

## New player on the scene: Turkish engagement in Africa

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**Abstract.** Turkey's engagement in Africa is connected to the ideological shift of Turkish government during the era of Justice and Development Party and its re-direction from the Western-centred to the more diversified foreign policy. Turkish policy in Africa has two dimensions: first one is promoted by the official representation of the State, and the second is performed mainly by civil sector of Turkish society, the business organisation as well as various NGOs. This paper examines Turkish involvement in Africa from various perspectives. It focuses on the economic, political as well as ideological role of Turkey in Africa.

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## 1. Introduction

Turkey's engagement in Africa has become an interesting phenomenon in current world politics. It is connected with the ideological shift of Turkish government during the era of Justice and Development Party with the most significant impact of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and with the redirection from the Western-centred to more diversified foreign policy. Turkish policy in Africa has two dimensions: first one is promoted by the official representation of the State, for example the Prime Minister's engagement in the reconciliation processes in the African continent, and the second one, less visible dimension, performed mainly by the civil sector of Turkish society, i.e. business organisations as well as various non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The main aim of this article is to examine Turkish involvement in Africa from various perspectives. It will focus on the role of Turkey in Africa on the economic, political as well as social level. In the first part, Turkish foreign policy during the era of Justice and Development Party will be evaluated. Second part of the paper will be focused on the history of Turkish-African relations, evaluated from the wider geopolitical perspective. In the third part, Turkish-African economic relations will be described with focus on Turkish economic strategies and the role of business associations. Fourth part of the paper will deal with the political engagement of Turkey in Africa with special focus on the Turkish engagement in African political institutions and its role in reconciliation processes in Africa. The final part of the paper will examine the role of Turkish civil society, mainly NGOs in Africa, mentioning both development projects as well as religious and ideological influence of Turkish organisations in Africa.

## 2. Turkish foreign policy and its development during the AKP era

The present style of proactive Turkish foreign policy has its roots in the era of Turgut Özal's presidency at the beginning of 1990s, which has shifted Turkey's foreign policy orientation and started the policy of better openness, especially in the state

economy (Özkan, 2012: 118). After Özal's era, another influential advocate of Turkish multi-dimensional and proactive Turkish foreign policy was the foreign minister of the coalition government between 1998 and 2002, İsmail Cem. Since the Justice and Development Party's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) government, a significant change in Turkish foreign policy may be observed. Since this time, Turkish foreign policy can be characterised by a motto 'zero problems with neighbours' and by the Turkish effort to play a crucial role in regional as well as global developments (Öniş, 2010: 5). This policy has been motivated also by the unique geostrategic location of Turkey, serving as a bridge between Europe and Middle East and, in the figurative meaning between Western and Eastern civilisations. In accordance with it, Turkey's new foreign policy is based on the democracy, human rights, political dialogue, economic interdependence, and multicultural coexistence in its region (Hursoy, 2011: 140). In the Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's words: "Turkey enjoys multiple regional identities and thus has the capability as well as the responsibility to follow an integrated and multidimensional foreign policy. The unique combination of our history and geography brings with it a sense of responsibility" (Davutoğlu, 2010: 12).

This approach corresponds with the concept of soft power developed by J. Nye in 1980s. According to him soft power is 'the second aspect of power – which occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants...and is associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions' (Nye, 1990: 166-167). It follows that by use of soft power, states are able to legitimize their policies and secure their interests even in the distant regions. In accordance with this concept, sources of Turkey's soft power may be identified in its history, geography and culture. Turkish diplomacy uses these sources for its geographic expansion not only to the neighbouring areas, but also to distant territories such as sub-Saharan Africa, and develops new strategies of soft power in the regional and global context. Another source of Turkey's soft power may be seen in its democratic experience, which enables Turkey to play the role of significant regional and global actor, despite the fact that Turkey has gone through numerous political turmoils in its history. Application of Turkey's soft power

in various regions is enabled also thanks to the effective use of public diplomacy and the activities of various elements of civil society abroad, most significantly non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Kalin, 2011).

The end of the Cold War had a significant influence on the ideological and geopolitical shift of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey had to respond to the change of global politics, which was not that polarised anymore, and to re-conceptualise its own perception of the globalised world. According to Özkan (2011: 116), since then ‘...Africa and Asia are not regarded as distant and troubled regions but as possible partners with which relations in political and economic areas ought to be established and developed.’

*Davutoğlu’s Era in Turkish Foreign Policy.* The significant change in the Turkish foreign policy can be observed especially in the second term of AKP’s government, when Ahmet Davutoğlu became the Minister of foreign affairs in May 2009. Since 2003, he had worked as a foreign policy advisor of Prime Minister and he is considered to be the real creator of AKP’s foreign policy (Aras, 2009: 3). His policy only confirmed the ‘shift of the axis’, from the western-oriented policy of post-war governments towards the eastern-oriented policy, signs of which firstly emerged in the 1990s. The important factor in re-shaping and diversification of Turkish policy can be seen in the rejective approach of the European Union (EU) towards Turkish admission due to the stressed difference in cultural and religious background of Turkey and in the making of Cyprus issues more problematic mainly after the admission of Greek Cyprus into the EU structures in 2004. All these difficulties led to the decline in public support for the EU membership and government almost abandoned this idea and started to search for another geopolitical alternative.

