Araştırma Makalesi ● *Research Article*

Turkey's "Opening up to Africa": From Idea to Full-Fledged Policy*

Türkiye'nin "Afrika Açılımı": Düşünceden Olgunlaşmış Politikaya

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MAKALE BİLGİSİ	ÖZ
	Türkiye'nin Sahra altı ülkelerle ilişkileri 2000'li yıllardan itibaren önemli ilerleme kaydetmiştir. Var olan çalışmalar bu politikanın ardındaki motivasyonlara odaklanmış ve meselenin siyasal, ekonomik ve kültürel boyutlarını analiz etmişlerdir. Bu makale ise politikanın oluşum sürecine odaklanarak yazına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Türkiye'de Afrika ülkelerine yönelik bir açılım 2000'lerden önce gündeme gelmiş olsa da bu çabalar ya tam anlamıyla bir politikaya dönüşmemiş ya da hükümet değişikliği nedeniyle terk edilmiştir. 2000 sonrası Afrika politikasının başarılı bir şekilde ortaya çıkması kısmen bu çabalara ve siyasa girişimcilerinin destek alabilmek için benimsedikleri stratejilere bağlı olmuştur.

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Turkey's relations with Sub-Saharan African countries have developed substantially since the 2000s. Existing research has focused on the motivations for this policy and analyzed it from political, economic and cultural aspects. This article seeks to contribute to this literature by focusing on the emergence phase of this policy. An opening towards African countries have come to the agenda in Turkey several times before the 2000s but these attempts either did not turn into full-fledged policies or were abandoned after a change of government. The successful emergence of the post-2000 African policy is in part based on these attempts but also on the strategies adopted by policy entrepreneurs to get support for the opening.

1. Introduction

On 17th of October, 2008, Turkey was elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council. This event, televised live nationally, was hailed by the Prime Minister Erdoğan as an illustration of "increasing weight" of Turkey in international politics while the Minister of Foreign Affairs Babacan said it was a "historic day" (Hürriyet, 2008).

Out of the 151 votes Turkey received for the non-permanent chair of the UN Security Council, 50 votes came from

African countries (Belder and Dipama, 2018: 235).[1] This is indeed a significant number, when one considers that Turkey at that time had only 12 embassies[2] in the African continent. This showed the gradual development of a strategic approach towards the African continent by Turkish policy makers. In this paper, I would like to show that Turkish diplomacy towards non-Western countries in general and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular evolved from being a mere function of Turkey's position on Cyprus question or an attempt to ward off Turkey's isolation in the late 1960s and 1970s into a strategy with its political, economic and social dimensions. As such, rather than engaging in an overview of Turkish policy towards Africa in the last decades, this study focuses on the slow emergence of a full-fledged African policy.

This study is guided by two basic ideas. First, it assumes that domestic political economy interacts with foreign policy (Putnam, 1988) where the interests of domestic business groups in Turkey are reflected on external relations, especially since the 1980s. Second, the study is guided by incremental models of policy making (Hill, 2005; Kingdon, 2014; Travis and Zahariadis, 2002; Zahariadis, 1996).[3] According to this framework, "policies result from a pluralistic process of interaction and mutual adaptation among a multiplicity of actors" (Hayes, 2007: 440). It is not always possible to apply a comprehensively rational analysis to policy making. Policies emerge when "three streams" of problems, policy and politics are coupled during an opportune time. Problems can be defined as "external stimuli" (Travis, 2010: 798) that lead the policy makers to pay attention. Problems are socially constructed but recognized through indicators or crises. Issues become part of the agenda only when they are pushed successfully by policy entrepreneurs and attached to specific solutions. Policies or solutions to problems are the "wide variety of ideas… generated by policy specialists" (Travis & Zahariadis, 2002: 496).

