

The Place and Importance of African Countries in Turkey's Seeking New Markets

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Abstract

Turkey's relations with countries in the African continent were at a minimum level until the early 2000s and Turkey had neither a consistent African policy nor the intention of expanding to Africa (Tepebas, 2013:320). Thus, African continent, especially Sub-Saharan region, remained as a marginal region which was not worth being examined for many years. With a comprehensive African policy goal, the first concrete steps were taken in 1998 and the aim was to promote economic, cultural and human relations with African countries by making an exhaustive action plan (Aydin, 2014:4). That the EU economy has shrunk recently in particular has paved the way for the realization of the economic potential of the African continent. Although the dimensions of our trade with African countries seem small, increases occurring since 2003 are significant in terms of showing how great the trade potential of African countries is and what kind of opportunities it will be able to create in the future. Employing qualitative research and analysis method based on the interpretation and discovery of hidden knowledge within the related literature, this study focuses on the significance of the development of economic relationships between Turkey and African countries and recommends policies in order to improve our trade volume with these countries. Moreover, considering current potential of African countries with whom we have historical and cultural ties and their gradually increasing importance in international arena, it has been concluded that it is essential for our academics to draw attention to this matter, have academic cooperation to build bilateral-regional relationships within the frame of mutual expectations, encourage young academics to conduct studies on Africa, create awareness by giving more place to Africa in printed and visual media and train specialists on African issues. Another significant finding is that Turkey does not have the luxury to disregard African countries considering the fact that the continent has become one of the most important competitive environments of the century, and that Turkey must provide technical assistance and training support for African countries in areas of experience and that it is possible to expand our foreign trade volume to desired levels by means of promoting cooperation opportunities.

Keywords: Africa, Turkey, Foreign Trade

1. Introduction

In the historical process, for years the colonial rule was dominant in the African continent which has a strategic importance due to its geographical location and underground and aboveground resources. The African continent, whose name was mentioned on the world agenda with words such as poverty, famine and conflict until recently, and which is home to 33 of the 48 least developed countries in the world, at the same time, also embodies the fastest developing countries within itself (Arslan, 2014:4). However, beginning to gain their independence after the Second World War, the African countries have begun to take their rightful place on the global stage as developing actors with each passing day. In addition, the rapid growth of urbanized and consuming populations, increase in agricultural lands, and rise in the income generated from industrialization and natural resources in African countries have manifested themselves as developments that will overcome the lack of demand encountered in exports to these countries.

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On the other hand, it is expected of African countries, whose more than two-thirds of the total population are made up of youngsters and children, to reach better position than the present and to have more power to influence global developments by playing a more active role in the international system from the second half of the 21st century. By taking this situation into consideration, Africa is assessed as a continent that changes a crust where wealth and poverty coexisted (Özgecan, 2010:p.y). Although there has been a turbulent period in the north of the continent in recent years due to the so-called “Arab Spring”, it is possible to say that the African continent is a relatively stable and economically revitalized region compared to the past.

The African continent is the target of many countries as the world’s second largest continent due to its rich natural resources, its population that exceeds one billion and its hunger for development and modernization. It is predicted that the continent will become an alluring market due to the fact that most of the African countries, which recorded a significant progress in economic growth and human development in recent years, will be transformed into developing countries in the next 20 years. Therefore, it is seen that the interest of the powerful actors of international economic system on this continent has increased in recent years and the US, EU, India, China in particular and other countries have intensified their efforts to increase their trade with the countries in the continent (Tepebaş, 2013:16).

Turkey, whose the most important principle of foreign policy has been “westernization” since its foundation, has ignored the African continent for many years. As a consequence, Turkey has had neither a consistent African policy nor an intention to open up to Africa until recently (Aydın, 2014:4). It has learned the reality of Africa after 2005 and has taken important steps to develop economic, cultural and political relations with this continent consisting of 55 large and small countries. Especially in recent years, the contraction of the EU economy, the changes in international conditions and the dynamics within the continent have removed the luxury of ignoring the African continent.

Turkey’s Africa expansion was initiated with a strategy targeting to develop economic relations with the African countries (SAGA) in the south of the Sahara and aimed at ending the neglect of the past by adopting “the African year” in the same year. Thus, the economic and commercial potential of Africa has been acknowledged and our trade volume, which was \$7.7 billion in 2004, reached \$ 19.7 billion in 2014, but decreased to \$16.7 billion in 2016. However, the number of countries with which we have intense commercial relations has remained rather limited and the number of countries, with which we have total trade volume of over \$ 100 million among 55 African countries, does not exceed 8 countries (TURKSTAT Foreign Trade Statistics).

