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Turkey's African Experience: From Venture to Normalisation

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ABSTRACT

Between 2005 and 2015, Turkey's sub-Saharan Africa policy has been transformed in such a way that it now constitutes one of the main focuses of Ankara's foreign policy. Initially begun with a modest humanitarian dimension, it now ranges across economic, social, political and security relations. This paper argues that Turkey's foreign and development policy towards Africa has changed at ideational, societal and institutional levels. On the ideational front, there is a new geographical imagination – a profound change in perceptions of Africa, mostly from negative to positive – in Turkey that sees Africa from a totally different perspective compared with a decade ago, while institutionally Turkey has been more visible in Africa. All these levels can be observed in Turkey's approach to sub-Saharan Africa and indicate that Ankara's policy has reached a level of normalisation, in the sense that it is no longer "new" but rather constitutes usual and normal relations.

Turkish foreign policy | Sub-Saharan Africa | Economic aid | Military missions | European Union | United States

keywords

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Introduction

Turkey's Africa initiative has produced dividends in less than a decade. In the early 2000s, Africa was not a serious consideration in Turkish foreign policy. When people talked about Africa, it was mostly limited to the North of Africa, where Turkey has considerable relations as a result of a shared religious and Ottoman background. In this context Turkey has pursued an aggressive, yet increasingly sophisticated and comprehensive, sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) policy since 2002. In retrospect, Ankara's Africa policy and the positive response it received from African countries went beyond the imagination of many. Indeed, the Justice and Development Party's Africa policy represents, hands down, the most successful aspect of Turkish foreign policy over the past decade. The Africa initiative, whose origins date back to 1998 and which was implemented beginning in 2002, promises to become a lasting element of the nation's foreign policy thanks to its content and potential repercussions.¹ In recent years, the Turkish government's interest in the African continent has expanded geographically into sub-Saharan Africa and thematically into the domains of security, humanitarian assistance and economic relations. The nation's active involvement at all levels in Somalia, in particular, has received much attention from across the continent and contributed to the consolidation of Turkey's position in Africa. Thus far, closer economic cooperation, coupled with more than half a million US dollars in development aid and humanitarian assistance, has formed the basis of this new approach. Various government agencies (e.g. AFAD, TIKA, YTB) and non-governmental organisations (IHH, Cansuyu, Hasene, etc.) have actively contributed to furthering the nation's relations with the African continent.² Meanwhile, the Turkish authorities' take on

¹ Numan Hazar, "Turkey's Policy of Outreach to Africa: An Assessment", in *Journal of Business Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 4, No. 7 (April 2015), p. 3-11.

² Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün, "Turkey's Opening to Africa", in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (December 2010), p. 525-546, <https://works.bepress.com/mehmetozkan/86>.

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· Paper produced in the framework of a project entitled "The EU, the US and the International Strategic Dimension of Sub-Saharan Africa: Peace, Security and Development in the Horn of Africa", August 2016. Copyright © Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS).

Somalia and other nations indicates that Ankara is interested in becoming not only an economic power in the continent but also a political ally. This brief intends to give a comprehensive perspective on the state of Turkey-Africa relations and the implications for the European Union (EU), the United States (US) and other actors at the international level.

1. Defining Turkey as an actor in Africa

The comprehensiveness and complexity of Turkey-Africa relations is already known. However, in order to contextualise contemporary relations very broadly, Turkey's Africa experience since the early 2000s can be explained as having occurred in five stages,³ each having laid the groundwork for the next.

The period between the Justice and Development Party's rise to power in 2002 and the designation of 2005 as the Year of Africa represented a preliminary stage of Turkey's foreign policy towards Africa. It was during these years that initial assessments of Africa's potential were made and lower-level meetings were held between Turkish officials and their African counterparts. When, as a sign of the success of this process of deliberation, Turkey designated the year 2005 as the Year of Africa, African governments were not taken by surprise. Announcing 2005 as the Year of Africa in practice generated a debate about Africa in Turkey and was followed by concrete actions in subsequent years. At the same time, the move represented an unmistakable sign of Turkey's commitment to building stronger relations with Africa.

