

**TURKISH INFLUENCE IN AFRICA: DIPLOMACY, TRADE
AND SECURITY IN RELATIONS BETWEEN
ANKARA AND THE CONTINENT.
OPPORTUNITIES AND
CHALLENGES FOR ITALY?**

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PART ONE

1. Turkish Projection on Africa Under AKP's Rule

Mattia Giampaolo, Valeria Giannotta

1.1 Introduction

Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, Turkish foreign policy has undergone a profound transformation, aimed at affirming Ankara not only as a regional, but also a global player. Indeed, one of the most exemplary areas of Türkiye's projection has been the African continent. While the relations between Türkiye and Africa were historically marginal during the Republican period – due as well to the dynamics of the Cold War – the 21st century has seen a clear reversal of the trend.

The AKP government, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has invested heavily at the diplomatic, cultural and economic level in strengthening economic and cultural partnerships with many African countries, both in the sub-Saharan and North region. The so-called "Türkiye's African turn"¹ is in fact part of a broader vision of foreign policy aiming to undermine the main isolationist and Eurocentric assumptions of the Kemalist legacy by pushing towards a "multi-vector" approach in many neighbouring and geographical areas. Beside the ideological factor, the African engagement coincides with broader transformations in the international system, tackling multipolarity, diffusion of power, rising regional organizations and evolving norms of development cooperation. Thus, the changing global order helps to explain Türkiye's posture in Africa along with its political, economic, and strategic vision.

As the world has moved beyond US-centric unipolar dynamics to a more multipolar system featuring rising powers such as China, Russia and regional actors advocating their own strategic autonomy, Africa arises as a landscape where diversifying partnerships beyond traditional alliances, leveraging non-traditional security and economic ties and reducing over-reliance on any single great power. Particularly, African engagement allows Türkiye to gain influence and bargaining power in a multipolar environment where great power competition shapes development and security agendas. Moreover, as power becomes systemically more diffused, South–South cooperation gains prominence and Africa is seen as an arena for reciprocal partnerships. From a shifting global economic trend toward diverse sourcing, supply chains, and new markets, the African gambit is about securing energy routes, connectivity networks and strategic footholds that enhance Türkiye's rising role in global value chains.

¹ Cavusoglu, M. "Africa and Turkey at the Threshold of Lasting Partnership", https://www.mfa.gov.tr/article-by-h_e_-mr_-mevl%C3%Bct-%C3%A7avu%C5%9Fo%C4%9Flu-entitled- africa-and-turkey-at-the-threshold-of-a-lasting-partnership_-published-in-various-newspapers-from-african-countries-_-daily-sabah-on-the-occasion-of-25-may-africa-day_.en.mfa#:~:text=What%20I%20see%20as%20absolutely,together%20Turkish%20and%20African%20businessme

Abdoulaye B.I, Jibril A.Z. "Turkey's Multidimensional Strategy Towards Africa", Seta Perspective, <https://www.setav.org/en/perspective-turkeys-multidimensional-strategy-towards-africa#:~:text=What%20are%20Turkey's%20expectations%20in,influence%20through%20its%20soft%20power>

In other words, in a time of fragmentation within traditional Western-led security and development architecture, Ankara looks at Africa as an alternative partner while African states aim at avoiding over reliance from a single partner. Hence, by leveraging on its peculiar soft power, common legacies and shared historical responsibilities in some geographies - mainly referring to the Ottoman past-, Ankara aims to weave relations pivoting on the sense of brotherhood and shared cultural elements that serve as a corollary to the new pragmatism of AKP's political and diplomatic approach as bridge builder towards Africa. Thus, the African dossier has served Erdogan for his own internal and international legitimacy as well as a tool to highlight Türkiye's regional influence.

1.2 Türkiye's Growing Role in Africa

In the past two decades, Türkiye has shown increasing activism in the African continent, marking a radical shift from its traditional Eurocentric foreign policy. This reorientation was made particularly under the leadership of the AKP and the current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan along with the broader vision of power projection and international assertiveness. Africa is indeed perceived as a rapidly growing continent as well as the focal point of emerging global competitions. Thus, for Ankara Africa is a strategic area to consolidate Türkiye's role as a regional power with global ambitions.

There is no doubt that Turkish activism in Africa reflects a structural shift in Turkish foreign policy. From a regional power confined between Europe, the Middle East and Asia, Türkiye has progressively sought to rise as a global player. This shift was at the core of “multidimensional foreign policy” and “strategic depth” doctrine developed by Ahmet Davutoğlu, a former foreign minister during the first AKP political mandates². Therefore, the projection towards Africa is consistent with the strategy to fill the gaps left by traditional colonial players and to emerge as an alternative partner to powers such as China and Russia. In this regard, Ankara proposes an anti-colonial and “South-South” solidarity narrative, taking advantage of its intermediate geographical and cultural stance³.

One of the main pillars of Turkish African expansion, however, is economic: the volume of trade has increased from around 5 billion dollars in 2003 to over 35 billion in 2022. Key sectors include: Construction and infrastructure: Turkish companies are very active in the construction of airports (e.g. Senegal, Sudan), hospitals, roads, dams and railways. Africa has become a growing destination for exports of consumer goods, household appliances, clothing and construction materials. In some countries (Libya, Algeria, Nigeria), Türkiye has sought access to oil, gas and strategic minerals, often in competition with European and Asian companies. Furthermore, Turkish Airlines has become a key player in connecting Türkiye to over 60 African cities, promoting mobility, trade and tourism.

In line with the strengthening of its regional projection and defence apparatus, Ankara has also developed a security dimension of its presence in Africa. In particular, Türkiye opened its largest military base abroad in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 2017. This base also hosts a military training center for the Somali army. Furthermore, worth of attention is the export of armaments to the African continent: Turkish drones (Bayraktar TB2) and armored vehicles have been exported to several African countries, such as Ethiopia, Morocco, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. In the defence

² Grigoradis, I. “The Davutoglu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy”, Working Paper 8/2010

³ Özkan, O. "Türkiye's Rising Role in Africa." *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 9(4), 93–105, 2011

sector, agreements have also been signed with several African states, including technical assistance, training, logistical support and cooperation against terrorism. Through these tools, Türkiye aims not only to strengthen its intervention capabilities, but also to consolidate alliances and direct influence in the most unstable African theatres.

However, the crucial axis of the Turkish strategy in Africa is the soft power aimed at local development projects, construction of schools, hospitals, mosques and health programs, intended as well as tools to strengthen the bond with African Muslim communities. Educational processes are another flagship of the Turkish approach towards Africa as they are aimed at creating direct ideological ties and training networks for future professional elites favorable to Ankara⁴.

In an increasingly fragmented international context characterized by a high rate of competition and power inflection, with relative dispersion of global leadership power, Africa is therefore a testing ground for Türkiye's projection as an emerging power. Ankara, in fact, aims at protecting its interests, extending its sphere of influence and maximizing its power, by positioning itself in a zone of strategic autonomy that allows the dialogue with all the major players (EU, USA, China, Russia, Gulf countries), without subordinating to anyone⁵. Hence, the Turkish proactive approach in Africa pivots on a transactional logic aimed at building relationships with rival actors (e.g. Ethiopia and Egypt, eastern Libya and Tripolitania) by trying to maximize its influence.

In addition to the systemic factor, Turkish activism in Africa is also a coherent manifestation of Erdoğan's vision, assuming that Türkiye must be an autonomous player capable of influencing strategic regions beyond NATO and the EU. In this regard, Africa is an area of opportunity, in which Ankara can expand its interests, cultivate new alliances and strengthen its international status without directly competing with the major power blocks. However, in recent years, much has been said about Türkiye's so-called neo-Ottoman approach, a political orientation evoking the former grandeur of the Ottoman Empire. This narrative gained particular traction in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings of 2011, especially with Türkiye's alignment—more or less formalized—with various Islamist-leaning movements that rose to power in Egypt and Tunisia. This perception was further reinforced, beyond any doubt, by Türkiye's military intervention in Libya in support of the former Government of National Accord led by Fayez al-Sarraj⁶.

Such developments led numerous analysts and scholars to interpret Türkiye's engagement in Libya as an attempt to expand its sphere of influence across North Africa—particularly in a country like Libya, which, in the wake of Gaddafi's downfall, has experienced, and continues to experience, a period of profound instability. However, upon closer examination of Türkiye's regional policies, the neo-Ottoman label appears to be only partially appropriate. While it is true that Türkiye has played an increasingly prominent role in the Libyan context over the past decade, the post-2011 period has also been marked—though not without tension—by the consolidation of economic and commercial agreements that date back to the early 2000s. Free trade agreements with Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, and Libya itself have, in fact, been strengthened in recent years⁷.

Although many observers have emphasized the growing volume of bilateral trade and Türkiye's diplomatic involvement in addressing regional tensions (in Libya, Gaza, and Syria), Türkiye still lags

⁴ Hodzi, O & Bahar, D. Turkey and Africa: Between Strategic Interests and Soft Power. In: Alden, C., & Yihdego, Z. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa*. Routledge, 2022

⁵ Chatham House. Türkiye's Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: Soft Power or Neo-Ottoman Strategy? London, 2021

⁶ Giannotta V. (2020) "La Turchia in Libia. I motivi della decisione di Erdogan", CeSPI, Brief n.4, https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/documenti/brief_4_giannotta_gennaio_2020.pdf

⁷ Dal E. P., Dipama S. (2023) "Assessing Turkey-Africa Engagements", APRI, Policy Brief, <https://afripoli.org/assessing-turkey-africa-engagements>

behind the European Union in terms of political and economic influence. In this regard, two levels of analysis emerge. The first is primarily political and concerns Türkiye's role within the Libyan and Egyptian contexts. The second relates more directly to economics and trade, where, despite Türkiye's increased engagement in recent years, its position remains subordinate to that of Europe. Nevertheless, Africa is a stage where Türkiye can extend its influence beyond traditional borders, diversify its alliances and respond to growing global competition⁸.

Especially sub-Saharan Africa, is a space where great power competition is less rigid, leaving room for middle powers. Türkiye promotes itself as a development model for Muslim-majority countries, combining political Islam, economic development and autonomy from the West. This approach has found fertile ground especially in African countries with Muslim elites seeking alternatives to Western or Chinese models.

Türkiye's activism in Africa is therefore the result of a mature, articulated and multi-level strategy combining economic interests, strategic ambitions and internal political calculations. Worth noting that President Erdoğan often uses Africa in his speeches as a symbol of rebirth of the Global South and the failure of the West, setting himself up as a spokesperson for the oppressed and marginalized in the attempt to integrate them into global dynamics.⁹ The domestic narrative, in fact, is not only useful for reuniting the electorate on nationalistic demands, but as a *viaticum* for obtaining a certain credibility at the international level.

With the AKP government, Türkiye has in fact understood that Africa offers unique opportunities for middle powers seeking international legitimacy and global influence. In this sense, Ankara's projection in Northern and Continental Africa must be seen as a part of a structured policy destined to last and evolve with the changing global balances.

1.3 Türkiye's Regional Policy: Between Soft and Hard Power

The electoral victories of various Islamist parties across the region have positioned Türkiye as an increasingly central actor in the shifting regional political balance. Alongside the small but influential state of Qatar, Türkiye offered strong support to both the presidency of the late Mohamed Morsi – Egypt's first democratically elected president – and to the al-Nahda-led government in Tunisia¹⁰.

The ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi triggered widespread regional tension and political polarization, which in turn led to a deterioration in political and diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Egypt. This broader tension reverberated across the region, most notably in Libya, where Egypt and Türkiye found themselves supporting opposing factions in the country's internal conflict: the western-based Government of National Accord (GNA), backed by Türkiye and the international community, versus the eastern faction

⁸ Kardaş, Ş. "Turkey: A Regional Power Facing a Changing International System." *Turkish Studies*, 14(4), 637–660, 2013

⁹ Levaggi A., Donelli F, "Türkiye's changing engagement with the Global South", <https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/11785/1/turkeys-changing-engagement.pdf>

¹⁰ Uysal, A. (2013) "Insights for Egypt's and Tunisia's Islamists from Turkish Experience of Democratic Transition", *Insight Turkey, Commentaries, Fall 2013 / Volume 15, Number 4*, <https://www.insightturkey.com/commentaries/insights-for-egypts-and-tunisias-islamists-from-turkish-experience-of-democratic-transition>

supported by the Gulf States (including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia) as well as other so-called revisionist powers such as Russia.

Türkiye's military intervention in Libya – including the provision of armed drones to the Tripoli-based government – allowed Ankara to emerge as a key political actor in western Libya. Conversely, the military support provided by the United Arab Emirates to General Khalifa Haftar, who controls the eastern region, proved insufficient to bring the entire country under his control¹¹. The failure of Haftar's offensive on Tripoli, repelled by GNA forces, demonstrated not only Türkiye's military capabilities, but also its ability to maneuver politically in high-stakes crisis scenarios. This success challenged not only regional actors, but also placed the European Union in a volatile position. Despite its stated strategic interests in Libya, the EU remained largely passive during Haftar's assault on a government it officially recognized and supported, along with the broader international community.

Ultimately, Türkiye managed to counter Haftar's ambitions and curb Russia's growing presence in eastern Libya, where Moscow had come to play a significant politico-military role in recent years.

Türkiye's initial re-engagement with the region is grounded in two primary strategies. The first is economic, focusing on trade relations and investment flows, with a particularly active role played by the private sector. The second involves the deployment of soft power instruments—such as television series, cinema, media outlets, cultural diplomacy, educational partnerships, and the recruitment of international students. Through these channels, Türkiye seeks to leverage shared cultural, religious, and historical connections to enhance its image and position itself as a reference point for the broader Islamic world¹².

At the political level, particularly since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Türkiye has emerged as a reliable and effective mediator in the region, notably in the management of the grain crisis. Given that most North African countries are heavily dependent on grain imports from Russia and Ukraine – many sourcing over 90% of their wheat from these two countries – Türkiye's mediation in securing supply chains has served as a valuable political instrument. The resumption of diplomatic engagement with Egypt was initiated through discussions on grain supply, while the continuity of relations with Tunisia – despite governmental and systemic changes – was largely sustained thanks to Türkiye's support in ensuring grain access. Although these dynamics have received limited attention in mainstream debates, they have played a central role in shaping Türkiye's relations with North African states. Nonetheless, despite Türkiye's heightened regional activity, its economic position remains secondary to that of Europe and the United States, and to a lesser extent, China.

From this perspective, Türkiye's involvement appears more focused on consolidating existing interests rather than displacing other powers' economic influence. As will be discussed in the following section, this limitation stems in large part from a lack of technological capacity and from disparities in trade volume and foreign investment.

¹¹ Megerisi, T. “Libya's global civil war”, ECFR, Policy Brief 26 June 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/libyas_global_civil_war1/

¹² Saddiki, S. (2020) “The New Turkish Presence in North Africa: Ambitions and Challenges”, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Med dialogue Series (33), <https://www.kas.de/documents/282499/282548/The+New+Turkish+Presence+in+North+Africa.pdf/1ef5bc1d-f900-a9b5-6fb0-619c94ec37b1?version=1.0&t=1607423237085>

1.4 Türkiye's Economic Policy in North Africa

Over the past two decades, since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power, Türkiye's economic and trade relations with North African countries have been shaped by a series of agreements not unlike those signed between the European Union and the region.

Starting in 2004, Türkiye concluded free trade agreements with several North African states: Tunisia (2004)¹³, Egypt (2007)¹⁴, and Morocco (2006)¹⁵. Relations with Algeria and Libya followed a different trajectory, being based largely on friendship and cooperation agreements in the case of Algeria, and on bilateral accords with the Libyan government under Colonel Gaddafi¹⁶. Despite regional instability and the rebalancing of external relations by the countries in the region, Türkiye has continued to implement these agreements. Particularly with Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, Türkiye has seen unprecedented growth in specific sectors where it holds a competitive advantage.

However, the country must also contend with the presence of both European and Chinese actors¹⁷. Algeria ranks as Türkiye's 23rd largest export market and 25th largest supplier, with total trade volume reaching \$4.1 billion. Türkiye is Algeria's sixth largest economic partner, with \$3.5 billion in investments, making it one of the leading investors and the largest foreign employer in the country. Conversely, Algeria is Türkiye's fourth-largest supplier of natural gas, following Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan¹⁸.

In recent years, Türkiye has taken part in various infrastructure projects in Algeria – a sector it considers strategic. However, the strong presence of China, which dominates major infrastructure initiatives through advanced technology and alternative know-how, places Türkiye at a disadvantage. Türkiye currently lacks such technological capacities, relegating it to a secondary role in comparison to China¹⁹.

In Morocco, Türkiye has leveraged free trade agreements to make significant investments, especially in the manufacturing sector (notably textiles), tipping the trade balance in its favor. Over time, this has resulted in a growing trade deficit for Morocco, prompting the North African monarchy to signal its intention to revise its trade agreement with Türkiye and to encourage greater Turkish investment to offset the imbalance, which stems largely from textile imports. In terms of Turkish-European (and particularly Italian) interests in Morocco, Ankara's role does not appear to pose a threat. On the contrary, Turkish and EU objectives in the country seem more complementary than competitive. Morocco has long served as a hub for the energy transition, a sector in which the EU enjoys a privileged position due to its technological edge – an advantage Türkiye cannot yet match.

With Tunisia, Turkish relations are even more structured, bolstered by a range of commercial agreements beyond the free trade framework. While exports have remained stable at around \$1 billion, they have endured despite Tunisia's ongoing instability. This resilience illustrates Türkiye's ability to maintain engagement in volatile environments, unlike other actors such as Russia. Türkiye

¹³ See: <https://www.trade.gov.tr/free-trade-agreements/tunisia>

¹⁴ See: <https://www.trade.gov.tr/free-trade-agreements/egypt>

¹⁵ See: <https://www.trade.gov.tr/free-trade-agreements/morocco>

¹⁶ See: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye%E2%80%93algeria.en.mfa>;

¹⁷ Giampaolo M. (2022) Turchia in Nord Africa: tra scontro politico regionale e pragmatismo economico, In Giannotta V. (a cura di) La Turchia nel Mediterraneo, Roma, Donzelli, pp. 87-107.

¹⁸ Relations between Türkiye–Algeria, Türkiye Ministry of foreign affairs, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye%E2%80%93algeria.en.mfa>

¹⁹ Zoubir, Y. (2023) “Türkiye and Algeria: A Promising Evolution”, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, Issue Brief, <https://mecouncil.org/publication/turkiye-and-algeria-a-promising-evolution/>

primarily exports processed goods (textiles, vehicles, and foodstuffs) while importing fertilizers and other chemical products²⁰. Again, Turkish interests do not appear to conflict with those of the EU. As in Morocco, Tunisia represents a strategic hub for green energy exports to Europe. There is minimal competition in key investment sectors, particularly since Turkish exports consist mainly of semi-finished goods (iron and steel) and, to a lesser extent, vehicles – a sector still dominated by France in terms of Tunisian imports.

Libya presents a markedly different scenario. Turkish-Libyan ties have deep roots, and during the last decade of Gaddafi's regime, Türkiye secured major contracts in infrastructure and construction, along with investments in agriculture and small-scale manufacturing. In return, Libya was a crucial energy partner for Türkiye. Following Gaddafi's fall and the resulting instability, Türkiye has deepened its involvement in Libya for both political and economic reasons. Infrastructure has always been a strategic sector for Türkiye, with tens of billions of dollars invested and some 25,000 Turkish workers employed in the country under Gaddafi²¹. However, the regime's collapse dealt a blow to Türkiye's interests.

Ankara's initial opposition to the 2011 NATO-led intervention (notably the no-fly zone) reflected its hesitations, though it later supported international efforts during the transition²². Türkiye's military involvement in Libya between 2019 and 2021 should be viewed through the lens of safeguarding its strategic interests, which have increasingly come to include energy. During the oil blockade led by Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), which slashed production to under 100,000 barrels per day, Türkiye offered technical assistance to Libya's oil sector, thereby reinforcing its influence. On September 9, 2020, Turkish officials held talks with Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) and the Government of National Accord (GNA) on electricity generation and pipeline construction – plans reiterated during meetings with Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah in 2021²³. Türkiye is particularly keen on expanding Libya's refining capacity to restore oil export levels to those of the Gaddafi era and to address chronic electricity shortages. As in Algeria, Türkiye's intervention has opened the door to a more central role in Libya.

However, from a commercial and technological standpoint, Türkiye still lags behind Western powers. In the energy sector in particular, Türkiye is unable to compete with ENI's Italian technology, nor does it yet possess the necessary expertise to support Libya's energy transition. In this context, Italy, along with France and to some extent Germany, continues to be a key partner for Libya's infrastructure development. For Italy and the European Union, Türkiye does not appear to be an obstacle – either politically or commercially.

On the contrary, Türkiye could serve as a valuable partner in promoting both political transition and technological, energy, and infrastructure development in Libya. There is no direct competition even in the defence sector. On the contrary, cooperation between Türkiye and some EU member states – such as Italy – is growing stronger. Recent agreements between Turkish defence firms and Italian companies such as Piaggio and Leonardo illustrate a convergence of interests and highlight Türkiye's continued reliance on Western technology for strategic sectors. In this context, the trilateral meeting

²⁰ Ergocun G. (2024) “ Türkiye, Tunisia vow to increase bilateral trade through investments in various sector”, Anadolu Ajansı, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkiye-tunisia-vow-to-increase-bilateral-trade-through-investments-in-various-sector/3241058>

²¹ Ramani, S. (2021). Turkey's Evolving Strategy in Libya: A Winning Gambit for Erdoğan? *Confluences Méditerranée*, No 118(3), 49-64. <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-confluences-mediterranee-2021-3-page-49?lang=en#re6no51>

²² Ibid.

²³ Ramani, Evolving Strategy in Libya, op. cit. <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-confluences-mediterranee-2021-3-page-49?lang=en#re6no51>

held in August 2025 between Türkiye, Italy, and Libya reflects the growing convergence of interests among the three countries²⁴. This alignment – extending beyond economic cooperation to include political coordination in specific North African contexts, such as support for the internationally recognized government in Libya – provides a solid foundation for the development of bilateral and multilateral relations, as well as future development initiatives.

Beyond unilateral intentions, the effectiveness of the Mattei Plan largely depends on cooperation with key regional actors. Among these, Türkiye has historically played a prominent role in Africa, benefiting from grassroots legitimacy and political recognition.

In this regard, Türkiye emerges as one of the actors with the greatest degree of legitimacy. Despite the convergence of interests, what appears to concern European actors most is Türkiye's assertive posture in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean. Tensions peaked between 2019 and 2020, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Türkiye and Libya on maritime boundary delimitation. Although the agreement has been deemed legally void by several parties, the issue remains unresolved, particularly given Türkiye's continued pursuit of energy exploration projects in areas of the Eastern Mediterranean claimed by Greece and Cyprus²⁵.

Relations with Egypt are even more complex. Despite tensions following the 2013 coup led by General al-Sisi against Türkiye-backed President Mohamed Morsi, economic and commercial interests have remained largely intact. Diplomatic friction notwithstanding, trade between the two countries has remained stable, even witnessing a significant rebound during the peak of the Libyan conflict (2019–2020) after a slight decline between 2016 and 2018. This continuity is mainly attributed to the free trade agreement signed in 2007 during the Mubarak era. Turkish exports to Egypt – machinery, processed goods, and other industrial products – have continued, along with some military components incorporated in recent bilateral deals²⁶. The recent normalization of relations has spurred further economic and commercial cooperation. These agreements fall within the broader framework of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council, established in 2010 under Mubarak and the Turkish government to promote bilateral ties.

The agreements cover a broad range of areas, from industrial development (especially in low value-added goods), to collaboration in tourism, transportation, and the still-developing defence sector. In this context, Türkiye represents a significant opportunity for the Egyptian economy, primarily due to its production of affordable modern technologies. This opportunity extends to the automotive sector (Türkiye is a major supplier of vehicles and transport equipment to Egypt), agricultural inputs (with Italy leading in agricultural exports), and infrastructure projects, particularly rail networks. The two countries have ultimately established a strong cooperative framework in the field of humanitarian assistance to the population of Gaza. The vast majority of aid that has reached the Gaza Strip has come primarily – if not exclusively – from Egypt (70% of the total) and Türkiye (30%)²⁷. This

²⁴ Giannotta V. (2025) “*Mediterranean alliance: Italy, Türkiye and Libya forge new path for co-op*”, DailySabah, 13 August 2025. <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/mediterranean-alliance-italy-turkiye-and-libya-forge-new-path-for-co-op>

²⁵ “*Eastern Libya Set to Approve Turkey’s Mediterranean Gas Exploration Deal*”, The Maritime Executive, 24 august 2025, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/eastern-libya-set-to-approve-turkey-s-mediterranean-gas-exploration-deal?s=09>

²⁶ Giampaolo M. (2022) *Turchia in Nord Africa*, op. cit.

²⁷ “*Turkish ship carrying 3,800 tonnes of aid for Gaza arrives in Egypt*”, Middle East Monitor, 10 February 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250210-turkish-ship-carrying-3800-tonnes-of-aid-for-gaza-arrives-in-egypt/>.

collaboration began in October 2023, when, during an official visit, the two presidents launched a joint task force addressing both diplomatic and humanitarian dimensions²⁸.

1.5 The African Opening Action Plan

As a matter of fact, the turning point in the Turkish focus on Africa occurred even before the AKP came to power, along with the launch of the Africa Opening Action Plan in 1998. Signed by then Foreign Minister Ismail Cem, the Africa Opening Action Plan was divided into four different components – diplomatic, political, economic and cultural – and it aimed to develop a systematic and organic foreign policy towards Africa, with particular attention to the sub-Saharan region. The Plan envisaged that Türkiye would raise the level of diplomatic representation, including infrastructural improvements to its embassies, and appoint a greater number of honorary consuls in Africa. This would support the political objective of increasing official visits to Africa, establishing mechanisms for political consultation between the parties, and participating in international peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance programs on the continent.

On the economic level, the main point was increasing trade relations with Africa, signing agreements for cooperation in the fields of trade, economy and technology, training institutional figures in the sectors of trade, industry, health, agriculture and education from African countries in Türkiye and African experts in sectors such as health, agriculture, pharmaceutical industry, mining, water management. Furthermore, it was envisaged the creation of a special fund for technical assistance available to African states while Türkiye becoming a partner of the African Development Bank and the African Exports and Imports Bank; as well as creating Joint Business Councils or Chambers of Commerce with sub-Saharan African states; developing communication and transport infrastructures with African countries; and finally, encouraging Turkish companies to enter African markets.

On the cultural level, the main goal was to conclude cultural cooperation agreements with individual states, to provide scholarships to African students, to allow the mobility of African scholars invited to Türkiye to contribute to international conferences and to establish African Studies Institutes in Türkiye aiming at arising awareness on Africa²⁹. The 1998 plan, therefore, has transformed Türkiye's foreign policy towards sub-Saharan Africa, which from a mere political-diplomatic component arose as a multidimensional strategy. It was at that moment that the transition of the Turkish approach towards Africa began systematically, although initially was limited to the opening of embassies or consulates, to trade flows aimed above all at strengthening political relations and the exchange of support for each other's positions in the United Nations General Assembly³⁰.

Those steps, however, have created and endured the basis for a multiple-level dynamic with significant increases in terms of investments, diplomatic missions, official visits and public diplomacy actions. The growing activism has therefore translated into institutional practice to the extent that the Africa dossier has become a central subject in Türkiye's political action and foreign projection. Africa has indeed progressively become the focus of diplomatic action and of foreign

²⁸ Giampaolo M. “*Egypt and Türkiye*”, CeSPI policy Brief n°65, November 2024, https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/osservatori/allegati/brief_65_-_turchia_ed_egitto_-_giampaolo.pdf

²⁹ Hazar, N. “The Future of Turkey-Africa relations”. *Dış Politika* 25, 3(4): 110, 2010

³⁰ Ipek, V. “La Politica estera della Turchia in Africa. I casi di Sudan e Somalia”, Osservatorio Turchia CeSPI, 2020, https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/osservatori/allegati/approf._7_-_politica_africana_della_turchia_def.pdf

policy implementation which pivots on a written document. This marks a *unicum* in the political and diplomatic history of the country; for no other area in the world Ankara has followed such a methodology.

1.6 Towards a structured cooperation

However, since 2005, when the “Year of Africa” was officially declared by the Turkish government, Türkiye has multiplied its efforts to establish deeper relations with the continent, along with the opening of new embassies, the signing of economic agreements and active participation in African multilateral forums.

In a few years, the number of Turkish embassies in Africa has increased from 12 (in 2002) to over 40 in 2023. In the same year, Türkiye obtained observer status at the African Union and became a strategic partner of the Union in 2008, the year when the first Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Summit was held in Istanbul.³¹ Those institutional steps are effectively to be considered the turning point of Turkish-African policy structured from a systemic and priority point of view.

In this spirit, the “2010-2014 Türkiye-Africa Partnership Joint Implementation Plan” was adopted by the High-Level Officials Meeting, which has paved the path to a new model of partnership under the 2015-2019 Joint Implementation Plan. Meanwhile, the third Türkiye-Africa Partnership Summit, held in Istanbul in 2021, adopted a joint action plan for the period 2022-2026. Hence, Türkiye has strengthened its institutional ties with African sub-regional organisations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This cooperation laid the foundation for a joint commitment on many global issues, including “peace, security and justice”, “human-focused development” and “strong and sustainable growth.” Those subjects were designed to be implemented under five strategic cooperation areas through a joint action plan from 2022 to 2026, namely “Peace, Security and Governance”, “Trade, Investment and Industry”, “Education, Science-Technology-Innovation skills, Youth and Women Development”, “Infrastructure Development and Agriculture” and “Promoting Resilient Health Systems.”.

It was also decided that the next summit will convene in Africa in 2026. Beside mutual esteem and trust towards Türkiye, which is perceived as a “friendly, supportive, equal and non-colonial state”, a key element of the relations has been the increase in trade. Between 2003 and 2022, the volume of trade between Türkiye and Africa has indeed grown exponentially, from around 5 billion dollars to over 35 billion with an exchange that sees Türkiye mainly exporting manufactured goods, textiles, household appliances, machinery and vehicles, while importing natural resources, raw materials and agricultural products.

According to some recent data, Turkish opening to Africa has boosted Ankara’s exports to the continent, reaching \$8.4 billion (TL 333.41 billion) in the first five months of 2025 – an 8.3% increase from the same period last year, according to official trade data. According to data from the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM), Türkiye’s total exports to African nations rose by 1.7% in 2024, reaching \$19.4 billion. Egypt was Türkiye’s top African export destination last year at \$3.5 billion, followed by Morocco with \$3.1 billion and Libya with \$2.5 billion. Egypt remains Türkiye’s most important trading partner in Africa, with a target of reaching a \$15 billion trade volume. Key export sectors to

³¹ Ibidem.

Egypt include machinery, mechanical appliances, mineral fuels, oils, iron and steel. Turkish businesses have established a strong presence in the country, especially in the textiles, electronics and home appliances industries³².

Along with its economic strategy to Africa, Ankara has also promoted a direct investments policy in the infrastructure, construction, energy sectors and defence. Many Turkish companies, especially those active in construction such as Yapı Merkezi or Limak Holding, are very present in strategic infrastructure projects, such as airports (for example in Dakar, Mogadishu and Khartoum), roads and power plants. Türkiye has also expanded defence cooperation with several African countries, including Libya, Somalia, Niger, Chad and Sudan. Under a 2019 memorandum of understanding on military and security cooperation, Türkiye continues to provide military training and consultancy services in Libya. Additionally, Türkiye has exported armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to Niger, Mali and Ethiopia, and delivered armored vehicles to Gambia, Uganda and Kenya.

Alongside economic diplomacy, the AKP government has developed a highly visible humanitarian diplomacy in East Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. In this regard, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) has significantly increased its presence on the continent, promoting development projects in health, education and agriculture. Ankara has also provided humanitarian assistance in areas affected by conflict or natural disasters, such as Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia³³. Hence, the proposed model pivots on a certain legitimacy in the eyes of Africans who perceive Türkiye as “fraternal”, “non-colonial” partner and respectful of African sovereignty, marking a difference from China or other Western powers.³⁴

On this, as Ankara sees Africa as a full partner in political and economic issues, its “South-South” rhetoric finds resonance in many African capitals. This process is certainly facilitated by the important congruences and complementarities at cultural and religious level. In addition to establishing itself as a major donor, Ankara promotes educational exchanges and offers scholarships to African students to attend Turkish universities. The presence of schools run by the Maarif Foundation, created after the attempted coup in 2016 to replace the schools affiliated with the Gülen movement, is widespread throughout the African continent.

Furthermore, the Directorate for Religious Affairs (Diyanet) has played an important role in the construction and renovation of mosques, helping to strengthen the religious dimension of Turkish soft power, especially in Muslim-majority countries. In recent years, Türkiye has also deepened its military and security presence on the continent. In Somalia, Ankara has opened its largest military base abroad, which also serves as a training center for the Somali armed forces. Türkiye has provided military assistance and sold drones to countries such as Ethiopia and Niger, while in Libya it has intervened militarily in support of the Government of National Accord in Tripoli. This military expansion reflects the AKP government’s desire to emerge as a global player that makes military self-sufficiency a strength to be extended beyond its neighbourhood, in a multipolar and autonomous perspective with respect to traditional allies such as NATO or the United States. Therefore, the balance of hard and soft power makes Ankara a smart power, which aims to extend its sphere of influence while maintaining a certain degree of strategic autonomy.

³² <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkish-exports-to-africa-rise-as-win-win-strategy-pays-off>

³³ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Africa Partnership Policy
<https://www.mfa.gov.tr>

³⁴ “Assessing Turkey-Africa Engagement”, Africa Policy Research Institute (APRI) <https://africapi.org/assessing-turkey-africa-engagements>

1.7 Conclusion

Africa is a dossier of crucial importance for Türkiye, which arises as a stakeholder of primary importance on the continent, by also investing a lot in its role as privileged interlocutor of the so-called "global south".

However, Turkish African policy encountered some criticism. Some observers question the economic and strategic sustainability of such rapid expansion, especially in the light of a domestic context marked by economic instability. Other critics regard the politicization of aid and the risk of an overlap between religious and state interests. Finally, competition with global players already well established in Africa (China, Gulf Countries, Russia) poses growing challenges for Ankara.

In any case, the relations between Türkiye and Africa in the AKP era mark one of the most emblematic cases of the transformation of Turkish foreign policy in the 21st century. The African strategy, articulated on multiple levels – political, economic, cultural, religious and military – reflects Ankara's ambition to become a global power with its own autonomous agenda. This policy has indeed helped strengthen Türkiye's image internationally and in many African countries, consolidating bilateral relations of increasing importance in an ever-evolving international system. With regard to North Africa, Türkiye's policy appears to be playing an increasingly central role.

In those chessboards, Turkish and Italian interests widely overlap and the synergies are consistent as was evident in the most recent Italy, Türkiye, Libya trilateral summit held in Istanbul at the beginning of August. However, margins of competition may persist on the Eastern Mediterranean due to the reciprocal relations with some coastal states and delimitation of maritime zones.

Furthermore, in a wider perspective Ankara may face significant challenges, particularly in terms of technological capacity and competition from major global actors such as China, especially in strategic sectors like infrastructure development. On the other hand, the Turkish growing defence capacity and expanding role as security provider may collude with other national interests, even though Italy and Türkiye as two NATO members and Mediterranean key states are strengthening their cooperation along with defence joint ventures and procurements.

What emerges from the current landscape is that Türkiye's approach in the region tends to align, rather than conflict, with European interests. The European Union is currently focusing heavily on the energy transition and the export of high value-added goods. In this regard, Türkiye does not express a clear strategic approach to compete directly with Europe, but along with its strategic autonomy the Rome-Ankara common interest and cooperation may act as a bridge in pursuing EU interests in the Continent.

PART TWO

2. Türkiye in the Horn of Africa

Elem Eyrice-Tepeciklioğlu, Ali Onur Tepeciklioğlu

2.1 Introduction

Researchers trace Türkiye's engagement in the Horn of Africa back to the sixteenth century during the Ottoman rule³⁵. As Kavas highlights, the Ottomans were active along the Red Sea and East African coasts, extending their sphere of influence to northern Somalia as early as the 16th century. The port of Seylac, strategically located at the entrance to the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden, held key importance for the Ottomans³⁶. In addition to some parts of Northern Africa, the Habesh Eyalet (province), comprising modern-day Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea and the Harar region of today's Ethiopia were parts of the Ottoman Empire³⁷. The long-standing historical ties, along with religious and cultural proximity to the regional countries, provide Türkiye with leverage and influence in the region.

Türkiye has solid and established ties especially with Somalia and Ethiopia while its relations with Djibouti and Eritrea remain free of major controversies. Ethiopia holds significant importance for Türkiye as a key partner, offering opportunities for enhanced political, economic and military collaboration. Turkish companies have significant investments in the country while Turkish drones have reportedly played a crucial role in the withdrawal of rebel Tigray forces from the capital in 2022. On the other hand, Somalia has also been a vital ally for Türkiye in the region, exemplified by Türkiye's significant contribution to the United Nations peacekeeping mission, UNOSOM II, in the early 1990s. The two countries deepened their cooperation in the security domain after the establishment of TURKSOM, Türkiye's largest military training facility, in Mogadishu in 2017. Two Turkish companies have taken control of Somalia's airport and port operations, while Türkiye has strengthened its presence in the country, particularly after President R.T. Erdoğan's first visit, through various soft power initiatives. Personal ties also contribute to expanding Türkiye's engagement in the region. For example, Somalia's Minister of Ports, Abdulkadir Nur is a graduate of Türkiye's Ankara University while Mulatu Teshome served as Ethiopia's ambassador to Türkiye until his appointment as president in 2013.

