

# The Rise of Turkey's Soft Power in Africa: Reasons, Dynamics, and Constraints

Abdurrahim SIRADAĞ<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Since 2005, with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) governments, the African continent has gained a great importance in Turkish Foreign Policy. Turkey's soft power policy is one of the most important tools in the development of multilateral relations with Africa. Turkey has been making significant cooperation with African countries in the fields of military and defense in recent years. For example, Turkey's largest overseas military base was opened in Somalia in 2017. However, Turkey's soft power prepares a very important strategic ground for deepening relations with the continent in the political, economic, social, and security fields. The ruling AK Party governments have moved Turkey's relations with Africa from an ideological dimension to a strategic one, revealing that the African continent has a strategic meaning for Turkey. The research argues that Turkey's soft power strategy toward Africa has been influenced by several factors and dynamics including historical, geographical, political, and economic. This study aims to contribute to the literature by analyzing Turkey's soft power policy in Africa in a conceptual framework and holistic approach.

**Keywords:** Turkey, Africa, Justice and Development Party (AK Party), Soft Power, Turkish Foreign Policy.

# Türkiye'nin Afrika'da Yumuşak Gücünün Yükselişi: Sebepler, Dinamikler ve Engeller

Abdurrahim SIRADAĞ<sup>1</sup>

## Özet

2005 yılından itibaren Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Parti) hükümetleri ile birlikte Afrika kıtası Türk Dış Politikasında önem kazanmaya başlamıştır. Türkiye'nin yumuşak güç politikası, Afrika ile çok taraflı ilişkilerin geliştirilmesinde en önemli araçlardan biridir. Türkiye son yıllarda Afrika ülkeleriyle askeri ve savunma alanlarında önemli işbirlikleri yapmaktadır. Örneğin Türkiye'nin yurtdışındaki en büyük askeri üssü 2017 yılında Somali'de açıldı. Ancak Türkiye'nin yumuşak gücü, kıta ile siyasi, ekonomik, sosyal ve güvenlik alanlarında ilişkileri derinleştirmek için çok önemli bir stratejik zemin hazırlamaktadır. AK Parti hükümetleri Türkiye'nin Afrika ile ilişkilerini ideolojik bir boyuttan stratejik bir boyuta taşıyarak Afrika kıtasının Türkiye için stratejik bir anlamı olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Araştırma, Türkiye'nin Afrika'ya yönelik yumuşak güç stratejisinin tarihi, coğrafi, siyasi ve ekonomik dahil olmak üzere bir dizi faktör ve dinamikten etkilendiğini savunuyor. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin Afrika'daki yumuşak güç politikasını kavramsal bir çerçevede ve bütüncül bir yaklaşımla analiz ederek literatüre katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye, Afrika, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Parti), Yumuşak Güç, Türk Dış Politikası.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The African continent was mostly known in Turkey with negative concepts such as hunger, wars, and drought. However, despite the fact that the African continent has always had a very important strategic position in world politics, with its geopolitical position, the enormous wealth in the underground, and its dynamic population exceeding 1 billion, the African continent has not received enough attention in Turkey for a long time. After the 1974 Cyprus Intervention, Turkey started to take a series of important steps to diversify Turkish foreign policy and develop strategic relations with non-Western actors in order to reduce its dependence on the West. In this context, the African continent has become one of the important strategic areas of interest for Turkish foreign policy. In this regard, under the leadership of the then foreign minister Ahmet Gündüz Gökçün, the First African Plan was initiated, and a delegation of politicians and businessmen was sent to Africa in February 1979 to develop multifaceted relations with Africa. However, with the military coup of September 12, 1980, the First African Plan could not be implemented as a long-term strategic plan (İncesu, 2020). The Second Africa Action Plan was prepared in 1998 under the leadership of the then foreign minister İsmail Cem with the contributions of the Turkish civil society, Turkish businessmen, and Turkish diplomats to develop bilateral relations with the African countries but the second plan was also not implemented successfully by the Turkish coalition government of that time because of the political and economic crises in the country (Özkan, 2014: 25). With the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) declaring 2005 as the Year of Africa, news and developments regarding Africa began to be followed more closely by the Turkish media and Turkish academics. Until the 2010s, the Turkish media was transmitting news about Africa to the Turkish society, mostly from western news sources. Especially after 2010, when state news institutions such as Anadolu Agency (AA) and Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) started to open representative offices in different African countries, African news and developments have been transmitted to Turkish society more accurately and more objectively. Since 2005 Turkey has been actively engaging with Africa at the highest level and has been implementing the Africa Action Plan of 1998 effectively (Hazar, 2016: 10-11). An illustration of this change of implementation can be demonstrated by the fact that in 2009 Turkey only had 12 embassies across the African continent. Contrast that with the 43 Turkish embassies present in Africa in 2021 (T.C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>1</sup>). Also, in 2008 only 10 African countries had diplomatic missions in Ankara. Today 37 African countries have diplomatic missions in the Turkish capital (T.C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>1</sup>). With the increase in the number of Turkey's diplomatic missions in the continent, Turkey started to become a more visible actor in the continent, and as a result, Turkey started to develop multilateral relations with African countries more easily.

