

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF TÜRKİYE-SENEGAL RELATIONS

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Türkiye-Senegal İlişkilerinin Ekonomik Boyutu
Öz

Tarihi, kültürel ve siyasi değerlere dayanan Türkiye-Afrika ilişkileri yirmi yılı aşkın bir süredir oldukça dinamik bir hal almıştır. Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin iktidara gelmesinden bu yana Afrika, Türk dış politikasında öncelikli bölgelerden biri olarak görülmektedir. Batı Afrika'da Senegal, Türkiye'nin kilit Afrikalı ortaklarından biri haline geldi. Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ın Dakar'a yaptığı altı ziyaret, bu ülkenin Türkiye'nin Afrika politikasında ne kadar önemli bir yere sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu makale, ekonomik ortaklıklara odaklanarak iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin gelişimini incelemektedir. Mevcut literatüre ve haber raporlarına dayanan makale, özellikle Cumhurbaşkanı Macky Sall döneminde Türkiye-Senegal ilişkilerinin gelişimini vurgulamaktadır. Türk şirketleri 2035'e kadar Yükselen Senegal Planı'nda kilit bir rol oynamış ve Macky Sall'in yükseliş stratejisinin temelini oluşturan birçok kamu ihalesini kazanmışlardır. Makale, özellikle enerji, altyapı ve tarımsal gıda sektörlerinde güçlenen Türkiye-Senegal işbirliğinin sonuçlarını vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Senegal, ekonomik ilişkiler, diplomasi

The economic dimension of Türkiye-Senegal relations
Abstract

Based on historical, cultural and political values, Türkiye-Africa relations have become very dynamic over more than two decades. Since the Justice and Development Party came to power, Africa has seemed to be one of the priority regions in Turkish foreign policy. In West Africa, Senegal has become one of the key African partners of Türkiye. President Erdoğan's six visits to Dakar show the importance the country has in Türkiye's African policy. This article reviews the evolution of the relations between the two countries, with a focus on economic partnerships. Based on the existing literature and news reports, the article highlighted the evolution of Türkiye-Senegal relations, particularly during President Macky Sall's era. Turkish companies played a key role in the Plan for an Emerging Senegal by 2035 and were awarded many public contracts, fundamental in Macky Sall's emergence strategy. The article highlighted the outcomes of strengthened Turkish-Senegalese cooperation, particularly in the energy, infrastructure and agri-food sectors.

Key words: Türkiye, Senegal, economic relations, diplomacy.

Türkiye has been deepening its presence in Africa for more than two decades. Despite an important historical background, particularly the relations between the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, Türkiye's diplomacy has become more proactive and fruitful since the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AK Parti) of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power in 2001. In 1998, the Turkish government adopted a document entitled 'Opening up to Africa policy' advocating deeper relations with Africa, by opening more ambassadors, extending trade, and economic ties, and multiplying reciprocally high-level visits (Özkan & Akgün, 2010). While this plan has not been able to be executed as expected due to the critical political and economic context in Türkiye, it has become a roadmap of Türkiye's foreign policy, enabling Türkiye to become over years a strategic partner for African countries. Economic and trade cooperation has notably taken a big place in Türkiye-Africa relations, stemming from the "Strategy for Enhancing the Economic and Commercial Relations with Africa" put into effect in 2003 by the Undersecretariat of the Prime Ministry for Foreign Trade, and advocating among others: increase of the share of Turkey in the total trade volume of African countries, opening the way for Turkish small and medium-sized enterprises so that they can penetrate the region countries, transfer technology from Türkiye to the region countries, preferential trade arrangements and Free Trade Agreements with the African countries, etc. This document has become also the basis of Türkiye-Senegal relations (Kizilarıslan, s. d.).

Senegal has become an important country and partner in Turkish foreign policy. President Erdoğan's six visits to Dakar show the particular attention he pays to this country. The two countries have successfully developed dynamic and diversified relations, but the economic cooperation and the place Turkish companies such as Summa, Limak, Karpowership, Çalık Enerji etc. have gained in Senegal, particularly under the former President Macky Sall, deserved great attention. The commercial exchanges between the two countries raised \$700 million in 2022 while they were only \$85 million in 2010 (Dia, 2014; Lô, 2024).

Based on the existing literature and news reports, the article first briefly describes the evolution of Türkiye-Senegal relations. The second part focuses on the economic dimension and Turkish companies' performances in Senegal since 2010. The third and last part analyzes the economic perspectives of Türkiye-Senegal relations, particularly under the new President Bassirou Diomaye Faye.

