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## Summitry Diplomacy in Turkey–Africa Relations: Statements, (Non-)Accomplishments and Effectiveness

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### ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, summits have gained great importance in developing relations with African countries and they have become useful tools to understand intersecting roadmaps on the continent. China, India, Japan, the United States, European countries and Russia conducted various summits and business forums targeting to develop their political, economic and military relations with Africa. In this vein, FOCAC (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation), European Union–Africa Business and Investment Summits, Japan’s Africa Development Summits and Russia–Africa Summit provide some details of these powers’ Africa policy. Turkey has also emerged as a new actor and summit organizer in Africa since it opened a new page for Africa in its foreign policy in 2005. After being a strategic partner to the African Union in 2008, Turkey has conducted three Turkey–Africa summits, Istanbul (2008), Malabo (2014) and Istanbul (2021), to form its roadmap in Africa. This work aims to analyse the role of Africa–Turkey summits in the development of Turkey’s Africa policy and its relationship with African countries. The paper looks at all declarations comprehensively to evaluate Turkey’s foreign policy discourse on Africa. Moreover, it examines Turkey’s Africa policy implementations and achievements on the continent through the lens of summits.

### KEYWORDS

Africa; Turkey; summit diplomacy; Africa–Turkey Summit; Istanbul declaration; Malabo declaration

## Introduction

In international politics, summitry has become an established part of the political interactions of states since the twentieth century. Summits are meetings involving representatives of the highest level of states or international organizations. These gatherings have a high frequency and involve heads of state or government in debates that affect the international environment. Beginning with early 2000s, summitry diplomacy has become a way of redeveloping relations with Africa.

There are numerous African summits, but why? Many pundits may ask this question but, first of all, it requires a contextualization. Russia, Turkey, USA, India, China and the EU have all organized Africa summits in one form or another. Many international organizations, from the UN to regional organizations, have joined this trend in the last decade to discuss Africa in special forums, summits and gatherings. Each country is probably moved by different specific motives and agendas, but the overall aim is same: to

upgrade relations with African countries and influence Africa's international outlook. Since 2002, Turkey has followed the same path, and organized the first Africa–Turkey Partnership Summit in 2008 in Istanbul. This article explains Ankara's motives in opening up to Africa and evaluates its summit diplomacy vis-à-vis Africa. Framing Turkey's Africa policy with its attainments, it is argued that the Africa–Turkey Partnership Summits have made a good contribution to the relationship in terms of discovering potentials along with setting future goals. Nevertheless, a promise or signing a document is not equal to full implementation.

### Summit as signifier in international politics

Many countries now organize summits with African countries almost as a matter of course. One can consider this as part of the global interest in the continent; however, in the first stage, it is more a way of connecting with Africa than doing business. Summit diplomacy is usually considered a type of conference diplomacy used by international governments in which the heads of state meet for face-to-face negotiations and get to know each other.<sup>1</sup> First of all, summits, if organized regularly, provide a mechanism for dialogue between participants, and summit declarations and implementation plans basically become strategic texts for participants. Although they carry a slightly idealistic tone, summit declarations offer some practical tools and form a limited frame for a period of 4–5 years. From this functional perspective, we may see summits as a vision-constructing instrument or a mechanism for strategic guidance.

Since mid-2000, it has been commonplace to hear in African politics, following meetings and forums bringing together the continent's presidents, ministers and high-level officials with their traditional, emerging and aspiring partners or with multilateral organizations: 'Russia–Africa summit 2019', 'UK–Africa summit 2020', 'Middle East–Africa summit 2020', 'Africa–France Summit 2020', 'Turkey–Africa Economic and Business Forum 2020', 'Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) 2021',<sup>2</sup> 'Russia–Africa Summit and Economic Forum 2022'. This is in no way an exhaustive list of scheduled or planned meetings. The COVID-19 pandemic has visibly decreased, or at least postponed, such summitry relations between African countries and the world, but the question remains: why are summit meeting so dominant in Africa's international politics? What makes Africa unique in the sense that each organization, country and entity is eager to have such meetings? Is it good for Africa?