The ruling AK Party governments opened new offices for the undersecretary of foreign trade in 26 countries across the African continent to enhance her economic relations with African countries (T.C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey<sup>1</sup>). Furthermore, Turkey has expanded commercial and economic relations with the African countries by establishing Turkey-Africa Business Councils with more than 40 countries in Africa. As a result of intense political and economic relations with Africa, Turkey's trading relations with Africa have increased significantly from 5.4 billion dollars in 2003 to about 30 billion dollars in 2021 (T.C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>1</sup>).

Moreover, Turkey organized Turkey-Africa Partnership Summits in Istanbul and in Malabo in 2008 and in 2014 respectively to institutionalize its multilateral relations with the continent (Sıradağ, 2020: 8-10). The third Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit was held on 16-18 December 2021 in Istanbul. Through these summits, Turkey aims to strengthen its multifaceted relations with the African countries and to become a permanent and visible actor in the continent. Importantly, the African Union (AU) accepted Turkey as a strategic partner of the continent in 2008. In this way, Turkey was recognized as an important strategic partner by the most important regional organization of the continent and started to establish strong relations with sub-regional African organizations.

It is important to highlight that Turkey has actively engaged in the re-building process of Somalia since the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a historic visit to this country in 2011. The state and non-state actors have collectively built schools, hospitals, mosques, and roads (Sıradağ, 2016: 95-98). Humanitarian and development assistance provided by Turkey to Somalia has exceeded 1 billion dollars since 2011. Meanwhile, Turkey opened its largest Embassy Complex in Somalia in 2016 and its largest overseas military base in 2017 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey<sup>2</sup>). Turkey's active foreign

policy in Somalia has led to the emergence of Turkey as a significant political actor in Somalia as well as in the African continent.

There has been a growing literature on Turkey-Africa relations since 2005 after the ruling AK Party governments began to be actively involved in African politics. Turkey's interest in African politics has not only drawn the attention of Turkish academics and the Turkish media. It has also caught the attention of many international academicians, politicians, and the international media. However, there is still a lack of academic literature examining the specific aspects of Turkey-Africa relations. In this regard, not enough scholarship work has been done in the specific fields illuminating Turkey's soft power in Africa from a conceptual and theoretical perspective. In this sense, this research will aim to fill this significant gap in the academic literature. This study will seek to answer the following questions: What are the reasons and the dynamics behind Turkey's increasing soft power activities in Africa? To what extent Turkey has constructed its soft power policy in Africa?

### **Discussion on the Concept of Soft Power**

When discussing the concept of soft power, the name Joseph Nye is usually mentioned as the most important originator of the concept of soft power in the 1990s. According to Nye (2004: 256), soft power is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments". Nye underlines that there are three important instruments of soft power, namely, culture, ideology, and institutions. If a country can attract other countries with its culture and ideology, it will be accepted as a model country by the other countries and will be followed. Global actors will be more powerful and effective if they can spread their language, culture, and ideology in the world (Nye, 1990: 167-169).

Public diplomacy is a significant component of the concept of soft power. Public diplomacy is defined as a means to establish long-term relationships with other countries. Global actors aim to create a suitable environment to implement their foreign policy objectives with other strategically important countries through public diplomacy (Nye, 2004: 8). Hence, academic exchange programs with different countries, providing scholarships to foreign students, and organizing international seminars and conferences are crucial to consolidating a country's soft power. In addition, the global actors need to open their own cultural and educational centers in foreign countries and establish their radio stations and TV channels to spread their foreign policy objectives and values. Not only talking but also listening to the people directly is necessary to reinforce the concept. Besides this, working with NGOs and with companies is also necessary to increase a country's soft power (Nye, 2004: 13-24).

Sharing the same values with other countries is important for the execution of soft power policies successfully. It is critical to emphasize that soft power policies should avoid offending the religious and cultural values of the other countries (Nye, 2004: 10-15). Nye (2004: 13) states that Hollywood movies weaken the U.S.'s global image by offending the cultural and religious values of Muslims. The global role of the US has been brought into question in the eyes of the public in foreign countries in recent times. This is due to her focus being the use of hard power. For example, the use of military force of the U.S. to change the political systems in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2001 and 2003 respectively. This was followed by a public perception that it neglected to implement soft power policies to rebuild those countries after the occupations (Nye, 2004: 19).

