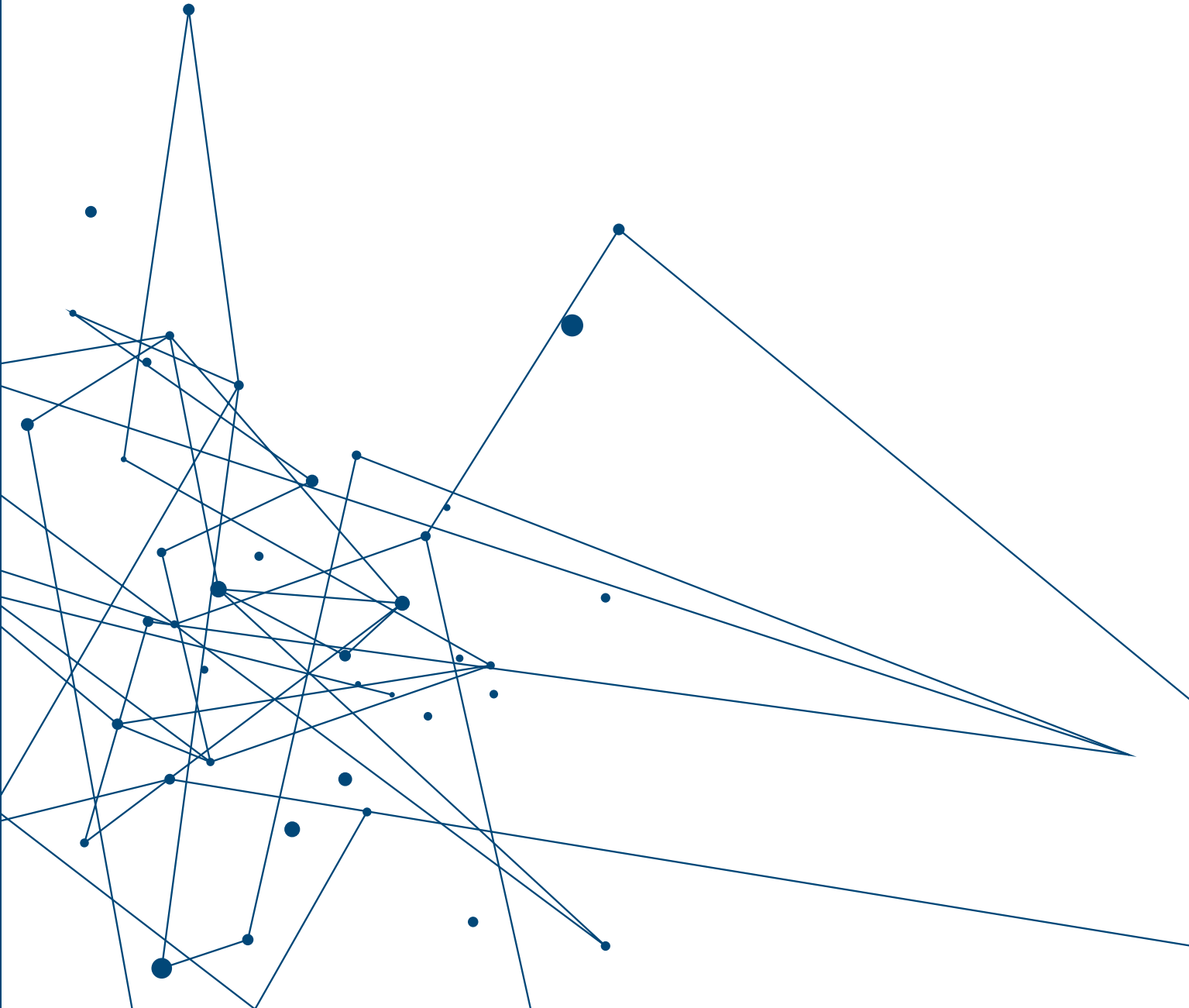


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Türkiye's Quest for Influence and Collaboration in Africa

Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar



Türkiye's sudden rise in Africa over the past twenty-five years has impressed many. Featured here are the key drivers, strategies, prospects and implications of Ankara's extensive position across the African continent.

This paper is part of a series of six CATS Network Papers assessing Turkey's engagement with Africa from the perspectives of Germany, France, Italy and Spain, complemented by analyses from Turkey itself and two major actors on the continent, Egypt and Ethiopia.

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1.

Türkiye's Quarter Century Engagement with Africa

Over the past two decades, Türkiye has considerably augmented its engagement with Africa, marking a period of significant growth and dynamism. This expansion commenced with the Africa Action Plan which was initiated in 1998 by the Turkish Foreign Ministry under the stewardship of then-Foreign Minister İsmail Cem.

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) subsequently revised and operationalised this plan upon assuming power in November 2002. After coming to power, the AK Party catalysed a profound transformation of Türkiye's diplomatic and economic footprint across the African continent. This period (2002-2024) has seen Türkiye fortify its relationships with a multitude of African states through multifaceted initiatives which transcend mere economic interests to include development and humanitarian aid. In particular, the years under review have been hallmarked by a flurry of reciprocal high-level visits culminating in the Türkiye-Africa summit hosted in Istanbul in early 2022. Concurrently, Türkiye has been advancing its defence industry and establishing its place as a key security actor in Africa through arms agreements and security cooperation.

Moreover, Türkiye has demonstrated resilience in maintaining its African engagements, despite the geopolitical landscape significantly shifting with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, necessitating a recalibration of Türkiye's foreign policy all of which has emphasised immediate regional threats. This is exemplified by Ankara's pivotal role in mediating the grain-export agreement between Russia and Ukraine, which has been crucial in bolstering food security for vulnerable nations-including many in Africa. This approach underscores Türkiye's commitment to its African partnerships while addressing emerging global challenges.

Türkiye's deepening African ties have sparked a diverse international and domestic discourse, drawing scrutiny, scepticism and endorsement in equal measure. Domestically, debates have revolved around the geopolitical reorientation under the AK Party with accusations of adventurous neo-Ottoman expansionism, particularly

evident through military deployments in Libya and Somalia. Also, some pundits have centred their criticism around the corruption of foreign policy, such as the government's facilitating arms deals across the continent for the companies close to the AK Party or mobilisation of public funds for controversial projects like leasing agricultural land in Sudan. Conversely, Turkish economic stakeholders have largely endorsed the AK Party's policies toward African states owing to the tangible commercial benefits accrued from the African engagements over the last two decades.

Internationally-while Türkiye is lauded by some as an alternative partner to Africa-European Union (EU) member states, and the United States (US) view Ankara's ascent with trepidation given the security implications in conflict-prone regions like Somalia and Libya. Most overtly, Türkiye's security assistance activities in Somalia and Libya have become a source of tension with the EU and are contributing to deepening foreign policy divergences and disagreements.

Additionally, Türkiye's increasing involvement has been a catalyst for tensions in the Middle East and North Africa, notably with the Gulf states and Egypt, particularly over Ankara's moves in the Horn of Africa.¹ Yet recently, due to Middle Eastern normalisation² between competing states such as Türkiye, Qatar, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia tensions have eased substantially.

For their part, African states have prudently navigated their relationship with Ankara and leveraged the burgeoning Türkiye-Africa partnership to enhance investment and bolster state-building initiatives.³ Despite Ankara's present domestic economic woes, Türkiye's growing footprint in Africa will likely continue to generate positive outcomes for both sides.

In understanding the dynamics of Türkiye's moves in Africa it is important to analyse three main themes. The first is to conceptualise the key drivers that motivate Ankara's

¹ Aslı Aydıntaşbaş and Cinzia Bianco, *Useful enemies: How the Turkey-UAE rivalry is remaking the Middle East* (Berlin: European Council on Foreign Relations [ECFR], 15 March 2021), <https://ecfr.eu/publication/useful-enemies-how-the-turkey-uae-rivalry-is-remaking-the-middle-east/> (accessed 16 April 2023);

Nihat Mugurtay and Meltem Muftuler-Bac, "Turkish power contestation with the United Arab Emirates: an empirical assessment of official development assistance", *International Politics*, no. 60 (2023): 659–684;

Andrew England, Laura Pitel, and Simeon Kerr, "UAE vs Turkey: the regional rivalries pitting MBZ against Erdoğan", *Financial Times* (online), 26 October 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/990f13cf-613f-48a5-ac02-c8c73741a786> (accessed 16 April 2023)

² Muriel Asseburg and Sarah Charlotte Henkel, *Normalisation and Realignment in the Middle East*, SWP Comment 2021/C 45 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], July 2021), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2021C45/> (accessed 16 April 2023);

Galip Dalay, *Turkey's Middle East Reset: A Precursor for Re-Escalation?* (Doha: Middle East Global Council on Foreign Affairs [ME Council], August 2022), https://mecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/MECGA_Policy-Paper_Galip-Dalay_Final-Web.pdf (accessed 16 April 2023)

³ Abdinor Dahir, "The Turkey-Africa Bromance: Key Drivers, Agency, and Prospects", *Insight Turkey Commentaries* 23, no. 4 (2021): 27–38

increasing engagement with African states and Türkiye's expectations from these relations. Secondly, onlookers must study the political frameworks and actors involved in implementation in terms of sustainability and effectiveness. Lastly, students of Türkiye's Africa foreign policy have to explain the existing modalities of interactions between Ankara and Brussels as well as separate EU member states.

2.

Türkiye in Africa: Key Drivers, Goals and Expectations

The current momentum of Turkish-African relations can be traced back to the 1960s. There are historically three drivers⁴ that have motivated Turkish decision-makers to engage African states: the drive to find new allies; meeting the market needs of a growing Turkish economy and supporting Türkiye's middle power activism at the international level. These historical and structural factors seem to be resilient and deep-rooted in the strategic thinking of different political actors.

Whenever Türkiye perceived a lack of sufficient support from Ankara's allies in Europe and North America, it has embarked on diplomatic initiatives aimed at expanding its international support network and forging new alliances. This pattern has also played a pivotal role in shaping Türkiye's relations with African countries, representing an ingrained aspect of Ankara's engagement with the continent. While Türkiye positioned itself as a committed member of the Atlantic Pact during the Cold War, this alliance faced significant challenges early on. Issues such as the Cyprus conflict in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as a notable letter from then-the US President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964⁵ and an arms embargo imposed by the US in 1974 (in response to Türkiye's Cyprus operation that same year) prompted Türkiye to diversify its foreign policy. To overcome its isolation during these turbulent times, the Turkish government began efforts to improve relations with African states as part of Ankara's outreach to Non-Aligned countries from the mid-1960s onward, which also marked

⁴ Mehmet Özkan, "What drives Turkey's involvement in Africa?", *Review of African Political Economy* 37, no. 126 (2010): 533-540;

Federico Donelli, "The Ankara consensus: the significance of Turkey's engagement in sub-Saharan Africa", *Peace & Security* 30, no. 1 (2018): 57-76;

Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu and Ali Onur Tepeciklioğlu, *Turkey in Africa: A New Emerging Power?* (New York, Routledge, May 2023);

Numan Hazar and Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu, Turkey-Africa Relations: A Retrospective Analysis, in *Turkey in Africa: A New Emerging Power?*, eds. Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu and Onur Tepeciklioğlu (May 2023): 56-74

⁵ President Lyndon B. Johnson, "64 Letter, Warned Turkey on Cyprus", *The New York Times Archives* (online), 16 January 1966, <https://www.nytimes.com/1966/01/16/archives/johnson-in-stern-64-letter-warned-turkey-on-cyprus.html> (accessed 13 January 2023)

Türkiye's shift toward a multi-dimensional foreign policy.⁶

This foreign policy tendency became prominent after a group of African states at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly supported a resolution favouring Cyprus' independence and sovereignty and opposed foreign interference in the island's internal affairs in 1965.⁷ Consequently, this period saw a growing debate among Turkish political elites about the alignment of Türkiye's pro-Western orientation with its national interests. The need to establish diplomatic and economic ties with Non-Aligned Movement countries, especially in Africa, played a pivotal role in these discussions. Turkish governments during this period organised high-level visits to African states to seek their support at the UN and tried to expand Ankara's diplomatic network in Africa. However, the 1980 military coup temporarily interrupted these efforts, leading to the closure of some diplomatic offices in African countries and a shelving of these efforts toward African states.

A renewed focus on Africa due to a multi-dimensional foreign policy search emerged in the mid-1990s when Türkiye's relations with the EU and the US faced challenges.⁸ The failure of Türkiye's EU membership application in 1997 reignited Turkish foreign policy activism in Africa. This activism aimed to leverage Türkiye's influence in other regions to strengthen ties with the West. This period saw the formulation of Türkiye's geopolitical identity beyond the East-West discourse and a concerted effort to strengthen relations with African nations. The 1998 Africa Action Plan was a document drawn up by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Africa Action Plan aimed to enhance relations with Sub-Saharan and North African nations. However, the implementation of the plan lost its priority due to events like the 1999 earthquake, the 2001 economic crisis and political instability. In the early 2000s, the AK Party government updated the Africa Action Plan with a focus on economic relations with African states.

⁶ Baskın Oran described this shift as a multi-dimensional and proactive foreign policy shift; while Mustafa Aydın stated that: "As in 1960s, Turkey's recalibration of its foreign policy toward the Third World continued and its main characteristic became a "multi-vectoral" or "multi-faceted" approach to international relations."

Baskın Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası Cilt II: 1980-2001 [Turkish Foreign Policy - Volume II: 1980-2001]*, 2. ed. (Istanbul: İletişim Publishing, 2002);

Mustafa Aydın, Doctrines, Strategies, and Tactics in Turkish Foreign Policy, in *Turkish Foreign Policy II* (Eskişehir: Anadolu University, 2020): 02-31

⁷ On 16 December 1965, the Cyprus problem was discussed at the 10th session of the UN General Assembly. As a result of the voting, with 47 votes in favour, 5 against and 54 abstentions, a resolution was adopted endorsing the views of the Greek Cypriot side in accordance with the decisions taken by the Non-Aligned Movement at the Cairo Conference.