We believe that there are several explanations for the rise and dominance of African summitry in global politics. First, Africa has been the centre of international attention since mid-2000 and summit meetings represent a way of showing interest in the continent by outside actors. Many consider Africa attractive because of its natural resources, economic potential and young population. This increasingly attractive environment in Africa has turned the continent into a theatre of great power and there is emerging competition for access to African natural endowments and relatively untapped market. This offers Africa a favourable position to enhance its international status and thus increase its agency.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, since the Cold War ended, and most specifically after early 2000; the United States of America and Europe alone no longer dominate, not only in global politics but also in African politics. The emergence and visibility of China and other

BRIC countries on the international stage as well as the interest of Turkey, Brazil and South Korea in Africa has positive implications for agency and action since African countries have considerably more leeway to choose partners. As a result, a number of African countries are showing growing signs of assertiveness in their negotiations for development assistance as they leverage their natural resources. Summits are one of the forums where African countries try to increase their leverage at the international level. As Brown rightly argued, 'future work on African agency [is to] be able to engage seriously with the continent's role in international politics in a way that presents Africa as actor and not just acted upon; and a historical agent, and not just history's recipient'.<sup>4</sup> As long as international interest in Africa continues, summit meetings are likely to be more frequent and important. The more such meetings occur, the better will be the institutional structure of Africa's relations with other countries.

Second, summits are very helpful in getting to know each other and discovering the potentials. Africa was neglected in international politics as a major region of cooperation during the Cold War, but the post-Cold War era opened new market possibilities and other benefits for many countries. As it is coupled with the rise of non-western countries in global politics, Africa has been an area that should be known and understood better at the social, political and economic levels.

Third, Africa is emerging as an area of confrontation and possible competition between different international actors. An unspoken China-US rivalry and Turkey-France competition is already visible in some parts of the continent.<sup>5</sup> Slowly emerging Russian influence is likely to be countered by various actors in coming years. In Eastern Africa, in particular, several Gulf countries, most prominently the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, are trying to decrease the influence of Turkey and Qatar.

Lastly, the utility of summit meetings has been called into question in the literature, as these meetings may create unfulfilled expectations, often remaining nothing more than 'talking shops' between leaders. Similarly, summits have been regarded as counter-productive as they can legitimize or de-legitimize undemocratic leaders.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, summitry is living diplomacy and diplomatic practice. It mainly concerns itself with the high-level participation of executive leadership; thus, the very presence of political leaders remains instrumental in the outcomes of these gatherings. However, this diplomatic instrument may also be used as a sanction in order not to legitimize undemocratic leaders. For example, the EU-Africa summits illustrate summitry sanctions as diplomatic instruments, as some African leaders have not been invited to EU-Africa summits over the years.<sup>7</sup> In other summits with African countries, including Turkey-Africa summits, one may not see such distinction as all leaders from the continent are invited.

To sum up, summit diplomacy has been a prominent feature in African politics, and it is likely to stay so for a while. This is because African actors are variously using Africa summit diplomacy with other countries, as Soule rightly argued, 'as a means to orient this interest to (i) attract investments through forum shopping in a competitive environment, (ii) diversify economic partners to reduce dependency, (iii) tactically claim back their economic policy space, and (iv) for some, to escape at least temporarily from political isolation by getting more visibility and expanding networks'.<sup>8</sup>

## Assessment of Africa–Turkey summits

The last two decades, Turkey has organized various gatherings, economic forums and summits in order to develop its multi-sectorial interaction with African countries. However, the summits took a very central role in the framing of Turkey's Africa policy.<sup>9</sup> So far, Turkey, in collaboration with the African Union (AU), has organized three different Africa–Turkey Partnership Summits, in 2008, 2014 and most recently in 2021. During these important events, declarations and joint implementation plans were accepted by participants in order to regulate cooperation. This section of the article aims to track the summits, make an assessment of what role they play in Turkey–Africa relations and try to understand the balance between the declarations and implementations. Via this assessment we are going to analyse challenges ahead for Turkey's Africa policy or Turkey–Africa cooperation.

### *Africa–Turkey partnership summit, Istanbul-2008*

2008 marked a special year in terms of Turkey's Africa policy since the same year Turkey held its first partnership summit with African countries and an important announcement before the summit was that Turkey had been accepted as Africa's new 'strategic partner' by the AU. This brought Turkey into the Union's strategic partners club that included the US, Europe, China, Japan and India. The first Africa–Turkey Partnership Summit indicated the beginning of a new period in which African affairs and relations with the continent were becoming essential for Ankara.

