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“Turkafrica”, virtuous power in action

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Abstract:

Since the mid-2010s, Turkey’s involvement in the African continent has greatly increased in the areas of diplomacy, investments, trade, humanitarian aid, education, culture and security. Via the planned application of both typical soft power tools and other classic power resources, including military power, Turkey intends to position itself in the continent as a first class member and to maintain multidimensional relations which would benefit both sides. However, an in-depth analysis of these relations indicates that Africa is less important in the overall Turkish foreign policy than it may appear at first glance. Turkey’s African policy is thus a risky bet that will only bear fruit in the long run.

Keywords:

Turkey, Africa, African policy, Turkish foreign policy.

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«Turcáfrica», poder virtuoso en acción

Resumen:

La implicación de Turquía en el continente africano ha experimentado una considerable expansión desde mediados de la pasada década. Mediante la aplicación planificada de instrumentos típicos de *soft power*, o «poder virtuoso», por utilizar la terminología oficial, en combinación con el uso de otros recursos clásicos de poder, incluyendo el militar, Turquía pretende posicionarse en el continente como un socio de primer orden y mantener unas relaciones multidimensionales de las que ambas partes puedan beneficiarse. Un análisis pormenorizado de estas relaciones indica que, no obstante, en el momento actual el peso África en el conjunto de la política exterior turca es menor de lo que a primera vista pueda parecer. La política africana de Turquía es, por tanto, una apuesta no carente de riesgos que únicamente dará frutos en el largo plazo.

Palabras clave:

Turquía, África, política africana, Política exterior turca.

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Introduction

Africa is a continent with enormous potential. Although today many of the African countries are living in poverty, and most countries at the bottom of the human development index (HDI) are African, many think that this situation may change in the coming decades. Fundamentals ranging from demographic potential, foreseeable economic growth, the availability of natural resources or the existence of huge areas for agricultural and livestock use that are still unexploited could, if moderately well managed, be a solid basis for pushing the African continent towards a promising future.

But at the same time, many analysts consider this abundance to be the cause of Africa's misfortunes. As early as the 19th century, Africa aroused the interest of resource-hungry Western powers such as the United Kingdom and France, and to a lesser extent Germany and Belgium, whose exploitation model has proved to be a limiting factor in the continent's development. In recent decades, without the former European powers having lost interest in the continent, other actors have entered the scene. China¹ and Russia², which has recently taken up the interest in Africa shown by the Soviet Union in the past, are the clearest examples of this “new fight for Africa” in which non-Western nations are seeking trade opportunities, attempting to project themselves into this difficult but dynamic part of the world. And among the emerging powers that are regional in scope but aspire to influence at the global level, Turkey is perhaps the one that is most actively seeking to expand its influence across the continent.

What is the reason for this interest? How is Turkey using the resources of power at its disposal? This document aims to provide clarity on these issues. To this end we first analyse the political reasons and motivations that have led Turkey to undertake this effort and then try to determine the extent of its involvement in the continent.

¹ MORA TEBAS, Juan, China: New Strategy [Peace and Security] in Africa, *IEEE Analysis Paper* 56/2016. http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2016/DIEEEA56-2016_China_NvaEstrategia_Africa-JAMT.pdf (accessed in April 2020).

² MORA TEBAS, Juan, “Russiafrica”: Russia's return to the African “great game”, *IEEE Framework Document* 10/2019. http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_marco/2019/DIEEEM10_2019JUAMOR_Rusiafrica.pdf (accessed in April 2020).

Political momentum

Many authors attribute Turkey's current expansion in Africa to the neo-Ottomanism mindset that often characterises Turkish foreign policy after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. For it is certainly under the AKP governments that the African dimension of Turkey's foreign policy has developed the most. In reality, the interest for Africa predates the AKP. It was Turgut Ozal's policies in the 1980s that initiated a timid expansion across the continent, breaking with a long tradition of absence and disinterest. And it was at the end of the 1990s when the Turkish government implemented its "Opening to Africa Action Plan" which, in addition to developing the economic side of international cooperation, considered increasing the number of diplomatic representations on the continent. In any case, the difficulties of the Turkish economy during those years prevented all those plans from being little more than a voluntary declaration of intent.

It is truly at the beginning of the first decade of this century that the African dream came back to life, driven, fundamentally, by two factors: 1) a remarkable recovery of the Turkish economy under the first AKP government, with growths that were close to 10%³ and 2) together with the above, a renewed interest in bringing Turkey out of the irrelevance and making it an actor that is indispensable in the international context, which leads it to implement an active foreign policy that has its first objective in Europe but does not neglect secondary scenarios with potential for development and economic cooperation, such as North Africa, with whose countries it has historical ties.

With these objectives in mind, Turkey embarked on an ambitious reform programme which enabled it to officially start the process of accession to the European Union in October 2005⁴. But just under a year later, in December 2006, the halt in the process

³ In 2004 growth was 9.6%. World Bank.