Türkiye has defence and/or military cooperation agreements with Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia. Military training cooperation agreement concluded with Djibouti in February 2024 reportedly includes financial cooperation and cash aid as well³⁸. The two countries also signed cooperation

³⁵ Numan Hazar, 'The Future Of Turkish-African Relations', *Dış Politika*, no. 3–4 (2000): 107–14.; Mehmet Özkan, 'Turkey's "New" Engagements in Africa and Asia: Scope, Content and Implications', *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs* 16, no. 3 (1 October 2011): 115–37.; Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, 'Ottoman Empire and Africa in the Age of Colonial Expansion: Appreciating the Loyalty of African Muslims, Debating Colonial Rupture', in *Turkey in Africa: A New Emerging Power?*, ed. Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu and Ali Onur Tepeciklioğlu (Routledge, 2021), 38–55.

³⁶ Ahmet Kavas, 'Doğu Afrika Sahilinde Osmanlı Hakimiyeti: Kuzey Somali'de Zeyla İskelesinin Konumu (1265-1334/1849-1916)', *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 5 (1 January 2001): 109–34.

³⁷ Numan Hazar, 'Turkish Foreign Policy and the Importance of Türkiye's Policy of Outreach to the African Continent', *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs* 28, no. 1 (11 July 2023): 11–26.

³⁸ Esra Tekin, 'Turkish, Djiboutian Defense Chiefs Sign Military Training, Military Financial Cooperation Pacts', *Anadolu Agency*, 19 February 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkish-djiboutian-defense-chiefs-sign-military-training-military-financial-cooperation-pacts/3142065>.

agreements in 15 fields including tourism, agriculture and environment in early February 2024³⁹. Türkiye's DEİK (Foreign Economic Relations Board) has a business council in Djibouti since 2015⁴⁰, Turkish Airlines started flights to the country in 2012 and Türkiye has an embassy in the country since 2013. Türkiye's relations with Eritrea are relatively limited compared to its ties with Somalia and Ethiopia. Nevertheless, Türkiye has maintained an embassy in Eritrea's capital, Asmara, since 2013, and Turkish Airlines started direct flights to the city in 2014⁴¹. This chapter will elaborate Türkiye's growing engagement with the region, with particular attention to Ethiopia and Somalia and its mediation attempts both in the Horn of Africa and in the wider region.

2.2 Relations with Ethiopia

Bilateral relations date back to the late nineteenth century during the Ottoman period, when delegations were exchanged between the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II and Emperor Menelik II. Ethiopia was also one of the few independent African countries when the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923. Nevertheless, Türkiye established its first embassy in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, in 1926, marking a relatively early diplomatic presence in the continent. Jima⁴² notes that this was welcomed by Ethiopia seeking for greater international recognition at that time. Ethiopia had an embassy in Ankara from 1933 to 1984, before it was closed by the Derg regime. It was re-opened more than two decades later, however, in 2006⁴³. Nevertheless, Türkiye's engagement with Africa remained limited during this time and throughout much of the Cold War era. This was largely because most African nations were not yet independent and because Turkish foreign policy was heavily influenced the Cold War dynamics and a pro-Western orientation⁴⁴. This also had implications for Türkiye's relationship with Ethiopia, constraining the scope of bilateral ties during this period. The regime change in Ethiopia in 1974 also had a huge impact on the course of relations between the two countries. Their alignment on the different sides of the bipolar system strained their relations which culminated with the closure of Ethiopia's embassy in Ankara⁴⁵.

Prior to the end of diplomatic relations, the incumbent Turkish government in 1978 introduced an opening plan to Africa in an attempt to diversify Türkiye's external relations. During this period, Turkish policy makers focused on fostering economic relations with African nations in order to strengthen political ties. To this end, an economic committee was formed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and visited economically significant nations including Ethiopia to explore market

³⁹ Tuba Ongun, 'Türkiye, Djibouti Agree to Enhance Cooperation', 2 May 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiye-djibouti-agree-to-enhance-cooperation/3128360>.

⁴⁰ DEİK, 'Türkiye - Djibouti Business Council - DEİK | Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler...', DEİK Website, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://www.deik.org.tr/turkiye-africa-business-councils-turkiye-djibouti-business-council?pm=28&sm=kunye>.

⁴¹ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Relations Between Türkiye and Eritrea', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-eritrea.en.mfa>.

⁴² Negesso Jima, 'Turkey and Ethiopia Relations: Historical Perspective (1920's to 1991)', *Cedrus* 9 (29 June 2021): 473–83.

⁴³ Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu, *Türk Dış Politikasında Afrika - Temel Dinamikler, Fırsatlar ve Engeller* (Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2019); Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Relations between Türkiye and Ethiopia', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-ethiopia.en.mfa>.

⁴⁴ Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu and Ali Onur Tepeciklioğlu, 'Introduction: Contextualizing Turkey's Africa Policy', in *Turkey in Africa: A New Emerging Power?*, ed. Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu and Ali Onur Tepeciklioğlu (Taylor and Francis Inc, 2021), 1–15.

⁴⁵ Jima, 'Turkey and Ethiopia Relations'.

opportunities⁴⁶. There have been other high-level visits to Ethiopia both at the prime ministerial and presidential levels. The first presidential visit to Sub-Saharan Africa took place in 1969 when the then Turkish President Cevdet Sunay visited Ethiopia⁴⁷. After the collapse of the Derg regime in 1991, the two nations revived their relations primarily through humanitarian aid initiatives and religious cooperation, particularly evident in the restoration and building of mosques especially in Ethiopia's eastern regions⁴⁸.

It was not until the mid-2000s that a Turkish prime minister visited the country. When President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a visit to Ethiopia in 2005 under his tenure as prime minister, some sceptics questioned the motives behind his trip⁴⁹. In 2007, Erdoğan attended the African Union (AU) Summit in Addis Ababa at the invitation of Alpha Oumar Konaré, then Chairman of the AU Commission.⁵⁰ Erdoğan visited Ethiopia again in 2015 as part of its East Africa tour, which also included stops in Djibouti and Somalia.⁵¹ Through this diplomatic engagement, Erdoğan became the only non-African leader to have made three official visits to the country in a decade.⁵² It was after his last visit Osmond argued that bilateral cooperation between Türkiye and Ethiopia are represented as a “mutual success story for the economic development of the two leading regional actors”.⁵³

Türkiye's name was listed among the few countries in Ethiopia's 2002-dated “Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy.” Highlighting Türkiye's democratic credentials, demographic strength, economic development and market potential, the document notes that relations between the two countries have yet to reach their full potential despite the opportunities available:

*Turkey's ... large market and relatively developed economy can make an important impact to our development.... It is essential that we draft and implement a policy toward Turkey that focuses on the economy and aims at fostering strong ties. Economic diplomacy should focus on inviting Turkish investors to Ethiopia, the promotion of our products and facilitating the establishment of firm contacts between the Ethiopian and Turkish business community*⁵⁴.

The focus on trade ties and investment opportunities is not surprising given that there was only one Turkish company investing in Ethiopia in 2003. Commercial ties between the two countries reached to an unprecedented level in the recent years that Turkey soon became one of largest investors in the

⁴⁶ Selçuk İncesu, ‘Afrika açılım politikası’, *Cumhuriyet*, 30 January 2020, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/olaylar-ve-gorusler/afrika-acilim-politikasi-1717211>.

⁴⁷ Numan Hazar and Elem Eyice Tepeciklioğlu, ‘Turkey—Africa Relations: A Retrospective Analysis’, in *Turkey in Africa: A New Emerging Power?*, ed. Elem Eyice Tepeciklioğlu and Ali Onur Tepeciklioğlu (Routledge, 2021), 56–74.

⁴⁸ Thomas Osmond, ‘Turks in Ethiopia/Ethiopians in Turkey. Transregional Circularities and South/South Bilateral Development in Globalization/Turcs En Éthiopie/Éthopiens En Turquie: Circularités Trans-Régionales et Développement Bilatéral Sud/Sud Dans La Mondialisation’, in *Annales d'Éthiopie*, vol. 31 (Persée-Portail des revues scientifiques en SHS, 2016), 245–67, https://www.persee.fr/doc/ethio_0066-2127_2016_num_31_1_1634.

⁴⁹ Elem Eyice Tepeciklioğlu, ‘What Is Turkey Doing in Africa? African Opening in Turkish Foreign Policy’, *Research Turkey Centre for Policy and Research on Turkey*, 2015, 95–106.

⁵⁰ CNN Türk, ‘Erdoğan Afrika Birliği zirvesinde’, *CNN Türk*, 29 January 2007, <https://www.cnnturk.com/dunya/erdogan-afrika-birligi-zirvesinde-359069>.

⁵¹ Anadolu Ajansı, ‘Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’dan 28 Afrika Ülkesine Ziyaret’, *Anadolu Agency*, 24 December 2017, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-28-afrika-ulkesine-ziyaret/1013648>.

⁵² Betselot Addisu Ayal, Nani Debele Dubale, and Esayas Bamaelc Bishaw, ‘Trade and Investment Trends Between Ethiopia and Turkey: A Comprehensive Study from 2012 to 2022’, *Insight on Africa*, 10 October 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09750878241274220>.

⁵³ Osmond, ‘Turks in Ethiopia/Ethiopians in Turkey. Transregional Circularities and South/South Bilateral Development in Globalization/Turcs En Éthiopie/Éthopiens En Turquie’.

⁵⁴ The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Information, ‘The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy’, 2020.

country.⁵⁵ As Table 1 reveals, it was after the mid-2000s that relations were restored with the signing of bilateral cooperation agreements mostly on trade and investment matters.

2.3 Trade and Investment Ties

A recent study revealed that, despite some fluctuations, trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) between Ethiopia and Türkiye experienced substantial growth in recent years. It also notes that Turkish FDI emerged as a crucial source of capital inflow, playing a significant role in economic growth and development in Ethiopia.⁵⁶ One of the first economic cooperation agreements Türkiye signed with a SSA country was concluded with Ethiopia in 1993. In a similar vein, one of the first business councils of Türkiye's DEİK (Foreign Economic Relations Board) in SSA was established in Ethiopia in 2009 to facilitate meetings between businesspeople and explore business opportunities.⁵⁷

Table 1: Agreements between Türkiye and Ethiopia (March 2025)⁵⁸

Agreement Type	Year of Signature
Agreement for Economic, Technical and Commercial Cooperation	1993
Agreement on Encouragement and Mutual Protection of Investments	2005
Agreements for the Avoidance of Double Taxation on Income	2007
Agreement for Scientific and Technological Cooperation	2010
Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism	2011
Agreement on Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation in the Field of Agriculture	2011
Agreement on Military Cooperation	2011
Agreement on Cooperation in Defence Industry	2014
Agreement on Cooperation in Mining and Hydrocarbons	2021
Military Framework Agreement	2021
Agreement on Cooperation in Water	2022

Source: Data abstracted by the authors from the webpages of Resmi Gazete (Official Gazette) and TBMM (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi: Turkish Grand National Assembly)

Türkiye's total investments in Ethiopia reached \$1.24 billion in 2010, with a significant focus on the infrastructure, transportation, agriculture and manufacturing sectors, surpassing China's \$836 million investment during the same period. However, the manufacturing sector leads not only in terms of capital investment and the number of projects but also in job creation.⁵⁹ Between 2003 and 2010, 204

⁵⁵ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Relations between Türkiye and Ethiopia'.

⁵⁶ Ayal, Dubale, and Bishaw, 'Trade and Investment Trends Between Ethiopia and Turkey'.

⁵⁷ DEİK's first business council in a Sub-Saharan African country was established in South Africa in 1997, followed by the council in Ethiopia. DEİK, 'Business Councils - DEİK | Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu', DEİK Website, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://www.deik.org.tr/business-councils>.

⁵⁸ Table includes the agreements not MoUs or protocols.

⁵⁹ Ayal, Dubale, and Bishaw, 'Trade and Investment Trends Between Ethiopia and Turkey'.

Turkish companies invested in the country. In 2014, Türkiye's Eximbank financed Ethiopia's 400-km Awash-Kombolcha-Weldia railway project with \$1.4 billion in funding and the number of Turkish companies operating in the country reached 238.⁶⁰ A 2018 analysis by *Nikkei Asia* highlighted that Turkish companies have outpaced Chinese competitors in securing major infrastructure projects in Ethiopia.⁶¹ In 2019, then Turkish Ambassador to Ethiopia, Yaprak Alp, defined the country as a perfect investment site for Turkish companies and said that Türkiye will continue to assist them.⁶² In 2020, Türkiye emerged as the second biggest investing country in Ethiopia after China.⁶³ Turkish investments reached nearly \$3 billion, with Turkish companies providing job opportunities for over 30.000 Ethiopians. This investment level corresponds to approximately half of Türkiye's investments in SSA.⁶⁴ Some of the Turkish companies withdrew from the country following the civil war that lasted between 2020 and 2022.

For example, Yapı Merkezi, a big Turkish construction company, assumed the construction work of 392-km Awash-Woldiya-Hara Gebeya railway project in 2015, which would connect central and northern parts of the country. Sources indicate that a significant portion of the infrastructure had already been put place by that time. However, the contractor was unable to proceed with the work as fighting also occurred near the project work and some of the infrastructure was damaged during the war with a portion of the equipment being stolen. While the company claim for half a billion dollars in compensation, they took the case to court and started negotiations with the Ethiopian government.⁶⁵

In addition to being an important investment destination for Turkish companies, Ethiopia has also been one of Türkiye's largest trade partners in SSA. Trade volume between the countries stood at \$421 million in 2013. Within the following seven years, it nearly doubled and reached 842 million in 2020. However, the civil war also disrupted some of those trade ties between the two countries. For example, in 2021, Türkiye ranked 4th among Ethiopia's import partners with a %5 share, whereas in 2023, it dropped to the 7th place. On the other hand, Ethiopia was Türkiye's 17th largest trade partner in 2021 but dropped to 19th place in 2023.⁶⁶ Trade volume between Türkiye and Ethiopia fell to its lowest level since 2010 and stood at \$224 million in 2024.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ János Besenyo, 'Turkey's Growing Interest in the African Continent', *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (2021): 70–89; David Shinn, 'Turkey's Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Chatham House Research Paper*, 2015,

https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20150909TurkeySubSaharanAfricaShinn.pdf; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Trade, '2003 - Eylül 2010 Döneminde Etiyopyada Yatırım Yapan Türk Firmaları Sayısı, Yatırım Tutarı ve İstihdam Durumu', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Trade Website, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/5b8a43355c7495406a22747e/Yat%C4%B1r%C4%B1mc%C4%B1%20Turk%20F%C4%B1rmalar%C4%B1n%C4%B1n%20L%C4%B1stes%C4%B1%202011.xls>.

⁶¹ Sano Akihiro, 'Turkey Jockeys with China for Influence in Africa', *Nikkei Asia*, 5 December 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Turkey-jockeys-with-China-for-influence-in-Africa>.

⁶² Seleshi Mulata Tessema, 'Turkey Motivates Companies to Invest in Ethiopia', *Anadolu Agency*, 5 October 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-motivates-companies-to-invest-in-ethiopia/1475086>.

⁶³ Salesi Mulata Tessema, 'Mutual Growth Drives Turkish Investment in Ethiopia', *Anadolu Agency*, 17 January 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/mutual-growth-drives-turkish-investment-in-ethiopia/1705411>.

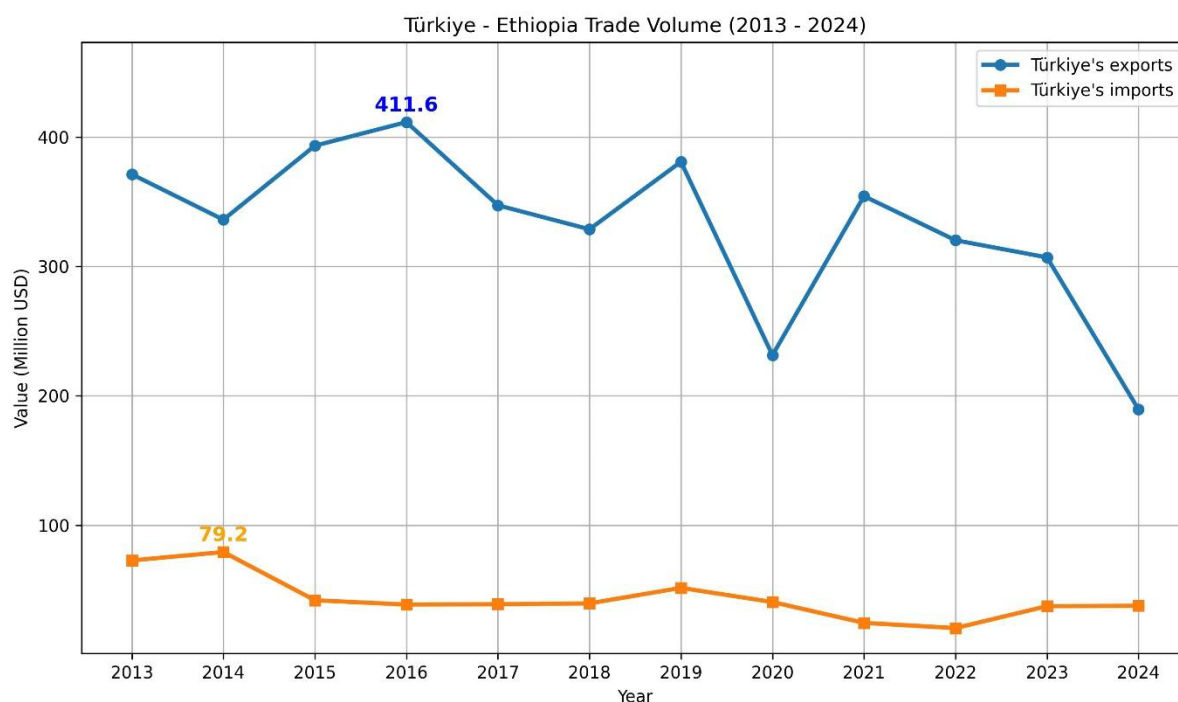
⁶⁴ Tunç Demirtaş, 'Türkiye'nin Doğu Afrika Ortaklığı: Öngörüler, Fırsatlar ve Riskler', SETA Rapor (SETA, 25 July 2023), 20, <https://www.setav.org/strateji-arastirmalari/rapor-turkiyenin-dogu-afrika-ortakligi-ongoruler-firsatlar-ve-riskler>.

⁶⁵ Selamawit Mengesha, 'Ethiopia, Yapi Merkezi Arbitration Hearing Begins In London', *The Reporter*, 1 June 2024, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/40252/>.

⁶⁶ Sedat Erdoğan, 'Etiyopya Sektörel Sohbet Toplantısı Sunumu' (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ticaret Bakanlığı, 17 June 2022), https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/62a9cdf913b8764f4041d7ab/Etiyopya_Sektorel_Sohbet_Toplantisi_Sunumu.pdf.

⁶⁷ TÜİK, 'TÜİK - Veri Portalı', TÜİK, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Kategori/GetKategori?p=dis-ticaret-104&dil=2>.

Graph 1: Türkiye and Ethiopia trade volume



The trade balance was often in favor of Türkiye but Ethiopia's exports to Türkiye is also on the rise. Turkey's trade with the country falls from 379 to 226 million dollars between 2021 and 2024. However, both countries are committed to furthering this trade volume and reaching \$1 billion in the following five years.⁶⁸ A recent study revealed that Ethiopia consistently experiences a trade deficit with Turkey, primarily due to unequal trade terms – Ethiopia mainly exports agricultural products while importing capital goods. However, trade and foreign investment between the two countries have grown significantly in recent years despite some fluctuations.⁶⁹ Turkish products are often perceived as offering “European quality with lower prices.” Alongside the strong bilateral ties, this is accepted as a positive aspect. However, challenges such as excessive bureaucracy, an underdeveloped banking system and infrastructure deficits in Ethiopia are identified as the primary obstacles.⁷⁰ Türkiye's relations with Ethiopia primarily centred on commercial matters, with security issues gaining prominence more recently, especially after 2021. While an energy cooperation agreement was signed during this period, no significant progress has been made in its implementation so far.

2.4 Security Cooperation

In 2020, Ethiopia was embroiled in civil war with militants from its northern Tigray region, under the control of TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front). The conflict erupted into full-scale military confrontation in November 2020, following prolonged animosity between the Ethiopian government

⁶⁸ Presidency of Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 'We are carrying out important projects with Ethiopia in terms of humanitarian and development aid', Presidency of Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 18 August 2021, <http://wt.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/we-are-carrying-out-important-projects-with-ethiopia-in-terms-of-humanitarian-and-development-aid/>.

⁶⁹ Ayal, Dubale, and Bishaw, 'Trade and Investment Trends Between Ethiopia and Turkey'.

⁷⁰ Erdoğan, 'Etiyopya Sektörel Sohbet Toplantısı Sunumu'.

and Tigrayan forces.⁷¹ Tensions between the two parties escalated when the federal government accused TPLF forces of launching attacks on military bases. In the early days of the conflict, the federal troops seized the control of key urban centers in Tigray. However, Tigrayan forces later maintained control of vast areas, which was followed by the recapture of main towns including Tigray's capital Mekelle.⁷² The Tigrayan rebel forces later advanced to southward and seized Dessia and Kombolcha. The capture of those key towns on the main road to Addis Ababa alarmed the Ethiopian leaders, who feared that the rebel forces might soon pose a direct threat to the capital.⁷³ The war officially ended in November 2022, with the region's capital being handed over to the federal government.⁷⁴

In August 2021, Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, paid an official visit to Türkiye, at the invitation of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.⁷⁵ Erdoğan offered to mediate to end the conflict, emphasizing his commitment to safeguard the country's "integrity."⁷⁶ During this visit, the two countries signed a military framework agreement which stipulated cooperation in military training and education, participation in joint exercises, defence industry, exchange of military intelligence and logistical support. The latter includes "the sale, grant, transfer, allocation and exchange of supplies and services."⁷⁷ In November 2021, then Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, expressed Türkiye's willingness to assist in resolving the conflict through dialogue.⁷⁸ It was reported that Çavuşoğlu held regular talks with his Ethiopian counterpart and Turkish diplomats in Ethiopia have consistently engaged with both sides of the conflict at various stages.⁷⁹

Although some external sources reported that the use of Turkish drones were instrumental in halting the advance of Tigrayan rebel forces towards Addis Ababa⁸⁰, there is no statement from Turkish official sources regarding their use in the conflict. However, some experts believe that Türkiye's military support proved pivotal in the Ethiopian government's success in the civil war.⁸¹ Türkiye has strengthened its defense industry cooperation with Ethiopia, including the sale of Turkish military

⁷¹ Michelle Gavin, 'The Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray Region: What to Know', Council on Foreign Relations Website, 10 February 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/conflict-ethiopia-tigray-region-what-know>.

⁷² 'Ethiopia's Tigray War: The Short, Medium and Long Story', 17 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54964378>; Philippe Pellet, 'Understanding the 2020-2021 Tigray Conflict in Ethiopia: Background, Root Causes, and Consequences', KKI Elemzésék, KKI Elemzésék (Külügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.47683/KKIElemzesek.KE-2021.39>.

⁷³ Martin Chulov, 'Tigrayan Forces' Capture of Two Towns Raises Fears for Ethiopian Capital', *The Guardian*, 1 November 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/01/tigrayan-forces-claim-control-of-two-cities-on-road-to-ethiopia-capital>.

⁷⁴ 'Conflict in Ethiopia', Global Conflict Tracker, 20 March 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ethiopia>.

⁷⁵ Jeyhun Aliyev, 'Ethiopian Prime Minister to Pay Official Visit to Turkey', *Anadolu Agency*, 17 August 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/ethiopian-prime-minister-to-pay-official-visit-to-turkey-/2338121>.

⁷⁶ 'Erdogan Backs Peaceful Resolution to Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict', *Al Jazeera*, 18 August 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/18/erdogan-offers-to-mediate-end-to-ethiopia-tigray-conflict>.

⁷⁷ 'Military Framework Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia', accessed 7 April 2025, <https://tommasin.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Turkey-Ethiopia-military-agreement.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Mehmet Şah Yılmaz, 'Turkish, Ethiopian Foreign Ministers Discuss Tigray Conflict', *Anadolu Agency*, 26 November 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkish-ethiopian-foreign-ministers-discuss-tigray-conflict/2431879>.

⁷⁹ Murat Sofuoğlu, 'How Türkiye Has Contributed to De-Escalating the Ethiopia Conflict', TRT World, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/how-turkiye-has-contributed-to-de-escalating-the-ethiopia-conflict-12783073>.

⁸⁰ Alex Gatopoulos, 'How Armed Drones May Have Helped Turn the Tide in Ethiopia's War', *Al Jazeera*, 10 December 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/12/10/how-armed-drones-may-have-helped-turn-tide-in-ethiopia-conflict>.

⁸¹ Asrat Birhanu, 'Behind the Scenes in the GERD Diplomacy: Turkey's Pivotal Role in the Standoff Between Ethiopia and Egypt', *Addis Insight*, 16 August 2024, <https://addisinsight.net/2024/08/16/behind-the-scenes-in-the-gerd-diplomacy-turkeys-pivotal-role-in-the-standoff-between-ethiopia-and-egypt/>.

equipment. According to data released by Türkiye Exporters Assembly, Türkiye's defense and aerospace exports have increased by nearly %18 since 2023, reaching \$6.7 billion in 2024.⁸² Experts note that Türkiye's defense exports to the country increased by 5.000% from 2020 to 2021.⁸³ Reportedly, Türkiye's defense and aerospace exports to Ethiopia surged to \$51 million in the first quarter of 2021 with additional growth observed in August and September.⁸⁴ It is also reported that Ethiopian Air Force purchased an undisclosed quantity of Akıncı UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) from Türkiye in early 2024⁸⁵ in addition to Baykar Bayraktar TB2 UCAVs (unmanned combat aerial vehicles) previously purchased.⁸⁶ Security ties between Türkiye and Ethiopia is likely to intensify in the coming years considering the unrest in other regions such as Oromia and Amhara.

2.5 Humanitarian Aid and Other Soft Power Tools

The two-year conflict devastated the country's economy and triggered the food shortage. Türkiye stepped up its humanitarian aid efforts to alleviate the impact of the conflict with Turkish public institutions and NGOs including Turkish Red Crescent and AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Directorate) providing humanitarian aid both to Tigrayan and other Ethiopians. A Turkish source even noted that "there was a time when any humanitarian aid could not reach Tigray. At that time, we were so active to make humanitarian aid reach Tigray, sending messages to the federal government to open humanitarian corridors."⁸⁷ Türkiye's TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), the state-run aid agency, distributed food aid to the displaced people in Addis Ababa,⁸⁸ followed by the delivery of 10 tonnes of humanitarian assistance to Tigray region.⁸⁹ Here, it should be noted that the first program coordination office of TİKA was established in Addis Ababa in 2005, underscoring Ethiopia's pivotal role in Türkiye's Africa policy. This was followed by Turkish Airline's first flight to a sub-Saharan African country again to Addis Ababa in 2006. Turkish public institutions and NGOs have been providing humanitarian aid and development assistance to the country for many years.

Türkiye recently accelerated its aid initiatives to the country which is currently grappling with the severe impacts of a devastating drought. In August 2024, Türkiye launched an aid campaign to assist drought-hit Ethiopia, along with Kenya, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.⁹⁰ In December 2024, TİKA provided food packages to Najashi village in the Tigray province, where the conflicts between

⁸² Türkiye İhracatçılar Meclisi, 'İhracat Rakamları', TİM, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://tim.org.tr/tr/ihracat-rakamlari>.

⁸³ Tunç Demirtaş, 'Türk Savunma Sanayii Ürünlerine Afrika İlgisi', *Sabah*, 6 November 2021, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/perspektif/tunc-demirtas/2021/11/06/turk-savunma-sanayii-urunlerine-afrika-ilgisi>.

⁸⁴ Gatopoulos, 'How Armed Drones May Have Helped Turn the Tide in Ethiopia's War'.

⁸⁵ Juster Domingo, 'Ethiopia Inducts Turkish Drones, Russian-Made Su-30 Fighter Jets', *The Defense Post* (blog), 19 January 2024, <https://thedefensepost.com/2024/01/19/ethiopia-akinci-uav-sukhoi/>.

⁸⁶ Mehmet Ali Kula, 'Etiyopya'nın Bayraktar TB2 SİHA'ları görüntülendi!', *DefenceTurk* (blog), 26 June 2022, <https://www.defenceturk.net/etiopyanin-bayraktar-tb2-sihaları-görüntülendi>.

⁸⁷ Sofuoğlu, 'How Türkiye Has Contributed to De-Escalating the Ethiopia Conflict'.

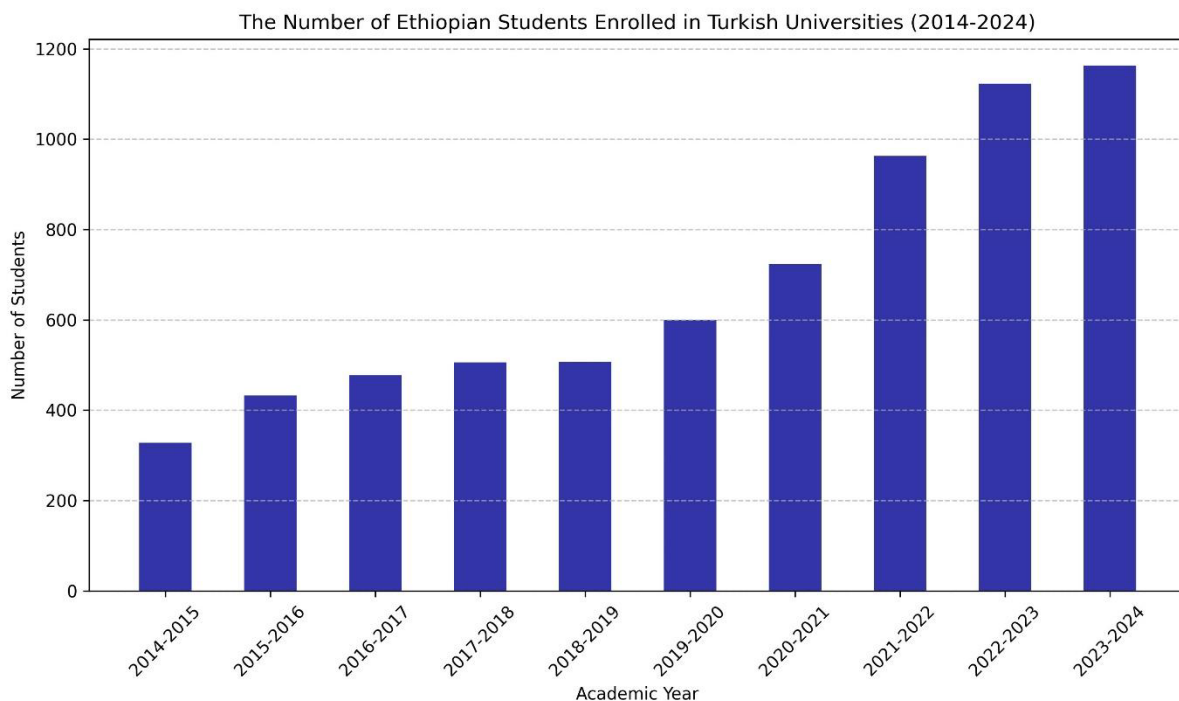
⁸⁸ Seleshi Mulata Tessema, 'Ethiopia: Turkish Charity Gives Food Aid to Needy People', *Anadolu Agency*, 29 April 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/ethiopia-turkish-charity-gives-food-aid-to-needy-people/2224890>.

⁸⁹ ReliefWeb, 'TİKA Provides 10 Tonnes of Humanitarian Assistance for Tigray Region in Ethiopia - Ethiopia', ReliefWeb, 17 June 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/t-ka-provides-10-tonnes-humanitarian-assistance-tigray-region-ethiopia>.

⁹⁰ AfricaNews, 'Turkey Launches Aid Campaign for Drought-Hit Horn of Africa and Yemen', *Africanews*, 5 March 2017, <https://www.africanews.com/2017/03/05/turkey-launches-aid-campaign-for-drought-hit-horn-of-africa-and-yemen/>.

2020 and 2022 had a devastating effect on the livelihoods of the local people.⁹¹ TİKA will also oversee the restoration of the Al-Nejashi mosque, which was damaged during the internal conflict. TİKA had previously restored the mosque back in 2018, believed to be the first mosque in Africa.⁹² Türkiye Maarif Foundation, the public educational institution established in 2016 to provide educational services abroad, opened a school in the Tigray region in early 2024. A total of 821 students receive education and training activities in the Meleke school. TMV has six other schools in the country educating 3.430 students in total while the first school in Ethiopia was opened in Harar in 2019.⁹³ As Table 3 indicates, the number of Ethiopian students enrolled in Turkish universities also increased in the last decade.

Graph 2: Ethiopian students in Turkish Universities



Türkiye captures “the hearts and minds” of the Ethiopian public through other soft power tools. One notable example is the widespread popularity of Turkish TV series such as *Kuzey Güney* (North South) and *Kara Para Aşk* (Black Money Love) in the country. There is even a satellite television channel that primarily broadcasts them in Amharic, one of the country’s official languages. Launched in 2016, Kana TV became one of the most popular channels in the country. Some of the viewers said that Turkish culture portrayed in these dramas closely resemble those of Ethiopia: “We feel like we are living in a united world with our Turkish brothers and sisters, and this is why the characters of the dramas have become adorable family members to every household.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ TİKA, ‘TİKA Provides Food Package Support to Najashi Village in Ethiopia, a Site of Historical and Cultural Significance’, TİKA, 16 December 2024, <https://tika.gov.tr/en/tika-provides-food-package-support-to-najashi-village-in-ethiopia-a-site-of-historical-and-cultural-significance/>.

⁹² Gökhan Kavak, ‘Türkiye to Restore Historic Mosque Damaged in Ethiopian Conflict’, *Anadolu Agency*, 6 January 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiye-to-restore-historic-mosque-damaged-in-ethiopian-conflict/3101998>.

⁹³ Daily Sabah, ‘Türkiye’s Maarif Foundation Opens School in Post-War Tigray’, *Daily Sabah*, 29 February 2024, sec. Education, <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkiye/education/turkiyes-maarif-foundation-opens-school-in-post-war-tigray>.

⁹⁴ Seleshi Mulata Tessema, ‘Ethiopia Takes Delight in Watching Turkish Drama Series’, *Anadolu Agency*, 13 November 2016, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/ethiopia-takes-delight-in-watching-turkish-drama-series/684000>.

Türkiye's engagement with Somalia is relatively recent compared to its more established relations with Ethiopia, however, the country has been gaining increasing prominence in Turkish foreign policy. This is particularly evident in the humanitarian and security domains. While trade and investment ties have long shaped Türkiye-Ethiopia relations, security cooperation has become more significant in recent years. On the other hand, Türkiye has been highly engaged in Somalia through humanitarian efforts, with security cooperation always being a key component of its involvement. In the coming years, energy cooperation is also likely to attract more attention.

2.6 Relations with Somalia

Somalia occupies a central place in Türkiye's Africa policy. The political pillar of Türkiye's first opening policy to Africa adopted in 1978 involved expanding its diplomatic presence across the continent. As part of this effort, two new resident embassies were established in 1979, one in Mogadishu and the other in Dar es Salaam.⁹⁵ However, Türkiye's embassy in Mogadishu were closed in 1991 due to the civil war in the country until it was reopened in 2011.⁹⁶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the embassy's reopening aimed to demonstrate Türkiye's unwavering support for the Somali people, to draw attention of the international community to the devastating humanitarian crisis unfolding in the country and to coordinate Turkey's ongoing and future aid efforts, as the country was facing the most severe drought and famine it had experienced in over 60 years.⁹⁷

The embassy was reopened after President Erdoğan's visit to the country under his tenure as prime minister. Erdoğan's visit to the war-torn country marked the first visit by a non-African head of government in nearly two decades.⁹⁸ Erdoğan defied the widespread perception of Mogadishu as a dangerous "no-go zone" and travelled there with his family, key cabinet officials and delegates from NGOs and the business community.⁹⁹ A month after his visit, Erdoğan delivered his notable speech at the UN, stating that: "The tragedy of Somalia is a shame for the international community... No one can speak of peace, justice and civilization in the world if the outcry rising from Somalia is left unheard."¹⁰⁰ Erdoğan's visit is defined as a milestone in bilateral relations. A decade later, Somalia's Minister of Defense, Mohamed Abdulkadir Nur, wrote an opinion for *Anadolu Agency*, Türkiye's official news agency, where he noted that Erdoğan's visit brought hope for Somalia and reinforced the enduring bond of brotherhood between Türkiye and Somalia. To him, what set Türkiye apart from other nations was its commitment to rebuilding Somalia's state capacity.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Hazar and Tepeciklioğlu, 'Turkey—Africa Relations', p.61

⁹⁶ Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu, 'Turkey's Peacebuilding Response in Africa: The Case of Somalia', in *Routledge Handbook of Conflict Response and Leadership in Africa*, ed. Alpaslan Özerdem, Sinem Akgül-Açıkmeşe, and Ian Liebenberg (Routledge, 2021), 200–211, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429318603-17/turkey-peacebuilding-response-africa-elem-eyrice-tepeciklio%C4%9Flu>.

⁹⁷ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Press Release Regarding the Re-Opening of the Turkish Embassy in Mogadishu', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, 1 November 2011, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-248_-1-november-2011_-press-release-regarding-the-re-opening-of-the-turkish-embassy-in-mogadishu.en.mfa.

⁹⁸ 'Somalia Famine: Turkish PM Erdogan Visits Mogadishu', *BBC News*, 19 August 2011, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14588960>.

⁹⁹ Abukar Arman, 'Erdogan: The Hero of Somalia', *Al Jazeera*, 21 January 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/1/21/erdogan-the-hero-of-somalia>.

¹⁰⁰ UN, 'Tragedy of Somalia Shames the World, Turkish Leader Tells', *UN News*, 23 September 2011, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/09/388502>.

¹⁰¹ Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur, '10th Anniversary of Erdogan's Visit to Somalia: Hope for a Nation', *Anadolu Agency*, 19 August 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/opinion-10th-anniversary-of-erdogan-s-visit-to-somalia-hope-for-a-nation/2339914>.