When one observes the content of the first summit,<sup>10</sup> it might be clear that some general principles and points and a frame for cooperation were set as the grounding for this new partnership. In that vein, the participating parties agreed to deal with each other for the 'common future', 'cooperation' and 'solidarity' on the principles of equality, mutual benefit and respect. Several areas, including intergovernmental cooperation, trade and investment, agriculture, agribusiness, rural development, water resources management, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), health, peace and security, infrastructure, energy and transport, culture, tourism, education, media, information and communication technologies (ICT) and the environment were designated as sectors for establishing cooperation between Turkey and African countries.

The Istanbul declaration<sup>11</sup> accepted during the summit included diplomacy and intergovernmental cooperation and was accepted as a vehicle for promoting diplomatic relations between Turkey and Africa. In order to deepen bilateral diplomatic relations, exchange of high-level official visits, intergovernmental dialogue, sharing experiences to support beneficial partnership, technology transfer, capacity building and promoting developmental projects were adopted as strategic tools. Trade, business and investment activities have had a critical role in the declaration; so the parties were urged to promote foreign direct investment (FDI) flows in both direction, from Turkey to Africa and vice versa.

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) has been considered an important institution within the declaration as a provider of development and humanitarian assistance to African countries. Cooperation in the health sector was also amongst the designated areas of the declaration, which requested Turkey's

support regarding Africa's chronic problems of poverty, malnutrition, infectious diseases and epidemics. The peace and security sector appeared to be another essential field for cooperation; and expectations in this sector were framed as Turkey's financial and military contribution to the AU Peace and Security Architecture, the African Standby Forces and the UN Peacekeeping Operations in Africa, along with training and experience change.

Infrastructure, energy and transport were also considered suitable areas for further developing cooperation. The parties have agreed to act jointly on development of transportation infrastructure as well as establishing business partnerships in order to execute joint physical infrastructure projects. The other important point in the declaration was to create better access to energy and non-agricultural biofuel sources.

Culture, tourism, education, science, technology, youth activities and sports were all considered as key fields in which to develop cooperation between Turkey and Africa. In this vein, policies such as scholarship programmes, cooperation between universities and local authorities, establishing research centres and collaborating in the fight against the illegal trafficking of cultural artefacts were adopted. The declaration also included cooperation in the field of media and ICT through exchange programmes for media staff and capacity building in the IT sector, and publicizing African and Turkish common achievements in the media.

Having agreed to cooperate in many different sectors, the first summit and its vast range of topics actually reflected that both Turkey and the African states had great ambitions to work jointly. The high profile of participants also provided for Turkey an early prestigious start to this new journey. But more importantly, the summit provided a legal framework for Turkey's new Africa policy. Diplomatic, economic and cultural initiatives of Turkish institutions, both governmental and civic, started developing considerable momentum after the first summit. And the follow-up mechanism of the deceleration provided for new summits to be held in every five years and ministerial review conferences every three years.

### ***Africa–Turkey partnership summit, Malabo-2014***

The second Africa–Turkey summit was held in Malabo, capital of Equatorial Guinea, in 2014, and a new declaration along with a joint implementation plan for the period 2015–2019 was accepted by the parties. This new declaration carried similarities with the first declaration but also opened some new areas for cooperation. Climate change, empowerment of women, livestock breeding, migration, cyber-crimes, conflict resolution and mediation appeared as the new designated fields for cooperation within the new declaration.

The Malabo declaration<sup>12</sup> included emphasis on deepening collaboration in peace and security and conflict resolution via exchange of expertise, information and training. It also projected further cooperation in combating the crime of human trafficking and illegal migration as well as fighting against the terrorism that threatens the stability of the continent. Recalling the previous declarations, the new declaration also encouraged increasing direct trade relations between the parties and promoted the social and economic development of Turkey and Africa in areas of infrastructure, industrialization, tourism and SMEs.

In Malabo, Turkey and African countries agreed to support Africa's continental priority programmes and demanded that parties cooperate on livestock breeding and developing productivity for Africa's food security. Cotton and textile industries were considered as new fields for cooperation by the participants. Additionally, capacity-building programmes for African youth, empowerment of African women and higher education activities were suggested for joint cooperation in the new declaration. The participating parties also agreed to act jointly in the health sector in order to combat diseases and establish an efficient and well-developed health system on the continent.