Unlike in the previous era, Turkish policy in the recent years seems to be more independent on Western foreign policy and in this context, some observers even raise the question if Turkey is following the strategy of BRICS (BRICS is association of emerging economies of Brasil, China, India and South Africa) (Öniş, 2010: 2). According to N. Danforth, it is important to distinguish between US and European policy. He concludes that we can not see the West as a political monolith and instead of turn from West-

ern-oriented policy we can identify the turn from US-oriented policy and adoption of more European-style foreign policy in Turkey during the government of AKP (Danforth, 2008: 92). This shift is illustrated for example by the incident when Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan criticised the Israeli policy during the Gaza War, taking place in the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 21 January 2009, during the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in 2009 (Öniş, 2010: 6). Turkey adopted the pro-active policy also in the dispute between Iran and Western countries about the Iranian nuclear programme in 2010. Along with Brazil, it convinced Iran to sign an agreement, on the basis of which Iran gave its low-enriched uranium in exchange for low-enriched uranium, in purity which may not be used for manufacturing of nuclear weapons, received from Western countries. Moreover, Turkey acted against the Western coalition, when it voted against the proposed sanctions against Iran at the United Nations Security Council in June 2010 (Öniş, 2010: 7). Turkey’s support for Iran was not motivated solely by the anti-Western policy, but it has to be seen in pragmatic way, in the connection with the Turkish needs of Iranian energy supplies (Davutoğlu, 2008: 91).

However, Turkey has still preserved to be the important ally of USA in the Middle East, despite some controversies during the Second Gulf War against the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003 as well as different postures towards Israel-Palestinian conflict. Turkey has played the role of important economic and political partner of Western countries, especially USA, for example in the reconstruction process of Iraq, but also in other global issues, for instance, American president George W. Bush discussed the situation in Darfur with Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan in October 2006 (Davutoğlu, 2008: 89-90).

Nevertheless, Turkish foreign policy seems to be more diversified and directed to more targets than in previous era. Diversification of Turkish foreign policy in recent years can be well-illustrated by the quote of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu: ‘Turkey’s engagements from Chile to Indonesia, from Africa to Central Asia, and from the EU to the OIC will be part of a holistic approach to foreign policy. These initiatives will make Turkey a global actor as we approach 2023, the one hundredth anniver-

sary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic' (Davutoğlu, 2008: 96). By the engagement in the various regions including Africa, Turkey is trying to validate its position of a regional power with aspirations to become an important global geopolitical player. Besides that, Turkish geopolitical role is confirmed by its active membership in G-20 group, which is the integration of twenty largest world economies. To strengthen its role in the global arena, Turkey hosts summits of various international organisations, from 5<sup>th</sup> Water Forum summit in Istanbul in May 2009 to the 4<sup>th</sup> United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which took place in May 2011 in Istanbul, and engages itself in the talks between parties in the conflicts in the Middle East and Eurasia (Aras, 2009: 9).

According to Özkan and Akgün (2010a: 529), another important factors in shaping the Turkish foreign policy in the era of AKP, besides the personality of Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, geopolitical reasons, and worsening of EU-Turkish relations, was the growing influence of civil society, mainly NGOs, dealing with Africa. Authors see the increasing role of civil society in Turkey as a result of the democratisation process and the economic development. Davutoğlu puts an emphasis on the use of soft power in foreign policy, as various economic and diplomatic tools as well as cooperation with civil society, despite the prevailed military strength of Turkish army.

Turkey's engagement in Africa has been motivated by both political and economic reasons. Due to the global economic crisis Turkey had to search for new markets for its goods as well as to diversify its economic relations, and the new markets in Africa and Middle East became perceived to be the new opportunities for Turkish entrepreneurs. Since the powers of today are, according to Nye (1990: 160), less able to use their traditional power resources, private actors have become more powerful in promoting the soft-power strategies. Therefore, the small and middle scale economic actors, associated in the organisations such as Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği, TOBB), Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği, MÜSİAD), and Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (Türkiye İşadamları ve Sanayiciler Kon-

federasyonu, TUSKON) have also started to play the significant role and to shape the Turkish foreign policy.

While dealing with the Turkish foreign policy during the AKP era, we also have to bear in mind an ideological background of this political party. Since it is an Islamic party, its cultural, diplomatic, and economic orientation is directed more to Middle Eastern and Islamic countries and vice versa these countries approach Turkey more receptively than when it was governed by strictly secular political party. The shift of Turkish foreign policy also helped the government to gain more support in the domestic political arena mainly because it managed to gain support from the business middle class of Turkish society.

### 3. Towards the new Turkish-African relations

Turkish conception of Africa has been generally based on the geographic division of this continent into the North Africa and the Sub-Saharan Africa. The North Africa has been seen as a part of Ottoman Empire and therefore has been more familiar to Turkish society. On the contrary, Sub-Saharan Africa has been perceived to be a distant and unfamiliar area with variety of problems, such as hunger, civil wars and diseases (Özkan, 2010a: 94-95).

Turks in general have a very long tradition of relations with Africa, thanks to the political, economic and military engagement of Ottoman Empire in various regions. Almost all of the territory of the North Africa as well as the area of modern states like Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia or Chad were all or in their part under the suzerainty of Ottomans (Pham, 2010). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Ottoman Sultans established diplomatic relations with African states in the northern part of Sub-Saharan Africa, namely with the powerful state of Kanem-Bornu, established in today's northern Nigeria, Niger, and Chad. The Ottoman Empire had a significant impact on the religious life of Muslim communities in South Africa. In the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottomans sent the Muslim imams to Cape Town to help the local Muslim community. Another, politically and culturally significant relations were established between

Ottoman State and some states of northern Nigeria by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example in 1894 Ottoman Empire sent there a special emissary (Özkan, Akgün, 2010a: 530-531).