Three concepts constitute soft power, namely benignity, brilliance, and beauty (Vuving, 2009: 8-11). Benignity refers to how a country develops its relations with another one. A benign country helps and protects another one without considering selfish interests. Such a country always respects different values and cultures, and it never threatens or forces other countries to get what it wants. Brilliance is the capability of the state to solve problems and make advances in science, technology, diplomacy, and the economy. Beauty denotes how a country can lead others to unite and work together. If a country can make successful and fair cooperation with other countries to pursue a common interest, it can be an influential power in world politics (Vuving, 2009).

The concept of soft power also includes some criticisms. The first criticism is that the resources of soft power are intangible. While a country's tanks and military aircraft are counted, soft power policies are uncountable. Therefore, it is difficult to measure the results of soft power policies (Yukaruc, 2017: 491-502). The second issue is that the soft power policies of global actors can sometimes damage the countries' global reputations. For instance, when Hollywood movies offend Muslims and undervalue Islam, the American government failed to control it (Nye, 2004: 13). For this reason, the question of how governments should assert control over the resources of soft power is not scrutinized thoroughly.

Furthermore, the question of how a country can make its policies more attractive remains ambiguous (Yukaruc, 2017: 499). It is hard to get a quick result from soft power policies because soft power policies take years. Importantly, the success of the soft power policies of a country depends on how foreign people internalize and respect soft power policies (Nye, 2004: 1).

In the light of the soft power concept debates, Turkey's lack of a history of exploitation in the African continent and its shared cultural and religious values with the African countries paved the way for Turkey to emerge as a strong soft power actor in the continent. At the same time, Turkey's active work through state and non-state actors in humanitarian and development aid projects in the continent and its direct contact with African people is one of the most important factors that increase Turkey's soft power on the African continent. Turkey does not use its political, economic, and military power as a pressure tool to strengthen its strategic relations with African countries. Turkey plays an important role in promoting Turkish culture in Africa through the activities of Yunus Emre Cultural Centers. The fact that news and developments related to Africa are featured more frequently in the Turkish media has also contributed significantly to the change in the perception of Africa in Turkey.

### **Change in Turkish Foreign Policy**

The end of the Cold War era not only brought about significant changes in Turkish foreign policy but also influenced global politics profoundly. Turkey saw the end of the Cold War era as a strategic opportunity to reconstruct its traditional foreign policy and, therefore played a more proactive role in increasing her bilateral relations with the newly independent states in Central Asia and Caucasus. During the leadership of Turgut Özal (1983-1993) Turkey reinterpreted its historical and geographical identity from a more dynamic perspective. A policy shift was made, with the assessment that if Turkey was to develop a multilateral and multidimensional foreign policy it would have to increase bilateral relations with the former territories of the Ottoman State at the highest level (Jung, 2012: 33).

When the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power in 2001, Turkey entered a new political, economic, and social transformation. It began to realign Turkey's soft power policies taking into consideration the underlying Ottoman history in Africa. Specifically emphasizing Turkey's geographical position as among the most significant assets behind Turkey's soft power policy. According to the AK Party elite, Turkey has an Afro-Eurasian identity meaning that Turkey should develop its relations not only with Europe but also with Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (Davutoğlu, 2001: 65-74). The AK Party's geopolitical identity relies on Turkey's changing political, economic, and security interests and its socio-cultural dynamics. The new geopolitical identity of the ruling AK Party government has expanded her geographical vision from the West to the Middle East, the Balkans, Africa, Asia, and far beyond (Kalin, 2012: 12). Turkey's geographical and historical depths construct the new identity of Turkish foreign policy (Aras, 2009: 5).

Kalin (2011: 21) argues that Turkey has constructed a new conceptual framework for Turkish foreign policy during the AK Party government. Turkey's soft power policy has been based on its history, geographical depths, its democratic experience, and its vibrant civil society during the period of the ruling AK Party governments. Turkey's soft power capacity depends on how Turkey mobilizes its internal dynamics. Turkey failed in the past and made strategic mistakes such as military coups, the closures of the political parties, economic and political crises, and identity crises between secularism and Islam. These mistakes weakened the development of Turkey's soft power. Turkey has become a center of attraction with her economic and political performance with the AK Party governments in the neighboring countries and beyond (Kalin, 2011: 16-8).