⁸ Numan Hazar, *Türkiye-Afrika ilişkileri: Türkiye'nin dost kıtaya açılım stratejisi [Turkey-Africa relations: The Turkey's strategy of opening to the friendly continent]* (Ankara: Akçağ Publishing, 2016); Abdurrahim Siradağ, "Turkey's Engagement with the African Organisations: Partner or Competitor?", *India Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2020): 519-534;

Ibrahim Bachir Abdoulaye and Zainul Abideen Jibril, "Turkey's Multidimensional Strategy toward Africa", *SETA Perspective*, no. 68 (2021), <https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2021/10/P68.pdf> (accessed 15 January 2023)

Then during and after the Arab Spring, Ankara once again increased its African engagement due to the double forms of isolation Türkiye experienced. On the one hand, Ankara felt isolated from its traditional Western allies over a range of foreign policy agendas as well as its increasingly authoritarian tendencies at home. On the other hand, Türkiye increasingly felt distant from its neighbouring Middle East countries as new political movements Ankara had supported in the Arab world were stamped out by reactionary forces.

While there have been variations in Türkiye's policies toward African states over time, the common thread has been leveraging Ankara's relations with Africa to enhance its standing in the international arena. Ankara has increased its trade, investment and diplomatic engagement with the African continent and featured a number of Africa-Türkiye summits. Türkiye's genuine engagement with Africa has proven pivotal, particularly when it faced challenges in its immediate neighbourhood and with its traditional Western allies.

A second historical force for Türkiye's outreach to Africa has been economic in nature. Turkish business people's increasing interest has played a pivotal role in steering economic activities toward the African continent. By the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, the economic interests of Turkish economic elites⁹ in new geographies—the Caucasus, Asian countries, the Arab world and Africa—became more visible in shaping the country's overall foreign policy. By the late 1980s, Turgut Özal—during his time as prime minister and then president—made it a tradition for business delegations to accompany him on his foreign visits. In the following years, Turkish politicians continued this tradition. These visits were instrumental in creating economic ties and establishing joint economic cooperation commissions. The result was that Türkiye became a trading state that conducted its foreign policy and foreign trade concurrently.¹⁰

When it comes to Türkiye's economic interests in Africa the small and medium-sized enterprises from Anatolian cities termed the Anatolian Tigers—especially those in the Gaziantep-Mersin as well as the Aegean industrial areas—played a significant role in the growth of the Türkiye-Africa trade. Opportunities in Africa became crucial for these enterprises and contributed to their economic dynamism. While large Turkish firms focused their economic animus toward the EU, smaller enterprises increasingly targeted neighbouring countries and Africa.

This diversification marked a significant transformation in Türkiye's economic outlook. In other words, Ankara's Africa policy and more specifically the economic engagement as a result has had significant repercussions on the Turkish economy and

⁹ Ziya Önüş, "Turgut Özal and His Economic Legacy: Turkish Neo-Liberalism in Critical Perspective", *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 4 (2004): 113–134

¹⁰ Kemal Kirişçi, "The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 40 (2009): 29–56

its development strategies. The growing role of relations with Africa is evident in Türkiye's eleventh Development Plan from 2019 to 2023 which focused on strengthening diplomatic, economic and cultural ties with the continent. Operating mainly in Anatolia, small and medium-sized enterprises have contributed significantly to Türkiye's economic development. These businesses play a crucial role in ceasing the impact of the economic crisis on the low- and middle-income population by contributing revenue incomes with their export volumes as well as creating employment.

Lastly, Türkiye's dynamic engagement with Africa unfolds through the lens of middle power activism—a key driver that has shaped its foreign policy for over three decades. Türkiye embraced middle-power activism in the post-Cold War era and sought a strategic role in the evolving global order. Turgut Özal championed a proactive foreign policy positioning Türkiye as a global player. However, during this era, Ankara faced challenges in the Middle East and Africa and often exceeded its actual capabilities. The deployment of troops to Somalia between 1992 and 1994 as part of a UN operation and diplomatic standoffs during then-Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan's 1996 visit to Libya (during his Libya, Egypt and Nigeria trip) highlighted the complexities of achieving influence in Africa.¹¹

Later governments, as a result, reviewed the policy at the end of the 1990s. İsmail Cem, Minister of Foreign Affairs under then-Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit's government, tailored a new foreign policy toward Africa which put soft power tools such as economic aid, health, education services, historical ties and religious appeals at the core of Türkiye's African engagement.¹² The policy developed during the late 1990s envisioned Türkiye as a pivotal bridge between regions like Africa and Europe which would enhance the country's global standing.

Successive AK Party governments have reconceptualised Türkiye's global position utilising the concept of strategic depth¹³ which seeks to view Türkiye not as a bridge

¹¹ These visits were significant attempts by the short-lived Refahiyol government under then-Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan together with then-Deputy Prime Minister Tansu Çiller, the leader of Doğruyol Party.

¹² İsmail Cem, "Türkiye küresel bir aktör [Turkey is a global actor]", *Milliyet* (online), 23 July 1998, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/ekonomi/turkiye-kuresel-bir-aktor-5351388> (accessed 08 January 2023);

İsmail Cem, *Turkey in the New Century* (Lefkoşe/Nicosia: Rustem Publishing, 2001);

İsmail Cem, "Turkish Foreign Policy: Opening New Horizons for Turkey at the Beginning of a Millennium", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (2002)

¹³ Over the past decade, the JDP government's foreign policy has been guided by Ahmet Davutoğlu's strategic depth doctrine. In his book *Strategic Depth* (Küre Yayınları, 2001), Davutoğlu contends that Turkey's historical legacy and geographic position endow it with strategic depth, situating it at the heart of various geopolitical spheres of influence. He advocated for Turkey to leverage this advantage to establish itself as a central power in these regions.

See Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu [Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position]* (İstanbul: Küre Publishing, 2001);

country but instead as a central country.¹⁴ In this strategic thinking, Africa has emerged as a key focus, rather than a secondary foreign policy agenda. Ankara has solidified its strategic alignment with the African Union (AU) and attained observer status at the AU. Türkiye has formulated foreign policy rhetoric which emphasises soft power instruments, mutual benefit and respect, a win-win strategy and equal partnerships.

Since 2016, Ankara has stepped beyond soft power and adopted an unusual middle power assertiveness.¹⁵ This new position is visible in President Erdoğan's calls for UN reform and a fairer world.¹⁶ Furthermore, Türkiye also began to adopt hard power instruments such as involvement in the Libyan civil war, which marked a departure from traditional middle power activism. Conversely, Türkiye's envisioned role as a middle power on the continent seeks to foster broad-ranging cooperation in the security realm with its African partners.

¹⁴ Ibid;

Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey* 1, no. 1 (2008): 77-96;

Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Türkiye Köprü Değil, Merkez Ülke [Turkey is a Centre Country, Not a Bridge]", *Haberler* (online), 21 September 2012, <https://www.haberler.com/guncel/turkiye-kopru-degil-merkez-ulke-3954318-haberi/> (accessed 29 August 2024)

¹⁵ Mustafa Kutlay and Ziya Öniş, "Understanding oscillations in Turkish foreign policy: pathways to unusual middle power activism", *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 12 (2021): 3051-3069;

Digdem Soyaltin-Colella and Tolga Demiryol, "Unusual middle power activism and regime survival: Turkey's drone warfare and its regime-boosting effects", *Third World Quarterly* 44, no.4 (2023): 724-743

¹⁶ President Erdoğan then published a book with the same title: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *A Fairer World is Possible: A Proposed Model for a United Nations Reform* (Turkuvaz Kitap, October 2021)

3.

Türkiye's Policy Framework for its Relations with African States

For many years, Türkiye's engagement with Africa lacked a cohesive and strategically coordinated approach. Despite ongoing interests and initiatives toward Africa until 1998, the absence of systematic coordination and continuity impeded the realisation of sustained achievements. Hence the adaptation of the 1998 Africa Action Plan¹⁷ represented a critical juncture in institutionalising Türkiye's efforts toward African engagement. The document highlighted the inadequacy of Türkiye's interactions with Africa, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa and underscored the imperative of establishing long-term sustainable relations supported by dedicated infrastructure and financial resources. It projected Türkiye's ambitions to explore new markets and raw materials over the forthcoming ten to fifteen years, advocating for the periodic delineation of short- to medium-term objectives aimed at fortifying economic, commercial and cultural ties—and advancing Türkiye's interests.

The Africa Action Plan is structured around three foundational pillars. The first pillar revolved around political and diplomatic relations, mapping several concrete policies including high-level state visits between Türkiye and African states, the establishment of a political consultation mechanism between foreign ministries, enhancement of Ankara's diplomatic presence in Africa and intensified cooperation within international organisations. This pillar advocated for the establishment of Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Summits, humanitarian aid participation and contributions to UN technical and financial assistance programs. This pillar had as its goal strengthening security cooperation through involvement in the UN peacekeeping missions and security training for African students in Turkish military institutions. The document underscored the necessity of securing support from African nations in the UN Security Council's temporary membership bid scheduled for 2000 and

¹⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, *Afrika'ya Açılım Eylem Planı*, (2. Edition, Ankara, 1999)

articulated Türkiye's stance on the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus to African counterparts.

The second pillar of the Africa Action Plan focused on developing economic relations such as execution of crucial economic, trade, technical and scientific agreements. Also, this second pillar stressed the need to establish technical assistance programs, a dedicated fund and technical trainings. It promoted private sector engagement through the establishment of business councils and joint trade chambers and the provision of financing options for Turkish exports to Africa through Eximbank, including Türkiye's accession to the African Development Bank. It advocated improved naval and aerial transportation links and suggested supporting the visibility of Türkiye's defence industry in Africa.

The third pillar sought to amplify Türkiye's influence through cultural exchanges. This pillar stressed the need to give scholarships to African students, create academic collaborations between Turkish and learning institutions in African states and to establish private and public cultural agreements. Finally, the pillar discussed mutual Türkiye-Africa interests and knowledge gaps.

The 1998 Africa Action Plan outlined initiatives that were perceived as conducive to the long-term strengthening of relations and took into consideration Türkiye's capacities and resources. Its fundamental aim was to establish the groundwork for the coming years and reflect Ankara's political determination to engage with African states. The fact that the AK Party implemented the document with minimal revisions underscores the party's alignment with and dedication to a political consensus that was produced four years before the AK Party came to power.

Since 1998, Türkiye has published various documents that summarise its institutional framework, strategies and objectives in its relations with African countries. These documents are of significant import as they shed light on the actors, tools and areas of cooperation that have evolved in Türkiye-Africa relations over time. Moreover, Türkiye's formulation of its Africa policy framework can be categorised into two periods. The first period, extending until 2008, was characterised by Ankara's unilateral political determination. The Africa Action Plan (1998) stood out as the most influential document of this period. Subsequently, after 2008, the policy framework transformed into an interactive space with Africa summits assuming a prominent role. Noteworthy documents from this second era include the Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Summit Istanbul Declaration (2008), the Prime Ministry Circular No. 2010/7 titled "Africa Strategy," the Second Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Summit Declaration (2014) and the Africa-Türkiye Joint Action Plan (2015-2019).

In 2008, Türkiye's engagement with Africa transitioned beyond the confines of unilateral political directives from Ankara. This change marked a pivotal shift toward a more collaborative and structured approach. The inaugural Türkiye-Africa

Cooperation Summit, convened in Istanbul from August 18 to 21, 2008 with participation from representatives of forty-nine African nations and eleven international and regional organisations resulted in the issuance of the Istanbul Declaration.

The Istanbul Declaration heralded a new era in Türkiye-Africa relations. It articulated a mutual desire to cultivate relationships on a foundation of equality and mutual benefit across various domains. Central to this ambition was the development of cooperation within the Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Framework, an annexe to the declaration that delineated areas of cooperation encompassing government-to-government interactions, trade, investment and a broad spectrum of other sectors. The framework document established a blueprint for activities within these cooperative areas proposing the formulation of a detailed program in the subsequent year. It underscored the necessity of implementing monitoring mechanisms at multiple levels to ensure the effective execution of these programs and projects. A resolution was made to organise summits every five years, with ministerial monitoring conferences scheduled in the interim to evaluate progress and plan forthcoming summits, supplemented by biannual senior officials' meetings.

On March 26, 2010, a directive titled "Africa Strategy" was issued stating that there was a need to create a comprehensive Africa strategy based on the shared areas of cooperation established during the 2008 Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Summit. Although referred to as the Strategy Document in scholarly literature, the directive did not divulge what the exact Turkish strategy would be. The directive aimed to fortify Türkiye's political and economic relations with select African countries and broaden these relations across the continent. It led to the formation of the Africa Strategy Coordination Committee chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and encompassing a wide array of governmental bodies tasked with overseeing Türkiye's engagement with African nations. The committee-which continues to this day-is comprised of representatives from various governmental bodies, including the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Treasury Undersecretariat, the Undersecretariat of Foreign Trade, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Presidency of Defence Industries (SSB), the General Directorate of Security, the General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works (DSİ), the Small and Medium Enterprises Development and Support Administration Presidency and the Turkish Red Crescent (*Kızılay*).

The 2010 Directive on Africa Strategy Document specified that the Africa Strategy Coordination Committee would convene every three months, with secretarial support provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, the committee possessed

the authority to invite other ministries, public institutions and organisations, universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), professional associations and private sector representatives to its meetings.

These two documents from 2008 and 2010 represent pivotal moments in Türkiye-Africa relations. The implementation of the Africa Strategy Document signalled that Ankara considered its Africa initiative complete and transitioned to the Africa Partnership Policy from 2013 onward.