In the era after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Turkey abandoned previously established relations with African territories, due to the colonial rule in Africa, which was dominated by European powers, as well as due to the necessity to consolidate and develop Turkey itself. In this era, Turkey developed diplomatic relations solely with two independent states in Sub-Saharan Africa, i.e. with Ethiopia and Liberia, and maintained, though limited, relations with the North African countries. During the decolonisation process in the late 1950s and beginning of 1960s, Turkey recognised new independent African states, but it did not develop tight contacts and relations with them. Nevertheless, Turkey opened a few diplomatic missions in African

countries, such as the consulate in Lagos in 1956, which was the first permanent diplomatic mission of Turkey in Africa, followed by the embassy in Ghana established in 1957 (Özkan, 2011: 121). Instead of its engagement in Africa, Turkey focused mainly on the internal consolidation of the state and on the development of relations with Western countries, especially USA, due to security and economic reasons. Another aim of Turkish foreign policy was the admission process to the European community at that time. The current position of Turkey in relation to European Union may be seen in the Figure 1. Turkey officially applied for membership in the European Economic Community, predecessor of European Union, in 1987, but it had been an associate member since 1963. Since Turkey feared about Soviet claims about eastern Turkish cities and their expansion in Caucasia, it sought Western allies to protect the integrity of its territory (Afacan, 2013: 47-48).

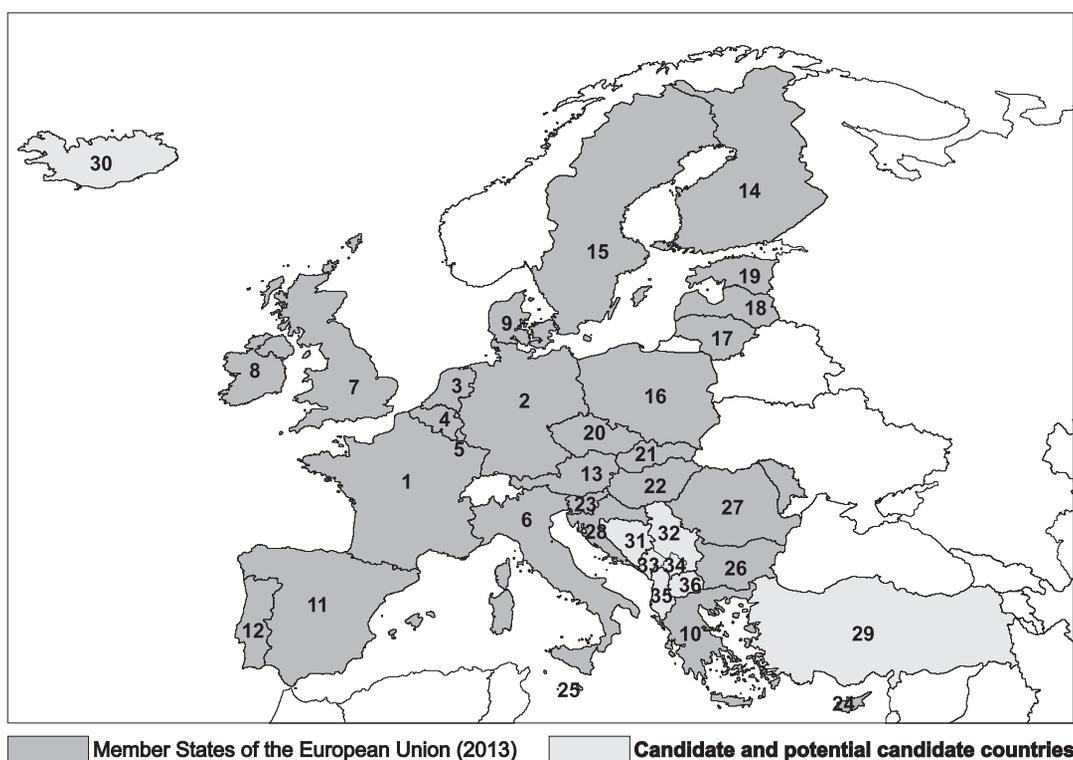


Fig. 1. Turkey and European Union countries

Explanation: 1 – France; 2 – Germany; 3 – Netherland; 4 – Belgium; 5 – Luxemburg; 6 – Italy; 7 – United Kingdom; 8 – Ireland; 9 – Denmark; 10 – Greece; 11 – Spain; 12 – Portugal; 13 – Austria; 14 – Finland; 15 – Sweden; 16 – Poland; 17 – Lithuania; 18 – Latvia; 19 – Estonia; 20 – Czech Republic; 21 – Slovakia; 22 – Hungary; 23 – Slovenia; 24 – Cyprus; 25 – Malta; 26 –Bulgaria; 27 – Romania; 28 – Croatia; 29 – Turkey; 30 – Iceland; 31 – Bosnia and Herzegovina; 32 – Serbia; 33 – Montenegro; 34 – Kosovo; 35 – Albania; 36 – The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Source: European Commission Audiovisual Services (2013)

Due to the Cyprus conflict, which erupted in 1960s, and the tense relations with Western countries during the 1970s, Turkey had to diversify its foreign policy more, and in this respect it started to develop closer relations with Middle Eastern and African countries more than in the previous era. Turkey was driven by the necessity to gain support in the United Nations during the discussions and voting about the Cyprus issue. However, due to the debilitating economic and political situation in 1970s and 1980s, and especially due to the military coup in 1982, Turkey was not able to play the significant role in Africa. Another factor which hobbled the Turkish penetration to Africa was the presence and policy of other global powerful states in Africa, especially former colonial powers, such as France, or new powers like USSR and USA had their own, cold-war influenced, interests in this continent (Afacan, 2013: 48).