Diversification in Turkish foreign policy (TFP) has become one of the most significant features of the AK Party governments (Öniş, 2011: 62). In this regard, Turkey has increased its strategic relations with Russia, Iran, China, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa at the highest level (Kalin, 2012: 11). Also, Turkey has become one of the largest economic powers within the EU and become the 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world under the leadership of the AK Party government. Additionally, Turkey has been among one of the fast-growing countries in the world and has made significant progress in advancing its national defense industry during this period. (Haugom, 2019: 212).

### **The New Instruments of Turkey's Soft Power in Africa: The New Political Values**

The ruling AK Party government has established new institutions and strengthened the existing institutions of the traditional Turkish foreign policy to revive its soft power in the world. In 2002 Turkey

only had 163 diplomatic missions in the world, this has increased to 239 today. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey1). The Office of Public Diplomacy (OPD) was among the most important institutions contributing to Turkey's soft power established under the Office of Prime Ministry in 2010. The OPC was re-named as the Directorate of Communications (DoC) in 2018 and set up under the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey. The main objectives of the DoC were to coordinate relations among public institutions, increase relations between state agencies and NGOs, and explain the changing role of Turkey in the world (Kalın, 2011: 11-12). Among the activities of the DoC, it has organized public policy panels, conferences, foreign policy workshops, youth programs, country meetings, international summits, journalist delegation programs, and cultural and promotional activities (Turan and Karafil, 2017: 25-9). The Directorate of Communications organized the "Turkey-Afrika Media Summit" in Istanbul on 25-26 May 2022. 80 press members from 45 African countries, African diplomats, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and academics attended this program. The aim of the summit is to increase cooperation between media representatives in Turkey and African countries and to strengthen Turkey's image in the African media (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı). With this summit, Turkey aims to further reinforce its strategic presence in the continent through its soft power policy in African countries.

### **Religion, Culture, and Education**

The ruling AK Party government took important steps at the institutional level to strengthen its relations with countries that have common social and cultural ties. In this sense, Türkiye Diyanet Foundation (TDV) is a religious organization aiming to increase historical, cultural, and religious ties with countries having a common historical and religious relationship. In this regard, the TDV has organized a wide range of social, cultural, and religious activities in Turkey and abroad. While it only operated in 30 countries before 2010, today it operates in more than 140 countries and runs 18 schools around the world. Moreover, it has built 294 water wells in 26 countries in Africa and runs four schools in Somalia including Somaliland (DiyanetHaber). TDV also provides scholarships for thousands of African students studying in Turkey under the International Imam Hatip High School Projects (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfi). Moreover, TDV organized the third Summit of African Muslim Religious Leaders, which was held in Istanbul in October 2019 (Directorate of Communications of Turkey, 2019). In addition, the TDV opened the largest mosque in Djibouti in November 2019 named Abdulhamid Han II Mosque (Anadolu Agency, 2019a).

Yunus Emre Institute (YEI) was set up in 2007 as an important pillar of cultural diplomacy to promote the Turkish language, history, and art abroad and to develop cultural relations with foreign countries. YEI has opened cultural centers in 58 countries with 8 being in African countries. YEI has plans to open new cultural centers in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique soon. The Turkish language has been taught as an elective course in three universities in Ethiopia since 2018 (TRT Haber, 2019). Since 2016, YEI has also been providing Turkish courses at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal. Furthermore, YEI signed a protocol with the Department of Chief of Staff in 2018 to establish a Turkish Language Teaching Centre in the Senegalese Army (Yunus Emre Institute, 2020).

The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) is also one of the newly established organizations founded in 2010 as a new diaspora institution to develop relations with Turks living abroad. YTB conducted the African Media Representatives Training Program (AFMED) in 2019 with 20 African journalists attending the program from 20 African countries (Anadolu Agency, 2019b). YTB has also regularly organized graduation meetings with African students who studied in Turkey such as in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Nigeria, Kenya, Chad and Mauritania, Mali, Somalia, and Ghana.

Educational activities of Turkey in Africa promote Turkey's soft power significantly. Turkey's Scholarship Program established in 2012 has been one of the most significant international programs developed by YTB. Through this program, more than 100,000 foreign students have applied for studying at Turkish universities every year. As of 2019, 150,000 from 203 countries have been studying in different universities in Turkey. More than 15,000 African students have been studying in Turkey, with only 4,500 studying under the Turkey Scholarship Program. Most students from African countries come to study in Turkey from Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Kenya, Somalia, Malawi, Nigeria, and Cameroon (Yurtdışı Türkler Başkanlığı, 2020). Furthermore, 135 African academicians work at Turkish universities (Hürriyet, 2016).

