

# TURKEY'S RISING ROLE IN AFRICA

*Turkey's interest to develop relations with Africa is highly interesting and a relatively new development in Turkish foreign policy. Although it has started in 1998, its implementation in a coherent and sophisticated manner took place since the AKP came in power in 2002. Currently, both Turkey and African countries benefits from this relation in not only in economic and political terms, but also Africa gains aid, investment and humanitarian assistance. In Turkey, a "new" Africa conception is under way that sees Africa as a full partner in political and economic issues. Developing and intensifying ties with African countries is likely to continue in future as it is supported widely by civil society in Turkey.*

Mehmet Özkan\*



\* Mehmet Özkan is a PhD Candidate at Sevilla University, Spain.

**U**ntil recently, Africa did not feature much in the Turkish foreign policy agenda. Turkey announced 2005 as “the year of Africa”, and in 2008 the first ever Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit in Istanbul with the participation of representatives from fifty African countries. Again in 2008, Turkey’s then-Foreign Minister Ali Babacan declared that Africa has a special importance to Turkey within the context of Turkey’s new foreign policy, and thus it was decided to open 15 new embassies in Africa within the next few years.<sup>1</sup> Since then, a reorientation of Turkish foreign policy toward Africa has taken shape and become steadily more visible publicly as well.

Turkey’s new engagement with Africa in terms of economic and political developments is more than just another country making inroads to Africa. Although Turks have a relatively long history of involvement in Africa, the new engagement is proactive and has borne fruit in a very short amount of time, particularly in terms of economic indicators. Although Ankara’s first serious interest in Africa dates back to 1998, the effort became more evident only after the AKP (Justice and Development Party) assumed power in 2002. The big share of interest in intensifying Turkey’s relations went to Africa due to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu’s continued efforts to develop relations with countries previously neglected by Ankara. Until ten years ago, Africa was known in Turkey through TV images of hunger, poverty and conflict whereas today it is regarded as a continent of hope, as well as a potential economic and political partner.

### ***Relevance of Perceptual/Historical Legacy***

One can speak of two distinct Turkish conceptions of Africa based on a geographical divide: North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. Both conceptions have been shaped in the Turkish psyche by historical developments mainly from the Ottoman times. This background has been articulated in classical Turkish foreign policy toward the continent. Historically, Turkey has had relatively strong relations with North Africa, as it was a part of the Ottoman State dating back to 15th and 16th centuries. On the other hand, relations with Sub-Saharan Africa are a more recent development, dating back to the 19th century.

North Africa is familiar to the Turkish society for two main reasons: First, Muslim populations of North African states and their close historical connection with the Ottomans created an understanding that North Africa is part of the Turkish periphery. Developing political and economic relations with North Africa has never been

---

<sup>1</sup> Ali Babacan’s speech to the group of African countries, New York, 24 July 2008, <[http://africa.mfa.gov.tr/speech-by-h\\_e\\_-babaca-to-the-group-of-african-countries-at-the-un\\_-24-july-2008.en.mfa](http://africa.mfa.gov.tr/speech-by-h_e_-babaca-to-the-group-of-african-countries-at-the-un_-24-july-2008.en.mfa)

questioned but seen as an essential part of diversifying Turkish foreign policy. Second, North Africa is considered part of the broader Middle East – an area that Turkish society feels close to.

As Sub-Saharan Africa as a geographical area has always been considered as a far away land, full of problems, hunger, diseases and civil wars; its history did not call any attention in academia or policy-making circles. However, since the official celebration in 1999 of the 700th year of the establishment of the Ottoman State, researchers have started to pay attention to areas of the Ottoman past that have since been neglected, such as Africa. Nevertheless, the persistent negative image of Sub-Sahara did not change until the recent efforts of both the AKP government and civil society organizations.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note here that when Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Ethiopia and South Africa in March 2005 (as the first prime minister of the republican era to officially visit a state below the equator), many Turkish columnists, retired diplomats and representatives of mainstream media criticized the visit, asserting that it was wasting Turkey's limited energy in vain.<sup>3</sup> Now however, this view of Sub-Sahara seems to be changing even in the minds of ardent critics.

