strategic partnerships, and leveraging international organizations, New Zealand has effectively expanded its economic footprint. Central to New Zealand's strategy, the CPTPP is crucial as it exemplifies the country's proactive stance in securing market access, diversifying trade partners, and retaining competitiveness in the global economy, by enabling New Zealand to engage with both developed and emerging markets, ensuring preferential access to major economies while reducing dependency on traditional partners, enhancing economic resilience, and positioning New Zealand to capitalize on emerging opportunities in sectors beyond primary industries, such as technology, digital services, and advanced manufacturing. The application of negotiation theory in the case of New Zealand highlights the significance of systemic and domestic factors in shaping its economic diplomacy. From a systemic standpoint, New Zealand's relative economic power, which is small, trade-dependent market economy, necessitates strategic alignment with international organizations such as the CPTPP and WTO, which serve as vital mechanisms for regulating free trade and mitigating asymmetrical power dynamics, mostly faced by small economies.

Domestically, institutions such as New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), and Export New Zealand play crucial roles in advancing national interests and facilitating effective bargaining. Furthermore, the two-level game framework highlights how New Zealand balances domestic interests with international commitments, ensuring that its participation in agreements like CPTPP aligns with national economic priorities.

From an ideational perspective, New Zealand's approach has been characterized by a focus on open regionalism and globalization as a market force, enabling its active participation in regional economic integration while maintaining a strong commitment to free trade principles.

The country's particular challenges, such as geographic isolation and reliance on primary sector exports, have driven its pursuit of comparative advantage in niche markets. By leveraging its strengths in high-quality agricultural products, technology and innovation, New Zealand has effectively positioned itself as a competitive player in the global marketplace. The enter-exit dynamics of international agreements have also played a role in shaping the trade strategy, as exemplified with the evolution of the CPTPP. In this context, New Zealand's strategy reflects an understanding of enter-exit dynamics and the shifting geopolitical landscape. The agreement's provisions on services, investment, and non-tariff barriers provide New Zealand with a competitive advantage in high-value sectors. Despite facing challenges such as global economic volatility and trade barriers in key markets, New Zealand's commitment to free trade and regional integration has enabled it to secure continual economic benefits. The CPTPP's potential expansion to align with member economies further reinforces its strategic importance for New Zealand, offering opportunities for deeper economic engagement and enhanced influence in shaping regional trade norms. In conclusion, New Zealand's engagement in the global economy in the post-2010 period, particularly through the CPTPP, demonstrates how small, developed countries can overcome size and geographic constraints within strategic economic diplomacy. By aligning with larger economies, participating in international organizations, and leveraging its comparative advantages, New Zealand has secured a significant role in the global economy. Moving forward, engagement in plurilateral discussions as in the CPTPP, ongoing adaptation to global trade, and continued emphasis on innovation and diversification will be critical to maintaining its economic resilience and competitiveness.

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