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Turkey's Evolving Engagement in Africa

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WRITTEN BY

Abdinor Hassan Dahir

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TRT WORLD İSTANBUL

AHMET ADNAN SAYGUN STREET NO:83 34347

ULUS, BEŞİKTAŞ

İSTANBUL / TURKEY

TRT WORLD LONDON

200 GRAYS INN ROAD, WC1X 8XZ

LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.

1819 L STREET NW SUITE, 700 20036

WASHINGTON DC / UNITED STATES

www.trtworld.com

researchcentre.trtworld.com

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Introduction

Turkey is a global actor which has cultivated deeper relationships with multiple African countries in the last two decades, and Ankara's determined outreach resonates with its African partners. Following many years of successful Turkish 'Opening to Africa' activism, Turkey-Africa ties have transformed into partnerships based on political,

economic, and development cooperation that serve the interests of both sides. These evolving partnerships signal that the two parties can achieve a lot by acting together to find solutions to their common challenges. It also signifies that Africa has true potential, which can only be discovered through mutual cooperation and development.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is welcomed by Mali's President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita with an official ceremony at Bamako Senou International Airport, during his official visit in Bamako, Mali on March 02, 2018. (Raşit Aydoğan - Anadolu Agency)

TIMELINE OF TURKEY-AFRICA RELATIONS IN THE LAST TWO DECADES

Political and economic ties between Turkey and African countries diversified over last 15 years using win-win approach.

Over last 20 years trade volume between Turkey and African countries rose six-fold to \$19 billion

Turkey's FDI in Africa

2003	2017
\$100 million USD	\$6.5 billion USD

Number of Turkish Embassies in Africa

2003	2020
12	42

Number of African Embassies in Turkey

1997	2020
1	36



Turkey signed trade and economic cooperation deals with 45 African countries



National flag carrier Turkish Airlines now flies to **52 destination in 33 African countries**



Turkey has provided an annual support of **\$1 million** to the African Union since 2009



Number of investment protection deals rose from **6 to 26**



President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made **49 visits to 27 African countries** since 2004.



Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) currently operates **21 program Coordination Offices** in Africa



Value of projects undertaken by Turkish construction firms topped **\$55 billion**



Turkey has provided undergraduate, graduate and doctoral scholarships to more than **8,000 African students** since 1992



Total Turkish investment in Africa is estimated to have surpassed **\$6 billion**

Source: Anadolu Agency

Overview of Turkey-Africa Relations

Turkey has enjoyed centuries-old cultural and historical ties with Africa. However, in the last 20 years Turkey has been pursuing greater political and business relations with African countries under the "opening to Africa policy." The Turkish government's intensive efforts to engage with African countries resulted in major transformations of bilateral relations as well as a rise in cooperation with African states. Since 2002, successive AK Party governments have pursued deeper ties with African countries by increasing foreign missions, maintaining consistent high-level visits, and Turkey-Africa cooperation talks.

The increased interest in Africa coincided with Turkey's decade-long economic boom, which effectively paved the way for the bilateral growth of trade and business. A notable strategy that determined the nature of the current Turkish-African business ties was "The Strategy on the Development of Economic Relationships with Africa" launched in 2003. As a result, Turkey's trade volume with the African continent quadrupled to 18.9 billion USD (exports = 11.6 billion USD, imports = 7.1 billion USD) by 2017.

Cultural diplomacy has been one of the instruments that has played a considerable role in improving the burgeoning Turkish relations with different African countries. This was realized with the provision of scholarship opportunities to African students, the establishment of Turkish schools, the export of Turkish cinema to the continent, and the formation of Africa-focused research institutions. Additionally, a major front where the Turkish government enhanced relations with African countries is the field of humanitarian aid. In the last ten years, Turkish state and non-governmental agencies have assumed a growing role in the humanitarian field in Africa. Other realms of cooperation between the two sides include a boost in defence and security collaboration, where Ankara provided training to some African counterparts and engaged in counter-terrorism and anti-piracy efforts.