Bearing in mind these two differing attitudes to Africa's two geographical regions, one can divide Turkey's relations with Africa into three periods. The first period covers the Ottoman State's relations with Africa until the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1923, during which Ottomans had considerable relations with Africa. The years from 1923 to 1998 can be seen as the second period where Turkish-African relations were at the lowest level, if existing at all. After 1998, with the acceptance of the Africa Action Plan, Turkey's interest in Africa has been gradually revived, reaching a peak level after 2005.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the first period, the Ottoman State had considerable relations with North Africa – aided by the fact that African states such as Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria were totally or partially subject to Ottoman rule. The Ottomans also played an important role to prevent Spanish incursions in North Africa, as they sent their emissaries when needed. In Sub-Saharan Africa, too, some African countries were partially included in the Ottoman State, such as Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, and even Niger and Chad. During the wave of colonialism, the Ottoman State was active in eastern Africa, attempting to balance Portuguese penetration. In northern Sub-Sahara, the Ottomans were also part of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün, "Turkey's Opening to Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 48 No.4, 2010, pp. 525-546.

<sup>3</sup> Özdem Sanberk, "Gül döneminde Türk dış politikası" [Turkish Foreign Policy Under Gül], *Radikal*, 21 August 2007, Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, "Etiyopya mı?" [Ethiopia?], *Sabah*, 3 March 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Mehmet Özkan, Turkey Discovers Africa: Implications and Prospects, *SETA Policy Brief*, No. 22, 2008.

balance of powers system, having friendship and alliance with the Kanem Burnu Empire, which prevailed in today's Northern Nigeria, Niger and Chad. The Kanem Burnu Empire even signed a defence pact in 1575 with the Ottoman State during the time of Sultan Murad III, upon which the Sultan sent military equipment and trainers to Kanem Burnu.<sup>5</sup>

In 1894 after the first mosque was built in Lagos, the Ottoman State sent a special emissary to Nigeria conferring the staff of office, the decoration of the Order of Medjidie<sup>6</sup> as well as the title of Bey, a higher civilian rank in the Ottoman State, to the leader of the Southern Nigeria's Muslim Community, Mohammed Shitta Bey. The Shitta Bey family is a large family and presently has several members playing an important role in Nigerian social and political life.<sup>7</sup>

Ottomans had diplomatic representation in Southern Africa from 1861 onwards. The appointment of the first honorary consul-general in Cape Town PE de Roubaix on 18 February 1861, followed with a series of honorary consul-general appointments in subsequent years. This was the case until the first Turkish diplomat, Mehmet Remzi Bey (who was stationed in South Africa on 21 April 1914), passed away on 14 February 1916.<sup>8</sup>

Adding a religious dimension to these relations, the Ottoman State also sent imams to the Muslims of the Cape of Good Hope (now in South Africa) in 1863, via honorary Consul-General de Roubaix, upon the request of the Muslim community. With the arrival of Abu Bakr Effendi as imam, a strong bridge was built between the Muslims of the Cape of Good Hope and the Ottoman State, due to his contribution to South Africa. As a sign of this, the Muslims of South Africa had actively participated in the Hijaz railway construction campaigns and raised funds.

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Turkey-Africa relations were downgraded to the lowest level. This was due to the domestic situations of both sides, such as establishing the new state structure and securing the independence, as well as colonialism. During Cold War years, Turkey started to attach greater importance to Africa, developing relations with North African states economically and politically. However, these relations were shaped by the conditions of the Cold-War bipolarity, and thus at times were at odds with the historical public sentiment toward the continent. When Ghana became independent in 1957,

---

<sup>5</sup> Numan Hazar, "The Future of Turkish-African Relations", *Diş Politika*, Vol. 25 No.3-4, 2000, pp. 109-110.

<sup>6</sup> Order of Medjidie is the name of a military and knightly order of the Ottoman State, which was often conferred on non-Turkish nationals upon their distinguishing service/help to Ottomans.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 110.

