

## PERCEPTION OF TURKEY IN THE AFRICAN PRESS-MEDIA: THE EXAMPLE OF THE SOMALI SOFRASI\*

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### Abstract

The visit of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2011 in the country, which is in severe crisis in terms of politics, economy and security, allows a great impetus to the relations between the two countries. As the relationship with Somalia has intensified, the number of Somalis who have come to Turkey to invest in Turkey has increased, as has the number of Turkish investments in Somalia. The restaurant, called Somali Sofrası in the Kızılay district of Ankara, is one of the establishments that started to function in this process. However, it has been observed that the security measures for the institutions opened by the Somalis such as Somali Sofrası have increased and as a result, these companies, which had to change their names, either entered the process of closure or transfer. In this study, the outcomes of the practices made since 2021 counter to the company called Somali Sofrası on the Somali press and Somalis will be examined. For this article, the Somali press has been examined for news related to this process, social media posts by Somalis on this topic have been scanned, and forum discussions have been researched

**Keywords:** Somali Sofrası, Turkey-Somalia relations, Africa, Somali diaspora, Migration, Foreign student

### *Afrika Basın-Medyasında Türkiye Algısı: Somali Sofrası Örneği*

### Öz

Doğu Afrika ülkelerinden Somali, Türkiye'nin dış politikasında önemli bir yer teşkil etmektedir. Siyasi, ekonomik ve güvenlik olarak ciddi krizler içerisinde olan ülkeye Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın (Başbakanlık döneminde) 2011'deki ziyareti, iki ülke ilişkilerine büyük bir ivme kazandırmıştır. Atılan adımlarla hem hükümetler hem de halklar arasındaki derin bağlar daha da güçlenmiştir. Somali ile ilişkiler derinleştikçe Somali'deki Türk yatırımları arttığı gibi Türkiye'ye yatırım için gelen Somalilerin sayısı da artmıştır. Ankara'nın Kızılay ilçesindeki Somali Sofrası isimli restoran da bu süreçte faaliyete geçen kuruluşlar arasındadır. Ancak özellikle 2021 senesinden itibaren Somali Sofrası gibi Somaliler tarafından açılan kuruluşlara yönelik güvenlikçi yaklaşımların arttığı görülmüş ve bunun sonucunda isim değiştirmek zorunda kalan bu firmalar ya kapanma ya da devredilme sürecine girmiş, diasporadan gelen Somaliler ise yeniden geldikleri ülkelere ya da başka ülkelere dönmüşlerdir. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'nin dış politikasında önemli bir yerde olan Somali ile ilişkilerin her alanda derinleşmesine rağmen daha önce Somali Sofrası olarak bilinen "Güzelyurt Sofrası" adlı firma ve sahibi Muhammed İsa'ya yönelik 2021 yılından itibaren yapılan uygulamaların Somali basını ve Somaliler nezdindeki etkisi incelenecektir. Somali basınında bu süreçte konu ile ilgili yayınlanmış haberler incelenmiş, Somalilerin bu konu ile ilgili sosyal medya paylaşımları taranmış ve forum tartışmaları araştırılmıştır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Somali Sofrası, Türkiye-Somali ilişkileri, Afrika, Somali diasporası, Göç, Yabancı öğrenci

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## **Perception of Turkey in the African Press-Media: The Example of the Somali Sofrası**

### **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of foreign immigrants in Turkey, particularly in cities such as Istanbul and Ankara. Among foreign immigrants, Somalis hold a significant place. Somalis who choose Turkey for education and investment purposes contribute not only to their own country but also to Turkey in political, economic, and cultural fields. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in public reactions towards foreigners in Turkey for economic and political reasons, which have become a topic of discussion. During this process, some significant events have occurred, including the security measures taken by law enforcement agencies towards businesses opened by Somalis in the Kızılay district of Ankara, which have come to the attention of the Turkish public.

Several factors have influenced the preference of both Somalis living in Somalia and in the diaspora to choose Turkey. The turbulent years in Somali history, negative attitudes towards immigrants in some European countries and the United States, Turkey's Somali policy, and the historical depth of the relationship between the two countries have paved the way for Somalis to settle in Turkey for education and investment. Additionally, factors such as Turkey's strategic location between Europe and Asia, the positive attitude of the Turkish people towards Somalis, and Turkey's perception as a modern Islamic state play a role in the preference of Somalis for Turkey, especially when faced with problems encountered by Somalis in Western countries, including negative attitudes towards Muslims and the risk of assimilation.

