

Turkey in Africa: Where Economic Diplomacy Meets Islamic Appeal

Introduction

Turkey has recently been showing increased interest in developing strong relations with African countries. Even though relations between the Ottoman Empire and parts of North-, West- and East- Africa date back several centuries, Ankara has not had a systematic policy towards the continent. Apart from some contact with guerrilla groups and various African leaders around the time of decolonization. This strategy of developing good relations represents a relatively new trend and builds on the synergy of multiple public and private actors. To mitigate the reality of expansion as a means of maximizing profits and prestige, Ankara has resorted to an arsenal of soft power instruments. Thus, development aid, humanitarian assistance and Islamic solidarity are nowadays strongly entwined with diplomacy and trade.

President Abdullah Gul is visiting the DRC on 14 March 2010



The Origins of Turkey's Africa Policy

Turkey's African adventure has been interpreted as a response to it being denied EU membership in 1997. The nation's first contacts with the continent, however, date back to the mid-1960s when Ankara decided to send delegates overseas to find support in the Non-Aligned Movement and at the UN General Assembly in its dispute with Cyprus. A speech by the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hasan Esat Işık, revealed deeper interests: 'The mission of the goodwill committees concerns not only the Cyprus problem, [but also] the acceleration of establishing sincere and close relations with the young countries of Africa'.

Ahmet Mesut Yılmaz's coalition government officially inaugurated its 'Opening Up Policy to Africa' in

October 1998, with the aim of increasing diplomatic representation, promoting official visits by African authorities, creating ministerial consultation mechanisms and consolidating inter-parliamentary relations. Turkey also pledged to increase its contributions to the World Food Program and other multilateral organizations. The economic sector saw the most prominent proposals, including the ratification of commercial deals, transfers of knowledge and the removal of any double taxation that might restrict the exchange of goods and services with Africa. African ministries of agriculture, industry, health, trade and education were invited to explore paths of economic synergy, while Ankara promised special funds for technical assistance programmes. Turkey's admission to the African Development Bank (ADB) and the African Export and Import Bank (AEIB) was seen as a priority. In addition, new air and sea routes and strengthened cooperation in the defence sector were encouraged, with training for African security forces, joint military exercises and Turkish participation in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. Proposals in the cultural domain included cooperation between research institutes and universities, grants for African scholars to attend seminars and conferences in Turkey, and the setting up of a Centre for African Studies at Ankara University. However, political instability and the global economic financial crisis ultimately dissuaded the Turkish authorities from implementing the plans.

It was only after Prime Minister Erdoğan came to power in 2003, and thanks to his strong parliamentary majority, the restructuring of the economy, and a solid foreign policy framework, that Turkey was able to embark on its African adventure. The declaration of 2005 as the 'Year of Africa' marked a turning point.

Multi-faceted Engagement

Diplomacy

In the first official visit ever by a Turkish head of state to a country south of the equator, Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Ethiopia and South Africa in March 2005 and, on 12 April 2005, Turkey was granted observer status in the African Union. After the election of Abdullah Gül as President of Turkey in 2007, contact with this pan-African organization intensified and Prime Minister Erdoğan attended the inaugural session of the summit of the African Union where he delivered one of the first official speeches on Turkey-

Africa relations. It included statements such as: 'Turkey has traditionally maintained very good relations with the African Continent' and 'It is our wish to support the efforts of the African Union and the peoples of Africa in their quest for peace, democracy, development and prosperity'. Similarly flattering rhetoric has been delivered to African leaders in bilateral and multilateral fora over the last few years. At the meeting of African Union foreign ministers in Addis Ababa in January 2008, Turkey was acknowledged as one of the organization's strategic partners. In May 2008, Ankara was invited to join the African Development Bank.