Table 2: Agreements between Türkiye and Somalia (March 2025)¹⁰²

Agreement Type	Year of Signature
Cultural Agreement	1982
Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement	1982
Technical Cooperation Agreement	2009
Framework Agreement on Education, Technical and Scientific Cooperation in the Field of Military	2010
Security Cooperation Agreement	2013
Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Health and Medicine	2014
Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement	2015
Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation	2020
Agreements for the Avoidance of Double with Respect to Taxes on Income	2020
Agreement on Development Cooperation	2021
Agreement on Donation in the Field of Health	2022
Grant Agreement	2023
Defense and Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement	2024

Source: Data abstracted by the authors from the webpages of Resmi Gazete (Official Gazette) and TBMM

Erdoğan paid two other visits to the country in 2015 and 2016. The latter was part of its East African tour where he inaugurated Türkiye's largest embassy complex in the world.¹⁰³ At that time, Türkiye was among the few countries that had a resident embassy in the country. Türkiye also opened a consulate general in Hargeisa, Somaliland in 2014.¹⁰⁴ Türkiye's growing involvement in the country began with humanitarian efforts, later expanding to include Turkish investments and security cooperation. Türkiye also assumed to play a crucial role in the country's post-war reconstruction process through its comprehensive peacebuilding approach, which integrates development assistance, trade relations, state-building initiatives, educational ties, security cooperation and mediation efforts.¹⁰⁵

2.7 Development Assistance and Other Soft Power Tools

Ethiopia has been the primary focus of Türkiye's investments in Sub-Saharan Africa; however, Türkiye's presence is widely embraced by many Somalians. President Erdoğan's popularity

¹⁰² Table includes the agreements not MoUs or protocols.

¹⁰³ Felix Nkambeh Tih, 'Erdogan Opens Turkey's New Embassy Complex in Somalia', *Anadolu Agency*, 8 June 2016, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/erdogan-opens-turkeys-new-embassy-complex-in-somalia/583793>.

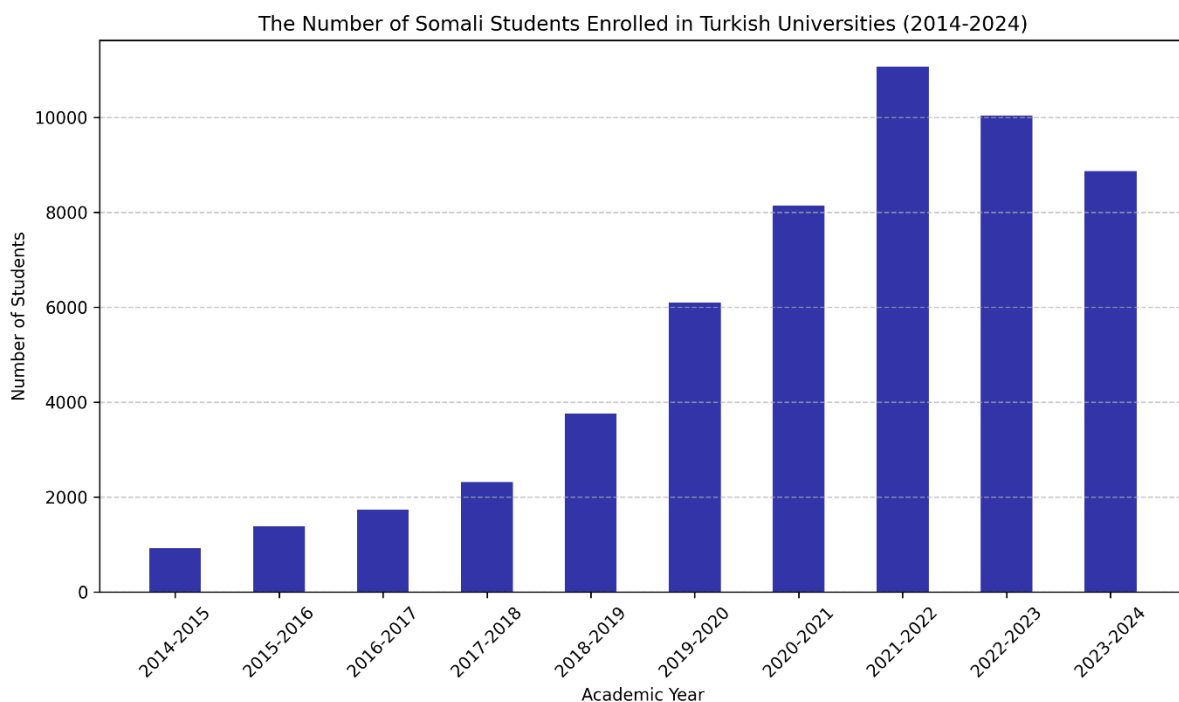
¹⁰⁴ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Relations between Turkey and Somalia', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-somalia.en.mfa>.

¹⁰⁵ Tepeciklioğlu, 'Turkey's Peacebuilding Response in Africa'.

is so significant that more and more people in Somalia even name their sons after him.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, an increasing number of Somali families are naming their daughters Istanbul, Türkiye's largest city. While some Somalis name their children Istanbul to honor Türkiye's aid efforts in the country, others are inspired by Turkish TV dramas,¹⁰⁷ which are also very popular among Somalis.

One of the strong indicators of Türkiye's commitment to Somalia is the Turkish Airlines' launch of direct flight to Mogadishu in 2012, at a time when other airlines avoided the route due to security concerns. BBC reported that the flight was "the first commercial airline in more than 20 years that has landed at the Mogadishu airport"¹⁰⁸, while the Guardian highlighted it as: "the first airline service linking Somali capital with the world beyond East Africa."¹⁰⁹ In response to critiques that flights to Somalia were not profitable, company managers told that Somalia has been their most profitable destinations worldwide, as they were the only international airline operating in the country.¹¹⁰

Graph 3: Somali students in Turkish Universities



In 2020, Türkiye granted around 2.4 for Somalia's debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).¹¹¹ As Table 4 shows, the number of Somali students also significantly increased over the past decade. While 638 Somali students were enrolled in Turkish universities during the 2013-2014 academic

¹⁰⁶ Brendon J. Cannon, 'Contextualizing Turkey's Actions in Somalia: Insights from Somaliland', *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies* 21, no. 13 (2021): 121–43.

¹⁰⁷ Nour Gell Gedi, "'Istanbul' Increasingly Popular Name for Somali Girls', *Anadolu Agency*, 6 July 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/istanbul-increasingly-popular-name-for-somali-girls/1196686>.

¹⁰⁸ 'Somalia: Turkish Airlines Begins Flights to Mogadishu', *BBC News*, 6 March 2012, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17269620>.

¹⁰⁹ David Smith, 'Turkish Airlines Starts Commercial Flights to Somalia', *The Guardian*, 6 March 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/06/turkish-airlines-flights-somalia-mogadishu>.

¹¹⁰ Maggie Fick, 'Turkish Airlines Profits in Africa, Where Others Fear to Fly', *Reuters*, 12 September 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/finance/turkish-airlines-profits-in-africa-where-others-fear-to-fly-idUSKCN1BN1CZ/>.

¹¹¹ Aysu Biçer, 'Turkey Helping Pay down Somalia's IMF Debt', *Anadolu Agency*, 6 November 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-helping-pay-down-somalias-imf-debt/2034992>.

year, this number surpassed 10,000 by 2021-2022 academic year. The number of Somalian students increased dramatically so much so that Somalia's then Minister of Justice, Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur said that "It wouldn't be a lie to say that Turkish has become the second language of Somalia."¹¹²

However, during the early years of Türkiye's engagement with Somalia, its humanitarian efforts and development assistance drew the most attention. Following Erdoğan's first visit to the country, TİKA, Turkish Red Crescent and Turkish NGOs initiated Türkiye's largest international aid operation.¹¹³ Turkish state institutions had been providing assistance to the country before Erdoğan's 2011 visit, but they significantly intensified their efforts with increased support from the government. Somalia quickly became Türkiye's largest aid recipient in 2011 and remained as one of the largest beneficiaries of Turkish development assistance for many years. In 2012, Somalia was the second largest recipient of Turkish emergency aid after Syria. In 2013 and 2014, it ranked fourth, while in 2015, 2016 and 2017, it returned to second place. Somalia ranked fifth, sixth and sixth respectively in 2018, 2019 and 2020. The most recent TİKA development assistance reports, published in 2021 and 2022, reveal that Somalia ranked second in those years, following Syria. Somalia also ranked first or second among the least developed country beneficiaries of Turkish bilateral assistance.¹¹⁴

The fact that Somalia were always among the top ten beneficiaries of Turkish bilateral and NGO assistance since 2011 indicates that the country continues to be a focal point for Turkish humanitarian assistance. Türkiye has also been one of Somalia's top ten donors, in terms of both humanitarian aid and official development assistance.¹¹⁵ Two conferences on Somalia were also hosted by Türkiye in order to draw international attention to the humanitarian crisis in the country and achieve peace, stability and reconciliation. The first Istanbul Conference on Somalia was held in 2010 and it was defined by the then UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon as a turning point for the country.¹¹⁶ The second conference, held in 2012, was attended by high level representatives from 57 countries and 11 international and regional organizations.¹¹⁷

Environmental challenges, including famine and drought, severely impact the country's well-being. Turkish development assistance therefore not only provides emergency relief but also includes capacity building initiatives to support long-term resilience and create employment.¹¹⁸ For example, in 2015, a training and research hospital, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Hospital, was inaugurated in Mogadishu. The project was undertaken by TİKA and the hospital would be operated jointly, with the Turkish Health Ministry providing staff and financial support for five years. After this period, Somalia would take full control of the hospital's operations.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, Turkish approach to capacity building and knowledge transfer stands out as a long-term development strategy. Both

¹¹² Abdirahman Ali Mugeere, Gökhan Kavak, and Mohammed Dhaysane, 'New Somali Justice Minister a Turkish University Grad', *Anadolu Agency*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/new-somali-justice-minister-a-turkish-university-grad/2012804>.

¹¹³ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Relations between Turkey and Somalia'.

¹¹⁴ For more detail, see TİKA development assistance reports, TİKA, 'Türkiye Kalkınma Yardımları Raporları', TİKA, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://tika.gov.tr/basin-odasi/yayinlar/turkiye-kalkinma-yarimlari-raporlari/>.

¹¹⁵ Neissan Besharati et al., 'South-South Peacebuilding: Lessons and Insights from Turkey and South Africa's Support to Fragile States', Occasional Paper, SAIIA Occasional Paper (SAIIA, March 2017), <https://saiia.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Occasional-Paper-254.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Anadolu Ajansı, 'Somalia Conference Is Turning Point for the Country', *Anadolu Agency*, 1 June 2012, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/somalia-conference-is-turning-point-for-the-country/364440>.

¹¹⁷ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'The Second İstanbul Conference on Somalia, Final Declaration, 1 June 2012, İstanbul', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, 1 June 2012, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-second-istanbul--conference-on-somalia_-final-declaration_-1-june-2012_-istanbul.en.mfa.

¹¹⁸ TİKA, 'Development Assistance Report of Türkiye 2021' (TİKA, 2022), <https://tika.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Development-Assistance-Report-of-Turkiye.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ Anadolu Ajansı, 'Turkish President Inaugurates Hospital in Somalia', *Anadolu Agency*, 25 January 2015, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkish-president-inaugurates-hospital-in-somalia/80873>.

governmental and non-governmental actors contribute to these efforts across different sectors such as health, engineering, agriculture and urban policy.¹²⁰

In 2022, President Erdoğan announced that Türkiye's humanitarian and development assistance to the country exceeded 1 billion dollars over the last decade. This announcement was made during Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's visit to Türkiye, where he emphasized that Somalians view Türkiye as an indispensable friend for their prosperity and development.¹²¹ That same year, humanitarian aid activities carried out by Turkish Red Crescent in the country reached over 1 million beneficiaries.¹²² A reporter noted that the aid packages distributed by Turkish public institutions and TİKA were labelled as "from the Turkish people to the Somali people."¹²³ A recent study highlights that Turkish NGOs viewed their assistance to the country not just as a humanitarian mission but also as a religious duty. It is also true that the ideologies and actions of Turkish NGOs created opportunities for the Turkish state to advance its market and regional interests.¹²⁴

2.8 Trade and Investment Ties

Türkiye's trade volume with Somalia was very limited before 2011. It was barely \$6 million in 2011 while it reached to \$42 million in 2011. As of 2024, the total trade volume between the two countries stood at \$376 million. Trade balance appears to favour Türkiye given that most of this trade is Türkiye's exports to Somalia while only \$21 million was Türkiye's imports from the country.¹²⁵ Agricultural products, especially grain-based products, products of the milling industry, seed oils and iron and steel constitute a significant portion of Somalia's imports from Türkiye. Türkiye is also among Somalia's largest trade partners – the third after China and India.¹²⁶

The value of Turkish companies' investments in the country was around \$100 million in 2020 (updated data is not available).¹²⁷ The Turkish private sector has become increasingly interested in Somalia's largely untapped yet promising market, leveraging Türkiye's ongoing involvement in the country.¹²⁸ Türkiye has played a significant role in rebuilding the infrastructure in the war-torn country. Turkish companies have rehabilitated and paved key roads, while also leading efforts to refurbishing public buildings that were destroyed during the civil war.¹²⁹ Turkish companies assume

¹²⁰ Besharati et al., 'South-South Peacebuilding: Lessons and Insights from Turkey and South Africa's Support to Fragile States'.

¹²¹ Ali Kemal Akan, 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Son 10 Yılda Somali'ye Yaptığımız İnsani ve Kalkınma Yardımlarının Tutarı 1 Milyar Doları Aştı', *Anadolu Agency*, 6 July 2022, 10, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-son-10-yilda-somaliye-yaptigimiz-insani-ve-kalkinma-yardimlarinin-tutari-1-milyar-dolari-asti/2631426>.

¹²² TİKA, 'Türkiye Development Assistance Report 2022' (TİKA, 2024), <https://tika.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/TurkiyeKalkinma2022ENG-Revised-by-BoosterWizad-1.pdf>.

¹²³ Verda Özer, 'Turkey's Soft Power in Africa', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 6 June 2016, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/verda-ozet/turkeys-soft-power-in-africa-100156>.

¹²⁴ Erdem Kayserilioğlu, 'Turkey's Aid Politics in Somalia: The Moral Economy of a Benevolent Expansion', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 22 November 2024, 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2024.2430062>.

¹²⁵ See the statistics provided by TUIK, TÜİK, 'TÜİK - Veri Portalı'.

¹²⁶ See 'Trade Map - Trade Statistics for International Business Development', accessed 7 April 2025, <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx>.

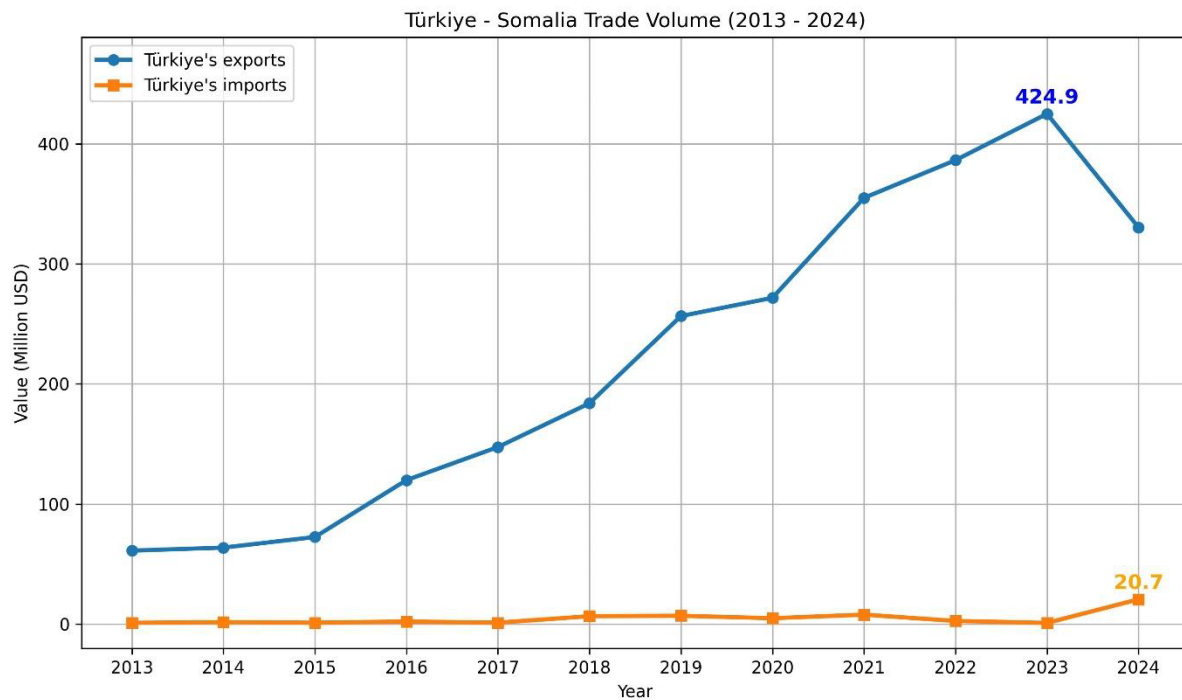
¹²⁷ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Relations between Turkey and Somalia'.

¹²⁸ Gizem Sucuoglu and Jason Stearns, 'Turkey in Somalia: Shifting Paradigms of Aid', Research Report, Research Report (SAIIA, November 2016), <https://saiia.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Turkey-In-Somalia-Shifting-Paradigms-of-Aid.pdf>.

¹²⁹ Abdiweli Mohamed Mohamoud, 'Turkey-Somalia Multitiered Relations: Economic Vantage Point', *Daily Sabah*, 21 September 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/turkey-somalia-multitiered-relations-economic-vantage-point>.

other large projects in the country and manage some of Somalia's most vital infrastructure.¹³⁰ For example, a Turkish firm, Favori LLC took over the renovation and management of Mogadishu Airport. The Following year, another Turkish company, Albayrak Group, took over the operations at Mogadishu Port.¹³¹ Turkish companies are also involved in other major infrastructure projects across the country, including the development of two vital highways connecting Mogadishu to neighbouring Lower and Middle Shabelle regions.¹³²

Graph 4: Türkiye-Somalia trade volume



According to reports, in 2021, the Galmudug regional administration entered into agreements with multiple companies for the construction of the Hobyo port, including a Turkish construction firm.¹³³ In 2024, a Turkish delegation led by Türkiye's Ambassador to Somalia, Alper Aktaş held talks with the state's president, Ahmed Abdi Karie to explore new investment opportunities in Galmudug. The discussions focused on establishing the necessary infrastructure for the state's development.¹³⁴ Defining such investments as critical components of Somalia's economic infrastructure, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Somalia, James Swan, highlighted the broader impact of Turkish investments and development assistance on the country.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Cannon, 'Contextualizing Turkey's Actions in Somalia'.

¹³¹ Brendon J. Cannon and Federico Donelli, 'Asymmetric Alliances and High Polarity: Evaluating Regional Security Complexes in the Middle East and Horn of Africa', *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (3 March 2020): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1693255>.

¹³² Abdinor Dahir and Sakariye Cismaan, 'Turkey in Africa: A Decade of Turkish Aid and State-Building in Somalia', Policy Outlook, Trt World Research Centre (Trt World Research Centre, August 2021), https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Turkey_Somalia_Afr.pdf.

¹³³ Mohamoud, 'Turkey-Somalia Multitiered Relations'.

¹³⁴ Mohammed Dhaysane, 'Türkiye Exploring Investment Projects in Central Somalia, Says Envoy', *Anadolu Agency*, 24 September 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiye-exploring-investment-projects-in-central-somalia-says-envoy/3340408>.

¹³⁵ Hazal Özcan, 'Turkish Investment in Somalia Had Broader Economic Impact: Official', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 13 November 2020, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-investment-in-somalia-had-broader-economic-impact-official-159985>.

At the 2016 Private Sector Investment Conference in Istanbul, co-chaired by Turkish President Erdoğan and Somali President Mohamud, Turkish investors expressed interest not only in Somalia's infrastructure and ports, but also in energy, ICT, agriculture, livestock and fisheries.¹³⁶ While Turkish investments in the country are still mostly in the construction, infrastructure and transportation sectors while Turkish textile products have also become popular in the country. They are defined by many Somalians as reliable and affordable. A Somali who visited Türkiye multiple times, told Anadolu Agency that every piece of furniture in his home is imported from Türkiye, stating, "from television to the dishwasher to the refrigerator, everything is made in Türkiye."¹³⁷ Interviews with Somali people also reveal that perceptions toward Turkish activities tend to be mostly positive. For example, one Somali said that Türkiye help capacity-building and provide service delivery while also building the best hospital in the country, another one praised Türkiye's contribution to rehabilitation of the war-torn country: "Look at the airport, for a country that has been out of touch for 25 years to have that kind of airport... They are planning to build – have built roads, the Turkish. They brought this town back".¹³⁸

As will be elaborated in more detail in the following pages, Türkiye and Somalia signed a Defense and Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement in February 2024. In addition to security cooperation, the deal will also support Somalia protect its rich maritime sources and commercial activities in the wider region. This is particularly important considering that fishing is a critical source of income for the Somalis living along the coasts, but illegal fishing as well as the resurgence of piracy off the Somali coast disrupts trade activities in the region.¹³⁹ It is believed that Somalia experiences an annual loss of \$500 million due to the illegal and unregulated fishing activities of external countries such as China and Iran. This recent agreement is expected to enhance Somalia's navy and coast guard, potentially increasing deterrence against illegal fishing and piracy.¹⁴⁰

In 2021, Türkiye's Ziraat Bank, the biggest state-owned bank in Türkiye, has become the first international bank to open a branch in the country in 50 years. The bank is expected to contribute to the development of Somalia's financial sector and to boost its economy.¹⁴¹ It is believed that daily Turkish Airlines flights have strengthened ties between the Turkish and Somali business communities, fostering greater connectivity.¹⁴² Somalia has an abundance of natural resources with preliminary explorations indicate significant deposits of oil, gas and minerals. Seismic studies suggest that Somalia could possess at least 30 billion barrels of oil and gas reserves,¹⁴³ making it an attractive partner in Türkiye's quest for energy cooperation.

¹³⁶ Sucuoglu and Stearns, 'Turkey in Somalia: Shifting Paradigms of Aid'.

¹³⁷ Mohammed Dhaysane, 'Türkiye's Engagement in Somalia Has Opened Avenues for Somali Businesses', *Anadolu Agency*, 8 February 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiyes-engagement-in-somalia-has-opened-avenues-for-somali-businesses/2496095>.

¹³⁸ Onur Sazak and Aueven Elizabeth Woods, 'Thinking Outside the Compound: Turkey's Approach to Peacebuilding in Somalia', in *Rising Powers and Peacebuilding: Breaking the Mold?*, ed. Charles Call and Cedric De Conning (Springer International Publishing, 2017), 167–89, <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/27874/1002130.pdf?sequence=1#page=176>.

¹³⁹ Elem Eyice Tepeciklioğlu, 'Türkiye-Somalia Maritime Deal: Navigating Regional Dynamics', 28 March 2024, <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/12120207/brief-n/13013960/>.

¹⁴⁰ Tunç Demirtaş, 'Turkish Influence Expands: Turkey-Somalia Maritime Agreement in the Horn of Africa', *Politics Today* (blog), 4 March 2024, <https://politicstoday.org/turkey-presence-in-the-horn-of-africa-somalias-maritime-agreement/>.

¹⁴¹ Mohammed Dhaysane, 'Türkiye's Ziraat Bank 1st International Bank to Open Branch in Somalia in 50 Years', *Anadolu Agency*, 30 October 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiye-s-ziraat-bank-1st-international-bank-to-open-branch-in-somalia-in-50-years/3038148>.

¹⁴² Dhaysane, 'Türkiye's Engagement in Somalia Has Opened Avenues for Somali Businesses'.

¹⁴³ International Trade Administration of USA, 'Somalia Country Commercial Guide', International Trade Administration of USA Website, 22 January 2024, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/somalia-oil-and-gas>.

2.9 Energy Cooperation

Türkiye, as a country heavily reliant on external sources to meet its energy needs, aims to diversify its suppliers. As part of these efforts, it has concluded energy cooperation deals with several African countries, including Somalia. In March 2024, the two nations signed an agreement of offshore oil and natural gas cooperation. Noting that the deal aims to “strengthen Türkiye’s presence in the Horn of Africa with new collaborations in the field of energy”, Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Alpaslan Bayraktar, said that it includes exploration, evaluation, development and production of oil in Somalia’s onshore and offshore blocks.¹⁴⁴ In July 2024, Türkiye’s state-owned energy company TPAO (Turkish Petroleum Corporation) and Somalia’s Petroleum Authority signed another deal for hydrocarbon exploration in land areas, furthering the cooperation in this field.¹⁴⁵

As part of these agreements, a Turkish seismic research vessel, Oruç Reis, arrived off the coast of Somalia at the end of October 2024 and began searching oil and natural gas. The seismic exploration vessel will conduct seismic activities across three licensed areas, each covering 5,000 square kilometers. President Erdogan attended the ceremony to mark the ship’s departure¹⁴⁶ while Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud inaugurated a welcoming ceremony for its arrival. Describing it a “historic day for Somalia”, “Somalia has never had a better opportunity than the one we have today”, said Mohamud during the ceremony. Accompanied by a Turkish delegation, Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister, Bayraktar, also attended the ceremony, stating that the bilateral cooperation would not be limited to oil and gas exploration but would also extend to the mining and electricity sectors.¹⁴⁷

As noted, Türkiye’s increasing energy demands have prompted efforts to diversify its suppliers and expedited its energy diplomacy with African countries. This is therefore not surprising that the deal with Somalia was followed by similar agreements with Niger and Senegal. In July, Türkiye concluded a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for cooperation in mining with resource-rich Niger following the official visit of Turkish FM Hakan Fidan to the country. The “Memorandum of Understanding on Energy and Hydrocarbons” with Senegal was signed during the official visit of Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Diakharr Faye’s to Ankara in late October and included cooperation in energy, oil and natural gas.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, energy cooperation with Somalia is likely to play a more prominent role in Türkiye’s relationship with the country, though it may not be the primary focus.

¹⁴⁴ Can Sezer, ‘Turkey Signs Energy Cooperation Deal with Somalia’, *Reuters*, 7 March 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/turkey-signs-energy-cooperation-deal-with-somalia-2024-03-07/>.

¹⁴⁵ Handan Kazancı, ‘Türkiye to Commence Oil and Natural Gas Exploration in Somali Territories’, *Anadolu Agency*, 25 October 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/natural-gas/turkiye-to-commence-oil-and-natural-gas-exploration-in-somali-territories/44210>.

¹⁴⁶ Zeynep Rakipoğlu and Mustafa Hatipoğlu, ‘Turkish President Erdogan Sees off Turkish Energy Research Vessel Bound for Somalia’, *Anadolu Agency*, 5 October 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkish-president-erdogan-sees-off-turkish-energy-research-vessel-bound-for-somalia/3352383>.

¹⁴⁷ Mohammed Dhaysane and Handan Kazancı, ‘Somali President Welcomes Türkiye’s Oruc Reis Seismic Vessel for Oil, Gas Exploration’, *Anadolu Agency*, 25 October 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somali-president-welcomes-turkiyes-oruc-reis-seismic-vessel-for-oil-gas-exploration/3374805>.

¹⁴⁸ Handan Kazancı, ‘Türkiye, Niger Sign Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation in Mining’, *Anadolu Agency*, 22 October 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/general/turkiye-niger-sign-memorandum-of-understanding-for-cooperation-in-mining/44080>.

2.10 Security Ties

Türkiye's involvement in Somalia's security domain started with its participation in the UN peacekeeping mission in Somalia, United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II) between January 1993 and February 1994. It was upon the invitation Türkiye received from the UN, to participate in the new US-led peace operation in the country. After the Turkish parliament's approval in 1992, a mechanized company-sized contingent was dispatched to the country. The Turkish contingent was responsible to protect the Mogadishu airport given that Somalia lacked critical infrastructure, and the airport was one of few facilities that connected the country to the world. The contingent was also tasked with the responsibility to protect UNOSOM II Headquarters, escorting convoys, facilitating the security and ensuring the delivery of food to the Somalians. The command of the mission was assumed by a Turkish General for a period.¹⁴⁹

Türkiye also participates in the Combined Task Force 151, established in 2009 to help ensure the safety of maritime trade and free navigation off the Somalia Coast and Gulf of Aden. This multinational force, operating alongside the EU and NATO operations, aims at combatting piracy and armed robbery incidents in the wider Indian Ocean as piracy attacks significantly disrupt commercial trade activities and harm the livelihoods of the coastal people. The command rotates among the participating countries every 3 to 6 months and Türkiye has assumed this role seven times to date. These periods include May-August 2009, September-November 2010, September-December 2012, August-December 2015, June-November 2017, June-December 2020 and most recently, from July 2024 to January 2025.¹⁵⁰

In 2017, Türkiye established a military training facility, (TURKSOM) in Mogadishu, to train Somali Armed Forces (SAF), provide logistical support to SNA and assist in combatting terrorist groups. Advertised as Türkiye's largest overseas military base abroad, TURKSOM has already trained over 5,000 Somalia soldiers and officers both in Ankara and Mogadishu. The aim is to train one third of Somali soldiers and strengthen the capacity of SAF especially against terrorist groups.¹⁵¹ Spanning 400-hectares, the installation stands as a testament to Türkiye's dedication to fostering peace and stability in the country. The training mission is defined as the most ambitious attempt at security sector reform by any external actor in recent years. Experts also argue that the term base "misleading" giving that the role of the Turkish troops in the country -training Somalia's armed forces – aligns with the contemporary activities of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). Therefore, Turkish officials often prefer using the terms such as military training "facility", "camp" or "complex" but not a "base."¹⁵² TURKSOM has been instrumental in strengthening Somalia's offensive capabilities, especially amid the rising attacks by terrorist groups like al-Shabab and Daesh. The Gorgor Battalions, an elite unit of the Somali army, are also equipped and trained by Türkiye and positioned on the frontlines in the fight against those terrorist organizations. It is reported that the TURKSOM Military Academy has been recognized as a university-level institution and started to offer degrees in defense studies in 2024.

Türkiye and Somalia signed another defense and economic cooperation agreement in early February 2024 after Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Somalia on January 1, 2024. The deal would provide Ethiopia with access to the sea through Somaliland's Port of Berbera

¹⁴⁹ Uğur Güngör, 'Leading Peace Operations: Turkey's Experience', SAM Paper, SAM Papers (Center For Strategic Research - SAM, November 2017).

¹⁵⁰ Combined Maritime Forces, 'CTF 151: Counter-Piracy', *Combined Maritime Forces* (blog), 17 September 2010, <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy/>.

¹⁵¹ Mohammed Dhaysane, 'Somalia's President Praises Türkiye for Its Support', *Anadolu Agency*, 26 September 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalias-president-praises-turkiye-for-its-support/3000888>.

¹⁵² Ash Rossiter and Brendon J. Cannon, 'Re-Examining the "Base": The Political and Security Dimensions of Turkey's Military Presence in Somalia', *Insight Turkey* 21, no. 1 (2019): 167–88.

in return for the recognition of Somaliland's official independence.¹⁵³ Somalia President defined the deal as a violation of international law and an overt interference with Somalia's unity and sovereignty.¹⁵⁴ The agreement with Türkiye, reached amid regional tensions, was celebrated by Somalian officials as a "historic" deal, expected to strengthen Somalia's ability to tackle terrorism, piracy, illegal activities and other external threats that undermine the nation's sovereignty.¹⁵⁵ The specifics of the agreement have not yet been disclosed to the public as it awaits ratification by the Turkish Parliament. However, reportedly, Türkiye will help in enhancing Somalia's maritime security, particularly by building and modernizing the Somali navy. Additionally, it will provide training and equipment support to Somali naval forces and conduct joint operations.¹⁵⁶ Recent reports indicate that Türkiye plans to deliver a batch of Bayraktar Akıncı UCAVs to Somalia to bolster the country's defense capabilities, enhance its counterterrorism efforts and counter the expansion of al-Shabab.¹⁵⁷

As highlighted by Turkish Ambassador to Somalia, Alper Aktaş, the country's strategic location in the Horn makes its security and stability a global priority. Somalia's security is essential not only for regional security but also for safeguarding global maritime trade and counterterrorism efforts.¹⁵⁸ In other words, Somalia's security challenges have far-reaching consequences for the entire region. Türkiye assumes to play a pivotal role as a security provider in Somalia, integrating security cooperation with mediation initiatives as part of its comprehensive approach to peacebuilding. These efforts align with its broader strategic aspirations in the region.

2.11 Türkiye's Mediation Efforts in the Region

Türkiye's role in Africa's security landscape has grown exponentially in recent years. However, the country has long avoided involvement in Africa's conflicts, focusing instead on peacebuilding through mediation efforts. Türkiye seeks to position itself as a neutral mediator in different African contexts, interested in regional peace and stability. This is not surprising, as Türkiye, along with Finland, co-launched the Mediation for Peace Initiative in 2010 to support international mediation efforts and recognize the importance of mediation as an effective conflict resolution tool. As noted by Akpınar: "These tools offer Turkey regional and international visibility and leverage on the continent."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu, 'Türkiye as a Mediator between Somalia and Ethiopia', *SAM Snapshots* (blog), 9 July 2024, <https://sam.gov.tr/snapshots/why-is-turkiye-s-recent-deal-woth-somalia-being-hailed-as-historic-0>.

¹⁵⁴ Imad K. Harb, 'The Dangerous Chipping Away of Somalia's Sovereignty', Arab Center Washington DC, 26 April 2023, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-dangerous-chipping-away-of-somalias-sovereignty/>.

¹⁵⁵ Tepeciklioğlu, 'Türkiye-Somalia Maritime Deal'.

¹⁵⁶ Tepeciklioğlu.

¹⁵⁷ F. T. L. Somalia, 'Turkey to Deliver More Bayraktar Akıncı Drones to Somalia on March 18 - Somali News Today Live', FTL Somalia, 17 March 2025, <https://www.ftlsomalia.com/turkey-to-deliver-more-bayraktar-akinci-drones-to-somalia-on-march-18/>; Türkiye Today, 'Türkiye to Deliver Bayraktar Akıncı Drones to Somalia: Report', accessed 8 April 2025, <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/turkiye/turkiye-to-deliver-bayraktar-akinci-drones-to-somalia-report-132555/>.

¹⁵⁸ Türkiye Today, 'Turkish Mission Plays Key Role in Somalia's Counterterrorism Efforts', accessed 8 April 2025, <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/world/turkish-mission-plays-key-role-in-somalias-counterterrorism-efforts-127892/>.

¹⁵⁹ Pınar Akpınar, 'Turkey's Peacebuilding in Somalia: The Limits of Humanitarian Diplomacy', *Turkish Studies* 14, no. 4 (December 2013): 735–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2013.863448>.

2.12 Previous Efforts

Türkiye has engaged in several mediation initiatives in the Horn of Africa and in the wider region. For example, in 2021, Türkiye offered to mediate between Ethiopia and Sudan to address their border dispute over the Al-Fashaga region. This was announced during the visit of Ethiopian President Abiy Ahmed's visit to Türkiye in August, when both countries signed a military cooperation agreement. Turkish President Erdoğan said that Türkiye is willing to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the dispute between the two countries.¹⁶⁰ General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman al-Burhan, the then chairman of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan (now the President of the Transitional Sovereign Council) visited Türkiye a week before Ahmed's visit. Speaking during a joint press conference with Abiy Ahmed, Erdoğan said that their discussions also addressed the tensions in the al-Fashaga region between Sudan and Ethiopia, both of which are Türkiye's friendly nations. Erdoğan also offered Türkiye's assistance in mediating efforts to end the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region. As discussed earlier, Erdoğan emphasized the importance of Ethiopia's peace, stability and territorial integrity, noting its strategic location in Africa. He warned that the escalation of the conflict in Tigray could have far-reaching consequences for the entire region.¹⁶¹

In September, the Sudanese Foreign Minister, Mariam Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi confirmed that the country accepted Türkiye's mediation proposal.¹⁶² Previously, in an interview with Anadolu Agency, Ethiopian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Ambassador Dina Mufti also stated that Ethiopia would appreciate Türkiye's mediation on the conflict. Highlighting Türkiye's strong ties with both countries, the ambassador urged Ankara to convey to "our Sudanese brothers" that war would not serve the interests of either nation.¹⁶³ Although both Ethiopia and Sudan welcomed Türkiye's offer, there have been no significant developments linked to Türkiye's mediation attempt.

Emphasizing the need for dialogue and negotiations, Türkiye also extended an offer to mediate between Egypt and Ethiopia over the latter's Grand Renaissance Dam in 2021. This happened after Türkiye began normalizing relations with Egypt, following years of strained ties that ensued after the 2013 coup d'état in Egypt. It was noted that Türkiye was on the ground to mediate the Dam dispute between the two countries.¹⁶⁴ Although the specifics of Türkiye's mediation efforts have not been disclosed publicly, this process appears to continue given that Türkiye's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hakan Fidan, has recently engaged in shuttle diplomacy between Addis Ababa and Cairo. Following his visit to Ethiopia, Fidan visited Cairo in early August, 2024 which signals Türkiye's key mediating role in the resolution of the conflict. Reportedly, it was Egypt's intelligence chief, Abbas Kamel, that reached out to Türkiye, highlighting Cairo's interest in having Ankara serve as a mediator capable of exerting influence over Ethiopia.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ 'Turkey Offers to Mediate between Ethiopia and Sudan', *AP News*, 19 August 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-middle-east-africa-sudan-turkey-4f3fc509ed7d23f5cfcf8871d8234acd>.

¹⁶¹ 'Turkish President Erdogan Offers to Mediate End to Ethiopia Fighting', *Al Arabiya English*, 18 August 2021, sec. World News, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2021/08/18/Turkish-President-Erdogan-offers-to-mediate-end-to-Ethiopia-fighting->; 'Turkey Offers to Mediate between Ethiopia and Sudan', *The Independent*, 18 August 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan-ethiopia-abiy-ahmed-sudan-b1904829.html>; Presidency of Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 'We are carrying out important projects with Ethiopia in terms of humanitarian and development aid'.