The Malabo implementation roadmap<sup>13</sup> again underscored Turkey's financial and military support for the security architecture of Africa. And, to promote Africa's socio-economic development and food safety, it recommended cooperation in the field of agriculture, agribusiness, rural development, water resources management and SMEs by following policies such as exchanging information, experience and experts. Broadcasting programmes, films and dramas by Turkish and African producers, training African youth on journalism and media, organizing Turkish–Africa media forums were adopted as strategic tools in order to strengthen cooperation in the fields of media and ICT.

Modernizing irrigation techniques and applying better environmental and water management methods were suggested by parties as ways to mitigate the negative effects of climate change. Implementing joint youth and sports events such as games, competitions and festivals, increasing air traffic between Turkey and the continent, in addition to developing aviation infrastructure and cooperating in the power sector in order to increase access to electricity and support the industrialization of African countries were included in the long list in the Malabo declaration.

The second summit can be seen a real turning point in terms of Turkey–Africa relations because after 2014 Turkey's relations with the continent diversified in parallel to the declaration's framework. The security sector, for example, became an important area for cooperation, especially after the failed coup attempt in 2016 and, as discussed below, Turkey started implementing some important health, education and military projects in the continent. The Malabo Summit and the declaration accepted by participants regulated Turkey's Africa policy until the third summit that in 2021 in Istanbul.

### ***Africa–Türkiye<sup>14</sup> partnership summit, Istanbul-2021***

After a delay of two years, Turkey's last Africa summit was held in Istanbul in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. The summit gathered under the theme 'Enhanced Partnership for Common Development and Prosperity' and was attended by 16 African heads, including Macky Sall, Paul Kagame, Nana Akufo-Addo and 102 ministers from 39 African states.<sup>15</sup> During the summit, a new declaration and a joint implementation plan<sup>16</sup> for the period 2022–2026 were accepted by the participants.

In general terms, the third summit declared satisfaction at the level of cooperation between Turkey and African countries since Turkey adopted its new Africa policy, and the summit reiterated the goals and principles adopted through the previous two summits. Although there was no fundamental change in the third summit, we may mention some new points and approaches that appeared in its declaration.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its negative effects at global and national levels was at the top of the agenda for the third summit. Turkish and African leaders agreed to work

together, especially for the fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines given the low level of vaccination on the continent due to vaccine scarcity. Moreover, the parties projected more cooperation, which will pave the way for Turkey and African countries to be better placed in the post-pandemic global world order. During the summit, Turkey and African nations also agreed to take into consideration the AU Agenda 2063 and United Nations' Agenda 2030 priority programmes and the zero-emissions target of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in order to reduce the destructive effects of climate change.

The third summit highlighted some political issues for the first time. Any form of armed violence and coup attempts to overthrow legal governments were condemned and the Arab–Israeli conflict came to the top of the agenda at the summit. Turkey and African countries called for a peaceful solution to the conflict and for an internationally recognized independent Palestinian state as advocated by the African Union. The declaration brought also tripartite approach along with G2G bilateral relation. In this regard, the participants agreed to implement tripartite projects with the involvement of Turkey, African countries and the African Union.

The Turkey–Africa Economic and Business Forum organized by DEIK in collaboration with the AU was appreciated for its role in developing trade and investment relations between Turkey and Africa. In fact, the forums held in 2016, 2018 and 2020 boosted Turkey's economic relations with Africa within a short period of time. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was also among the top items on the agenda of the third summit and a memorandum of understanding was signed between Turkey's Ministry of Trade and AfCFTA's Secretariat.

The summit declaration accepted Turkey's Maarif Foundation as the main vehicle for cooperation at the level of primary and secondary education between Turkey and African countries. As known, the foundation became effective after the failed coup attempt in Turkey in 2016 and later handed over Turkish schools from FETÖ on the continent. Moreover, for better cooperation on higher education, the parties requested a memorandum of understanding to be signed between Turkey's Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and the African Union in order to implement academic exchange programmes and to provide YÖK scholarships to the Pan-African University.

Diaspora matters are in a separate section in the third declaration. The participating parties agreed to fight together against the racism, discrimination and xenophobia that diaspora communities increasingly face nowadays. At the summit, Turkey and African countries agreed to cooperate with UNESCO on the matter of returning Africa's cultural heritage and archives looted during the colonial era by the European nations. For the purpose of cultural exchange, translation of literary and artistic works of Africans into Turkish and works of Turkish artists into African languages was also proposed by the parties. On technology-related issues, the summit participants agreed to facilitate Turkey's satellite TÜRSAT in order to provide TV broadcasting and internet services to African countries.