The tumultuous years in Somali history, marked by internal conflicts and socio-economic problems, have driven Somalis to scatter across different countries around the world. While Somalia gained independence from Britain and Italy in 1960, a coup in 1969 brought Mohamed Siad Barre to power, and his

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\* SBF Dergisi, kendi atıf tarzını uygular. Çalışmanızın bu atıf tarzına uygun olduğundan emin olmak için kılavuzumuzu inceleyiniz

regime lasted for 21 years. After his regime ended in 1991, Somalia descended into a period of internal conflict, ethnic struggles, and security problems, making the country ungovernable for an extended period. The formation of the Somali diaspora intensified during this period, as Somalis fleeing the internal conflict began to migrate to neighboring countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda, as well as to Western countries like the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and European Union countries. Turkey gradually became one of the preferred destinations for the Somali diaspora during this period.

While the international community remained indifferent to Somalia's struggles with internal wars and famine for years, Turkey's Somali policy, which started in 2011, garnered attention worldwide and increased international interest in Somalia. This policy not only drew attention to Somalia-Turkey relations but also contributed to the positive view Somalis have of Turkey. At that time, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is now the President, led a delegation consisting of his family, ministers, non-governmental organizations, and artists to Somalia, which he declared as the "world's most dangerous place"<sup>2</sup> due to armed conflict. This visit not only marked a turning point in Somalia-Turkey relations but also in Somali history. Following this visit, Somalia diaspora's first choice among countries to settle in became Turkey. Somalis started to invest in Turkey, shifting their investments from countries like the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Somali diaspora's preference for Turkey increased as Turkey hosted the Somali World Diaspora Conference in 2014 and 2019, aiming to find solutions to the problems of approximately 3 million Somalis living in diaspora, encourage them to invest in Turkey and their homeland, and improve communication among Somalis.

There are also similarities between the history of the Ottoman Empire and Somalia. During the disintegration process of the Ottoman Empire, similar to what happened in Somalia, external powers played a role in dividing territories, and conflicts among different ethnic groups were incited. During this period, the Ottoman Empire provided open support to Somalia against colonialism, strengthening historical ties between the two nations. These historical ties significantly contribute to the preference of Somalis to choose Turkey for education and investment.

At this point, Somalia has become an important political, economic and military partner for Turkey that cannot be explained only by humanitarian aid. Although the relations between Turkey and Somalia seem to be institutionalized from today's perspective, the dysfunctionality of institutionalization comes to light when the events are taken into consideration. It should not be forgotten that, with the steps taken by Turkey in Somalia, it is stated that no other state has achieved the success that Turkey has achieved and won the hearts of Somalis.

(Demirci, 2021, p. 11-16) For this reason, it is clear that the style of relations established with Somalis both in Somalia and on the Turkish border will affect the current process positively or negatively.

## 1. Purpose and Methodology of the Research

This study aims to uncover the reflection of negative developments concerning Somalis in Turkish domestic politics in the press and media of the concerned country. Therefore, this research is not only intended for readers interested in this field but is also of importance to bureaucracy, security, and decision-making authorities in politics. Due to the extensive scope of the topic, this study focuses on the news articles and social media posts related to the business located on Sümer Street in the Kızılay district of Ankara, known as the “Somali Sofrası”, which have been published in the Somali press. Interviews were conducted with relevant parties to gain insight into the matter. Furthermore, despite the presence of numerous businesses operated by Somalis and their negative impact on the process, this study specifically examines the repercussions of the closure of the establishment formerly known as Somali Sofrası and the deportation of its owner, as it has garnered more attention. Since local language news articles are scarce in the Somali press, English-language news reports and comments shared on social media, particularly on the Twitter platform, by individuals with real names are considered in this research.

## 2. Brief History of Turkey-Somalia Relations

Somalia, which gained its independence from England and Italy in 1960, witnessed a coup in 1969, leading to the rise of Mohamed Siad Barre to power, whose regime lasted until 1991. After 1991, due to power struggles between clans, the country experienced a prolonged period without a central government. It took approximately 20 years before the first Somali Parliament convened in 2012, and Hasan Sheikh Mahmoud was elected as President. The election process that began in 2016 resulted in the election of Mohammed Abdullahi Mohammed (Farmajo) as President on February 8, 2017. As the country sought political stability, it also started to grapple with issues such as security and famine. Furthermore, in recent years, attacks by the Al-Shabaab organization and an increasing food crisis have become the government’s most pressing concerns.

In Turkey’s foreign policy the African continent, especially Somalia has come to the forefront in the past two decades. Observations show that Turkey has deepened its relations with Somalia in all areas. The historical ties between the two countries can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire’s relations established

through the Harar Emirate in the early 16th century. During this period, support was provided to the emirate in its struggle against Portugal (Orhonlu, 1996, p. 35).