A brief review of the evolution of Türkiye-Senegal relations

The level of Türkiye-Senegal relations has increased particularly since 2006, at the opening of the Senegalese embassy in Ankara. However, the two countries had al-

ready a solid diplomatic link since Senegal became an independent State in 1960. In 1962, Türkiye took the decision to open an embassy in Dakar and the ambassador was appointed in 1963 (Lô, 2024). In 1968, the two countries already signed a first agreement during the visit of the Senegalese Minister of Cultural Affairs in Ankara, aiming to strengthen cultural cooperation, promote student and internship exchanges, and cooperate in sports and cinema sectors (Direction des Relations avec les Institutions, 2013). During the 1990s, the relations between Senegal and Türkiye, without being yet really proactive, have recorded important steps. The former Turkish President and Prime Minister Turgut Ozal visited Dakar in 1990 in the framework of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. In 1993, he paid a second visit to Senegal after a first step in Cameroon (Akan, 2021). In 1994, the Senegalese National Assembly ratified an agreement with Türkiye signed two years ago, that has become the roadmap of the relations between the countries. This agreement created the Senegal-Türkiye Joint Economic Commission and stipulated: "This agreement aims, among others, assistance and encouragement of the continued development and diversification of trade, economic and technical cooperation between economic organizations, enterprises, and firms of both states" (Direction des Relations avec les Institutions, 2013).

The Senegalese embassy was opened in Ankara in 2006 but in the same year, was organized also the first meeting of the Joint Economic Commission between the two countries, in Ankara. Since 2006, high-level visits have been paid reciprocally by the Senegalese and Turkish leaders. Former Turkish President Mustafa Gul participated in the OIC Conference in Dakar in 2008. Since 2013, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid six visits to Senegal, including three times between 2018 and 2022. On the eve of his last visit to Dakar in February 2022, he underlined the importance of Senegal in Turkish policy:

Among African countries, Senegal occupies an exceptional place in the heart of our nation. The roots of fraternal relations between our two peoples go back six centuries. Relations between Türkiye and Senegal, built on these solid foundations, have grown stronger every year since the 1960s. The land of 'Teranga' has played an essential role in our country's partnership policies with the African continent, to such an extent that Senegal and Dakar have become one of our nation's first addresses for a new reunion with Africa (Erdoğan, 2022).

His counterpart Macky Sall has visited Türkiye four times since he came to power in 2012. The two presidents have particularly built a trustworthy relationship that has facilitated the strengthening of the relations between the two countries.

The cooperation is dynamic and diversified, covering economic partnerships, culture, education, industries, and agrifood issues. The common Islamic religion and identity have been able to put closer the two people together, being a soft power potential making Türkiye more positively perceived in Senegal. The role of TİKA whose office was opened in Dakar in 2007, and the achievements of Turkish NGOs and foundations such as Turk Kızılay and Diyanet Foundation, also participated in improving Türkiye's image in Senegal. TİKA has supported Senegal's development by signing 186 projects worth a total of \$12 million across the country touching health sector, women empowerment, water, and mosques renovation(Erdoğan, 2022).

However, economics, trade, and investments remained the dimension that better portrays the quick evolution of Türkiye-Senegal relations. In the sector of infrastructure notably, Turkish companies have become key partners of the Senegalese state, particularly in the framework of the Plan for an Emerging Senegal adopted by former President, Macky Sall between 2014 and 2024. The following part enables a better understanding of the impacts of Turkish companies in Senegal.

Türkiye-Senegal economic relations and outcomes

There is a double connotation of Türkiye's economic presence in Senegal: first, Senegal enjoys political stability, an attractive business climate for Turkish businesspeople and a marge of economic growth; second, as President Erdoğan stressed, "Senegal is an export gateway for West African countries, thanks to its position and power in the region"(Présidence de la République de Türkiye, 2022). Located in the extreme Western part of Africa with an opening to the Atlantic Ocean, Senegal and its Dakar Autonomous Port is a commercial gateway that facilitates commercial partners to easily reach countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, or Niger. Senegal's political leadership and endearment in the West African region made the country an example or model: a foreign power that has good relations and built win-win cooperation with Senegal, can have more facilities to extend itself in the other countries of the region.

In the framework of the economic cooperation between the two states and their businesspeople, the DEİK/Türkiye-Senegal Business Council was established in 2015 to improve bilateral business relations. For this purpose, the Business Council organizes business forums, delegation visits, meetings, and seminars. Almost all presidential official visits between the countries have been followed by an economic forum to deepen contacts between businesspeople and political leaders.