### **The balance between the declarations and implementation**

Africa–Turkey summits are multi-faceted events framing general aspects of cooperation between the participating parties, and some observations can be made from the discourse



and language dominating these events. Official summit declarations, at first sight, may be seen like lists of generous promises concerning issues from trade and diplomacy to cooperation on cyber-crime. The diversity of the mutual agenda contained in the declarations and the idealistic tone dominating it actually show high expectations and potential for both sides to form better relations.

From a critical perspective, for Africa–Turkey summits, it can be also said that joint implementation plans usually lack specific steps, so they remain ambiguous. But still, the summits provide a basis for mutual understanding for participants and actually shape concrete strategic roadmaps for the parties. Additionally, they provide a set of measures for evaluating the consistency of steps taken in order to reach the targets set at the summits. If one considers the above-mentioned three summits, it can be seen that Turkey’s Africa policy is quite coherent with what has been adopted by the three declarations so far. Now, to understand the balance between what is declared and what implemented we need to look at the pillars of Turkey’s Africa policy and the implementation.

One of the intriguing facts about current Turkey–Africa relations is that Turkey started expanding its diplomatic presence on the continent after the first summit. On G2G level, a wide range of official visits from Turkey to African countries and from African countries to Turkey brought a diplomatic victory for Turkey. For example, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan officially visited 31 different countries on the continent over a period covering 2005 to 2022 and the number of Turkish embassies on the continent rose from 12 to 43 as a result of Turkey’s diplomatic activity.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the number of African embassies in Ankara rose to 32 from a very low level. Overall, these diplomatic outcomes have been appropriate to the implementation plans of the summit declarations.

Cooperation on economic issues and deepening trade relations between parties took an important place in the three summits. In this regard, we see that trade relations and direct investment figures have clearly increased between Turkey and African countries, especially after 2008. According to some sources, Turkey–Africa trade today is around \$25.5 billion while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared it as \$34.5 billion on its official page.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned at the last Istanbul summit, periodic Turkey–Africa Economic and Business Forum meeting continue to play an important role in boosting trade and investment, and the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK) established 43 business councils across the continent in order to regulate and promote trade relations between Turkey and Africa. However, from the official declarations, it is understood that the expectations regarding trade between the two sides is higher than the current volume. For example, the Malabo declaration in 2014 projected \$50 billion of trade and investment by 2019, but this aim has not so far been reached. This shows how summits designate cooperation between parties in an optimistic way while implementation goes more slowly due to procedures or various setbacks.

In all three summits, the role of Turkey’s official aid agency TİKA as a development aid provider has been mentioned in a positive tone. In line with this, TİKA has widened its operations on the continent since its first branch opened in Addis Ababa in 2005. Especially after the first summit, TİKA opened new branches across the continent. Today in Africa, it has 22 coordination offices implementing vocational training, rural development projects and agricultural programmes.<sup>19</sup>

In the last decade Turkey has boosted its cooperation in the health sector, also in line with summit declarations. Turkey has signed cooperation agreements with more than 20 African countries and the Turkish Ministry of Health, TİKA, KIZILAY, along with Turkish INGOs, implemented health projects on the continent. Hospital complexes in Sudan's Darfur region, Somalia's capital Mogadishu and Niger's capital Niamey have been constructed and equipped by Ankara. Moreover, Mitiga military hospital in Libya has also been renovated and equipped. And during the pandemic, Turkey provided COVID-19 aid packages to various African countries using cargo planes.<sup>20</sup>

Turkey's presence in Africa's security sector became more visible after the Malabo summit. As demanded in the declarations, Turkey started providing some troops to the UN military operations in Mali, Liberia, Sudan, South Sudan, DRC, Ivory Coast and Central African Republic and joined maritime security initiatives and rescue efforts in the Horn of Africa against piracy.<sup>21</sup> Turkey also constructed a military training centre (TURKSOM) in Somalia's capital Mogadishu in order to train the Somalian National Army. Thanks to TURKSOM, Turkey started playing an essential role in Somalia's security sector, where AMISOM (African Mission in Somalia) is being authorized to secure the country against al-Shabab attacks.<sup>22</sup>