⁴ Turkey's aspirations in this direction go back a long way, the first agreement formalising Turkey's interest in joining the then European Economic Community (EEC) being the 1963 Ankara Agreement. Since coming to power, the Erdoğan government had spared no effort to undertake the far-reaching reforms required, such as the adoption of a liberal penal code or the submission of the armed forces to the civilian power of the state, which were duly rewarded with the official opening of accession negotiations in October 2005.

turned the initial enthusiasm for the progress achieved into frustration⁵. At that time, Africa presented itself as a great alternative to show the world that Turkey is a nation powerful enough to carry out an autonomous foreign policy.

Intense political and diplomatic activity has since taken place in both bilateral and multilateral relations. As far as bilateral relations are concerned, political boost has been provided from the highest state institutions, with the current President of the Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, making nearly 50 official visits to different countries in the continent. Thanks to this impetus, Turkey has been able to increase the number of its diplomatic representations in African countries from 12 in 2003 to over 40 at present.

At the multilateral level, Turkey has fostered relations with African organisations, starting with the African Union (AU) itself, where it was admitted as an observer in 2005 and has been a strategic partner since August 2008⁶. Governed by the so-called “The Istanbul Declaration on Turkey-Africa Partnership”, which is supplemented by an action plan on specific areas of cooperation⁷, this partnership has held two major summits (Istanbul, April 2008 and Malabo, November 2014), with a third scheduled to take place in Istanbul in 2019, but which has been postponed *sine die*.

Throughout these years, this political and diplomatic impetus has progressively articulated African expansion, basically along three lines of action that complement each other: a first line of cultural and political influence, a second economic/trade line, and a third line of security.

⁵ On 11 December 2006 the EU Council decided to block negotiations on 8 of the chapters opened until Turkey accepted the implementation of the additional protocol to the EU-Turkey Association Agreement extending the customs union to the countries that have recently joined the EU, including Cyprus. The process of accession to the EU is based on the fulfilment of a series of criteria (Copenhagen criteria) set out in 35 chapters covering the same number of areas in which the candidate must ensure convergence with democratic institutions, have a functioning market economy and, ultimately, accept the principles and values of the Union. Only 15 of the 35 chapters in Turkey’s accession process have been opened, of which only the chapter on science and technology has been successfully completed. If there is no political will to admit a given candidate, a Member State need only oppose the conclusion of one of them, which *de facto* implies $35 \times 27 = 945$ possibilities of blocking.

⁶ “The Istanbul Declaration on Turkey-Africa Partnership: Cooperation and Solidarity for a Common Future” and “Cooperation Framework for Turkey-Africa Partnership”, available at http://www.iri.edu.ar/publicaciones_iri/anuario/CD%20Anuario%202008/Africa/ua/istambul%20declaration%20august%202008.pdf (accessed on May 2020).

⁷ Cooperation Framework for Turkey-Africa Partnership

In search of lost influence: the “virtuous power”

One of the driving forces of Turkish foreign policy during the first decades of the 21st century has been the aspiration to make Turkey a regional power and a global player, destined to play a major historical role. The former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu⁸ articulated the theoretical foundations of a foreign policy that considers that a country's strategic depth is determined both by its military power and by its historical and cultural affinities with other countries. Focusing on this second aspect, which, following Joseph Nye, could be likened to *soft power*, in the model of Davutoğlu historical affinity for Turkey is none other than its common reference to the Ottoman Empire and cultural affinity is equated, though not exclusively, with certain elements of Sunni Islam. The party's rhetoric uses the terminology “virtuous power”⁹. In fact, in many cases, among the former vassals the perception of the Ottoman Empire is not exactly favourable. For this reason, its improvement has been one of the priority objectives of Turkish diplomacy for years. And for this purpose it is essential to present a benign and attractive image, an alternative to the predatory attitude displayed by the European colonial powers.

To this end, the Turkish government has taken initiatives, which we can group into three main areas: 1) cooperation and development aid, 2) cultural diplomacy and 3) religious diplomacy. For its implementation, the government has state agencies which, unlike what are commonplace in other countries, in Turkey report directly to the Presidency of the Republic and not to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And beyond the geographical scope of the Ottoman Empire, these agencies have shown their usefulness and effectiveness in other areas that are not priorities for Turkish diplomacy, such as sub-Saharan Africa.

⁸ Ahmet Davutoğlu was foreign affairs advisor to the then prime minister Erdoğan, then foreign minister (2009-2014) and prime minister (2014-2016).