According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the primary aim of the 2013 Partnership Policy has been to share Türkiye's experience, societal, political and cultural knowledge, as well as its resources, with African governments and peoples within the framework of equal partnership and mutual benefit principles. This approach aims to contribute to peace, stability, economic growth and social development across the continent under the guiding principle of "African solutions to African problems."¹⁸

The second Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Summit in 2014 in Malabo¹⁹, Equatorial Guinea introduced tangible initiatives including the 2015-2019 Türkiye-Africa Joint Implementation Plan. Some of these initiatives included developing expertise in cotton and textile production, joint efforts in livestock to enhance productivity through advanced technologies and collaboration among NGOs. Yet, the 2015-2019 Türkiye-Africa Joint Action Plan lacked concrete targets for measuring progress or assessing implementation.²⁰

This evolving strategic framework between African capitals and Ankara shows that the relationship between Türkiye and Africa remains an evolving and ongoing process. It also signifies Ankara's ongoing commitment to deepen its relationship with the continent highlighting both the adaptability of Türkiye's foreign policy and its continuous exploration of opportunities across Africa.

¹⁸ Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, *Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nın 2017 Mali Yılı Bütçe Tasarısının TBMM Genel Kurulu'na Sunulması Vesilesiyle Hazırlanan Kitapçık*, [Booklet Fiscal Year 2017 Draft Budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of Presentation to the General Assembly of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey] (Ankara: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 09 December 2016): 121, www.mfa.gov.tr/site_media/html/2017-yili-basinda-dis-politikamiz.pdf (accessed 2 February 2023)

¹⁹ African Union, "New Model of Partnership for the Strengthening of Sustainable Development and Integration", (The second Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Summit, 19-21 November 2014, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea) https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/41270-wd-JOINT_IMPLEMENTATION_PLAN_OF_AFRICA-TURKEY_PARTNERSHIP_2015-2019-EN.pdf (accessed 26 August 2024)

²⁰ Ali Oruç, *Türkiye'nin Afrika Stratejisinin Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Bağlamında Değerlendirilmesi Ve Öneriler* [Evaluation of Turkey's Africa Strategy in the Context of Foreign Economic Relations, Evaluation and Suggestions] (Ankara: T.C. Presidential Strategy and Budget Directorate, May 2022), https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Turkiyenin-Afrika-Stratejisinin-Dis-Ekonomik-Iliskiler-Baglaminda-Değerlendirilmesi-ve-Oneriler_Ali-Oruc.pdf (accessed 2 February 2023)

4.

Key Players: Policy Formulation, Implementation and Coordination

Under the auspices of the AK Party, the landscape of Turkish foreign policy formulation and implementation has witnessed significant diversification incorporating a broad spectrum of actors beyond traditional diplomatic channels. As articulated by İbrahim Kalın, a long-serving advisor to President Erdoğan and the current head of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MİT),

“[...] foreign policy and international relations now encompass a broad spectrum that includes not only states and diplomats but also business people, civil society organisations, intellectuals, opinion leaders, journalists, think tanks, humanitarian aid, and international law.”²¹

Thus, according to Kalın, many other actors, such as TİKA, Directorate of Communications (DoC), Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), Anadolu Agency, the Directorate General of Press and Information, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), the *Yunus Emre* Foundation, *Kızılay* and the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) must engage with the foreign policy making and implementation processes along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

According to official strategy documents, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs bears the primary responsibility for coordinating institutions, resources and initiatives in the pursuit of Türkiye’s African policy objectives. However, it is noteworthy that historically, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has shared certain responsibilities—particularly those pertaining to economic foreign relations—with

²¹ İbrahim Kalın, “Türkiye Artık Ölçek Küçültemez [Turkey can no longer scale back]”, *Yeni Şafak* (online), 22 January 2013, <http://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/turkiye-artik-olcek-kucultemez-460184> (accessed 21 February 2023)

other government bodies such as the State Planning Organisation, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Trade. Furthermore, over the past two decades, other ministries and public institutions have increasingly played an active role in implementing policies aimed at bolstering relations with African states. This expanded engagement encompasses ministries spanning Health, Education, Trade and Defence as each body forges and executes collaborative initiatives with African counterparts. For instance, in 2021, Türkiye's Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca, announced that Türkiye had forged 37 cooperation agreements in the field of healthcare with 25 African countries. Under these agreements, friendship hospitals in Sudan, Somalia and Niger have been providing healthcare services within these nations.²² Similarly, the *Diyanet*²³ has undertaken substantial collaborative endeavours in Africa. In 2006, for instance, it convened religious leaders from various African countries leading to the enrolment of numerous students from nearly 20 African nations who came to Türkiye for education through a collaborative effort between the *Diyanet* and the Ministry of National Education. Since 2006, the *Diyanet* has also been allocating a portion of sacrificial animal donations to African countries. The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), and the defense industry are playing an increasingly prominent role in foreign policy, as demonstrated by Turkey's expanding security engagement with several states in Africa through security cooperation, arms sales, military training, and strategic defense partnerships.²⁴

Beyond governmental institutions, the private sector emerges as a pivotal contributor to Ankara's African policy framework. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, during his tenure as Prime Minister, underscored the leading role of the private sector in a liberal economy urging Turkish entrepreneurs and associations to engage with Africa. At the inaugural Türkiye-Africa Congress held on August 18, 2008, Erdoğan said that “[...] in a liberal economy, the private sector takes the lead in Türkiye. Consequently, we anticipate Turkish entrepreneurs and associations to direct their focus toward the African continent.”

²² Sefa Mutlu, Elif Küçük and Kaan Bozdoğan, “Sağlık Bakanı Koca: Afrika kıtasında bulunan 25 ülke ile sağlık alanında 37 iş birliği anlaşmamız mevcut [Minister of Health Koca: We have 37 cooperation agreements in the field of health with 25 countries in the African continent]”, *Anadolu Agency* (online), 17 December 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/saglik/saglik-bakani-koca-afrika-kitasinda-bulunan-25-ulke-ile-saglik-alaninda-37-is-birligi-anlasmamiz-mevcut/2450146> (accessed 13 June 2023)

²³ *Diyanet*, formally known as the Presidency of Religious Affairs established in 1924, is a state institution responsible for administering religious activities in Türkiye and abroad, and oversees mosque operations, religious education, and international religious outreach.

²⁴ Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, *Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa*, SWP Comment 2022/C 42 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], 30 June 2022), doi:10.18449/2022C42
Sinem Adar and Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, *Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in Turkey: How Has the Security Landscape Changed under AKP Rule?*, SWP Comment 2023/C 55 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], November 2023) doi:10.18449/2023C55

As previously mentioned, with the shift toward an export-oriented development model in the 1980s, the role of Turkish industrialists in foreign policy became more prominent.²⁵ Until the 2000s, their role in Türkiye's foreign relations was confined domestically as an interest group, and their agency was limited to what the government allowed. Historical instances include engagements by Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD)²⁶ members with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the US and diplomatic initiatives in Greece by a conglomerate of Turkish business executives. In 1978 a group of TÜSİAD members met with the IMF in the US. Meanwhile, in 1996, a delegation comprised of executives from TÜSİAD, the Istanbul Chamber of Industry, the Economic Development Foundation (İKV), the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK), the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-İş) attempted a diplomatic initiative in Greece. These endeavours did not yield substantial results due to minimal support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the government at the time.

The paradigm shifted in the 1990s, marking the inception of organised, state-backed efforts to synergise business interests with foreign policy objectives. This was seen notably during Turgut Özal's prime ministership mainly through the integration of TÜSİAD's circles with government ministries and subsequent engagements with conservative Anatolian business circles in the 2000s. A landmark event in 1993 saw a delegation from the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MÜSİAD)²⁷, a conservative business association, participate in a presidential visit to the Turkic republics in Central Asia, signifying the first formal integration of conservative Anatolian business interests into Türkiye's foreign relations by Turgut Özal.²⁸ Ankara's full cooperation with conservative Anatolian business figures in the sphere of foreign relations only truly materialised in the 2000s.²⁹

The AK Party's tenure from the early 2000s further amplified this trend, with conservative capital groups becoming pivotal in shaping Türkiye's engagement with Africa. In its early years in power the AK Party established a close relationship with the Gülen-affiliated Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) and conservative inclined Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association

²⁵ The relationship between business organisations and foreign policy in Turkey was primarily focused on the domestic market and shaped around protectionist-punitive political authority until the mid-1980s.

²⁶ Founded in 1971, TÜSİAD is the biggest and the most influential interest-based voluntary business association in Turkey.

²⁷ Founded in MÜSİAD represented conservative business people.

²⁸ Recep Temür, *Baskı grupları ve Türkiye'de bir işveren örgütü olarak MÜSİAD [Pressure groups and musiad as an employer organization in Türkiye]* (Istanbul: İstanbul University, Master's Thesis, 2019: 104) <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezDetay.jsp?id=U1zRtvoWlaXF15S3xhwoA&no=8d9Cf9fdFWRaoAccrj4jSg> (accessed 7 October 2023);

Adem Dönmez, *25 Yılın Hikayesi [The Story of 25 Years]*, (MÜSİAD Kültür Kitaplığı-3: 2015): 86

²⁹ Kemal Kirişçi 2009;

Şebnem Gümüşçü and Deniz Sert, "The Power of the Devout Bourgeoisie: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey", *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no.6: 953–968

(MUSIAD) while seeking to enhance economic ties with African countries.³⁰ In 2009, Rızanur Meral, then-President of TUSKON, described the collaboration as a partnership where the state formulated strategy and planning while TUSKON executed implementation on the continent.³¹ Until the failed coup attempt in 2016, TUSKON-with Ankara’s support-organised numerous trade summits between Türkiye and African countries. In 2006-a year that Ankara declared as the “Year of Africa”-TUSKON held its inaugural foreign trade bridge events and this trend continued in subsequent years. The 7th Türkiye-Africa Business Bridge event took place in January 2011 in Istanbul with the participation of delegates from 54 African countries and in collaboration with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economy and Türkiye Exporters Assembly (TİM).³² The involvement of Turkish state institutions, including the Presidency, the Prime Ministry and various ministries such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the Undersecretariat of Foreign Trade (DTM) and TİKA underscored the institutional and financial backing for these initiatives.³³TUSKON’s significant role was evident in its participation in high-level visits to African nations, exemplifying the close ties between the state and TUSKON in promoting economic engagement with Africa. For instance, when the Minister of Industry and Commerce Nihat Ergün visited Morocco in 2009 a delegation of 60 business people from TUSKON accompanied him. Similarly, during President Abdullah Gül’s visits to Kenya and Tanzania in 2009 and Nigeria in 2010 TUSKON also participated with substantial delegations.³⁴

Concurrently, Ankara cultivated platforms for other business groups like the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB), DEİK and TIM, though TUSKON remained highly influential.³⁵ In 2008, when Türkiye declared Africa as a strategic partner, the Türkiye-Africa Business Forum was jointly organised by DEİK

³⁰ Senem B. Çevik, “The voice of the voiceless”, in *Turkey in Africa: A New Emerging Power?*, eds. Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu and Onur Tepeciklioğlu (May 2023): 168;

Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu and Onur Tepeciklioğlu (eds.), (May 2023): 261

³¹ “Afrika için 1 koydu 3 aldı [African businesswomen are pushing us]”, *Patronlar Dünyası* (online), 19 October 2009 <https://www.patronlardunyasi.com/haber/-afrikali-is-kadinlari-bizleri-zorluyor-/72052> (accessed 7 October 2023)

³² “TUSKON Afrika-7 Zirvesi gerçekleşti [TUSKON Africa-7 Summit was held]”, *Anayurt Gazetesi* (online), 24 December 2011, <https://anayurtgazetesi.com/haber/10610399/tuskon-afrika-7-zirvesi-gerceklesti> (accessed 7 October 2023)

³³ Haluk Alkan and Muhammet Hüseyin Mercan, Yeni Burjuvazi, Ekonomik Kalkınma ve Afrika: Tuskon Afrika Ticaret Köprüleri [New Bourgeoisie, Economic Development and Africa: Tuskon Africa Trade Bridges], *Journal of Political Science* 1, no. 1 (2013), <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1149> (accessed 7 October 2023)

³⁴ Abdullah Gül, “Kenya and Tanzania Visits”, *Abdullah Gül’s website* (online), 19 February 2009, <http://www.abdullahgul.gen.tr/aciklamalar/252/61580/kenya-ve-tanzanya-ziyaretleri.html> (accessed 7 October 2023)

³⁵ The Foreign Policy Yearbooks prepared annually by SETA reflected TUSKON’s significance in Turkey’s foreign policy during those years.

As an example, check: Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat & Mesut Özcan (eds.), *Turkish Foreign Policy Yearbook 2010* (Ankara: SETA, 2011), <https://tdpyilligi.setav.org/tdp/turk-dis-politikasi-yilligi-2010.pdf> (accessed 7 October 2023)

and TUSKON.³⁶ However, TUSKON's role began to diminish following the break between the AK Party and the Gülen Movement in 2013, the designation of the Gülen Movement as a terrorist organisation in Türkiye in 2016 and with DEİK assuming the coordinating body in managing Türkiye's private sector relations in its foreign policy by 2014. As a result, Ankara began to manage its relationships with various business associations, regional groups and diverse interest-based business entities through DEİK. In 2016, the first Türkiye-Africa Economic and Business Forum was organised under the coordination of DEİK.

In the educational sphere, Ankara's early AK Party years witnessed the establishment of Gülenist Turkish schools across Africa by business leaders in TUSKON, serving as a cornerstone of Türkiye's soft power strategy on the continent. The failed coup attempt in 2016 and the designation of the Gülen Movement as a terrorist organisation in Türkiye the same year transformed the strategies of this area with the focus shifting toward the Turkish public institution established in 2016, *Maarif* Foundation³⁷ mainly due to two reasons: to leverage the soft power of Turkish schools in Africa, and to curtail the activities of Gülen-affiliated actors. Since 2016 Ankara has demanded the closure of 110 schools operating in 35 African countries affiliated with the Gülen movement³⁸ and mostly Türkiye has succeeded in this offensive. Today the *Maarif* Foundation operates schools in 25 African countries and is the primary executor of Türkiye's educational soft power activities.³⁹

This recalibration of Turkish educational soft power in Africa has extended to authorising specific organisations for targeted purposes and centralising each organisation's efforts in their areas of expertise. The *Yunus Emre* Foundation is tasked with running Turkish language education abroad, as stated the *Maarif* Foundation is entrusted with establishing and operating Turkish schools and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) is responsible for educational scholarships. This centralisation has signified a strategic realignment of Türkiye's diplomatic and educational endeavours in Africa.