The Turkish government established Türkiye Maarif Foundation in 2016 to take over the schools affiliated with the FETO abroad, open new schools where the Turkish population is high in foreign countries, and make Turkish schools a global brand (Usluer, 2016, 39-40). TMF operates in 66 countries with 323 schools that provide education to 36,282 students. Meanwhile, TMF took over 150 schools from the FETO in 30 African countries in which 15,747 African students were studying (Türkiye Maarif Vakfı). In conjunction with this, TMF has been lobbying internationally and contacting African governments, to take over all the schools affiliated with the FETO.

### **Media**

In 2017 Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) began broadcasting in the Hausa language which is spoken by 45 million people in the West and Central African regions. Likewise, in 2020 TRT began broadcasting in the Swahili language which is spoken by 150 million people in Eastern and Southeastern Africa (DunyaBulteni, 2020). TRT World was founded in 2015 to broadcast internationally in the English language. It deals with the current developments on the African continent (TRT Haber, 2016). Turkey also has an international news agency known as the Anadolu Agency founded in 1920. Its scope and activities have been expanding during the AK Party governments and it opened its first office in Ethiopia in 2014. It has also opened its representatives in South Africa, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, and Senegal (Anadolu Agency1).

Moreover, Natural TV was founded in Ankara in 2017 by a group of Turkish businessmen to air in Western Africa in 22 countries in English and French languages reaching over 5 million African people. It airs programs about Turkish culture, history, and art as well as the new developments in Turkey. Importantly, Turkish soap operas are being watched in more than 20 countries in Africa. Ethiopia, Tanzania, Ghana, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Cameroon, Madagascar, Mali, and Nigeria are among the countries where Turkish TV series are most-watched (The Guardian, 2019). The main purposes of such programs are to create a positive perception of Turkey in Africa, to eliminate the biases related to Africa in the mind of the Turkish people, and to increase bilateral relations with African countries in the long term.

### **Turkish Airlines**

Turkish Airlines (THY) is one of the most prestigious institutions in Turkey increasing the country's image in the world. THY is an airline that flies to most countries in the world. In 2003 it flew to 103 destinations in 55 countries. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, it used to fly to 316 destinations in 125 countries. Since the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) governments implemented the Africa Action Plan in 2005, Africa has become a special destination for the THY which flies to most cities in the African continent. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the THY used to fly to 58 destinations in 37 countries in Africa. Currently, it regularly increases the number of her flights with the lifting of the travel ban. THY both connects Turkey to the African continent directly as well as connecting the African continent to Turkey and different parts of the world (DailySabah, 2018a).

Before 2005, it was difficult to get a direct flight to African countries from Turkey, for Turkish citizens and businessmen. This was due to THY having limited access to countries in North Africa and just a few destinations in Sub-Saharan Africa. These problems have been eased through the new initiative of the THY in Africa, allowing Turkish businessmen to contact their partners in Africa directly and easily. For instance, Turkish businessmen have begun to undertake more contracting projects in Africa, facilitated by THY starting direct flights to different destinations on the continent. In 2002 the total amount of contracting projects undertaken by Turkish businessmen in Africa was 769 million dollars, today it has increased to 71 billion dollars (DailySabah, 2018b).

### **State and Non-state Organizations**

Turkish foreign aid policies in Africa including humanitarian relief activities and development assistance are one of the most significant components of Turkey's soft power policy (Çevik, 2019: 61). The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) governments have increased the number of Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) offices around the world. Between 1992 and 2002, TİKA had only 12 coordination offices in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans, today it operates in 60 countries through 62 coordination offices. Since 2005 TİKA has been actively engaging with African countries. Today it has 22 coordination offices in different countries across the African continent (TİKA)

and implements hundreds of projects in various areas. Among its activities in Africa, it has opened more than 100 water wells across the continent and built modern hospitals in Mogadishu (Somalia), Nyala, and Darfur (Sudan) (Akıllı ve Celenk, 2019: 139-142).