The second period, which started in 2005 and ended with the first Turkey-Africa Summit three years later, marked a period of more diverse relations in a range of areas, including politics and the economy. During this period, Turkish-African relations made more progress than the Turkish authorities had initially predicted, while both sides became more familiar with their counterparts. The main purpose of the 2008 Turkey-Africa Summit was to develop a mutual perspective on cooperation, and this has been mostly achieved.

The third period began with the 2008 summit and continued until then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's August 2011 visit to the Somali capital. This was when Turkish-African relations assumed a multi-dimensional nature. While the Turkish government opened embassies in various African countries in almost every region of Africa, the nation's trade volume with Africa tripled from 6 billion dollars to approximately 18 billion dollars.⁴ As such, the years between 2005 and

³ Mehmet Özkan, "A Post-2014 Vision for Turkey-Africa Relations", in *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2014), p. 25-26, <http://www.insightturkey.com/a-post-2014-vision-for-turkey-africa-relations/articles/1488>.

⁴ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, *Turkey-Africa Relations*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-africa-relations.en.mfa>.

2008 represent a key period of growing complexity in Turkey's Africa policy.

It was during the fourth period, which began with Erdoğan's official visit to Somalia, that Turkish-African relations assumed a different nature – a political one. In 2011, the Turkish government's Somalia Initiative represented the nation's added focus on high politics, i.e. political matters and security issues, in addition to mere economic ties and humanitarian or development aid. As a matter of fact, Turkey's involvement in Somalia constitutes a second experience of state-building for Ankara, after the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, although they differ both in scope and in nature. The restoration of relative public order in Somalia, and the world's renewed interest in the conflict, rendered Turkey a prominent stakeholder whose opinions were widely appreciated. As a result, Turkish authorities met with representatives from the European Union, Great Britain, Spain, Norway and the United States, among others, on African issues, mostly in bilateral formats. Most of these meetings took place within a framework of exchanging ideas and understanding Turkey's position and policy toward Africa. This was the first time that the international community started to see Turkey as a potential partner on Africa.

The end of 2014 marked the beginning of the fifth chapter in Turkish-African relations. The coming years will be particularly important, as they will present opportunities to consolidate existing achievements and develop a more systematic approach. At an institutional level, for example, the 2014 Malabo Summit paved the way for the full normalisation of the Turkish government's relations with countries in Africa, as most African leaders attending the 2008 Turkey-Africa Summit retained some doubts about the sincerity of Turkey's interest in the continent. However, such sentiments were absent at the Malabo Summit; on the contrary, the summit advanced relations still further, as stated in the 2015-2019 Joint Implementation Plan.⁵ However, the Malabo Summit agenda focused on the possibility of more comprehensive cooperation and maximising mutual benefits for the future. In the 2015-2019 Joint Implementation Plan, Turkey and the African Union (AU) agreed on the development of political, social and economic relations, with a special focus on health, communication, tourism, peace and security, and mediation.

2. The role of Turkey in peace and security in SSA

Since 2011, Turkey has become more involved in peace and security throughout Africa. The security elements in Turkey-Africa relations essentially have three dimensions. Firstly, Turkey has contributed to international efforts to ensure peace and stability in Africa. Ankara contributes to the United Nations (UN) missions deployed in the continent. As of August 2015, Turkey was taking part in seven of

⁵ Turkey-Africa Joint Implementation Plan 2015-2019, Second Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit, Malabo, 19-21 November 2014, <http://afrika.mfa.gov.tr/summit.en.mfa>.

the nine existing UN missions in Africa, albeit providing only a small number of police and military officers. In addition, by the end of 2014, military training was provided in Turkey for 2,200 military personnel from over 20 African countries. This training was implemented through a joint project between the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and the Turkish National Police Academy in Ankara. For the period 2015-2016 it expected to receive more than 1,200 African military personnel for training.⁶