<sup>8</sup> Serhat Orakçı, "The Emerging Links between the Ottoman Empire and South Africa", *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 14 No. 1-2, 2008, pp. 47-60.

Turkey recognized Ghana and opened a resident embassy at a later stage. With the decolonization process in Africa having begun in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Turkey recognized all the newly independent countries, established diplomatic relations, and opened resident embassies in a number of them. However this was not based on any significant long-term relationship and Turkey was not seriously involved in African affairs.<sup>9</sup> However, one should note that since the 1970s, Turkey's relationship with North African countries has been strengthened, albeit in a limited way, due to Turkey's efforts to diversify its economic and political relations. In spite of this development, Sub-Saharan Africa did not gain a position of special importance within the Turkish foreign policy of the time. The only exception was Turkey's minor role in the independence of Namibia and Zimbabwe.

*"Although Turks have a relatively long history of involvement in Africa, the new engagement is proactive and has borne fruit in a very short amount of time, particularly in terms of economic indicators."*

When the decolonization process unveiled in Africa, Turkey missed the opportunity to develop permanent political, economic and commercial relations with Africa, although it had designed an opening plan in the 1970s as part of an attempt in diversifying its foreign policy. The plan was tabled due to the conflict in Cyprus issue, which left Turkey in a difficult position in its interactions with its Western allies. Although the lack of action in regards to establishing stronger relations with Africa could be seen partly as a result of other issues persisting on the Turkish agenda of the time, the main reason was lack of Turkey's interest, knowledge and strategy about what to do in Africa. Turkey's opening up to Africa came only in the late 1990s, with the Africa Action Plan adopted in 1998. This opening has been taken very seriously, especially by the AKP government, and has been supported by various civil society organizations in Turkey. What is different and unique in this new orientation of Turkish foreign policy is that it aims to overcome the two previously outlined, geographical conceptions of Africa, in order to create a new and united image of Africa in Turkish society. Underlying this point, when Africa is debated, neither a special treatment to North Africa nor a negative image of Sub-Sahara persists. Turkey seems to be rediscovering Africa as a whole, while businessmen and politicians are busy developing strong connections with Africa.

<sup>9</sup> Numan Hazar, "The Future of Turkish-African Relations", *Diş Politika*, Vol. 25 No.3-4, 2000, pp. 109-110.

## ***Anatomy of Turkey's Soft Power in Africa***

The Turkish opening to Africa has been an intensive attempt to revitalize relations in several ways. On the one hand, Turkey has increased its financial aid to Africa both through international agencies and its own official aid and cooperation agency - TIKA. On the other hand, Turkey announced 2005 as “the year of Africa”, and hosted the first Turkey-Africa Summit at Istanbul in 2008, and opening eight new embassies in 2009 – increasing the total number of Turkish resident embassies in Africa to 20. In their discourse on the opening to Africa, Turkish officials have usually emphasized increasing trade relations with Africa and economic development. However, Africa has only recently reciprocated interest in developing relations with Turkey. The scope of relations may be categorized in three sections: from humanitarian aid, economic relations and the African response. The response from the African side, by and large, has been a mixture of confusion and hope. Whether African interest and Turkish eagerness will converge is an important issue that will define the future of Turkey's opening to Africa.

### ***Humanitarian Aid and Politics***

In the last decade, aid has been one of the stronger elements in Turkey's overall foreign policy in general and its Africa policy in particular. It has been part of soft power strategy. The official Turkish aid agency, the Cooperation and Development Administration of Turkey (TIKA), currently operates in Africa through three offices located in Addis Ababa, Khartoum and Dakar, as part of Turkey's development aid to Africa.