¹⁶² Middle East Monitor, 'Sudan Accepts Turkey Mediation Offer to End Disputes with Ethiopia', *Middle East Monitor*, 20 September 2021, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210920-sudan-accepts-turkey-mediation-offer-to-end-disputes-with-ethiopia/>.

¹⁶³ Sadik Kadir Abdu, "'Ethiopia to Welcome Mediation of Turkey with Sudan'", *Anadolu Agency*, 17 February 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/ethiopia-to-welcome-mediation-of-turkey-with-sudan/2147257>.

¹⁶⁴ Muzaffer Hakan Tok, 'Turkey Can Mediate in the Renaissance Dam Dispute', *Daily Sabah*, 24 June 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/turkey-can-mediate-in-the-renaissance-dam-dispute>.

¹⁶⁵ Birhanu, 'Behind-the-Scenes in the GERD Diplomacy'.

Türkiye also mediated talks between Somali and Somaliland, a breakaway region of Somalia. The latter unilaterally announced secession from Somalia in 1991 and there have been several rounds of talks between those conflicting parties. After nearly twenty years of prolonged silence, the political leaders first met in London in February 2012. Later, in June 2012, the president of the Somali Federal Government, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed also met for the first time with his Somaliland counterpart, Ahmed Mohamed Silanyo in Dubai, where they engaged in formal talks. Türkiye also hosted three negotiation rounds between the two sides to facilitate the peace process. The first round, which included the presidents of both countries took place in Ankara in April, 2013. It culminated in the concluding of the Ankara Document, comprising thirteen points on possible areas of cooperation. In July 2013, Türkiye hosted the Istanbul Conference, which led to an agreement allowing Somaliland to directly receive international aid from donors. In early 2014, another conference was held in Istanbul and Türkiye hosted the third round of the talks between the two countries.¹⁶⁶ Türkiye's efforts failed to produce any concrete outcomes but demonstrated its commitment to revive the dialogue between the two countries and promote regional stability through diplomatic engagement.

2.13 Current Initiatives and Ankara Declaration

Türkiye recently acted as a mediator between Ethiopia and Somalia with an overall aim to ease longstanding tension between the two neighbouring countries rooted in historical mistrust and competing regional interests in the region. A significant source of contention has been the territorial dispute over the Ogaden region in Ethiopia, home to a large Somali population. These challenges are further complicated by the region's complex security and competing regional alliances. The situation escalated when Ethiopia signed an MoU with Somaliland on the use of the latter's Port of Berbera in early 2024. With a population of 120 million, Ethiopia is the most populous landlocked country in the world and lost its sea access following Eritrea's secession in 1993.¹⁶⁷ Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed defined Red Sea access as an "existential issue" and "natural right" for Ethiopia, stating that the country would resort to force if peaceful means to secure it fail.¹⁶⁸ Roughly 95% of Ethiopia's trade pass through the Djibouti port, which renders Ethiopian economy vulnerable to external interventions.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre condemned Ethiopia for concluding the agreement and defined it as an attack to Somalia's sovereignty while Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud called it as a violation of all international norms.¹⁷⁰ On 6 January, Mohamud also signed a law nullifying the MoU between Ethiopia and Somalia.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Unit for Political Studies Doha Institute, 'Negotiations between Somaliland and the Federal Government: Prospects of Success or Failure', Situation Assessment, Situation Assessment, 30 June 2020, <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/Negotiations-between-Somaliland-and-the-Federal-Government.aspx>. See also Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Press Release Regarding the Third Round of Negotiations between Somalia and Somaliland', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, 20 January 2014, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-22_-20-january-2014_-press-release-regarding-the-third-round-of-negotiations-between-somalia-and-somaliland.en.mfa.

¹⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, 'The Stakes in the Ethiopia-Somaliland Deal | Crisis Group', International Crisis Group Website, 6 March 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia-somaliland/stakes-ethiopia-somaliland-deal>.

¹⁶⁸ The Independent Uganda, 'New War Looms over Nile Water', *The Independent Uganda*, 9 September 2024, sec. The News Today, <https://www.independent.co.ug/new-war-looms-over-nile-water/>.

¹⁶⁹ Tepeciklioğlu, 'Türkiye-Somalia Maritime Deal'.

¹⁷⁰ Mohamed Sheikh Nor, 'Somaliland – Ethiopia Port Deal Sets Neighbours on Edge', *The Africa Report.com*, 4 January 2024, <https://www.theafricareport.com/332110/somaliland-ethiopia-port-deal-sets-neighbours-on-edge/>.

¹⁷¹ Abdi Sheikh, 'Somalia President Signs Law Nullifying Ethiopia-Somaliland Port Deal', *Reuters*, 7 January 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/somalia-president-signs-law-nullifying-ethiopia-somaliland-port-deal-2024-01-07/>.

Somalian officials later declared that they would not consider mediation with Ethiopia unless the country annul the contentious MoU and reaffirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia.¹⁷² With no progress on the implementation of the MoU, the two sides agreed to meet in Ankara for mediation by Türkiye. Reportedly, it was the Ethiopian side that sought Türkiye's mediation in May 2024, in Ankara.¹⁷³ On July 1, 2024, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan hosted Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Taye Atske Selassie and Somalian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ahmed Moallim Fiqi in Ankara, where two parties signed the Joint Ankara Statement. While reaffirming their commitment to address their disputes and continue the dialogue process, they expressed their gratitude to Türkiye, for its facilitator role.¹⁷⁴ The two parties agreed to convene in Ankara in early September for a second round of talks; however, they met earlier on August 12, instead of the originally scheduled September 2, following Hakan Fidan's visit to Ethiopia on 3 August.¹⁷⁵ The parties met earlier likely due to their desire to accelerate the process, to avoid third-party interference that could hinder the process and even to prevent third parties to spoil the outcomes. Hakan Fidan engaged in shuttle diplomacy and talked with the presidents of Somalia and Ethiopia separately. In a joint press conference held on 13 August 2024, Fidan announced that the talks addressed a broader range of cooperation compared to the first round and that significant progress had been made.¹⁷⁶

Once again, both parties expressed their gratitude for Türkiye for its role as a mediator role and its efforts to ease tensions in the region but emphasized different points that were crucial to their respective interests and priorities. Noting that great things can be achieved through ongoing engagement, Ethiopian Foreign Minister Selassie added that Ethiopia seeks to "secure dependable access to and from the sea." Somalian Foreign Minister Fiqi stated that Somalia is dedicated to maintaining its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and noted that a peaceful and mutually beneficial outcome should be in line with international law and UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.¹⁷⁷ Both parties voiced their hope to reach a final resolution during the third round and agreed to convene on the 17th of September in Ankara for the next round of talks. However, the third round of talks between Ethiopia and Somalia were later postponed with no official statements from either party. On 17 August, Somali President Mohamud announced in a televised address that his country would not engage in further talks with Ethiopia unless Ethiopia acknowledges Somalia's sovereignty.¹⁷⁸ While this statement raised concerns about the continuation of the mediation efforts, Turkish Foreign Minister Fidan held separate meetings with Selassie and Fiqi in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in late September 2024. It was later announced from the

¹⁷² Al Jazeera, 'Somalia Rejects Mediation with Ethiopia Gov't over Somaliland Port Deal', Al Jazeera, 14 January 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/18/somalia-rejects-mediation-with-ethiopia-govt-over-somaliland-port-deal>.

¹⁷³ BBC Türkçe, 'Somali-Etiyopya görüşmeleri: Türkiye nasıl arabulucu oldu, anlaşma sağlanabilir mi?', BBC News Türkçe, 13 August 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/cpw8xl54vj4o>.

¹⁷⁴ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Joint Ankara Statement', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, 1 July 2024, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-ankara-statement-\(by-turkiye--ethiopia-and-somalia\).en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-ankara-statement-(by-turkiye--ethiopia-and-somalia).en.mfa).

¹⁷⁵ Gökhan Çeliker, 'Türkiye to Host Ethiopia-Somalia Talks on Monday', *Anadolu Agency*, 12 August 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiye-to-host-ethiopia-somalia-talks-on-monday/3301104>.

¹⁷⁶ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Joint Press Conference by Foreign Minister H.E. Hakan Fidan with Foreign Minister of Ethiopia H.E. Taye Atske Selassie and Foreign Minister of Somalia H.E. Ahmed Moallim Fiqi, 13 August 2024, Ankara', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, 13 August 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-press-conference-by-foreign-minister-he-hakan-fidan-with-he-taye-atske-selassie-and-he-ahmed-moallim-fiqi.en.mfa>.

¹⁷⁷ Esra Tekin, 'Türkiye to Continue Bridging Gaps between Somalia, Ethiopia: Foreign Minister', *Anadolu Agency*, 13 August 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkiye-to-continue-bridging-gaps-between-somalia-ethiopia-foreign-minister/3302956>.

¹⁷⁸ Abdolgader Mohamed Ali, 'Can Turkish Mediation Mend Somalia and Ethiopia's Rift?', *newarab.com* (The New Arab, 19 August 2024), <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/can-turkish-mediation-mend-somalia-and-ethiopias-rift>.

official X account of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that, despite the challenges, Ankara process remains ongoing.¹⁷⁹

The second round of talks concluded in August without an agreement with no date set for the third round. However, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hosted the President of Somalia, Hasan Sheikh Mohamud and the President of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed Ali on 11 December 2024 in Ankara. This was the third round of negotiations, culminated in the Ankara Declaration where they decided to conclude technical negotiations by the end of February 2025. The parties reiterated their respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and expressed their gratitude to Erdoğan for his mediator role and commitment to the process.¹⁸⁰ Turkey effectively assumed the role by capitalizing on its strong relationship with both countries and its extensive experience in mediation.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries were restored shortly afterwards, reflected in Somalia President Mohamud's visit to Ethiopia in January 2025. During the visit, both countries agreed to re-establish their ties by re-instating full diplomatic representation. Ethiopian ambassador to Somalia had been expelled in April 2024, after Ethiopia and Somaliland signed the MoU with Somaliland. In a statement from the Somali Presidency, it was noted that: "this visit builds on the recent agreement reached in Ankara. This renewed cooperation underscores a new era of collaboration between Somalia and Ethiopia."¹⁸¹

Shortly after Türkiye brokered a deal between Ethiopia and Somalia, Turkish President Erdoğan offered to mediate between Sudan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Speaking with the leader of Sudan's Sovereign Council, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Erdoğan expressed Ankara's willingness to help bring "peace and stability" in the country.¹⁸² There have been previous efforts to mediate between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by al-Burhan and the paramilitary force, Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, including the US-Saudi Arabia-led Jeddah Process. Yet, these initiatives fell short of preventing the war from escalating further. What is particularly noteworthy about Türkiye's offer is its recognition of external influences and their significant role in shaping the dynamics of the conflict. Although the Sudanese government accuses the UAE of supplying arms to the RSF and thereby prolonging the conflict, the UAE rejected such allegations.¹⁸³ During a meeting in Port Sudan in early January, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan asked Türkiye's Deputy Foreign Minister, Burhanettin Duran convey the Sudanese leadership's welcoming of Erdoğan's offer. In a statement from the UAE foreign ministry, it was highlighted that: "the UAE is fully prepared to cooperate and coordinate with the Turkish efforts and all diplomatic initiatives to end the conflict in Sudan and find a comprehensive solution to the crisis."¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Can Efesoy, 'Dışişleri Bakanı Fidan, Etiyopya ve Somalili Mevkidaşlarıyla New York'ta Görüştü', *Anadolu Agency*, 27 September 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/disisleri-bakani-fidan-etiyopya-ve-somalili-mevkidaslariyla-new-yorkta-gorustu/3343011>.

¹⁸⁰ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Ankara Declaration by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Federal Republic of Somalia Facilitated by the Republic of Türkiye', Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, accessed 8 April 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/etiopya-federal-demokratik-cumhuriyeti-ve-somalifederal-cumhuriyeti-nin-ankara-bildirisi.en.mfa>.

¹⁸¹ Sadık Kadir Abdu, 'Somali President Visits Ethiopia in First Trip since Bilateral Disputes Resolved by Ankara-Brokered Agreement', *Anadolu Agency*, 13 January 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somali-president-visits-ethiopia-in-first-trip-since-bilateral-disputes-resolved-by-ankara-brokered-agreement/3447800>.

¹⁸² Daily Sabah, 'Türkiye Prepares to Step in as Mediator in Sudan Crisis', Daily Sabah, 6 January 2025, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-prepares-to-step-in-as-mediator-in-sudan-crisis>.

¹⁸³ Presidency of Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 'Türkiye's Erdogan offers to mediate between Sudan and the UAE', Presidency of Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 13 December 2024, http://wt.iletisim.gov.tr/english/dis_basinda_turkiye/detay/turkeys-erdogan-offers-to-mediate-between-sudan-and-the-uae/.

¹⁸⁴ Meryem Demirhan, 'Sudan Welcomes Turkish Offer to Mediate Peace — Sudanese FM', TRT World, accessed 8 April 2025, <https://www.trtworld.com/turkiye/sudan-welcomes-turkish-offer-to-mediate-peace-sudanese-fm-18250566>.

During Rwandan President Paul Kagame's visit to Turkey on January 23, 2025, President Erdoğan expressed Türkiye's willingness to support resolving the conflict between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). At the joint press conference with Erdoğan, Kagame praised Türkiye's successful mediation between Somalia and Ethiopia, suggesting that Türkiye's efforts might be helpful in addressing the situation in the region, involving the DRC.¹⁸⁵ A few days later, the DRC declined Türkiye's mediation offer. After his meeting with Turkish Ambassador to the DRC, Hüsnü Murat Ülkü, Congolese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gracia Yamba Kazadi emphasized that Kishasa is focusing on "African solution" and "has not requested external mediation."¹⁸⁶

The escalating tensions between the regional countries have the potential to further destabilize the region. These already complex regional dynamics are being exacerbated by Houthi attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea. To deescalate the tensions and resolve conflicts peacefully, engaging in constructive dialogue is essential. Otherwise, the situation could strengthen the position of al Shabab, allowing the group to exploit the instability to expand its influence. In such an environment, the role of mediation is vital for the peaceful resolution of the region's many conflicts. Türkiye has been involved in several mediation initiatives in the Horn of Africa and in the wider region, either directly mediating talks at the request of regional countries or offering its services as a mediator, which was welcomed by the conflicting parties.

2.14 Conclusion

The strategic location of the Horn of Africa attracted the attention of several regional and international actors, leading to increased competition and rivalries in the region. The Horn has a unique strategic location alongside key maritime trade routes connecting Europe and Asia. It is estimated that 12 percent of the world trade goes through the Horn of Africa and Red Sea.¹⁸⁷ However, the region is also home to several conflicts or is in close proximity to conflict zones. In such an environment, conflict resolution mechanisms, including mediation, are crucial for de-escalating tensions in an already volatile region. However, competing regional interests complicate these efforts.

Over the past years, the Horn of Africa has also become a key region for Türkiye. The country increased its engagement in the region through a comprehensive strategy that includes trade ties, investments, diplomatic initiatives, development assistance, education, capacity building, security cooperation and mediation initiatives. The latter gained significant policy and media attention as Türkiye positions itself as an active mediator in regional disputes. In doing so, it leverages its diplomatic ties with the regional countries and its growing influence in the region. Türkiye has strong and well-established relations particularly with Somalia and Ethiopia while its relations with Djibouti and Eritrea remain largely contentious. The country will likely increase its engagement with regional countries, enabling cooperation with friendly nations including Italy to address shared challenges.

¹⁸⁵ Esra Tekin and İlayda Çakırtekin, 'Türkiye Ready to Support Resolving Dispute between Rwanda, DRC: President Erdogan', *Anadolu Agency*, 24 January 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiye-ready-to-support-resolving-dispute-between-rwanda-drc-president-erdogan/3460636>.

¹⁸⁶ Patrick Ilunga, 'Congo Rejects Türkiye Offer of Mediation in Spat with Rwanda', *The EastAfrican*, 26 January 2025, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/congo-rejects-tuerkiye-offer-of-mediation-in-spat-with-rwanda--4901940>.

¹⁸⁷ Motaz Zahran, 'Stability in the Horn of Africa Is Vital to Global Trade | Opinion', *Newsweek*, 10 December 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/stability-horn-africa-vital-global-trade-security-opinion-1998578>.

3. Türkiye in the Sahel

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3.1 Introduction

Türkiye's involvement in the Sahel and in wider West Africa is relatively new when compared to its established presence in other parts of the continent. Historically, Türkiye shares closer ties with North and East African countries due to cultural and religious connections. Although the peoples of Niger, Chad and Sudan also have historical ties with Türkiye, the whole Sahel region did not come under Ottoman rule. Bilateral ties between the Republic of Türkiye and the Sahelian states, most of which are former French colonies, had been limited until the 2000s. Recent anti-French sentiments in the region, however, have provided opportunities for Türkiye.

Trade and investment relations along with various soft power currencies have enabled Türkiye to expand its footprint in the Sahelian countries. It is evidenced that the presence of embassies has significantly conducted to the increase in Türkiye's trade¹⁸⁸, while Turkish Airlines have critically facilitated Türkiye's soft power.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, Türkiye appears to enhance its presence in the security landscape by gaining ground in arms sales. The latter is particularly important, as Turkish weaponry, particularly UAVs and UCAVs, has proven successful in several conflict zones, making it crucial for regional countries grappling with various terrorist groups.

This chapter analyses Türkiye's relationship with Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan, and South Sudan. The post-coup context is the focus of the chapter, though the pre-coup context is also introduced to highlight the continuity in bilateral relations. The official contacts and agreements between Türkiye and the Sahelian states are documented through the records of *Devlet Arşivleri* (State Archives) and *Resmî Gazete* (Official Gazette). The chapter features mutual visits, trade figures, and student numbers, as well as development and security engagements.

3.2 Relations with Mali

Ankara-Bamako relationship started in 1969, when Turkish ambassador to Dakar was accredited to represent Türkiye in the Republic of Mali.¹⁹⁰ Ankara initially participated in global efforts to assist Mali by dispatching a tuberculosis specialist under the auspices of the World Health Organization in 1972.¹⁹¹ Türkiye was one of the significant contributors to the emergency relief assistance program

¹⁸⁸ Tepeciklioğlu, A. O., Eyice Tepeciklioğlu, E. & Karabıyık, C. 2024, *(Exploring) the Impact of Turkey's Embassies on Trade with sub-Saharan Africa*, in «Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies», 26(3), 360-377.

¹⁸⁹ Němečková, T. & Varkočková, M. 2024, *Turkish Airlines: Facilitating Türkiye's Soft Power in Africa*, in «Canadian Journal of African Studies», 58(3), 491-513.

¹⁹⁰ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 234-36-10, 23 May 1969.

¹⁹¹ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 285-55-19, 15 July 1972.

during the Sahelian drought in the 1980s.¹⁹² Ankara subsequently launched its own technical assistance program and sent a delegation to Mali, Niger, and Chad.¹⁹³

The African Initiative in 1998 was a turning point in boosting Türkiye-Mali cooperation, with trade and security being the key components. In 1999, a Turkish (and Northern Cyprus) delegation led by State Minister Hasan Gemici visited Mali to sign an agreement on trade and technical cooperation, as well as to negotiate an agreement on military training cooperation.¹⁹⁴ A protocol on the training of Malian gendarmerie by Türkiye was signed and ratified the same year¹⁹⁵, whereas a broader agreement on military training cooperation was ratified in 2001.¹⁹⁶

The Turkish embassy in Bamako and the Malian embassy in Ankara were inaugurated in 2010 and 2014, respectively. Turkish Airlines launched direct flights to Bamako in 2015 and subsequently increased the frequency of flights from three times a week to seven times a week. Meanwhile, *Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı* (TİKA) intensified its development projects in Mali, the most notable of which was the renovation of Malian national assembly.¹⁹⁷ Growing ties culminated in mutual presidential visits and new cooperation agreements. Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita visited Ankara in 2015, which brought along an agreement on defence industry cooperation between Türkiye and Mali.¹⁹⁸ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met his counterpart successively in Bamako and Istanbul in 2018 and 2019. The two countries signed nearly a dozen of agreements including mutual abolition of visas for holders of diplomatic passports¹⁹⁹, mutual promotion of investments²⁰⁰, and cooperation in such diverse fields as information technology, diplomatic archives²⁰¹, culture²⁰², handicrafts²⁰³, health²⁰⁴, and sports²⁰⁵.

The government of Keita supported the Turkish state following the failed military coup in Türkiye on 15 July 2016. The Fethullahist group who were linked to the bloody coup attempt had been active in Mali, particularly in the field of education. Upon the request of Türkiye, the government of Mali wasted no time in transferring their schools to *Türkiye Maarif Vakfı* (TMV), the sole entity authorised by the Turkish parliament to provide educational services abroad. Since 2017, the TMV has been operating 30 schools in Mali (26 in Bamako and 4 in Ségou). Mali thereby hosts the highest number of Turkish schools in Africa.²⁰⁶ Along with other Sahel states, Mali sends students to 14 International Imam-Hatip High Schools in Türkiye, which are supported by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs. Over the last decade, increasingly more Malian students have preferred Turkish universities. The number of Malian students receiving education in Turkish universities rose from 271 in 2014 to 1171 in 2024 (See Graph 1).²⁰⁷

¹⁹² Devlet Arşivleri, No. 467-581-10, 13 December 1982.

¹⁹³ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 611-773-8, 14 November 1988.

¹⁹⁴ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 987-340-4, 10 March 1999.

¹⁹⁵ Resmî Gazete, No. 99/13026/23752, 11 July 1999.

¹⁹⁶ Resmî Gazete, No. 2001/3206/2459, 28 November 2001.

¹⁹⁷ *TİKA'nın Yenilediği Mali Ulusal Meclisi Açıldı*, TİKA, 4 April 2017, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika_nin_yeniledigi_mali_ulusal_meclisi_acildi/, Accessed on 26 December 2024.

¹⁹⁸ Resmî Gazete, No. 2017/10277/30089, 7 June 2017.

¹⁹⁹ Resmî Gazete, No. 2012/28242, 23 March 2012.

²⁰⁰ Resmî Gazete, No. 2363/31089, 04.04.2020.

²⁰¹ Resmî Gazete, No. 2018/11782/30460, 26.06.2018.

²⁰² Resmî Gazete, No. 2015/8013/29456, 25 August 2015.

²⁰³ Resmî Gazete, No. 2016/8454/29661, 22 March 2016.

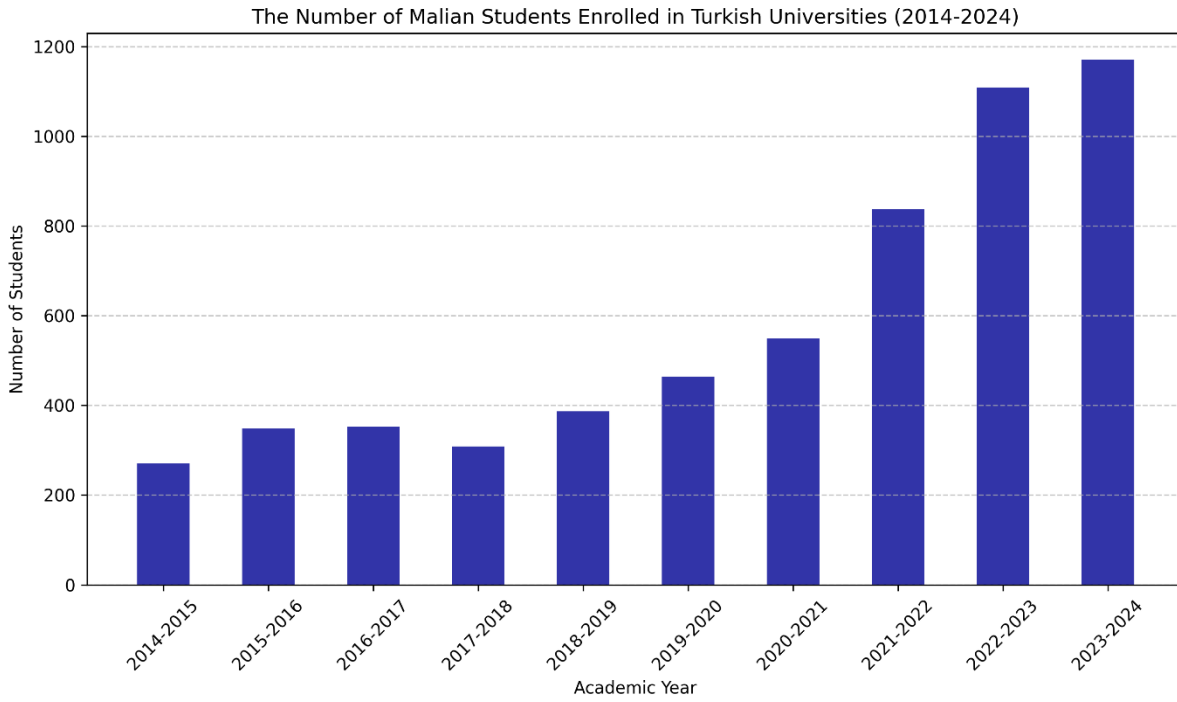
²⁰⁴ Resmi Gazete, No. 77/30533, 12.09.2018; Resmî Gazete, No. 3721/31430, 21.03.2021.

²⁰⁵ Resmî Gazete, No. 645/30657, 16.01.2019.

²⁰⁶ *Dünyada Maarif*, Türkiye Maarif Vakfı, <https://turkiyemaarif.org/dunyada-maarif>, Accessed on 25 December 2024.

²⁰⁷ *Uyruğa Göre Öğrenci Sayıları Raporu*, Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>, Accessed on 25 December 2024.

Graph 1: Malian Students in Turkish Universities



Türkiye appears to have efficiently navigated the geopolitical change in the Sahel. The forced resignation of Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita on 18 August 2020 triggered the anti-French coups in neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger, eventually leading to the formation of *Alliance des États du Sahel* (AES). Türkiye acted on principle by condemning the Malian coup and asking the junta to release President Keita, although Ankara was aware of the strong anti-French tendency and the resultant political change that seemed irreversible. Instead of waiting and seeing, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu visited Mali on 8 September 2020. He was notably the first non-African top diplomat to hold talks with the members of *Comité national pour le salut du peuple* (CNSP) led by Colonel Assimi Goita who toppled Keita. Çavuşoğlu stated that Türkiye “would always stand by the friendly and brotherly people of Mali”.²⁰⁸ There were non-governmental contacts with the prominent Malian figures as well. The circles of *Millî Görüş* (literally National Vision), the current of Turkish Islamism from which President Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party emanates, had contacted Imam Mahmoud Dicko, an influential opposition figure during the last years of the Keita government.²⁰⁹

Türkiye’s realist approach helped the continuity in Ankara-Bamako relationship. Both Keita and the military leaders who deposed him favoured cooperation with Türkiye, which is observed particularly in bilateral trade. Türkiye’s exports to Mali increased by 34% in the last five years of Keita government. In 2021, Türkiye’s exports to Mali increased by 25% compared to 2020, while its imports from Mali increased by 1300%, with cotton being the main commodity. Cotton, metal ores and gold account for 96 % of Türkiye’s imports from Mali. Turkish exports of iron, steel, cement, and defence industry products have stimulated a sharp increase in bilateral trade.²¹⁰ In 2022, Türkiye-Mali trade volume reached a record high of \$ 197 billion. Obviously, Türkiye is a net exporter in

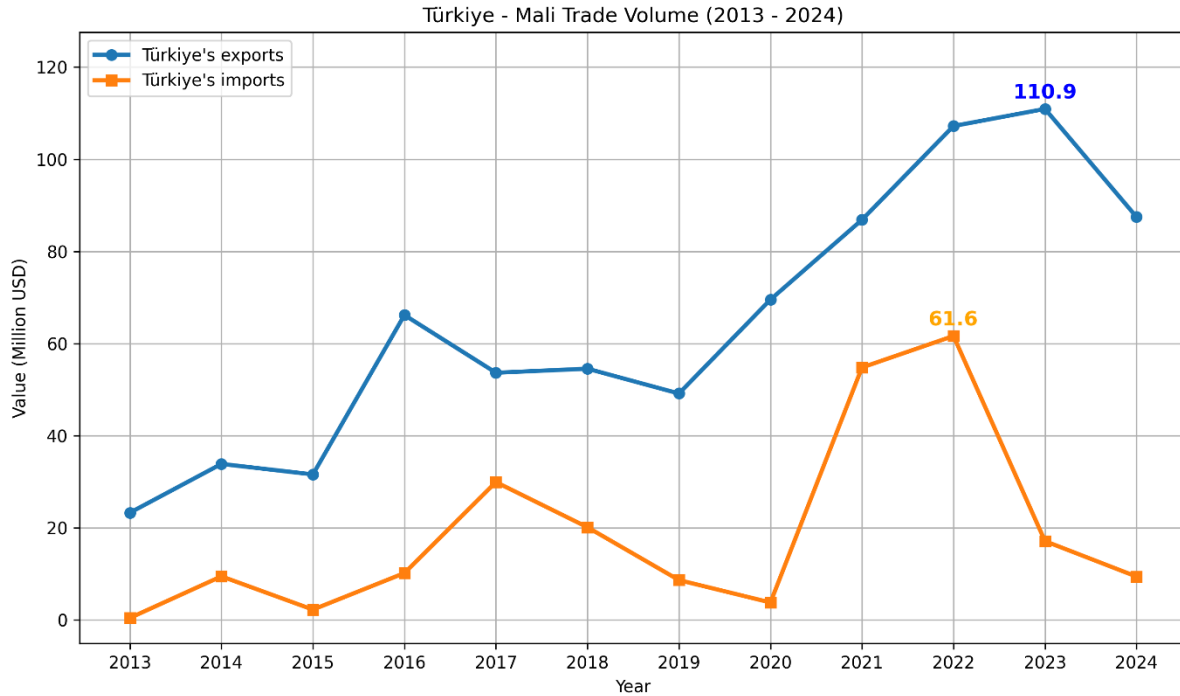
²⁰⁸ *Visit of Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu to Mali*, Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 September 2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-mali-yi-ziyareti.en.mfa>, Accessed on 27 December 2024.

²⁰⁹ *Défaite de la France au mali, victoire de la Turquie*, Observatoire de la Turquie, traduit par Renaud Soler, <https://www.observatoireturquie.fr/defaite-de-la-france-au-mali-victoire-de-la-turquie-par-fehim-astekin/>, septembre 19, 2020.

²¹⁰ *Mali Bilgi Notu*, Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu (DEİK), 2022, p. 8.

trade with Mali. In 2023, Türkiye exported \$ 111 million to Mali, while importing just \$ 17 million from the Sahel state (See Graph 2).²¹¹

Graph 2: Türkiye-Mali Trade



Security cooperation is also indicative of the continuity in Türkiye-Mali relationship. Türkiye has been training the Malian gendarmerie, albeit to a limited extent, since 1999. The government of Assimi Goita took a step further by inaugurating a Turkish language training centre at the gendarmerie school in Bamako. “Thanks to the fruitful collaboration with Mali’s Ministry of Defence, we have been able to open this training centre, which will enable Malian officers to learn the Turkish language before going to Türkiye,” noted Murat Mustafa Onart, the Turkish ambassador to Bamako.²¹² The 2015 agreement on defence industry cooperation, which was critical in furthering Ankara-Bamako military ties during the Keita government, has been concretised by the Goita government, so much so that Mali is presumably the largest African operator of Turkish UCAVs.²¹³ From December 2022 to November 2024, Mali purchased at least 17 Bayraktar TB2 and two Bayraktar AKINCI, the famous Turkish unmanned combat aerial vehicles.²¹⁴ Having changed the course of battles in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkish drones are expected to play a similar role in Mali, as Malian Minister of

²¹¹ *Mali Ülke Profili*, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2024, p. 14.

²¹² Atangana, V. N. 2022, *Mali: un centre de formation en langue turque destiné aux officiers*, L’Agence Ecofin, 5 April 2022. <https://www.agenceecofin.com/formation/0504-96403-mali-un-centre-de-formation-en-langue-turque-destine-aux-officiers#>, Accessed on 23 December 2024.

²¹³ Abdul, K. 2024, *Mali boosts its drone fleet with new Bayraktar TB2s from Turkey*, Military Africa, 9 January 2024, <https://www.military.africa/2024/01/mali-boosts-its-drone-fleet-with-new-bayraktar-tb2s-from-turkey/>, Accessed on 24 December 2024.

²¹⁴ *Mali receives military equipment from Türkiye to fight terrorism*, TRT Africa, 28 November 2024, <https://trtafrika.com/africa/mali-receives-military-equipment-from-turkiye-to-fight-terrorism-18237478>, Accessed on 27 December 2024.

Foreign Affairs Abdoulaye Diop affirms that “Turkish UCAVs are of great help to Mali in controlling its lands”.²¹⁵

3.3 Relations with Niger

Turkish-Nigerien relationship dates back to the Ottoman era. The rulers of Agadez self-identify as *Istanbulawa* (people from Istanbul) based on a version of oral history about Yunus, the half-African son of Bayezid I, who purportedly reigned over the Touaregs of Agadez in the mid-15th century.²¹⁶ Besides oral history, there are documented relations between the Ottoman Empire and the peoples of Niger in the 19th century. Kaouar in north-eastern Niger was organised as an Ottoman district under the sanjak of Fezzan when the Toubou requested Ottoman protection against the French colonisers. The Kel Ajjer Touaregs in northern Niger also came under Ottoman rule in 1875. Toubou and Touareg peoples of Niger could not escape the French colonisation when the Ottoman Empire lost Fezzan and its hinterland in the early 20th century.²¹⁷ As a political narrative, however, the Ottoman presence in the Sahara has fostered the relations between the republics of Türkiye and Niger.

The attendance of a Turkish diplomat in the ceremony held for the first anniversary of Niger’s independence constituted the initial contact between Ankara and Niamey.²¹⁸ The two nations eventually established diplomatic relations in 1967.²¹⁹ As in Mali, Türkiye helped Niger during the Sahelian drought. In 1982, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, İltis Türkmen, visited Niamey to attend the session of the Organization of Islamic Conference, where Turkish Muslim Community of Cyprus also attended as observer.²²⁰ Ankara and Niamey concluded their first cooperation agreement in 1989.²²¹

Türkiye-Niger relationship gathered momentum after the two countries reciprocally inaugurated embassies in 2012. TİKA launched its Program Coordination Office in Niamey the next year. Through this office, Türkiye has implemented a wide range of development projects, including the construction of hospitals, schools, and parks.²²² During Erdoğan’s momentous visit to Niger in 2013, President Mahamadou Issoufou defined Türkiye as “a role model for the Islamic world”.²²³ The Turkish leader pledged to build a 450-kilometre road from Niamey to Agadez, which he named as “Istanbulawa” in reference to the historical link between Türkiye and the region. Subsequently Turkish state institutions, NGOs, and media have paid special attention to Niger and Agadez. As Bachir argues well, Türkiye has translated Ottoman nostalgia into a diplomatic strategy to ensure a

²¹⁵ *Turkish combat drones help Mali control its lands: FM Diop*, Daily Sabah, 19 April 2024, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/turkish-combat-drones-help-mali-control-its-lands-fm-diop>, Accessed on 26 December 2024.

²¹⁶ Keenan, J. 2024, *Peoples of the Sahara*, Routledge Handbook on the Modern Maghrib, Routledge, New York.

²¹⁷ Çaycı, A. 1995, *Büyük Sahra’da Türk-Fransız Rekabeti (1858-1911)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu: Ankara; Kavas, A. (2000), *Osmanlı-Tibu Münasebetleri: Büyük Sahra’da Reşade (Çad) ve Kavar (Nijer) Kazalarının Kurulması*, in *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi*, No. 4, p. 69-103.

²¹⁸ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 30-18-1-2/163-61-2, 28 November 1961.

²¹⁹ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 30-18-1-2/203-15-5, 14 February 1967.

²²⁰ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 458-523-9, 16 August 1982.

²²¹ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 30-18-1-2/633-880-2, 13 September 1989.

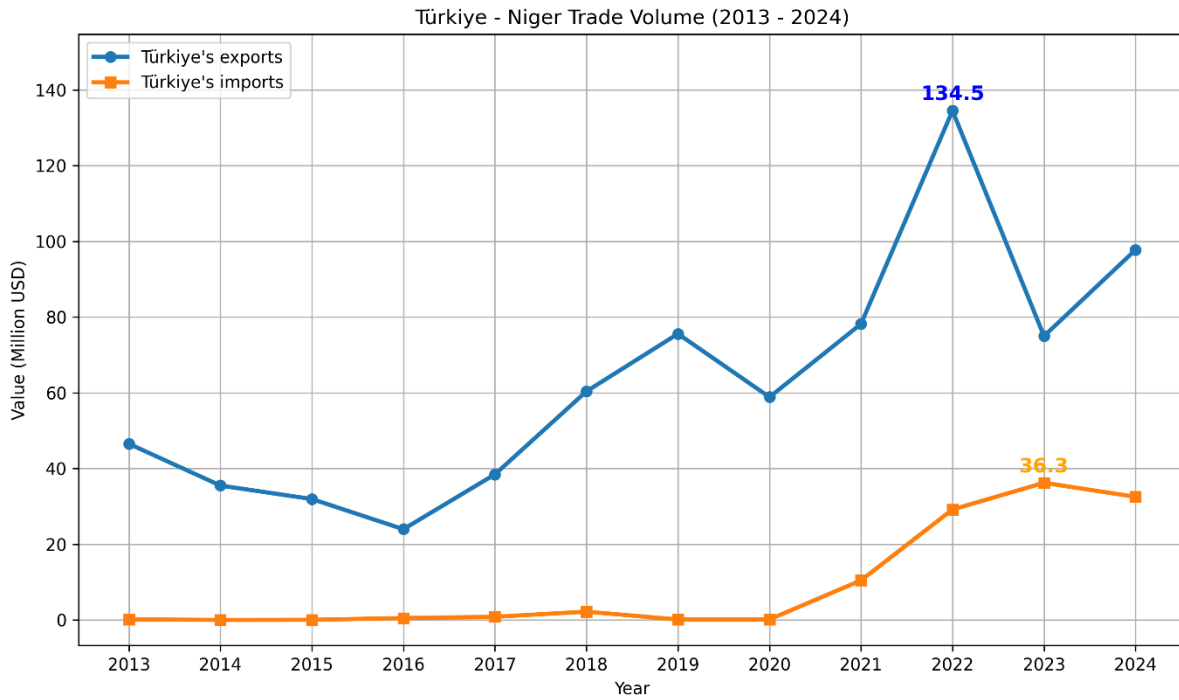
²²² *Niger-Niamey Program Coordination Office*, TİKA, <https://tika.gov.tr/en/office/niger-niamey-program-coordination-office/>, Accessed on 24 December 2024.