Secondly, Turkey has contributed to the security of international trade through its efforts in the Horn of Africa. Since 2009, Turkey has taken an active role in combatting piracy in the Gulf of Aden⁷ and has provided military support to fight against this scourge in cooperation with the EU and the UN. The Turkish G-class frigate *Turkiye Cumhuriyeti Giresun* (TCG Giresun) joined the Combined Task Force 151, which was formed by the United Nations Security Council.⁸ The Giresun frigate was sent on a four-month mission, starting 25 February 2009, within the framework of the Turkish Armed Forces' authorisation to serve in the sea off of Somalia. According to the mandate, Turkish Armed Forces personnel would not engage in ground operations against piracy and armed robbery; instead they would provide protection to Turkish merchant and military ships within their task areas. Upon the expiry of its mandate, the Giresun frigate returned to Turkey on 25 June 2009. However, on 19 June 2009 another frigate, the *Gediz* frigate, was sent to the Gulf of Aden with 28 commissioned officers, 156 non-commissioned officers, ten specialised sergeants and 72 rank-and-file personnel on board.⁹ Subsequently, the TCG *Gokova* frigate was dispatched to combat piracy after the return of the *Gediz* frigate due to the expiration of its mandate in September 2009. A total of 267 staff, including 30 commissioned officers, 158 non-commissioned officers and 79 soldiers, served on the frigate for five and a half months in the Gulf of Aden.¹⁰ On 20 February 2010, SAT (Underwater Offence Group) commandos neutralised seven sea pirates in the Gulf of Aden. The TCG *Gemlik* frigate (F-492) indicated that SAT commandos had impeded pirates from attacking a Japanese ship in the Gulf of Aden.¹¹

⁶ Feridun Sinirlioğlu, "Turkey in Africa. A Humanitarian Approach", in *TesfaNews*, 11 November 2015, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/article-by-h_e_-feridun-sinirlioglu-published-in-tesfanews_net_-on-11-november-2015.en.mfa.

⁷ Mehmet Özkan, *Turkey's Involvement in Somalia: Assessment of a State-Building in Progress*, Ankara, SETA Publications, 2014, p. 32-34, <http://setav.org/en/turkeys-involvement-in-somalia-asesment-of-a-state-building-in-progress/book/17644>.

⁸ "Turkish frigate sets sail to join international Somali piracy mission", in *Hürriyet*, 17 February 2009, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkish-frigate-sets-sail-to-join-international-somali-piracy-mission-11022802>.

⁹ "TCG *Gediz* Fırkateyni Aden Körfezi'ne uğurlandı" (TCG *Gediz* frigate sent to the Gulf of Aden), in *Sabah*, 19 June 2009, http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2009/06/19/tcg_gediz_firkateyni_aden_korfezine_ugurlandi.

¹⁰ "TCG *Gökova*, Korsan Avına Uğurlandı", in *Deniz Haber*, 27 September 2009, <http://www.denizhaber.com/deniz-kuvvetleri/tcg-gokova-korsan-avina-ugurlandi-h19132.html>.

¹¹ "TCG *Gemlik* Fırkateyni, 7 deniz haydudunu ele geçirdi" (TCG *Gemlik* Frigate captured 7 pirates), in *Milliyet*, 21 February 2010, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/d/t.aspx?ID=1202013>.

On 1 April 2010 a Taiwanese-flagged ship was hijacked, and on 7 April 2010 a Turkish bulk carrier named Yasin-C was hijacked 270 nautical miles from its destination at Kenya's port of Mombasa. According to a statement delivered by the Turkish General Staff on 1 April,¹² the Gallipoli frigate had interfered with a pirate ship in the Gulf of Aden, which was preparing to attack other ships, and captured nine pirates. According to another statement made by the Turkish General Staff on 18 April,¹³ the Gallipoli frigate had organised an operation with two speedboats near the north-east of the Seychelles against a pirate ship, which was close to the route of the Turkish-flagged ship Servet-Y. Following this operation, 13 pirates were neutralised and the materials used were captured.