⁹ The term “virtuous power” was coined in 2012 by the then President of the Republic, Abdullah Gül, in a speech to the Armed Forces War College in Istanbul. In Gül's words, “a virtuous power takes into account not only the military and political dimensions of security, but also justice and human values”. *Virtuous power new defense doctrine: Turkish president*, HURRIYET DAILY NEWS, 6 April 2012, available at <https://www.hurriyetedailynews.com/virtuous-power-new-defense-doctrine-turkish-president-17784> (accessed in April 2020)

Humanitarian diplomacy / cooperation and development

Turkey carries out these activities through its International Cooperation and Development Agency TIKA (*Türkiye İşbirliği ve Kalkınma İdaresi*), which was set up in 1999 based on the model of European cooperation agencies. The agency soon proved its worth as a foreign policy instrument, and, as proof of this, the government has gradually increased the volume of development aid channelled through TIKA from \$85M in 2002 to \$3,919M in 2015¹⁰. TIKA currently has project coordination offices in 23 African countries, from where it coordinates both humanitarian and development aid programmes in fields such as transport, infrastructure, energy, construction, agriculture, etc. Without a doubt, TIKA's actions are in line with Turkey's foreign policy objectives and on many occasions it also manages cultural and religious diplomacy projects, such as the restoration of the Ketchaoua mosque in Algeria in 2013, or in the area of security, such as the construction of the military academy and training centre in Mogadishu, Somalia¹¹. These actions have been reinforced with the sending of medical material in relation to COVID-19 to many African countries.

Cultural diplomacy

Officially, cultural diplomacy is directed and coordinated from the *Yunus Emre* Institute, named after one of the greatest figures of Turkish literature (14th century). Its creation in 2007 as an instrument of cultural dissemination responded to the need to establish a strategy to promote a favourable image of the country by making known to the world, through various activities, its values, history, language and literature, archaeological treasures, scientific achievements, art, cuisine, traditions, etc. The institute has 55 Cultural Centres throughout the world, 8 of which are in Africa¹².

¹⁰ Turkish Development and Assistance Report 2015, TIKA, available at <https://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/2017/YAYINLAR/TKYR%202015%20ENG/KALKINMA%20.pdf> (accessed in July 2020).

¹¹ TIKA Annual Report 2017, available in <file:///Users/felipesanchez/Documents/TRABAJOS%20Y%20PUBLICACIONES/20%2003%20TURCAFRI%20TIKA%202017.pdf> (accessed in July 2020).

¹² Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Senegal, South Africa and Somalia.