If the politics stream, namely the government, is ready to adopt this issue then the process leads to a policy. This often takes place when there is a change in government. Yet one of the insights of this policy model is that all these three streams need to come together during a "policy window" (Kingdon, 2014: 88) for the successful emergence of policy. This model can be successfully applied to the case of Turkish foreign policy towards Africa. Given the fact that relations with Africa has appeared on the agenda of Turkish policy makers several times before (İncesu 2020; Oğurlu 2018), how is the post-2002 attention towards the region different? How did the problem, policy and politics streams were coupled in the late 1990s and 2000s to lead to a full-fledged policy towards Africa? This article seeks to answer these questions. A limitation of this study is that it seeks to explain the emergence phase of the policy rather than the consolidation phase or the recent years where it has become much more complex.

2. Africa and Turkey during the Cold War years

During the early years of the Republic, relations with Sub-Saharan countries were not developed. Turkey had a resident embassy in Ethiopia from 1926 on (Worku, 2018), but still the continent was neglected to a great extent by the decision makers in Ankara. Until the end of the 1990s, the extent of relations with the Sub-Saharan countries was defined by Turkey's relations with the Western powers and especially the Cyprus question. Whenever Turkish policy makers felt isolated and sidelined and looked for support at the multilateral fora they turned to the non-Aligned and developing nations including African countries. However, Turkey's often negative attitude in the United Nations (UN) towards the decolonization movement created a significant obstacle to the development of relations between Turkey and the Third World (Tepeciklioğlu, 2012).

Turkey began to pursue a "multidirectional" foreign policy in the mid-1960s (Hasgüler, 2000: 110). This shift in policy came in a time of worsening relations with the US due to disagreements over the Cyprus question. Rebuffed by the US and warned by Soviet Union (Bölükbaşi, 1998), Ankara tried to build bridges to the Third World and the Warsaw Pact countries in a bid to influence the world public opinion. Ankara was successful in reducing Soviet support for pro-Makarios (Bölükbaşi, 1998) policies but the same could not be said for the developing nations that went on supporting the Greek side. The long standing pro-Western attitude of Turkey haunted these efforts and Turkish diplomats' request to attend the Cairo Summit of the Non-aligned movement in 1964 as "observers" was rejected (Hasgüler, 2000: 109). African nations' negative view of Turkish policies was also reflected in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions (Sönmezoğlu, 1996). For instance in 1965, UNGA adopted Resolution 2077 (XX) which supported Cypriot sovereignty and independence against Turkish intervention. Sub-Saharan countries supported this resolution *en masse* with the exception of Senegal, which abstained.

After the 1974 Turkish intervention in Cyprus, the US had imposed an arms sale embargo on Ankara. This came as a shock to the Turkish policy makers. What worsened the situation was that Turkey did not have the chance to play the Soviets against the US as Moscow thought that supporting Greek Cypriots was the only way to keep the island independent (Hasgüler, 2000). Facing isolation in international politics, Turkey again began to look for partners in Third World countries. This proved to be a difficult exercise due to the reaction some African countries showed against intervention in 1974. For instance, Turkish move was called an "invasion" and condemned by Sudan in 1974 in an apparent act of solidarity with the Greek Cypriot President Makarios (FBIS, 1974).[4] Later, Turkey's overtures towards the non-aligned movement were also disappointed as they were seen as infiltration attempts by a Western puppet state (FBIS, 1976b).

How can we conceptualize these in terms of an incremental approach to foreign policy? It is clear that in the 1970s, the Cyprus crises and votes of African countries in the UN were

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[1] The continent had 53 members in the UN, thus 3 African countries did not vote for Turkey.
[2] Only seven of them were in the Sub-Saharan region: Ethiopia, Sudan, Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, DRC, and Kenya.