This proactive economic diplomacy has enabled Türkiye-Senegal relations to know rapid growth. The economic outcomes of their relations can be analyzed in the infrastructures, energy, agri-food industry, and trade sectors.

Turkish companies have gradually improved their reputation in Senegal, particularly thanks to the respect of deadlines. The strengthening of their presence even stems from this problem the Senegalese state was meeting with other foreign partners, especially in the infrastructure sector. "In early 2016, Limak was invited to Senegal to complete work on Blaise-Diagne (Airport-AIDB), 70% of which had been built by the Saudi BinLadin Group. Plagued by economic difficulties, the latter had thrown in the towel in 2014, followed by Fraport, the airport operator", said Hakan Öztürk, a member of the Limak executive board(Dedet, 2020a). However, before this achievement, Summa had already constructed the International Conference Center of Abdou Diouf for a cost of \$100 million, to welcome the 15th Francophonie Summit on November 2014.

These achievements have increased Turkish companies' credibility in the eyes of Senegalese political leaders, and President Macky Sall in particular(Saanouni, 2020). Summa has become a key partner for President Sall's Plan for an Emerging Senegal (PSE) and his infrastructure policies. In the new city of Diamniadio built to deconcentrate Dakar, Summa has been awarded many public contracts such as: the 30.8-million-euro Radisson Hotel Diamniadio, built between 2016 and 2017; the 15,000-seat Dakar Arena multifunctional sports complex, financed by Türk Eximbank for 117 million euros; the 238 million euro, 50,000-seat Abdoulaye Wade Stadium, built between 2020 and 2022, and inaugurated in March 2022 by President Sall with President Erdoğan among the guests(Lô, 2024; Summa, 2024). Summa was also responsible for finishing the Ahmadou Mahtar Mbow University in 2021 (completed in 2022), initially unsuccessfully entrusted by the Ministry of Higher Education to Ivorian politician Adama Bictogo's company Marylis BTP, then to Israeli investor Ron Yafett's company DSC(du Couëdic, 2022). To these achievements can be also added the ongoing project of Courtyard Hotel started in 2023, and the new TER (Express Regional Train) station at the AIDB(Hajbi, 2023; Summa, 2024). In the TER project also, the Turkish company Yapıray was responsible for the construction of the railroad which cost 400 million euros(Doğru & Çakmak, 2019).

In the energy sector, in August 2019, Karpowership signed a contract with Senegal's Electricity Authority (SENELEC) to deploy a floating power plant of 235 MW. In December 2021, an additional contract of 100 MW was signed. The Turkish company is involved in the "Gas to power" project destined to exploit and transform the Senegalese gas into power. In this same sector, Çalık Enerji also signed an agreement in October 2020 with West African Energy, General Electric of the USA and Senelec to build one of the biggest power plants in the sub-region, with a capacity of 300 MW, at Cap-des-Biches, near Dakar. The project is worth 350 million euros(-Dedet, 2020b).

In the agri-food industry sector, there is FKS food of Basturk Family, one of the first Turkish companies investing in Senegal. Created in 2008, the factory, which is seen as “the pride of Türkiye” in Senegal, meets 40 percent of the flour demand in the country and employs more than 200 people(Doğru, 2019). FKS has also acquired the largest grain storage capacity in the country. The Turkish company is not limited to the food sector. It has provided the country with a modern concrete batching plant, becoming the leader in this sector(Gossou, 2022). In the food sector, Turkish restaurants such as Chocolate Sarayı have also begun to spring up in the Senegalese capital, Dakar.

In the trade sector, as abovementioned, commercial exchanges are dynamic between Senegal and Türkiye. The volume of exchange raised \$700 million in 2022 while it was only \$35 million in 2035 but has decreased to \$450 million in 2023, far from the ambitions of reaching one billion dollars, as advocated by President Erdoğan during his last visit to Senegal in 2022(Lô, 2024). This decrease might be due to the political tensions in the country in 2023, with protests and the arrests of the main opponent to Macky Sall, Ousmane Sonko, who has become now the Prime Minister. Türkiye exports to Senegal: iron and steel; cereals, flour, milk, and pastry products; machinery, mechanical appliances, and tools; cement, earth, stone, salt, sulfur, gypsum, lime; plastics and plastics products(Senegal - Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2020). Senegal’s exports to Türkiye are mainly: Metal ores, slag, and ash; food industry residues, animal feeds; oil seeds and fruits, straw, and roughage; jeweler’s articles; fish and aquatic products(Senegal - Ankara Ticaret Odası, 2020).

