

POLICY UPDATE

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Spotlight on Africa | Turkey–Africa Relations

(2nd Turkey–Africa Ministerial Review Conference, Istanbul)

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On the 11th and 12th of February 2018, the “2nd Turkey–Africa Ministerial Review Conference” transpired in Istanbul. The Conference was held under the tutelage of the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. In participation was the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, H. E. Thomas Qwesi Quartey together with several foreign affairs ministers of African countries as well as AU representatives.

Considering that a Turkey–Africa Summit is scheduled to be held in 2019 in Turkey, this Turkey–Africa Ministerial Review Conference was held to evaluate the progress of Turkey’s Africa partnership so far in conjunction with steps that could be taken to even solidify this special relationship.

A 26-point Joint Declaration Communiqué² was released after the Conference in which respective foreign affairs ministers and AU representatives who participated on behalf of their governments re-emphasized their commitment to make Turkey–Africa partnership flourish.

Since African Union recognized Turkey as its “strategic partner” in January 2008 (this year is the 10th year anniversary), Turkey–Africa relations have witnessed diverse developments in areas such as trade, humanitarian assistance, diplomacy, education etc. This policy update seeks to give an overview of the relations between the two parties and offer an alternative for an even closer relationship. It will give a snapshot of the Turkey–Africa diplomatic strides so far and factor in trade relations, development assistance, security cooperation in conjunction with health assistance and cultural cooperation.

Diplomacy

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² A full-text of the 26-point Communiqué could be found here: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-second-ministerial-review-conference-of-african-union-_turkey-partnership_en.en.mfa.

In 2009, only 12 Turkish embassies were in Africa with 5 of them in North Africa, however, there are now 41 embassies according to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Africa on the other hand has moved from 10 embassies in 2009 in Ankara to 32 African embassies currently with Guinea-Bissau, Cameroun, Tanzania and Mozambique all projecting to establish embassies in Turkey in the near future.

Trade

Pursuant to the rapid increase in diplomatic representation in both Turkey and Africa, the former has established a further 26 Commercial consulates in 26 African capitals. The Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Council has also opened business councils with 19 Sub-Saharan African countries. Moreover, the Turkish government has 38 Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreements with 38 African countries per information gathered from the Turkish Ministry of Information website.

In terms of bilateral trade, Turkey's portfolio with Africa reached \$17.5 billion in 2015 rising to \$18.8 billion in 2017. Turkish contractors executing various projects on the African continent also have an international business volume of about 21 percent with 19 percent in the North African market. Significantly, Turkish contractors have undertaken over 1150 projects amounting to over \$55 billion (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

Specifically also, bilateral trade between Somalia and Turkey rose to \$72.3 million in 2015; this figure increased to \$123 million at the end of 2016 (Dahir, 2017). Ghana is also Turkey's largest trade partner in Sub-Saharan Africa with trade volumes amounting to \$480 million in 2016 (Hudson, 2017).

Development Assistance

Turkey as an emerging donor has also contributed enormously in terms of development assistance to Africa. For instance, Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination (TIKA) – official Turkish development assistance agency currently operates 15 Programme Coordination offices in Africa. Also, in 2014, Turkey's official development assistance to Africa was \$383.3 million with \$153.6 million going to Sub-Saharan Africa (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

Another key component of development is education, in this regard too, Turkey has been providing scholarships to African students. The number of African students in possession of Turkish scholarships between 1991 and 2014 stood at 4,380. In the 2015–2016 academic year, Turkey provided 1239 scholarships to African students. At the time of writing figures on the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website indicated that there were 5437 students in Turkish higher educational institutions with 116 visiting professors and research assistants from African countries.

Various Turkish ministries and institutions also run technical training programmes. For instance, around 200 African junior diplomats have participated in the “International Young Diplomats

Training Programme” organized by the Diplomatic Academy of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1992. The Academy also runs tailor-made training programs for African countries such as Somalia, Madagascar, South Sudan, Sudan, Kenya, Nigeria and Namibia.

In other developments, Turkey also opened its largest military base abroad in the Somalian capital of Mogadishu on 30 September, 2017 (Hussein, Coskun, 2017). The \$50 million military base adds to the solidification of Turkey’s growing partnership with Somalia and will also train over 10000 Somali soldiers to beef up Somalia’s peace and security efforts.

Security Cooperation

Turkey further assists with peace and stability efforts in Africa and currently contributes to the United Nations’ missions on the continent which currently include MONUSCO/DRC, MINUSMA/Mali, MINUSCA/CAR, UNAMID/Darfur, UNMISS/South Sudan, UNOCI/Cote d’Ivoire and UNMIL/Liberia, thus, seven of nine peacekeeping missions in Africa. The Turkish National Police also provides training in various fields to counterpart personnel in African countries. For instance, in terms of military personnel training too, at the end of 2014, Turkey received and trained 2202 personnel. In 2015, a further 570 military personnel from African countries were trained in Turkey according to the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Health Sector Cooperation

In terms of the health sphere, Turkey has signed health cooperation agreements with around 20 African countries. Besides this, between 2007 and 2010, Turkish doctors embarked on diverse health screening campaigns organized by Turkish NGOs in cooperation with the Turkish Ministry of Health and TİKA. Information gathered from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website indicates that approximately 500 Turkish doctors and over 100 health personnel have provided health care services in around 20 African countries by 2014 with over 28000 Africans having undergone health screenings alongside 53000 cataract patients.