[3] Although these models focus on the agenda-setting phase of policymaking process, in this study I extend the model to policy formation.
[4] The communique also condemned the Cypriot National Guard.

seen as significant problems for Turkish foreign policy. Policy entrepreneurs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested better relations with Africa as a solution to these problems. Thus improving relations with Africa was on the agenda of decision makers. During the Premiership of Bülent Ecevit, there was a narrow "policy window" when the government was convinced by policy proposals coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop relations with Sub-Saharan Africa (İncesu, 2020). Thus, in the language of the policy model used in this study, the problem, policy and politics streams were coupled. However, this government was quite short-lived and due to the by-election in 1979, namely changes in the politics stream, the policy was abandoned.

3. Rethinking Africa in the 1980s and the End of Cold War

In the 1980s and 1990s, Turkey's indifference towards Africa began to be replaced with a newfound interest. Political relations with the continent were being established in these years. Yet, as mentioned above, the main factor in this new attitude was greater emphasis on trade issues in Turkey's external relations. Then as now, the main destination for Turkish goods was European and other regional countries. However, African continent also came to be seen as a suitable destination for Turkish goods that were not able to compete in the Western markets. It was in the 1980s that Turkey significantly started to exhibit features of a "Trading State" (Kirişci, 2009). In this decade, Turkey started to use foreign aid in its external relations (DPT, 1998). Interestingly, one of the first recipients of the Turkish aid were Sub-Saharan African countries (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2015: 51) showing that there was some receptivity towards policy ideas to improve relations with Africa.[5] Furthermore, rising costs of domestic production and competition with Chinese manufacturers led Turkish business people to look for locations where they could produce with lower costs. Several African countries emerged as an ideal place for that since they also had trade agreements with United States, the European Union or other regional countries.

One of the reflections of this new activism (Öniş and Yilmaz, 2009; Özkan and Akgün, 2010) can be seen in the attitude towards the Sub-Saharan countries. Turkish strategy in this region is illustrious of not only the impact of conservative business circles on foreign policy making but also the initiative of the state to increase political and economic presence globally (Silverman, 2014).

In the commercial sphere, Ankara sought to develop its relations especially with Nigeria, South Africa and Sudan. There was already a Turkish embassy in Nigeria since 1960 and Lagos and Ankara had concluded an agreement on cultural and educational matters in 1976, at a time when Nigeria was going under a political upheaval (FBIS, 1976a). As the Turkish Ambassador to Nigeria admits, the main interest of Ankara in its relations with Nigeria was commerce (FBIS, 1984). Turkey has been interested in engaging in counter trade with Nigeria for some years to no avail.

Relations with Sudan were also significant. Under the Nimeiri regime (1969-1985), Sudan had relatively close relations with the Western world, as well as with Egypt and the Gulf States (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 2005). There has been a visit at the presidential level from Sudan to Turkey, and Sudan has seen Ankara as a potential partner in its bid to stabilize the country (FBIS, 1982; Hasan, 2005). Turkish President Turgut Özal's positive attitude towards the Muslim world and Sudan's continued domestic troubles created the conditions to sustain the relationship after Nimeiri's fall (FBIS 1986a). For instance, al-Mahdi cites military cooperation with Turkey, more specifically, "Turkish assistance in modernizing the Sudanese Armed Forces" after his visit to Istanbul within the framework of Islamic Conference in 1986 (FBIS, 1986b). The continuation of Khartoum-Ankara links into the 1990s, after the fall of al-Mahdi attests to interest-based relationship. Economic cooperation from Ankara in turn for security cooperation formed the basis of the relationship.

