

Exporting to Türkiye: Customs & Import Risks

A practical guide for Chinese companies shipping goods to Turkish buyers

The goods are in Türkiye, but the buyer will not clear them?

For Chinese manufacturers, exporters, suppliers and trading companies selling to Türkiye.

This guide covers:

01 Why goods get stuck at Turkish customs

02 What the Chinese exporter can actually control

03 Why GTIP, origin and import measures matter

04 What to do when the buyer refuses to clear

05 How to reduce the risk before shipment

Why are your goods stuck at Turkish customs?

Arrival does not mean delivery

Arrival in Türkiye does not mean the goods can be handed to the buyer straight away. Clearance can be delayed by the buyer, the documents, the product itself or the import rules.

01 · The buyer has not started clearance

The buyer stops replying, lacks funds, does not want to pay the import costs or has decided not to take the goods.

02 · Classification

The GTIP code used in the declaration differs from the classification Turkish customs considers correct.

03 · Origin or documents

The certificate of origin, commercial invoice, transport documents or other papers are incomplete, inconsistent or need verification.

04 · Licences or compliance checks

Some products are subject to product safety rules, technical regulations, licences, inspections or other import controls.

05 · Additional duties or trade measures

Depending on classification and origin, additional customs duty, anti-dumping duty or other trade policy measures may apply.

06 · Customs value

The declared customs value may be reviewed or disputed.

Do not just wait for “we are handling it”

Find out quickly: Where are the goods? Has a declaration been filed? What is the customs status? Who holds the transport documents? Are storage or demurrage charges already running?

Who controls the customs clearance?

What the Chinese exporter can do

In an ordinary China–Türkiye sale the Turkish buyer is normally the importer, so the Chinese exporter is not necessarily in a position to control the Turkish customs procedure directly. What is possible depends on the structure of the deal, the transport documents, the status of the declaration and the legal position of each party.

When a problem arises, confirm four things

Import declaration

Has the buyer filed an import declaration?

Broker

Has the Turkish customs broker started work?

Status of the goods

Are the goods still in temporary storage, a bonded warehouse or another form of customs supervision?

Release

Has customs released the goods into free circulation?

Sea freight: check the bill of lading at once. Who holds the original B/L? How was it issued? Has there been a telex release? Has delivery been authorised?

An exporter that still controls the key transport documents usually has more commercial options than one that has released them unconditionally.

Holding the bill of lading ≠ the right to deal with Turkish customs

Payment terms, control of the B/L and import arrangements should be designed together before shipment.

GTİP, origin and import measures

Classification, origin and trade measures

GTİP (*Gümrük Tarife İstatistik Pozisyonu*) is the 12-digit customs tariff code used in Türkiye. The correct GTİP can affect:

Customs duty and other taxes

Product inspections

Import licences

Additional duties

Anti-dumping and other trade measures

The Chinese HS code is not necessarily the final Turkish classification. The first six digits of the GTİP follow the international Harmonized System, but Türkiye uses twelve, and the code on Chinese export documents does not bind Turkish customs.

Where classification is uncertain, it should be assessed before shipment by the Turkish importer or another appropriate party. In suitable cases binding tariff information (BTB) can be requested for greater certainty.

Origin matters as well

The country of origin is not always the country of dispatch. Origin can affect duties, anti-dumping measures, safeguards and other trade policy measures. Check the applicable duties, trade measures and product requirements for the **specific product + GTİP + origin + planned import date**.

What if the Turkish buyer refuses to clear the goods?

Do not just keep chasing the buyer

- 1 Establish the current status.** Contact the carrier or forwarder, the buyer, the customs broker and the warehouse to confirm whether a declaration has been filed, which customs procedure the goods are under and what charges have accrued.
- 2 Confirm who controls the transport documents.** Who holds the bill of lading and other key documents determines how many options remain.
- 3 Assess return or other solutions.** Depending on the stage, return to the place of dispatch (*mahrece iade*), re-export or another lawful customs treatment can be assessed. These are not available automatically at every stage; they generally depend on statutory conditions and customs permission.

The earlier the status is established, the better the chance of deciding before costs rise further.

The buyer has taken the goods but has not paid? That is no longer only a customs problem. See Guide 01, *Recovering Receivables in Türkiye*.

Customs deadlines matter

Do not wait until the goods go into liquidation

Goods cannot stay under customs supervision indefinitely while the buyer makes up its mind.

Goods that entered under a summary declaration generally have to be assigned a customs-approved treatment or use within a set time:

45 days	Sea freight (as a rule)
20 days	Other modes of transport (as a rule)

Time generally runs from the date of the summary declaration or, where that declaration was lodged before arrival, from presentation of the goods to customs. An extension can be requested in writing where the conditions are met.

If no customs procedure is started in time, the goods may by law be placed in liquidation (*tasfiye*) and may be disposed of, for example by public auction. Meanwhile storage, container demurrage, return freight and other commercial costs keep growing.

Ask two more questions today

How many days are left before the customs deadline?

If the buyer does nothing today, what is our alternative?

Protect the shipment before it leaves China

The best customs crisis is the one that never happens

01 · Check the importer

Verify the Turkish buyer's company details, whether it is trading and whether it meets the conditions for importing the product.

02 · Check the GTİP

Do not simply reuse an old HS code. For high-value, technical or regulated goods, confirm the Turkish classification and import requirements before shipping.

03 · Check origin and product requirements

Confirm origin documents, product certification, technical regulations, import licences, safety inspections and any trade measures in advance.

04 · Design payment and document control

Weigh advance payment, letters of credit, documentary collection, staged payment and control of the bill of lading against the risk.

05 · Use Incoterms properly

State who is responsible for transport, insurance, import clearance, duties and import costs, and when risk passes. Incoterms do not replace a full sales contract and payment security.

06 · Deal with non-clearance in the contract

What if the buyer refuses or delays clearance? Who pays the extra storage and logistics costs? What may the exporter do instead? How is non-payment pursued?

How Tercan Legal can help

Supporting Chinese exporters in Türkiye

Chinese companies exporting to Turkish buyers

Legal options when goods are held · contract issues arising from refusal to clear or to pay · legal risk on GTİP, origin and import requirements · the legal framework for return and other customs solutions · contract, payment and risk structure for future deals

Chinese companies with a Turkish company or importing directly

Classification disputes · customs valuation disputes · objections to customs penalties · customs litigation

Goods held in Türkiye right now?

Have these ready: commercial invoice · packing list · bill of lading or transport documents · sales contract or purchase order · origin documents · customs or warehouse documents · the main correspondence with the buyer and the logistics providers.

The earlier the customs status is established, the easier it is to judge the next step.

Contact Tercan Legal

Istanbul · Acting in matters throughout Türkiye

Tercan Legal is an Istanbul law firm that has advised foreign clients from more than 40 countries since 2013. Matters are handled by lawyers registered with the Istanbul Bar; the founding lawyer spent years as in-house counsel to banks.

Start with a free 20-minute online introductory meeting. Document review, written opinions and detailed consultations are charged, on terms agreed in writing beforehand. Send us a message with a time that suits you for a call.

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Written materials can be provided in Chinese; the language of day-to-day communication is agreed before engagement.

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