### **3.1. Africa Action Plan as a turning point in Africa-Turkey relations**

The importance of Africa for Turkey was newly recognised in the era of Prime Minister Turgut Özal, who came to power in 1983 and who started the policy of structural adjustment with the aim of creating the free-market economy. Africa with its resources and almost one billion inhabitants was identified as an important market for Turkey (Tepedelen, 2008: 104). The year of 1998 meant the real turning point in Turkish approach towards Africa and from this year Turkish government started to focus its policy to this continent. In this year, the newly appointed foreign minister İsmail Cem introduced the 'Africa Action Plan', adopted in the document entitled 'Opening up to Africa Policy', which served as a new road map for the political, commercial, and cultural cooperation between Turkey and African countries. This plan included strategies like opening new embassies, which could help develop economic and political contacts with Africa. On the basis of this plan, some ambassadors were accredited directly from Ankara and they would have been sent to develop the bilateral relations with particular African countries, where the opening of an embassy was not possible due to the financial reasons. On the economic level, this plan was aimed at

concluding the trade agreements, cooperation between African and Turkish technical ministers as well as between businessmen from both territories, and at the creation of special fund for use in Africa. Moreover, the plan presumed the proposed Turkey's membership in important African economic organisations. Besides economic and political dimension, Action Plan aimed at the development of cultural ties between Turkey and Africa as well. It was based on the conclusion of various cultural agreements, contacts between universities and the organisation of international conferences. Cooperation in the field of military training and taking part in the peacekeeping missions of UN was also established by this plan (Özkan, Akgün, 2010a: 532-533; Özkan, 2012: 120-121).

### **3.2. Turkish internal challenges and retreat in Africa-Turkey relations**

However, despite the significant change in the foreign policy, in the 1990s Turkey had to face some severe issues in its internal politics. These were, above all, the fragility of the current coalition, Kurdish problems, and also economic crisis which started in 2000. Due to these reasons, African Action plan did not come to any action and stayed only on the paper until the Justice and Development Party came to power in Turkey (Afacan, 2013: 48). Justice and Development Party assumed power in November 2002. In the first years of its government, it had to deal with the problematic internal situation, mainly with the criticism from the secular opposition, economic crises, as well as the foreign policy. Relations with European Union were deteriorating, the new regional problems emerged, like the Second Gulf War in 2003, and old problems prevailed, as Cyprus issue. According to M. Özkan (2012: 113), Turkey has been driven by two main factors, while approaching Africa: firstly by Turkey's need to diversify its economic relations and to reduce its dependence on European countries and Russia in a new global political economy and secondly, by its re-orientation in global politics from the Western-centric to more diversified foreign policy.

Even though AKP government proposed the 'Development of Economic Relations Strategy with African Countries' in 2003, this plan did not have

much significant impact on the real government's policy. Until 2005, AKP government managed to secure its legitimacy, both internal and external, and since then, it could focus on the development of the more peripheral issues of its foreign policy, such as the creation of Middle Eastern and North African policy as well as on the development of relations with more distant regions like Sub-Saharan Africa. In other words, it re-directed its foreign policy from the Europe-centred to the Middle Eastern-centred with focus on the third world's regions. Improving the political, economic and cultural relations with African countries was still 'designed as one of the "secondary" tools to "complement" other central foreign policy initiatives like the zero-problems with neighbours and multi-dimensional foreign policy' (Afacan, 2013: 49). Since the end of 1990s Turkey has focused on the improvement of relations with Russia as well as neighbouring countries, especially those on Caucasus. This zero-problems policy with Turkey's neighbouring states illustrates for example the visit of Turkish president Abdullah Gül to Armenia in 2008. However, critics see the Turkey's engagement in neighbouring countries as the manifestation of 'neo-ottomanism', since Turkey is developing contacts mainly with countries, which were the parts of the Ottoman Empire in the past. Foreign minister of Turkey is also accused of trying to take advantage of historico-cultural affinities with neighbouring countries in particular (Aras, 2009: 7).

### 3.3. The era of take-off in Africa-Turkey relations

The Year 2005 was proclaimed as 'the year of Africa' by the Turkish government and in the same year Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became the first Turkish head of government who carried out an official visit south of the equator when he traveled to Ethiopia and South Africa (Pham, 2010). Since then, his government has focused on the increasing economic ties, opening new embassies, strengthening cultural and political contacts with African countries. Turkey started to cooperate with Africa on the institutional level as well and in 2005 it gained observer status to African Union and opened its diplomatic mission to AU in Addis Abeba (Özkan, Akgün, 2010a: 534).

In August 2008, Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit was held in Istanbul, hosted by President Abdullah Gül, with representation of 50 African countries except Swaziland, Lesotho, and Mozambique, chairperson of African union Jean Ping, and representatives of other international organisations. However, the importance of this Summit for African leaders may be illustrated by the composition of delegates from African countries, from whom six were African presidents, mainly from small African countries as well as controversial Sudanese leader Omar Al-Bashir, five vice-presidents, six prime ministers and a deputy prime minister. The other countries were represented either by their foreign ministers or by senior-level representatives. Composition of delegates illustrates that African leaders did not have clear idea about the benefits which deepening of relations with Turkey would have brought for Africa and African people (Özkan, 2010b: 535-536).

The summit resulted in the adoption of the 'Istanbul Declaration on Africa-Turkey Partnership: Solidarity and Partnership for a Common Future' with its annex the 'Framework of Cooperation for Turkey - Africa Partnership' and has started extensive economic relations, opening new embassies around whole Africa. In this declaration both sides "...agreed that the Africa-Turkey Partnership presents a suitable framework for collective dialogue that should lead to positive outcomes in terms of concrete programme of action and implementation modalities, which should be based on equality, mutual respect and reciprocal benefits" (The Istanbul Declaration on Africa - Turkey Partnership, 2008). This summit resulted also in the decision to form Turkish-African Chamber to deepen the economic ties, with cooperation of Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) and the Union of African Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture and Professions (UACCIAP) (Özkan, 2012: 123). It also initiated wider political cooperation between Turkey and African countries in the global arena and international forums such as UN. It was decided that Turkey-Africa summits will be organised every five years and the next Summit was scheduled to be held in 2013 and organised by an African country with the assistance of African Union (African Union, 2013).