TIKA was initially established to help the transition of states in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Balkans. However, after 2003, it transformed into a more global aid agency, expanding its areas of operation. One of the regions that this expansion has covered is Africa. Through offices in the continent, Turkey aims to widen cooperation with Africa, and currently its three regional offices implement projects in 37 African countries. Turkey has also promised to provide technical assistance to African countries through TIKA and strives to open an affiliate office in other African countries to further cement cooperation with Africa on the basis of several priorities. President Gül marked these priorities to be: “health, education, agriculture, environment, infrastructure and capacity-building”.<sup>10</sup>

Besides the activities of TIKA, Turkey has also utilized international organizations to provide aid to Africa. For example, through the World Health Organization (WHO),

---

<sup>10</sup> Abdullah Gül, “Africa's development needs: State of implementation of various commitments, challenges and the way forward”, Remarks by President of Turkey in New York, 22 September 2008, <<http://www.un.org/ga/president/62/ThematicDebates/adn/turkey.pdf>

World Food Programme (WFP) and the Red Crescent, Turkey has donated 7.5 million dollars to various African countries in last 5 years, to assist them in coping with the negative effects of drought and other natural disasters. In 2008, Turkey allocated 3.5 million dollars of humanitarian aid through the WFP, while in 2009 it made a modest donation of 0.5 million dollars to the African Union budget. In a similar vein, in 2007 Turkey hosted for the first time a summit of the Least Developed Countries in Istanbul, 33 out of 49 of which are located in Africa. In this summit, Turkey committed 20 million dollars of development aid for these countries' use. Turkey will also be hosting the fourth conference on Least Developed Countries in the first half of 2011.

In the last several years, Africa has forged new partnerships and renewed existing ones with several countries, as part of conglomerate economic and political entities or even on a bilateral basis. Such strategic partnerships entered enforcement under the ACP-EU, and in the form of cooperation with individual countries such as China, Japan, Brazil and India. The Turkey-Africa partnership may be seen as the latest strategic link. The first Turkey-Africa Cooperation summit was held under the theme "Solidarity and Partnership for a Common Future" from 18 August - 21 August 2008, in Istanbul. The summit is considered by many as a success, in terms of Turkish-African economic relations. It has achieved several concrete results, including a decision that the next summit is to be held in an African country in 2013.

The summit brought together the leaders and representatives from 50 member-states of the African Union with the absence of Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique. The AU Commission Chairperson Jean Ping, representatives of some 11 international organizations, and hundreds from business communities were also present. The summit concluded by adopting two documents: "The Istanbul Declaration" and the "Turkey-Africa Partnership Framework Document", which were prepared by senior experts and ministers. The framework document reads: "Acknowledging the critical role that Trade and Investment should play within the framework of this partnership as agents of development...and we pledge to create a favourable legal and stimulating business environment for economic cooperation as a central pillar of the Africa-Turkey Partnership."<sup>11</sup>

The immediate objective of the summit was two-fold. First, as part of Turkey's serious effort to expand ties and increase trade volume with the African continent, it was a venue through which Turkey could prove its seriousness. It seems that Turkey convinced African leaders; a joint decision was announced at the end of the

---

<sup>11</sup> Framework of Cooperation for Africa, ISS Resource Center, 19 August 2008, <http://www.iss.org.za/uploads/TURKEYAFRIFRAME-AUG08.PDF>, p. 1-2

summit that the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) and the Union of African Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture and Professions (UACCIAP) would cooperate to establish the Turkish-African Chamber for furthering commercial relations. Turkey's second immediate aim was to gain the support of African nations in its bid to be a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2009-2010. Turkey was also successful in this goal: the election in September 2008 held by the UN General Assembly resulted in Turkey receiving 151 votes.

One of the most discussed but less understood areas in Turkey relations with Africa has been Ankara's approach to Darfur. Turkey's approach to Darfur has been subject to criticism by analysts and human rights groups as contradictory and

*"When the decolonization process unveiled in Africa, Turkey missed the opportunity to develop permanent political, economic and commercial relations with Africa, although it had designed an opening plan in the 1970s as part of an attempt in diversifying its foreign policy."*

holding a double standard. However, Turkey's distinctive foreign policy approach to Darfur requires a closer and in-depth analysis. It should be viewed within the context of Turkey's changing role in regional and global affairs. Turkey has not aligned itself with the Western position of criticizing the Sudanese government and its leader Omar al-Bashir by describing the conflict in Darfur as "genocide". However, Turkey has also not ignored the developments and human tragedy that occurred, in its official dealings with the Sudan. Ankara's policy on Darfur is basically a strategy of "passive quiet diplomacy" and constructive engagement, supported by its developing economic and political ties with the Sudan. It has also been constrained by international and regional involvements.<sup>12</sup>