Furthermore, the emphasis on state actors in Türkiye's African strategy became pronounced especially in humanitarian efforts. There has been a shift in focus among organisations like TİKA and *Kızılay* redirecting their efforts toward state actors,

³⁶ Ayşe Çavdar, "AKP'nin Afrika Açılımı: Anti-Emperyalizmin Emperyalizmi [AKP's Africa Opening: The Imperialism of Anti-Imperialism]", *Heinrich Böll Stiftung Perspectives* 5, no.13: 36-39, https://tr.boell.org/sites/default/files/perspectives_5_toplu_tr.pdf (accessed 8 October 2023)

³⁷ Turkish Maarif Foundation was established by the enacted law on June 17, 2016, by the Turkish parliament and is authorized to provide educational services abroad, including managing schools and educational institutions.

³⁸ Michelle DeFreese, "Diplomatic Row over Gulen Influence in Africa", *Diplomatic Courier* (online), 04 October 2016, <https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/posts/diplomatic-row-gulen-influence-africa> (accessed 8 October 2023)

³⁹ Birol Akgün, "Afrika'nın Geleceği için Eğitim: Türk Maarif Vakfı [Education for the Future of Africa: Turkish Maarif Foundation], *Kriter Dergisi* 6, no. 63 (2021), <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-afrikada-turkiye/afrikanin-gelecegi-icin-egitim-turkiye-maarif-vakfi> (accessed 8 October 2023)

especially those like the YTB and the *Diyanet*. This shift began in 2011 with Somalia. Ankara continues to provide support for the humanitarian activities of private religious foundations and civil society organisations in its relations with African countries. Notably, the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH) and the *Hudayi* Foundation are among the largest and most centrally organised entities active in Africa.⁴⁰ There are numerous Turkish civil society organisations engaged in a wide range of activities in African countries, including healthcare, childcare services, well drilling and food aid.

⁴⁰ Hürcan Aslı Aksoy, Salim Çevik and Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, *Turkey's Soft Power Tools in Africa, Visualizing Turkey's Activism in Africa* (Berlin: Centre for Applied Turkey Studies [CATS], June 2022), <https://www.cats-network.eu/topics/visualizing-turkeys-activism-in-africa#c8238>

5.

Policy Strategies

Another topic of debate regarding Ankara's relations with African countries is whether available resources and capabilities are effectively harnessed to achieve its defined objectives. First and foremost, Ankara's strategies in Africa have been moulded by Türkiye's capacity to exert influence and accept its constraints on the continent. Furthermore, Türkiye's status as a relatively new actor in Africa necessitates careful consideration when devising strategies. As a newcomer, Ankara needs to compete and differentiate itself economically and politically from more established and powerful actors on the continent. Consequently, Ankara's efforts to overcome these limitations have become central in shaping its strategies. These strategies aim at enhancing Türkiye's capabilities on the continent and consist of three components: establishing and enhancing Türkiye's identity and image in Africa; ensuring the development and expansion of institutional infrastructure; and fostering economic integration with the continent.

5.1

Nation-Branding

Türkiye's journey to strengthen its relations with African countries embodies a comprehensive campaign to refine its national image within the African continent, a venture that falls within the ambit of soft power strategy. This initiative seeks to reposition Türkiye as a central and influential global actor with a particular emphasis on reinforcing its national brand. Anchored in three foundational elements, Türkiye's nation-branding strategy incorporates:⁴¹ humanitarian and philanthropic engagement across pivotal sectors including politics, economy, culture, and religion; the portrayal of Türkiye as a collaborative partner and ally to African states; and the establishment of Türkiye's image as a nation of benevolence.

⁴¹ Ambassador Tom Wheeler, "Ankara to Africa: Turkey's outreach since 2005", *South African Journal of International Affairs* 18, no. 1: 43-62;
Emel Parlar Dal and Samiratou Dipama, *Assessing Turkey-Africa Engagements*, Policy Brief, (Berlin: African Policy Research Institute [APRI], April 2023), <https://afripoli.org/assessing-turkey-africa-engagements> (accessed 16 June 2023)

Central to this nation-branding effort is Türkiye's commitment to humanitarian aid in Africa—one of the most widely agreed-upon aspects of its strategy.⁴² In response to the humanitarian crisis caused by famine in Somalia, Türkiye positioned itself as a benevolent fraternal nation providing not only aid and grants but also advocating for international attention to the issue. This proactive engagement was marked by the convening of an urgent session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Executive Committee in August 2011⁴³, complemented by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's address at the UN General Assembly on September 22, 2011 and through the publication of Erdoğan's article "The Tears of Somalia" in *Foreign Policy* magazine in October 2011.⁴⁴ The subsequent Somalia Conference hosted by Türkiye in 2012 signified a sustained commitment. Post-crisis—when the famine crisis was declared over by the UN—Türkiye's focus pivoted to development aid and capacity-building, proliferating these endeavours to other African nations over time.

Türkiye's dedication to humanitarian principles has persisted as a salient aspect of its national branding strategy across Africa. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, Türkiye's provision of health assistance, including vaccines and masks to the African continent, underscored the sustainability of this commitment.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Türkiye's swift response in providing aid following natural disasters in Libya serves as another illustration of its expanding efforts.⁴⁶ President Erdoğan consistently portrays Türkiye as a compassionate nation that does not turn a blind eye to Africa's challenges in his speeches across various platforms. Similarly, Turkish politicians and diplomats also convey the empathic approach to African issues as intrinsic to Türkiye's foreign policy ethos. For example, Ertuğrul Apakan, the Turkish Ambassador to the UN, explained this stance, "We approached Africa's problems as if we were one of their own."⁴⁷

Distinctive from other donor nations, Türkiye has tailored its aid to North and Sub-Saharan Africa with a specific emphasis on food security utilising bilateral cooperation channels over multilateral international organisations and offering

⁴² Andrew Lebovich and Nienke van Heukelingen, *Unravelling Turkish involvement in the Sahel: Geopolitics and local impact* (Amsterdam: Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, July 2023)

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, *Somali Hakkında İİT İcra Komitesi Acil Toplantısı Nihai Bildirisi [Final Declaration of the OIC Executive Committee Emergency Meeting on Somalia]* (Ankara, May 2019), [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/ENFORMASYON/Somali%20hakk%C4%B1nda%20%C4%Boslam%20%C4%B0%C5%9Fbirli%C4%9Fi%20Te%C5%9Fkilat%C4%B1%20\(%C4%B0%C4%B0T\)%20%C4%B0cra%20Komitesi%20Acil%20Toplant%C4%B1s%C4%B1,%20%C4%B0stanbul,%2017%20A%C4%9Fustos%202011.pdf](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/ENFORMASYON/Somali%20hakk%C4%B1nda%20%C4%Boslam%20%C4%B0%C5%9Fbirli%C4%9Fi%20Te%C5%9Fkilat%C4%B1%20(%C4%B0%C4%B0T)%20%C4%B0cra%20Komitesi%20Acil%20Toplant%C4%B1s%C4%B1,%20%C4%B0stanbul,%2017%20A%C4%9Fustos%202011.pdf) (accessed 17 February 2023)

⁴⁴ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "The Tears of Somalia", *Foreign Policy* (online), 10 October 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/10/the-tears-of-somalia/> (accessed 17 February 2023)

⁴⁵ Yunus Turhan, "Turkish Humanitarian Assistance During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Focus on Africa", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 26, no. 3 (2023): 1-19

⁴⁶ Faruk Zurlu, "Turkish naval vessels arrive in flood-hit Libya with humanitarian aid, personnel", *Anadolu Agency* (online), 17 September 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkish-naval-vessels-arrive-in-flood-hit-libya-with-humanitarian-aid-personnel/2993503> (accessed 8 November 2023)

⁴⁷ İsa Afacan, "The African Opening in Turkish Foreign Policy", *Ortadoğu Analiz* 5, no. 52 (2013)

grants while eschewing loans. This approach has served to “consolidate its identity as a humanitarian actor in Africa and its positive distinctiveness.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reveals a predominant reliance on public sector channels for the disbursement of Türkiye’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) to these regions in 2020 indicating a pronounced government-centric approach.⁴⁹ Notably, in Sub-Saharan Africa, engagement was absent through non-governmental channels underscoring a potential area for diversification in aid delivery mechanisms.

In Ankara’s quest to build a strong reputation, Türkiye’s national branding strategy in Africa is predicated upon the notion of partnership among equals.⁵⁰ This partnership among equals approach strategically distances itself from traditional paradigms of power asymmetry. Turkish officials have consistently articulated the progression of Türkiye-Africa relations as grounded in the principles of equal partnership, sustainable cooperation and mutual benefit.⁵¹ Erdoğan frequently characterises relations as evolving “in a multidimensional way based on equal partnership and win-win.”⁵² Similarly, former Trade Minister Mehmet Muş, speaking at the 2021 Türkiye-Africa Economy and Business Forum, said, “Türkiye is not pursuing one-sided economic ambitions but rather aims to contribute to Africa’s development.”⁵³

Türkiye’s self-proclaimed humanitarian and entrepreneurial⁵⁴ foreign policy is increasingly recognised as more and more competitive. Erdoğan has explicitly differentiated Türkiye’s role in Africa from historical colonial legacies often challenging Western engagement on the continent. For instance, he questioned the West’s contributions to Africa and highlighted Türkiye’s commitment to the continent stating, “Couldn’t the West make any positive contributions to this place so far? They have been coming here for years. Did they provide any support? No. The significance of the importance we give to Africa is becoming clearer day by day.”⁵⁵ This discourse-articulated during the follow-up tour after the 2022 Africa-Türkiye

⁴⁸ Emel Parlar Dal and Samiratou Dipama, 2023: 14-15

⁴⁹ Emel Parlar Dal and Samiratou Dipama, 2023: 15

⁵⁰ Alexis Habiyerama and Tarık Oğuzlu, “Engagement with Africa: Making Sense of Turkey’s Approach in the Context of Growing East-West Rivalry”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 11, no. 41 (Spring 2014): 79

⁵¹ “Turkey reaffirms win-win approach in ties with African countries”, *Daily Sabah* (online), 22 October 2021 <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkey-reaffirms-win-win-approach-in-ties-with-african-countries> (accessed 13 July 2023)

⁵² Official Website of TABEF, *Addressing Challenges, Unlocking Opportunities: Building Stronger Türkiye-Africa Economic Partnerships*, Quotation from Recep Tayyip ERDOGAN, President of the Republic of Türkiye (12-13 October 2023, İstanbul): <http://tabef.org/> (accessed 10 November 2023)

⁵³ *Daily Sabah*, 2021

⁵⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, *National Foreign Policy in the “Century of Türkiye”: A Synopsis* (Ankara) <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa> (accessed 17 February 2023)

⁵⁵ Merve Şebnem Oruç, “Africa tour follows up on decisions made at Africa-Turkey summit”, *Daily Sabah* (online), 22 February 2022, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/africa-tour-follows-up-on-decisions-made-at-africa-turkey-summit> (accessed 23 May 2023)

summit-is one example of this competitive tone.

Additionally, Ankara strives to differentiate itself not only from Western powers but also from major Eastern players like China and Russia. This approach underscores Türkiye's desire to present its brand as unique in international politics. It is also described as the Ankara Consensus, which is

“[...] an alternative to both the so-called Washington Consensus, dominated by the United States and Europe, which advocates neoliberal economic and development policies, and the more recent Beijing Consensus, which emphasises state-led economic growth and prioritises stability over democracy.”⁵⁶

While Türkiye's rhetoric may assume a competitive tenor, it is imperative to note that Ankara's strategic intentions do not inherently imply aggressive competition with other global actors in Africa. Turkish diplomat Elif Ülgen has clarified that Ankara's policy is not to contend with third-party countries, including non-continental actors.⁵⁷ The rationale behind this restraint is attributed to the recognition of Türkiye's relative capacities and the impracticality of engaging in direct competition across political, economic and military arenas. Instead, Ankara seeks to identify and exploit strategic opportunities on the continent by fostering alliances and positioning itself as a reliable partner. This approach is encapsulated in Türkiye's foray into security cooperation—an extension of its nation-branding initiatives.

Ankara's goal is to preserve the gains it has made through its Africa outreach policy over the past two and a half decades and maintain this momentum in its foreign politics. Türkiye has judiciously navigated emerging trends in Africa which point toward militarisation and securitisation. To this end, Ankara has embedded security collaboration within its African policy and positioned itself as a trustworthy security partner for African countries.⁵⁸ Türkiye has ratified a series of security and defence industry agreements with 30 African nations and has established military attachés in 19 countries signalling a commitment to enduring strategic partnerships. In addition to adding security as an extra layer to its existing toolkit for its African foreign policy, all these efforts underscore Türkiye's dedication to long-term strategic cooperation with African states. The integration of security dimensions into its diplomatic repertoire not only diversifies Ankara's engagement across Africa but also reaffirms its aspiration for sustained and strategic cooperation with the continent's states.

⁵⁶ Harry Clynch, “The Ankara Consensus: How Turkey is boosting influence in rising Africa”, *African Business* (online), 06 February 2024, <https://african.business/2024/02/politics/the-ankara-consensus-how-turkey-is-boosting-influence-in-rising-africa> (accessed 10 February 2024)

⁵⁷ Emel Parlar Dal and Samiratou Dipama, 2023

⁵⁸ Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, 2022

5.2

Network Expansion and Institutional Capacity Building

The second facet of Türkiye's Africa strategy pushes Ankara to overcome the limitations that Türkiye has faced as a newcomer to the continent. New policies on the expansion of networks and institutional capacity building on the continent call on Turkish policy makers to broaden and intensify their diplomatic network. Historically, since the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, the proliferation of Türkiye's diplomatic presence has been pivotal. This entrenched practice continues to be the backbone of the AK Party's Africa policy. Today, Türkiye boasts one of the most extensive diplomatic networks in Africa and a significant portion of this network has been established over the past two decades through a diplomatic marathon across the continent.