Sudanese-Turkish relations began to deteriorate after the US attack against Iraq. The two countries were on the different sides of the line as Özal sought to increase Turkey's influence in the Middle East while al-Bashir supported Iraqi sovereignty over Kuwait. Sudan went on pursuing anti-Western policies after the War on Iraq and was put on the US list of "state sponsors of terrorism" in 1993 (Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2005). In 1996, Turkish premier Necmettin Erbakan went on a tour in Africa comprising Libya, Egypt and Nigeria. His invitation to the Sudanese leader Hasan al-Turabi, among other issues, has created an uproar in secularist circles in Turkey (Akinci, 1996). The US State Department also went out of its way to comment on the issue and called on the Turkish government to stay within the lines of Western policies. In 1998, USA launched a missile strike against what it claimed to be chemical weapons factory in Sudan. This attack, which was undertaken simultaneously with another missile attack in Afghanistan, put Turkey in a difficult position. In the press statement made from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the American claim that the purpose of the attack was self-defense was not contested but the attack was called a "unilateral intervention" (MFA, 1998). The messages from the President and Prime Minister however, were in a softer tone, as they considered that Turkey could also need to launch a similar attack against Kurdish separatists in countries neighboring Turkey (TDN, 1998).

These developments show that in the 1980s and early 1990s deeper relations with some African countries came to the agenda of the policy makers. However, the contacts took place in a bilateral framework and a full-fledged approach towards the region was not visible. Lack of dense relations with Sub-Saharan Africa was not seen as a problem in the politics stream.

4. Late 1990s and Turkey's "Opening up to Africa" Policy

In 1998, Turkish diplomats immersed in African affairs held several meetings with representatives from the Turkish business community and other officials (Hazar, 2003). In

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[5] These countries were Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal, Somalia and Sudan.

these gatherings, diplomats talked about the economic and commercial opportunities in the African continent and tried to attract the attention of the businesses to the region. As a result of this initiative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a "Plan for Action" was developed and published in October 1998 (Altan, 2007).

The plan emphasized economic, cultural and social spheres of interaction over political relations. It was proposed that Turkey should take steps such as:

> (…) completion of the legal framework of economic and trade relations, exchange of visits by businessmen, encouragement of Turkish contractors to enter African markets, cooperate in military, cultural and scientific fields (…)(Hazar, 2000: 112–113)

According to the plan, Turkey would also engage with the continent within multilateral organizations and step up its efforts for providing development assistance to troubled areas. This plan of action showed Turkey's decision to end its long negligence of the continent. Economic considerations and the need to provide new markets for the Turkish exporting sector were certainly significant in this outreach to Africa. Yet, Ankara was not very keen to meddle in the political problems of the continent so long as its commercial relations did not require it to do so. Indeed, Turkish diplomats thought that there would be a ground for political relations with the Sub-Saharan countries only after the economic relations reached a certain level of significance (Altan, 2007). Apart from economic and social cooperation, Turkish diplomats also saw the African continent as a significant source of votes at multilateral organizations, especially the United Nations (Hazar, 2008). Amassing support of the African countries in the UN General Assembly or getting their support for ending the international isolation over Turkish Cypriots would be a significant achievement for Turkish diplomacy. This case also shows that policy entrepreneurs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were able to couple the problem, policy and politics streams. The lack of dense relations with African countries were constructed as a problem and policy entrepreneurs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed a detailed Action Plan as a solution to this. The politics stream, namely the coalition governments between 1997-2002 and the Minister of Foreign Affairs İsmail Cem was receptive towards this and took it to the policy agenda. It should also be noted that the Action Plan sought the collaboration of the business to increase the viability of the policy. The policy was designed not only to improve diplomatic relations but also to benefit the trade and investment interests. In this way, the policy entrepreneurs sought to attract a wide variety of supporters. This was a significant difference between previous attempts to improve relations with African countries.

5. Emergence of full-fledged Turkish Policy towards Africa under the Justice and Development Party (JDP)

Turkish diplomats' initiative for building bridges to the African continent was well received by the business community. This initiative was sustained with various instruments such as international development assistance and relations within multilateral fora in the following years. After the rise of the JDP to power, economic relations with the continent have been boosted and political relations intensified.

What differentiated the new government's policy towards Africa was the impact of the business community as well as the civil society (İpek and Biltekin, 2013; Siradag, 2015; for a different view see Turhan, 2020). Quite similarly to the era of Turgut Özal, Premier Erdoğan gave special importance to economic relations in foreign affairs and at times used state procurement as a means to improve relations with other countries in the region. This "trading state" strategy is quite apparent in relations with Italy, Germany, Syria and Iraq among others.