### **Trade and Institutional Cooperation**

Nothing can summarize the remarkable change of Turkey-Africa relations better than the increasing trade and institutional cooperation between the two. The year 2005 was a turning point in Turkey's relations with Africa. Turkey obtained observer

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion on Ankara's policy and approach to Darfur see, Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün, "Turkey's Darfur Policy: Convergences and Differentiations from the Muslim World", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 12 No. 4, 2010, pp. 147-165.



status in the African Union in 2005, which declared Turkey a strategic partner in January 2008. In May 2008, Turkey joined the African Development Bank and has strengthened relations with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in East Africa and the Economic Community of West African States. The Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEIK) has established eight Business Councils as part of Ankara's attempts to increase business activities with Africa. Turkish business councils are operating in Ethiopia, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, South Africa, Sudan and Tunisia. To accelerate these relations further, in 2008, Turkey decided to open 15 new embassies in Africa, in addition to the 12 it already had on the continent, more than doubling the density of its diplomatic representation in Africa. In 2009, Turkey appointed eight new ambassadors responsible for opening embassies in their designated countries and starting to work as soon as possible. Currently, legal procedures have been completed for opening three new embassies and seven others are under consideration and negotiations. Once all of them are completed, Turkey will have 30 embassies in Africa.

While these developments at the political and institutional level are important, the Turkish opening to Africa is underscored by soaring bilateral trade. Turkey's trade volume with African countries was only 5.4 billion dollars in 2003, and it increased more than twofold, exceeding 16 billion dollars in 2008. Despite the world economic crisis, it did not lose its pace, numbering around 16 billion dollars in 2009 (Table 1). Yet, in comparison to Turkey's total trade volume with other regions in the world, its current trade volume with African countries is not significant. However, it is enough to get the attention of other outside players in Africa. For example in November 2010, France announced its interest to team up with Turkey for joint European trade missions in Africa, to counter the growing power of China in winning contracts there.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 1: Turkey's Trade with Africa (1999-2009)**

<b>Export</b>											
<b>Million \$</b>	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>North Africa</b>	1.344	1.087	1.150	1.267	1.577	2.203	2.544	3.097	4.030	5.850	7.447
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	311	285	371	430	554	765	1.087	1.469	1.947	3.212	2.732
<b>Total</b>	<i>1.655</i>	<i>1.373</i>	<i>1.521</i>	<i>1.697</i>	<i>2.131</i>	<i>2.968</i>	<i>3.631</i>	<i>4.566</i>	<i>5.976</i>	<i>9.062</i>	<i>10.179</i>
<b>Import</b>											
<b>North Africa</b>	1.404	2.257	2.115	2.138	2.519	3.231	4.212	4.878	3.616	5.267	3.542
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	283	457	704	558	820	1.589	1.835	2.526	3.168	2.503	2.158
<b>Total</b>	<i>1.687</i>	<i>2.714</i>	<i>2.819</i>	<i>2.696</i>	<i>3.338</i>	<i>4.820</i>	<i>6.047</i>	<i>7.405</i>	<i>6.784</i>	<i>7.770</i>	<i>5.700</i>

Source: Turkish PM, Undersecretary of Foreign Trade website, <http://www.dtm.gov.tr>

<sup>13</sup> "France seeks Turkey as Trade ally in Africa", *EU Business*, 9 November 2010, <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/france-turkey-china.6v4>