Thirdly, Ankara continues to contribute to the state-building process in Somalia, increasingly with a security component.¹⁴ Turkey mostly provides support to the Somali central government in the area of training for security services. Since 2011, Turkey has dedicated a budget of 20 million Turkish lira for the restructuring of the Somali army and its police forces. One of its projects is to build a non-commissioned officer school in Mogadishu with a capacity of 100 student-officers in the first phase, followed by plans to start building the foundations for professional military ground, air and naval schools. Turkey's General Directorate of Security, the Turkish General Staff, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have conducted various studies on how best to restructure the Somali army and police forces. Turkey has pledged to contribute to building infrastructure and to configuring and training the Somali police in order to ensure stability. To this end, 60 Somali police officers were brought to Turkey through the General Directorate of Security, then sent back to Somalia after receiving training at the Police Academy. Subsequently, more than 500 police officers have travelled to Turkey for training in the last three years.¹⁵ Currently Turkey has expanded its military activities, with the Turkish Armed Forces involved in training the Somali army, as requested by the Somali government, and opened a military base in Somalia.¹⁶

However, Turkey's engagement in Somalia has not been without its detractors. On 27 July 2013, the Turkish embassy in Mogadishu was attacked, leaving one dead and three wounded from among the Turkish security forces.¹⁷ Shortly before President Erdoğan's January 2015 visit, militants attacked the hotel where the Turkish forward-planning team was based. Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin ("al-

¹² Ankara University African Studies Research Center, "Korsanlar İle Türk Firkateyni Arasındaki 'Kovalamaca' Devam Ediyor", in *Afrika Gündemi*, No. 16 (April 2010), p. 36-37, http://bultenler.ankara.edu.tr/detail.php?id=47&sayi_id=875.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mehmet Özkan, *Turkey's Involvement in Somalia*, cit., p. 31-32.

¹⁵ "TSK Somali Askerini Eğitecek" (Armed Forces to Train Somali Troops), in *TimeTurk*, 4 March 2013, <http://www.timeturk.com/tr/2013/03/04/tsk-somali-askerini-egitecek.html>.

¹⁶ "First Turkish military base in Africa to open in Somalia", in *Daily Sabah*, 19 January 2016, <http://sabahdai.ly/6hKkhZ>.

¹⁷ Feisal Omar and Abdi Sheikh, "Al-Shabaab Claim Attack on Turkish Mission in Somalia, Three Dead", in *Reuters*, 27 July 2013, <http://reut.rs/13lDRv5>.

Shabaab") claimed responsibility for both attacks.¹⁸

Ankara's involvement in restoring peace and security in Somalia has been focused especially on three approaches.¹⁹ Humanitarianism has been the main theme and one of the most pronounced official discourses since the start of bilateral relations. Humanitarianism relates not only to emergency aid, but also to development aid. With a mixture of both aid policies, Turkey has become a leading and visible actor in Somalia.²⁰

The second aspect of Turkey's Somalia policy relates to implementation of its development policies. There has been a convergence of activities by the state apparatus and civil society organisations such as IHH Humanitarian Relief Organisation and others on the ground.²¹ This unofficial coalition – most often lacking perfect coordination – has boosted Turkey's overall visibility in Somalia. Most importantly, based on the author's observation and conversations in Mogadishu, whatever has been done in Somalia, irrespective of whether it has been done by state institutions or civil society, all the credit has gone to Turkey, making it appear as if Ankara were the initiator of everything.

The third aspect of Ankara's involvement is its regional approach. Turkey has realised that the "Somalia problem," with all its complexities, goes beyond the nation-state and includes regional and global dimensions.²² This approach has mostly stemmed from a geopolitical understanding that without solving the regional balance, any peace in Somalia is likely to be temporary. At the Fifth Annual Ambassadors Conference in Ankara, on 2 January 2013, then-Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu demonstrated Turkey's recognition of the issue at hand when he announced Turkey's integrated strategy to address the issues in Eastern Africa as a whole. Davutoğlu discussed Ankara's diplomatic commitment to ease tensions between Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia.²³ When Turkey opened an embassy in Eritrea in 2013, it became the only country to have

¹⁸ Mehmet Özkan and Serhat Orakçi, "Turkey as a 'Political' Actor in Africa - An Assessment of Turkish Involvement in Somalia", in *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2015), p. 344, <https://works.bepress.com/mehmetozkan/234>.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 346.

²⁰ Mensur Akgün, "Somali'de Yeni Bir Devlet İnşaa Ediyoruz" (We are Building a New State in Somalia), in *Star*, 22 December 2012, <http://haber.stargazete.com/yazar/somalide-yeni-bir-devlet-insa-ediyoruz/yazi-714006>.