In order to implement the strategies based on the documents adopted during the Africa Summit

in 2008, Turkish Prime Minister announced the 'African Strategy' on 26 March 2010. In December of the same year, the First High Level Officials Meeting of the Turkey-Africa Partnership was held in Istanbul. At this meeting '2010 – 2014 Turkey-Africa Partnership Joint Implementation Plan' was adopted. The achieved attainments were reviewed one year later on the First Ministerial Review Conference of Turkey-Africa Partnership, held in Istanbul (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011a).

#### 4. Turkish-African trade and the role of Turkish business associations

The Turkish-African economic relations were significantly influenced by the plan elaborated by the Under-Secretariat for Foreign Trade in 2003 and named 'Strategy for Improving Economic Relations with Africa'. This plan was aimed at supporting Turkish small and medium-sized investments in Africa, increasing the commerce volume with African countries as well as at transferring technologies from Turkey to Africa (Tepedelen, 2008: 105-106). Turkish-African economic relations can be illustrated by the Table 1, which shows the trade volume between Turkey and sub-Saharan African countries between 2005 and 2013.

**Table 1.** Turkish foreign trade with Sub-Saharan African countries (in thousands US dollars)

Year	Export	Import
2005	1,086,849	1,632,270
2006	1,469,127	2,233,388
2007	1,946,661	2,821,104
2008	3,212,341	2,060,486
2009	2,738,866	1,700,198
2010	2,257,898	1,725,916
2011	3,633,016	3,424,658
2012	3,913,246	2,613,447
2013*	2,460,291	1,560,207

Explanation: \* from January to July 2013

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (2013)

As we can see in the table, the trade volume between Turkey and sub-Saharan Africa increased in

the era since 2005, 'the Year of Africa', to 2013 significantly. However, in comparison to the trade volume with other countries, such as Germany, Russia, China or USA, the trade volume with 50 sub-Saharan African countries together seems to be still low. In addition, the trade volume between Turkey and sub-Saharan Africa remains still relatively small even in comparison to the trade volume between Turkey and the North Africa, and constitutes around 40% of all Turkish-African trade volume (Afacan, 2013: 50; Turkish Statistical Institute, 2013). Moreover, Turkish investments in Africa can be hardly compared with the investments of China or India or the former colonial powers. Nevertheless, according to P. Pham (2010), we should consider the significance of the Turkish penetration of Africa for several reasons: Turkey can serve as a model for political and economic development for African countries more than China or India; African states may diversify more of their sources of foreign investments; Turkey may diversify its diplomatic relations, it can avoid its dependency on the West; Turks have now power to diminish the Western influence in Africa (for example, Turkey has invited Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir to the Africa Summit held in Istanbul in 2008, although he was alleged of the crime of genocide by International Criminal Court on 14 July 2008); other important factor, worth concerning is the Islamic orientation of the Turkish government, especially in the connection with the Islamic character of some of African regimes. Moreover, European and global powers penetrating of Africa have also recognised the importance of Turkish involvement, for example, in 2010 France intended to cooperate with Turkey to establish European trade missions in Africa as the counterbalance to Chinese economic presence in African countries (Özkan, 2010a: 101).

New economic opportunities could interest traditional economic players in Turkey, called 'Anatolian Tigers'. African opportunities have been important especially for small and middle sized entrepreneurs in Turkey, who may profit from them significantly and at the same time they can support the economic growth of the whole country. As the consequence, the business associations as Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MÜSİAD) and Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) have recently taken major part

in exports to Africa. These associations also organised summits for the African entrepreneurs, for example MÜSİAD organised seven ‘Turkey Africa Foreign Trade Bridge’ summits in Istanbul since 2005 (Afacan, 2013: 50). TUSKON organised another three Africa Summits in conformity with the government’s African policy and has brought high numbers of African ministers as well as entrepreneurs to Turkey. TUSKON also encourages the international trade between Turkey and African countries. Moreover TUSKON members take part in the development sector in Africa, they support opening of the Gülen schools (viz further) as well as they provide funding for development projects of various Turkish NGOs in Africa (Özkan, Akgün, 2010a: 540). Another Turkish-African business forum was organised by TOBB and Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (Dis Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu, DEİK) in cooperation with Undersecretariat for Foreign Trade (Dış Ticaret Müsteşarlığı, DTM) in Istanbul in 2008 (Kirişci, 2009: 50).

The strategies of the state and those of civil society, especially corporations and business entrepreneurs, are in conformity and the rising role of traditional Anatolian bourgeoisie, brought about by opening of the new African markets besides other economic and political factors, has helped in fact AKP to win three succeeding elections (Afacan, 2013: 50). Up to 2010, around four hundred Turkish businesses, mostly small- and medium-sized enterprises, had invested over \$500 million in various African countries (Pham, 2010). Besides that, Turk-

ish firms took part in giant construction projects in Africa, as building the Suleja-Kaduna motorway in Nigeria or the al-Halfaia bridge in Sudan constructed between 2008 and 2010. Among African consumers, Turkish products have a good reputation, since they are 20-30% cheaper than those made in Europe and at the same time their quality is better than that of Chinese or Indian ones (Vicky, 2011). Turkey is exporting to Africa mainly building materials, processed food, textiles, furniture and other house products, iron-steel, etc. and importing raw materials, minerals, gold and oil, even though Turkish political and business representation is stressing that it shares the technologies with African countries and is not interested solely in African markets and raw materials (Özkan, 2012: 124-125). Moreover, as opposed to China, Turkey is hiring locals for its developing projects and focuses on cultural exchange between Africans and Turks living in African countries. Turkey has also made an effort to familiarise Africans with Turkey using scholarship programmes for African students. Cooperation with Turkey is more profitable for the local population in African countries and this interpersonal approach adopted by Turkey, may be fruitful for future Turkish involvement in Africa (Harte, 2012).