Significantly, within the framework of the “Africa Cataract Project” initiated by a Turkish NGO in Niger, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan about 21600 patients were operated on in 2015.

Additionally, in line with bilateral agreements, Turkey has treated around 1000 patients through its emergency humanitarian aid program. TİKA also constructed a 150-bed Turkish-Sudanese Research and Training Hospital in Nyala. The hospital has been operational since February 2014. Per the agreement surrounding the management of the Hospital, both Turkish and Sudanese Ministry of Health would run it for five years with total control of operations being handed over to Sudanese government afterwards.

Turkey also built and equipped the biggest Somalian hospital in Mogadishu. The 200-bed hospital is named after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and was officially opened in January 2015. Other health institutions that have received significant Turkish contributions from the Turkish

Ministry of Health include the Educational Hospital in Juba, South Sudan and the Black Lion Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Transportation and Cultural Cooperation

With regards to air transport, Turkish Airlines has become one of the leading airline operators with over 48 flight destinations in 31 African countries. The number of African tourists visiting Turkey too has increased from about 210000 in 2006 to over 885000 in 2015 and beyond.

Turkey has also removed visa requirements for diplomatic passport holders of 17 African countries. Furthermore, African businessmen and tourists travelling with Turkish Airlines and holding a valid Schengen, US or UK visa could acquire their Turkish entry visas at the Ataturk Airport in Istanbul.

The Yunus Emre Association of Turkey has also established Turkish Cultural Center in Khartoum, Sudan with plans to open new branches in other African countries to facilitate cultural cooperation.

Alternatives for an even closer partnership

Trade Partnership

A close view of the Turkey–Africa partnership meetings reveal that most of these meetings are held on the shores of Turkey thus, projecting an uneven balance. In order to quash the sentiment of alienation in terms of the West’s partnerships with African countries, Turkey could ensure that an analogous number of these conferences are held on the shores of African countries as well. Already, Turkey enjoys an amiable receptivity across many African countries owing in part to its lack of colonial and imperialistic history on the continent; and its measured determination to perceive its African partners as equal stakeholders.

To this end, increasing the number of Turkey–Africa conferences organized in Africa is a win-win for both parties. A Turkey–Africa Business and Investment Forum or a Trade Expo in an African country (it could be specific say one each for the respective regions in Africa – North Africa, East Africa, West Africa etc.) would significantly contribute and deepen ties between the two parties. The Turkey–Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS) Economic and Business Forum is already earmarked to be held in Istanbul on the 22–23 of February 2018.

Education

Also, whatever progress Turkey has chalked in Africa needs to be sustained. In view of this, the Turkey–Africa scholarship programme is a significant step which will boost an even closer partnership between Turkey and Africa in that, African students who would be future leaders would by time acquire more knowledge about Turkey by studying in the latter and so would Turkish students.

However, since one of the goals of Turkey–Africa partnership is to reinforce developmental progress in the latter, Turkey could earmark its Turkey–Africa scholarships to be industry-relevant and development specific. Precisely, in consultation with African countries and the African Union the scholarships could go towards students whose knowledge could directly benefit the African continent, for instance, in most needed sectors like Agriculture, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programmes.

Diplomacy and Cultural cooperation

Additionally, irrespective of the progress Turkey–Africa relations has accomplished so far, there is a general lack of information about each other. Emphatically, bridging the knowledge and information gap between Turkey and African Countries that will inextricably accelerate the developmental trajectory in the latter and facilitate Turkish investments could not hinge on a few exchange programmes between same.

Thus, a concerted effort could be made in terms of the expansion of the *Yunus Emre* Cultural programme in African countries to facilitate easy access for nationals of African countries to learn more about Turkey. France has the *Alliance Française*, UK has the British Council, Germany has the *Goethe Institut* for these purposes, Turkey could likewise develop an institution along these paths.

In terms of diplomatic representation, clearly there has been an upward increase nonetheless, the two parties should not rest until both parties reach full representation reciprocally – Turkey should work to achieve diplomatic representation in all AU member countries and vice versa as diplomatic representation still remains one of the distinctive features of cooperation among any given two countries.

Finally, given the fact that Turkey–Africa relations is on the upward irrespective of Turkey’s domestic challenges specifically the coup attempt which was also unanimously condemned at the Conference, one can only look forward towards an even closer partnership.

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