²²³ *Niger President: Turkey a role model*, Anadolu Agency, 9 January 2013, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/niger-president-turkey-a-role-model/287711>, Accessed on 27 December 2024.

enduring influence in Niger. The traditional authority of Agadez has also appropriated this narrative in order to strengthen their historical legitimacy and to benefit Turkish cooperation.²²⁴

Türkiye and Niger signed at least 20 cooperation agreements and protocols. Apart from a trade deal²²⁵ and two agreements on visa abolition²²⁶, Ankara and Niamey have cooperated on such diverse fields as information technology²²⁷, education²²⁸, and sports²²⁹. Three agreements are related to health sciences²³⁰, medical grant²³¹, and the inauguration of Türkiye-Niger Friendship Hospital²³². There are two agreements on water²³³, drinking water supply and sanitation²³⁴, while three agreements involve cooperation on forestry²³⁵, mining²³⁶, energy and hydrocarbons²³⁷.

Graph 3: Türkiye-Niger Trade



The remaining five agreements involve police²³⁸ and military training²³⁹, as well as security²⁴⁰ and defence industry cooperation²⁴¹. Although most of these agreements were concluded during the

²²⁴ Bachir, A. I. (2024), *Narrative Encounters: Reimagining the Turkish Presence in Niger*, Reconfigurations in Africa - and in African Studies, 30 September - 02 October 2024, Bayreuth.

²²⁵ Resmî Gazete, No. 2017/10162/30088-1, 6 June 2017.

²²⁶ Resmî Gazete, No. 2013/4995/28718-1, 25 July 2013; Resmî Gazete, No: 2021/4135/31522, 25 June 2021.

²²⁷ Resmî Gazete, No. 2022/5983/31934, 25 August 2022.

²²⁸ Resmî Gazete, No. 2018/11700/30444, 7 June 2018.

²²⁹ Resmî Gazete, No. 2022/5982/31934, 25 August 2022.

²³⁰ Resmî Gazete, No. 2013/5068/28718, 25 July 2013.

²³¹ Resmî Gazete, No. 2020/2657/31158, 17 June 2020.

²³² Resmî Gazete, No. 2019/1262/30814-1, 27 June 2019.

²³³ Resmî Gazete, No. 2017/10682/30195, 29 September 2017.

²³⁴ Resmî Gazete, No. 2013/5314/28790, 9 October 2013.

²³⁵ Resmî Gazete, No. 2018/11256/30365-1, 19 March 2018.

²³⁶ Resmî Gazete, No. 2017/10419/30142-1, 2 August 2017.

²³⁷ Resmî Gazete, No. 2017/10369/30105-1, 23 June 2017.

²³⁸ Resmî Gazete, No. 2016/8417/29652, 13.03.2016.

²³⁹ Resmî Gazete, No. 2017/10184/30087, 05.06.2017; Resmî Gazete, No. 2021/3447/31380, 30.01.2021.

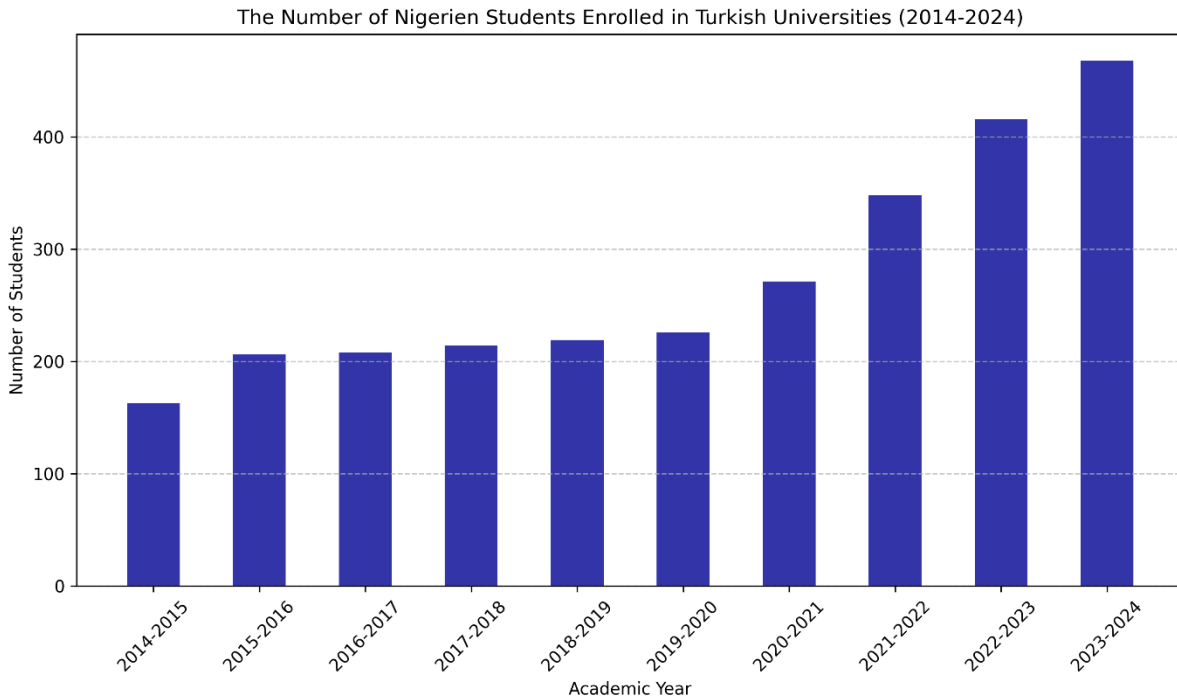
²⁴⁰ Resmî Gazete, No. 2018/11317/30365-1, 19.03.2018.

²⁴¹ Resmî Gazete, No. 2018/11914/30461-1, 27.06.2018.

Issoufou government (2011-2021), Ankara-Niamey relationship went on track during the short-lived government of Mohamed Bazoum (2021-2023) who received six Bayraktar TB2 drones and two Hürkuş aircrafts, as well as Ejder Yalçın 4x4 armoured vehicles and semi-automatic pistols from Türkiye.²⁴² Defence industry exports have contributed to the significant increase in Türkiye-Niger trade volume in 2022, reaching a record high of \$ 213 million (See Graph 3).

Like Mali, Niger supported the Turkish state during the bloody coup attempt on 15 July 2016 in Türkiye. In December the same year, the schools of the pro-coup group were transferred by Nigerien authorities to TMV. Annually more than a thousand Nigerien students receive education in 9 TMV schools in Niamey. In 2018, Niger Ministry of Secondary Education selected the Turkish schools as the most successful institution in terms of quality of education and compliance with environmental, technical and pedagogical standards.²⁴³ Meanwhile, the number of Nigerien students receiving education in Turkish universities also rose from 163 in 2014 to 468 in 2024 (See Graph 4).²⁴⁴

Graph 4: *Nigerien Students in Turkish Universities*



Türkiye's stance following the military coup in Niger on 26 July 2023 was similar to the case of Mali. A Turkish Foreign Ministry statement said, "We follow with deep concern the coup attempt perpetrated by a group within the Armed Forces in Niger, which led to the removal from duty of President Mohamed Bazoum, who came to power through democratic elections", adding that "Türkiye will continue to stand by friendly and brotherly Niger".²⁴⁵ On the other hand, Türkiye opposed an ECOWAS-led military intervention in Niger against the junta of *Conseil national pour*

²⁴² Fatma Nur Canbaz, 2024, *Türkiye'nin Afrika'ya Açılım Politikası Sonrası Dönemde Türkiye-Afrika Askeri İlişkileri*, M.A. Thesis, Social Sciences University of Ankara, p. 193.

²⁴³ *Nijer Maarif Okulları En Başarılı Okul Seçildi*, Türkiye Maarif Vakfı, 8 February 2018, <https://turkiyemaarif.org/news/nijer-maarif-okullari-en-basarili-okul-secildi>, Accessed on 28 December 2024.

²⁴⁴ *Uyruğa Göre Öğrenci Sayıları Raporu*, Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>, Accessed on 25 December 2024.

²⁴⁵ Muhammed Enes Calli, *Türkiye following coup attempt in Niger with 'deep concern'*, Anadolu Agency, 27 July 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiye-following-coup-attempt-in-niger-with-deep-concern/2955817>, Accessed on 28 December 2024.

la sauvegarde de la patrie led by Abdourahamane Tchiani.²⁴⁶ During a press conference at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs where I personally attended on 22 October 2024, Ambassador Şebnem Cenk, the Director General for West and Central Africa, said that Türkiye has opposed and actually hindered the isolation of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

The working visit of Prime Minister Ali Lamine Zeine to Türkiye in early 2024 obviously indicates the continuity of Türkiye-Niger partnership. Having been invited by Erdoğan, Zeine visited the facilities of Turkish military electronic and air defence companies, ASELSAN and ROKETSAN. In July the same year, Zeine hosted a high-level Turkish delegation in Niger. He chaired a meeting attended by Turkish Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Energy, as well as Intelligence Chief, Deputy Minister of Trade, and Director of Defence Industry. General Tchiani also accepted Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. Turkish and Nigerien authorities negotiated new cooperation agreements on a variety of fields, including oil, natural gas, and gold.²⁴⁷ Türkiye eventually made a deal for three new gold fields in the Agadez region, thereby having a total of six gold fields in Niger.²⁴⁸

Although Türkiye previously expressed its willingness to invest in Niger's uranium deposits²⁴⁹, there seems no progress in that field. Türkiye constructs its first nuclear power plant in Akkuyu and relies on a long-term fuel-supply contract with Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear energy corporation. Currently Türkiye lacks the capacity to convert uranium ore into the material needed for nuclear reactors.²⁵⁰ According to the Turkish state institution of Mineral Research and Exploration, however, the operationalisation of Akkuyu nuclear power plant will inevitably mobilise Türkiye towards uranium trade and production.²⁵¹

3.4 Relations with Chad

The historical foundations of Türkiye–Chad relations can be traced back to the Ottoman era. Following the conquest of Tripoli in 1551, the Ottoman Empire initiated diplomatic and commercial engagements with the sultanates of Kanem-Bornu and Ouaddaï, located within the territory of present-day Chad. In 1556, a treaty of friendship and trade was concluded between the Ottomans and Kanem-Bornu, establishing a mutually beneficial partnership centered around trans-Saharan trade networks. Throughout the 19th century, in response to the growing colonial ambitions of France and Britain in the region, the Ottoman Empire recognized the sultanates of Tibesti, Kanem-Bornu, Bagirmi, and Ouaddaï as falling within its sphere of influence. Despite cooperative efforts between the Ottomans and these sultanates to resist European colonial expansion, the eventual French

²⁴⁶ Ragip Soylu, Niger coup: Turkey's Erdogan opposes Ecowas military intervention, Middle East Eye, 21 August 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/niger-coup-turkey-erdogan-opposes-ecowas-intervention>, Accessed on 28 December 2024.

²⁴⁷ *Türkiye-Nijer İlişkileri: Osmanlı Türkiyesi'nin Mirası ve Gelecek Perspektifleri*, Millî İstihbarat Akademisi, Ankara, 2024, p. 52.

²⁴⁸ *Nijer'de üç yeni altın sahası anlaşması imzalandık*, Bloomberg HT, 27 December 2024, <https://www.bloomberght.com/nijerde-uc-yeni-altin-sahasi-anlasmasi-imzalandik-3738034>, Accessed on 27 December 2024.

²⁴⁹ *Turkey to invest in Niger's uranium*, Daily Sabah, 13 March 2014, <https://www.dailysabah.com/energy/2014/03/13/turkey-to-invest-in-nigers-uranium>, Accessed on 28 December 2024.

²⁵⁰ *Turkey envoy goes to Niger to secure uranium supplies*, Bloomberg, 17 July 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-17/turkey-top-envoy-goes-to-niger-in-bid-to-secure-uranium-supplies>, Accessed on 27 December 2024.

²⁵¹ Gonca Eroğlu & Mesut Şahiner, 2017, *Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Uranyum ve Toryum*, Maden Tetkik ve Arama Genel Müdürlüğü, Ankara, 2017, p. 17.

occupation of the region, along with the loss of Tripoli, led to a temporary disruption in bilateral relations.²⁵²

Türkiye-Chad relations were revived following Chad's independence on 11 August 1960. In 1969, the Turkish ambassador in Nigeria was accredited to Chad.²⁵³ Two decades later, in April 1989, a delegation was sent to Chad as part of a \$10 million technical assistance program coordinated by the State Planning Organization. These efforts culminated in the signing of a technical cooperation agreement aimed at facilitating technology transfer and implementing development projects in manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, and infrastructure.²⁵⁴

The first high-level official visit from Türkiye to Chad took place in December 1999, when Turkish State Minister Ramazan Mirzaoglu participated in the Turkish-Chad cooperation negotiations in N'Djamena. An agreement on economic, scientific and technical cooperation was signed during this visit. Subsequently, at the invitation of Turkish President Süleyman Demirel, Idriss Déby Itno paid an official visit to Türkiye in April 2000. "We can achieve significant progress in the 21st century, just as we had extensive relations in the past", Déby stated during this visit.²⁵⁵

Türkiye opened its embassy in N'Djamena in 2013, and Chadian embassy in Ankara was opened the next year. Meanwhile, Turkish Airlines launched direct flights to Chad's capital city.²⁵⁶ The establishment of embassies and the initiation of air travel has facilitated Türkiye-Chad partnership in trade, development, security, and energy.

The trade agreement signed between Türkiye and Chad in 1999 conferred most-favored-nation status upon both countries. The year 2012 marked a substantial shift in trade ties. While the trade volume stood at \$6.15 million in 2011, it increased by 215% in 2012, reaching \$19.4 million. The remarkable growth in question is attributable to Türkiye's imports of sesame seeds and gum arabic from Chad, which collectively account for \$9 million. These commodities, absent from trade records prior to 2012, became central to bilateral trade, underpinning the expansion in subsequent years.²⁵⁷ In 2023, Türkiye's total imports from Chad rose to \$122.4 million, of which only \$700,000 consisted of goods other than sesame seeds and gum arabic. In contrast, Türkiye's exports to Chad are more diversified, encompassing products such as pasta, wheat flour, yeast, carpets, tobacco, ready-made clothing, iron, steel, automobiles, and aircraft. A noteworthy development in 2023 was the \$44 million export of fighter jets and UAVs, which marked a milestone in Türkiye-Chad trade. This transaction not only reflected the deepening of bilateral cooperation in the defense sector but also made a considerable contribution to the overall increase in Türkiye's exports to Chad.²⁵⁸

Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu (DEİK), the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye, established the Türkiye-Chad Business Council in 2015 and organized forums in N'Djamena and Istanbul to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between business leaders and government officials from both countries. A notable forum took place in 2017 in N'Djamena, with the participation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and a delegation of 100 business representatives. During this visit, the two countries signed seven key agreements, including the Agreement on the Prevention of Double Taxation on Income and the Agreement on the Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments.

²⁵² Gökgedik, İ. 2020, *Sahrâaltı (Bilâdüssûdan) Afrika'da Çad Havzası Sultanlıkları ve Osmanlılar ile Münasebetleri*, PhD Dissertation, Marmara University.

²⁵³ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 242-81-6, 29 November 1969.

²⁵⁴ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 633-880-2, 13 September 1989.

²⁵⁵ *Çad'a Dostluk Eli*, Milliyet 29 April 2000, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/dunya/cada-dostluk-eli-5321786>, Accessed on 15 February 2025.

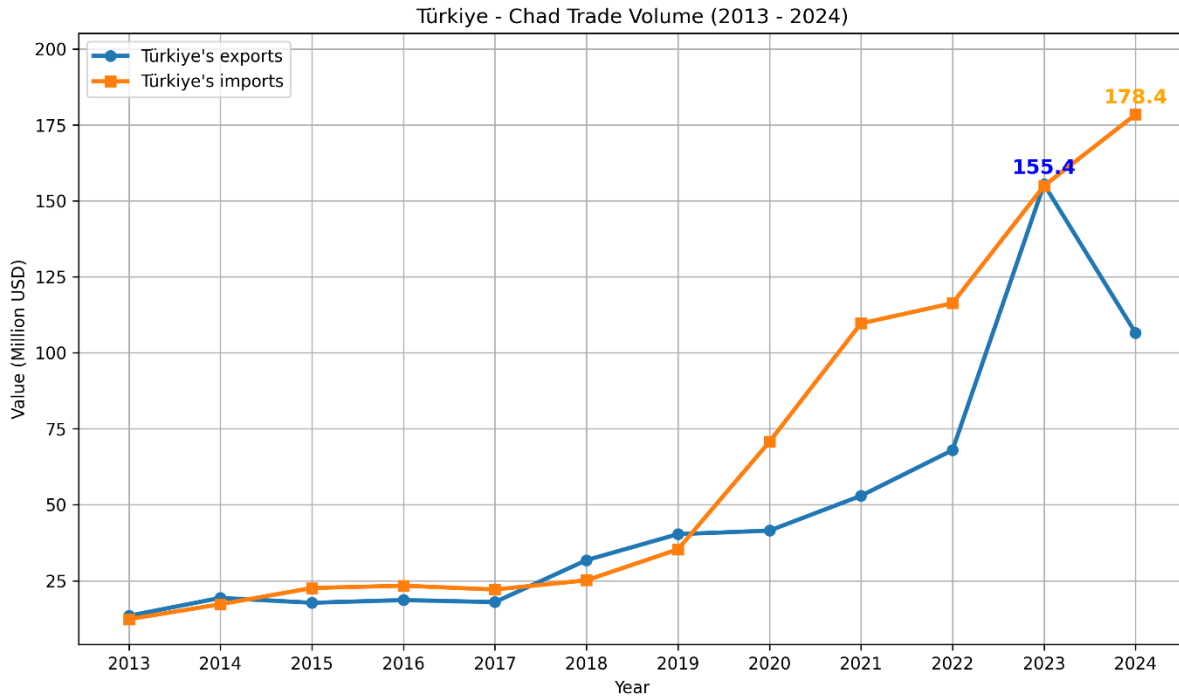
²⁵⁶ *Relations Between Türkiye and Chad*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-chad.en.mfa>, Accessed on 15 February 2025.

²⁵⁷ *Ülke ve Fasıllara Göre Dış Ticaret 2012*, Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK), <https://www.tuik.gov.tr/>, Accessed on 15 February 2025.

²⁵⁸ *Ülke ve Fasıllara Göre Dış Ticaret 2023*, Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK), <https://www.tuik.gov.tr/>, Accessed on 15 February 2025.

During the first official presidential visit from the Republic of Türkiye to the Republic of Chad, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan underscored the inadequacy of the existing trade volume between the two countries and emphasized the necessity of enhancing bilateral economic relations. He highlighted the significance of the agreements signed during the visit, which aim to facilitate increased trade and investment.²⁵⁹ Notably, during a joint press conference in 2021 with Chad's Transitional President, Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, Erdoğan announced Türkiye's strategic objective to elevate the bilateral trade volume to \$500 million. In 2023, trade volume between the two nations reached \$310 million, reflecting significant progress toward this target (See Graph 5).²⁶⁰

Graph 5: Türkiye-Chad Trade



An analysis of the agreements signed between Türkiye and Chad reveals that development cooperation, particularly in education, health, and technical assistance, has been a priority. The two countries signed the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Health and Medical Sciences in 2015, the Technical and Development Cooperation Protocol in 2017, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Education in 2019, and the Agreement on Grant Aid in the Field of Health in 2020.²⁶¹ Through these agreements, Türkiye has implemented various programs and projects aimed at strengthening Chad's health infrastructure, supporting educational initiatives, and enhancing technical capacity. Following a meeting with the Chadian delegation in October 2021, President Erdoğan emphasized the significant contributions of TMV in education, TİKA in development initiatives and humanitarian assistance, and THY in facilitating diplomatic and economic exchanges

²⁵⁹ *Türkiye ile Çad Arasında 7 Anlaşma ile Yeni İşbirliği Dönemi*, Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu (DEİK), <https://www.deik.org.tr/basin-aciklamalari-turkiye-ile-cad-arasinda-7-anlasma-br-ile-yeni-isbirligi-donemi>, Accessed on 20 February 2025.

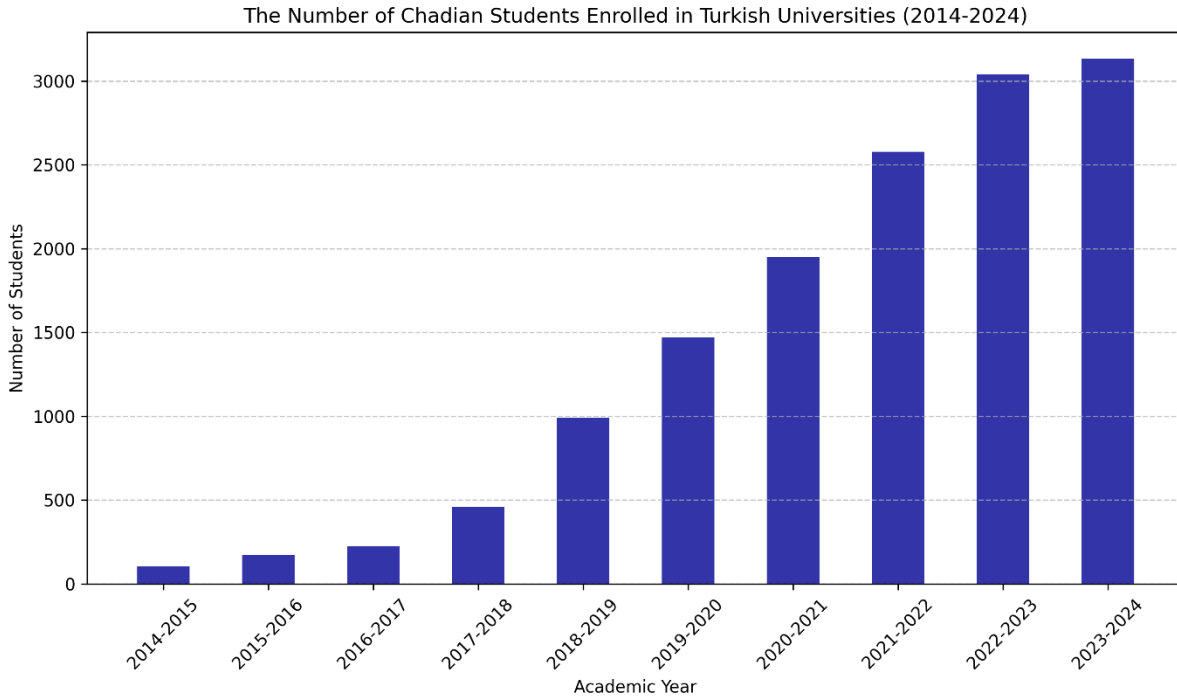
²⁶⁰ *We Stand Ready to Enhance Our Cooperation with Chad*, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 27 October 2021, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/132162/-we-stand-ready-to-enhance-our-cooperation-with-chad->, Accessed on 20 February 2025.

²⁶¹ Resmi Gazete, No. 2015/7477, 9 May 2015; Resmi Gazete, No. 1377, 26 July 2019; Resmi Gazete, No. 2658, 17 June 2020; Resmi Gazete», No. 4543, 1 October 2021.

through regular flights. He also assured that scholarships for Chadian students and other projects would continue uninterrupted.²⁶²

Education is a vital component of the development cooperation between Türkiye and Chad. Türkiye has contributed to the enhancement of educational infrastructure and access in Chad by providing both personnel and equipment support. Additionally, it has played a significant role in facilitating access to higher education for Chadian students through government-funded scholarships. The number of Chadian students pursuing higher education in Türkiye increased markedly from 48 in 2013 to 3,135 in 2023 (See Graph 6).²⁶³ This significant rise can be attributed to a range of factors, including shared religious and cultural values, the availability of scholarships and other opportunities offered by Turkish universities, as well as supportive policies by both governments.²⁶⁴ Moreover, since the commencement of operations in Chad in 2017, the TMV has implemented several noteworthy educational projects. TMV currently operates two campuses and six schools across Chad, rapidly establishing itself as one of the country's prominent educational institutions, offering educational services from kindergarten through to the high school level.²⁶⁵

Graph 6: Chadian Students in Turkish Universities



TİKA has played a significant role in enhancing Chad's educational infrastructure through a wide range of initiatives, including the provision of equipment, school renovations, laboratory support, and the rehabilitation of social centers. In addition, it has introduced vocational training programs in various fields such as solid waste management and urban planning for municipal employees, modern educational technologies for vocational high school teachers, rescue and first aid for firefighters, basic

²⁶² *We Stand Ready to Enhance Our Cooperation with Chad*, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 27 October 2021, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/132162/-we-stand-ready-to-enhance-our-cooperation-with-chad->, Accessed on 20 February 2025.

²⁶³ *Uyruğa Göre Öğrenci Sayıları Raporu*, Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>, Accessed on 25 February 2025.

²⁶⁴ Mahamat, H. F. 2022, *Fransa ve Türkiye'deki Çadlı Öğrencilerin Uyum Süreçlerinin Karşılaştırması*, *Toplumsal Değişim Dergisi*, 4, 109.

²⁶⁵ *Maarif Okulları Çad'da Eğitimin En İyi Adresi Oldu*, 29 July 2021, <https://turkiyemaarif.org/news/maarif-okullari-cadda-egitimin-en-iyi-adresi-oldu>, Accessed on 25 February 2025.

intelligence for police officers, and general health insurance for Ministry of Health specialists. To further support employment, TİKA has implemented specialized training programs. Chadian women have received training in soap and cosmetic production, agriculture, fishing, and sewing, while individuals with disabilities have been trained in leather processing and shoe repair.²⁶⁶

Within the framework of health cooperation agreements between the two countries, Türkiye has provided substantial support to Chad, which faces major challenges in delivering healthcare services due to shortages of both personnel and medical equipment. As part of this support, volunteer doctors from Türkiye have conducted free medical screenings and treatments across various regions of Chad, reaching a large part of the population with limited access to healthcare services. In addition to these medical missions, Türkiye has also addressed specific health concerns in Chad. Given the high malaria-related mortality rates, Türkiye has supplied essential medical equipment to improve diagnosis and treatment. This support has strengthened hospitals' capacity to combat the disease. TİKA built the Moussoro Maternity Clinic in 2022 as a sustainable project focused on maternal and neonatal care. By improving access to essential healthcare services, the clinic has played a vital role in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates in Chad.²⁶⁷

Following the Technical and Development Cooperation Protocol signed in 2017, TİKA has undertaken significant projects in Chad, focusing on critical areas such as agriculture, livestock farming, and water access.²⁶⁸ Among these initiatives, 280 farmers were provided with seeds for crops including tomatoes, peppers, watermelons, carrots, and okra, aimed at bolstering agricultural productivity and supporting local livelihoods. In addition, an old water well was rehabilitated and modernized through the installation of a solar energy system, ensuring sustainable access to clean water for the local community. These efforts underscore Türkiye's commitment to addressing immediate needs while promoting long-term development in Chad.²⁶⁹ In a further demonstration of bilateral cooperation, President Erdoğan, during his engagements in 2021, announced the construction of an agricultural school as part of the Chad-Türkiye Friendship Complex in N'Djamena. This project symbolizes the deepening ties between the two nations and reflects Türkiye's dedication to strengthening institutional and people-to-people connections. President Erdoğan emphasized the importance of inaugurating the complex as a tangible representation of the friendship and partnership between Chad and Türkiye.²⁷⁰ These initiatives collectively highlight Türkiye's multifaceted approach to fostering sustainable development in Chad, focusing on sectors that directly influence the well-being of the local population. By addressing critical challenges in agriculture, water access, and education, Türkiye's efforts contribute to the broader goals of poverty reduction, capacity building, and the promotion of self-sufficiency in Chad.

During the AK Party era, security cooperation has become another significant dimension of Türkiye-Chad relationship. The Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement in 2014 and the Military Cooperation Framework Agreement in 2019 have strengthened bilateral ties by expanding their scope beyond trade and development. The agreements in question have facilitated the modernization of the Chadian Armed Forces through Turkish defense industry products, while simultaneously strengthening Türkiye's position in the African defense market. Turkish-made armored fighting vehicles, defense systems, small arms and light weapons have been integrated into Chad's military

²⁶⁶ *Faaliyetlerimiz*, <https://tika.gov.tr/office/cad-encemine-program-koordinasyon-ofisi/>, Accessed on 25 February 2025.

²⁶⁷ *TİKA'dan Çad'ın Sağlık Altyapısına Destek*, 20 June 2022, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika%27dan_cad%27in_saglik_altyapisina_destek/, Accessed on 27 February 2025.

²⁶⁸ *Resmi Gazete*, No. 4543, 1 October 2021.

²⁶⁹ *TİKA'dan Çad'da Güneş Enerjisiyle Çalışan Su Kuyusu*, 8 June 2018, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika_dan_cad_da_gunes_enerjisiyle_calisan_su_kuyusu/, Accessed on 25 February 2025.

²⁷⁰ *Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Çad ile İş Birliğimizi Her Alanda Daha İleriye Taşımaya Kararlıyız* [President Erdoğan: We are Determined to Advance Our Cooperation with Chad in Every Field], 27 October 2021, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-cad-ile-is-birligimizi-her-alanda-daha-ileriye-tasimaya-kararliyiz-27-10-21>, Accessed on 25 February 2025.

inventory, enhancing its operational capacity. Among the key acquisitions are wheeled armored personnel carriers (APCs)²⁷¹, Yörük armored vehicles²⁷², HÜRKUŞ light attack aircraft, ANKA unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), ROKETSAN MAM-L smart micro munition and CİRİT missiles.²⁷³

The rising terrorist threats in the Sahel region have positioned Chad as a key player in regional security initiatives, particularly in the fight against Boko Haram. Türkiye's military and technical assistance have contributed to Chad's counterterrorism capabilities, reinforcing its role as a stabilizing force in the region. The Security Cooperation Agreement signed between the Interior Ministries of both countries in 2016 institutionalized collaboration in counterterrorism efforts. During the signing ceremony, Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu emphasized Chad's commitment to combating Boko Haram and acknowledged its support for Türkiye's efforts against FETÖ and other terrorist networks. In response, Chadian Minister of Public Security and Immigration Ahmed Mahamat Bachir underlined the necessity of joint efforts in maintaining regional security and reaffirmed Chad's commitment to deepening cooperation with Türkiye in this field.²⁷⁴

Cooperation between Türkiye and Chad has also involved internal security. Within the framework of the International Police Training Cooperation Project, implemented in 2019 through a partnership between TİKA and the Turkish National Police, Chadian police officers received specialized training to enhance their operational capacities. As part of the project, 20 Chadian police officers participated in visual and practical training sessions on Fundamental Intelligence Concepts, equipping them with essential skills to strengthen law enforcement and security operations in the country.²⁷⁵

With its expanding economy and growing population, Türkiye has been actively pursuing alternative energy sources to strengthen its security. In this context, fostering trade relations with African countries rich in energy resources, such as Chad, has become a strategic priority. Despite its vast energy reserves, Chad faces significant challenges in developing its oil and energy sector due to limited capital and technological capacity. Recognizing this potential and the need for foreign investment, Bechir Madet, Chadian Minister of Energy, stated in a 2017 interview that Chad was open to Turkish investment in its oil and energy sector. He further emphasized the country's eagerness to initiate oil production and exportation through partnership with Turkish firms.²⁷⁶ The growing interest in cooperation materialized in February 2018 when Türkiye and Chad signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Hydrocarbons and Energy Cooperation. This agreement laid the foundation for collaboration in energy projects, including hydrocarbons and renewable energy, as well as trade in crude oil and petroleum products. Moreover, the MoU outlined joint initiatives in personnel training, technical cooperation, and field studies, fostering the exchange of expertise and information between the two countries.²⁷⁷

In 2023, Chad took a step toward asserting greater sovereignty over its energy sector by nationalizing all assets previously held by ExxonMobil. This action encompassed the transfer of hydrocarbon permits, exploration rights, and production licenses to the Chadian state, signaling a strategic shift

²⁷¹ *Türkiye'den 11 Ülkeye 309 Adet Zırhlı Araç İhracatı*, 8 June 2019, <https://www.savunmasanayist.com/turkiyeden-11-ulkeye-309-adet-zirhli-arac-ihracati/>, Accessed on 28 February 2025.

²⁷² Yıldırım, G. *Türk Zırhlısı Yörük, İlk Görevine Afrika'da Başladı*, 22 May 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turk-zirhlisi-yoruk-ilk-gorevine-afrika-da-basladi/2594449>, Accessed on 28 February 2025.

²⁷³ *Çad'da HÜRKUŞ ve ANKA teslimatı töreni*, 11 August 2023, <https://www.savunmasanayist.com/cadda-hurkus-ve-anka-teslimati-toreni/>, Accessed on 28 February 2025.

²⁷⁴ *Türkiye ile Çad Arasında Güvenlik Anlaşması*, 16 December 2016, <https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/turkiye-ile-cad-arasinda-guvenlik-anlasmasi>, Accessed on 28 February 2025.

²⁷⁵ *TİKA'dan Çadlı Polislere Eğitim*, 9 March 2019, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika%27dan_cadli_polislere_egitim/, Accessed on 28 February 2025.

²⁷⁶ Dogru, A. *Oil-rich Chad invites Turkish Companies*, 29 December 2017, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/oil-rich-chad-invites-turkish-companies/1017591>, Accessed on 28 February 2025.

²⁷⁷ Resmi Gazete, No. 4544, 1 October 2021.

toward increased national control over natural resource management. While pursuing a policy of enhanced autonomy in the energy domain, Chad has maintained an openness to forming new international partnerships. In this context, the potential for a deepened energy cooperation between Chad and Türkiye appears increasingly viable. As Chad diversifies its external energy collaborations and Türkiye continues its efforts to secure alternative energy sources, a partnership in this sector could be mutually beneficial. Prospective areas of cooperation include Turkish investment in Chad's energy infrastructure, expansion of trade in petroleum products, and the development of joint initiatives in both fossil fuels and renewable energy. Such collaboration would not only contribute to the energy security and economic development of both nations but also reinforce the growing strategic ties between them.²⁷⁸

3.5 Relations with Sudan

The relationship between Türkiye and Sudan dates back to the Ottoman expansion into the region following the conquest of Egypt in 1517. The conquest of Sudan by Muhammad Ali Pasha in 1821 led to the establishment of an administrative structure under Ottoman-Egyptian authority. The period from 1821 to 1885 in Sudanese history is known as the "Turkish era" and regarded important for the evolution of modern Sudan, characterized by urbanization and centralization. One of its most notable outcomes was the development of Khartoum into a prominent urban and political center.²⁷⁹

The historical ties have been instrumental in shaping contemporary relations. Türkiye was among the first countries to recognize the Republic of Sudan, establishing its embassy in Khartoum on 1 January 1957.²⁸⁰ However, until the 1980s, relations remained relatively limited. A pivotal moment occurred with the meeting between Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiry and Turkish President Kenan Evren in Ankara on 2 August 1982. This important meeting led to agreements that strengthened bilateral relations.²⁸¹ The foundation for the robust ties that flourished during the AK Party era was laid during this time through collaboration in trade, development, and security.

The first notable efforts concerning trade relations between Türkiye and Sudan began in the early 1980s. On 5 July 1980, a trade agreement was signed in which both nations committed to granting each other most-favored-nation status. In 1982, Türkiye and Sudan established a ministerial-level Economic and Technical Cooperation Commission.²⁸² This Commission remains active today and convened 15 times between 1983 and 2018 for consultations. The primary goal of these meetings has been to maximize and diversify trade between the two countries.²⁸³

The development cooperation between Türkiye and Sudan has been as deep-rooted and significant as their trade relations. The Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement from 1982 anticipated Türkiye providing technical assistance in agriculture and livestock, along with offering higher education scholarships in fields such as medicine, pharmacy, and engineering. Furthermore, this Agreement assigned the Turkish Technical Cooperation Agency (TİA) the responsibility of overseeing the negotiation and implementation of development projects between the two countries.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁸ Baykuş, A. B. & Aliyev P. 2023, *İnsani Yardımlardan Savunma Sanayi İşbirliğine: Türkiye-Çad İlişkilerinin Derinlemesine Analizi*, in «The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations», 54, s. 15.

²⁷⁹ Kavas, A. 2009, *Sudan*, in «TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi», 37, 462.

²⁸⁰ *Relations Between Türkiye and Sudan*, Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-sudan.en.mfa>, Accessed on 13 December 2024.

²⁸¹ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 459-525-4, 18 August 1982.

²⁸² Devlet Arşivleri, No. 407-174-7, 9 October 1980.

²⁸³ Devlet Arşivleri, No. 459-525-4, 18 August 1982.

²⁸⁴ Resmi Gazete, No. 91/1634, 12 April 1991.

One concrete outcome of Türkiye-Sudan development cooperation during this period was the establishment of the Kalakla Hospital in 1996, which has a capacity of 64 beds and continues to serve the Sudanese people.²⁸⁵

Until the early 2000s, bilateral relations between Türkiye and Sudan remained relatively limited in scope and impact, constrained by internal political instability within Sudan and the broader dynamics of the international system. A significant shift occurred with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit in 2006 and his subsequent visit as President in 2017, marking the first such high-level engagements by Turkish officials.²⁸⁶ The 2017 visit proved particularly consequential, as it resulted in the elevation of relationship to the level of a strategic partnership. In a reciprocal gesture, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir paid an official visit to Türkiye in 2008. Al-Bashir took part in the Turkish-African summit along with other leaders. It was his first flight abroad since the ICC indictment.²⁸⁷

High-level diplomatic engagements, along with the agreements signed during these interactions, have been institutionalized and strengthened through public institutions. Turkish institutions that began operations in Sudan after 2000, including TİKA (2006), the Yunus Emre Institute (2016), TMV (2017), and THY (2006), have played a significant role in reinforcing the bilateral relationship.