While Somalia had some interactions with Turkey in the 1960s after gaining independence, its alignment with the Soviet bloc in 1969 hindered the progress of relations. However, starting from 1979, Somalia shifted from the Soviet bloc to the Western bloc, and during this period, Turkey established diplomatic relations and opened its first Embassy in 1979. The relationship between Turkey and Somalia has progressed in subsequent years through agreements in the fields of education, military, and technology (Resmi Gazete, 1982). The Embassy in Mogadishu, which was closed in 1991 due to the civil war, was reopened on November 1, 2011. Additionally, on June 1, 2014, the Hargeisa Consulate General was established in Somaliland. It is worth noting that Turkey's relations with Somalia included sending a Turkish battalion-level unit to the UN Mission in 1993 and General Çevik Bir, the Chief of General Staff Operations Commander, serving as the commander of the UNOSOM II Mission responsible for the security of Mogadishu Airport between 1992 and 1994.

In Turkey's African policy, President Erdoğan's visit to Somalia in August 19, 2011, during his tenure as Prime Minister, played a significant role. In that year, as Somalia faced its most severe drought and food crisis, Turkey, along with TİKA, Red Crescent (Kızılay), TMV, and civil society organizations began working in the country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). During this process, Turkey initiated the largest foreign aid operation, providing over 1 billion US dollars in aid to Somalia in various fields such as development, security, education, health, and transportation (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı [TCCB], 2022). Another significant aspect of the 2011 visit was that despite the serious security problems in Somalia at the time, President Erdoğan, along with his family, ministers, bureaucrats, businessmen, and artists, risked their lives to visit the country. Not only in Turkey but also internationally, attention was drawn to President Erdoğan's act of kissing Somali children during the 2011 visit and his wife Emine Erdoğan holding and comforting a severely malnourished child who had not been fed for a long time (Harper, 2019, p. 149). This visit left such a profound impression on Somalia that the Somali government commemorated the 10th anniversary of Erdoğan's visit in 2021 with significant state-led celebrations on August 19, 2021 (Demirci, 2021, pp. 11-16).

Turkey hosted the First Turkey-Somalia Conference in Istanbul from May 21 to 23, 2010, with the participation of high-level representatives from international organizations, including then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. The Second Turkey-Somalia Conference was held from May 31 to June 1, 2012 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Alongside these steps, Turkey's relations with

Somalia were reinforced by President Erdoğan's two additional visits to Somalia in 2015 and 2016, during the latter of which he officially opened the Turkish-Somali Education and Research Hospital, the largest and most advanced hospital in East Africa. It is essential to highlight that Turkey's relations with Somalia have been built on goodwill since the Ottoman Empire, and the fact that Somalia's population is predominantly Muslim, Turkey lacks a colonial history, and its historical support for African countries in their struggle against European colonizers, particularly along the coasts of East Africa, has placed Turkey in a significant position in the eyes of Somalis. After these initiatives, not only Somalis residing in Somalia but also Somalis in European countries and the United States turned their attention to Turkey for both living and conducting business activities (Demirci, 2021, p. 11-16).

The deepening of political relations between the two countries has also been reflected in economic relations. Starting from 2011, the trade volume between Turkey and Somalia has increased rapidly. Turkey's exports to Somalia, which were \$50 million in 2013, exceeded \$300 million in 2021 (Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu [DEİK], 2022). Turkish companies' investments in Somalia have reached \$100 million. Especially after the 2011 visit, Somalis who had previously invested in the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, India, Malaysia, and Western countries turned their attention to Turkey. The increase in the number of Somalis settling in Turkey has also shifted the balance of trade between the two countries in favor of Turkey. In addition to dominating the Somali market, Turkish products, ranging from construction materials to furniture, textiles, and food products, have begun to find a place in the Somali market, alongside China.

Turkey has deepened its relations with Somalia in the field of security. So far, Turkey has provided training to approximately 5,000 Somali soldiers and 1,000 special operations police officers (TCBB, 2022). In 2017, the Turkish Somalia Task Force Command was established, making it Turkey's largest military training center abroad. In Mogadishu, the Turkish-Somali Military Training Base (TÜRK SOM) was established to provide faster and more efficient training for security forces. It is important to recall that in 2013, during the attack on the Turkish Embassy by Al-Shabaab, a special operations police officer lost his life (Şahin, 2021, p. 109-147). Additionally, it should be noted that in 2021, during the period when there was pressure on Somali restaurants like Somali Sofrası run by Somalis, the then-Justice Minister, who had graduated from a Turkish university, was appointed as the Minister of Defense.