According to the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), which is very active in bolstering Turkish-African relations through its Turkey-Africa business meetings, African countries are mostly demanding furniture, apparels, durable house products, home textiles, processed food, packaging devices, iron-steel, electrical devices, and construction materials. This is contrast to Turkey's imports from Africa, which consists of oil, raw material, gold and minerals. To diversify the nature of relations and urge investment in Africa by Turkish businessmen, Rızanur Meral, the chairman of TUSKON, has frequently underlined the importance of investing in African countries by pointing out that there is significant potential in investing, especially in drilling and construction industries. The current nature of the relations is not exhaustive, and the potential of cooperation is yet to be explored. For example, there are signs that African nations are interested in Turkey's agricultural expertise. During the Istanbul summit of the Union of African Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture, and Professions (UACCIAP), President Mohamed Elmasry noted that the causes of Africa's current food crisis were not well understood in many Western nations; but as Turkey's agriculture sector had experience in raising food under adverse conditions, cooperation utilizing Turkish agricultural expertise could prove invaluable.<sup>14</sup>

Since 2005, there have been a quite a few prominent meetings between Turkey and African nations. These meetings have taken place both at the ministerial and private sector levels and have become so common that arguably, Turkey's "historical ties with Africa are being revived".<sup>15</sup> However, Turkey's keen interest in Africa seems to go beyond strengthening only historical ties. Turkey is interested in bringing Africa to international attention. When President Gül visited Kenya and Tanzania in February 2009, he pointed out that all but two African countries<sup>16</sup> had supported Turkey's candidacy in 2008 for a two-year, non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Thus, he stated that the Turkish Republic will be the spokesman for Africa at the UN. Such expressions of solidarity have been very frequent since the 2008 Turkey-Africa Summit, now often making way into the speeches of Turkish leaders. For example, in a recent statement President Gül once again made clear that "everyone should show an undivided interest in Africa without losing time. [In that sense] Turkey indicates its responsibility towards Africa".<sup>17</sup>

In general, Turkey's approach to developing trade with African nations seems to differ from that of a number of nations seeking business opportunities on the continent, whose overriding interests are Africa's oil resources. As a mid-sized

---

<sup>14</sup> J.C.K. Daly, "Turkey courts Africa", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 5 No.183, 23 September 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Abdullah Gül, "Turkish foreign policy in the new era" Lecture at USAK, 16 December 2009, <<http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/338/full-text-of-turkish-president-abdullah-gul-39-s-lecture-on-39-turkish-foreign-policy-in-the-new-era-39-at-usak.html>

<sup>16</sup> Reportedly these two countries were South Africa and Mozambique.

<sup>17</sup> Abdullah Gül, "Turkish foreign policy in the new era" Lecture at USAK, 16 December 2009.

nation with a developing economy, Turkey carries none of the free market capitalist baggage aimed at securing the best deal at any cost, which Africans so resent. By concentrating on lower profile development issues such as agriculture, Turkish initiatives arguably carry the promise of effecting genuine change in the lives of masses of Africans.<sup>18</sup>

### ***African Response: Cautious but Receptive***

African reactions to Turkey's initiative have so far been a mixture of mild expectation and confusion. Following China and India, the question of why Turkey has shown what some consider an unexpected interest in the continent still does not have a clear answer for African partners. Nevertheless, the fact that Turkey does not have a colonial background in the continent, and has emphasized an equal partnership, optimism about the future has spread amongst African leaders.<sup>19</sup>

The lack of interest from Sub-Saharan Africa to develop relations with Turkey was very dominant, hindering economic development until recently. This trend seems to be changing due to Turkey's increasing economic potential in global affairs since 2002. Since 1998, Turkey has shown a keen interest to sign a Free Trade Agreement with the South African Custom Union (SACU), but there has been reluctance especially from the part of South Africa, the biggest economy of the SACU. Perhaps as a sign of the recognition of Turkey's new status, in May 2009 for the first time the South African Department of Trade and Industry announced a study into the potential for a free trade deal between the SACU and Turkey.<sup>20</sup>

*"While the emerging multidimensional foreign policy has provided the theoretical basis of opening to Africa, increased Turkish involvement in Africa at political and economic levels represents a smooth convergence of both governmental and business policies."*

In recent years, African business in Turkey has also made serious inroads, especially in the finance sector. For example, the South African Standard Bank has been active in Turkey since 1999 and bought a Turkish broker dealer in 2002.