Moreover, TİKA has restored more than 100 schools and has equipped them with basic resources. It has carried out agricultural development projects in 13 African countries to empower agricultural infrastructure and create jobs for Africans. Since 2011, it has also renovated 90 historical buildings in Algeria, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and South Africa. TİKA has built modern roads and buildings in Mogadishu. In September 2017, it has established Turkey's largest overseas military training complex in Mogadishu aiming to train the Somali National Army and the soldiers of other African countries (Sıradağ, 2018: 10). At the same time, Turkish NGOs have been carrying out a significant number of humanitarian and development aid projects across the continent. Turkish NGOs have begun to work together with state agencies to implement joint humanitarian aid projects in Africa (Donelli, 2019: 69). The IHH (Humanitarian Relief Foundation), Hudayi Foundation, Cansuyu Association, Deniz Feneri, Milli Gorus Foundation, and Doctors Worldwide Turkey are among the most active and well-known Turkish NGOs operating in Africa (Siradag, 2015: 11-15). According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report published in 2018, Turkey was ranked the number one country providing the largest amount of humanitarian assistance in the world in 2018. Turkey spent a total of 8.4 billion dollars on global humanitarian relief in 2018 and was therefore singled out as the most generous country in the world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey3).

In addition, Turkey sent medical aid to 45 African countries during the Covid-19 pandemic process. Also, at the 3rd Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit, President Erdoğan stated that 15 million doses of vaccine will be supplied to African countries. The hospitals built by Turkey in Sudan, Niger, and Somalia offered free healthcare services to hundreds of Covid-19 patients during the pandemic. Only 6% of the African population has been vaccinated during the pandemic process (France24, 2021). Pandemic aid from Western countries to African countries also remained very limited. In this context, Turkey's pandemic aid to 45 African countries contributes to Turkey's image in the continent. It also strengthens Turkey's international image in the world. We can express the reasons why Turkey helped African countries during the pandemic process as follows. The first reason is the social and cultural identity of the ruling AK Party which sees helping African countries in the pandemic process as a social responsibility. The second reason is that Turkey's strong historical relations with Africa have been an important source of motivation for these aids. The third reason is that the ruling AK Party aims to further deepen and expand its strong political and economic relations with the continent. We can state that the aid provided by Turkey to African countries during the pandemic period will play an important role in strengthening bilateral relations in the medium and long term.

### **The Strengthened Institutions to Develop Economic Relations**

One of the important dynamics of strengthening Turkey's soft power policy components in Africa is to boost Turkey's commercial and economic relations with the African countries. In this regard, The Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK) officially organizes the management of Turkey's foreign economic relations with the rest of the world. It has established 45 African Business Councils aiming to increase bilateral economic relations with African countries. Moreover, the Independent *Industrialists and Businessmen Association* (MÜSİAD) has been one of the most active private business associations that aims to enhance economic relations with African countries and has opened 30 branches across the continent (MÜSİAD, 2018).



**Table 1. Turkey's Trade with North Africa (2000-2021) (Million \$)**

Year	Export	Import	Total
2010	7.025,168	3.098,091	10.123,259
2011	6.700,805	3.342,055	10.042,860
2012	9.443,604	3.308,343	12.751,947
2013	10.930,556	3.630,876	14.561,432
2014	10.240,492	3.584,217	13.824,709
2015	8.918,833	3.173,401	12.092,234
2016	8.069,446	3.252,568	11.322,014
2017	7.918,462	4.203,460	12.121,922
2018	9.915,077	4.685,547	14.600,624
2019	10.828,878	4.009,992	14.838,870
2020	9.224,060	4.757,326	13.981,386
2021	13.339,835	5.417,618	18.757,453

**Source:** Turkish Statistical Institute

According to Table 1, while Turkey's total trade with the North African region was 10 billion dollars in 2010, its total trade with the region in 2021 approached 19 billion dollars. According to the table above, it is seen that Turkey's total trade with the North African region has nearly doubled in 2021.

**Table 2. Turkey's Trade with Sub-Saharan Africa (2000-2021) (Million \$)**

Year	Export	Import	Total
2010	2.257,898	1.725,916	3.983,814
2011	3.633,016	3.424,658	7.057,674
2012	3.913,246	2.613,447	6.526,693
2013	4.405,698	2.559,946	6.965,644
2014	4.267,226	3.584,217	7.851,443
2015	4.212,322	2.151,915	6.364,237
2016	3.833,943	2.151,987	5.985,930
2017	4.318,839	2.978,629	7.297,629
2018	5.173,872	2.451,876	7.625,748
2019	5.794,323	1.810,756	7.605,079
2020	6.016,613	2.552,458	8.569,071
2021	7.873,284	2.814,891	10.688,175

**Source:** Turkish Statistical Institute

According to Table 2, whilst Turkey's total trade with the Sub-Saharan Africa region was approximately 4 billion dollars in 2010, this figure exceeded 10 billion dollars in 2021. While Turkey's total trade with the African continent was 14 billion dollars in 2010, this figure reached roughly 30 billion dollars in 2021. According to table 2, Turkey's total trade with Sub-Saharan Africa has more than doubled in 2022. When Tables 1 and 2 are examined, we see that the Covid-19 pandemic period did not adversely affect Turkey's commercial relations with African countries, on the contrary, its commercial relations with the continent developed steadily. This situation shows that Turkey's state and non-state actors are in intense cooperation in order to develop commercial and economic relations with the African countries, especially during a difficult time like the Covid-19 pandemic process.