One should also note that the so-called Anatolian tigers had a favorable relationship with the government (Gülalp, 2001). The government's openness to business people's concerns meant that they could have an impact on the making of the foreign policy. Endurance of Turkey's "Opening to Africa" policy is partly a result of this agenda shaping ability of these business circles. Their need for new export markets led the government to sustain this policy. African continent, as many other emerging markets, is different from the American or European markets. Turkish entrepreneurs frequently need the support of their own government in bidding for government projects. This is because, as developing economies, many African countries' most urgent needs are infrastructural projects which are usually given by local or national governments. In these kind of projects, inter-state relations and assistance has an important role to play.

There were already semi-official institutions such as DEİK and TOBB where export-oriented firms could interact with the officials from various ministries and seek help from the government for their day-to-day problems. This lobbying went so far as to lead the head of Union of Chamber and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) Hisarcıklıoğlu to suggest that "interests of the corporations should be placed at the center of national interests" (Anka, 2007). This was indeed a very interesting suggestion for a country where anxiety over "national security" is always prevalent and had priority over other concerns (Cizre, 2003).

To this overture, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Gül responded that his top diplomats are already "working like CEOs of corporations" (Anka, 2007). Earlier remarks of the top advisor to the Prime Minister on issues of foreign policy, Ahmet Davutoğlu, give further hints about the changing dynamics of foreign policy making in Turkey, once the protected domain of diplomats and to some extent top military officers. Davutoğlu pointed out that, foreign policy making now had many shareholders such as the Ministry of Transportation, Energy, Foreign Trade and certainly the business community (Han, 2004).

This transformation in the mechanisms of policymaking constitutes another difference between previous and current Turkish policies towards Africa. For at least a decade, Turkish outreach to the continent has been motivated by economic gains, search for export markets and an attempt to increase influence in the international sphere. Yet, under JDP, this policy has become more attuned with the concerns of the business community, which has also been one of the main supporters of the government.

There are various instances of the attunement of the trade strategy of the Turkish exporters and the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Sub-Saharan countries. One of the cases is the use of international development assistance agency. Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) has been established in 1992. At that time, the main objective of the organization was to coordinate official development assistance to Central Asian republics, which had recently gained their independence and had a Turkic population (Fidan and Nurdun, 2008). With the new orientation of policy towards Africa, this organization has also become active in the continent in various long-term development assistance projects and emergency relief. Besides seeking to improve Turkish image abroad, TİKA works in areas such as health, education, and agriculture with indirect effects and creating a positive environment for trade.

TIKA's activities have more direct relevance for Turkey's export activities as well. In Turkey, Africa has long been a continent known only through stereotypes and clichés. Many suggest that the lack of knowledge of the Turkish people about Africa is one of the formidable reasons behind the low level of relations. In such a context, TİKA presence in the field and its several offices in Ethiopia, Sudan and Senegal (Ozkan, 2008) has been an important source of information. The semi-official Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) of Turkey has sought to tap into to this source of knowledge for trade and investment purposes.[6] A "cooperation and technical assistance protocol" has been signed between Turkey's development aid agency TİKA and DEİK (Anka, 2008) which, according to a prominent member of DEİK, would enable Turkish exporters to:

> develop Turkey's economic and commercial relations; facilitate the entry of Turkish business community to new markets, enhance its activity in already existing markets, and intensify international relationships.