Economic perspectives of Türkiye-Senegal relations

Turkish-Senegalese relations have undergone a remarkable evolution under the Macky Sall era. In effect, Türkiye’s interest in Africa and particularly in Senegal has been enabled by the diversification approach of African leaders nowadays in their foreign policy. In Senegal, diversified relations have been at the core of former President Abdoulaye Wade’s foreign policy (2000-2012) before being perpetuated by President Macky Sall. This approach is maintained too by the new leaders, the duo Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Ousmane Sonko. Prevented from being a candidate at the presidential election of March 2024, Ousmane Sonko chose his number 2, Bassirou Diomaye Faye who successfully became the 5th President of Senegal and made Sonko the Prime Minister. Their political party PASTEF (Senegalese African Patriots for Ethics, Work and Fraternity) defends sovereignty and pan-Africanist ideology but the new leaders also expressed their opening to all foreign partners for a balanced, respectful and win-win cooperation. They search for a new approach of cooperating, based on key sectors for development and respectful to Senegalese values. The new government, as advocated in the new National Development Strategy 2025-2029,

Vision 2050, relies on industry, agriculture, professional training and technology sectors as priority sectors for Senegal’s development. This approach may be the framework of their new collaboration with foreign partners, including Türkiye. Furthermore, the first foreign visits of Bassirou Diomaye Faye seem to create a progressive breakdown with France, the former colonizer, and boost relations with other partners. In effect, even though President Faye has visited Paris twice in the framework of international forums and despite a launch with President Macron, his agenda has been less intense in France compared to his proactive diplomacy in China and the United States. Faye’s first official bilateral (work) visit was to Pekin on the eve of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and was particularly marked by his push for densifying cooperation with Chinese universities, business-people, and investors(MFAPRC, 2024). Same in the United States where he met with American giants of technology at Silicon Valley including 500 Global and signed agreements with important companies such as Google(AFRIMAG, 2024). President Faye is visibly prioritizing to be less close to France than were his predecessors. Furthermore, he is expected to be in Türkiye on October 31 for his second official bilateral visit, according to the 3rd meeting of Türkiye-Senegal political consultations(APS, 2024; Arslan, 2024). The choice of Türkiye, after China and the United States seems to show new Senegalese leaders’ wish to keep and reinforce the cooperation with Ankara.

Economic diplomacy may be at the core of Diomaye’s visit to Ankara which may also draw the framework of the future relations with Türkiye. The cooperation in the field of energy is likely to be deepened in the context of the gas and oil exploitation in Senegal. In addition to the presence of Karpowership and Çalık Enerji, another Turkish company named Aksa Enerji is establishing a natural gas power plant in Senegal and the production is expected for 2026 (Enerji ekonomisi, 2026). In Dakar, on October 3, the Turkish Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs who met with the Senegalese Ministry of Armed Forces also stressed the two “countries’ will to further develop the cooperation in the field of military and defense industry”, which was an advanced field of cooperation in Macky Sall’s era(Burhanettin Duran [@burhanduran], 2024).

Conclusion

In less than twenty years, Türkiye has been largely strengthening its presence in Africa, reaching the number of 44 embassies in the continent while there were 12 in 2003. Commercial exchanges between the two entities have reached 35 million nowadays and the dynamic Turkish economic diplomacy reinforces the framework to expand better. Senegal appears notably to be one of the key partners of Ankara in Africa, with which it shares political and religious values. Dakar was one of the first

Sub-Saharan countries to hold a Turkish embassy in 1963. TİKA also opened in Senegal its first office in West Africa, its third one in Africa. The article has highlighted the evolution of Türkiye-Senegal relations, facilitated by early diplomatic dialogue and the particular attention Türkiye has been paying to Senegal.

The relations between the two countries have been diversified over to decades, with economic issues as a key point. Commercial relations have reached \$700 million in 2022 while they were \$85 million in 2010. The role of Turkish Companies in the Plan for an Emerging Senegal by 2035 has been significant. Among them, Summa has notably been a key partner for public construction, awarded many public contracts such as the Abdoulaye Wade Stadium, Dakar Arena sports complex, etc. Cooperation is also important on energetic issues with the presence of Çalık Enerji, Karpowership and Aksa Enerji.

With the shared religious and political values, Senegal-Türkiye relations enjoy deep frameworks of cooperation that may continue to be reinforced with the new government, as stressed by the Minister of Family and Social Services Mahinur Özdemir Göktaş, during her visit to Senegal in June 2024 and his meeting with new President Bassirou Diomaye Faye. “During our meeting, we discussed cooperation between the two friendly and brotherly countries in various fields and regional issues. We expressed our determination to develop our bilateral relations in all fields”, she said (Özer, 2024).

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