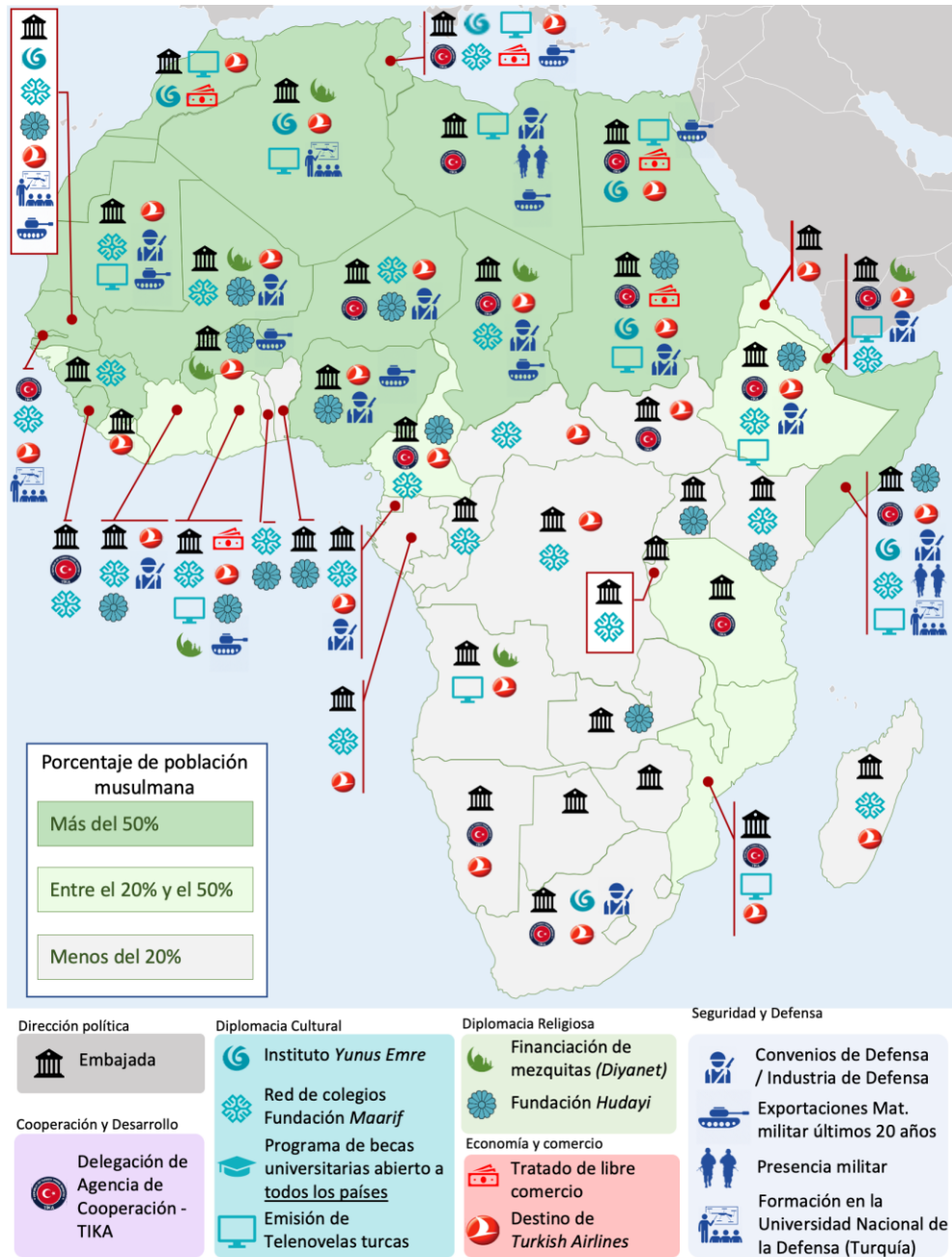


Figure 1: Involvement of Turkey in Africa. Prepared internally.

The second instrument to be considered in cultural diplomacy is the network of schools, institutes and universities of the *Maarif* Foundation, created to absorb the vast network of educational centres spread throughout the world, with great penetration throughout Africa, of Fetullah Gülen’s *Hizmet* (service) movement¹³. These centres, which enjoyed

¹³ As will be recalled, the Gülen movement (*Hizmet*, service), is considered responsible for having orchestrated the attempted coup d’état that in July 2016 attempted to overthrow the government of Erdoğan, causing nearly 300 deaths among supporters and opponents, including civilians.

great prestige, privileged access to the elites of the countries where they were established, from which, normally, the ruling classes were nourished, and therefore their capacity to influence was considerable. Since its creation in June 2016¹⁴, exactly one month before the attempted coup d'état, the *Maarif* Foundation has established contact with a total of 104 countries to negotiate either the incorporation of centres in Gülen or the opening of new centres. Today, the foundation has succeeded in establishing educational institutions in 28 African countries¹⁵.

Continuing in the educational field, in 2012 the Turkish government established a university scholarship programme (officially known as *Türkiye Bursları*) aimed at talented foreign students in the hope that they will eventually become part of the leading elites in their home countries and act as “brand Turkey” ambassadors around the world. Since its launch, the programme, which does not impose restrictions on students of any nationality, has awarded a total of 17,000 scholarships, of which some 8,000 have been awarded to African students¹⁶.

Beyond the activities directed by official bodies, it is essential to mention a phenomenon that is gaining popularity on a global scale: television series. Initially designed for domestic audiences, they have rapidly gained popularity and have expanded with great acceptance throughout the world, acting as a magnificent vehicle for transmitting values and culture. Most are produced by private companies which, given the media landscape in Turkey today, are heavily dependent on state contracts, making them vulnerable to political pressures¹⁷. The thematic series that we could define as social are mostly romances that show a society with a western lifestyle, although always reflecting traditional values. A second group of series are those with a historical content that try to revalue the virtues of an Ottoman Empire whose prestige, after the defeat suffered in the First World War, was not in good health¹⁸. These series are currently broadcast in

¹⁴ Law no. 6721 of 17 June 2016.

¹⁵ Türkiye Maarif Vakfı, available at <https://turkiyemaarif.org/> (accessed in July 2020)

¹⁶ YTB, available at <https://turkiyeburslari.gov.tr/> (accessed in July 2020)

¹⁷ ÇEVİK, Senem B., Turkish historical television series: public broadcasting of neo-Ottoman illusions, *Southeast European and Black East Studies*, Routledge, 27 May 2019.

¹⁸ Two producers close to the ruling party (AKP) stand out in the production of series on this subject: Es Film, production company of *Payitaht: Abdulhamid*, on the life of Abdulhamid II, a model sultan from the perspective of the AKP; and Tekden Film, producer of *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (Resurrection), set in the life of Ertuğrul, father of Osman I, founder of the Ottoman Empire, both broadcast exclusively on the state TV channel, TRT.

10 African countries, especially in the north of the continent, as well as being accessible through other channels.

Religious diplomacy

Although secularism continues to be one of the pillars of the state and is reflected in the Constitution, it is essential to point out that the interpretation of this term in Turkey does not exactly coincide with the definition given elsewhere. Although the SAR dictionary defines secularism as the “independence of public affairs from religious affairs”, in modern Turkey it is more appropriate to refer to state management of religious institutions rather than to a strict separation of religion and state. To this end, as early as 1924 the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, established the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), an organisation currently responsible, under the direction of the Presidency of the Republic, for regulating and controlling all religious affairs in the country.

From this perspective, the potential of the *Diyanet* as an instrument of state foreign policy has not gone unnoticed and its activity with respect to Africa has been increasing in step with other state institutions. In addition to financing the construction or rehabilitation of mosques, mainly in Muslim-majority countries, financing cooperation and development projects, such as the construction of water wells in Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Kenya, Sudan, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe, or undertaking the translation of the Koran into local languages, the *Diyanet* has organised a series of summits (2006, 2011 and 2019) of religious leaders from up to 51 African countries in order to strengthen ties, promote cooperation in religious matters, religious education, etc.¹⁹

In addition to the activities promoted by the *Diyanet*, other religious foundations in civil society use their religious character to base their activities in African countries, such as the *Hudayi* Foundation which, essentially dedicated to education, maintains offices in 12 countries. Although officially they are non-governmental organisations, it would be difficult for them to operate outside the *Diyanet*.