Economic relations between Türkiye and Sudan have considerably evolved, building on the diplomatic groundwork established in the 1980s, particularly under the multidimensional foreign policy approach adopted during the AK Party era. The implementation of Türkiye's Strategy for the Development of Commercial and Economic Relations with African Countries, launched in 2003, further strengthened commercial ties with Sudan.²⁸⁸ Additionally, the Agreement on the Prevention of Double Taxation signed in 2001, facilitated private sector activities in Sudan and significantly enhanced the overall economic relationship between the two countries.²⁸⁹

Erdoğan's visit to Khartoum in 2006, accompanied by a delegation of bureaucrats and business representatives, marked a turning point in bilateral trade relations. Following this visit, Turkish companies have expanded their operations in Sudan. Between 2007 and 2010, Türkiye undertook 23 projects in Sudan valued at \$430 million. During the same period, Türkiye's direct investments in Sudan reached \$210 million. A key milestone in economic cooperation was reached in 2008 when Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir visited Türkiye, leading to the establishment of the Türkiye-Sudan Business Council through an agreement between DEİK and the Sudanese Federation of Businessmen and Employers. This Council remains operational and continues to function effectively.²⁹⁰

Since 2007, Türkiye has consistently exported to Sudan at levels exceeding \$200 million, with figures reaching \$462.9 million in 2022. In comparison, Sudan's exports to Türkiye were relatively modest until 2021, when they surpassed \$100 million for the first time and increased to a record high of \$233 million in 2022 (See Graph 7). Despite occasional fluctuations over the years, the trade balance has predominantly favored Türkiye, reflecting the asymmetric nature of bilateral trade. Türkiye's primary exports to Sudan include milling products, vegetables, root tubers, animal or microbial oils, machinery, mechanical devices, electrical machinery and equipment, soap, footwear, iron and steel.

²⁸⁵ Resmi Gazete, No. 96/8501, 22 September 1996.

²⁸⁶ *We are Determined to Stand by the Sudanese People and State*, in T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/we-are-determined-to-stand-by-the-sudanese-people-and-state>, 12 August 2021.

²⁸⁷ *Sudan Cumhurbaşkanı Ankara'da*, CNN Türk, 21 January 2008, <https://www.cnntrk.com/turkiye/sudan-cumhurbaskani-ankarada-178936>, Accessed on 13 December 2024.

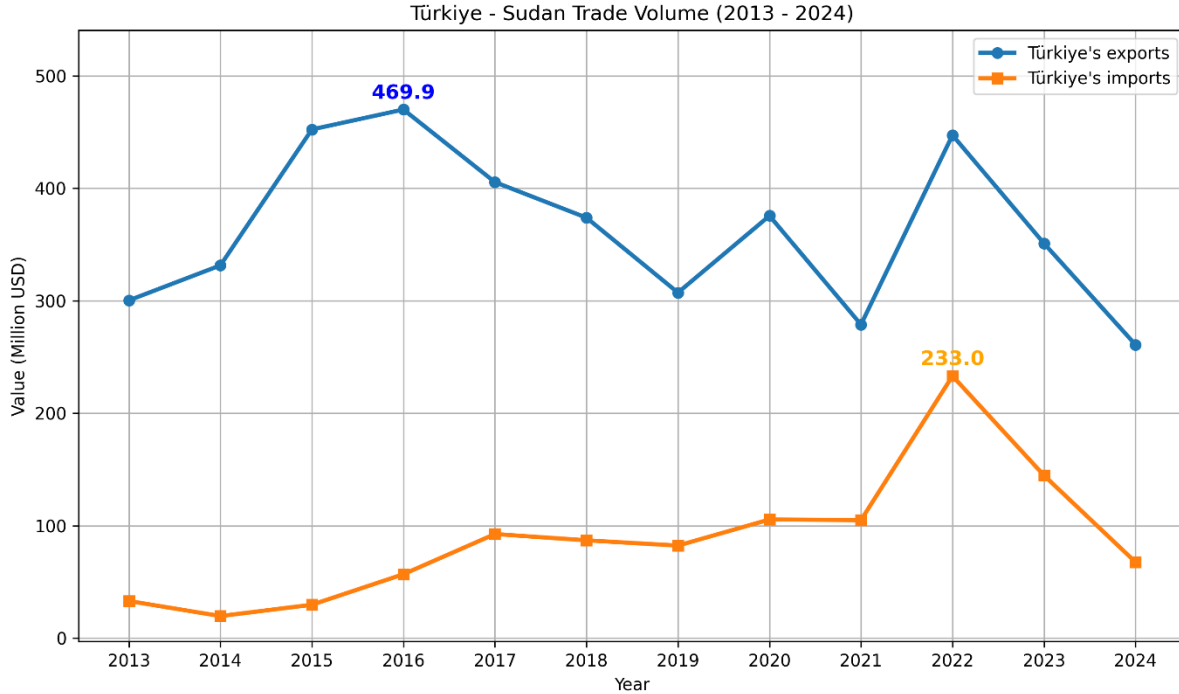
²⁸⁸ Altan, C. s.d., *Afrika Ülkeleriyle Ekonomik ve Ticari İlişkilerimiz*, in «Uluslararası Ekonomik Sorunlar Dergisi», 17.

²⁸⁹ Resmi Gazete, No. 4932, 22 July 2003.

²⁹⁰ *Türkiye-Sudan İş Konseyi*, in «Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu (DEİK)», <https://www.deik.org.tr/turkiye-afrika-is-konseyleri-turkiye-sudan-is-konseyi>, Accessed on 15 December 2024.

On the other hand, Sudan's exports to Türkiye are primarily comprised of oilseeds and fruits—particularly sesame—raw cotton, sheep and lamb hides, and precious metals.²⁹¹

Graph 7: Türkiye-Sudan Trade



During his official visit to Sudan in December 2017, President Erdoğan, accompanied by over 100 businesspeople, underscored the inadequacy of Turkish-Sudanese trade volume, which stood at \$500 million. He projected that this figure could potentially increase to \$2 billion in the short term and to \$10 billion in the long term. President Omar al-Bashir expressed his support for Erdoğan's target in his remarks. Following the discussions, the two leaders signed the Türkiye-Sudan Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement²⁹², which aims to liberalize trade in alignment with the development levels of both countries, expand cooperation across various trade and investment sectors, and enhance bilateral relations based on solidarity and mutual benefit. Additionally, the visit resulted in the signing of nine agreements addressing key areas such as health, agriculture, cold storage, and airport construction, further solidifying the economic ties between the two nations.²⁹³

Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay paid an official visit to Sudan for the 15th Term Joint Economic Commission meeting on November 19–21, 2018. During his visit, he attended the inauguration of the branch of the Turkish-Sudanese International Agriculture and Livestock Company, which was established in Khartoum under the Bilateral Agricultural Cooperation and Partnership Agreement signed in 2014.²⁹⁴ Vice President Oktay announced that the company will oversee joint agricultural activities on 780,000 hectares (1,930,000 acres), following a pilot study on 12,500 hectares (30,890 acres).²⁹⁵ He added, Türkiye's goal is Sudan's development, enhancing the quality of life of the

²⁹¹ *Sudan Ülke Profili*, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2024, 12.

²⁹² *Onay Süreci Devam Eden STA'lar*, T. C. Ticaret Bakanlığı, 14 January 2018 <https://ticaret.gov.tr/dis-iliskiler/serbest-ticaret-anlasmalari/onay-sureci-devam-eden-stalar/sudan>, Accessed on 17 December 2024.

²⁹³ *Türkiye ve Afrika Ülkeleri Arasında 33 Anlaşmalı Ortaklık*, «Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu (DEİK)», Ocak 2018, <https://www.deik.org.tr/uploads/kuresel-ocak-2018-2.pdf>, Accessed on 17 December 2024.

²⁹⁴ Resmi Gazete, No. 2015/8234, 19 November 2015.

²⁹⁵ *Cumhurbaşkanı Yardımcısı Fuat Oktay: Sudan'da Tarım Faaliyetlerine İlişkin Şu Anda 12 Bin 500 Hektar Alanda Pilot Çalışmayı Hayata Geçireceğiz*, Anadolu Agency (AA), 21 November 2018,

brotherly people of Sudan and at the same time boosting the fraternity between the peoples of the two countries. In a press statement made during the Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan Abdel Fattah al-Burhan's visit to Türkiye in 2021, Vice President Oktay revealed that Sudan had allocated an initial 100,000 hectares of agricultural land to Türkiye, with plans for further expansion. He emphasized that the agricultural cooperation under the pilot farm project, led by Türkiye's General Directorate of Agricultural Enterprises (TİGEM), would provide significant investment opportunities for Turkish entrepreneurs in Sudan while contributing to employment, agricultural technology, and food security in the country.²⁹⁶

Türkiye-Sudan engagement has persisted following the ousting of President al-Bashir in 2019, indicating a commitment to cooperation irrespective of domestic political transitions. Economic relations between Türkiye and Sudan remained largely unaffected after the removal of al-Bashir. The trade volume between the two countries increased from \$389 million in 2019 to \$680 million in 2022. Both sides continued to conduct mutual visits, demonstrating their commitment to positive relations. Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu visited Sudan in August 2019 at the invitation of Sudanese authorities to attend the signing ceremony for the Constitutional Declaration.²⁹⁷ The high-level engagement continued in May 2021 when Vice Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, paid an official visit to Ankara. During a joint press conference, Vice President Fuat Oktay reaffirmed that both parties were dedicated to strengthening cooperation within their previously agreed frameworks.²⁹⁸

Another significant development in enhancing economic relations was the opening of a branch of Ziraat Katılım in Khartoum in 2020. This step was seen as a strategic advancement in supporting trade and investment relations. Ziraat Katılım became the first Turkish bank to establish a branch on the African continent, providing a secure financial institution for entrepreneurs from both countries.²⁹⁹

Although comprehensive agreements on development cooperation with Sudan were signed before the AK Party era, their implementation resulted in limited outcomes. During this period, cooperation mainly focused on training experts, providing educational scholarships, and offering financial aid. However, Türkiye's economic growth in the 2000s significantly enhanced its role in development cooperation. Türkiye's official development assistance increased substantially after 2005 and reached an annual average of \$1.2 billion between 2005 and 2013.³⁰⁰ This rise in development aid positively impacted Türkiye-Sudan relations as well.

The second TİKA Programme Coordinator Office in Africa was established in Khartoum in 2006, following the opening of the first office in Addis Ababa. Since then, TİKA has implemented numerous projects in Sudan, spanning key sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, livestock, vocational training, administrative and social infrastructure development, and

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/cumhurbaskani-yardimcisi-oktay-sudanda-12-bin-500-hektar-alanda-pilot-calismayi-hayata-gecirecegiz/1317794>, Accessed on 23 December 2024.

²⁹⁶ Güler, A. Y. *Sudan'da 1 Milyon Dönüm Tarım arazisi Türkiye Tarafından İşlenecek*, Anadolu Agency, 13 August 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/sudanda-1-milyon-donum-tarim-arazisi-turkiye-tarafindan-islenecek/2333368>, Accessed on 23 December 2024.

²⁹⁷ *Relations between Türkiye and Sudan*, Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-sudan.en.mfa>, Accessed on 23 December 2024.

²⁹⁸ Güler, A. Y., Yılmaz, M. Ş. & Çetinkaya, İ. H. *Cumhurbaşkanı Yardımcısı Oktay: Sudan'ı Kendi Ayakları Üzerinde Sapasağlam Dururken Görmek İstiyoruz*, Anadolu Agency, 13 August 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/cumhurbaskani-yardimcisi-oktay-sudani-kendi-ayaklari-uzerinde-sapasaglam-dururken-gormek-istiyoruz/2256488>, Accessed on 23 December 2024.

²⁹⁹ Erdem, Ö. *Ziraat Katılım İlk Yurt Dışı Şubesini Sudan'da Açtı*, Anadolu Agency, 23 November 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/ziraat-katilim-ilk-yurt-disi-subesini-sudan-da-acti/2053355> Accessed on 24 December 2024.

³⁰⁰ Arpa, E. & Bayar M. 2019, *Türkiye'nin Afrika'ya Yönelik Kalkınma Yardımlarının Yardım Etkinliği Açısından Değerlendirilmesi*, in «Bilge Strateji», 11(21), 203.

restoration.³⁰¹ In addition to TİKA's efforts, Turkish institutions such as TMV, Yunus Emre Institute, Turkish Red Crescent, and TDV have played a significant role in advancing Türkiye-Sudan development cooperation. A closer examination of these projects and institutions reveals that Türkiye-Sudan development cooperation has predominantly focused on three key sectors: healthcare, agriculture, and education.

Türkiye has undertaken several significant healthcare initiatives in Sudan, one of the most notable being the Sudan-Türkiye Training and Research Hospital in Nyala, which has been operational since 2014. The hospital has 150 standard beds, 46 intensive care beds, three operating rooms, and two maternity wards. It also features a fully equipped radiology unit and a laboratory. Serving approximately 120,000 patients annually, the facility hosts Turkish specialists who provide training for Sudanese healthcare personnel and physicians.³⁰² Beyond hospital-based healthcare services, Türkiye has prioritized capacity-building and public health initiatives in Sudan. One prominent example is TİKA's support for the Khartoum International Midwifery Training Center. Designed to combat Sudan's high infant mortality rate, this initiative led to the launch of comprehensive midwifery training programs, enhancing the professional capacity of healthcare personnel.³⁰³ In addition to strengthening medical education, Türkiye has addressed fundamental public health needs by improving access to clean water. Through well-digging projects across Sudan, TİKA and TDV have worked to provide access to drinking water, further contributing to the country's overall development efforts.

Türkiye's development assistance to Sudan has focused on agriculture and livestock, both of which are vital sectors for the Sudanese economy. Several key initiatives have been implemented to improve productivity and sustainability within these sectors. A prominent example is the establishment of the Sudan-Turkish Genetic Resources and Sperm Production Center in 2013. This project aims to enhance animal breeding practices and increase both meat and dairy production in Sudan, thereby contributing to the country's food security and agricultural development. Turkish experts have trained Sudanese veterinarians at the center to enhance the project's long-term sustainability. By increasing efficiency in Sudan's livestock sector, this initiative plays a crucial role in strengthening the country's food security.³⁰⁴ Following the signing of the Bilateral Agricultural Cooperation and Partnership Agreement in 2014, Türkiye expanded its agricultural projects in Sudan. Through TİKA, Sudanese farmers have received various agricultural inputs, including seeds, fruit saplings, plows, and irrigation pumps. Additionally, targeted support has been provided to mango and gum arabic producers to strengthen their capacity and market access.³⁰⁵

A significant dimension of Türkiye's development cooperation with Sudan is the provision of education and vocational training. One of the key initiatives in this regard is the Khartoum Vocational Trainers Training Center established in 2013. This institution offers specialized training programs across multiple disciplines, including mechatronics, electronics, electrical engineering, furniture production, computing, hospitality, tourism, and textiles. These courses are conducted by Turkish

³⁰¹ *Sudan-Khartoum Program Coordination Office*, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), <https://tika.gov.tr/en/office/sudan-khartoum-program-coordination-office/>, Accessed on 27 December 2024.

³⁰² *Nyala Türkiye Sudan Eğitim ve Araştırma Hastanesi Yılda 120 Bin Hastaya Hizmet Veriyor*, TİKA, 15 August 2016, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-nyala_turkiye_sudan_egitim_ve_arastirma_hastanesi_yilda_120_bin_hastaya_hizmet_veriyor/ Accessed on 2 January 2025.

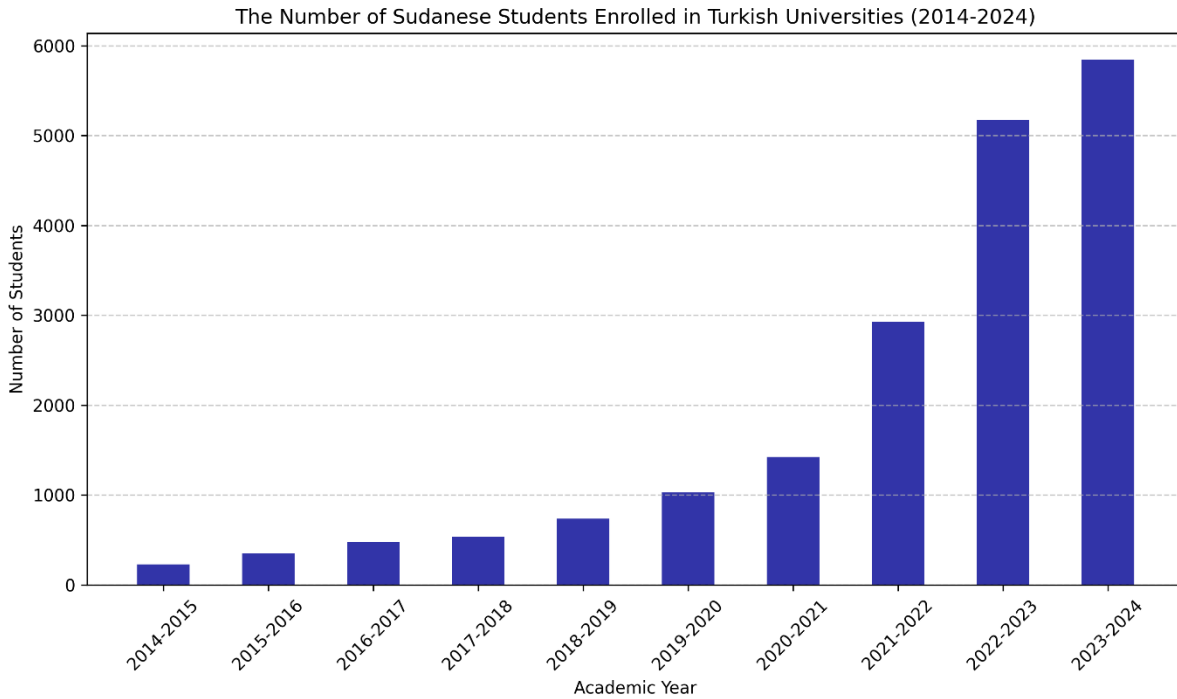
³⁰³ *Sudan'da Uluslararası Ebe Eğitimi Merkezine Tadilat ve Çevre Düzenlemesi*, TİKA, 3 January 2017, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-sudan_da_uluslararası_ebe_egitimi_merkezine_tadilat_ve_cevre_duzenlemesi/ Accessed on 2 January 2025.

³⁰⁴ *Sudan Türk Gen Kaynakları ve Sperm Üretim Merkezi Personeline Eğitim*, TİKA, 23 August 2015, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-sudan_turk_gen_kaynakları_ve_sperm_uretim_merkezi_personeline_egitim/, Accessed on 2 January 2025.

³⁰⁵ *TİKA'dan Sudan'ın Tarım Altyapısına Destek*, TİKA, 19 April 2019, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika%27dan_sudan%27in_tarim_altyapisina_destek/, Accessed on 2 January 2025.

experts, and the center annually accommodates approximately 600 trainees.³⁰⁶ In addition to this initiative, TİKA has implemented vocational training programs specifically for women to equip them with skills in fields such as tailoring and culinary arts.³⁰⁷ Participants in these programs have been provided with essential business equipment, including sewing machines, leather processing machinery, ovens, and spice processing tools, thereby facilitating their integration into the workforce and fostering economic empowerment.³⁰⁸

Graph 8: Sudanese Students in Turkish Universities



To strengthen the technical infrastructure of universities and educational institutions, state-of-the-art physics and chemistry laboratories have been established, complemented by specialized training programs in these disciplines. Since 2017, TMV has been actively engaged in providing education across six schools in Khartoum and South Darfur. These institutions, previously affiliated with the FETÖ, were officially transferred to TMV by the Sudanese government in the same year. At present, these schools provide education to approximately 1,200 students at the primary, secondary, and high school levels, contributing to the advancement of Sudan's educational landscape.³⁰⁹ Moreover, Türkiye has extended publicly funded higher education scholarships to support Sudanese students pursuing their studies in Türkiye. While the number of Sudanese students in Türkiye stood at 132 in 2013, this figure surged to 5,847 in 2023, reflecting a significant expansion in educational cooperation between the two countries (See Graph 8).³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ TİKA, *Sudan'da Yılda Bin Kişiyi Meslek Tecrübesi Kazandırıyor*, Anadolu Agency, 9 August 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/tika-sudan-da-yilda-bin-kisiye-meslek-tecrubesi-kazandiriyor/880393>, Accessed on 2 January 2025.

³⁰⁷ TİKA'dan Sudan'da Kadın İstihdamına Destek, TİKA, 26 July 2020, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika%27dan_sudan%27da_kadin_istihdamina_destek/, Accessed on 2 January 2025.

³⁰⁸ TİKA, *Sudan'daki Liseye Fizik ve Kimya Laboratuvarı Kurdu*, TİKA, 25 November 2021, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika_sudan_daki_liseye_fizik_ve_kimya_laboratuvari_kurdu/, Accessed on 2 January 2025.

³⁰⁹ *Sudan Maarif Okulları Hedeflerine Adım Adım Yaklaşıyor*, Turkish Maarif Foundation, 6 July 2022, <https://turkiyemaarif.org/news/sudan-maarif-okullari-hedeflerine-adim-adim-yaklasiyor>, Accessed on 8 January 2025.

³¹⁰ *Uyruğa Göre Öğrenci Sayıları Raporu*, Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>, Accessed on 8 January 2025.

Security cooperation between the two nations deepened through the signing of two military agreements. The first one, the Framework Agreement on Military Training, Technical, and Scientific Cooperation, was signed in 2011 and came into effect in 2015. This agreement laid the groundwork for comprehensive collaboration across various military domains, including education and training, defense industry development, inter-army relations, military intelligence, logistics, military healthcare, military law, communication and information systems, peacekeeping operations, and personnel exchanges.³¹¹ The second agreement, the Military Training Cooperation Agreement, was signed during President Erdoğan's visit to Sudan in 2017. This agreement aimed to institutionalize structured mechanisms for military training collaboration between the two countries. A comparative analysis of the two agreements reveals that the latter was more expansive in scope and more detailed in its provisions, reflecting the growing depth of bilateral ties.³¹²

Türkiye's commitment to strengthening defense relations with Sudan was further underscored during a joint press conference in 2021 with Sudan's Sovereignty Council Chairman, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, during his visit to Türkiye. President Erdoğan announced Türkiye's intention to enhance cooperation in the defense industry, culminating in the signing of the Military Financial Cooperation Agreement following their discussions.³¹³ Similarly, at the International Defence Industry Fair (IDEF) 2023 in Türkiye, Adil Ismail, Director of the Sudanese Ministry of Defence's International Relations Department, highlighted Sudan's interest in leveraging Türkiye's expertise in the defense industry.³¹⁴ These high-level engagements and agreements yielded tangible outcomes; in 2022, Türkiye's arms and ammunition exports to Sudan doubled, reaching \$9.73 million, highlighting the growing economic and strategic dimensions of their partnership.³¹⁵

Another critical aspect of Türkiye-Sudan security cooperation has been Ankara's mediation efforts in Sudan's ongoing civil war which erupted in April 2023. In a phone conversation with Sovereignty Council Chairman Burhan on December 13, 2024, President Erdoğan reaffirmed Türkiye's support for Sudan's unity and territorial integrity and expressed Ankara's willingness to mediate in the conflict. Burhan responded positively to this offer, signaling a potential avenue for Turkish diplomatic engagement in resolving the crisis. This mediation effort underscores Türkiye's broader strategic interest in fostering stability in the region and its role as an active participant in conflict resolution initiatives.³¹⁶

In 2013, Türkiye and Sudan took steps to enhance their energy cooperation by signing two key Memoranda of Understanding.³¹⁷ The first was focused on the hydrocarbon sector, aiming to expand collaboration in oil and gas exploration, production, and related activities. However, as of 2025, this agreement has not been implemented, and the energy partnership between the two countries has largely shifted toward electricity rather than hydrocarbons. The second MoU, signed the same year, centered on cooperation in the field of electricity. This agreement aimed to encourage investment in Sudan's electricity sector and foster partnerships between public and private institutions in both

³¹¹ Resmi Gazete, No. 2014/6871, 25 October 2014.

³¹² Resmi Gazete, No. 2018/11570, 2 May 2018.

³¹³ *Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Sudan'ın Kalkınmasına ve Altyapısının Geliştirilmesine Yönelik Desteğimizi Artırarak Sürdüreceğiz*, T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı, 12 August 2021, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-sudanin-kalkinmasına-ve-altyapisinin-gelistirilmesine-yonelik-destegimizi-artirarak-surdurecegiz>, Accessed on 9 January 2025.

³¹⁴ Kavak G. *Sudan, Türkiye'nin Savunma Sanayisindeki Deneyiminden Faydalanmak İstiyor*, Anadolu Agency, 26 July 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/sudan-turkiyenin-savunma-sanayisindeki-deneyiminden-faydalanmak-istiyor/2954554>, Accessed on 9 January 2025.

³¹⁵ *Turkey Exports of Arms and Ammunition, Parts and Accessories to Sudan*, Trade Economics, <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/exports/sudan/arms-ammunition-parts-accessories>, Accessed on 9 January 2025.

³¹⁶ *Burhan, Türkiye'nin Sudan'da Savaşın Durdurulması İçin Her Türlü Rolünü Memnuniyetle Karşıladı*, Anadolu Agency, 13 December 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/burhan-turkiyenin-sudanda-savasin-durdurulmasi-icin-her-turlu-rolunu-memnuniyetle-karsiladi/3423961>, Accessed on 13 January 2025.

³¹⁷ Resmi Gazete, No. 2017/10301, 7 June 2017; Resmi Gazete, No. 2017/10157, 6 June 2017.

countries. One of the most notable outcomes of this MoU was the deployment of the Karadeniz Powership Rauf Bey in 2018. This floating power plant, anchored off the coast of Port Sudan, initially generated 150 megawatts (MW) of electricity. By 2024, its capacity had increased to 350 MW, significantly bolstering Sudan's energy supply and addressing critical power shortages in the country.³¹⁸

3.6 Relations with South Sudan

The Republic of South Sudan, the youngest state in Africa, became independent in 2011. Türkiye immediately upgraded its Consulate General in Juba to the Embassy. The Turkish Embassy was among the first diplomatic missions established in the country. South Sudan opened its Embassy in Ankara in June 2012.³¹⁹ Following the recognition, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in a press release that Türkiye would exert every effort to develop friendly and brotherly relations with the Republic of South Sudan and the People of South Sudan, wishing them a peaceful and prosperous future.³²⁰

After the establishment of diplomatic relations, bilateral ties between Türkiye and South Sudan were strengthened through reciprocal high-level visits. The first of these took place on July 9, 2011, when Türkiye was represented by Minister of Development Cevdet Yılmaz at South Sudan's independence ceremony in Juba. This visit marked the beginning of a series of high-level engagements aimed at deepening cooperation and solidarity between the two nations. Following Yılmaz's visit, South Sudanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Nhial Deng Nhial visited Türkiye on November 22–23, 2012, and attended the official opening of the South Sudanese Embassy in Ankara. During his visit, he held a meeting with his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoğlu. Following the discussions, both sides agreed to increase high-level mutual visits and to hold regular political consultations. The efforts to enhance diplomatic ties culminated in the first presidential-level visit from South Sudan to Türkiye. President of the Republic of South Sudan Salva Kiir Mayardit, visited Türkiye in April 2015 to attend the 100th Anniversary Commemoration of the Gallipoli Naval Battles and held a meeting with President Erdoğan.³²¹

As diplomatic relations between Türkiye and South Sudan have progressed and official visits have increased, the scope of bilateral cooperation has significantly expanded. Since 2011, the two countries have signed numerous agreements spanning visa exemptions, transportation, education, and trade. Furthermore, bilateral ties have been reinforced through institutional partnerships. In 2014, TİKA opened an office in Juba to coordinate and streamline Türkiye's development assistance initiatives in South Sudan.³²² To further strengthen economic and trade relations, the Türkiye-South Sudan

³¹⁸ *Türk Enerji Gemisi Sudan'da Elektrik Üretimine Başladı*, Anadolu Agency, 22 May 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/turk-enerji-gemisi-sudanda-elektrik-uretimine-basladi/1153373>, Accessed on 13 January 2025.

³¹⁹ *Relations Between Türkiye and South Sudan*, Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-south-sudan.en.mfa>, Accessed on 12 January 2025.

³²⁰ Press Release Regarding the Recognition of the Independence of the Republic of South Sudan, Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No: 162, 9 July 2011, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-162_-9-july-2011_-press-release-regarding-the-recognition-of-the-independence-of-the-republic-of-south-sudan.en.mfa, Accessed on 12 January 2025.

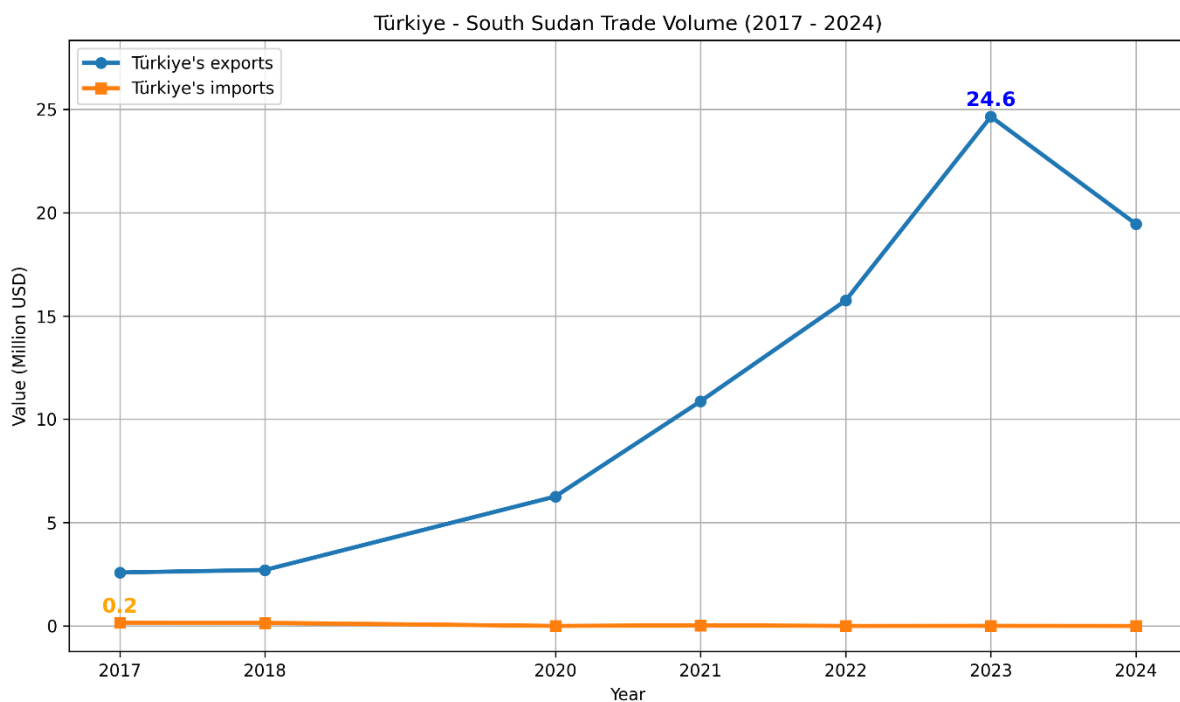
³²¹ *Relations Between Türkiye and South Sudan*, Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-south-sudan.en.mfa>, Accessed on 12 January 2025.

³²² *South Sudan – Juba Program Coordination Office*, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), <https://tika.gov.tr/en/office/south-sudan-juba-program-coordination-office/>, Accessed on 12 January 2025.

Business Council was established under DEİK in March 2019.³²³ In a notable development reflecting the deepening of these ties, THY commenced regular flights to Juba, the capital of South Sudan, in 2022. These milestones underscore the growing engagement between the two countries and highlight the potential for continued collaboration across various sectors.³²⁴

Although the economic and trade ties between Türkiye and South Sudan exhibit growth potential, the relations remained relatively underdeveloped for much of the 2010s due to the civil war in South Sudan. In 2016, the trade volume between the two countries was a mere \$196,000. However, since 2020, trade relations have demonstrated steady growth, reaching approximately \$24.6 million by 2023. Despite this progress, the trade balance continues to be heavily skewed in Türkiye's favor (See Graph 9). Türkiye's primary exports to South Sudan include processed grain products, fresh fruits and vegetables, beverages, medical supplies, and machinery. In contrast, South Sudan's exports to Türkiye are predominantly composed of oilseeds and fruits—particularly sesame—raw cotton, sheep and lamb hides, and precious metals.³²⁵

Graph 9: Türkiye-South Sudan Trade



The two states signed the Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement in 2017 to enhance bilateral trade relations. The agreement outlines cooperation in various sectors including trade, agriculture, livestock, education, health, energy, fisheries, mutual investment, science, and technology. Under this framework, both parties agreed to grant each other the most favored nation status concerning customs duties and other trade-related costs for imports and exports. The agreement included the establishment of a Türkiye-South Sudan Joint Economic Commission at the ministerial level to facilitate bilateral

³²³ Türkiye - South Sudan Business Council, Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu (DEİK), <https://www.deik.org.tr/turkiye-africa-business-councils-turkiye-south-sudan-business-council?pm=66>, Accessed on 12 January 2025.

³²⁴ Yılmaz, G. THY'nin İstanbul-Juba seferleri 1 Haziran'da başlıyor, Anadolu Agency, 8 April 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/thynin-istanbul-juba-seferleri-1-haziranda-basliyor/2558870>, Accessed on 12 January 2025.

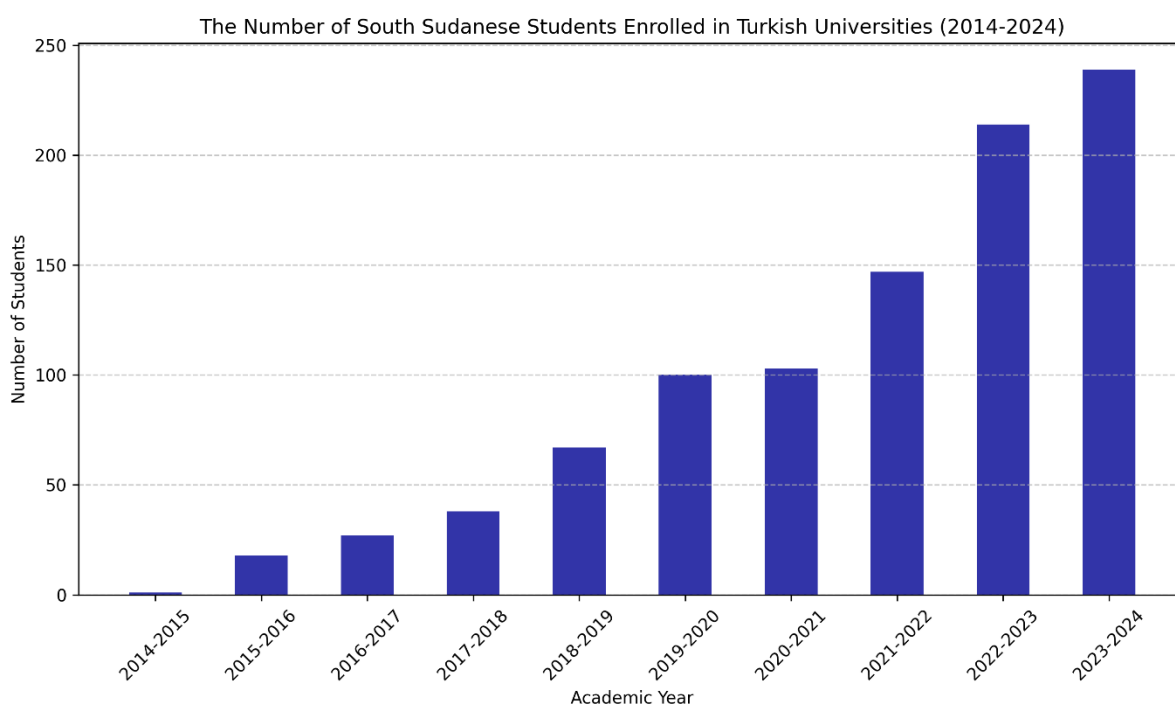
³²⁵ Turkey Exports to South Sudan, Trading Economics, <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/exports/south-sudan>, Accessed on 15 January 2025; Turkey Imports from South Sudan, Trading Economics, <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/imports/south-sudan>, Accessed on 15 January 2025.

economic and trade cooperation. However, as of 2024, the commission has not commenced its activities.³²⁶

In 2014, Türkiye established the TİKA Program Coordination Office in Juba to implement capacity-building and technical cooperation projects in South Sudan. TİKA's initiatives in the country have primarily focused on key sectors such as vocational training, health, agriculture, social development, and education. As part of its support for agricultural development in South Sudan, TİKA has provided substantial quantities of seeds and farming equipment to local producers. In 2018, the agency distributed 30 tons of seeds and various agricultural tools in Juba.³²⁷ By 2021, this support had expanded substantially, exceeding 250 tons of seeds and benefiting 500 farmers. The assistance included seeds for maize, beans, sorghum, peanuts, and sesame, along with essential agricultural tools. TİKA extended its support to poultry and beekeeping farmers, promoting diversified rural livelihoods and enhancing income-generating opportunities for local communities.³²⁸

The promotion of women's entrepreneurship has been a significant component of development cooperation. Numerous projects have been implemented to enhance women's participation in economic and social life. Training programs in tailoring and soap production have been launched, accompanied by the establishment of workshops and small-scale production facilities. In addition to training, women have received material and technical support to help them develop professional skills and achieve economic self-sufficiency.³²⁹

Graph 10: South Sudanese Students in Turkish Universities



The 2017 Agreement on Cooperation in Education is a significant pillar of development cooperation between Türkiye and South Sudan. The agreement outlines initiatives such as expert, teacher, and

³²⁶ Resmi Gazete, No. 6342, 1 November 2022.