As Table 2 and 3 illustrate, Turkey has established economic ties mainly with big African countries, both economically developed and rich in natural resources, such as South Africa or Nigeria, and which have therefore a significant trade potential for Turkey.

**Table 2.** Turkish Export to Selected African Countries (in millions US dollars)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*
South Africa	316	598	654	1 239	867	369	511	382	381
Ghana	32	33	84	100	73	96	219	224	104
Nigeria	99	83	133	281	257	251	394	439	244
Ethiopia	109	92	146	164	229	175	275	395	208
Sudan	145	217	180	234	247	228	244	280	157
Angola	27	45	48	182	152	109	221	235	147

Explanation: \* from January to July 2013

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (2013).

**Table 3.** Turkish Import from Selected African Countries (in millions US dollars)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*
South Africa	1 260	1 793	2 172	1 502	1 103	890	1 955	1 290	903
Ghana	73	57	41	46	102	194	292	303	129
Nigeria	31	87	147	79	147	221	366	113	109
Ethiopia	30	24	43	39	35	41	42	47	36
Sudan	8	8	8	9	7	5	9	11	21
Angola	9	27	0,9	16	0,1	0,3	0,3	2	0,1

Explanation: \* from January to July 2013

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (2013)

African-Turkish economic relations are facilitated by the established regular direct flights operated by Turkish Airlines from Istanbul to the most important African cities, for example Addis Ababa, Khartoum, Lagos, Johannesburg, Nairobi, and Dakar. In 2012 Turkish Airlines even launched its flights to Somali capital Mogadishu as the first service to this city operated by any European airlines (Turkish Airlines, 2012).

*Turkish Development Aid to Africa.* Despite the fact that Turkey is still the aid-recipient country, development aid is another important tool of Turkish foreign policy. First foreign development programme destined to Africa was launched during the era of Prime Minister Turgut Özal in 1985 in order to open Turkey to outside world, to enhance the image of Turkey abroad, and using aid to establish important economic ties with African countries. This project worth US\$10 million was implemented in Sahel countries, namely in Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal, Somalia, and Sudan (Kulaklikaya, Nurdun, 2010: 133).

Recently, Turkey has engaged in mainly long-term development projects in thirty-seven African countries, through the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı, TİKA) which opened the regional offices in Addis Ababa in 2005, in Khartoum and Dakar in 2006, and 2007 respectively (Kulaklikaya, Nurdun, 2010: 136). Development projects of TİKA in Africa are mainly project formulated in accordance to needs of African countries and therefore are aimed mainly at the building of infrastructure, cultural cooperation, and TİKA takes part also in urgent humanitarian support. Turkish official development assistance was US\$714 million in 2006

and the total amount of official developing assistance of Turkey including private donations reached US\$ 1,7 billion in 2006. In addition, Turkey is providing the development assistance via international organisations, such as UN agencies or Red Crescent Society (Özkan, Akgün, 2010a: 537). Even though US\$ 51,73 million of development aid was allocated for Africa in 2006, it is still the small portion of money in comparison to large development assistance provided to neighbouring countries, especially in Caucasus and Central Asia (Kulaklikaya, Nurdun, 2010: 144).

## 5. Turkish-African relations on the political level

The political development in the Turkish-African relations was accelerated especially after 2005, which was proclaimed as the 'Year of Africa' by the Turkish government. This year, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid an official visit to Ethiopia and South Africa, which was the first formal visit by any Turkish Prime Minister to African countries (Tepedelen, 2008: 108). In the same year Turkey gained an 'observatory status' within the African Union (AU) and the same institution declared Turkey as a 'strategic partner' at the summit held in 2008 (Afacan, 2013: 51). According to Tepedelen (2008: 110), Turkey is perceived by African countries to be a strategic partner because of its geopolitical and geostrategic position. The most important factors for African countries seem to be Turkey's secular institutions, candidature for EU membership as well as its membership in the Organisation

of Islamic Conference (OIC). Since Turkey is among the world's twenty largest economies (G-20), it may, according to African leaders, using the trade connections, take part in the economic development of African countries as well.

Turkey also plays a significant role in African economic organisations. In 2005 it became the 25th non-regional member of African Development Bank (Pham, 2010) and as a consequence of it Turkey will possibly be able to participate in tenders for various infrastructure projects financed by this institution. Moreover, Turkey is supposed to enter into the free trade agreement with the East African Community, which is custom union between Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda by 2019 (Vicky, 2011). Moreover, since 2008, Turkey is also a member of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Partners Forum, which is the Eastern African regional political and economic organisation, and since 2005, Turkish Embassy in Nigerian Abuja is accredited to the Western African political and economic governmental organisation, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Additionally, since 2010 Turkish Embassy in Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania is accredited to the East African Community (EAC) (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011b)

In 2008 the 1st Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit was held in Istanbul, with participation of 49 African countries and 11 regional organisations. Following this summit, since 2009, tightening of political relations has been accompanied by the opening of numerous new Turkish embassies around Sub-Saharan Africa as well, as seen in the Table 4. Opening of the new embassies signified also the geographic expansion of Turkey in Africa, which prepared the way for the larger investments of Turkish entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa. As it is apparent from the Figure 2 which shows the geographical positions of Turkish embassies in Africa, Turkey does not focus solely on the largest economies in Africa anymore, but it deepens its relations with smaller African countries such as Burkina Faso, Gabon or Djibouti. Besides these diplomatic missions, Turkish foreign ministry declared that new embassy will be open also Gambia in the following years (Afacan, 2013: 51; Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011c).