¹⁹ Final Declaration of the 3rd African Summit of Muslim Religious Leaders, available at <https://www.diyamet.gov.tr/en-us/Content/PrintDetail/26049> (accessed in August 2020).

The economic-commercial dimension

Without any doubt, the trade dimension is one of the main driving forces of Turkish-African cooperation. Under the above-mentioned strategic partnership, the Turkey-Africa Economic and Trade Forum started its formal meetings for the promotion of bilateral trade in November 2016 with the participation of senior officials and businessmen from 49 African countries. The third of these biennial meetings is scheduled for October 2020, also in Istanbul, and is expected to be well attended, provided that COVID-19 allows so²⁰.

Turkey is making a huge effort to present the economic relation as equally beneficial for both sides, trying to make a clear difference with the exploitation models that were imposed by the French and British during the colonial period. In this line, Turkey has established free trade agreements with 5 countries, agreements to avoid double taxation with 13 countries and agreements for reciprocal investment protection with another 30²¹. These business relationships have been strengthened with flights by *Turkish Airlines*, the state-owned airline, to almost all African countries, making it the world's largest carrier covering a number of destinations in Africa.

In fact, the first results of the political momentum and influence activities that we have just analysed have started to be perceived, in a way that is advantageous for Turkey. As can be seen in Figure 2, Turkey has managed to reverse the trade balance with Africa in its favour since the implementation of these policies. In 2019, South Africa was the only country with a negative balance, with the overall balance being clearly favourable.

²⁰ Turkey-Africa Economic and Business Forum, available at <http://www.turkeyafricaforum.org/> (accessed in July 2020)

²¹ Turkey to establish logistics centers in African countries, *Daily Sabah*, 9 December 2019, available at <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2019/12/09/turkey-to-establish-logistics-centers-in-african-countries>(accessed in July 2020).

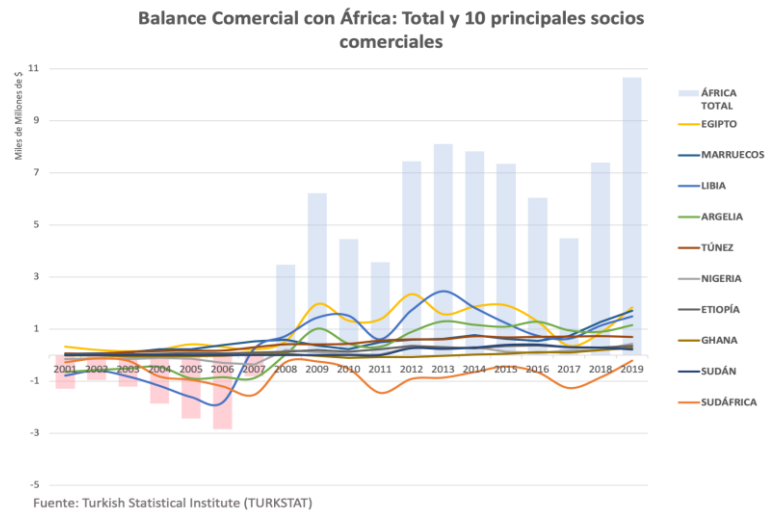


Figure 2: Trade balance with Africa. Source: Turkish Statistical Institute. Prepared internally.

But these figures need to be put into context. Although it is true that the trade volume between the two blocks has increased fivefold since 2001 and Erdoğan has set the objective of increasing it to 50 billion USD²², the same has happened with the rest of the world (Figure 3).

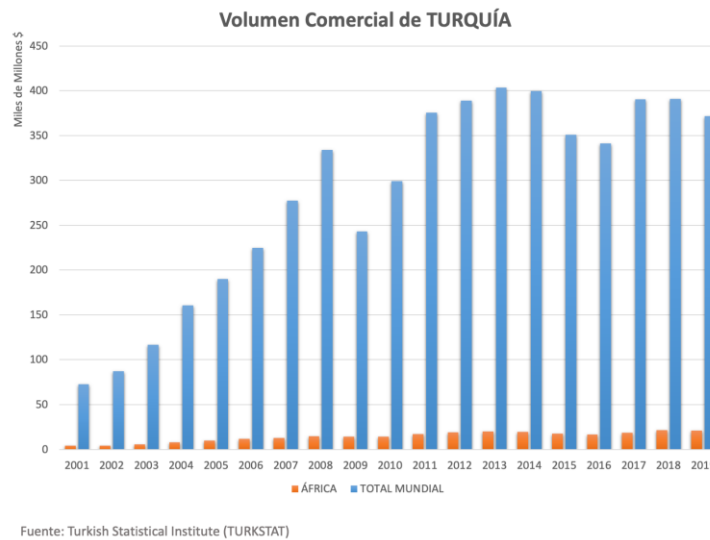


Figure 3: Turkey’s trade volume with Africa and the rest of the world. Source: Turkish Statistical Institute. Prepared internally.