The first ever Turkey-Africa summit, entitled Solidarity and Partnership for a Common Future, sealed the country's new relationship with Africa in August 2008. Held in Istanbul in the presence of President Abdullah Gül, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, the President of the Commission of the African Union Jean Ping and representatives from all over Africa, two important documents were signed. The Istanbul Declaration on Turkish-African Partnership outlined the principles of equality and mutual benefits as basic pillars of the relationship, and indicated the sectors targeted for long-term cooperation. The latter were elaborated on in the Framework of Cooperation for Turkish-African Partnership and included:

- intergovernmental cooperation and development assistance
- the diversification of African exports and free trade agreements
- cooperation between banks and private investors through joint business councils
- the transfer of expertise in the agribusiness sector
- health campaigns
- military training and support for the African Standby Force
- cultural agreements, youth exchange programmes and scholarships for African students
- the promotion of tourism and media coordination

Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit 2008



Two parallel meetings were also held: the Turkish-African Forum for Civil Society Organizations that welcomed African and Turkish organizations working on

social issues such as gender, family, water, health, and migration; and the Turkish-African Economic Forum that was set up by the Union of Turkish Trade Chambers and Stock Markets (TOBB) and the Council for Economic Relations with Foreign Countries (DEIK), and welcomed entrepreneurs from all over Africa and also the World Bank.

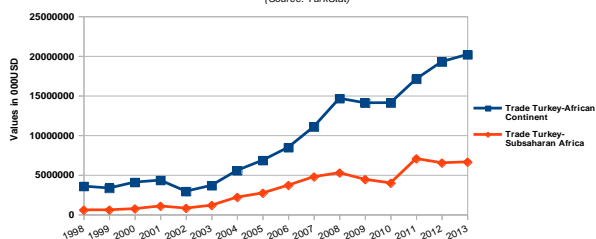
With the aim of gaining support within multilateral international bodies, then Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Babacan delivered a speech at the Executive Council of the African Union summit in Sharm El Sheikh in June 2008, in which he announced that: 'Turkey is a candidate for one of the non-permanent seats of the UN Security Council for the period of 2009-2010. I am pleased to acknowledge that Turkey has received support for this candidature from many African nations. I also wish to assure you all that during her term in the Council, if elected with your valuable support in October this year, Turkey will remain particularly sensitive to the challenges facing Africa'. Before the election, which was held on 17 October 2008 and in which 51 African countries voted for Turkey, there were only seven Turkish embassies in Africa. These were in Ethiopia (opened in 1926), Sudan (1956), Senegal (1960), Nigeria (1962), Kenya (1968), Democratic Republic of Congo (1974) and South Africa (1993). By June 2013, Turkey had 36 embassies in Africa, 31 of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Thirty-five SSA countries already have either a consulate or an embassy in Turkey. In addition, Turkey has gained observer status in several regional economic communities: ECOWAS (in 2005), EAC (2010), IGAD and COMESA (2012) and ECCAS (2013). Finally, as well as military cooperation agreements with Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and South Africa, Ankara has provided military and police personnel for five recent UN peacekeeping missions: MONUSCO (in DRC), UNAMID (Darfur), UNMIL (Liberia), UNMISS (South Sudan) and UNOCI (Ivory Coast).

Trade and Investment

Economic relations have always been closely connected to diplomatic endeavours. A delegation from Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Under-Secretariat for Foreign Trade went to Africa on a fact-finding mission in 1989, long before the Opening Up to Africa Policy was even conceived. The 2003 document called 'Strategy for Enhancing Trade and Economic Relations with African Countries' aimed to increase Turkey's commercial presence in Africa and encouraged companies to invest there. As a result, trade with Africa as a whole saw an average increase of 10% annually between 2003 and 2008, going from US\$ 3.6 bn to US\$ 14.6 bn. Turkish-African trade had decreased by 15% between 2008 and 2010 due to the economic crisis but reached US\$ 20 bn by 2013. Although the largest share of this has traditionally been with North Africa, trade with Sub-Saharan African

countries has soared from US\$ 0.6 bn to US\$ 6.6 bn in sixteen years.

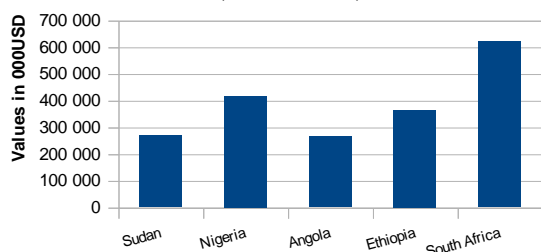
Evolution of Trade Volume with Africa 1998-2013
(Source: TurkStat)



Turkey currently has commercial relations with all African countries. Some of them, such as Senegal, Cameroon, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Angola, have a trade deficit with Ankara, while others, like Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Zambia, have a trade surplus.