Table 1: Türkiye's Embassies in Africa by Their Opening Dates⁵⁹

Year	Name of Country
1925	Egypt
1926	Ethiopia
1952	Libya
1956	Tunisia
1957	Morocco, Sudan
1962	Nigeria, Senegal
1963	Algeria
1964	Ghana (closed in 1981)
1968	Kenya
1974	Democratic Republic of the Congo
1979	Somalia (closed in 1991), Tanzania (closed in 1984)
1994	Republic of South Africa
2009	Ivory Coast, Tanzania (reopened)
2010	Angola, Cameroon, Ghana (reopened), Mali, Madagascar, Uganda
2011	Gambia, Mauritania, Mozambique, Somalia (reopened), South Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe
2012	Burkina Faso, Gabon, Namibia, Niger
2013	Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Guinea
2014	Benin, Botswana, Congo, Rwanda
2018	Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone
2021	Togo

Source: Authors own compilation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye

Moreover, Türkiye's efforts to enhance its institutional framework over the past two decades extend well beyond the confines of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Türkiye's institutional engagement encompasses several strategic domains, including economics, politics, culture and religion. Public institutions from Türkiye are actively extending their influence across Africa. For example, the Ministry of Trade—boasting

⁵⁹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, Foreign Policy: Sub-Saharan, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sub.en.mfa?4be7cc34-c47c-4814-940a-de518162ff84> (accessed 23 August 2024); The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, Turkish Representations, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkish-representations.en.mfa> (accessed 23 August 2024)

trade advisors or attachés in 119 countries worldwide—maintains representatives in 26 African nations. DEİK orchestrates business councils that foster collaboration with counterparts in 48 African countries. Türkiye’s foreign policy ethos emphasises developmental cooperation, with the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) spearheading development aid initiatives. Notably, Türkiye has transitioned from an aid recipient to a donor⁶⁰ and TİKA’s presence is marked by 23 offices across Africa.

Table 2: Türkiye’s Economic-related Network in Africa

Name of Economic-related Network in Africa	Name of Countries
DEİK Türkiye–Africa Business Councils ⁶¹	Angola, Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Cape Verde, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia
Ministry of Trade’s Attaches in Africa ⁶²	Angola, Algeria, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt (Cairo, Alexandria), Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco (Rabat, Casablanca), Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia
Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) ⁶³	Algeria, Comoros, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Libya, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda

Source: Authors own compilation from DEİK, Turkish Ministry of Trade, TİKA

Health sector contributions in countries like Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia exemplify Türkiye’s substantial developmental impact. Ankara also has signed health cooperation agreements with 20 African countries. Furthermore, Turkish NGOs have embarked on humanitarian aid projects in Africa since the early 2000s with Turkish medical practitioners voluntarily offering health services in remote regions. Since 2006, supported by TİKA and the Ministry of Health, these efforts have facilitated the provision of free health check-ups and surgeries bolstering

⁶⁰ Musa Kulaklıkaya and Ali Aybey, “An Emerging Donor in the Mediterranean Basin: Turkey”, *IEMed* (online), 2008, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/an-emerging-donor-in-the-mediterranean-basin-turkey/#:~:text=The%20first%20official%20provision%20of,country%20to%20a%20net%20donor> (accessed 24 August 2024)

⁶¹ Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), *Türkiye – Afrika İş Konseyleri [Turkey – Africa Business Councils]*, <https://www.deik.org.tr/turkiye-afrika-is-konseyleri> (accessed 8 July 2023)

⁶² Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye, *Ticaret Müşavirliklerimiz ve Ataşeliklerimiz [Trade Counsellorships and Attaché Offices]*, https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/5d2467fb13b87617fcd15ade/Ticaret_M%C3%BC%C5%9Favirliklerimiz_ve_At%C5%9Feliklerimiz.pdf (accessed 11 July 2023)

⁶³ Offices, TİKA (online), <https://tika.gov.tr/en/offices/> (accessed 12 July 2023)

Türkiye's humanitarian credentials.

TİKA's support to these organisations takes the form of both encouragement and financial assistance. Through a formal agreement with the Ministry of Health, TİKA ensures that voluntary doctors are officially recognised by the Ministry in the countries they visit. This recognition prevents any loss of income or leave for these doctors and actively promotes voluntary activities in Africa. Additionally, TİKA covers the travel expenses of doctors to the region and the costs associated with shipping medications collected through donations in Türkiye to those in need in Africa. Furthermore, to bolster the efforts of NGOs conducting health screenings in Africa, TİKA established the Civil Society Organisations Collaboration and Coordination Unit in August 2009.

One of the most well-known collaborative initiatives in Africa is the cataract surgery project led by the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH), a leading Turkish relief organisation. This initiative was supported by the Turkish Ministry of Health, TİKA, the Health Ministries of Sudan and Niger, the World Health Organization and the Islamic Development Bank. The project has reached patients in 14 countries including Sudan, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Mali, Chad, Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Niger, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Somalia⁶⁴ and includes training programmes for local healthcare professionals. The success of continuous healthcare delivery at permanent clinics compared to short-term missions has prompted TİKA to advocate for the establishment of enduring healthcare facilities.⁶⁵

5.3 Economic Leverages

As already mentioned, Türkiye's economic engagement in Africa has historically been rooted in long-term strategic interests aiming to carve out a significant sphere of economic influence. In the coming years, Türkiye seems likely to face significant challenges with the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Ankara is expected to be among the top six countries to experience the largest export losses.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Türkiye is likely to face increased competition,

⁶⁴ "Katarakt ameliyatlarında 100 bin hedefimize ulaştık [We have reached our goal of 100 thousand in cataract surgeries]", *IHH İnsani Yardım Vakfı* (online), 13 November 2017, <https://ihh.org.tr/haber/katarakt-ameliyatlarinda-100-bin-hedefimize-ulastik> (accessed 5 August 2023)

⁶⁵ İhsan Çomak, "Türkiye'nin Afrika Politikası ve Sağlık Sektöründe Çalışan Türk [Turkey's Africa Policy and Turkish Employees in the Health Sector]", *Avrasya Etüdüleri* 2, no. 40 (2011): 218-219

⁶⁶ The other countries are China, the UAE, India, France, and Belgium.

especially from countries like South Africa and Egypt which have export portfolios similar to Türkiye.⁶⁷

In response to the potential constraints posed by the AfCFTA, Ankara is actively pursuing a mitigation strategy emphasising the continuance of sectoral cooperation with North African and Sub-Saharan nations. This strategy includes the negotiation of bilateral agreements and the pursuit of customs privileges. Such initiatives remain a priority within Türkiye's diplomatic engagements and its dialogues with the African Union.⁶⁸ Consequently, Türkiye accords significant importance to establishing free trade agreements, bilateral investment treaties and double taxation avoidance agreements with African states. These agreements are intended to streamline trade and investment processes for Turkish companies on the continent and facilitate the acquisition of projects. The number of trade and economic cooperation agreements with African nations has increased from 23 in 2003 to 45 in 2017 institutionalising a bilateral mechanism for regular follow-up on a range of issues from trade to health to technology.

As of now, Türkiye has successfully concluded free trade agreements with several African countries, primarily concentrated in North Africa. These nations include Tunisia (2005), Morocco (2006), Egypt (2007) and Mauritius (2013). Türkiye and Somalia signed a free trade agreement but the agreement with Sudan remains pending ratification by both parties and has not yet come into effect. Türkiye is actively involved in ongoing negotiations for free trade agreements with various other African countries including Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Djibouti, Somalia and the Seychelles. Moreover-while Türkiye has double taxation avoidance agreements with 89 countries globally-only 10 of these are with African countries namely Algeria, Chad, Ethiopia, Morocco, Gambia, South Africa, Egypt, Rwanda, Sudan and Tunisia indicating a window for expansion in this field.

A secondary strategic approach involves the promotion of Turkish direct investments in Africa as a means to circumvent potential export barriers introduced by the AfCFTA. Türkiye's commercial diplomacy-coordinated through DEİK⁶⁹-plays a pivotal role in achieving this goal. DEİK proudly characterises itself as a voluntary business diplomacy organisation and boasts participation from prominent Turkish

Afrika Kıtasal Serbest Ticaret Bölgesi (AfCFTA) ve Türk Firmalarına Etkisi [African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Its Impact on Turkish Firms], Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey [DEİK] Report (Istanbul: DEİK, 2021)

⁶⁷ DEİK Report, 2021: 53

⁶⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, *Turkey-Africa Partnership First Ministerial Review Conference* (Istanbul: 16 December 2011) <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-afrika-ortakl%C4%B1%C4%9Fi-birinci-bakanlar-duzeyinde-gozden-gecirme-konferansi-16-aralik-2011.tr.mfa> (accessed 7 August 2023)

⁶⁹ DEİK is tasked with overseeing various aspects of Turkey's external economic relations, including trade, international investments, services, construction, logistics, and more. A pivotal development occurred in 2014 when legislative changes entrusted DEİK as the central coordinating entity for Turkey's private sector in matters of external economic relations.

entrepreneurs and business representatives. Berna Gözbaşı, coordination chairperson of DEİK's Türkiye–Africa Business Councils, states, “As business councils, we will continue to pursue commercial diplomacy activities to improve our trade and investment relations.”⁷⁰ In the post-COVID landscape, DEİK recognises the continent as an increasingly vital alternative market which aligns with Türkiye's vision of sustainable trade expansion.

Reflective of this proactive stance, DEİK, in partnership with Turkish ministries, has orchestrated business forums to cement Türkiye's summit diplomacy with the continent. DEİK-in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade (formerly the Ministry of Economy)-successfully organised the inaugural Türkiye–Africa Economy and Business Forum in Istanbul on November 2–3, 2016 featuring the participation of representatives from 42 African states. Subsequently, under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the “Türkiye–Africa I. Agriculture Ministers Meeting and Agriculture Business Forum” convened in Antalya on April 27–28, 2017. The event attracted nearly 50 ministers and heads of state from 54 countries, effectively expanding Türkiye's summit diplomacy with the continent into a sectoral dimension. In the latter part of 2018, DEİK hosted the “II. Türkiye–Africa Economy and Business Forum” in Istanbul on October 10–11. According to the activity reports for 2019 and 2020, Turkish business councils collectively convened a substantial number of meetings with their African counterparts totalling 275 in 2019 and 230 in 2020. These forums have facilitated numerous connections and provided platforms for dialogue and partnership development.

Table 3: Business Forums⁷¹

Name of Business Forum	Date	Place
Türkiye– Africa I. Economic and Business Forum	November, 2–3, 2016	Istanbul
Türkiye– Africa I. Agriculture Ministers Meeting and Agribusiness Forum	April 27–28, 2017	Antalya
Türkiye–Ecowas Economic and Business Forum	February 22 – 23, 2018	Istanbul
Türkiye– Africa II. Economic and Business Forum	October 10–11, 2018	Istanbul
TABEF Türkiye– Africa: Partners in Resilience in Post-Pandemic World	October 8–9, 2020	Online
Türkiye– Africa III. Economic and Business Forum	October 21–22, 2021	Istanbul

Source: Authors own compilation from Türkiye–Africa Business and Economic Forum (TABEF)

⁷⁰ Alen Lapan, “Turkey, Africa seek stronger post-pandemic partnership”, *Daily Sabah* (online), 11 October 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkey-africa-look-for-stronger-post-pandemic-partnership> (accessed 13 August 2023)

⁷¹ Türkiye–Africa Business and Economic Forum (TABEF), Past Forums (online), <http://tabef.org/about-past-forums.html> (accessed 27 August 2024)

In parallel, Ankara is exploring new avenues for economic cooperation, in line with the resolutions of the 2nd Türkiye-Africa Partnership Summit of 2014. Since 2016, the periodic Türkiye-Africa Business and Economic Forum (TABEF)-co-organised by the Turkish Ministry of Trade, the African Union Commission and DEİK-offer a nexus for information exchange. The TABEFs are networking spaces which help foster business relationships between Turkish and African enterprises.

Table 4: TABEF by Numbers⁷²

	2016	2018	2020	2021
Businesspersons (Türkiye)	1770	1800	1145	1505
Businesspersons (Africa)	1213	850	1186	1182
African Countries	49	47	46	45
Ministers	35	30	20	41
Officials	186	245	41	250
Business-to-Government Meetings	5200	3500	4062	4900

Source: Authors own compilation from Türkiye-Africa Business and Economic Forum (TABEF)

In 2001, Türkiye's export presence in African markets was relatively modest, holding the twenty-first position with a mere 1 per cent share of exports. By 2019, this figure had impressively increased to 3 per cent, elevating Türkiye to the ninth rank among exporting countries to the continent. In 2023, Türkiye identified a roster of target countries for heightened export engagement. These included South Africa, Nigeria, Morocco, Ethiopia, Libya, Egypt, Angola, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, and Sudan.⁷³ The strategic focus on South Africa and Nigeria-Africa's most industrialised country, in the case of GDP for South Africa, and the nation with the largest population on the continent, in the case of Nigeria-is a salient feature of Türkiye's Distant Countries Strategy which aims to solidify Türkiye's positioning within global markets and value chains.⁷⁴

A third aspect of Ankara's economic expansion involves the promotion of geostrategic investments, particularly in enhancing logistical connectivity between Türkiye and African nations. Türkiye has announced plans to establish logistics centres not only in

⁷² Türkiye-Africa Business and Economic Forum [TABEF], Past Forums; Türkiye-Africa Business and Economic Forum [TABEF], Reports, <http://tabef.org/reports.html> (accessed 30 August 2024)

⁷³ Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye, Annual Activity Report 2022 (Ankara): 44 <https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/63fe041613b876614c89335b/T%C4%B0CARET%20BAKANLI%C4%99EI%202022%20YILI%20FAAL%C4%B0YET%20RAPORU%20.pdf> (accessed 21 August 2024)

⁷⁴ Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye, Annual Activity Report 2022 (Ankara): 45

Africa but also in the Americas, Europe and the Far East.⁷⁵ This signals an ambitious agenda to redefine interregional commercial connectivity notably between Europe and Africa.⁷⁶ Turkish enterprises are actively executing significant infrastructural projects across Africa and these projects are critical in bridging infrastructure deficits. Ankara has underscored the vital importance of developing energy, infrastructure and transportation networks to facilitate access to raw materials and penetrate crucial markets.