²¹ Mahad Wasuge, *Turkey's Assistance Model in Somalia: Achieving Much with Little*, Mogadishu, The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, February 2016, <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/?p=2643>.

²² Serhat Orakçi, "Somali'nin geleceği ve 2015 hedefleri" (Somalia's future and 2015 targets), in *Dünya Bülteni* (World Bulletin), 28 May 2012, <http://www.dunyabulteni.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=211627>.

²³ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Speech at the Fifth Annual Ambassadors Conference* (in Turkish), Ankara, 2 January 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-v_-buyukelciler-konferansinda-yaptigi-konusma_-2-ocak-2013_-ankara.tr.mfa. See also Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Minister Davutoğlu "History flowed fast in 2012. It will flow faster in 2013 and we will work harder"*, 2 January 2013, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/foreign-minister-davutoglu-history-flowed-fast-in-2012.en.mfa>.

embassies in all countries in the region.

Less than four years after his first visit on 19 August 2011, President Erdoğan again visited Mogadishu in January 2015 to survey the ongoing development projects. His visit signalled Turkey's strong intention to continue to focus on Somalia's state-building and development. Similarly, in March 2016, Turkey organised an international Somalia conference in Istanbul to focus attention on the situation in Somalia, again at the international level. During the meeting, Erdoğan tweeted that

Somalia has become a symbol of how we view Africa and of the brotherly relations we wish to establish with the African people. Turkey, through its all state bodies and NGOs as well as official and voluntary personnel, supports the rebuilding of Somalia. The international community should assume a more active role in Somalia. We, in cooperation with the international community, will continue to work until Somalia becomes a country of peace and stability.²⁴

Somalia is still considered something of a domestic issue in Turkey. There is perhaps no single state that has contributed more to the betterment of Somalia in the last five years.²⁵ Many Turkish civil society organisations, large and small, have also provided support to rebuild Somalia.

3. The role of Turkey in development in SSA

Between 2005 and 2015, aid has been one of Turkey's strongest foreign policy elements in general and in its Africa policy in particular. The official Turkish aid agency, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, currently has operations in over 40 countries in Africa. TIKA was initially established to help in the post-cold war transition of the states in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Balkans. However, after 2003 it was transformed into a more global aid agency and its areas of operation were expanded, including to Africa.²⁶ Through TIKA offices, Turkey has shown a strong will to widen cooperation with Africa. Turkey has also executed projects by which it provides technical assistance to African countries through TIKA. Turkey's former President Abdullah Gül explained that Turkey is attempting to build relations with Africa by engaging in "health, education, agriculture, environment, infrastructure, and capacity-building" as strategic areas of action,²⁷ which basically constitute the essence of Turkey's humanitarian aid

²⁴ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's twitter posts, 23 February 2016, https://twitter.com/RT_Erdogan.

²⁵ For a detailed account of the roles and projects pursued by Turkey's state agencies in Somalia, see Mehmet Özkan, *Turkey's Involvement in Somalia*, cit.

²⁶ Hakan Fidan and Rahman Nurdun, "Turkey's Role in the Global Development Assistance Community: The Case of TIKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency)", in *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (April 2008), p. 93-111.

²⁷ Anatolian Agency, "Turkish President Attends Meeting on African Development", in *Hürriyet*,

to Africa. In that sense, Turkey has built hospitals in Somalia and Sudan and has implemented many health projects, including for cataract surgery, in central African countries. Many micro-level educational and infrastructural projects, along with capacity-building in many areas, have been carried out through TIKA.

Besides the activities of TIKA, Turkey has also utilised international organisations to provide aid to Africa.²⁸ For example, through the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Red Crescent Society, Turkey has donated 7.5 million dollars to various African countries to help them cope with the negative effects of drought and other natural disasters.²⁹ In 2008, Turkey allocated 3.5 million dollars to humanitarian aid through the WFP,³⁰ while in 2009 it made a modest donation of 0.5 million dollars to the general African Union budget as part of its commitment to institutional development in Africa. In a similar vein, in 2007, Turkey for the first time hosted a summit of the least developed countries (LDC) in Istanbul, of which 33 out of 49 were from Africa. During the summit, Turkey committed 20 million dollars in development aid for African countries. To show Turkey's seriousness and commitment to development of the LDC, Ankara also hosted the fourth conference of least developed countries in the first half of 2011.³¹