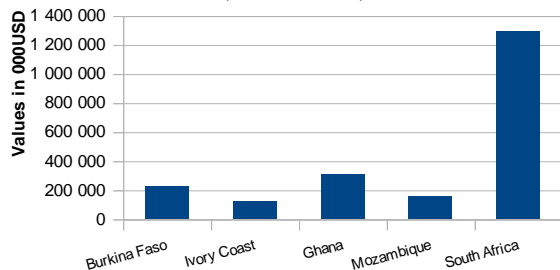
Top 5 Export Partners Turkey-SSA 2013

(Source: TurkStat)



Top 5 Imports Partners Turkey-SSA 2013

(Source: TurkStat)

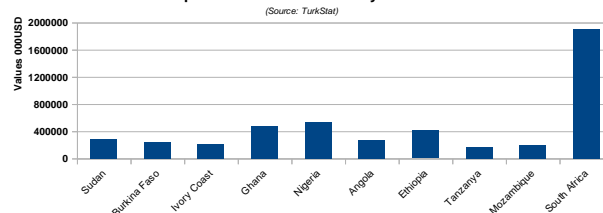


As far as the regional distribution of investments goes, about 66% of Turkish imports from the continent (excluding Northern Africa) come from Nigeria and South Africa, while Turkey exports to many more Sub-Saharan countries. Turkish entrepreneurs are active in almost all sectors, including the extraction of raw materials, such as fossil fuels, wood, minerals and precious stones.

According to the Union of Turkish Contractors (TMB), Turkish companies completed more than 500 construction projects in Africa worth a total of US\$ 24 bn between 1972 and 2008, which accounts for more than 19% of all the contracts won by Turkish contractors abroad in this period. Turkish companies have built highways, government buildings, military installations, airports, hospitals, residential compounds, in-

dustrial complexes, hydroelectric dams, drinking water and sewage systems and ports in Africa. A galaxy of small and medium-sized enterprises, known as Anatolian Tigers, have played a crucial part in Ankara's penetration of Africa. Various professional confederations have emerged in the Turkish business community over the last decades, including the Confederation of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen (TUSKON) that, encouraged by the Turkish government, organized three Turkey-Africa Foreign Trade Bridges to which thousands of entrepreneurs were invited between 2006 and 2008.

Top 10 Trade Partners Turkey-SSA 2013
(Source: TurkStat)



Although Turkey is not only interested in Africa's energy potential, fossil fuels represent the major component (60%) of all the total imports, which is similar to other emerging powers like China and India. Some analysts have tried to detect a unique Turkish approach towards Africa, talking about less risk-averse entrepreneurial families, cheaper products than those traded by other European countries while of higher quality than Chinese ones, and a synergy between government policies, business strategies and humanitarian activities. In spite of all the fraternal tones in Ankara's rhetoric, however, Turkey's Africa strategy is primarily an attempt to secure cheap energy supplies for its producers and viable markets for its products.

Aid

Africa has been a focus of Ankara's aid policies from the very beginning. One of Turkey's first official assistance programmes in June 1985 included the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal, Somalia and Sudan. Twenty years later in March 2005, the first liaison office of the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), which was founded in 1992, was set up in Addis Ababa, followed by others in Dakar and Khartoum in 2006 and 2007 respectively. From these three outposts, TIKA's operations have expanded to more than 30 African countries. Projects have been implemented in sectors such as education, water and sanitation, productive activities, infrastructure development, agriculture and animal breeding, financial support for local governments and civil-society organizations.