The "Istanbul Meetings" and the "Ankara Declaration" held in Turkey have made significant contributions to the development of relations with Somalia. On April 26, 2017, the "Development Cooperation Agreement" was

signed between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Federal Republic of Somalia. Furthermore, Turkey continues its efforts in favor of the Somali people in various fields, including education, health. The relations established with Somalia in 2017 have been reflected in bilateral agreements. Indeed, the two countries have signed agreements in security cooperation, grant agreements, as well as in the areas of trade and economic cooperation (Resmî Gazete, 2017).

### **3. A “Unwanted” Restaurant in Ankara: Somali Sofrası**

With the investment of the Somali diaspora in Turkey for the reasons mentioned above, Somalian investors in Istanbul and the capital city, Ankara, have engaged in various commercial activities, with “Somali Sofrası, later renamed “Güzelyurt Sofrası” being one of them.<sup>1</sup> The establishment known as Somali Sofrası was founded in 2018 in the Kızılay district of Ankara by three Somali students studying in Turkey: Abdülnasır Hasan, Muhammed İsse Abdullah, and Adam Halac Yusuf. Abdülnasır Hasan, one of the partners of Somali Sofrası, came to Turkey for university education in 2012. He pursued his undergraduate studies at Samsun 19 Mayıs University’s Faculty of Theology, and later, in 2016, he moved to Ankara for his master’s degree at Atılım University (Anadolu Ajansı [AA], 2019).

Muhammed İsse Abdolahi, another partner of Somali Sofrası, came to Turkey for education in 2009 and completed two undergraduate degrees and a master’s degree, one of them with honors. Muhammed decided to settle in Turkey after marrying a Somali woman who had also studied in Turkey. After graduating from his master’s program in Bursa in 2019, Muhammed started his business career in Ankara. Inspired by the increasing number of Somalis coming to Ankara from their home country and especially from Europe, the Somali students had the idea to open a restaurant serving traditional Somali dishes. Somali Sofrası became the first establishment to offer authentic Somali cuisine to its customers (AA, 2019).

Muhammed transitioned from a student status to a business position legally, but he faced various challenges after initiating the official residence permit process. Additionally, it was observed that security measures in the form of raids on businesses owned by Africans, including Muhammed’s restaurant and other businesses on the same street, were intensified, especially starting from August 2021 (Abdullahi, 2022). The most widely reported incident related to

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<sup>1</sup> “Somali Sofrası” name was changed to “Güzelyurt Sofrası” on November 26, 2021.

these measures occurred on August 8, 2021. A group, including municipal officers, tax officials, health inspectors, and uniformed police officers, visited the businesses, including Somali Sofrası, and conducted identity checks on customers. During this operation, Muhammed and some Somalians were detained and held for 5 hours at Çankaya Police Station. They were informed that they would be deported without a given reason, and their businesses would be closed. Those Somalians facing deportation included individuals who had received education in Turkey and others who had come from European countries and Canada to start businesses in Turkey. In their statements, the Somali business owners emphasized that they did not want one person to take away a right legally granted by the Turkish Republic, and they reported the first official complaint to the Ankara Governor's Office on August 14, 2021 (Abdullahi, 2022).

According to allegations, Somali individuals with businesses on Kızılay Sümer Street were asked to move their businesses outside of Çankaya. Faced with this demand, some African business owners chose to shut down their operations and leave Turkey. The requests to change the names of the businesses that continued to operate persisted, and as part of this study, "Somali Sofrası" changed its name to "Güzelyurt Sofrası". Other businesses like "Kafi" became "Dünya" and later "Anadolu", while "Hoda Cafe" transformed into "Nasip Cafe". "Afrikan Cafe" and the Somali barbershop closed, and the owners of these closed businesses returned to their previous countries, such as the Netherlands and Canada.

In conclusion, African individuals, including Somalians, with businesses in Kızılay, Ankara, have reported unauthorized penalties, changes in firm names, detentions of Somalians, and the expulsion of customers by law enforcement, which has had a negative impact on them both financially and spiritually (Mazlumder, 2022).

#### **4. Coverage of the "Somali Sofrası" Incidents in the Somali Press**

The reflection of the events in Ankara in the press and media can be evaluated by categorizing it into different sections. As the scope of our study, we primarily focus on the Turkish press, secondly, international press, thirdly, African press, and finally, Somali press. However, considering the nature and limitations of our study, we have only examined the Somali press. In our research, along with the Somali press, prominent press and media outlets in the African continent related to the topic have also been reviewed. It should also be noted that regarding this matter, there is no significant distinction in English-language publications of African media outlets and newspapers.