As with trade, health and security, Turkey's cooperation in the field of education also deepened in African countries. In recent years, Turkey has introduced a new scholarship programme providing free higher education, and more than 5000 youth from different African countries were accepted for funding. The field of African Studies has become a popular academic field in Turkish universities. Additionally, Turkey has increased its investment in Africa's education sector, opening Yunus Emre Foundation, a cultural institute which supports Turkish language education, and establishing Turkology departments at African universities. After 2016, the Maarif Foundation became the main vehicle for Turkey's support to elementary and secondary schooling in Africa. The foundation now operates 175 private schools in 25 different African countries.<sup>23</sup>

Interaction between Turkey and Africa in the media sector is also drawing attention. Turkey's oldest news agency, Anadolu News Agency (AA), opened its continental office in Addis Ababa and later located some newsmakers in Dakar, Nairobi, Cape Town, Khartoum and Abuja. AA organizes periodical training programmes for African newsmakers on conflict and war journalism. In order to increase African media awareness of Turkey and strengthen Turkey's image on African media, the Turkish Ministry of Communication recently organized the first Africa-Turkey Media Summit in Istanbul with the participation of African media professionals.

Not only state institutions but also civic society organizations and private companies from Turkey have shown an interest in Africa since Turkey's Africa policy took effect. The FDI of Turkish companies on the continent reached \$6.5 billion. As is well known, Turkey's official flag carrier, Turkish Airlines, widened its operations in Africa. The company has flights to 39 countries in Africa.<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion, interaction between Turkey and Africa is very active in certain areas, especially diplomacy, trade, security, health and education. It can be said that Turkey has increased its visibility on the continent and regulated its relations with African countries in many fields, in conformity with the declarations of the Africa-Turkey summits. However, there is still a gap between the declarations and

implementation. Turkey–Africa cooperation in areas such as sports, climate change, women's empowerment, technology, science, tourism, art and culture is very limited or non-existent.

### Assessments on Turkey–Africa relations (2005–2022)

Nobody could have imagined the current status of relations between Turkey and Africa just a decade ago. However, what one could have imagined was probably a type of limited relations between the two parties mostly based on economic activities. Ankara's Africa policy to develop relations and the response from African countries went beyond the imaginations of many. Indeed, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government's Africa policy represents the most successful aspect of Turkish foreign policy over the past decade. The success that Turkey has enjoyed on the African continent represents an impressive achievement. Ankara has effectively nurtured its political, economic and socio-cultural ties with Africa and gradually established itself as a long-term stakeholder. The details of this success can be examined in five periods, each of them indicating a different level of understanding of, and approach to, the continent.

The period between the AKP's rise to power in 2002 and the designation of 2005 as the Year of Africa represented a preliminary stage of Turkey's foreign policy towards Africa. It was during these years that initial assessments of Africa's potential were made and Turkish officials held lower-level meetings with their African counterparts. When, as a sign of the success of this process of deliberation, Turkey designated 2005 as the Year of Africa, African governments were not surprised. At the same time, the move represented an unmistakable sign of Turkey's commitment to building stronger relations with Africa.<sup>25</sup>

The second period, which started in 2005 and ended with the First Turkey–Africa Summit three years later, marked a period of more diverse relations in a range of areas, including politics and the economy. During this period, Turkish–African relations made more progress than the Turkish authorities had initially predicted, while both sides became more familiar with their counterparts.

The third period began with the 2008 summit and continued until then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's August 2011 visit to the Somali capital Moghadishu. This was when Turkish–African relations assumed a multi-dimensional nature.<sup>26</sup> While the Turkish government established embassies in various African countries, the nation's trade volume with Africa quadrupled from \$4 billion to approximately \$25 billion. As such, the years between 2005 and 2008 represent a key period of growing complexity in Turkey's Africa policy.