²² We will increase our trade volume with African countries to \$50 billion, Turkish Republic Presidency website, 26 January 2020, available at <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/116415/-we-will-increase-our-trade-volume-with-african-countries-to-50-billion-> (accessed in July 2020).

And if this can be said of trade in general, the same can be said of direct investment. In this case, the figures for Africa pale in comparison with other geographical areas, such as Europe (Figure 4). Taken as a whole, there is no particular emphasis on the African area.

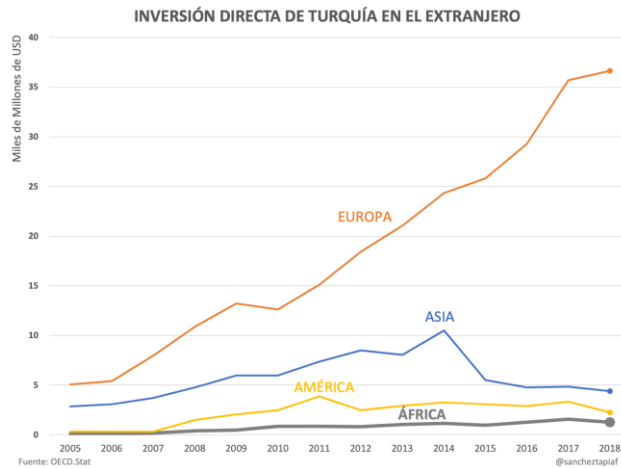


Figure 4: Turkish direct investment abroad. Source: OECD. Prepared internally.

On the other hand, analysed from the African perspective, Turkey continues to be a minor partner and its trade relations are considerably smaller than those of other countries with the continent (Figure 5), and it is therefore to be expected that its influence will also be reduced.

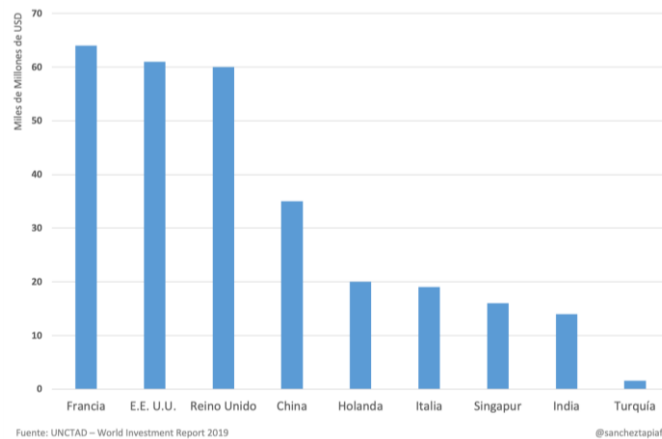


Figure 5: Direct investment in Africa in 2017: major investors and Turkey

The Achilles heel of Turkey’s aspirations to consolidate its status as a regional power is the lack of energy resources, and cooperation in this sector is therefore a priority. Energy resources thus occupy the leading position in Turkey’s imports from African countries (Figure 6). In addition, in recent years it has signed energy cooperation agreements with Cameroon, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan, to which we must add recent agreements with the Algerian state-owned company Sonatrach for cooperation in the *upstream* sector of this country²³, with the Libyan Government of National Unity (GNA), for exploration of its exclusive economic zone²⁴ and with the Somali government for the same purpose²⁵.

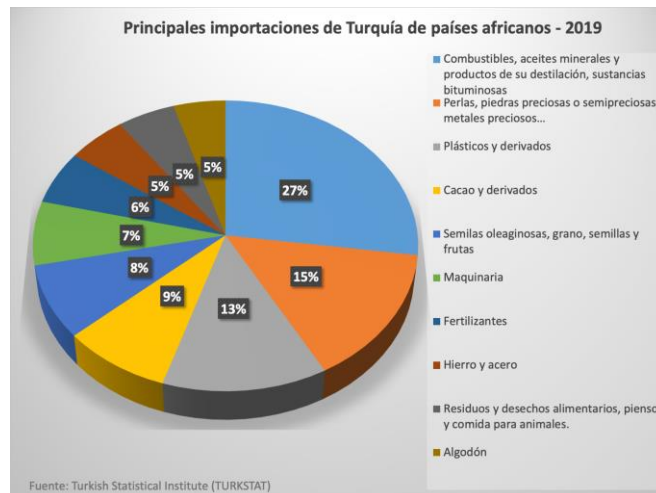


Figure 6: Turkey’s imports from African countries Source Turkish Statistical Institute. Prepared internally.