Returning to our study, when examining the news related to the issue in the Somali press, it is noteworthy that the source of these news articles is mostly foreign. At first glance, this situation may indicate that the Somali press does not closely follow the developments in Ankara. However, when we asked the stakeholders of the process about this, an important detail emerged. In English-language Somali media, the Ankara incidents have been largely copied from certain European institutions and organizations, as mentioned above. For the purposes of our study, only the headlines and contents of the news articles will be presented, as the source of the news is less important than its content and its reflection in the Somali press.

What draws attention here is that the practices carried out by the security forces against the establishment in Ankara, which have been criticized, do not find an in-depth place in the Somali press. The reason for this is that the Somali business owners rejected interview offers from the Somali press and international media. This situation limits the content of our study, but it also demonstrates that the Somali business owners, despite the pressures they faced, did not want to create a negative perception of Turkey. Mohamed Isse Abdullah, in particular, highlights that they rejected interview offers from the Somali press and outlets like the BBC and that their goal was to seek their rights within the framework of the Turkish legal system. Furthermore, despite being detained for 36 days, he did not share this with anyone, including his close friends,<sup>2</sup> emphasizing that he did not want to create a negative public opinion against Turkey (Mohamad, 2022).

#### 4.1. News Articles in the Press and Media

On January 12, 2022, Shabelle Media published a news article with the headline “Somalis in Turkey Under Attack Due to Anti-Immigrant Sentiments” (Shabelle Media, 2022). Similarly, on January 12, Som Tribune and on January 13, Garowe Online both ran stories with the headline “Somalis in Turkey Under Attack Due to Xenophobia” (Som Tribune, 2022; Garowe Online, 2022). These reports highlighted that Somalis had been contributing to the Turkish economy for years but had become targets due to the increasing anti-immigrant sentiments in Turkey. The articles, which shared the same content and source, contained statements such as, “Turkey is an opportunistic country with its own agenda, focused on its economic and strategic goals. Rather than facilitating Somalia’s development, Turkey has used its state-supported companies as part of a development trap disguised as religion to exploit their presence.” It was noted that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (during his time as Prime Minister) visited

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<sup>2</sup> Mohamed I. Abdullahi was detained between September 15, 2022, and October 25, 2022.

Somalia in 2011, and after this visit, Turkey went beyond providing assistance, opening its largest embassy in Africa in Somalia and initiating Turkish Airlines flights. It was stated that Erdoğan had gained significant praise throughout Somalia during this visit, emphasizing that “approximately 10 years later, these friendly relations have turned from friendship to hostility, from a commercial partnership to economic patronage, and from state-building to limitless plunder.” Following this introduction, the news articles shared information about Somalis owning various institutions in Ankara, including restaurants, barbershops, markets, and consultancy firms. An interesting detail in the reports was the mention of, “Until recently, Turkish government-friendly media was applauding the contributions of Somali entrepreneurs to the Turkish economy.” This referred to news articles published by AA and Daily Sabah since 2019.

Garowe Online’s report highlighted that in recent times, the region with a significant Somali population in Turkey had become a target, and in April 2021, a newspaper described as “anti-immigrant and right-wing”<sup>3</sup> (Refugee Media, 2021) published a story titled “Somalia in the Heart of Ankara”, where it was claimed that businessmen and refugees from the East African country had completely transformed two streets in Kızılay into their own. Following this period, civilian police officers were reported to frequently visit businesses owned by Somalis, conducting identity checks and harassing customers. The report also mentioned the IFFRAS report, stating that in September 2021, some Somalis were detained with the intention of deporting them, forcing them to sell or close their businesses. It was noted that the name of “Somali Sofrası” had been changed to “Güzelyurt Sofrası,” and the signboard had been forcibly removed for this purpose. According to witnesses, Somalis on the street were detained without cause and held for hours before being released. An important detail was that Somali customers no longer felt safe due to these actions and stopped coming to this street. Targeting Somali customers was presented as the final blow to Somali businesses, and it was noted that customers no longer wanted to shop from them. Finally, the report emphasized that the local administration in Turkey did not want to see Somalis and their businesses in the heart of Ankara, indicating an increase in xenophobia in Turkey (Garowe Online, 2022).

FTL Somalia, in a news article published on January 14 with the title “Somalis Under Attack Due to Xenophobia in Turkey,” emphasized that xenophobia in Turkey was on the rise, with Somalis being victims of this trend (FTL Somalia, 2022). SomTribune published a news article on September 23 with the headline “Restaurant Owner Arrested Amid Increased Police Presence and Local Anger against Somalis in Turkey,” highlighting that Mohamed Isse Abdullah, the owner of the Somali restaurant in Ankara was detained despite

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3 *Sözcü* was referend in here.

having a legal residence permit. The report also mentioned that Abdullah's deportation order had been appealed by his lawyer, and it was stated that when sent back to Somalia, he could be killed. The news article noted that Member of Parliament Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu from the People's Democratic Party (HDP) called for Abdullah's release. Additionally, Member of Parliament Mustafa Yeneroğlu from the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) visited Abdullah in solidarity and support and described the treatment by the police as "shameful" (Som Tribune, 2022).