It was during the fourth period, which began with Erdogan's official visit to Somalia, that Turkish–African relations assumed a different nature—a political one.<sup>27</sup> In 2011, the Turkish government's Somalia Initiative entailed the nation's focus on high politics, i.e., political matters and security issues, in addition to mere economic ties and humanitarian or development aid. In fact, Turkey's involvement in Somalia ushered in a second experience of state building for Ankara after the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The relative restoration of public order and the world's renewed interest in the Somalia conflict rendered Turkey a prominent stakeholder whose opinions were widely appreciated. As a result of this, the Turkish authorities met with representatives from the

European Union, Great Britain, Spain, Norway and the United States, among others, to discuss African issues.<sup>28</sup>

The end of 2014 marked the beginning of the fifth period in Turkish–African relations, which focuses on normalization and institutionalization of relations. Therefore, the current period has particular importance, as it holds the key to consolidating existing achievements and developing a more systematic approach. At this point, there are two pressing issues at hand. Primarily, as mentioned in the previous section, the Malabo and Istanbul summits in 2014 and 2021 paved the way for full normalization of the Turkish government’s relations with the African countries; most African leaders, attending the first Turkey–Africa Summit in 2008, had serious doubts about the sincerity of Turkey’s interest in the continent and raised questions about the nation’s agenda at that time. However, the Malabo and Istanbul summits focused on the possibility of more comprehensive cooperation and maximizing mutual benefits in future.<sup>29</sup>

The imperative for the current phase is to deepen and broaden relationships. Thus far, government agencies, including the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), the Turkish Maarif Foundation, and even Turkish Airlines,<sup>30</sup> have sought to independently explore the African continent and to develop their own perspectives. This has resulted in further diversification of Turkey’s interactions on the continent. Keeping in mind that Turkey has no colonial history in Africa, this approach represented a suitable course of action. One can argue that Turkey has developed a more effective and result-oriented style and managed to win over sceptics across the continent. Nevertheless, the time has come for the Turkish government to consciously trade its current position as a super nation for a lasting presence through local-level partnerships

Turkey’s Africa policy mixes elements of soft power and hard power. Economically, trade between Turkey and African countries has increased from \$5 billion in 2002 to \$25 billion in 2021. Deepening this aspect, the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey established 43 business councils across the continent and Turkish business and investment is very active there. Politically, a mutual understanding has been reached and both sides now have a better appreciation of each other. Although bilateral relations dominate the relationship, Ankara has good relations with the African Union, ECOWAS, IGAD as well as other organizations on the continent. Looking forward, the Turkey–Africa summits (2008, 2014 and 2021) have been the best institutionalized form of interaction in these relations. Security aspects have become more visible in recent years. In the last few years, increasing interest in buying military equipment, especially drones, from Turkey added a totally new dimension. The success of Turkish unmanned drones in the Azerbaijan–Armenia war, Libya, Ethiopia and recently in Ukraine have stressed one thing: economically reasonable Turkish drones have proven efficient and game changing in hybrid wars. No fewer than a dozen African countries have shown interest in Turkish military equipment. In 2020, Ankara signed a military cooperation agreement with Niger including the possible opening of a military base in the future. That same year, Turkey signed a defence pact with Nigeria, and talks on deepening relations were held during Erdoğan’s state visit to Nigeria in October 2021. Similarly, military cooperation with several African countries, including Togo, Senegal, Ethiopia, Somalia and Gambia, exist at different levels, including the education and training of military

personnel. This could mark the beginning of a new era in security relations between Ankara and Africa.

Overall, Turkey's mode of engagement with Africa has been a slowly deepening process with new elements being added as time passes. Similarly, new actors and institutions from the Turkish bureaucracy have also been involved in shaping Africa policy, while African partners' interest in developing these relations have also gradually increased.<sup>31</sup> One can now view the relationship between Turkey and Africa as fully developed with all relevant actors contributing. This process has led to normalization of these relations at social, political and economic levels. Turkey has transitioned from being a 'new' entrant into the African space to being an increasingly established partner with Africa.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Summit conferences related to the continent of Africa are a new phenomenon in shaping relations with African countries. Gathering delegations from a considerable number of African countries provides a cost-effective and practical way to regulate one country's approach to a huge continent. Besides, summit gatherings provide academics and policy makers a practical tool to track the balance between declaration and implementation. As a new emerging actor on the African scene, Turkey presents an image of eagerness to develop its diplomatic, economic and cultural relations with African nations. In this vein, Africa–Turkey Partnership Summits that were held in 2008, 2014 and most recently in 2021 play a crucial role and help track Turkey's footprint on the continent. Moreover, these summits might be seen as highly strategic visionary events.