Turkish firms - especially those in North Africa - are focusing on investments that catalyse employment creation on the continent. To this end, they are leveraging build-operate-transfer models in the construction sector. President Erdoğan underscored this aspect in one of his speeches, noting,

“Turkish investors, who predominantly fulfil their workforce needs locally, have wisely refrained from importing labour from abroad, unlike many foreign companies. Thanks to Turkish investors, over one hundred thousand African workers have gained access to employment opportunities.”⁷⁷

Erdoğan further highlighted that the collective value of projects undertaken by Turkish companies across Africa has reached approximately \$70 billion with the market value of Turkish investments on the continent surpassing \$6 billion.

While Türkiye’s investment footprint in Africa may not rival that of other key global players, its ventures have been notably successful in generating employment opportunities. A report by FDI Intelligence from 2014 underscores this point - despite China’s leading investment volume and India’s substantial economic footprint - Türkiye outperformed both Beijing and New Delhi in Africa by creating employment for 16,593 individuals through its investments, exemplifying a significant triumph in Türkiye’s economic engagement with Africa.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ “Turkey to establish logistics centers in Africa, Americas, Europe, Far East”, *Daily Sabah* (online), 25 October 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkey-to-establish-logistics-centers-in-africa-americas-europe-far-east> (accessed 27 August 2023)

⁷⁶ Michaël Tanchum, *Turkey’s Maghreb – West Africa Economic Architecture: Challenges and Opportunities for the European Union*, SWP Working Paper WP 3 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], June 2021)

⁷⁷ Alen Lapan, 2020

⁷⁸ China creates employment for 10,811 and India creates employment for 6,193.

6.

Assessing Türkiye's African Policy: Efficacy, Constraints and Evolving Challenges

In Türkiye's African policy a confluence of state, business and non-governmental actors has undergone a remarkable evolution. The 1998 Action Plan—a testament to Ankara's autonomous policy design to fortify relations with African nations—has transitioned into a more interactive modality. The Action Plan is now characterised by institutionalised relations with the African Union and the development of bilateral ties with individual African states. Contemporary strategy documents, crafted collaboratively, reflect the diverse expectations and policy frameworks of African partners.

Domestically, Türkiye's approach to foreign policy has matured from a singular foreign ministry pursuit into a multi-dimensional landscape influenced by an array of state institutions, business sectors, NGOs and public opinion. This evolution signifies an overcoming of initial state-level limitations and Ankara's expansion into a more complex foreign policy arena. The dynamism of non-state actors has been deftly harnessed by Turkish diplomacy resulting in a synergy often termed the “grand consensus” among Turkish diplomats, business figures and civil society stakeholders. It is evident that a shared interest—predominantly economic—has oriented the Turkish government toward endorsing the initiatives of non-state actors and conversely this shared public-private interest has motivated non-state actors to lend their support to the Turkish-African diplomatic rapprochement.

However, this broadened participation has not been without criticism. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has viewed other institutions in Türkiye as competitors in foreign policy agenda-setting and argued that the autonomous execution of activities by

these rival Turkish institutions has led to coordination and synergy errors.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the transition to a presidential system in Türkiye has shifted decision-making processes in politics and thus coordination to the presidency. In practice, this shift has provided autonomy to institutions and strengthened the frequently cited characteristic of multi-actor foreign policy formulation and implementation.

Hakan Fidan, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, accentuated the imperative of collaboration and disciplined coordination in foreign relations and has advocated for a comprehensive assessment of foreign relations to address current challenges and capitalise on strategic opportunities. In a speech delivered during the 14th Ambassadors Conference after assuming his role, Fidan stated that the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs would prioritise the goal of, “comprehensively assessing foreign relations, formulating positions on current challenges and strategic opportunities, and fostering coordination among ministries and institutions” as a key objective for his tenure.⁸⁰ Given Fidan’s track record for structural reforms during his tenure at the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (also known by its Turkish initials MİT), it is plausible to expect similar reforms that further institutionalise the synchronisation of these established structures with the developed strategies so as to align diverse strategies with overarching national objectives.

Economically, Türkiye’s strides in Africa are notable. Firstly, Turkish construction companies have successfully expanded their presence in Africa. As of 2022, a total of eighty-eight Turkish companies were undertaking numerous high-value infrastructure and superstructure projects across Africa.⁸¹ By the end of 2023, Turkish firms had completed 1,864 projects worth \$85.4 billion across the continent, employing over 100,000 Africans and investing more than \$10 billion.⁸²

Secondly, Ankara has made substantial progress in diversifying its export markets within the continent. This diversification has manifested itself in a more varied range of sectors contributing to exports, with notable demand for defence industry products in the African market. Over the past decade, Türkiye has witnessed a similar diversification in the geographical distribution of its trade activities across Sub-

⁷⁹ Temel İskit, “Dış Politika ve Dış Ekonomik İlişkilerin Yönetimi [Foreign Policy and Management of Foreign Economic Relations]”, *International Journal of Economic*, Issue 3 (September 2001) <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/uluslararasi-ekonomik-sorunlar-eylul-2001.tr.mfa> (accessed XXX)

⁸⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, H.E. Hakan Fidan, *Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye at the Opening Session of the 14th Ambassadors’ Conference* (Ankara, 07 August 2023), <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-hakan-fidan-in-14-buyukelciler-konferansi-acilisinda-yaptigi-konusma--7-agustos-2023.en.mfa> (accessed 13 August 2023)

⁸¹ “Türkiye’nin Afrika ile ticaret hacminin 45 milyar dolara çıkacağı öngörülüyor [It is predicted that Turkey’s trade volume with Africa will increase to 45 billion dollars]”, *Merhaba Afrika* (online), 30 September 2022, <https://merhabaafrika.com/turkiyenin-afrika-ile-ticaret-hacminin-45-milyar-dolara-ckacagi-ongoruluyor/> (accessed 14 August 2023)

⁸² “Turkish companies winning African infrastructure, superstructure projects”, *Anadolu Agency* (online), 13 January 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/afrika/turkish-companies-winning-african-infrastructure-superstructure-projects/3108216> (accessed 5 May 2024)

Saharan Africa. Türkiye's successful diversification efforts span all subregions of Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, Türkiye's top 10 trading partners in Sub-Saharan Africa include four in West Africa (Nigeria, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Ghana), two in Southern Africa (Angola and South Africa), three in East Africa (Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania) and one in Central Africa (Cameroon).⁸³ However, the entrance of new actors like Türkiye into African markets has not gone unnoticed. France, among other established powers, has voiced concerns over Türkiye's growing influence. For example, President Macron has accused Türkiye of pursuing imperialist and colonialist policies in Africa, alongside China and Russia. President Macron's assertions of Turkish imperialism stand in contrast to the broader economic transformation of Africa, where trade with emerging powers like Türkiye is on the rise, challenging the traditional dominance of European nations.

This perspective is overly narrow and limiting. Over the past two decades, the entry of emerging economies such as Türkiye into the African economy has fundamentally transformed the external relations of African countries. Consequently, Africa's trade with emerging powers is increasing, while its trade with traditional partners - primarily European countries - is declining.⁸⁴ Türkiye is one of the five emerging countries (the others being China, India, Brazil and South Korea) with the largest trade volume in Africa.⁸⁵ Members of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are also displaying a growing interest in Sub-Saharan Africa due to their increasing financial resources and political influence.⁸⁶ The BRICS countries aim is to integrate with the African economy and secure their access to the African market and resources. Türkiye's African policies significantly differ from those of BRICS countries - notably in its use of humanitarian and developmental aid and its support for non-state actors, particularly civil society institutions. In addition to that, Ankara's current strategy heavily relies on the development of bilateral relations with African countries. Ankara's strategy of fostering bilateral relations has allowed Türkiye to develop associations without getting entangled in intra-continental disputes. Yet, future geopolitical shifts may compel Türkiye to forge broader regional alliances challenging Ankara's capability to harmonise its global and regional alliance networks. Ankara's most significant test in this context will be its ability to ensure the alignment of the alliances it has established both globally and regionally.

⁸³ Dirk Kohnert, *Does Turkey Support Development in West Africa? The Example of Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast* (Hamburg: GIGA Institute of African Affairs, 01 May 2023) <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4434235> (accessed 27 August 2023)

⁸⁴ In the report written by Gabrielle Angey for the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), this transformation has been quantified as a shift in favour of emerging powers, rising from 23 per cent to 36.5 per cent between 2000 and 2009, while concurrently decreasing against traditional partners from 77 per cent to 63 per cent. Gabrielle Angey, *La recomposition de la politique étrangère turque en Afrique subsaharienne: entre diplomatie publique et acteurs privés* (Paris: French Institute of International Relations [IFRI], 2014) <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/032014.angeyafriqueturquie.pdf> (accessed 28 August 2023)

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Dirk Kohnert, 2023

7.

Analysing Türkiye–EU Relations in Africa: The Modalities, Expectations and Confrontations

As Africa ascends in global strategic significance, it has become a pivotal region for both Türkiye and the European Union in terms of policy development, implementation mechanisms and diplomatic engagement. In assessing the impact of Türkiye’s involvement with African countries, with EU member states and the overarching nature of Türkiye–EU relations within the continent, two crucial aspects warrant close examination.

Firstly, Türkiye’s engagement with Africa in terms of economics, politics and security is relatively modest when compared to the EU and its member states and global powers such as China and Russia particularly when examined in the context of geopolitical competition. Secondly, it’s noteworthy that Türkiye and the EU, despite their significance in the region, have limited interaction with each other in Africa. Furthermore, their approaches to establishing relations with African countries often diverge and even, at times, lead to conflicts.

In the evolving landscape of Africa’s policy sphere the nuances of Türkiye–EU relations have emerged as significant. To dissect this complex dynamic the 5C framework provides an essential analytical tool. The 5C framework enables a multifaceted examination of Türkiye and the EU’s engagement strategies in Africa that transcend a binary approach of cooperation versus conflict and incorporates elements of collaboration, coordination, cooperation, communication, and conflict.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Interaction modalities have been developed and used in other disciplines, such as human resources management for effective teamwork and organisational goals; managing governmental bodies at local level or to formulate and conceptualise practices of interorganisational relationships. Xavier Castañer and Nuno Oliveira, “Collaboration, Coordination, and Cooperation Among Organisations: Establishing the Distinctive Meanings of These Terms Through a Systematic Literature Review”, *Journal of Management* 46, no. 6 (2020): 965–1001; Eric Martin, Isabelle Nolte and Emma Vitolo, “The Four Cs of disaster partnering: Communication, cooperation, coordination and collaboration”, *Disasters* 40, no. 4 (2016)

Collaboration, defined as joint policy formulation and implementation, is acutely deficient between Türkiye and the EU in Africa. This deficiency is primarily due to the absence of mechanisms that facilitate tripartite policymaking and execution. The deficiency in collaborative frameworks limits effective coordination and compromises the potential synergy of collective efforts. This gap is exacerbated by the protracted stagnation of Türkiye's EU accession process which has, in the past, offered fertile ground for foreign policy coordination. Since 2016, this stagnation has further deepened the gap in Africa between Türkiye and the EU since Ankara has notably increased its engagement with Africa in the past eight years. A collaborative relationship between the EU and Türkiye may only be feasible if Türkiye's accession to the EU is successfully concluded allowing for full participation in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Coordination activities-intended to be directed by a central coordinator toward shared objectives-similarly suffer from the absence of collaborative structure. The period when Türkiye's EU membership appeared imminent was a showcase of Ankara's willingness for collaboration. The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) had served as a central coordinator during this period to some extent, as evidenced by Türkiye's efforts to harmonise its foreign policy initiatives with the CFSP. The high degree of convergence in this period of possible Turkish accession to the EU-from 1987 until 2016-was also evident in Türkiye's foreign policy toward Africa. At that time, Türkiye's policy was generally based on soft power and was in harmony with the EU's foreign policy approach.

For instance, when the EU decided to implement the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995 with the aim of establishing a free trade area with Mediterranean countries, Türkiye accelerated its economic relations with these countries. In the early 2000s, the EU's Neighbourhood Policy was influential particularly through the free trade agreements signed with Tunisia and Morocco in 2004 both of which came into effect in 2005 and 2006 respectively. Furthermore, in 2005, when Türkiye initiated full membership negotiations with the European Union, it also declared 2006 to be the Year of Africa; a move which clearly signalled Ankara's interest in the continent to the world. Brussels-as reflected in the European Commission's progress reports from that time-appreciated Türkiye's increasing diplomatic role as a stabilising force in neighbouring regions and as a symbol of Ankara's contribution to collective crisis management efforts.

Despite the harmonious alignment in prior periods, the EU provided a limited role in security coordination even during these years. Türkiye played a significant role in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), contributing the largest single third-country participation through troops and personnel.⁸⁸ Yet, Ankara's role in EU

⁸⁸ Sinem Akgul-Acikmese and Marilena Koppa, "Turkey-EU Relations: The Security Perspective and the CSDP", *UİK Panorama* (online), 16 February 2022,

missions in Africa remained modest. Türkiye was one of the contributing countries to two EU missions in the Congo between 2006 and 2007–European Union Military Operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (EUFOR RD Congo) and European Union Police Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (EUPOL Kinshasa). In a speech to the Turkish Parliament in 2006, the then–Defence Minister Mehmet Vecdi Gönül defined Türkiye’s military support as a positive contribution to the EU’s collective security efforts and stated that it would assist Türkiye’s membership application.⁸⁹

Cooperation is the pursuit of independent objectives in a cooperative set of actions. While some forms of cooperation are present between Ankara and EU member states, extensive cooperation has been inconsistent and could be augmented through systematic approaches. Since 2016, Ankara’s waning alignment with the EU’s CFSP due to the stalling of its membership process has negatively impacted Türkiye’s security and foreign policy cooperation with the EU–especially in Africa. Similarly, when it comes to communication–a critical component which entails the reciprocal exchange of ideas and information–there is currently insufficient dialogue between Türkiye and the EU in African contexts. This deficiency in information exchange is a significant barrier to harmonising strategies and maximising the impact of Brussels’ and Ankara’s engagements in Africa.