**Table 4.** Turkish embassies in Africa established since 2009

Year	Newly Opened Embassies in Africa
2009	Ivory Coast, Tanzania
2010	Angola, Cameroon, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali
2011	Gambia, Maritania, Mozambique, Somalia, South Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe
2012	Burkina Faso, Gabon, Namibia, Niger
2013	Chad, Djibouti, Guinea

Source: Afacan 2013: 51; Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011b

The importance of political relations with African countries can be seen also within the bodies of United Nations. In 2008, Turkey was elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council by the vote of 151 countries, which was possible also thanks to the support of African countries, that voted en block in favour of Turkish candidacy, with exception of South Africa and Mozambique (Pham, 2010). Moreover, as we can see on this example, Turkey is seeking the leadership role in world politics by the establishing of relations with African states. In exchange, African countries expect from Turkey to articulate their problems and interests at the UN forum. Successfulness of this strategy may be illustrated by the fact that Turkey has announced its candidacy for the 2015-2016 non-permanent Security Council seat in 2012 and Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni has already declared his support for Turkish candidacy (Harte, 2012).

Turkish foreign policy in Africa may sometimes seem to be inconsistent or controversial and contradictory to the Western policy while dealing with African problems and conflicts. It may be illustrated by the Turkey's conciliatory approach towards Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir and Sudanese political representation, illustrated for example by the Turkey's official invitation of Sudanese Vice-President Ali Osman Mohammed Taha in 2009. In the case of Darfur, Turkey adopted the position more similar to that of Arab League, African Union, and Organisation of Islamic Conference, and turned its back on the West when it refused to claim the situation in Darfur as the genocide. Turkey's position was influenced by close economic and political relations with Sudan as well as external factors such as the war on terrorism led by Western countries and opposed, to a certain extent, by Turkey. Özkan and



Fig. 2. Demarcation between North and Sub-Saharan Africa and the Turkish embassies in African countries

Source: Luděk Krtiřka

Akgun termed the Turkish policy towards Sudan as a ‘passive quiet diplomacy’, which means a “middle ground between accusations of “genocide” and defending al Basheer’s position” (Ozkan, Akgun, 2010b). It consisted in the developing of economic and political relations with Sudan and Turkish dip-

lomatic involvement in the peace process in Darfur, even though Sudanese leader was accused of serious crimes by International Criminal Court. (Ozkan, Akgun, 2010b; Ozkan, Akgun, 2010c)

However, besides specific approach to Sudan, Turkish diplomacy puts emphasis to the reconcil-

iation processes in other parts of Africa, especially in Somalia. In August 2011, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became the first high state representative who had visited Mogadishu since the outbreak of the Somali civil war. Consequently, Turkey established the embassy in Somalia and allocated the resources for humanitarian aid in this country, which was hit by famine in 2011. In addition, Turkey has hosted two international conferences on Somalia in Istanbul since 2011 and has been involved in the diplomatic peacemaking efforts in Somalia, including support for Somali Transitional Federal Government as well as the reconciliation process between Somalia and self-declared state of Somaliland (more about Turkish involvement in Somalia viz International Crisis Group, 2012 and Harte, 2012).

Moreover, Turkey has engaged in five peacekeeping missions of United Nations in Africa, namely UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), the hybrid AU-UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), and the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI). Turkey also took part in the United States-led Combined Task Force (CTF) 151, a multinational naval force carrying out anti-piracy operations under the mandate of UN Security Council off the coast of Somalia since 2009, and in 2012 Turkey assumed command of this task force (Pham, 2010; Combined Maritime Forces, 2012).

The most significant competitor for Turkey in Africa is China, which developed mutual relations with numerous African countries, based on the economic relations and mainly on the construction projects in exchange for the access to the extraction of raw materials. Unlike European Union, China adopted the policy of non-interfering into the political and human rights issues in African countries, for which is criticised by the Western countries. According to I. Afacan, some political advisors in Turkey also recommend Turkish foreign policy makers to adopt the same style of 'apolitical' development policy in Africa, which could be more profitable for Turkey (Afacan, 2013: 52). However, in comparison to China, Turkey has adopted more 'interpersonal approach to its business deals in Africa', based on the initiating a cultural exchange between locals and Turkish nationals in Africa, and

hiring the locals for its construction projects and creating local jobs (Harte, 2012).

While opening new embassies in Africa, it became problematic to define the new discourse of the foreign policy towards these new, relatively unknown countries, in order to achieve the most effective incomes in the economic sphere. In this respect, Turkey had to develop and promote the new foreign policy discourse which would be aimed on the region of sub-Saharan Africa and which would target its needs. As the speeches of the president Abdüllah Gül illustrate, Turkey is trying to define itself in the contrary to European, former colonial countries and to stress the altruistic interests in this continent and its claim to be the equal partner for African countries. President Gül stated: "We have never run after only our own interests. We know that the states, which only looked after their own interests in the past, engendered major damage to Africa. The international community should know that we could only be equal partners with Africa" (Cit in Afacan, 2013: 53). And in the meeting in Ghana he claimed that "We are different from Europeans. We do not take away your raw materials. We invest and also bring along technology and qualified work force. We have done so in other African countries. We already began to do so in Ghana as well" (Cit in Afacan, 2013: 53).

## 6. The role of Turkish Civil Society in Africa

Until recently, there has been lack of reliable information about Africa in Turkey, both in academia as well as media. Media has informed about this continent solely in connection to the epidemy of AIDS, hunger and civil wars. The establishment of African Studies Research and Application Center at Ankara University in 2008 was inspired by the need of expertise and deepening the knowledge about Africa (Pham, 2010). For future deepening of knowledge about Africa, it will be essential for Turkish universities as well as research institutions to initiate the exchange of scholars between Turkey and African countries as well as encourage Turkish students to learn more about African countries. One of the fruitful strategies seems to be also the organising of

scholarly conferences about African topics in Turkey and cooperation between Turkish and African research centres (Özkan, 2010b: 538).