Turkish authorities are also aware of the importance of human development in the country's relations with the African continent. In line with this policy, the Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), a prime ministerial office responsible for Turkish scholarships, has covered, and continues to cover, the costs of education for more than a thousand African students in Turkish universities. Similarly, there are Turkish vocational schools in Africa run by several Turkish non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as Hudayi Foundation from Turkey. Turkey's contribution to education in Africa feed up to perception in the continent that Turkey constitutes an important player and also creates an important link between Ankara and the continent.

In addition to these developments, nothing illustrates the remarkable change in Turkey-Africa relations better than the increasing trade and institutional cooperation between the two regions.³² As mentioned above, 2005 was a turning point in Turkey's relations with Africa. Turkey obtained observer status in the African Union in 2005, which declared it a strategic partner in January 2008. In May 2008, Turkey joined the African Development Bank and strengthened its

23 September 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkish-president-attends-meeting-on-african-development-9960222>.

²⁸ Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey's Rising Role in Africa", in *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Winter 2010), p. 97-98, <http://turkishpolicy.com/article/403/turkeys-rising-role-in-africa-winter-2010>.

²⁹ "Africa: Turkey Donates \$3.5 Million for Africa Africa-Turkey Summit to Be Held Next Week", in *AllAfrica*, 13 August 2008, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200808130809.html>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Details about this conference can be found on its official website: Midterm Review of the Istanbul Programme of Action, Antalya, 27-29 May 2016, <http://ldc4istanbul.org>.

³² Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey's Rising Role in Africa", cit., p. 100-101.

relations with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in East Africa and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).³³ The Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEIK) has established eight Business Councils as part of Ankara's attempts to expand business activity with Africa.

While these developments at the political and institutional level are important, the Turkish opening up to Africa is underwritten by soaring bilateral trade. Turkey's trade volume with African countries, only 5.4 billion dollars in 2003, increased nearly threefold by 2008, when it exceeded 14 billion dollars. Despite the economic crisis, trade continued to expand and reached around 17 billion dollars in 2015. Yet, considering Turkey's total trade volume with the world, its current trade volume with African countries is not significant.³⁴

Table 1 | Turkey's trade with Africa, 2006-2015 (million dollars)

| Export | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| North Africa | 3,096 | 4,029 | 5,850 | 7,415 | 7,025 | 6,700 | 9,443 | 10,041 | 9,757 | 8,527 |
| Other Africa | 1,469 | 1,946 | 3,212 | 2,738 | 2,257 | 3,633 | 3,913 | 4,103 | 3,996 | 3,921 |
| Total | 4,565 | 5,975 | 9,062 | 10,153 | 9,282 | 10,333 | 13,356 | 14,144 | 13,753 | 12,448 |

| Import | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| North Africa | 1,676 | 2,285 | 3,535 | 2,237 | 3,098 | 3,342 | 3,308 | 3,508 | 3,435 | 3,006 |
| Other Africa | 2,233 | 2,821 | 2,060 | 1,700 | 1,725 | 3,424 | 2,613 | 2,522 | 2,502 | 2,092 |
| Total | 3,909 | 5,106 | 5,595 | 3,937 | 4,823 | 6,766 | 5,921 | 6,030 | 5,937 | 5,098 |

Source: TurkStat, *Foreign Trade Statistics*, http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1046.

4. Priorities and challenges

Turkey's relations with sub-Saharan Africa, which started out with a strong focus on the dimensions of aid and humanitarian efforts, have since expanded and accelerated with an increase in trade, and deepened by addressing state-building and security. However, despite this positive trajectory Turkey-Africa relations are not without risk.

One can argue that there are two fundamental risks associated with the future direction of Turkey's relations with the African continent. The first risk relates to a certain tiredness of "opening" to Africa, which can be called African fatigue. The

³³ Mehmet Özkan, "What Drives Turkey's Involvement in Africa?", in *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 37, No. 126 (December 2010), p. 533-540, <https://works.bepress.com/mehmetozkan/88>.