³²⁷ TİKA'dan Güney Sudan'lı Çiftçilere Destek, TİKA, 18 January 2021, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika%27dan_guney_sudan%27li_ciftcilere_destek-2/, Accessed on 15 January 2025.

³²⁸ Güney Sudanlı Çiftçilere Tohum ve Tarım Ekipmanı Desteği, TİKA, 2 July 2018, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-guney_sudanli_ciftcilere_tohum_ve_tarim_ekipmani_destegi-2/, Accessed on 15 January 2025.

³²⁹ TİKA, Güney Sudanlı Kadın Girişimcilere Desteğini Sürdürüyor, TİKA, 4 November 2022, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika_guney_sudanli_kadin_girisimcilere_destegini_surduruyor/, Accessed on 15 January 2025.

student exchanges; higher education and research scholarships; experience sharing in technical and vocational education; technology transfer in education; partnerships between academic institutions; mutual recognition of academic titles and diplomas and Turkish language education in South Sudan. Cooperation in the field of education has yielded concrete results.³³⁰ While only one South Sudanese student was enrolled in a Turkish university in 2015, this number rose steadily to 239 in 2024 (See Graph 10).³³¹ The agreement stipulated the establishment of TMV in South Sudan. However, as of 2024, the foundation has yet to commence its activities.

Another notable outcome of the agreement has been the implementation of educational projects through TİKA. These projects have focused on enhancing the infrastructure of schools and providing students with essential learning resources. For example, in 2024, the Upper Nile University Faculty of Medicine received projectors, stethoscopes, blood pressure monitors, thermometers, laboratory coats, and anatomical models.³³² Alongside these efforts, projects supporting vocational and professional training have been introduced. Training programs were organized for South Sudanese doctors, diplomats, and journalists. In cooperation with TİKA and TRT, training on radio and television broadcasting was provided to staff of the South Sudan Radio and Television Corporation.³³³ In 2019, the Turkish Foreign Ministry Diplomacy Academy hosted South Sudanese diplomats in Ankara for a comprehensive training program that addressed economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, international protocol, and security.³³⁴

Türkiye is one of the contributing countries to United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) established by the UN Security Council Resolution 1996 (2011) on 8 July 2011. Since its inception, Türkiye has actively supported UNMISS by deploying police personnel to the region. As of 2024, Türkiye continues to fulfill its responsibilities within the mission, demonstrating its ongoing commitment to international peacekeeping efforts and stability in South Sudan.³³⁵

In 2021, during the International Defence Industry Fair (IDEF) in Istanbul, Turkish Minister of National Defense, Hulusi Akar, met with South Sudan's Minister of Defense, Angelina Jany Teny. The two ministers discussed opportunities for cooperation in the area of security, particularly in the context of the provisions outlined in Chapter II of the 2018 peace agreement, which marked the end of the civil war in South Sudan. This chapter specifically emphasizes the goal of training and integrating 83,000 soldiers into a unified, professional national army. During their discussions, Minister Akar reaffirmed Türkiye's commitment to supporting South Sudan's security sector. In response, Minister Teny highlighted South Sudan's interest in deepening cooperation with Türkiye, particularly in areas such as military industry and defense production, underscoring the potential for mutually beneficial collaboration.³³⁶

Although no concrete steps have been taken to date in the field of energy cooperation, this sector is regarded as a promising area for bilateral collaboration between Türkiye and South Sudan. Despite its abundance of natural resources, South Sudan faces significant challenges in oil production due to

³³⁰ Resmî Gazete, No. 2018/11488, 3 April 2018.

³³¹ *Uyruğa Göre Öğrenci Sayıları Raporu*, Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>, Accessed on 17 January 2025.

³³² TİKA, *Güney Sudan'da Tıp Eğitimine Destek Sağlıyor*, TİKA, 28 March 2024, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-tika_guney_sudan%27da_egitime_destek_olmaya_devam_ediyor/, Accessed on 17 January 2025.

³³³ *Güney Sudanlı Medya Personeline TİKA ve TRT İşbirliğinde Eğitim*, TİKA, 13 March 2018, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-guney_sudanli_medya_personeline_tika_ve_trt_isbirliginde_egitim/, Accessed on 17 January 2025.

³³⁴ *Güney Sudanlı Diplomatlara Eğitim*, 13 March 2019, https://tika.gov.tr/detail-guney_sudanli_diplomatlara_egitim/, Accessed on 17 January 2025.

³³⁵ *Turkey Seeks to Tighten Mutual Cooperation with South Sudan*, Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Juba, 25 June 2016, <https://juba-be.mfa.gov.tr/Content/assets/consulate/images/localCache/12/14a295df-6559-4800-bb7a-159da5837521.pdf>, Accessed on 19 January 2025.

³³⁶ Takpiny, B. Turkey to Back Unification of South Sudanese Forces, 24 Augut 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-to-back-unification-of-south-sudanese-forces/2344929>, Accessed on 19 January 2025.

insufficient infrastructure and limited technological capacity. In contrast, Türkiye possesses advanced technological expertise and substantial investment capabilities, positioning it as a potential partner to support South Sudan's energy sector development. This complementarity could pave the way for mutually beneficial cooperation, enabling South Sudan to harness its natural resources more effectively while providing Türkiye with opportunities to expand its international energy partnerships.³³⁷ In 2017, Minister of Petroleum of South Sudan, Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth, underscored the potential for energy cooperation. He specifically invited Turkish investors to participate in the development of five oil blocks that had already been explored, contained proven reserves, and were ready for production. This invitation was later reaffirmed in January 2020 during an official visit to Türkiye by South Sudan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Awut Deng Acuil. Minister Acuil highlighted Türkiye's constructive and growing role in Africa and urged Turkish investors to engage in South Sudan's development. She emphasized the need for knowledge sharing and expertise in key sectors such as petroleum, gold, mining, natural gas, agriculture, and fisheries, all of which are integral to South Sudan's abundant natural resource base.³³⁸

3.7 Conclusion

Türkiye's relations with the Sahel date back to the Ottoman Empire, particularly in Niger, Chad, and Sudan where historical narratives are leveraged for diplomatic ties. Following the independence of Sahel states, Türkiye established diplomatic relations and provided aid, especially during humanitarian crises like drought. Türkiye's recent engagement in the Sahel represents a strategic expansion of its African policy, blending historical ties, economic interests, security cooperation, and soft power. By investing in infrastructure, expanding educational and cultural influence, and supplying advanced drones, Türkiye has positioned itself as a key partner for Sahelian nations—even amid political instability and coups.

The continuity of Türkiye's relations with military-led governments in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger demonstrates its prioritization of long-term strategic interests over ideological alignment. Türkiye has adopted a principled approach after coups in the Sahel, maintaining relations with military governments while opposing ECOWAS intervention. Development projects through TİKA foster goodwill, while defense exports solidify Türkiye's role as a rising security provider in the region. Türkiye's ability to adapt to shifting political landscapes and offer an alternative to both traditional Western powers and emerging powers of Russia and China suggests its presence in the Sahel will continue to grow, shaping the region's geopolitical and economic future.

³³⁷ Erdoğan, H. Güney Sudan'dan Türk Yatırımcılara Çağrı, Anadolu Agency, 13 June 2017, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/guney-sudandan-turk-yatirimcilara-cagri/840377>, Accessed on 23 January 2025.

³³⁸ *South Sudan Looks to Deepen Relations with Turkey, Signs Four Agreements*, Daily Sabah, 9 June 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2020/01/09/south-sudan-looks-to-deepen-relations-with-turkey-signs-four-agreements>, Accessed on 19 January 2025.

PART THREE

4. Italy's Policy Towards Africa: A Character in Search of a Role

Aurora Ianni, Mattia Giampaolo

4.1 Introduction

Due to its natural resources and its strategic position, Africa has progressively captured the interests and appetites of many international actors, opening ground to geopolitical competition. The continent has indeed generated attention from many of the world's powers such as Türkiye, China, Russia and the Gulf countries, that, at different times and with various interests, have started penetrating Africa through both hard and soft power measures. In this framework, Italy has been defined by many as a 'latercomer', having been unable to overcome the emergency and short-term approach in its relations with the continent, at least until recent years. Indeed, although both development and energy cooperation have had a prominent role in relations³³⁹, Italian political interests in Africa have mainly focused on the Northern region with a focus on Libya³⁴⁰. As a matter of facts, Italy's engagement in Africa was conditioned by "a certain refrainment due to its colonial legacy, as well as by the lack of political and material capabilities."³⁴¹ Domestic instability has also been responsible for Italy's delay in capitalizing opportunities in Africa, compared to other EU and international actors³⁴².

The change in approach has been progressive but recent, thanks to a succession of economic, socio-political, health crises which have forced Italy to transform its outlook towards Africa since the early 2000s. Indeed, with Africa's population projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050³⁴³, there has been an increasing will to foster a mutually beneficial partnership for development broadening the traditional, limited perspective, of the "good neighbourly" relations in the Mediterranean region.

Given the geographical proximity and interdependence of the two shores of the *Mare Nostrum*, Italy has progressively matured the need to engage with Africa over the different dimensions of diplomacy, cooperation, trade and security. The steps to pursuing these objectives have varied and included targeted bilateral as well as interministerial meetings, bilateral agreements and cooperation initiatives, culminating recently into the flagship initiative of the Mattei Plan. With a special focus on joint development, the plan aims to position Rome as a key player in Africa, through investments and capacity-building measures, contributing to the enhancement of Italy's room of manouvre in the continent as well as to its role as bridgehead between Europe and Africa. In this context, however, Rome's aspirations need to cope with those of key global powers which have been consolidating their presence in Africa over the last decades.

³³⁹ Thanks to humanitarian and business led activities by NGOs and Catholic based entities, as well as multinational companies like ENI. To a broader analysis L. Guglielminotti, G. Trombelli *The evolution of Italian presence in Africa: towards an innovative policy approach?*, FMES, November 2024 <https://fmes-france.org/the-evolution-of-italian-presence-in-africa-towards-an-innovative-policy-approach/>

³⁴⁰ F. Donelli, *Turkey's Presence in Italy's Re-Engagement with Africa*, CATS NETWORK PAPER | NO. 7 | 11.06.2024 https://www.cats-network.eu/assets/cats/CATS_Network_Paper_Briefs/CATS_NETWORK_PAPER_NO_07_11.06.2024.pdf

³⁴¹ See S. Abrami, R. Gasco, *Italy and Türkiye's presence in Africa*, Türkiye's Observatory, CeSPI, June 2024 https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/osservatori/allegati/approf_30_turchia_e_africa_gasco_e_abrami.pdf

³⁴² F. Donelli, op cit.

³⁴³ See <https://www.uneca.org/stories/%28blog%29-as-africa%E2%80%99s-population-crosses-1.5-billion%2C-the-demographic-window-is-opening-getting>

With the process of Italy re-positioning in Africa still underway, this chapter aims to analyse the path that led to the Mattei Plan, the traditional Italian interests in Africa and the challenges and opportunities posed to Rome by the role and interests of other international players in the Continent.

4.2 *Italy's engagement in Africa: traditional priorities*

Italian action in Africa has been historically driven by its “Mediterranean identity” with a particular focus on Arabic-speaking countries North of the Sahel.

Pursuing the manthra of ‘stabilization’ Italy have maintained cooperation with Algeria even during the *décennie noire*, sharing the priority objectives of security and prosperity in the Mediterranean, fighting against international terrorism, organised crime and illegal immigration’, beyond energy cooperation³⁴⁴. With Libya, the 2008 ‘Treaty of Benghazi’, was already aimed at “strengthening of peace, security and stability in the Mediterranean, through a series of commitment including border control, fight against terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking, illegal immigration as well as defence, scientific, cultural, economic and energy cooperation”³⁴⁵, among the others. Since the beginning of 2000’s, indeed, Italy and other EU countries became the main commercial, economic and financial partners of the North Africa countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. At the general level, Italian exports expanded significantly from the mid-1990s, with an accelerated pace during the following decade, reaching a peak of approximately €13 billion in 2010. In 2011, Italy ranked as the second-largest exporter to North Africa, accounting for 8.2% of the market, behind France (11.4%). However, the overall European share of exports to North Africa has declined in recent years, largely due to the growing presence of emerging economies in these markets. Notably, China (closely behind Italy with 8.1% in 2011), Turkey (3.4%), Saudi Arabia (3.4%), Russia (3.1%), and Brazil (3%) have all registered substantial growth³⁴⁶.

At the country level, Italy has expanded its investments in Tunisia since the early 2000s, particularly through the provision of technological inputs in the agricultural, manufacturing, and energy sectors. In Libya, although energy resources represented the primary pillar of bilateral relations, Italy also ranked among the leading exporters of agricultural machinery, automobiles, and technology for the country’s limited manufacturing industry. These economic ties were further reinforced by various infrastructure development initiatives and energy extraction projects. In Egypt, Italy’s presence was marked by close cooperation in the industrial sphere, notably in the chemical and manufacturing sectors. In addition, the services sector—especially tourism—has played a crucial role, with Italy emerging as one of the countries registering the highest number of visitors to Egyptian tourist sites³⁴⁷.

More broadly, Italian relations with North Africa have been shaped by cooperation in the fields of security and migration. Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and, to a lesser extent, Morocco, have been key partners with which Italy has concluded multiple agreements on migration management and security.

This was particularly true since the Arab Uprisings and their consequences, when the numbers of arrivals by sea increased, heightening fears of protracted migration crisis from the enlarged Mediterranean region. The Libyan crisis represented a watershed for Italy, making its stabilisation a

³⁴⁴ See <https://ambalgeri.esteri.it/it/italia-e-algeria/>

³⁴⁵ See <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2009/02/18/009G0015/sg>

³⁴⁶ See, ISPI, *Conseguenze economiche della Primavera Araba La prospettiva italiana dal punto di vista dell’interscambio commerciale e degli investimenti in Nord Africa*, Rapporto ISPI per il Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Dicembre 2012, https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/ricerca_ispi_su_primavera_araba_14.12.12.pdf

³⁴⁷ L. Guglielminotti, G. Trombelli, op cit.

top priority. Italy has taken an active role in attempts at political mediation, support for peace processes and cooperation on migration and anti-trafficking measures with key international actors, recently renewed during Meloni-Erdogan-Dabaiba trilateral summit in Istanbul³⁴⁸.

As a spillover effect of Libyan instability, the Sahel region -especially Niger, Mali and Chad- started to be considered as the EU's southernmost border³⁴⁹ thus capturing Italy's efforts to contrast terrorist threats. Hence, Italy has considerably expanded its engagement in the Sahel region in recent years, by opening new embassies (such as that Niamey in 2017), setting up its military (bilateral Mission) and cooperation presence (the AICS Office in Niamey opened in 2023)³⁵⁰. Italy remains particularly concerned over Sahel instability, since of the risks of consequences to the Gulf of Guinea, the Great Lakes region and the wider Horn of Africa³⁵¹. Although Italy having not played a central role since in the Horn during the post-colonial period, it nonetheless maintained political and diplomatic ties that enabled the pursuit of cooperation policies aimed at fostering development in impoverished areas of the region. This engagement was complemented by several infrastructure projects—such as road construction and water management—as well as financial and economic support, particularly during the early 2000s. However, security cooperation has represented the most prominent dimension of Italy's involvement in the region³⁵². In pursuit of this objective, Italy established the Italian African Peace Facility (IAPF) to support the African Union's engagement in contexts marked by instability. The initiatives undertaken include mediation efforts, financial assistance, and capacity-building measures, which carry significant weight in conflict-affected regions such as the Horn of Africa.³⁵³

In Sudan, despite the country's chronic instability, Italy succeeded in establishing a dense network of relations, largely through international cooperation. Operating in crisis-affected areas, Italy played a leading role in several local development initiatives, especially in the agricultural sector and in efforts to strengthen the resilience of communities in conflict zones. Wars in Sudan, Yemen, and Gaza have prompted Italy to accelerate its efforts, as maintaining freedom of navigation from the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden is essential for secure trade routes, in addition to addressing migration and anti-piracy operations.

4.2.1 Migration and security

As a matter of facts, Rome's projection towards Africa has been *driven*, first and foremost, by the need to protect Italy's borders. Whether related to illegal migration, trafficking in human beings, or transnational faith-based terrorism, Italy's traditional engagement with Africa is linked to security. In this frame, the Italian strategy on migration has been aimed at migration containment (when not prevention) through either border security measures or those aimed at addressing the 'root causes' of migration, irrespective of political Governments' affiliation.

On the one hand, cooperation agreements have been signed with neighboring African countries both at the bilateral and EU levels: to name a few, the 2017 MoU between Italy and Lybia aimed at

³⁴⁸ See <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/incontro-trilaterale-con-il-presidente-della-repubblica-di-turchia-erdo-e-con-il-primo>

³⁴⁹ F. Donelli *op cit*.

³⁵⁰ See <https://ambniamey.esteri.it/it/italia-e-niger/rapporti-politici/>

³⁵¹ *Relazione analitica sulle missioni internazionali in corso e sullo stato degli interventi di cooperazione allo sviluppo a sostegno dei processi di pace e di stabilizzazione*, riferita all'anno 2024, anche al fine della relativa proroga per l'anno 2025, deliberata dal Consiglio dei ministri il 19 febbraio 2025 Doc. XXVI n 3, Senato della Repubblica

³⁵² See Strangis, Silvia, *Italy's Renewed Interest in the Horn of Africa*, IAI commentaries, 07/12/2022, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/c05/italys-renewed-interest-horn-africa#:~:text=The%20drivers%20of%20Italy's%20policy,trade%20routes%20in%20the%20world>.

³⁵³ Italy and African Union, *Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Italy and the Commission of the African Union on the Management of the "Italian African Peace Facility (IAPF)"*, Lisbon, 8 December 2007, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2008/05/10/109/so/118/sg/pdf>.

strengthening border security and countering illegal migration, human trafficking and smuggling,³⁵⁴ the 2023 MoUs between the EU and Tunisia championed by Italy was aimed at preventing the country socio-economic collapse as well as the controversial agreement between EU and Egypt in 2024, considered by Italy's PM, "the best way to deal with the problem of illegal immigration."³⁵⁵

On the other, Italy has been investing in development cooperation, particularly focusing on migration and development nexus³⁵⁶. The role of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation has been key to pursue these goals, but also the synergies with EU program and the collective initiatives with leaders of the enlarged Mediterranean. The International Conference on Migration and Development organised in Rome in 2023 was a major step in this sense. The so-called 'Rome Process' is to provide a coordinated and comprehensive response to support political stability and encourage social and economic development by addressing the root causes of forced displacement, facilitating legal migration, and tackling irregular migration and human trafficking across the Mediterranean region, the Middle East, and Africa.³⁵⁷

Participation in international missions and peace processes is another step in securing stability in the region through bilateral and international missions (within the UN, NATO and the EU). Recent examples in this regard are the Italy's commitment to Libya's stability with training, consulting, assistance, support and mentoring activities for Libyan security forces and government institutions through the MIASIT missions well as maritime security in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden amid *spill over effects* of the war in Gaza, thanks to its leading role in EU's mission EUNAVFOR Aspides³⁵⁸. In Niger, particularly in the field of security, Italy has preserved diplomatic relations and military cooperation (MISIN) in the aftermath of the coup d'état. Within this framework, the control of irregular migration plays a central role, given Niger's position as one of the main transit countries along the Central Mediterranean route. Of key importance to anti-piracy and anti-terrorism activities is the Italian military base in Djibouti. Located at a strategic crossroad intersecting the Red Sea and the Horn region, it aims at providing logistical support for missions in the Horn of Africa and neighboring areas, consolidating the efforts of the international community against piracy, illegal immigration, drug trafficking, terrorism, through support for the development of self-sufficient capacity by the states in the Horn of Africa³⁵⁹.

4.2.2 Energy and economy

Whether energy relations between North African countries and Italy are not a novelty, the need to diversify energy providers with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, has led Italy further strengthening its partnership with Algeria. The North-African gas giant has become Italy's first source of gas through pipeline so far³⁶⁰.

The commitment of Italy-Algeria partnership in the sector of energy has been renewed recently during the fifth Italy-Algeria Intergovernmental Summit held in Rome in late July 2025. Indeed, with Italy's

³⁵⁴ See <https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Libia.pdf>

³⁵⁵ S. D. la Fed, *what's in the 7.4 billion deal with Egypt, the most substantial ever signed by the EU*, EU News March 2024, <https://www.eunews.it/en/2024/03/18/7-4-billion-deal-with-egypt-eu/>

³⁵⁶ Annual updates on Italy's efforts to pursue the link between 'migration and development' are collected into the EMN asylum migration overview. Latest version available, *Migrazione e Asilo in Italia Rapporto 2024*, [https://www.emnitalyncp.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Asylum%20and%20Migration%20Overview%20\(AMO\)%202024%20part%20%20%E2%80%93%20national%20report.pdf](https://www.emnitalyncp.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Asylum%20and%20Migration%20Overview%20(AMO)%202024%20part%20%20%E2%80%93%20national%20report.pdf)

³⁵⁷ See https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Conclusioni_20230723_IT.pdf

³⁵⁸ Relazione analitica sulle missioni internazionali, op. cit.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ A. Sanelli, *L'Algeria e la Libia sono i primi fornitori italiani di gas e petrolio*, GEA, March 2025, <https://geagency.it/energia/lalgeria-e-la-la-libia-sono-i-primi-fornitori-italiani-di-gas-e-petrolio/>

ambition to become ‘a gateway for energy’ from Africa to the EU, strengthening partnership with Algeria becomes of outmost importance, particularly in terms of cooperation between ENI and the Algerian company Sonatrach. While Rome and Algiers’ energy ties date back to the 80s, ENI has progressively strengthened its presence in the country reaching net production of 137.000 oil-equivalent barrels per day in 2024, positioning itself as the leading international energy company operating in the country³⁶¹.

In line with Italy’s *hub-to-be* aspirations, ENI’s AD Descalzi has recently announced an investment of around 24 billion euros (\$26.24 billion) in Algeria, Egypt and Libya to help boost energy production over the next four years.³⁶² To be underlined that after 14 years since the outbreak of the civil war, Libya has returned Italy’s main oil supplier covering 21.5% of national crude oil imports.³⁶³

Meanwhile, Italy has been exploring the potential of Africa in terms of green energy. At present, Enel Green Power has 5 country hubs (Morocco, Ethiopia, South Africa, Kenya, Zambia) and 16 plants in the Continent, divided between wind and solar power with installed renewable capacity of approximately 1.5 GW³⁶⁴. In Morocco, EGP started supporting the country’s energy transition process with the wind farm included in the 850 MW *Projet Éolien Intégré*, in Midelt in 2018. As of the Horn, the company has stepped the Ethiopian market since 2017 for developing, building and operating a solar PV plant in Metehara in cooperation with Ethiopian infrastructure company Orchid Business Group.³⁶⁵ In terms of energy infrastructure, former Salini Impregilo (now WeBuild) also counts long and important presence in the country. The group completed complex and ambitious projects in Ethiopia including power plants and dams on the Omo River, and the controversial Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a project long opposed by Egypt amid concerns it would deplete its share of Nile River waters.

Although trade and investment relations between Italy and the continent remain below their potential³⁶⁶ there has been an increasing engagement of Italian companies, including SMEs. Italian National Foreign trade agency nowadays counts 12 operational offices (the latest in Lagos, Dakar and Nairobi) and eight observatories, which work with embassies to identify sectors and areas of interests,³⁶⁷ when in 2013 there was only one in South Africa. But also, SACE is expanding guarantees to Italian business in Africa to invest and operate in the region.

4.2.3 Development cooperation

Beside political instability and security threats, Africa face challenges linked to rapid population growth and unemployment, natural disasters such droughts and floods, lack of access to basic services for part of its population as well as recurrent food crises recently aggravated by the war in Ukraine,

³⁶¹ ENI, *Il presidente dell’Algeria Abdelmadjid Tebboune incontra l’amministratore delegato di Eni Claudio Descalzi*, July 2025. <https://www.eni.com/it-IT/media/comunicati-stampa/2025/07/cs-eni-presidente-algeria-abdelmadjid-tebboune-incontra-ad-eni-claudio-descalzi.html>

³⁶² REUTERS, *Italy’s Eni to invest \$26 billion in North Africa over next four years, CEO says*, April 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/italys-eni-invest-26-billion-north-africa-over-next-four-years-ceo-says-2025-04-08/>

³⁶³ A. Sanelli, cit.

³⁶⁴ See <https://www.enelgreenpower.com/it/paesi/africa>

³⁶⁵ Africa News, *Ethiopia 100 MW solar farm project, Italian firm to invest \$120m*, August 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2017/10/25/ethiopia-100-mw-solar-farm-project-italian-firm-to-invest-120m/>

³⁶⁶ To the data for Africa-Italy economic exchange see https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/osservatorio/schede-aree-geografiche/Indicatori%20%20Africa_01_08_2025_1754032100.pdf

³⁶⁷ Confindustria Assafrica e Mediterraneo, ASSEMBLEA PUBBLICA DI CONFINDUSTRIA ASSAFRICA & MEDITERRANEO “L’IMPRENDITORIALITÀ IN AFRICA A UN ANNO DAL LANCIO DEL PIANO MATTEI | Progetti, opportunità e strumenti finanziari”, January 2025. <https://www.assafrica.it/assemblea-pubblica-di-confindustria-assafrica-mediterraneo-limprenditorialita-in-africa-a-un-anno-dal-lancio-del-piano-mattei-progetti-opportunita-e-strumenti-finanziari/>

which has created significant obstacles to the supply of wheat and fertilizers, on which many African states are dependent. Hence, African countries have long represented a priority for the Italian cooperation whether in terms of participation in European Union cooperation programmes, multilateral initiatives; or bilateral cooperation through different channels, including by supporting the work of Italian humanitarian NGOs. As of today, Africa represents the first Continent per number of priority countries (23) of the Italian cooperation³⁶⁸ with 10 out of the 20 units of its international network based in Africa³⁶⁹.

While maintaining a strong focus on humanitarian assistance and basic service support, in the last years Italy have increased its effort in trainings and employment, as well as legal migration, especially targeting Mediterranean Africa. Indeed, recent priorities of Italian cooperation in Nord Africa³⁷⁰ focus on decent employment, supporting the local private sector and entrepreneurship as well as investment in food security, strengthening vocational training initiatives, including within the European Talent Partnerships initiative³⁷¹. Italy's was indeed involved in the THAMM Plus program on legal migration aimed to facilitate the mobility of newly skilled and trained workforce between targeted North African countries and Italy to meet labour market shortages jointly identified by Moroccan and Tunisian authorities, as well as three Italian regions (Lombardia, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna)³⁷².

In West Africa, Italy is committed to cooperation in the Sahel region focused on the triple humanitarian-development-peace nexus, but also expanding to the Republic of Congo and the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea to implement interventions on health, socio-economic inclusion and the development of sustainable and resilient agri-food supply chains³⁷³. More broadly, in matters of security and migration, Italy has sought to strengthen its ties with several other Sahelian states. Together with the European Union, Italy has become increasingly engaged in efforts to stabilize the region, seeking to balance its contribution across security provision, institutional consolidation, and development cooperation. Italy participates in the Alliance and the Coalition for the Sahel, while also supporting the G5 Sahel framework. Moreover, it encourages the involvement of regional organisations such as ECOWAS and the African Union and maintains channels of dialogue with non-European partners. Italian engagement is further expressed through the participation in EU civilian and military operations (EUTM Mali, EUCAP Sahel Mali, and EUCAP Sahel Niger), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the Task Force Takuba³⁷⁴.

In the Horn of Africa Italy is focusing on intergovernmental cooperation, stepping up interventions in the infrastructure, energy, water and agriculture sectors, to counter climate change and food insecurity, innovation and entrepreneurship improvement of basic services and urban regeneration

³⁶⁸ PRIORITY COUNTRIES TO THE ITALIAN COOPERATION IN AFRICA 2024-2026: MEDITERRANEAN AFRICA (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia); EASTERN AFRICA (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda); WESTERN AFRICA (Burkina Faso, Ciad, Ivory Cost, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Republic of Congo, Senegal); SOUTHERN AFRICA (Malawi, Mozambico, Tanzania, Zambia)

³⁶⁹ See <https://www.aics.gov.it/news/cresce-la-presenza-aics-in-africa-attivate-due-nuovi-sedi-in-costa-davorio-e-uganda/?lang=en>

³⁷⁰ Documento Triennale di programmazione e di indirizzo della politica di cooperazione allo sviluppo, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2024-2026 <https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/DOCUMENTO-TRIENNALE-DI-PROGRAMMAZIONE-20-GIUGNO-2025.pdf>

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

³⁷² See <https://italy.iom.int/en/thamm-plus-towards-holistic-approach-labour-migration-governance-and-labour-mobility-italy-and-north-africa>

³⁷³ Documento Triennale di programmazione e di indirizzo della politica di cooperazione allo sviluppo 2024-2026, cit.

³⁷⁴ Ministero Affari Esteri e Cooperazione Internazionale, *The Sahel region and West Africa*, MAECI, https://www.esteri.it/en/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/aree_geografiche/africa/sahel-e-africa-occidentale/.

initiatives³⁷⁵. In Somalia, Italy has initiated several cooperation programmes primarily aimed at strengthening the training of public sector personnel. The project “*Italy–Somalia Public Administration – Training of Somali State Officials (Pais-Fus) – Health and Justice Sectors*” is supported by Italian Development Cooperation and the University of Palermo³⁷⁶. In addition, since Somalia joined in Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, has opened new prospects for the country's development. This has reinforced Italy's development cooperation commitment, with a stronger focus on supporting key sectors such as strategic infrastructure for national reconstruction and economic growth, institutional strengthening, agriculture, fisheries and livestock, as well as private sector development³⁷⁷. In Ethiopia, besides the infrastructure development cooperation, Italy is playing a prominent role in terms of development and training. Italy has developed a two-year support program that also includes South Sudan and Djibouti among its target countries. The cooperation initiative, led by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), aims to strengthen key sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and water resource management³⁷⁸. Furthermore, with the introduction of the Mattei Plan, the focus of future cooperation projects— as will be further discussed in the following section— will increasingly shift towards areas related to the energy transition and sustainability.

4.3 Last step of a (slightly) longer journey: the Mattei Plan

In early 2024 Italy launched the Mattei Plan with the aim to ‘building partnerships on an equal basis, overcoming the donor-beneficiary logic and generating mutual benefits and opportunities between Italy and Africa’³⁷⁹. To this end, the Plan is to promote institutional growth of targeted countries, investments in food security, green and digital transitions, training of young people as well as cultural, scientific, technological and academic relations with African countries.³⁸⁰ The timing and ‘manner’ of the presentation were peculiar. The launch of the Plan aligned with Italy's presidency of the G7, highlighting Rome's intention to prioritize Africa within the group's political agenda³⁸¹. Additionally, it was unveiled during the January 2024 Italy-Africa summit, which, for the first time, expanded beyond its traditional ‘ministerial’ format to include African Heads of State and Government. Together with both African State and African Union representatives the summit was joined by UN, International Organisations, Financial Institutions, Multilateral Development Banks as well as the Heads of European Institutions. And that to underline the interconnecting nature of this *medium-term vision* toward the continent, aimed at positioning Italy as the bridgehead between Africa and Europe.

Although the Mattei Plan has been presented as the first *of its kind* strategy towards the Continent as a whole, it attempts to systematize and materialize a path of re-engagement with Africa, that has started in the last two decades.

³⁷⁵ <https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/DOCUMENTO-TRIENNALE-DI-PROGRAMMAZIONE-20-GIUGNO-2025.pdf>

³⁷⁶ Onuitalia, *Somalia: cooperazione italiana lancia programma per la formazione di funzionari pubblici*, Onuitalia, 21/07/2025, <https://onuitalia.com/2025/07/21/somalia-16/>

³⁷⁷ Ambasciata Italiana di Mogadiscio, *Cooperazione allo sviluppo*, Ministero Affari Esteri e Cooperazione Internazionale, <https://ambmogadiscio.esteri.it/italia-e-somalia/cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/>.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ See “Piano Mattei per l'Africa”, Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri, <https://www.governo.it/it/piano-mattei> ;

³⁸⁰ Documento triennale di programmazione e di indirizzo della politica di cooperazione allo sviluppo 2024-2026, cit.

³⁸¹ For a broader analysis see ILPIANO MATTEI: RILANCIARE L'AFRICA POLICY DELL'ITALIA, Comunità di Politica Estera Italiana, July 2024, https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ISPI_FPC-Piano-Mattei.pdf

Since the early 2000s, Africa has indeed regained centrality in political discourse with the first milestone in the paradigm shift made by the Italy-Africa conference held in Rome in 2013. The need to recover from the economic crisis started in 2009 as well as to manage the effects of the 2011 Arab Uprisings led Italy to pragmatically reconsider his role in Africa. The conference was also in the light of supporting Italian companies that were looking with interest at the growing potential of emerging African markets trying to compensate the domestic crises by expanding abroad³⁸². Successive governments have then been developing an orientation towards Africa along human development, capacity building and economic cooperation to foster stability and partnership with African countries deemed to be of relevant geopolitical interest³⁸³ especially since when, in 2015, the EU was interested by a massive migratory crisis. The strategies to pursue these objectives were many, including increasing diplomatic, economic, development cooperation activism.

Targeted bilateral visits consistently increased between 2014-2016 with PM Renzi in Western-Eastern and central Africa, while President Mattarella visited Ethiopia, Cameroun and the African Union in 2016 and PM Conte in the Horn in 2018, to name a few. Synergies with Africa have been also confirmed by the growing diplomatic presence of Italy in the continent, that today counts 30 Embassies according to MFA's data³⁸⁴. Meanwhile, Law 125/2014 building the Italian Agency for development cooperation was adopted, paving the way for a more structured approach to development cooperation in different world regions, including those in Africa.

But it was with the health crisis and the disruption of supply chains on the global markets by Covid 19 Pandemic that the need to speed up the repositioning in Africa had taken hold, leading to a more programmatic approach.

At the end of 2020, Italy's commitment to the continent was re-emphasized with the 'Partnership with Africa', which outlined the thematic and geographic priorities of Italy's projection in the medium to long term. In Mediterranean Africa, Horn and Sahel, the objectives to be pursued were those of peace and security, governance and human rights; migration and mobility; trade and investment partnerships; sustainable development, development cooperation, fight against climate change; cultural and scientific collaboration.³⁸⁵

The war in Ukraine and the need to diversify economic sources from Russia have struck the final blow to the need of speeding relations with Africa, with PM Draghi looking to Algerian gas as the immediate source to meet national energy needs. PM Meloni has been following and strengthening the path since its appointment, making Africa a pillar of her government's strategy aiming at a 'cooperation as equals, far from any predatory temptation'.³⁸⁶

Hence, is in the wake of a growing interest generated in the recent past that the Mattei Plan has come to life, organizing in a more structured manner Italy's objectives in the continent and the way to pursue them, seeking to promote greater coherence in Italian policies and interests towards the Continent.

³⁸² "Italia – Africa", Senato della Repubblica, Servizio Affari Internazionali, n°34, 11, February, 2021 <https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/BGT/01208033.pdf>

³⁸³ G. Dentice, F. Donelli, "I rapporti Italia-Africa: un partenariato dinamico in un'arena frammentata e multidimensionale", in «Africa e Mediterraneo», vol. 28, n. 92- 93, 2020, pp. 28-36, <https://www.africaemediterraneo.it/public/newsite/2018/09/DENTICE-DONELLI.pdf>

³⁸⁴ See Rete diplomatica, Ministero Affari Esteri e Cooperazione Internazionale, <https://www.esteri.it/it/ministero/struttura/laretediplomatica/?tipoL%5B%5D=0&cont%5B%5D=Africa&c=&capomissione> Last accessed August 3, 2025.

³⁸⁵ Per una più ampia trattazione vedasi, Partenariato con l'Africa, December 2020, https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2020/12/2020_12_10_partenariato_con_lafrica_-_versione_italiana.pdf

³⁸⁶ See <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/vertice-italia-africa-linterventi-di-apertura-del-presidente-meloni/24857>

4.4 *A breakthrough in relations?*

Presented as a ‘living document’ the Mattei Plan is to evolve through engagement with National Authorities in Africa and with their development plans, marking a line of cooperation with Africa since the designing phase, as well as of consultation with international partners to enhance cooperation across the continent.³⁸⁷ The Mattei Plan revolves around the sectors of agriculture, education, health, water, infrastructure, and energy, first targeting Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, the Republic of Congo and the Ivory Coast. Angola, Ghana, Mauritania, Senegal and Tanzania have been added at a later stage, bringing the number of countries involved to fourteen,³⁸⁸ at the time of writing.

Hence, projects take place in countries with whom Italy has already strong relations and in sectors where Italy has strong expertise. Land and lake reclamation to agriculture in Algeria and Kenya respectively, distribution of unconventional water and revitalization of crops affected by drought in Tunisia, the establishment of an agri-food center for the promotion of local agricultural products in Mozambique, to name a few, are among the planned interventions, together with those aimed at enhancing the health sector in Ivory Coast and Ethiopia as well as Morocco. Projects in the energy sector are mainly targeting North Africa and Kenya, with the aim at diversifying energy sources, strengthening infrastructures as well as trainings. But education and professional training are also at the core of Italy’s Mattei Plan. Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, are all involved in interventions in vocational training/education/culture.

In Morocco, the Pan-African Centre of Excellence for training on renewable energy and energy transition³⁸⁹ is a major example in this sense. The center launched its inaugural course in October 2024 with the participation of 47 managers chosen from Moroccan public and private institutions and from the African countries targeted by the Mattei Plan³⁹⁰, and in July 2025 held both the second High-Level Managerial Course on Renewable Energy and the Energy Transition, and the inaugural Technical & Vocational School on Decentralized Renewable Energy Solution³⁹¹. But Italy is also strengthening relation with Africa in terms of research, in the framework of agreements signed with the Ministry of University and Research (MUR) with some African Countries. Two joint calls for proposals Italy and Algeria (€1.5 million) and Tunisia (€1 million) have been published so far, to co-finance scientific projects and agreements were also signed to finance innovation and training projects worth €4.5 million in Ethiopia³⁹².