Although this hardly sounds like a typical "terms of reference" for a technical aid and cooperation body, it is a good illustration of the symbiotic relationship between the government and the business. Another reflection of this rapport can be seen when one compares the trade strategy of Turkish exporters with the policy of the government in the continent. The Anatolian entrepreneurs viewed the economic performance of Sub-Saharan countries as a great opportunity in a time of decreasing demand in the developed world. In defining its objectives, Turkish traders aimed at the 10 to 20% of population in African countries who comprise the relatively well-off sections (Alpay, 2008). In this, they usually tended to avoid highly competitive countries such as South Africa and focus on the "emerging markets" such as Tanzania, Ethiopia and Liberia. These were the same countries that Turkish foreign affairs were focusing their energies on during that time: the Prime Minister had visited Ethiopia two times, and Tanzania was one of the countries where Turkey considered opening an Embassy. Energy sources, export potential and security situation have been the main parameters taken into account when the government was deciding where to post its diplomats and open new embassies in Africa (Radikal 2008). These embassies also acted as sources of information for Turkish exporters to

Africa and they facilitated economic relations. Various "Investment Reports" were prepared by the experts of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, stationed in African capitals. These reports not only provided practical guidance to the prospective Turkish exporters but also became an official channel to convey the problems of Turkish entrepreneurs in Africa.

6. Political Relations with Africa

During the early years of Turkish engagement with Africa, developing political relations with Africa was not the priority of the Turkish government but was not ignored either. Economic interdependence between Africa and Turkey has been the main instrument for developing relations. Developing political consultation mechanisms with African countries was one of the points in the Action Plan of 1998 (Hazar, 2008). In line with this, Turkey established such mechanisms with Nigeria and South Africa in 2000 (Wheeler, 2005) and a "Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of Political Consultation Mechanism Between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs" was signed with Sudan in 2008 (MFA, 2009). The initial aloofness towards political affairs has also been weakened due to the election of Turkey to the non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council. Turkish President Abdullah Gül paid a "thank you" visit to several African countries to show appreciation of the African support for Turkey's election at the Security Council. In his trip, the President has emphasized that Ankara seeks to be the "voice of Africa in the Security Council" (Haber7, 2009).

7. Conclusion

Relations with Sub-Saharan African countries developed incrementally. Although these countries were ignored for a long time in the Turkish capital, there have been some brief and unsystematic attempts towards Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. Given the range of domestic and international problems Turkey had to cope with, Africa has not always caught the attention of policy makers. Before the 1980s, there were attempts to put Africa on the policy-making agenda. However, as shown above, these attempts either failed or were short-lived. Thus, even when the problem of poor relations with Africa was recognized and new policies suggested, the three streams did not create a significant policy window. Moreover, in those years the audience and stakeholders of a potential African policy was quite narrow and consisted mainly of the foreign policy establishment. This was a significant problem that Africa policy entrepreneurs had to deal with.

With the changing economic direction of the country and the end of the Cold War, the Turkish business community has acquired a more prominent place in decision-making mechanisms. Turkish diplomacy also sought to increase its activity in previously uncharted waters with a clear program of action. The latter's initiative towards Africa has been taken up by Justice and Development Party and like-minded business circles after 2002 and coupled with a more trade and investment oriented approach. After 2002 Turkey has been

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[6] In 2014, DEİK has become an agency of the Ministry of Economy. See (Anon, 2014)

successful not only in getting the diplomatic support of the Sub-Saharan countries in several international issues and multilateral fora but also expanded its economic presence in the region. This expansion in turn had become an important link to maintain the political support of business community to the government. Rising economic presence of Turkey in Africa also prepared the ground for Ankara's increasing political involvement. Thus, the successful emergence of a full-fledged policy towards Africa was possible with the opportune timing and broadening of the stakeholders. While international conditions made such a policy possible, the timing of the policy needs to be explained with reference to Turkey's internal transformation and the successful broadening of Africa policy to include not only the foreign policy establishment but also the economic interests. In the language of the incremental policy model, while the problem of weak relations with Africa was recognized several times since the 1960s and several policy ideas were suggested in the following decades, three streams of problem, policy and politics aligned only in the early 2000s to create a window of opportunity. The Opening to Africa Policy of the 2000s was a significant turning point. This study has argued that it was built on past policy experiences with Sub-Saharan African countries.

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