Turkey is a powerful emerging economic power. It is NATO's second largest military power, has the seventh-largest naval fleet in the world and is home to the world's seventeenth-largest economy. It can be contended that Turkey's impressive economic performance since 2005 has inspired African leaders to consider its development model. Additionally, as an emerging global power and respected member of the international community, Turkey also envisions playing a greater role by projecting its power beyond its traditional area of influence. In this regard, Ankara

is seeking to form alliances with African countries as it continues to push for reforms to the international system, particularly as it relates to the UN Security Council.

A factor facilitating Turkey's relationship with African countries is that Turkey neither has a colonial past on the continent, nor is it inclined to pursue one. Western countries have colonial links and their priority has always been their own national interests rather than those of the African nations. From the perspective of Turkish leadership, Turkey does not have essentialist views on Africa and therefore is open to establish relations based on mutual trust. For instance, on a visit to Zambia, President Erdoğan remarked "We are not going to Africa to take their gold and natural resources as Westerners have done in the past, we are going there to build a solid and sustainable partnership based on mutual benefits." Similarly, African officials point out that Turkey has "won the hearts and minds" of Africans due to its projects and engagements on the continent. Here, cultural factors play an important role. An [African citizen](#) exposed to Turkish projects in Africa said "the Turkish workers know how to live and work with the local community, and we have a similar culture." A final aspect is the unprecedented extent of foreign engagements in Africa. As many outsiders (i.e. governments and businesses) are rushing to strengthen diplomatic, commercial, and strategic links with Africa, African leaders themselves have also begun exploring alternatives to traditional actors when choosing the continent's partners according to its priorities. All these factors amount to making African leaders more eager to partner with Turkey.

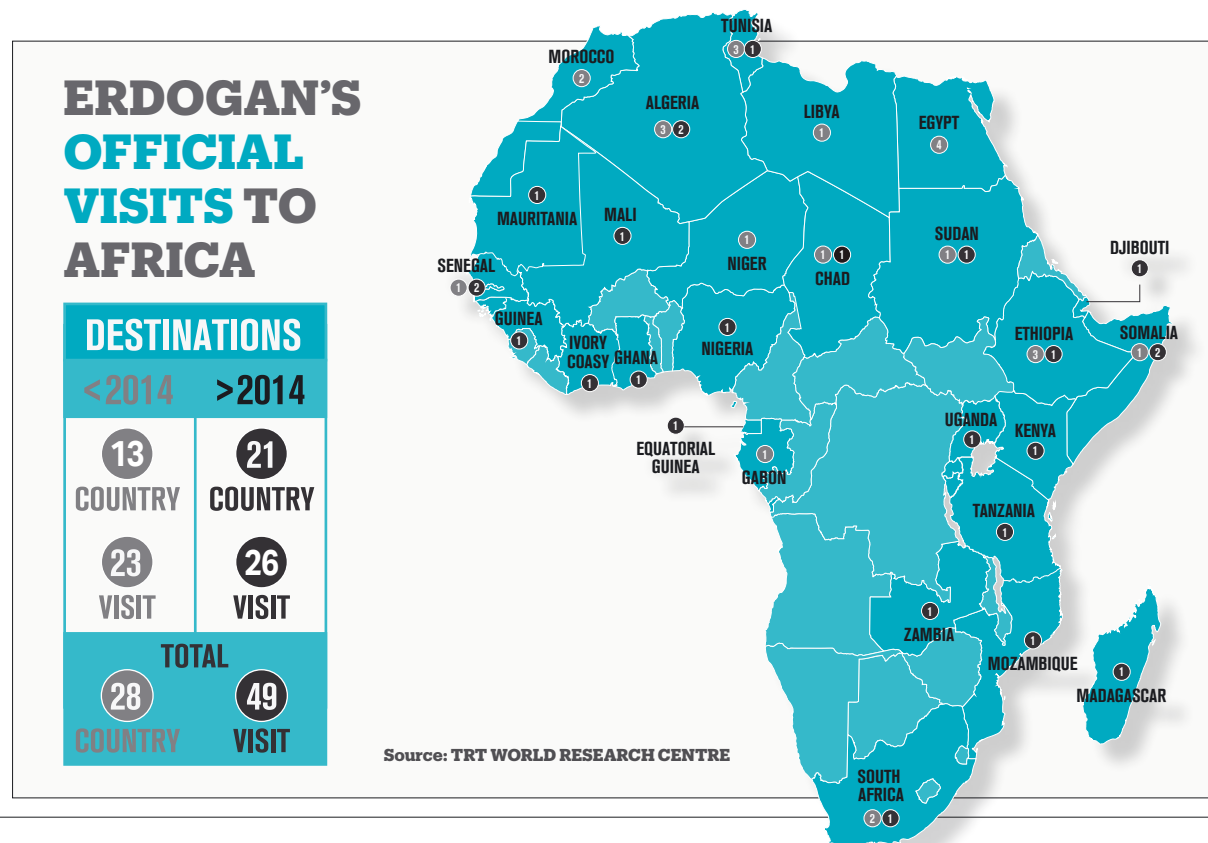
Realms of the Strategic Partnership for Development