An interesting point in this news article is that the text was taken from the Stockholm Center for Freedom.<sup>4</sup> This is because, despite Yeneroğlu's statement on his Twitter account, where he mentioned, "I have been fighting against racism and xenophobia for the past 25 years," the statement in the Stockholm Center for Freedom publication was altered, with the phrase "in European countries" being notably omitted. This suggests that the news was taken from an institution that operates in Europe. The report also cited that Yeneroğlu shared an article from Sözcü newspaper titled "Somalia in the Heart of the Capital," which led to an increase in police pressure on the Somali restaurant. The news article further mentioned that Abdullah had asked for help from President Erdoğan in a social media post but later deleted it (Som Tribune, 2022).

In the SomTribune news article, information about the number of immigrants in Turkey was also shared. Indeed, the article stated, "Turkey is the country that hosts the most refugees in the world, with 3.7 million Syrian temporary protection beneficiaries and 400,000 refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries" (Som Tribune, 2022). However, immediately after this statement, the opinions of Tineke Strik, a Member of the European Parliament, were included, suggesting that Turkey could no longer be a safe country for migrants and refugees. Strik argued that Turkey was not bound by the refugee convention regarding non-European refugees, and she claimed that economic and social problems in Turkey were being blamed on migrants and refugees, which had increased in recent years. Additionally, it was mentioned that both pro-government and opposition media outlets in Turkey were fueling hate crimes (Som Tribune, 2022).

The Hiiraan news outlet, in a news article dated September 21 with the title "Somali Restaurant Owner in Ankara Detained for Deportation amid Racist Attacks" and the Caasimada Online news outlet, in an article dated September 22 with the title "Somali Restaurant Owner who faced racist attacks in Ankara detained for deportation" reported that the Somali restaurant in Ankara had been

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4 Stockholm Center for Freedom, established by journalists who fled Turkey to Sweden in the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt.

subjected to racist attacks, and Mohamed Isse Abdullah had been detained and taken to a deportation center. The news articles included social media posts by HDP Member of Parliament Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, where he called for Abdullah's release. It was also mentioned that Abdullah, who was described as a human rights advocate, had his lawyer calling for the urgent release of the Somali citizen who was accused of violating laws and restricting individual freedom. The articles stated that since the fall of 2021, businesses opened by Somalis in Ankara had faced racist attacks. These attacks had increased, especially after Somalis established businesses in different sectors in the capital city. In Hiiraan's news report, Ankara University Faculty of Law Assistant Professor Neva Övünç's opinion was shared, stating that the cancellation of a work permit could lead to deportation, but if the person faced a life-threatening risk in their own country, deportation decisions should be canceled (Hiiraan, 2022).

An interesting point in the news was the mention that the Saab restaurant had been closed because it was claimed to carry the colors associated with an illegal organization. The article stated, "In June, the police painted over the sign of the Saab restaurant because it displayed colors that Ankara viewed as belonging to Kurdish militants". Gergerlioğlu's statements mentioned in the report indicated that Abdullah, a Somali who had lived with his wife in Turkey for more than 10 years, had graduated from a Turkish university, and had excellent relations with his neighbors. The news report also highlighted that after the publications in Sözcü newspaper, pressure had increased, and in the following period, Somalis either transferred their businesses or closed them down (Hiiraan, 2022).

Horseed Media, in a news article dated September 22 with the title "Somali restaurant owner detained in Ankara," reported that Mohamed Isse Abdullah had been detained and taken to a deportation center. The article also included calls from HDP Member of Parliament Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu for Abdullah's release. Furthermore, it mentioned the visit of Mustafa Yeneroğlu from the DEVA Party to the Somali restaurant, including a photo he took during the visit and shared on his social media account. The main focus of this news article was Yeneroğlu's social media posts related to the issue (Horseed Media, 2022).

## 4.2. Social Media Posts

The events in Ankara related to the Somali Sofrası (Somali Restaurant) have also generated discussions on social media, as they did in the Somali media. Social media reactions to the events in Ankara, often associated with the Somali Sofrası, predominantly involve Somalis living in Turkey. The social media discussions on this topic, particularly on Twitter, intensified after the police raid

on May 7, 2022, and were mainly conducted in Turkish. Although there was a hashtag in Turkish, “#SomaliliAbdullahÖlümeGönderilmesin” (which roughly translates to “Do not send Somali Abdullah to death”), no specific hashtags in English or Somali were identified. Nevertheless, it’s noteworthy that a significant number of posts were made in English, although not as much as in Turkish. Twitter posts related to the events were also shared on the official accounts of news outlets such as Hiiraan Online and Global Diaspora News. For instance, Global Diaspora News, which focuses on African issues, shared a post on July 29, stating, “Somali restaurant owner in Ankara, facing racist attacks, is detained for deportation” (Global Diaspora News, 2022). However, individual posts appeared to be more prevalent than institutional ones (Hiiraan Online, 2022).