The modalities of cooperation and communication between Türkiye and the EU in their foreign policy engagements in Africa have been notably limited such as in humanitarian and development aid, mediation, conflict resolution initiatives and security assistance. The EU, along with its member states, harbours concern that Türkiye’s escalating involvement in Africa might undermine their own policies and interests.⁹⁰ Both Türkiye and the EU have been engaging in security cooperations with African countries without prior collaboration or consultation between Brussels and Ankara. A clear instance of this deficiency in cooperation can be observed in Somalia where Türkiye and the EU provide tactical training support to the Somali National Army but without effective coordination and communication between them. Compared to EU member states, Türkiye offers more comprehensive training packages including direct links to proficient operational units and military equipment options thereby diminishing the overall impact of the EU’s efforts.⁹¹

<https://www.uikpanorama.com/blog/2022/02/16/turkey-eu-relations-security-perspective-cdsp-panorama/> (accessed 5 May 2022)

⁸⁹ Turkish Parliament, *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, vol. 125 (120) (Ankara, 27 June 2006), <https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d22/c125/tbmm22125120.pdf> (accessed 6 May 2022)

⁹⁰ Nienke van Heukelingen and Andrew Lebovich, *Unravelling Turkish Involvement in The Sahel*, Policy Brief (Amsterdam: Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, July 2023)

⁹¹ Paul D. Williams and Hussein Yusuf Ali, *The European Union Training Mission in Somalia: An Assessment*, SIPRI Background Paper (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], December 2020): 9

Since 2021, in parallel with Türkiye's charm offensive to repair its relations with EU⁹², Türkiye began to shift its strategic approach toward Africa toward signalling its willingness to cooperate with the EU member states involving the pursuit of independent but harmonious actions. As Türkiye navigates its foreign policy in Africa, its interactions with EU member states reveal Ankara's search for a complex tapestry of cooperation underscored by a willingness to explore joint initiatives and address shared economic and geopolitical challenges. While the recent past has seen friction, this willingness to work with the EU suggests that a more systematic method could enhance consistency and effectiveness between Brussels and Ankara.

Recently there has been a growing perception in Ankara that Germany and Türkiye could present a better equitable perspective on Africa compared to global competitors.⁹³ During the Turkish-German Energy Forum held on October 26, 2018-as part of German Economy and Energy Minister Peter Altmaier's visit to Türkiye-Nail Olpak, President of the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye (DEİK), mentioned discussions between Turkish and German companies about opportunities for cooperation in African countries and said that African partners have also expressed interest in such cooperation.⁹⁴ Given that Germany-like Türkiye-places a priority on direct investments that generate employment, Turkish business circles are eager for partnerships with German companies.

Ankara's willingness to enhance cooperation in Africa extends to the EU Mediterranean countries despite the absence of substantial outcomes thus far. For example, the third intergovernmental summit between Italy and Türkiye in July 2022 marked a positive shift in relations and generated an improved agenda for cooperation⁹⁵ particularly after the half decade of stagnation and a diplomatic crisis following the Palermo summit on Libya in 2018.

Regarding the Palermo incident, the Turkish delegation was excluded from the mini-summit at the Palermo summit. This exclusion triggered diplomatic tension between Ankara and Rome, resulting in Türkiye's withdrawal of its delegation.⁹⁶ This crisis was

⁹² "Turkish FM on charm offensive in Brussels", *Euractiv* (online), 21 January 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/turkish-fm-on-charm-offensive-in-brussels/> (accessed 5 September 2023)

⁹³ Deniz İstikbal and M. Ali Uçar, "Türkiye ile Almanya'nın Afrika perspektifi işbirliği imkanlarına zemin hazırlıyor [Turkey's and Germany's African perspective paves the way for cooperation opportunities]", *Anadolu Agency* (online), 12 July 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/turkiye-ile-almanya-nin-afrika-perspektifi-is-birligi-imkanlarina-zemin-hazirliyor/2301769> (accessed 6 September 2023)

⁹⁴ Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), *Almanya ile Türkiye İş Birliği'nde Afrika Fırsatı [Africa Opportunity in Cooperation between Germany and Turkey]*, <https://www.deik.org.tr/basin-aciklamalari-almanya-ile-turkiye-is-birligi-nde-afrika-firsati> (accessed 6 September 2023)

⁹⁵ Valeria Giannotta, "Türkiye-Italy summit to consolidate bilateral dialogue", *Anadolu Agency* (online), 11 July 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/turkiye-italy-summit-to-consolidate-bilateral-dialogue/2634966> (accessed 8 September 2023)

⁹⁶ "Turkey pulls out of Libya conference in Italy with 'deep disappointment' VP Oktay says", *Daily Sabah* (online), 13 November 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2018/11/13/turkey-pulls-out->

interpreted as a sign that Türkiye was being excluded from Mediterranean affairs and Italy was seen as aligning itself with other regional actors such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against Türkiye. The tension in the Rome–Ankara relations reached its peak with Türkiye’s military engagement to Second Libyan Civil War in 2019.

As such the 2022 diplomatic thaw between Italy and Türkiye has represented a significant turning point. High expectations for cooperation with Italy in Africa have been echoed in Turkish media outlets.⁹⁷ Italy has substantial investments in Türkiye and the volume of exports between the two countries is considerable. Consequently, both nations have seen the advantage of extending their existing joint ventures to Africa particularly in the realm of the economy. Moreover, a geopolitical symbiosis exists between Italy and Türkiye giving rise to the Türkiye–Italy–Tunisia transportation corridor which holds the promise of reshaping trade dynamics among Europe, Africa and the Middle East.⁹⁸ Extending from Tunisia’s ports, the corridor has the potential to expand further southward, ultimately reaching Lagos, Nigeria. Such a corridor would establish a comprehensive trade route for Italy and Türkiye and bridge Europe to Africa via the Trans–Saharan Highway through Algeria.⁹⁹

Despite tensions in their relationship due to Türkiye’s policies in North and West Africa, Ankara has been vocal about its willingness to cooperate with France in Africa. In 2022, during a joint press conference of Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, Çavuşoğlu expressed Ankara’s desire for Turkish and French business people to collaborate in promoting development in Africa.¹⁰⁰ In 2019 the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye (DEİK) also organised a trip to Paris, bringing Turkish business people together with their French counterparts to discuss cooperation opportunities in Africa.¹⁰¹

[of-libya-conference-in-italy-with-deep-disappointment-vp-oktay-says](#) (accessed 8 September 2023)

⁹⁷ “Türkiye ve İtalya, üçüncü ülkelerde yatırım yapabilir” beklentisi [Expectation that 'Turkey and Italy can invest in third countries']”, *Anadolu Agency* (online), 11 January 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turkiye-ve-italya-ucuncu-ulkelerde-yatirim-yapabilir-beklentisi/2105621> (accessed 8 September 2023)

⁹⁸ Michaël Tanchum, “Italy and Turkey’s Europe–to–Africa Commercial Corridor: Rome and Ankara’s Geopolitical Symbiosis Is Creating a New Mediterranean Strategic Paradigm”, *Austria Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES) Fokus*, no. 10 (2020)

⁹⁹ Michaël Tanchum, 2020

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, *Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu'nun Fransa Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Catherine Colonna ile Ortak Basın Toplantısı, 5 Eylül 2022, Ankara [Joint Press Conference of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Catherine Colonna, 5 September 2022]* (Ankara, 05 September 2022), https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-mevlut-cavusoglu-nun-fransa_db-ile-ortak-basin-toplantisi.tr.mfa (accessed 8 September 2023)

¹⁰¹ Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), *Türkiye–Fransa Afrika’da İşbirliği Toplantıları 28 Şubat – 01 Mart 2019 [Turkey–France Cooperation Meetings in Africa 28 February – 01 March 2019]*, Paris Final Report (Istanbul: 2019), <https://www.deik.org.tr/uploads/turkiye-fransa-afrika-da-isbirligi-ve-ceo-yuvarlak-masa-toplantisi.pdf> (accessed 9 September 2023)

Conflict encompasses the idea of the pursuit of goals and actions that are incompatible and interfere with another nation's aims. An aspect of conflict occasionally has characterised the Türkiye-EU dynamic in Africa, thereby diminishing the potential for a synergistic impact. For example, in Libya Türkiye's provision of security assistance and the deployment of its soldiers has led to escalated tensions with the EU and its separate member states. These instances underscore a marked absence of effective communication and cooperation with both sides frequently resorting to third parties such as NATO or the United States for crisis management.

These crises and the increasingly confrontational tone in relations negatively affect Turkish public opinion and Turkish intellectuals' perspectives on Türkiye's possible cooperation approaches with EU members in Africa. There are concerns in Türkiye regarding the unwillingness of EU member countries to cooperate with Türkiye in Africa as well as the chance of success of such cooperation between the EU member states and Türkiye.¹⁰² Furthermore, those critics argue that Paris aims to curtail Ankara's security, economic and investment-focused relations with North and West African countries.¹⁰³ More Turkish researchers working on this subject agree that Türkiye offers an alternative approach to those of European powers, particularly in its collaborative efforts in Africa.¹⁰⁴ Hasan Servet Öktem, a retired Turkish diplomat who has also served as the Director-General for the Far East and Africa, has argued in one of his articles that France's policies have suffered from strategic errors in response to the emerging multipolarity on the continent.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, Öktem claims that Türkiye

¹⁰² Burhanettin Duran, "Üç Örnekle Türkiye'nin Artan Jeopolitik Önemi [Turkey's Growing Geopolitical Importance with Three Examples]", *SETA* (online), 06 September 2023, <https://www.setav.org/uc-ornekle-turkiyenin-artan-jeopolitik-onemi/> (accessed 9 September 2023)

¹⁰³ Mehmet Özkan, "Why Turkey is making friends in West Africa", *Middle East Eye* (online), 22 September 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/what-are-ankaras-ambitions-west-africa> (accessed 9 September 2023);

Serhat Orakçı, "Batı Afrika'da Türkiye-Fransa Rekabeti Bağlamında Nijerya'nın Stratejik Önemi [The Strategic Importance of Nigeria in the Context of Turkey-France Rivalry in West Africa]", *INSAMER* (online), 13 November 2020, https://www.insamer.com/tr/bati-afrikada-turkiye-fransa-rekabeti-baglaminda-nijeryanin-stratejik-onemi_3469.html#_ednref7 (accessed 10 September 2023);

Gökhan Gökçe, "Fransa Afrika'daki "Kanlı Elmas" Güzergahında Türkiye'yi Tehdit Görüyor [France Sees Turkey as a Threat on the "Blood Diamond" Route in Africa]", *Kriter Dergi* (online), December 2021, <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-afrikada-turkiye/fransa-afrikadaki-kanli-elmaz-guzergahinda-turkiyeyi-tehdit-goruyor> (accessed 9 September 2023);

¹⁰⁴ Adem Kılıç, "Türkiye; Rusya, Çin, ABD ve Fransa'nın rekabet ettiği Afrika'da rolünü sessizce güçlendirdi [Turkey has quietly strengthened its role in Africa, where Russia, China, the US and France are competing]", *GDH* (online), 26 February 2023, <https://gdh.digital/inews-turkiye-rusya-cin-abd-ve-fransanin-rekabet-ettigi-afrikada-rolunu-sessizce-guclendirdi-56796> (accessed 10 September 2023);

Adem Kılıç, "Türkiye'nin Afrika Politikası ve Afrika'daki Varlığı [Turkey's African Policy and Presence in Africa]", *M5 Dergisi* (online), 25 January 2021, <https://m5dergi.com/dunya/turkiyenin-afrika-politikasi-ve-afrikadaki-varligi/> (accessed 11 September 2023);

Mehmet Özkan, "Doğu Afrika Jeopolitiği ve Türkiye'nin Somali Politikası [East Africa Geopolitics and Turkey's Somalia Policy]", *SETA* (online), 2014, https://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20141021153934_40_somali_web.pdf (accessed 10 September 2023)

¹⁰⁵ Hasan Servet Öktem, "Fransa Afrika politikasını gözden geçirmek zorunda kaldı [France forced to rethink its Africa policy]", *T24* (online), 23 March 2023, <https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/hasan-servet->

has been more successful regarding multipolarity in Africa.

Tensions have been further exacerbated by an increase in anti-Western sentiment within Türkiye's political discourse particularly concerning human rights, democracy and foreign policy issues. During his three-day tour of Africa in 2017, President Erdoğan made statements implying that Africa is aware of historical exploitation, further contributing to the tensions.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the perception that France aligned with Gulf Monarchies and Egypt against Türkiye during the Qatar crisis (2017-2021) has contributed to a complex and occasionally contentious Türkiye-EU relationship.¹⁰⁷

[oktem/fransa-afrika-politikasini-gozden-gecirmek-zorunda-kaldi,39268](#) (accessed 8 September 2023)

¹⁰⁶ Felix Tih, "Erdoğan: 'We know very well who exploited Africa'", *Anadolu Agency* (online), 25 January 2017, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/erdogan-we-know-very-well-who-exploited-africa/734731> (accessed 8 September 2023)

¹⁰⁷ "Qatar and Turkey refuse to close Turkish base as France offers to mediate Gulf crisis", *Middle East Eye* (online), 17 July 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/qatar-and-turkey-refuse-close-turkish-base-france-offers-mediate-gulf-crisis> (accessed 9 September 2023)

8.