Another, though controversial, strategy, which Turkey adopted mainly through the NGOs, is ideological and educational influence in the countries with Turkish or Muslim minority population. Especially the summit meeting with senior African Muslim figures organised by Diyanet (Directorate for Religious Affairs of Turkey) in 2006 and invitation for African students from countries such as Sudan, Mauritania or Togo, to study theology in Turkey in 2009, have been negatively commented (Vicky, 2011). The 2006 Summit meeting was attended by religious figures from 22 African countries, for example from Chad, Cameroon, Rwanda, Mali, Kenya etc. Delegates discussed a variety of topics, as 'Religious Identity in the Globalization Process', 'Religious Education and Opportunities in the Educational Field', and 'The Basic Approaches and Stances in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage'. The real importance of this meeting consisted in the creation of the platform for sharing experience and knowledge between Turkey and Africa (Özkan, 2011: 123).

According to Özkan and Akgün (Özkan, Akgün, 2010a: 538), the hosting of African religious figures in Istanbul illustrates the shift of Turkish foreign policy paradigm. Firstly, formerly strongly secularist Turkey has changed its position towards the religious organisations and has started to use religion as a tool of its soft power while approaching Muslim countries in Africa. Secondly, Turkey started to emphasize its Ottoman past in Africa with the special emphasis on the religious dimension of the Ottoman Empire.

The growing influence of Turkish aid organisation İHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation (full name Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı, İHH) in African countries is also worth attention. Members of this organization are predominately Turkish Muslims. This NGO, established in 1992, firstly took part in humanitarian aid in Somalia and Ethiopia in 1996 and between 1999 and 2000 respectively, and then it started another development projects, aimed for example at the provision of the clean water, in various African countries and specialized also in the health projects, such

as eye operations in Africa or the provision of help to AIDS patients (Özkan, Akgün, 2010a: 540-542).

Turkish NGOs have been involved in the development projects in Somalia, which still is a war-torn country and has been perceived by various foreign development agencies to be too dangerous due to the security threats, such as militant Islamists. Besides schools and hospitals, Turkish NGOs developed projects to restore religious life in the country by building new mosques and by exchanging imams between these two countries. Moreover, 1200 scholarships for Somali students were arranged by Turkish Religious Foundation (Türk Diyanet Vakfı, TDV) to study religion at Turkish public universities and Quranic courses as well as *imam-hatip* high schools in Turkey (Harte, 2012).

Religious and ideological dimension in Turkish penetration to Africa is evident due to the connection of TUSCON with Turkish prominent religious thinker Fethullah Gülen who has established the worldwide Islamic movement based on the moderate teaching with emphasis to altruism, tolerance, and education (Harte, 2012). Since the late 1990s, members of his organisation have built the network of highly evaluated schools throughout the world, in countries with significant Muslim community particularly. In Africa, we can find this kind of schools for example in South Africa, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania (Vicky, 2011). Besides educational dimension, these schools have helped Gülen-affiliated Turkish businessmen as well as development workers to operate in various African countries, especially in those where official Turkish diplomatic missions have not been yet established (Harte, 2012).

However, religious factor of the Turkish policy in Africa should not be overstated. According to Özkan and Akgün: "The Turkish conception of Islamic understanding is compatible with western democratic values, and provides an alternative to that fostered in Africa by a number of other Muslim states" (2010a: 538).

## 7. Conclusion

Even though Turkish involvement in Africa has a long history, owing to the fact that the Ottoman Empire established various forms of relations with

African territories both in North as well as Sub-Saharan Africa, the systematic approach towards Africa on the economic and political level is the new phenomenon in Turkish foreign policy. It is the result of the shift of foreign policy from the Western-centred to more diversified, which has been apparent during the government of Justice and Development Party, and especially in the foreign policy, promoted by the Foreign Minister Davutoğlu. Since then, the State has supported Turkish business associations to establish economic relations with African countries and as a result the trade volume between Turkey and African countries is still growing. Unlike in previous era, Turkey has been cooperating closely with non-state actors during the government of AKP, such as with business associations and development agencies to achieve a successful cooperation with African countries. All these strategies are in compliance with the Turkey's adoption of soft power strategies in its foreign policy. Thanks to its geographical and geopolitical position, Turkey can build on its history, culture, and political values while approaching new territories, and sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Unlike China, Turkey has adopted more interpersonal approach in African countries and has involved the local populations not only in its construction project but also through cultural and educational exchange between African countries and Turkey, represented for example by the establishment of Turkish schools throughout the whole Africa. This interpersonal approach has been adopted by various elements of Turkish civil society, such as business associations, NGOs and Islamic charities, Fethullah Gülen's movement in particular.

Turkish involvement in Africa also has a wider geopolitical dimension. As a consequence of Turkish involvement in Africa and deepening of knowledge about Africa, the image of Sub-Saharan Africa as continent of despair has been replaced by the image of its economic and political potential. This potential seen by Turkey may be illustrated by the Turkey's purposes to play the role of regional and global power in which by use of the soft power mechanisms Turkey managed to gain support from African countries for its goals, for example during the voting about Turkish candidacy for non-permanent membership in UN Security Council. On the contrary, Turkey is not burdened by the coloni-

al past and can serve as a good example for African countries in promoting democracy and in achieving success in economic development. The wider dimension of Turkish strategy towards Africa, which is not focused solely on the economic and political relations, is illustrated by the fact that Turkey is also trying to support the education of African students when it provides scholarships for them to study at Turkish universities and other institutions. As it is evident from the paper, Turkey's involvement in Africa has various dimensions and it will be interesting to observe a further Turkish engagement in Africa and mainly its competition with tradition powers like European countries and USA as well as with new emerging powers like China or India.

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