Twitter seems to be the primary platform for these social media discussions. The involvement of Mohamed I. Abdullahi, one of the owners of Somali Sofrası, played a significant role in this trend, but the politicization of the process due to the participation of MPs also contributed to the intensity of Twitter posts. There appears to be a concentration of Twitter activity following specific incidents related to the events. These incidents include the police raid on Somali Sofrası on May 7, 2022, the changing and painting of business names, and visits by politicians.

Abdihakim Kalale, who quoted Mohamed I. Abdullahi, one of the partners of Somali Sofrası, in his post, expressed his thoughts by saying, “Trying to disrupt the relationship between Turkey and Somalia means disrupting the relationship between Turkey and Africa. Let’s all say no to this” (Kalale, 2022). Another user, Waleed Attayb posted on social media after the police raid on Somali Sofrası on May 7, 2022, raising concerns about what Turkey would gain by displaying such behavior if similar actions were taken against Turkish firms and restaurants in Somalia, Sudan, and all African countries (Attayb, 2022). Osman Berre shared an article titled “Somali restaurant owner who faced racist attacks in Ankara detained for deportation” from Caasimada Online and commented with the headline (Berre, 2022).

Abdulkadir Hoshes, a user who posted about this issue in a foreign language, gained significant attention. In one of his tweets, he shared, “Turkish police harassed and humiliated a Somali businessman in Ankara” and tagged the Somali Embassy in Turkey, the Turkish Embassy in Somalia, and the Ankara Governorship. This tweet became the most commented-on post during this period (Hoshes, 2022). Hoshes, in another tweet, mentioned that the detained Somali businessmen had been threatened and were unable to speak about the situation publicly (Hoshes, 2022). He also made posts in Turkish, stating, “Disrupting the beautiful relationship between Turkey and Somalia in Ankara is unacceptable. Treating Somali businesspeople, who come to Turkey and have all the official

documents, like this is a shame and not becoming of Turkish officials” (Hoshes, 2022).

Nasiib Cadaani criticized Somalis for investing in countries like South Africa, Congo, or Turkey rather than in their own country, Somalia, following the police raid on Somali Sofrası on May 7, 2022 (Cadaani, 2022). Can Jeex, in his post following the events, emphasized that many Turkish companies with investments in Somalia, from ports to airports, existed and that attacks like these against Somalis should stop (Jeex, 2022). Mohamed Abdullahi posted in response to the same events, expressing support for Somalis and emphasizing that Somali-Turkish relations should not be disrupted. He acknowledged the need for people to follow the law but argued that those who did not comply should be closed down (Abdullahi, 2022).

Jama Abdi Jama stated that the intervention against Somali Sofrası was unacceptable and that Somalis in the area did not harm anyone, calling on Turkey to prevent such actions (Jama, 2022). Kasim Abdisalam argued that the restaurant owners were not refugees and had legal permits provided by Turkey. He emphasized that they were not a burden to Turkey and were making investments, stating that if this treatment continued, visas should not be granted from the beginning (Abdisalam, 2022). Abdiraxman GiftedNation mentioned that Turkish businesspeople were warmly welcomed in Somalia, but Somalis were seen as refugees and threats in Turkey (GiftedNation, 2022).

Social media discussions surrounding the events in Ankara primarily took place on Twitter and involved various individuals, including Somalis living in Turkey, as well as activists and politicians. These discussions expressed a range of opinions, from condemning the actions to emphasizing the importance of maintaining good relations between Turkey and Somalia.

### 4.3. Forums

The events in Ankara also came up for discussion on a forum called “Somali Spot”. Some comments made on this forum in January 2022 include:

- *“I invite Somalis to stay away from Turkey; your life and property may be in danger in this country.”*
- *“Before the economic crisis and before the devaluation of the Turkish lira, many people didn’t care about immigrants. Now, they blame Somalis because Syrians, who are hungry and consuming resources, are here. They envy the success of citizens from third-world countries.”*
- *“Turks love Black people, especially Somalis. But they still don’t really like Syrians and other Arabs. Somalis are treated very well there. The*

*Somali diaspora in non-Western countries has always been loved for their entrepreneurial spirit.” (Somali Spot, 2022).*

These comments reflect various perspectives on the situation, including concerns about the safety of Somalis in Turkey, economic factors, and perceptions of how different immigrant groups are treated in the country.