The Turkish Perspective on Trilateral Cooperation and Competition

Türkiye's mode of interaction—particularly in the economic sphere—demonstrates a distinctive trilateral approach in comparison to the European Union and its member states.¹⁰⁸

Ankara is developing cooperation—especially in trilateral cooperation modalities—to compensate for its weaknesses against rivals with financial superiority such as China. For some projects Turkish companies have secured funding from financial institutions such as the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the World Bank. In states where Turkish business people have won projects and competed against Chinese rivals (for instance in Rwanda, Tanzania and Senegal) Turkish contractors have utilised funds from international institutions.¹⁰⁹

The Türkiye-Azerbaijan Cooperation Program in Tanzania is an illustrative example where nearly a hundred Tanzanians underwent free cataract surgeries and hundreds received eye examinations in February 2014. The Türkiye-Singapore-Africa collaboration also provides a good example of such trilateral cooperation modalities. In February 2018, the Turkish cooperation agency TİKA and the Singapore Cooperation Program collaborated to provide aviation and satellite meteorology training for African meteorologists. Participants received training in the use of satellite systems and the integration of aviation with meteorology. Meteorologists from 15 African countries participated in the training program, led by Turkish and Singaporean experts.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ivano di Carlo, Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu, Amanda Paul and Yu-Shan Wu, *Turkey's African engagement: A critical analysis* (Berlin: European Policy Centre [EPC], November 2020) https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2020/Eurasia_goes_to_Africa_WEB.pdf (accessed 20 June 2022)

¹⁰⁹ Andrea Ayemoba, "Turkish builder signs \$1.9b railway construction deal with Tanzania", *Africa Business Communities* (online), 29 December 2021, [https://africabusinesscommunities.com/news/turkish-builder-signs-\\$1.9b-railway-construction-deal-with-tanzania/](https://africabusinesscommunities.com/news/turkish-builder-signs-$1.9b-railway-construction-deal-with-tanzania/) (accessed 26 August 2023)

¹¹⁰ Ersin Çopur, *Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency [TİKA] 2018 Annual Report* (Ankara: Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency [TİKA], 2018), <https://tika.gov.tr/wp->

Triangular collaboration between Türkiye and Japan in African countries is noteworthy. Turkish Eximbank has collaborated with Japan's Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI) to provide valuable support to Turkish companies in insuring investment and export credits. Furthermore, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), in partnership with Turkish Eximbank, have explored ways to enhance cooperation between Japanese and Turkish companies in infrastructure construction in Africa.¹¹¹ During the Türkiye-Japan Business Council meeting held in Türkiye in 2019, the Japanese side emphasised Tokyo's motivation to support Turkish construction companies in their investments in Africa while Turkish firms expressed expectations for expanding cooperation in Africa, particularly in technology-enhanced sectors and other areas.¹¹²

This is notably evident in sectors where Turkish investments are strongest—such as infrastructure and construction projects. In the infrastructure and construction sectors Turkish firms are increasingly outperforming their Chinese counterparts. For instance, Turkish companies were involved in the construction of the Kigali Convention Centre which hosted the 27th African Union Summit in 2016. This convention centre, with a capacity of 2,600 people, is part of a five-star hotel with 292 rooms and holds significant importance not only for Rwanda but also for the entire African continent. The construction was initiated by a Chinese company in 2009 but was later taken over by Turkish companies and completed on time. In another example, Turkish companies, Summa and Limak, undertook the construction of the Blaise Diagne Airport which began operating in Senegal in 2017. The initial construction of the airport in 2008 was primarily led by a Saudi Arabian company but it was completed by a consortium comprising Summa and Limak companies in eight months.

In 2023, the Turkish construction company Yapı Merkezi took over the construction of the railway line connecting the Ugandan capital Kampala to the Kenyan border town of Malaba from the China Harbour Engineering Company, a state-owned Chinese company.¹¹³ This occurrence was not a one-time event. Turkish firms had a track

<content/uploads/sayfa/publication/2018/T%C4%B0KA%20Annual%20Report%202018.pdf> (accessed 17 August 2023)

¹¹¹ John Calabrese, "Building in Africa: Turkey's "Third Way" in China's Shadow", *Middle East Institute (MEI)* (online), 21 June 2021, https://www.mei.edu/publications/building-africa-turkeys-third-way-chinas-shadow#_ftnref44 (accessed 6 May 2022)

¹¹² Ergin Garip and Yunus Turk, "Turkey, Japan eye further cooperation in Africa", *Anadolu Agency* (online), 19 June 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkey-japan-eye-further-cooperation-in-africa/1508830> (accessed 23 June 2023)

¹¹³ Hamza Kyeyune, "Uganda pitches Turkish company Yapı Merkezi to build railway", *Anadolu Agency* (online), 12 January 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/uganda-pitches-turkish-company-yapi-merkezi-to-build-railway/2786340> (accessed 23 June 2023)

record of outperforming their Chinese construction rivals in Africa.¹¹⁴ In 2019, the Turkish company Summa secured contracts for a parliament building and shopping centre in Equatorial Guinea and a convention centre in Rwanda winning the contracts over Chinese competitors. In 2017, Yapı Merkezi won a bid against a Chinese company to build one of Ethiopia's modern railway lines. In 2021, Yapı Merkezi outbid another Chinese competitor to secure a \$900 million railway project in Tanzania.

Despite these examples, China—with its larger allocation of finances and Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—has committed far more resources than Türkiye to China's relationship with the African continent. While there is intense competition between Turkish construction companies and their Chinese counterparts, both sides are cautious about directly labelling each other as competitors. Given China's massive financial strength and the resources it has poured into mega projects across the continent, openly discussing China as a competitor to Türkiye in Africa would only serve to bolster Türkiye's popularity in African states. Yet, both Ankara and Beijing consistently stress that neither nation competes in Africa with any other country. Nonetheless, the fact remains that Turkish companies have emerged victorious in projects against their Chinese rivals. These successes have allowed Ankara to gain more visibility across Africa and enhance Türkiye's reputation. Thus, an implicit Beijing–Ankara competition has improved the competitiveness of Turkish firms in the eyes of African countries.

As Türkiye's portfolio of activities in Africa expands—particularly within the economic domain—an intensification of competitive dynamics seems probable. The burgeoning scale of Türkiye's economic initiatives is likely to fuel demand for enhanced tripartite cooperation mechanisms. These mechanisms are set to be driven by the need for support in finance and technology—both of which are critical elements for sustainable development and Türkiye's competitive advantage. As a strategic response, Türkiye will develop cooperative mechanisms to strategically overcome the limitations of bilateral engagements and enhance its competitive position against financial giants like China, as well as financially advantageous middle powers such as the oil-rich Gulf countries and India in Africa.

The potential insufficiency of current trilateral cooperation frameworks could necessitate novel alliances, not solely to bolster Türkiye's economic pursuits but also to ensure a balance of interests and competitive equities on the continent. This scenario posits that faced with the constraints of its competitive power against China, Türkiye may increasingly seek collaborative relationships to mitigate direct competition.

¹¹⁴ Yusuf Selman Inanc, "The Turkish construction companies outfoxing China in Africa", *Middle East Eye* (online), 05 February 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-africa-construction-companies-outfoxing-china> (accessed 17 June 2023)

9.

Fostering an Improved EU-Türkiye Relationship in Africa

In the formulation of policies concerning EU-Türkiye relations in Africa it is imperative to incorporate three critical factors that will shape the trajectory of this complex interaction.

Firstly, there is a discernible inclination on Türkiye's part to seek alternative partnerships as a means to navigate and potentially temper the burgeoning competitive dynamics on the continent. Given this, it is prudent for the EU to reassess its engagement modalities with Türkiye and acknowledge Türkiye's pragmatic shift to circumvent existing constraints and advance Ankara's foreign policy objectives. A strategic recalibration on the part of the EU should consider Türkiye's pursuit of diversification in partnerships that align with Brussels' interests and complement its strengths-particularly in regions where the EU's influence is traditionally less pronounced. Such an EU realignment will necessitate a nuanced understanding of Türkiye's strategic imperatives and an openness to collaborative frameworks that can accommodate shared goals.

Secondly, the relationship between Türkiye and the EU member states is fraught with risks stemming from their occasionally discordant policies. Türkiye's increased engagement in Africa has led to heightened competition with the European Union, resulting in occasional policy conflicts. Currently, neither Türkiye nor the EU has a concrete agenda for addressing this competition or reconciling conflicting policies. The fact that there is no agenda to resolve issues between Brussels and Ankara suggests that the situation of increased competition is likely to persist and potentially evolve into a more conflicted relationship. These tensions not only undermine collective efforts in the region but also pose a significant challenge to the stability and effectiveness of broader foreign policy agendas. Addressing these risks requires a concerted effort to establish a dialogue that transcends transactional interactions and moves toward sustainable cooperation. The EU should engage Türkiye in a constructive discourse that seeks to harmonise their respective policy approaches. Such a discourse will leverage areas of convergence to mitigate potential conflicts.

Finally, the current modalities between Türkiye and the EU as well as its member states in Africa also bring new risks of producing prejudices and restrictions in strategic thinking and perceptions regarding cooperation with the EU. The risk of deepening prejudices among Turkish decision-makers and the public towards the EU and its member countries must also be considered. If left unaddressed, these fears and biases may exacerbate the existing mistrust between Türkiye and the EU.

As the EU and its member states deliberate the future contours of their relationship with Türkiye in Africa, it will be to Brussels' benefit to strategically engage with Ankara's evolving foreign policy framework. This engagement should be characterised by a willingness to explore innovative partnership models, address underlying tensions and foster a collaborative environment conducive to shared prosperity and stability on the African continent.

In order to mitigate the conflictual relationship, the EU and its member states should prioritise the establishment of robust communication channels with Türkiye. The discord in the Mediterranean has underscored the critical need for enhanced dialogue mechanisms. The EU-and Germany in particular-should incorporate these dynamics since Türkiye's ongoing security assistance and military presence in Libya and Somalia has brought the possible risk of continual tensions in the future.

Economic cooperation presents a pragmatic avenue for improving EU-Türkiye relations. Türkiye's contributions to infrastructure and construction projects across Africa have demonstrated compatibility rather than rivalry with European endeavours. Turkish authorities have consistently expressed a preference for collaborative engagements over competitive narratives-especially within the economic domain. The EU and its member states have several options in this regard. Triangular cooperation between Türkiye, the EU and African nations offers a fertile ground for joint initiatives. Leveraging Türkiye's construction sector prowess, marked by high quality and cost-effectiveness alongside the EU's technological and financial resources could facilitate the development of sustainable public infrastructure in North Africa which can be tailored to address climate change challenges. The EU and member states should consider cooperation with Türkiye on infrastructure investments and projects which will set an interregional pattern of commercial connectivity between Europe and Africa.

Should Türkiye and the EU manage to bridge their differences and place cooperation and coordination at the forefront of their shared strategic interests in Africa, they would find themselves in a more advantageous position to craft policies that resonate with the aspirations of African nations. Bridging the strategic divide between Türkiye and the EU in Africa and pivoting toward a cooperative model aligns with the EU's commitment to revitalised multilateralism.

Addressing the divergence with Türkiye – particularly concerning security and defence matters in Africa – is of utmost importance. To achieve this, the EU should engage in more structured foreign policy dialogues. Allowing the current divergence to persist could lead to Türkiye independently pursuing its geopolitical agenda in Africa and creating a wider gap between Ankara and Brussels in terms of Türkiye’s active security engagements with African states on the ground. The challenge extends beyond simply overcoming the EU’s hesitancy to collaborate with Türkiye; it also involves establishing a more strategic and multilateral framework with African partners. This does not mean advocating for an ad hoc, case-by-case, interest-based cooperation scenario. While such cooperation might temporarily prevent the Brussels-Ankara relationship from deteriorating in specific regions, it will not prevent Türkiye-EU relations from becoming increasingly contentious.

The EU should consider alternative ways for partnership with Türkiye within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), recognising Türkiye as a non-EU NATO member. This could serve to bolster the EU’s defence capabilities and effectiveness in CSDP missions in Africa while fostering alignment between the defence and foreign policies of the EU and Türkiye within the African context.

Abbreviations

AFAD	<i>Disaster and Emergency Management Authority</i>
AfCFTA	<i>African Continental Free Trade Area</i>
AfDB	<i>African Development Bank</i>
AK Party	<i>Justice and Development Party</i>
AU	<i>African Union</i>
BRI	<i>Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative</i>
BRICS	<i>Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa</i>
CFSP	<i>Common Foreign and Security Policy</i>
CSDP	<i>Common Security and Defence Policy</i>
DEİK	<i>Foreign Economic Relations Board</i>
Diyanet	<i>Presidency of Religious Affairs, Presidency of Religious Affairs</i>
DoC	<i>Directorate of Communications</i>
DSI	<i>General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works</i>
DTM	<i>Undersecretariat of Foreign Trade</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
EUFOR	<i>European Union Military Operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo</i>
RD Congo	
EUPOL	<i>European Union Police Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo</i>
Kinshasa	
IHH	<i>Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief</i>
İKV	<i>Economic Development Foundation</i>
IMF	<i>International Monetary Fund</i>
JBIC	<i>Japan Bank for International Cooperation</i>
JETRO	<i>Japan External Trade Organisation</i>
Kızılay	<i>Turkish Red Crescent</i>
MİT	<i>Turkish National Intelligence Organization</i>
MUSIAD	<i>Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association</i>
NEXI	<i>Japan's Nippon Export and Investment Insurance</i>
NGOs	<i>Non-Governmental Organisations</i>
ODA	<i>Official Development Assistance</i>
OECD	<i>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</i>
OIC	<i>Organisation of Islamic Cooperation</i>
SSB	<i>Presidency of Defence Industries</i>
TABEF	<i>Türkiye-Africa Economic and Business Forums</i>
TAF	<i>Turkish Armed Forces</i>
TİKA	<i>Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency</i>
TİM	<i>Türkiye Exporters Assembly</i>
TOBB	<i>Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye</i>

TRT	<i>Turkish Radio and Television Corporation</i>
Türk-İş	<i>Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions</i>
TÜSİAD	<i>Turkish Industry and Business Association</i>
TUSKON	<i>Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists</i>
UAE	<i>United Arab Emirates</i>
UN	<i>United Nations</i>
US	<i>United States</i>
YTB	<i>Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities</i>

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the CATS Network. All CATS Network publications undergo an internal peer review process to uphold quality and accuracy.

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