Besides Official Development Aid (ODA), assistance by non-governmental organizations has also gained momentum. Dozens of Turkish NGOs are operating in healthcare and the water and sanitation sectors and share an implicit Islamic orientation in terms of rheto-

ric, areas of intervention and fundraising. Among the Turkish NGOs, *İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri İnsani Yardım Vakfı* (Foundation of Humanitarian Aid for Fundamental Rights and Freedoms) has undoubtedly played a pioneering role in Turkish relief and is operating in more than 40 countries. Considering that projects have been included on the agendas of meetings between Turkish and African leaders, doubts have to be raised as to its independence from the government.

Turkey's opening up to Africa even included the involvement of the Presidency for Religious Affairs, known as *Diyanet*. In November 2006, the international Meeting for Religious Leaders of Muslim Countries and Communities of the African Continent was hosted in Istanbul in the presence of Ekmelettin İhsanoğlu, the Secretary General of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The outcome was a request to establish an international theological school in Turkey. Hundreds of young Muslims from all over Africa have thus been invited each year to attend theology courses. Receiving enthusiastic requests to restore the former Ottoman influence, *Diyanet* hosted the same meeting for a second time in November 2011 with the goal of strengthening Islamic education in Africa, establishing joint research centres, coordinating NGOs and creating business environments that are sensitive to the situation and priorities of African Muslims.

Turkish Schools in Africa

Ankara's Africa strategy has, interestingly, been helped by the presence in Africa of the religious movement inspired by the exiled Turkish preacher Fethullah Gülen. Seen as a grim tangle of criminality by some and as an elected circle of enlightened minds by others, this movement, which is guided by the most influential spiritual leader in Turkey today, has been increasing its hegemonic grasp on political and economic establishment in Turkey since the military coup in 1980 when its anti-communist, conservative ideas found fertile ground in the Turkish-Islamic synthesis that was imposed as state doctrine by the junta. Its material and immaterial capital comes from teachings that aim to harmonize Islam not only with secular modernity, scientific thought and inter-religious dialogue but particularly with capitalistic ethics, representative democracy and Turkish nationalism. In the 1990s, Ankara used this extraordinary soft power leverage to spread its influence in Central Asia, the Balkans and the Caucasus, disseminating a broad network of private Turkish schools that nowadays have spread to more than 90 countries around the world.

These schools, based on cooperation between educators and business people, currently represent a precious tool in cultural diplomacy in Africa. Some members of the Gülen movement have taken advantage of the fruitful commercial relations they have secured with Africa to enforce the precepts of their

leader through the creation of schools. Many foreign-policy initiatives implemented by the Turkish government in Africa have clearly benefited from the human and social capital the Gülen network has been able to mobilize. For example, TUSKON is establishing 'bridges of commerce' using the social infrastructure laid by the Turkish schools. In June 2013, more than 40 kindergartens, high schools and colleges managed by Gülenist entrepreneurs were operating in 29 Sub-Saharan African countries. These educational bodies generally adopt a non-confessional programme with well-paid young teachers teaching maths, chemistry, biology, physics, informatics and the Turkish language. On a visit to the Light Academy in Kampala in December 2010, then Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç stated that: 'These teachers lead the way for our businessmen. They act as translators for them and even host them in their homes. They have created an environment of confidence for politicians and businessmen. I think this is the fundamental secret of the success of our relations.' Thousands of African students are thus becoming acquainted with Turkey, although the high tuition fees exclude the vast majority of local children and the schools still remain the exclusive privilege of Africa's middle and upper classes.

Conclusion

Economic interest is an irrefutable feature of Turkish penetration in Africa beyond short-term goals like the support for its candidacy for a position on the UN Security Council that Turkey plans to reiterate in 2015-2016. Assessment of Ankara's performance shows typical manifestations of the rise of a trading state. Tom Wheeler, former Turkish ambassador to South Africa, has stated that 'the development of stronger relations between Turkey and African countries will be founded on trade and investment, with development aid playing a minor role, while commonality of political interests in Sub-Saharan Africa are largely non-existent'. Religious affinity is emerging as the only noteworthy element that might be a specific feature in Turkey's favour in comparison with other powers active on the continent. Turkish investors are arriving in Africa with a strategy of forming alliances with local Muslims. And this has symbolic appeal, one that Chinese and American businesses lack.

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See also:

<http://www.ascleiden.nl/research/themes/africas-global-connections>

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