### **The Driving Forces Influencing Turkey's Soft Power in Africa**

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) governments have formed a new foreign policy identity based on history, geography, and national interests. According to this identity, Turkey has a unique geographical position in the world connecting Asia, Europa, and Africa. Given this fact, Turkey needs to diversify its strategic allies for the sake of its national interests. As a part of the new identity construction in Turkish foreign policy, Turkey has developed new strategies to carry out her soft power policies in Africa more effectively through Yunus Emre Cultural Centres, Maarif Schools, TİKA, Diyanet, THY, and the Turkish NGOs.

Turkey has a deep historical relationship with the African continent dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, Turkey ignored developing its relations with the African countries due to its Western identity and the lack of strategic vision in traditional Turkish foreign policy. According to the new foreign policy identity, Turkey should strengthen its relations with the countries that had strong historical relationships in Africa. It is important to underline that Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country with 98 percent of its population. The ruling AK Party is also a political entity that has an Islamic identity. In this regard, providing humanitarian assistance to poor people in Africa is a significant responsibility of the believers in the religion of Islam. In addition, helping needy people without any religious and ethical discrimination has become a spiritual obligation for the ruling AK Party governments and the Turkish people. In this sense, Turkey has been among the significant actors in providing humanitarian and development assistance in Africa and in the world during the administration of the ruling AK party governments.

Turkey was a highly dependent actor on the Western world in the Cold War era. Reducing Turkey's over-dependence on the West has become a strategic priority through the strategic diversification of Turkish foreign policy. Transformation in Turkey in the fields of economics, politics, and society over the last two decades has become a critical driving force to increase multilateral relations with non-Western actors (Özkan, 2010: 104-105). Moreover, Turkey has become a more ambitious actor to advance economic and political relations beyond the region in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) after the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011 because the conflicts and political crises in the MENA region have pushed Turkey to find the new economic and allies and markets for export of Turkish goods.

Today, the strategic importance of the African continent, which international actors see as an important competitive field, is increasing day by day in world politics. While China and Russia deepen their strategic relations in this continent, they also challenge the political and economic interests of the old traditional actors on the continent. In this context, the importance of the African continent in Turkish foreign policy is increasing day by day. Especially with the AK Party governments, the strategic meaning of the continent for Turkish foreign policy has been moved from an ideological basis to a strategic ground. In this sense, in the rapidly developing and changing world politics, Turkey has endeavored to become an important geopolitical actor on the African continent by using its soft power instruments in Africa.

Globalization has also created new political and economic opportunities for Turkey to get more actively engaged with the continent. As a part of the newly established foreign policy identity, state and non-state actors have actively collaborated to implement joint projects in Africa. Furthermore, Turkey has increased its bilateral relations with the African countries to close the FETO-affiliated schools and institutions seen as a security threat to Turkey. In the post-failed military coup in 2016, implementation and diversification of Turkish foreign policy have been imperative for Turkey to increase strategic relations with the continent and eliminate the FETO terrorist organization across the continent.

We can summarize the factors and dynamics behind Turkey's soft power policy toward Africa as follows: Firstly, AK Party governments have implemented a soft power policy in order to establish strong political and economic relations with Africa. Secondly, it has aimed to make Turkey a visible actor in African countries and to receive the political support of African countries at international platforms such as the UN. Thirdly, the ruling AK Party government has aimed to increase Turkey's geopolitical power in the world and its global prestige through its soft power instruments. Finally, the ruling party governments have intended to eliminate the institutions of the FETO terrorist organization that is still effective in Africa.

### **The Constraints of Turkey's Soft Power in Africa**

Several significant factors damage Turkey's soft power policy in Africa. The first factor is domestic dynamics in Turkey. Turkey has faced different threats and challenges since 2011 including the failed military coup in 2016, the fluctuations in the Turkish Lira, and the Syrian conflict. Although Turkey has faced huge security threats since 2016, it has managed to maintain its strategic relations with Africa in a stable and strong manner. The role of the AK Party governments, which have been in power since 2002, in maintaining political and economic stability in Turkey plays a very important role in the strong progress of Turkey's relations with Africa. It is important to underline that maintaining political and economic stability in Turkey has been vital for implementing an effective soft power policy in Africa.