Since 2005, Turkey's opening to Africa has been a direct result of Turkey's domestic political transformation and change in the global political economy. This opening has given a new impetus to Ankara. Turkey's domestic transformation has challenged the traditional Turkish partners in the economy and led to the aim to diversify its trade alternatives in line with changes in the global political-economic power configuration. Changes in the international system have led countries to define their own interests in a newly emerging system.<sup>33</sup> Turkey's response to such changes has been to define a multi-dimensional foreign policy and develop economic and political relations with not only immediate neighbours but also other regions and continents. Turkey's Africa opening is part and parcel of this new redefinition of Turkish foreign policy.

Turkey's Africa opening has been, so far, one of the most successful foreign policies in terms of economic, political and social gains. Relations between African countries and Ankara have turned out to be mutually beneficial for both parties and this has created a momentum and willingness to deepen the ties. Turkey–Africa summits have helped to facilitate these relations at a broader level and continue to be main reference in taking the relations forward. Today, Africa is considered as a natural ally by the Turkish people and this is so normalized that nobody—not even opposition parties—criticizes these relations. Some African issues, like that of Somalia, are literally internalized and now are considered as part of Turkey's domestic agenda.

Turkey–Africa relations are likely to continue in the coming years because it has been accepted at a social level. Politically speaking, more engagement with Africa has created a better understanding of Africa and its potentials in Turkey and has created a successful

example of south–south cooperation. Whether the global and domestic developments may bring any change in the nature and speed of Turkey–Africa relations in coming years is yet to be seen. In particular, the worsening of the Turkish economy in recent years is likely to have a direct negative impact on Ankara’s development projects and investments on the continent. It is not clear whether social support from Turkey to deepen relations with Africa will continue if the Turkish economy worsens in the coming years. Despite this possibility, it should be stressed that redefinition of Africa at both conceptual and political levels in Turkish foreign policy represents a novelty. Turkey–Africa relations appear to be normalized and the Turkish government’s efforts tend to be appreciated across the continent. It is possible, nonetheless, to identify several more shortcomings. The most important point right now relates to the challenging task of making the country’s efforts matter on a regional and global scale.

Up until 2011, key African countries believed Turkey’s sudden interest in Africa’s affairs to be primarily economically motivated—which is why they concentrated on short-term benefits at the expense of the Turkish government’s long-term contributions. Ankara’s policy towards Somalia, however, helped transform African leader’s perceptions of Turkey at national and regional levels.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, official visits by Turkish leaders made positive contributions to Turkey’s image on the continent. The upcoming years, though, will put Turkey’s position as a security actor alongside other critical players such as France, the United Kingdom and the United States to the test. One can argue that Turkey’s place is now firmly secured as an emerging power in Africa, especially with regard to trade and humanitarian aid.

Domestically, besides the economy, the biggest challenge is the lack of understanding of and interest in Africa among policy circles and academia within Turkey. This continues to be very much present, despite more than a decade of engagement with the continent. There still remains an acute shortage of trained Turkish experts on African affairs. Although various Turkish institutions have launched Africa research centres in recent years, these organizations remain both ill-equipped and prone to reproducing Orientalist approaches that are on the verge of becoming obsolete.

Turkey wants to be a political and security actor in Africa while it also faces many domestic issues, including criticism on the human rights front and its foreign policy towards Syria and the region. The more Ankara becomes a security actor in Africa, the more it will be subjected to criticisms for its domestic politics. So far none of the African leaders has raised critical domestic issues of Turkey at either summits or bilateral meetings with their Turkish counterparts. Since 2021, Turkey has been under scrutiny for its military help to Ethiopia with drones, given some possible civilian casualties in Tigray region,<sup>35</sup> however such issues have not yet proved to be an obstacle or a barrier to Turkey–Africa relations.

In conclusion, interaction between Turkey and African counties as well as the African Union is very active in certain areas, especially diplomacy, trade, security, health and education. It can be said that Turkey has increased its visibility in the continent and regulated its relations with African countries in many fields in conformity with declarations of Africa–Turkey summits, but there is still a considerable gap between what was accepted within the declarations and what steps have been taken with regard to implementation. While Turkey’s engagement with Africa in the fields of diplomacy, trade and security are on the rise, in areas such as sports, climate change, women’s empowerment,

technology, science, tourism, art and culture, the interaction between Turkey and Africa is limited or non-existent.

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## Disclosure Statement

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