Over the years, Turkey has pursued intensive engagement based on building lasting relationships with African countries. This encompasses trade, state-building and humanitarian dimensions. Turkish leadership continuously emphasizes a "win-win" approach towards African counterparts that mainly focuses on political equality and mutual economic development. It is expected that this approach would pave the way for sustainable and mutually productive relations instead of cultivating yet another relationship of dependence and economic exploitation. This info pack briefly discusses three major realms of strategic partnership between African states and Turkey.

a. Political collaboration

Back in 1998, which Turkish policy-makers declared as the "year of Africa" in its Africa Action Plan, Turkey began to enhance its political and diplomatic engagement with the continent. Since 2002, Turkey has designed a very strong and cohesive political and diplomatic strategy to boost its relations with African countries, particularly in the sub-Saharan region. Therefore, Ankara's increased involvement in Africa in the last two decades has become a subject of dis-

cussion among political and academic circles. The major areas of Turkish-African partnership include an increase in Turkey's diplomatic presence which has tripled since 2005. In 2002, there were only 12 Turkish embassies in Africa (5 of which were in North Africa). By the end of 2018, the number of Turkish missions had expanded to 42. After the five permanent UN Security Council members, Turkey is the most diplomatically represented country globally with 137 missions abroad. Currently, Ankara has foreign missions in 42 out of 54 African nations and aims to establish missions in the rest of the continent. The African embassies in Turkey have also increased over this period. For example, in 1997, South Africa was the only Sub-Saharan African country maintaining diplomatic representation in Ankara; Today, there are 36 African embassies in Turkey. The increase in Turkish diplomatic presence across the African continent has been accompanied by high-level Turkish visits, which served as part of the wider "opening to Africa" initiative. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as both Prime Minister and President, has made 49 foreign trips to Africa.



Another front where Turkey's political partnerships with different African countries have been enhanced is cooperation with African governments. In 2008, Istanbul hosted the first ever Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit with the participation of 49 African states. The second Turkey-Africa Partnership summit took place in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in 2014. The outcome was the adoption of a Declaration and Joint Implementation Plan for the Period of 2015-2019. As per this declaration, the African and Turkish representatives would convene for the third partnership summit in April 2020 in Turkey. Ankara's increased cooperation has also included the African Union (AU) as well as regional organizations. Turkey was accorded observer status at the AU in 2005, which Ankara also marked as a "Year of Africa." In 2008, the body recognized Turkey as a strategic partner. Additionally, the African Development Bank accepted Turkey as a non-regional member in 2008, which finally came to fruition in 2013. Since 2009, Turkey has been providing an annual budgetary contribution of \$1 million USD to the AU. Ankara has also cultivated close ties with regional and sub-regional organizations, such as IGAD, ECOWAS, COMESA, ECCAS¹ and the East African Community. Additionally, during its G20 Presidency in 2015, Turkey organized a High Level Conference on Access to Energy in Sub-Saharan Africa, in line with the African Union's "Agenda 2063", for the first time under the G20 framework.