Italy is progressively expanding the scope and actions of the Mattei Plan, as well as its internationalization. With an initial endowment of 5 billion and 500 million euros the financing aims at mirroring the interdependence of cooperation, development, security and trade as different financial instruments have been dedicated to the Mattei Plan, in a ‘logic of attraction’. Among the others, the ‘Mattei Plan and Rome Process Financing Facility’ is set to support projects implementing both the Plan and the Rome Process for Migration and Development³⁹³ with an initial contribution by Italian government, but it is thought as a multilateral fund open to other international partners (the

³⁸⁷ RELAZIONE SULLO STATO DI ATTUAZIONE DEL “PIANO MATTEI PER L’AFRICA” 2024, available at https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/documenti/documenti/Notizie-allegati/Piano%20Mattei/Relazione_Attuazione_PianoMattei_2024.pdf

³⁸⁸ RELAZIONE SULLO STATO DI ATTUAZIONE DEL “PIANO MATTEI PER L’AFRICA” 2025, available at https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/documenti/documenti/Notizie-allegati/Piano%20Mattei/Relazione_Attuazione_PianoMattei_2025.pdf

³⁸⁹ Supported by Res4Africa and the Enel Foundation, in partnership with Mohammed VI University

³⁹⁰ RELAZIONE SULLO STATO DI ATTUAZIONE DEL “PIANO MATTEI PER L’AFRICA” 2025, cit.

³⁹¹ See <https://res4africa.org/news/2025/res4africa-enel-foundation-and-um6p-conclude-high-level-and-technical-trainings-with-the-support-of-the-mattei-plan-for-africa/>

³⁹² RELAZIONE SULLO STATO DI ATTUAZIONE DEL “PIANO MATTEI PER L’AFRICA” 2025, cit.

³⁹³ RELAZIONE SULLO STATO DI ATTUAZIONE DEL “PIANO MATTEI PER L’AFRICA” 2024, cit.

UAE have already taken part in it with 25 million), and set to co-finance ‘African Development Bank sovereign and sovereign-guaranteed projects in agri-business, energy environment and industrialization, among others, to transform economies and help address the root causes of migration’³⁹⁴.

But also, the idea of “verticality” underlining the interdependence of Africa, Italy and Europe could be a guarantee of success. The strengthening of synergies with the EU initiatives such as that of the Global Gateway with Italy’s involvement in the railway of ‘Lobito corridor’ is a major step in this sense or the discussion on extending the Blue Raman project towards Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the formalisation of the cooperation with the World Bank to accelerate the Mattei Plan.³⁹⁵

Involving all components of the so-called “Sistema Paese” is among the major efforts of the strategy. Hence, Public-private economic partnership and internationalization of both the Plan implementation and of Italian companies are at the core of The Plan’s strategy and goals. Through subsidies finance measures³⁹⁶ (e.g. the Plafond Misura Africa) from both Cassa Depositi e Prestiti and SIMEST, the main idea is to set up a network of projects that will trigger the industrialization of the continent by involving Italian small and medium-sized enterprises, abandoning the “predatory approach” solely aimed at raw materials exploitation.

Besides the number of companies involved in the implementation of the Mattei Plan, most pilot projects and initiatives target the managerial sector in Africa pursuing the *training for trainer’s* approach. Capacity building and exchange are apparently the leading strategies to foster co-development by strongly counting on businesses.

Cassa Depositi e Prestiti has already opened (2024) its first representative office in Africa in Egypt, demonstrating Italy’s willingness to involve both the Italian and local private sectors³⁹⁷. An attitude that was confirmed during the 2024 ‘Forum di Dialogo imprenditoriale Italia Africa’ in Rome aimed to strengthen partnership by involving Italian and African private sector associations, as well as multilateral development banks and Italian agencies³⁹⁸ and that seems to be welcomed internationally. During the 2025 African Development Bank’s Meetings Gauthier Boulard, Director and Special Advisor to the Cabinet of the African Development Bank President, said the partnership with Italy though the Mattei Plan represents “a real shift from traditional aid to co-investment strategic sectors that generate jobs ...and that will address migration.”³⁹⁹

Although not specifically a sector of intervention, reducing migration remains a political driver for the Mattei Plan. Co-developing solutions with African institutions to foster co-development, create job opportunities and enhance living standards both in terms of livelihoods and health is intended for mutual growth and investments, but also for reducing the intention of migrating towards the EU. However, the idea of addressing a complex socio-economic phenomenon with a project-based approach could be challenging⁴⁰⁰ and short-sighted, since supporting endogenous growth also means countering the corruption of some ruling political classes, while promoting spaces for individual

³⁹⁴ [African Development Bank Group, The Mattei Plan - a shared pathway to boost development across Africa - in spotlight at African Development Bank Group’s 2025 Annual Meetings, https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/mattei-plan-shared-pathway-boost-development-across-africa-spotlight-african-development-bank-groups-2025-annual-meetings-84134](https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/mattei-plan-shared-pathway-boost-development-across-africa-spotlight-african-development-bank-groups-2025-annual-meetings-84134)

³⁹⁵ See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/04/24/-italy-increases-ida-commitment-launches-africa-partnership-with-world-bank>

³⁹⁶ RELAZIONE SULLO STATO DI ATTUAZIONE DEL “PIANO MATTEI PER L’AFRICA” 2025, cit.

³⁹⁷ Documento Triennale di programmazione e di indirizzo della politica di cooperazione allo sviluppo, cit.

³⁹⁸ See <https://www.assafrica.it/forum-di-dialogo-imprenditoriale-italia-africa/>

³⁹⁹ The Mattei Plan - a shared pathway to boost development across Africa in spotlight at African Development Bank Group’s 2025 Annual Meetings, <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/mattei-plan-shared-pathway-boost-development-across-africa-spotlight-african-development-bank-groups-2025-annual-meetings-84134>

⁴⁰⁰ For a broader analysis see, A. Muliro, *Italia e Africa: il Piano Mattei può farcela?*, Forum CeSPI, 19 december 2024 <https://www.cespi.it/it/eventi-attualita/dibattiti/il-piano-mattei-opportunita-ambizioni-elementi-di-dibattito/italia-africa>

freedoms. Also, it is not yet evident how the Plan's initial steps will impact local communities. Improvements are thus needed in the monitoring system; since the annual implementation report serves as the main method for tracking progress, enhancing its structure and clarity would be of crucial importance.

To sum up, the choice of pilot countries as well as sectors of intervention of the Mattei Plan show Italy's will to start with the known, capitalize, and expand if successful. In a way, it can be said that the Mattei Plan is an implementation area, serving part of Italian traditional interests in selected priority countries. Indeed, Italy's activism in Africa is motivated by addressing the underlying causes of instability through a comprehensive strategy focused on mutual growth and development, aiming at playing a prominent role in and with the Continent.

Although it is too early to assess the impact that the Mattei Plan will have on Italy-Africa joint development, much of its success will depend on how relations between Italy and other African countries will evolve with their main competitors in the area. In this frame, it is important to underline that while Italy can have some advantage compared to other EU countries, it needs to cope with the role of China, Russia, and the Gulf countries which have been consolidating their presence in Africa over the last decades.

4.5 Global powers competition in Africa

In recent years, the Horn of Africa⁴⁰¹ has become increasingly strategic for the interests of various regional and international actors. This is evident by the growing attraction the region exerts in terms of trade, energy transition, infrastructure development, and maritime security.

China, Russia, the Gulf countries, together with Türkiye, have all intensified their presence in several countries of the region in recent years, aiming to play a leading role through substantial investments. This position has had not only economic repercussions but has also significantly influenced political trajectories, reshaping both regional and international alliances.

For Europe and so Italy, this raises questions about the possibility of cooperation as compared to competition. Addressing these issues requires examining the actors involved, their respective interests in the region, and how these relate to multilateral institutions. There are several points that should be clarified from the outset to obtain a clear understanding of the role and approach of the various actors. China, more than any other actor, represents the most direct and formidable competitor. This is due not only to its extensive capacity to penetrate African markets and channel financial resources into individual countries, but especially to its ability to offer technology and goods to African partners that directly compete with those from the West.

The Belt and Road Initiative still retains a significant operational presence across the African continent. The development of a commercial network and large-scale infrastructure investments, coupled with a dense security apparatus anchored by the military base in Djibouti, positions the Asian giant as a central player in the region. China's trade routes, which largely pass through the Red Sea, makes the Horn a strategically security zone for protecting Beijing's economic and commercial interests. In this regard, Djibouti appears to occupy a primary role within China's geostrategic framework. Since 2013, Chinese activities in the small Arab state have focused on transforming it – through substantial direct investment – into a genuine logistical hub for trade development.

⁴⁰¹ Understood here as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia—including Somaliland and Puntland—Sudan, and South Sudan

Through the China Merchant Group (CMG), a state-owned enterprise based in Hong Kong⁴⁰², China has adapted the "port-park-city" (PPC) logistics-based urban development model first introduced in Shekou in 1979, which stimulated the rapid growth of Shenzhen.

CMG aims to replicate this success in Djibouti. Its objective is to transform the city into the "Shekou of East Africa," positioning it as a key gateway for maritime transport, logistics, and trade.⁴⁰³ While Djibouti functions as the infrastructural backbone of China's interests in the region, Beijing's growing influence across other states in the Horn is no less significant.

Ethiopia constitutes another key destination for Chinese foreign direct investment. The railway connecting Addis Ababa to Djibouti has dramatically reduced travel time (from 20 to 3 hours), facilitating the movement of goods and people and enhancing the export capacity of local products through port access. This directly supports the expansion of Chinese investment, particularly in Ethiopia's manufacturing sector and the development of the country's first privately managed special economic zone. Beyond these specific initiatives, it is crucial to underline that China's engagement in the region is carried out with full autonomy and independence in terms of the provision and execution of its projects. This self-sufficiency constitutes the core element that defines China's competitive edge vis-à-vis the European Union. The fact that China can provide not only financial capital but also its own technological infrastructure places the Asian power in direct competition with Western efforts in the region.

In recent years, Russia's presence in the Horn of Africa has grown primarily in the military and political spheres. Despite its direct involvement in specific contexts—such as Sudan, where it has supported military actors—Russia's economic role in the region remains limited and does not appear to pose a significant threat to European interests. In this sense, Russia seems to function more as a disruptive and destabilizing force rather than a constructive or strategic economic competitor.

This role has been evident in its support for authoritarian regimes such as Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as for the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan. Russia's main interests in the region lie in arms trade and the construction of a naval base, most likely in Sudan, to strengthen its strategic foothold in the Red Sea. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia is currently the largest arms supplier to countries in the Horn of Africa, accounting for 40% of total arms exports, ahead of the United States (16%), China (9.8%), and France (7%)⁴⁰⁴.

While this presence should not be underestimated, it nonetheless presents structural limitations, especially in the absence of clear and consistent support from China. Unlike the Chinese presence – which reflects the full spectrum of imperial-style influence, including financial, technological, and infrastructural investments – Russia's capabilities in the economic and technological domains remain markedly limited. But although Russia lacks permanent military bases in the region, the Chinese base in Djibouti indirectly facilitates Russian maritime access to strategic ports, enabling Moscow to sustain its arms trade and limited commercial activities.

Further constraints on Russia's influence have been imposed by the war in Ukraine, which has significantly diminished Moscow's capacity to act in Africa. The conflict has also made Russia increasingly dependent on China, both diplomatically and economically. Prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia could still position itself as a disruptive actor potentially

⁴⁰² See C. Xiangming P. E. Raether, China's huge geoeconomic footprint in the Horn of Africa, Think China, 12 August 2024, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/economy/chinas-huge-geoeconomic-footprint-horn-africa>.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ See P. D. Wezeman, J. Gadon, S. T. Wezeman, "Trends in international arms transfers 2022, SIPRI, 2023, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/2303_at_fact_sheet_2022_v2.pdf

counterbalancing Chinese interests in the region—especially through the manipulation of regional instability⁴⁰⁵. Since the onset of the war, however, this potential has largely dissipated.

In the post-Ukraine war context, Russia’s main remaining levers of influence in the region are the arms trade and grain exports, the latter having become a strategic instrument in maintaining political relevance in several African countries. Complementing this are soft power tools, such as the presence of Russian media outlets, cultural institutions, and state-sponsored television networks, all aimed at disseminating Moscow’s political narrative and cultivating support.

This context underscores a key point: Russia, unlike China, does not possess the multidimensional capabilities required to effectively compete with Western powers in the region. Nonetheless, it remains an agile actor in contexts of instability, such as Sudan—and, beyond the Horn, in Libya, Chad, and Niger—where it capitalizes on political vacuums and weak state structures to exert influence through opportunistic engagements.

The complexity of regional dynamics is further shaped by the increasing involvement of Gulf states, which in recent years have not only expanded their investments but also established a systematic presence across the countries of the Horn of Africa. Thanks to their substantial financial resources and a growing need to expand trade and market access, Gulf states have increasingly asserted themselves in the Horn of Africa. As noted by scholar Husam Mahjoub, these countries can be understood as sub-imperial powers—states that not only possess the capacity to invest heavily in individual countries across the region but also actively extract resources and generate profits in ways that primarily serve their own strategic and economic interests. This evolving role reflects a broader shift in the regional order, where Gulf actors operate with increasing autonomy and influence, often blurring the lines between development cooperation and geopolitical projection⁴⁰⁶.

Among these actors, the United Arab Emirates stand out as particularly active. Since the late 2000s, the UAE has pursued an ambitious investment strategy in the region, consolidating its influence through economic engagement. Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda have emerged as the primary focal points of this investment drive, collectively attracting an estimated \$40 billion in Emirati capital. This growing presence reflects the Gulf’s broader strategic interest in projecting influence and securing access to resources and logistical corridors in East Africa. These investments have been concentrated primarily in the energy, infrastructure, and agricultural sectors, reflecting a strategic focus on resource access, supply chain control, and long-term economic influence across the region.

Port infrastructure represents a central pillar of the United Arab Emirates’ strategic engagement in East Africa, closely tied to the operations of DP World, the UAE’s global port management company. Through DP World, the UAE has signed development agreements in at least six countries—Djibouti, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, Somaliland, and Tanzania—with an additional deal under negotiation in Sudan⁴⁰⁷. Given that the UAE imports approximately 85% of its agricultural products, food security has become a critical national priority. In this context, the UAE has emerged as one of the largest foreign land investors in Africa, with Sudan serving as a key destination for Emirati agricultural interests. The country has attracted over \$10.2 billion in Emirati investments, underscoring its strategic role in the UAE’s broader pursuit of external food sources and supply chain resilience.

Among the Gulf countries, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been particularly active in the realms of security and military engagement. Beyond investments and arms trade with various governments

⁴⁰⁵ S. Ramani, “Engaged opportunism. Russia’s role in the Horn of Africa”, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/engaged-opportunism-russias-role-in-the-horn-of-africa.pdf>

⁴⁰⁶ See H. Mahjoub, “The emerging sub-imperial role of the United Arab Emirates in Africa”, 4 February, <https://www.tni.org/en/article/the-emerging-sub-imperial-role-of-the-united-arab-emirates-in-africa>

⁴⁰⁷ See: “Mapping Gulf State Actors’ Expanding Engagements in East Africa”, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 8 July 2025, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/gulf-state-actors-east-africa/>

in the region, the UAE has also played a direct role in several conflict scenarios, including its support for Hemedti in Sudan, as well as involvement in Somalia and Ethiopia.

Another key regional actor is Saudi Arabia, which in recent years has allocated substantial resources to infrastructure development across the region. Djibouti has emerged as the primary recipient of Saudi investments, amounting to approximately USD 13 billion—representing 80% of the Kingdom’s total investments in the region. These funds are largely concentrated in the development of the Damerjog International Park oil refinery and the adjacent logistics park, with the overarching aim of establishing a Saudi commercial hub that serves as a gateway to regional trade networks. Like several other nations, Saudi Arabia is also pursuing the establishment of a military base in Djibouti, primarily to safeguard its commercial and financial interests. In addition to Djibouti, Sudan has attracted significant Saudi investment interest, albeit on a smaller scale. With an estimated USD 1 billion in Saudi funding, Sudan is the second-largest recipient in the region. More broadly, Saudi Arabia is expanding its regional presence through the creation of a dense infrastructure network. Trade constitutes the central axis of this capital flow, and—as in the case of the UAE—agriculture has become one of the most strategically important sectors. Given the Kingdom’s heavy reliance on imported agricultural products, investing in agricultural development abroad allows Saudi Arabia to secure more favorable production and export mechanisms. In this context, Sudan stands out as the primary partner, with approximately USD 500 million invested in the agricultural and infrastructure sectors, particularly in technological innovation projects focused on irrigation and rainwater harvesting.

Finally, Qatar is another noteworthy actor, consistently investing significant capital in both infrastructure and agriculture across various East African countries. Rwanda serves as the focal point of Qatari investment in the region, with around USD 1 billion directed toward development initiatives. A major project includes the construction of the Bugesera International Airport, located 40 kilometers south of Kigali International Airport. Qatar Airways holds a 60% stake in the project and is currently negotiating the acquisition of a 49% stake in RwandAir⁴⁰⁸. In addition, there have been several investments in other countries in the region, including the acquisition of approximately 40,000 hectares of land in Kenya to produce agricultural goods.

In contrast to the presence of Russia and China, the engagement of Gulf countries in the region does not constitute a direct challenge to European interests. Nevertheless, the significant investments and developments undertaken by Gulf states—particularly in sectors such as energy and energy transition, which have also become strategic priorities for Europe—highlight certain limitations in local technological capabilities. Many Gulf-based companies operating in the region rely heavily on partnerships with major European firms, especially in the energy sector and in the provision of equipment and machinery for agricultural development.

Despite their stated ambitions to diversify their economies and reduce dependency in key sectors, Gulf states remain, for the most part, importers rather than producers of advanced technology. This reliance is particularly evident in the joint ventures that underpin investments in the energy transition. The United Arab Emirates, for instance, channels its activities through two state-owned companies: Masdar and AMEA Power, while Saudi Arabia primarily operates through ACWA Power⁴⁰⁹. Although these companies can carry out development projects in the field of energy transition, they are in fact assisted by Western companies in terms of technology supply and know-how.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ M. Procopio, C. Čok, “Diversification nations: The Gulf way to engage with Africa”, ECFR Policy Brief, 24 March 2025, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/diversification-nations-the-gulf-way-to-engage-with-africa/#where-the-gulf-states-diverge>

4.6 Conclusion

Over the past decade, Italy's relationship with Africa has undergone substantial transformation, shifting from a predominantly Mediterranean-focused perspective to a more comprehensive and structured partnership with the Continent. This renewed engagement has most recently been exemplified by the launch of the Mattei Plan, a key Italian strategic policy aimed at fostering reciprocal benefits and opportunities for both Italy and Africa.

The initiatives of the Mattei Plan are aimed at strengthening cooperation in sector of mutual interests with African countries, moving beyond the donor-beneficiary logic in favour of a horizontal cooperation, also by involving key international partners. Indeed, this strategy aims to strengthen Italy's role in the continent, including as a bridge between Africa and Europe.

While positive in intentions, the actual impact of joint development initiatives between Italy and Africa can only be evaluated over the long term. Not to forget that Africa is a complex and competitive arena. Various key international players, such as China, Russia and the Gulf countries, have consolidated their presence in the Continent through infrastructure investments, strategic partnerships and hard power measures way before Italy. Although they do not always pose challenges to Italian and EU interests, they require Italy to continue calibrating its strategies both with African counterparts as well as their international partners including by exploring multilateral synergies. In this context, sectors related to the energy transition and local development—both public and private—are of central importance. Synergies in these areas would not only promote more robust efforts toward sustainable development but also foster cooperation in the creation and dissemination of replicable best practices. Within this framework, Europe, and so Italy, particularly in its relations with Gulf States, can leverage its advanced technological capacity, which remains among the most innovative in the fields of energy transition and agricultural development.

5. Italy and Türkiye: Towards Complementarities in Africa

Valeria Giannotta, Aurora Ianni, Mattia Giampaolo

In a changing geopolitical environment, the need to diversify resources, alliances, vision and approach has shaped many of the recent moves of both Italy and Türkiye in Africa. South–South cooperation has been regaining prominence, and Africa is key for increasing mutual partnerships and development.

For years Türkiye has been forging important relations with the African continent, rivalling the political, economic and cultural interaction it has enjoyed along with its traditional partners since the founding of the Republic. Türkiye’s involvement in several African countries with both public diplomacy and humanitarian agencies, as well as military contingents have helped strengthen its position in the Continent, leveraging on value-based bottom-up legitimacy both in terms of soft power measures and as a security provider. In some cases, Türkiye ’s anchoring to international institutions and its membership in NATO, as well as its historical heritage and shared values/religion with African communities, have made it a key interlocutor of the so-called “Global South”.

Italy, for its part, has been expanding its traditional engagement in Africa from externalisation of borders to ‘mutual benefits’ development, strengthening its diplomatic ties as well as policy strategies in and with the Continent. Since the last decades indeed, Rome has been adjusting its approach to Africa for its security and economic needs, amid growing economic and geopolitical crises. But while with the Mattei Plan Italy is intended to pursue horizontal cooperation, the real outcome of this effort is still to be evaluated. It can be stated that Italy, in alignment with the European Union’s foreign policy approach, is seeking to develop a strategic framework aimed at positioning itself as a credible alternative to revisionist powers such as Russia and China. Whether cooperative relations with non-Western powers once gave Italy a degree of autonomy in foreign policy, growing US-China competition and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have put this policy under severe strain⁴¹⁰.

In this context, the growing presence of China in various regions of the African continent is increasingly perceived as a strategic challenge not only to Italy, but to Europe as a whole. Hence, while Europe—and the West more broadly—continues to represent a reliable partner in areas such as technology transfer and development cooperation with Africa, the expanding influence of China may, in the long term, significantly challenge the European moves in the Continent. In this sense, cultivating relations with Middle powers, including Arab Gulf Countries and Türkiye could facilitate the success of Italy’s repositioning in Africa. The Mattei Plan, which cemented Italy’s renewed interest in the Continent is encountering, until now, favour rather than contrast both by the EU and some regional powers (namely the Gulf), beyond the African partners. It is no coincidence that Italy has already intensified cooperation with both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the light of the Plan’s internationalisation intending to promote projects of common interests in the sectors of energy and water⁴¹¹.

⁴¹⁰ Siddi, M. (2025). From middle power to subordinate ally? Meloni’s foreign policy in the aftermath of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23248823.2025.2555147>

⁴¹¹ Piano Mattei per L’Africa, RELAZIONE ANNUALE AL PARLAMENTO SULLO STATO DI ATTUAZIONE, 2025, https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/documenti/documenti/Notizie-allegati/Piano%20Mattei/Relazione_Attuazione_PianoMattei_2025.pdf

However, with Türkiye, as a historic NATO member and a candidate to the European Union, Italy boasts longstanding cooperation in several fields, which also extends to third countries. Indeed, the relationship between Ankara and Rome has historically been considered as "more than just friendship," given the cultural affinities and mutual understanding, but above all the extensive and growing complementarities in various sectors.

Economics and business are certainly the driving force behind these relations. Both the Italian Turkish economic environment is populated by small and medium-sized enterprises that have significantly contributed to trade and business exchange over the years. Currently, more than 1,500 companies operate in Türkiye, which, according to a survey conducted by CeSPI, are more than satisfied in operating in Türkiye, perceived as well as a gateway to third-party markets⁴¹². More recently, bilateral trade has grown to \$32 billion, far exceeding the target of \$30 billion jointly established at the 2022 Italy-Türkiye intergovernmental summit.

Furthermore, following the April 29, 2025, bilateral summit, a new target of \$40 billion has been established. This is an ambitious goal, which, however, reflects the positive economic trend in terms of greater business potential. Bilateral trade flow has long been recording constant growth; in 2019, it stood at \$19 billion, in 2023 it reached \$26 billion, and it sealed \$32 billion in 2024. This significant increase signals the great resilience and recovery capacity of both Italy and Türkiye, especially in the post-pandemic world and at a time of global economic turmoil⁴¹³. As a matter of fact, it pivots on the traditional congruence of the respective industrial and business sectors by recording important numbers in the presence of Italian companies and investments in Türkiye and increasing growth of the Turkish companies in Italy. With a well-balanced bilateral exchange and a complementary business environment, today Italy ranks as Türkiye's first partner in the Mediterranean and the second within the European area.

Today, the bilateral relationship is experiencing a sort of "golden age" and it has become strategic thanks to numerous and growing industrial synergies. Among these, the most recent joint venture between Leonardo and Baykar is particularly noteworthy for its strategic implications in the defense and security sector, coupled with the acquisition of Piaggio Aerospace by the Turkish company Baykar. These transactions should be understood in the light of greater systemic integration, which, through the alignment and strengthening of value chains, allows Italy and Türkiye greater resilience and regional integration, especially in contexts where both Rome and Ankara boast expertise and a long-standing presence.⁴¹⁴

Especially in the Mediterranean basin, understood in its broadest sense, Ankara and Rome, as NATO eastern bastions, share the historic responsibility of ensuring stability and security, by facing the same opportunities and challenges. At a time of global uncertainty, marked by a decline in leadership and growing critical issues, both Italy and Türkiye beyond their own national interests, could extend their influence in Africa, by focusing on specific-issue coalitions and reinforcing regional partnerships. Indeed, to preserve their power and to expand their own influence, middle powers are committed to cooperation, consensus building and multilateralism by showing their willingness as well to act as brokers in international relations.

⁴¹²Survey on the Italian Companies operating in Turkey, CeSPI, https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/osservatori/allegati/ixe_cespi_turchia_dic21_eng_def.pdf

⁴¹³ Giannotta V, "Turkish Italian Relations: 4th Italy-Türkiye intergovernmental summit", Anadolu Agency <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/opinion/opinion-turkish-italian-relations-4th-italy-turkiye-intergovernmental-summit/3552787>

⁴¹⁴ Giannotta V, "The golden era of Italy-Türkiye relations", Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/the-golden-era-of-italy-turkiye-relations>

Hence, engaging in cooperative approaches with actors such as Türkiye which has a strong presence in Africa and is generally considered as a reliable partner by the African Countries could guarantee sustainability to the outcomes of the renewed Italian attitude towards the Continent.

5.1 *Mutual aspiration and shared interest*

Given the mutual aspiration and vision, in terms of policy, Italy and Türkiye could build up some initiatives as *coalition builders* by forging partnerships and alliances with other like-minded states to leverage their combined resources. Indeed, at a time of geopolitical turmoil, strengthening traditional relations with Mediterranean countries and expanding towards the rest of the African continent becomes of crucial importance for both Italy and Türkiye. Migration, security and energy are all issues that Ankara has been dealing with for some time now in various African forums and on which Italy shares approaches and interests. In this regard, further developing robust regional alliances and collaborative frameworks could address shared challenges and promote stability in specific geographic areas. The way has been already paved in this sense, considering the recent developments in Türkiye-Italy cooperation to counter human trafficking and transnational organized crime along the Libyan route⁴¹⁵. Also, the trilateral meeting held in August 2025 between Türkiye, Italy, and Libya reflects the growing convergence of interests among the three countries⁴¹⁶. Indeed, Libya is no longer solely concerned with its internal dynamics, but it has seemingly become instrumental in shaping the new commercial, political and military balances in the region⁴¹⁷.

By building on the already numerous complementarities and a positive bilateral relationship, Italy could find in Türkiye a privileged partner in addressing specific issues of shared interest. Given the strategic nature of their cooperation and their respective contributions to sectors such as energy, infrastructure and migration, facilitated by regular contacts and effective diplomatic dialogue, Türkiye and Italy seem well positioned to redefine traditional models of influence and create a balanced and reciprocal dynamic with African States, which could also facilitate the opening of new spaces for the European Union. This becomes particularly relevant along with the recent political developments within several African countries, where certain European and western states have been perceived negatively; thus, they lost credibility in the eyes of local authorities. On the contrary, Italy is regarded as a credible actor and a reliable partner. The effectiveness of Italian public diplomacy and the lack of hegemonic ambitions also facilitate Italy's interlocution with the emerging political realities on the ground and its role as a potential bridge between these countries and the European Union.

Moreover, Italy can also leverage its geographic location and its traditional relations with the Mediterranean region that already links Rome to Africa, and the Middle East. In this regard, Rome could enhance its traditional multilateral engagement by actively participating in international organizations and promoting cooperative solutions to regional challenges through different channels.

⁴¹⁵ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye, Italy sign deal to curb illegal migration*, September 2025. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-italy-sign-deal-to-curb-illegal-migration>

⁴¹⁶ Giannotta V. (2025) “*Mediterranean alliance: Italy, Türkiye and Libya forge new path for co-op*”, DailySabah, August 2025. <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/mediterranean-alliance-italy-turkiye-and-libya-forge-new-path-for-co-op>

⁴¹⁷ U. N. Taşçı, *The Istanbul meeting: What does it portend for Türkiye, Italy and Libya?*, Daily Sabah, August 2025, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/the-istanbul-meeting-what-does-it-portend-for-turkiye-italy-and-libya>

On the other hand, Rome's strategic importance in both migration and energy transit increases its own responsibility in enhancing stability, development and security in the whole area. Hence, the Mattei Plan could partly serve the purpose, if it is successfully expanded beyond the actors involved and in its intersections with European strategies and those of middle-powers such as Türkiye, in Africa.

Beyond the national intents, the effectiveness of the Mattei Plan depends largely on cooperation with key regional stakeholders, and Türkiye has been a historic player in Africa by enjoying bottom-up legitimacy and political acknowledgment. Strengthening cooperation is therefore crucial to mitigate the effects of the crisis and contain the regional volatility impacts. Specifically on Africa, along with the second report of the Mattei Plan released in mid-July and the Turkish Plan for Africa, which is due to be extended in 2026, the scope for cooperation is broadening with a view to stabilization and security in North Africa, the Sahel and the sub-Saharan region⁴¹⁸.

Both central players in the Mediterranean, Italy and Türkiye share interests and cooperation in some crucial dossiers and a common anchor in international institutions. In this sense, Rome and Ankara can play a significant role in bridging divides between great powers and promoting dialogue and understanding in an increasingly polarized world, supporting multilateralism, strengthening international institutions and advocating for cooperative solutions to global challenges through multilateral engagement.

This is particularly crucial in certain conflict-affected contexts, where both Italy and Türkiye continue to maintain a degree of autonomy and credibility. Libya, as well as Ethiopia and Somalia, are illustrative cases in which Italy has demonstrated notable effectiveness, largely due to the combined use of diplomatic engagement and development cooperation. The complimentary attitude towards Africa was clearly acknowledged at 2024 Italy's Borgo Egnazia G7, when Türkiye was invited to the table, signalling joint interests and common stances in Africa. But relations further cemented during the 4th Italy-Türkiye intergovernmental summit held in Rome in 2025.

Beside signing over ten agreements in the fields of trade, infrastructure, culture, business and technology, among the others, the Parts committed to Libya's stability⁴¹⁹ as well as reiterated to advance collaboration on energy as a factor of common growth, security and prosperity, including the Mediterranean Region⁴²⁰. In a sort of reciprocal bandwagoning logic by pivoting on the deep sense of friendship as well mutual understanding and shared interest with Ankara, Rome can benefit from Turkish long-standing presence in Africa, also for accomplishing the Mattei Plan goals. Likewise, Türkiye, along with its growing engagement across the continent, has shown the capacity to build bridges and deliver results. Hence, there is a common effort in terms of vision, results and investments. Italy-Türkiye initiatives in Africa are not in competition, but they rather reflect the complementarity spirit characterizing their bilateral relations. In other words, Türkiye's long-standing "win-win" approach in Africa through trade, investment, and humanitarian efforts could complement rather than obstruct Italy's renewed projection and activism in the Continent.

⁴¹⁸ Giannotta V. "Mediterranean alliance: Italy, Türkiye and Libya forge new path for co-op", DailySabah, August 2025. <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/mediterranean-alliance-italy-turkiye-and-libya-forge-new-path-for-co-op>

⁴¹⁹ Joint Declaration 4th Italy-Türkiye Intergovernmental Summit (29 April 2025, Rome) https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Joint_Declaration_4th_Italy-Turkiye_Intergovernmental_Summit.pdf

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

5.2 *Energy, Trade, Infrastructure*

In numerous sectors, including energy, infrastructure, climate, connectivity, and the blue economy, there is significant potential for deeper integration of reciprocal expertise. Italy holds strategic importance in energy technologies, particularly in the areas of extraction and transit, positioning itself as a key actor in the diversification of energy routes. As in the current context of geopolitical instability, reducing dependence on individual markets and diversifying trade relationships has become essential for enhancing economic resilience, pursuing bilateral and multilateral trade agreements with a range of partners and fostering regional economic integration is of crucial importance.

Moreover, considering the public-private partnership approach underpinning the Mattei Plan, joint ventures and investment funds could merge Italian and Turkish spirit of cooperation. In this regard, the establishment of a joint fund, bringing together major financial and investment actors operating internationally—such as CDP-SACE, AICS, ENI on the Italian side, and Eximbank Türkiye, TİKA, and the Turkish private sector— would eventually facilitate the co-financing of projects aligned with the pillars of the Mattei Plan, as well as the priorities outlined in Ankara’s Plan for Africa.

Joint investment in infrastructure projects—particularly in the energy sector and the transition to renewable sources—may generate mutual benefits for both Türkiye and Italy. Libya in this sense could represent a good starting point since the infrastructural sector seems to represent a joint activity/interest in the country.

Co-management of logistics with a focus on Türkiye -Africa networks and the Italy-Mediterranean routes could also help in pursuing successful cooperation and elevate Italy as Mediterranean hub.

5.3 *Cultural diplomacy and education*

In the light of the bilateral commitment between Rome and Ankara for cooperation in the fields of culture, science, youth, arts, music, cinema, choreographic training, innovation and for mutual circulation of artworks, cultural diplomacy can be expanded at multilateral levels. Türkiye has an extensive presence in Africa especially in terms of higher education while Italy's rich cultural heritage and soft power capabilities can be leveraged to promote understanding and cooperation across different regions.

Establishing coordinated cooperation mechanisms in education could serve to cement ties and overcome one-sided interests. Since of the importance that the Mattei Plan gives at training, further spaces of cooperation can be explored to enhance and facilitate tertiary education exchanges. Mutual benefit development also means learning from each other. Attracting and retaining international university students from Africa to Italy and from Italy to Africa facilitate mutual benefit cooperation. Significant potential exists for jointly acting with Türkiye in a sort of “trilateral format”: scholarship could be provided for students between Italy-Türkiye and Africa, starting with North African countries as well as the Horn, in which Italy’s Ministry of Education is already expanding cooperation in education.

5.4 *Migration and security*

Whether Italy's Mattei Plan emphasizes the enhancement of African human capital with a view to growth and development, the vision is not separated by the need of managing migration in the framework of the Rome process. Security remains a top issue on Italy and the EU's agenda beyond trade, energy and overall development. Investments in territories of origin and anti-trafficking cooperation on the Libyan route (in which Italy and Türkiye share both concerns and opportunities) consistent with the Istanbul trilateral process could partially serve the purpose.

However, a merely securitized approach must be avoided in favour of a genuine human rights monitoring approach and the opening of alternative mobility channels. If cooperation is focused only on border control without linking it to development and legal pathways, the risk is falling short of both African expectations and humanitarian values. Thanks to both deep and acknowledged soft power, Italy and Türkiye may invest further in training and education by ensuring a safe professional pathway. In this sense, training and education and exchanges could represent a positive starting point in generating highly skilled profiles useful for the country of origin. Creating a sort of follow up and link structure to what has been already established in the Italian-Libyan-Turkish meeting in Istanbul. This could be replicated also in the Horn of Africa where Italy is active through some cooperation projects within the framework of the Mattei Plan.

Hence, creating a task force of Italian and Turkish diplomatic corps in Africa to jointly act and mitigate the risks could be considered. Ankara's logistics/embassy network in Africa already offers concrete delivery capacity, while the recent Istanbul trilateral format with Italy and Libya opens an operational window on migration, energy, and stabilization. On the other hand, as the Mattei Plan aims at strengthening its commitment to foster socioeconomic growth together with African countries, it would be effective to further increasing the political dialogue with countries and key regional organizations, following up the Italy-Africa Summit by enlarging to new partners such as Türkiye. Capacity building initiatives targeting public sector personnel are also of particular importance. Such initiatives would enhance intergovernmental interaction and contribute to the development of a shared approach to project design and international cooperation.

5.5 *Fostering Italy-Türkiye-EU cooperation*

Strengthening alignment between the Mattei Plan and the EU Global Gateway while exploring synergies with the Türkiye Plan for Africa to scale funding and prevent duplication/overlapping/rebranding of existing projects, would be recommended. This may involve establishing systematic reporting mechanisms concerning mutual commitments, disbursements, and outcomes. Indeed, successful convergence in Africa could further underscore the significance of EU and Türkiye relations, while also reinforcing the contributions of Türkiye and Italy to the stability not only of Europe but also the broader Mediterranean region.

5.6 *Risks and challenges*

Italy and Türkiye often operate in the same spaces; if not coordinated, the risk of fragmenting activities and resources might arise. Hence, joint efforts may be investing in avoiding the risk of duplication and overlapping. Along with the principle of sustainability and accountability, the Italy-Türkiye partnership must be perceived as balanced and transparent. Therefore, clarity in objectives, goals and cooperation is essential. Furthermore, while Italy complies with EU principles, Türkiye's approach - although it is more flexible and pragmatic- shows some fragilities in converging on EU standards.

In this regard, the main challenge is not sending mixed signals; thus, a certain sensitivity towards democratic values, good practices and good governance, should be protected with the Mattei Plan and its cooperative framework.

Nevertheless, challenges for a fully successful cooperation in the Mediterranean remains also in relation to the Eastern Mediterranean dispute and its reverberances over Libya-Türkiye delimitation of territorial waters.