<sup>18</sup> J.C.K. Daly, "Turkey courts Africa", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 5 Nol.183, 23 September 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Wheeler, "Turkey's outreach to Africa", 25 August 2008, <http://www.saiia.org.za/diplomatic-pouch/turkeys-outreach-to-africa.html>

<sup>20</sup> Peter Delonno, "Turkey gets on with business - on its own terms", *Business Report*, 9 June 2009, p. 20, <http://www.busrep.co.za/index.php?fArticleId=5026771>

However, the major development occurred in 2007, when Standard Bank bought a majority stake in Turkish investment banking and brokerage firm Dundas Ünlü, with an initial 67 percent shareholding. With a new name, Standard Ünlü, Standard Bank is expected to substantially develop its business and possibly further invest in banking services located in Turkey. African exports to Turkey are also on the rise since 2002, especially from key countries in the continent. The amount of increase is noteworthy in the case of South Africa, which jumped from 212 million dollars in 2002 to 1503 million dollars in 2008. A similar jump can also be observed in the volume of exports from Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia and others to Turkey. The change in African side is best illustrated in the defense dimension of Turkey-Africa relations. Turkey has had a long-time interest in buying the Rooivalk attack helicopters for the Turkish army. Since the 1990s, Turkey knocked the doors of South African officials for its request, but was rebuffed by then President Nelson Mandela's administration, due to the Kurdish issue. Relations were further exacerbated by Mandela's refusal to accept the Atatürk Peace Prize in 1992 and the imposition of arms embargo on Turkey by South Africa in 1995.<sup>21</sup> However, the country's policies toward Turkey have changed under Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki. Prime Minister Erdoğan made the first visit by a Turkish head of government to South Africa in March 2005, and in August 2008, former South African Deputy-President Phumzile Mlambo-Nguka was among the 50 heads of state at the first Turkish-African Summit in Istanbul. Apparently since June 2006, a Turkish bid for Rooivalk was viewed by South African officials with a positive prospect, as South African Minister of Public Enterprises Alec Erwin announced in a press conference to promote the Rooivalk that "there would be a high level of sharing in transfer of technology [with Turkey]...that applies to any program we are involved in with Turkey, not only the Rooivalk."<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

Behind much of the lofty political rhetoric about humanitarian aid and economic development, Turkey's Africa policy is driven by a long-term orientation of Turkey in international politics and can be understood within this context. Turkey seems to be following a foreign policy that may eventually lead in diversifying its economic allies. For example, Turkey is interested in reducing economic dependence on traditional European and Russian trading partners by efforts such as opening to Africa. Turkey has understood that the world has changed profoundly and new allies, strategic calculations and planning are a must in a rapidly shifting global economy.

---

<sup>21</sup> Tom Wheeler, "Turkey and South Africa: Development of Relations 1860-2005", *SALIA Report* No. 47, 2005, pp. 17-22.

<sup>22</sup> *Business Report*, 1 June 2006, <http://www.busrep.co.za/index.php?fSectionId=561&fArticleId=3272460>

Turkey's opening to Africa is a result of both Turkey's domestic transformation and change in the global political economy. Turkey's domestic transformation has challenged traditional Turkish partners in the economy and aimed at diversifying its trade alternatives in line with change in the global political economy power configuration. Change in the international system leads countries to define their own interest in a newly emerging system. Turkey's response to such changes has been to define a multidimensional foreign policy, and develop economic and political relations with not only immediate neighbors, but also with other regions and continents. Turkey's opening to Africa is part and parcel of this new redefinition of Turkish foreign policy.

In a broader perspective, while the emerging multidimensional foreign policy has provided the theoretical basis of opening to Africa, increased Turkish involvement in Africa at political and economic levels represents a smooth convergence of both governmental and business policies. It is interesting to note here that after the global economic crisis in 2009, Turkey's opening to Africa has gained more importance in terms of opening up new markets as a way to decrease the influence of the global economic meltdown. Turkey's growing involvement in Africa is likely to continue in the near future, as it now has a solid economic and social base to support it at home.