³⁴ Turkey's target was to increase trade volume with Africa to around 50 billion dollars by 2015. See Anatolia News Agency, "Turkish PM Erdogan Sees \$50 Billion in African Trade", in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 7 January 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nid=38502>.

opening period that began in 2002 is now over, requiring a much larger vision, planning and a new discourse.

Another key risk relates to the potential influence of domestic developments on Turkey's Africa policy. Since the 17-25 December 2013 graft operations, and more precisely the failed military coup, led by Gulenists in Turkey, of 15 July 2016, the Gulenists have sought to compensate for their losses at home by discrediting the Turkish government inside African countries. Considering that the power struggle in Turkey is unlikely to end in the immediate future, these developments could possibly contribute to closer cooperation between Ankara and African capitals, since the Turkish authorities are increasingly likely to develop a more direct and comprehensive policy toward the continent to counter the negative campaign conducted by the Gulenists. In this sense, various aspects of Turkish-African relations will continue to remain at the forefront of public attention in the foreseeable future.

However, at present there are no serious problems facing Turkish-African relations. The Turkish government's efforts are greatly appreciated across the continent. It is possible, nonetheless, to identify certain shortcomings, if not full-blown problems. The most important point right now relates to the challenging task of making the country's efforts matter on both a regional and a global scale.

Up until 2011, key African countries believed that Turkey's sudden interest in the African continent's affairs was primarily an economic adventure – which is why they concentrated on short-term benefits at the expense of the Turkish government's long-term contributions. Ankara's policy toward Somalia, however, helped transform perceptions of Turkey among both key nations and regional organisations.³⁵ Furthermore, official visits by Turkish leaders have contributed greatly to Turkey's positive image in the continent. However, in the coming years Turkey's position is likely to be put to the test alongside that of other critical players such as France, Great Britain and the United States, as Ankara has expanded its activities in Africa from development aid to themes of high politics such as security.

Domestically, the biggest challenge is the lack of understanding of Africa in both policy circles and academia, which remains the case despite more than a decade of engagement with the continent. There continues to be a shortage of African affairs experts in Turkish think tanks and academia. Although various Turkish institutions have launched Africa research centres in recent years, these organisations remain both ill-equipped and prone to reproducing extremely orientalist approaches that are on the verge of becoming obsolete in the West. The fact that Turkish institutions falsely present out-of-date Western arguments as new and original findings does not do justice to the country's increasingly prominent position in Africa. In this sense, the Turkish government needs to take the steps necessary to encourage

³⁵ Mary Harper, "The Unlikely Love Affair between Two Countries", in *BBC News*, 15 December 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30447039>.

graduate students and doctoral candidates to specialise in African countries in an effort to follow continental developments more closely. Furthermore, Turkish universities could establish Africa research centres to host lectures by prominent African academics in order to familiarise the continent's leading minds with Turkey.

Recommendations

After more than a decade of experience in Africa, Turkey is inclined to work more closely with the international community in the continent. Initially, Turkey approached the policies of Western countries with criticism and suspicion. However, this has started to change as Turkey has established itself as an actor in Africa.

Despite the change of mood in Turkey concerning possible cooperation with the EU and the US, potential partnerships are likely to be pursued on niche issues rather than as an overall approach. This requires some sort of framework for harmonisation of Turkey-EU or Turkey-US joint policy towards Africa. So far there has been no special framework. For example, Turkey could be invited to the EU-Africa summits.

Turkey has been relatively successful in Somalia. It is now the role of the international community to help push regional powers in the Horn of Africa to continue the stabilisation process in Somalia. Turkey is aware that if the international community does not pressure regional actors to be constructive in the Horn of Africa, the future of Somalia is uncertain. To date there have been talks about cooperation between Turkey and the Western countries in Somalia, but nothing has yet been agreed.

Overall, the ongoing nature of Turkey's relations with the West will most directly impact the chances for possible cooperation in Africa. One should not forget that the West's negative perception of President Erdoğan is to a great extent shaping the nature of relations between Turkey and the West. If this persists, it will not only prevent joint efforts in Africa, but also may create a certain rivalry in Africa between Turkey and the West.

Updated 25 July 2016

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