²³ Algeria’s Sonatrach signs upstream MOUs with Turkey’s TPAO, Russia’s Zarubezhneft, *S&P Global*, 16 April 2020, available at <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/natural-gas/041620-algerias-sonatrach-signs-upstream-mous-with-turkeys-tpao-russias-zarubezhneft> (accessed in July 2020).

²⁴ Turkey to launch oil exploration in East Med soon under pact with Libyan government, *Daily Sabah*, 29 May 2020, available at <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/turkey-to-launch-oil-exploration-in-east-med-soon-under-pact-with-libyan-government> (accessed in July 2020).

²⁵ Somalia Invites Turkey To Explore For Offshore Oil, *OILPRICE.COM*, 20 January 2020, available at <https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Somalia-Invites-Turkey-To-Explore-For-Offshore-Oil.html> (accessed in August 2020)

The security dimension

The policies developed on this dimension must be considered, in the first instance, as complementary to those previously analysed. Along these lines, Turkey has developed typical instruments of defence diplomacy, such as defence industry cooperation or military cooperation in the broadest sense, including military education and training, instruction and training, etc., establishing agreements of various kinds with Algeria, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, South Africa and Djibouti. Given the influence that the armed forces generally exert on the policies of African countries, it is to be hoped that the ascendancy that Turkey can gain over high-ranking officers will eventually bear fruit.

In addition to these classic defence diplomacy actions, it is necessary to consider the deployment of military contingents in two countries on the continent –Somalia and Libya– a deployment that occurs, however, for different reasons.

In the first case, the deployment of forces is merely the natural continuation of the African policy we have described throughout this analysis. The drought that devastated Somalia in 2011, which had already become a failed state, was an opportunity to show the world the Turkish government's commitment to the continent. The response to the Somali government's request for assistance was immediate and the then prime minister Erdoğan visited the country accompanied by several members of his cabinet who, in addition to committing over \$300 million in humanitarian aid, were responsible for setting in motion the entire foreign cooperation machinery, including defence. The two countries signed a Cooperation Agreement on Military Training and Education in April 2012, in which the Turkish government undertakes to carry out instruction and training of part of the Somali National Army, providing for the training of certain personnel in Turkey. A second agreement (2015) complements the previous one, this time on defence industry cooperation²⁶.

²⁶ ABDULLE, Abdulkarim and GURPINAR, Bulut, Turkey's Engagement in Somalia A Security Perspective, *Somali Studies: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Journal for Somali Studies*, Volume 4, 2019 , pgs 53-71.

Under these agreements, Turkey inaugurated in September 2017 the facilities of the military academy²⁷ and training centre²⁸ TURKSOM in Mogadishu, where some 200 Turkish instructors have already completed the training of more than 10,000 officers, non-commissioned officers and troops of the Somali Army. The deployment of Turkish military personnel in Somalia is limited to compliance with the content of these agreements and the Turkish Armed Forces do not maintain units on the ground with operational missions. Therefore, although the Turkish military presence is often pointed out as a proof of Turkey's interest in a military expansion of imperialist (neo-Ottoman) type, in reality it is a question of military cooperation actions in the framework of defence diplomacy.

A different objective is its military deployment in Libya, with which it signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in November 2019. This MoU regulates Turkey's military cooperation in matters of technical support, advice, information and intelligence exchanges, training and education, equipment, defence industry and a long list of other activities, which significantly do not include the deployment of combatant forces²⁹. A second agreement signed in August 2020 provides for the training of commanders to transform the militias serving the NAP into a genuine conventional army with funding from Qatar³⁰.

In this case, access to energy resources, containing the influence of Egypt in North Africa and, above all, having a faithful ally in the dispute that Turkey has with the countries bordering the eastern Mediterranean over the delimitation of the maritime areas of sovereignty, are the fundamental issues for which Turkey has opted for the decisive support, including military support, of the Government of National Accord (GAN)³¹.

²⁷ Training of officers and non-commissioned officers.

²⁸ Troop formation and unit training.

²⁹Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of National Accord-State of Libya on Security and Military Cooperation, Istanbul, 27 November 2019.

³⁰ Some sources have speculated on the possibility of this agreement including a clause that would allow the use of Misrata port as a naval base for the next 99 years.

³¹ SÁNCHEZ TAPIA, Felipe. *What is Turkey looking for in Libya?* IEEE Analysis Paper 6/2020.

http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2020/DIEEEA06_2020FELSAN_TurquiaLibia.pdf

This support has been sufficient to reverse the course of the civil war in Libya, halting the momentum of the offensive launched in April 2019 by Marshal Khalifa Haftar. However, despite the fact that this strategy is bearing fruit, it is not without its risks, perhaps the most worrying of which is over-extension. Unfavourable developments in the military situation in Libya could drag Turkey into a greater involvement in the country in a forced manner, at a time when the demand for military resources on its borders, especially in Syria, is high. Under these circumstances, not only would their Mediterranean strategy be jeopardised, but practically the entire security strategy at their borders.