b. Security and military cooperation

One of the areas encompassed by Turkey's evolving engagement with Africa is cooperation in defence and security. Due to its long anti-terrorism experience, Turkey is a valuable partner for African countries in their continental level fight against violent terrorism, which continuous to devastate the Sahel, the East and the West Africa regions.

In 2017, Turkey opened its first overseas military facility in Somalia with the aim of training the Somali army in their fight against extremist groups and contributing to regional stability. The military facility has the capacity to train more than 1,500 troops at any one time. Turkey also contributed forces to the United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM) between the years 1992-1995. Since 2009, Turkey has participated in the US-led, multinational Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) anti-piracy and counter-terrorism operations in the Gulf of Aden. In 2014, the Turkish navy conducted 40 port calls in 28 African countries and circumnavigated the continent. In 2018, Turkey pledged to donate \$5 million USD to the fledgling G-5 force battling terrorism and trafficking in the Sahel region. Most recently, the Turkish government signed a military cooperation deal with Libya's Government of National Accord,



which has been facing an attack on the the capital Tripoli by Khalifa Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) since April 2019. The agreement encompasses bilateral cooperation in training and intelligence to help defend the Tripoli-based government and bring stability to the North African country, according to the Turkish government.

The Turkish government also gives training to the military and security personnel from African countries intended to improve their capacity and help the secure their countries. According to Turkish government, 2,772 African personnel received training in Turkey by the end of 2015. The training programmes and the number of trainees have increased significantly in recent years. In addition, the Turkish National Police provides training in various fields to the personnel of its counterparts in African countries. Moreover, Turkey plays a significant role in peacekeeping operations on the continent. According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey currently provides personnel and contributes financially to seven UN-led peacekeeping missions in Africa, namely: MONUSCO (DRC), MINUSMA (Mali), MINUSCA (CAR), UNAMID (Darfur), UNMISS (South Sudan), UNOCI (Cote d'Ivoire) and UNMIL (Liberia). Finally, there is an increasing interest in Turkish weapons as the Turkish defence industry grows. Turkey is home to two of the world's one hundred largest defence firms, namely ASELSAN and TUSAS. In 2011, ASELSAN acquired a local engineering firm in South Africa and established [ASELSAN South Africa](#), which manufactures electro-optical systems for military aerospace and maritime markets. Turkish officials had previously [hinted](#) that the Turkish defence industry wanted to secure weapons deals in African markets. In 2018, Turkey [equipped 400](#) Somali soldiers that graduated from the Turkish training camp in Somalia with MPT-76s, a Turkish-made rifle. Other Turkish weapons exports to Africa include [4x4 armoured vehicles](#), known as Ejder TOMA and Ejder Yalcin, which have been already used in several parts of the continent.

¹ IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development); ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States); COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa); ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States).

c. Economic partnership

Turkey's business and economic ties with the African continent have also seen returns, reflecting the gradual boom of Turkey's bilateral relations with African countries. In 2003, the Turkish government adopted the "Strategy for Enhancing the Economic and Commercial Relations with Africa" that sought to increase Turkey's share in the total trade volume with African countries, create favorable conditions for Turkish companies to enter Africa, and facilitate technology transfer to African countries. In the 2014 Malabo summit on Turkish-Africa partnership, the strategy was modified to respond to the changing conditions and needs of the continent. The updated strategy focused more on increasing Turkish investments in Africa, creating jobs for local people as well as generating an atmosphere conducive to the economic development of African states.