The second factor is regional dynamics. Political and economic instabilities in the region have a significant potential to affect Turkey's political and economic power in the region. For instance, Turkey's long-lasting fight against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Iraq and Syria has weakened Turkey's long-term soft power strategies in the world (Öner, 2013: 13). The terrorist organizations' activities against Turkey have forced the Turkish policymakers to invest more in Turkey's hard power capacity. The third factor is global threats and challenges. Global economic crises in the world such as the economic crisis of 2007, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war between Russia and Ukraine have had a negative impact on the economic development of many countries in the world. (Oğuzlu, 2007: 90-1).

The security problems and conflicts that emerged in the Middle East after 2011 have revealed the fact that Turkey must remain a stronger actor in the fields of defense and military in its region and in the world. After 2016, Turkey seems to play a more active role in the field of defense both in its region and in the African continent. For example, the opening of Turkey's largest military base abroad in Somalia in 2017 is one of the important examples showing the change in Turkey's foreign policy after 2016. At the same time, Turkey has made bilateral agreements with more than 20 African countries in the fields of defense and military. However, since 2016, Turkey continues to strengthen its soft power policy in the African continent, especially through its institutions such as Maarif Schools, TİKA, Yunus Emre Cultural Centers, and Turkish NGOs. The new regional and global dynamics that emerged after 2011 revealed that Turkey needs to establish a fine balance between its military power and soft power. In this context, although Turkey has increased its investments in the military and defense field after 2016, it has also continued to strengthen its soft power policy elements in a strategic way.

Understanding the African social, economic, and political dynamics and values is vital to developing effective soft power policies toward Africa. Turkey ought to establish a more effective system of coordination between the state and non-state institutions in Africa. The state and non-state institutions should not duplicate each other's activities on the continent. Furthermore, there are many universities and research centers in Turkey which have opened "Centers for African Studies", but there is a lack of experts on Africa to run these centers accurately. Turkey needs to send more Turkish students to African universities at the graduate level. African politics and Turkey-Africa relations courses should be taught in the departments of politics and international relations.

For the institutionalization of Turkey's relations with Africa, academic relations between Turkish universities and African universities should be strengthened. Turkish universities should send their doctoral students to African countries for research purposes will contribute to further strengthening the relations between Turkey and Africa academically. Supporting undergraduate students studying in Turkish universities who are interested in African politics, history, and art is also of great importance for the future of relations. It is not possible to progress Turkey's African policy only with political dynamics. In this sense, it is very important for the future of relations that institutions such as YÖK, TÜBİTAK, and universities should provide financial support to researchers studying on Africa. In addition, African Research Centers opened in universities in Turkey should be established for scientific aims rather than political purposes and should continue their work in this direction.

## **CONCLUSION**

Turkish foreign policy has undergone a significant transformation under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government. The ruling AK Party governments have developed a new foreign policy identity based on Turkey's geographical, historical, socio-religious dynamics and strategic interests. Turkey has been a more visible and active player in African politics through its active soft power policies over the last decade. Importantly, Turkey has implemented the Africa Action Plan of 1998 to actively engage with the continent. In this regard, Turkey has cooperated with NGOs, businesses, religious associations, universities, and research centers to build up its soft power capacity. Turkey's soft power policies do not conflict with Africa's social and cultural values, and it does not aim to change the foreign policy preferences of the African countries. It is important to highlight that Turkey's growing soft power in Africa is more likely to open new strategic spaces for Turkey to develop its political and economic relations with African countries in the coming years. Humanitarian and development assistance has been one of the most important components of Turkey's new soft power policy in Africa. This research argues that Turkey's domestic dynamics have been playing a major role

in constructing effective and successful soft power in Africa. Political and economic stability is a key precondition for improving Turkey's long-term soft power policy toward Africa.

The AK Party governments have actively implemented the Africa Action Plan of 1998 since 2005, revealing that Africa is one of the most important strategic areas of Turkish foreign policy. Keeping Turkey's relations with Africa at the highest level is one of Turkey's historical and strategic responsibilities. With the establishment of the Republic, Turkish policymakers determined foreign policy approaches according to their ideological tendencies and they considered Turkey's strategic interests at the lowest level. With the end of the Cold War period, an intense debate started in Turkish politics, media, and academia on Turkey's new role in the changing world order. Having undergone a major strategic transformation with Turgut Özal, Turkey took important steps to implement this strategic transformation in a more systematic way during the AK Party period. In this context, it is possible to say that Turkey's African approach has shifted from an ideological approach to a strategic one. Finally, keeping Turkey's relations with Africa strong at all times is not only important for its national interests and historical responsibilities but also a necessity for Turkey to remain a strong actor in its region and world politics.

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