Ethiopia is another country that could be the target of a forthcoming militarisation of Turkey's African policy, as is Sudan, as an alliance with them would be very useful in blocking Egypt's influence in the region. The search for allies by the former in its dispute with Egypt over the construction of the *Renaissance* dam in the waters of the Nile offers undeniable opportunities for Turkey, which it will certainly not let slip.

The picture is somewhat more complicated in Sudan, where until 2019 it had achieved considerable successes, including the right to rebuild the island of Suakin, a major Ottoman port from the 15th to 19th centuries on the shores of the Red Sea which many analysts have considered to be of potential military use. But the fall of Omar al-Bashir's regime has cooled these aspirations. Furthermore, the new Sudanese regime seems to be seeking a formalisation of its relations with the EU. This would undoubtedly limit Turkish influence in the region.

Military cooperation has also developed somewhat at the multilateral level, although Turkey's presence in this field is hardly less than a sign. Its contribution to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa is not very significant³², more notably its participation in maritime security and anti-piracy missions in the Mediterranean (NATO SNMG 2) and the Gulf of Aden³³.

³² As of 30 June 2020 it is contributing 22 police to the United Nations Assistance Mission in the Republic of Southern Sudan, UNMISS, 19 to the African Union-United Nations hybrid operation in Darfur, UNAMID, 3 to the mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO and 1 expert to the mission in Somalia, UNSOM - *UN Peacekeeping*, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> (accessed in July 2020)

³³ Combined Maritime Forces - CMF - which includes naval forces from 33 countries, exercising since July 2020 the command of *Task Force 151* -CTF-151. Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), available at <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy/> (accessed in July 2020)

On the other hand, in recent years Africa seems to have gained some interest as a target area for the Turkish defence industry, which has exported armoured vehicles to Burkina Faso (60), Chad (20), Ghana (30), Libya (13), Mauritania (18), Nigeria (204), Rwanda (76), Senegal (25) and Tunisia (170)³⁴. In addition, in line with the alliances forged by Turkey in the Maghreb, which have been conditioned by the increase in tension in Libya, exports of armed UAVs to the Libyan National Accord Government (NAG) and KANGAL and KIPRI-type inhibitors to Tunisia, which is also considering the acquisition of armed UAVs, have also been included since 2019³⁵. But as in the economic/trade dimension, the figures for military exports to Africa must be put into context, as they are insignificant when compared to the overall exports of the Turkish defence industry (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Arms and defence material exports to African countries. Source: SIPRI. Prepared internally.

³⁴ SIPRI.

³⁵ Of the type ANKA and BAYRAKTAR - Gros contrat pour Aselsan en Tunisie, *MENADEFENSE*, 15 April 2020, available at <https://www.menadefense.net/afnord/gros-contrat-pour-aselsan-en-tunisie/> (accessed in August 2020).

Conclusion

It is common to attribute Turkey's African policy of the last decades to the attempt of re-establishing the influence of the imperial spirit, or neo-Ottomanism, which would be the thread of Turkey's foreign policy. Certainly, the influence and prestige enjoyed in past times by the Ottoman Empire are being emulated by modern Turkey, but limiting expansion throughout the African continent to the recovery of lost prestige would certainly be reductionist and, without playing down these emotional motivations, it is essential to consider other factors.

The deterioration of Turkey's relations with traditional powers and, in particular, the EU, has been a powerful catalyst that has encouraged the search for alternatives, among which Africa has presented itself as a magnificent opportunity. Since the middle of the past decade Turkey has thus been carrying out intense political and diplomatic activity with African countries and regional organisations, articulating an ambitious strategy through which it aims to present an image of a nation committed to development and cooperation that contrasts with the extractive policies that the European powers have displayed in other times and even today.

It is under this strategy that Turkey has been able to expand both direct investments and bilateral trade with African countries, opening up great expectations for Turkish export companies. The balance is undoubtedly promising, but as impressive as it may seem at first sight; the data indicate that Africa continues to be an area of secondary interest for Turkey, far behind a European area that attracts the interest of both companies and the Turkish state itself. The figures are simply more than ten times higher, showing that official rhetoric is not always accompanied by facts on the ground.

In the north of the continent other motivations should also be considered that have more to do with their vision of security than with questions of prestige. This is the case of Libya, which for Turkey is merely a continuation of the eastern Mediterranean basin, where the dispute over the delimitation of the areas of sovereignty has raised tension between Turkey and its neighbours to worrying levels. It is not without risk, and developments both in this geographical area and in neighbouring Syria may end up compromising the capabilities of a regional power with limited resources.

Turkey’s African policy is a strategy directed and coordinated from the highest levels of government that will only bear fruit in the long term. The success of such a company is far from guaranteed. This depends on both internal and external factors. Internally, it will depend both on the remaining in power of those who have initiated it or the will of those who may succeed them in the future, and on the capacity of the country to carry it out effectively. And on the external front, we must be able to rely on the help of other powers whose interests may clash with our own. Turkey faces many risks and uncertainties in this enterprise, but in geopolitics, only risk-takers win.

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