Turkey's engagement with African countries over the last two decades has been driven largely by Ankara's recognition of Africa as an emerging market and its desire to increase its business and trade opportunities. Besides a huge diplomatic presence, Turkey also maintains commercial consular offices in 26 African countries. Prior to an official visit to the continent in 2016, President Erdogan [mentioned](#) that Africa possesses three core advantages. Firstly, the continent is home to a rapidly growing young and vibrant population, as opposed to the ageing and de-

clining population in the West. If the world (and especially Turkey) cooperates with African governments, necessary venues can be created for the young African population to make positive impact on their communities. Secondly, the African continent has been blessed with natural resources and vast, fertile land. If the more developed countries ceased their drive for exploitation, Africa could become a major economic engine. Finally, the African people have been blessed with an entrepreneurial spirit despite the development challenges they continually endure. If provided with the opportunity, the entrepreneurial drive among Africans will transform the continent and will help create a safer future for the next generation. In regards to Ankara's efforts in helping to materialize these objectives, the Turkish government sought to develop deeper ties with its African counterparts in a range of areas, including economic partnerships. Such a relationship helped facilitate the growth of bilateral trade and business links. Consequently, Turkey's trade volume with African countries recorded a three-fold increase to \$18.9 billion USD in 2017, 15 years after the Turkish strategy on the Development of the Economic Relations with African Countries was adopted in 2003. Moreover, small and medium companies have begun to invest as African markets have become more accessible. In 2017, the Turkish construction company Yapı Merkezi [won a \\$3 billion USD](#) railway project in Tanzania and Ethiopia over Chinese rivals.

Turkey's Trade with Africa (USD Million)

	2007			2017		
Region	Exports	Imports	Total	Exports	Imports	Total
SSA	1,946	2,821	4,767	4,149	3,034	7,183
World	107,271	170,062	277,333	156,993	233,800	390,793
SSA (%)	1,8	1,7	1,7	2,6	1,3	1,8
North Africa	4,029	2,285	6,314	7,525	4,143	11,668
North Africa (%)	3,8	1,3	2,3	4,8	1,8	2,9

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute

TURKEY'S WIN-WIN APPROACH TOWARDS AFRICA



**Trade & Economic
Cooperation
Agreements with**

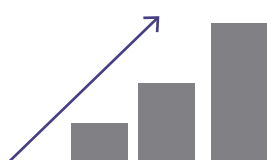
**38 African
Countries**

**1150
Projects**



Turkish Contractors

**55\$
Billion**



**Turkish
Investments**

**6,2\$
Billion**

**78000
JOBS**



Source: Turkeyafricaforum.org

Turkey's emphasis on a "win-win" approach towards Africa has resulted in mutual economic development. The first Turkey-Africa Economic and Business Forum was convened in Istanbul in 2016. Co-chaired by Idriss Deby, President of Chad and the Term Chairman of African Union, and President Erdogan, the forum brought together 50 high level officials and 3,000 businessmen from African countries and Turkey. The second forum of this kind took place in 2019 again in Istanbul with the participation of the representatives of more than 50 countries and 3,000 business people. The Turkey-Africa Economic Forum complements the political partnership summits by bringing together business circles (e.g. heads of financial institutions, company executives, and investors) from African countries to meet with their Turkish counterparts to develop new partnerships on joint ventures, trade and investments. Turkish Airlines is a perfect example of the expanding business ties between African countries and Turkey. The Turkish flag carrier not only connects Turkey to African via Istanbul, but also offers service between its various African destinations. Currently, Turkish Airlines