## 5. Conclusion

When examining Turkey’s relationship with Somalia, it is observed that Turkey holds a significant position not only in the context of the African continent but also in its overall foreign policy. The historical and deep-rooted ties between the two countries have been further strengthened in recent years through various initiatives. Especially, the positive perception of Africa towards Turkey has led to increased investments by the African diaspora in Turkey, with Somalis prominently participating in this process. Somalis, in particular, prefer cities like Istanbul and Ankara for their investments.

In our study, we discussed the case of Somali Sofrası, an establishment located in Ankara’s Kızılay district. The owners of this establishment had received their education in Turkey and subsequently started their business lives in the country. Problems related to the restaurant formerly known as “Somali Sofrası” but renamed “Güzelyurt Sofrası” came to light in 2021 and gained public attention in Turkey in 2022.

The aftermath of the Syrian civil war and the influx of migration, particularly from Asian countries, to cities like Istanbul and Ankara, has resulted in noticeable tensions. During this period, Turkey, particularly in recent years due to the impact of COVID-19, has experienced economic contractions, leading to certain societal issues. These issues have been reflected, primarily, in the discomfort among the local population towards foreigners in Turkey.

Throughout its history, Turkey has been a country that has accepted migrants from abroad. Migration from Africa has occurred not only in recent times but also centuries ago, from countries like Sudan. Similarly, Turkey hosts thousands of foreign students who often express the unparalleled hospitality they receive. Therefore, the issue of the ‘Somali Sofrası’ in Ankara actually has a socio-economic background specific to Turkey, and this problem needs to be considered as a local crisis.

We should also note that our study examines developments in just one street of a district in the capital city of Ankara, Turkey. Therefore, the developments observed in the ‘Somali Sofrası’ example should not be

generalized to the entirety of Turkey. In fact, Somalis operate businesses not only in Ankara but also in various parts of Turkey such as Istanbul, Kayseri, and Izmir, among others, established primarily by foreign nationals. For instance, Aksaray district in Istanbul can be cited as an example. Additionally, as mentioned in our study regarding the ‘Somali Sofrası’ in Ankara, it’s important to recall that there was an offer to continue operations in another district within the same city.

Regarding the sources of the news articles that appeared in the Somali press regarding this establishment, it was observed that they were mostly taken from two or three sources and that there were no special reports prepared by Somali journalists. Additionally, it was noted that English-language publications, rather than those in the local Somali language, were more prevalent in the Somali media. Considering the weak interest in Somali Sofrası in the local Somali press and the international media, the question arose as to why the Somali media remained disengaged from the issue. The answer to this question was obtained during an interview with one of the Somali restaurant owners, Mohamed I. Abdullahi. The owners, in coordination with both their own country and other media organizations, chose to reject interview offers in order to prevent any negative perceptions or propaganda against Turkey and to assert their rights. This situation indicates that despite the steps taken towards Somali investors in Turkey, they are primarily focused on asserting their rights and do not intend to take actions that could be detrimental to Turkey’s image or interests.

Turkey-Somalia relations have entered a new phase since 2011, with both countries striving to support each other in various ways. In the face of Turkey’s support, Somali leaders were among the first to condemn the FETÖ coup attempt that aimed to overthrow the elected government in Turkey. Despite the steps taken, the relationship between the two countries is still in its early stages. Turkey’s state capacity and military power serve as an exemplary model for Somalia. In this regard, representatives of the Somali government express their expectations of support from Turkey in various fields (Nur, 2022).

Nevertheless, it is clear that the recent events have damaged Turkey’s foreign policy and negatively affected its image both among Africans and in the international community. Furthermore, these events have revealed that issues concerning citizens of a country with which Turkey has invested in and developed cooperation in various fields cannot be resolved effectively and swiftly. This situation raises questions about the functionality of relations established with a country and the distinction between “individual” actions and “institutional” actions in foreign policy.

According to Article 10 of the Constitution, “Everyone is equal before the law, regardless of language, race, color, gender, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion, sect and other similar reasons”. Therefore, the discriminatory



approach towards Somalis in Ankara's Kızılay district could put Turkey in a difficult legal situation.

This study, although one of the first to focus on this topic, requires further research and analysis. While this study did not include reactions from the African and international media, examining these responses and their impact on the African diaspora, as well as their economic implications and the perceptions of Turkey, both in Africa and on the international stage, would be crucial. This would provide valuable insights for various stakeholders in Turkey, including policymakers.

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