flies to 51 destinations in 33 African countries. Moreover, the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), which is tasked with managing the foreign economic relations of the Turkish private sector, has established Business Councils with African counterparts in 43 countries. DEİK has played a major role in the development of Turkey's bilateral economic links with African countries. A final note on expanding Turkey-Africa economic relations is the recently launched Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement, which represents a critical milestone that will shape the future of Africa by boosting intra-African trade and integration. The AfCFTA deal is projected to [increase Turkish FDI](#) in Africa in will allow Turkish companies to claim a bigger slice of the market. The Turkish government has declared 2020 as a [year of Africa](#) for a third time and plans to expand trade activity on the continent. Turkey already has free trade deals with 5 African states, understandings for reciprocal protection of investment with 30 countries, as well as agreements with 13 countries to prevent double taxation. In 2020, high-level Turkish visits to several African countries are expected.

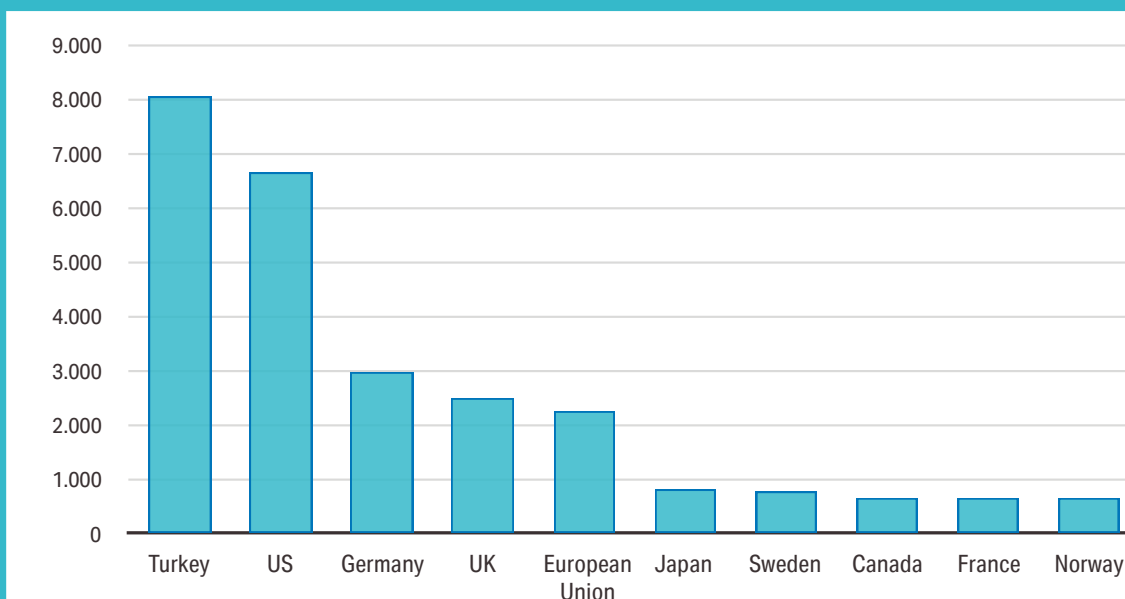
d. Humanitarian assistance and Development Partnership

As an emerging donor, Turkey spends 0.54 percent of its GDP on official development assistance, and intends to share its development experience with developing countries. In 2013 and 2014, Turkey was ranked the largest humanitarian aid donor in the world. Beyond political and economic cooperation, the government of Turkey has been engaging in humanitarian and development assistance in Africa.

The Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), which is the official development agency of Turkey, operates across the continent via 21 program coordination offices. TIKA undertakes hundreds of humanitarian and development initiatives to provide better healthcare, promote agriculture, protect the environment and facilitate commerce. Turkish civil society and NGOs such as IHH, are also active the continent and contribute to Turkey's aid operations. In 2013, Africa became the largest beneficiary of Turkish aid, receiving 33.7 per cent of TIKA's total disbursement. In 2015, the Turkish assistance to Africa reached \$395 million USD, out of a total of \$3.9 billion USD earmarked for official development assistance. In general, Turkish aid addresses pressing problems and contributes to African security and state-building efforts. Turkish aid also balances African countries' trade deficit with Turkey. Below is a snapshot of Turkish humanitarian and development assistance to Africa:

- In 2015, Turkey's official development assistance to Africa amounted to \$395.77 million USD.
- Since 2009, Turkey has given an annual budgetary support of \$1 million to the African Union.
- Since 1992, the Turkish government granted undergraduate, graduate and doctoral scholarships to 8,000 African students. There are currently 5,437 students in higher education and 116 visiting professors/research assistants from African countries.
- Since 1992, the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has provided training to around 200 junior African diplomats in Turkey.
- Turkish-built hospitals and health facilities treat thousands of patients in different regions of Africa. For example, Ankara has [opened](#) a vocational training center in Madagascar, maternal and child care centres in Niger, and women's shelters in Cameroon. Turkish doctors continuously take part in health screening campaigns. The Turkish Ministry of Health also provides vocational training to its African counterparts.
- Turkey's Maarif Foundation—a public foundation that has been created by the Turkish Parliament following the 2016 failed coup attempt— provides educational services and currently runs 17 schools across Africa with over 9,000 students. The Yunus Emre Foundation, a cultural institution created by the Turkish government in 2007, has centers in eight African countries.

Top 10 Contributors of Humanitarian Assistance 2017 (USD Million)



Source: Turkish Statistical Institute

Conclusion

Although Turkey's relations with Africa date back to the Ottoman era, its contemporary ties were jump-started when the Turkish government declared 1998 as the "Africa opening year." Turkey-Africa relations have further developed following coordinated "opening to Africa" initiatives undertaken by successive AK Party-led governments since 2002. These efforts have transformed bilateral relations into strategic partnerships involving diplomacy, trade, development and state-building with a humanitarian aspect and a focus on human development. The engagements have helped facilitate the growth of bilateral trade and business links and led to mutual economic improvements. These multidimensional "win-win" partnership realms are expected to strengthen Turkey-Africa cooperation and establish lasting relationships between Turkey and African countries.

In the face of ongoing issues with existing multilateral organizations, Turkey-Africa offer a model of possible cooperation on the global stage. Both Turkey and African countries continue to call for comprehensive UN Security Council reform. President Erdogan has adopted a motto regarding the UN Security Council (UNSC) that 'the world is bigger than five'. President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, after his country was elected as a non-permanent member in the UNSC for the term 2019-2020, called for Africa to be fully represented at the Security Council. The Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration on the conti-

nent's inclusion on the Council form the basis of the common Africa inclusion view, which calls for the allocation of two permanent seats and two additional non-permanent seats at the UNSC for African countries.

A common challenge facing Turkey's evolving engagement in Africa is the existence of a gap of understanding on both sides. As Ankara University's Journal of African Studies explains, to the Turkish public, and particularly to Turkish intellectuals, Africa remains a great enigma, a dark continent full of obscurities. The current state of knowledge and of perspectives on Africa is very limited, poor and prejudiced." Similarly, a significant portion of African views on Turkey are shaped by third parties (i.e. Western media) that usually [portray and compare](#) "Turkey to other countries with bad intentions." Although Turkish involvement on the African continent has increased in the last two decades and Ankara is taking steps to address this gap, there is still room for improvement. Another common impediment to Turkish-African links is the FETO organization, which Turkey charges with orchestrating the 15 July 2016 coup attempt. The outlawed group pursues an anti-Turkish state agenda in many parts of the world where it still operates and many Africans unknowingly believe it represents Turkey's official position. FETO reportedly runs a considerable number of schools and businesses across Africa, thereby risking the evolving Turkish-African partnership.



MALABO, EQUATORIAL GUINEA - NOVEMBER 21: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (6th L) and African leaders pose for family photograph for the Second Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit at Sipopo Congress Center in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea on November 21, 2014. (Aykut Ünlüpinar - Anadolu Agency)