Africa is almost entirely new and unknown, except for the countries of North Africa, from Turkey’s perspective. Likewise, Turkey is a new and even uncharted player for these countries. The African continent is filled with new opportunities for Turkey despite these uncertainties and the difficulties of trading in the continent. The developmental potential of the African continent and its complementary features with Turkey are other reasons that render the economic and commercial cooperation attractive. Turkey will have the widest potential to benefit from opportunities in Africa provided that it shares its own historical experience, political and cultural heritage and its facilities and resources on the basis of mutual benefit (Erduran, 2014:p.y).

The initiatives undertaken within the frame work of “Initiation to Africa” aiming to diversify and strengthen our relations with the African countries in economic, commercial, cultural and political spheres have yielded positive results, high levels of bilateral visits with many African countries have taken place and the agreements that constitute the legal foundation of our economic relations with these countries have been signed by taking these aspects into consideration. Turkey’s search for expansion in the continent through bilateral agreements signed with the countries in the continent and the fact that it is seen as target markets especially for small and medium-sized Turkish companies have necessitated the developments in the continent to be monitored more carefully (Kızılarşlan, 2009:11).

Nevertheless, the fact that should not be overlooked is that Turkey has still a long way to go in Africa. As of today, Free Trade Agreements (FTA) have been signed only with four countries in the continent. The objectives to increase intra-continental trade, led by the Regional Economic Communities, have been at the forefront of the obstacles to the signing of FTAs with African countries. African countries, wishing to build their local industries and to manufacture their basic food and consumer products, do not open up to signing FTAs due to the reason that FTAs would have negative impact on their national development initiatives (Karabalık, 2013:p.y).

The African continent has the characteristic of being an important market for the growing Turkish economy. Taking this into consideration, the intensification of business world into Africa is attempted through the hand of the state on the one hand, and, on the other hand, efforts are being made to increase the interest of the private sector and non-governmental organizations towards Africa. The fact that some African countries have become the oil exporters will lead to the increase in the relative purchasing power in these countries and the development of our trade with those countries in question. On the other hand, the establishment of organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS) and the Common Market for East and South Africa (COMESA), and the reduction of customs taxes among member countries render African countries an attractive market for Turkish private sector (Öztürk, 2004:8).

Specialists in the continent, who draw attention to Turkey's expansion to Africa in parallel with Turkey's overall development process, make mention of expressions such as a new partner and global player (Wheeler, 2012). In this context, Turkey is shown among the five emerging partners of Africa with countries like China, India, Brazil and South Korea (Davies, 2008:32). This requires, on the one hand, the attempts to intensify business world in Africa through the hand of the state and, on the other hand, the efforts to increase the interest of private sector and non-governmental organizations towards Africa. In particular, encouraging young academics to conduct studies on Africa, announcing the developments related to Africa and market opportunities to our businessmen, increasing the number of experts specialized on Africa, conducting detailed market research about the countries to be traded and finally clarifying the factors that make Africa special will give significant acceleration in increasing our trade volume.

It is important for Turkey to look for ways to move the relations that it established with African countries to more advanced dimension, to develop and maintain a human-based perception in order to show its determination in this direction. In addition to the political will and mechanisms that can achieve this, it is of utmost importance to generate knowledge about Africa, to provide more support for studies on Africa and to identify possible problems in advance and take precautions. Indeed, the image that Turkey's historical residual has installed upon is in quite positive, acceptable and desirable form before African people. For this reason, relationships can be established with every state in the African continent even if there are political differences. In addition, this will also make a positive contribution to Turkey's relations with other states.

This study was carried out with the notion of drawing attention to the studies that need to be done in order to strengthen economic and commercial relations so that Turkey can gain mutual benefits from its African expansion by taking the above-mentioned opportunities and problems into consideration. Turkish public does not know Africa sufficiently although there has been a considerable progress in economic and political relations within the scope of expansion to Africa for the last 15 years. Therefore, it aimed at drawing attention of especially academic circles, the media and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to this matter and reminding their responsibilities.

2. Literature Review

Turkey's relations with African countries, which began to gain their independence from the colonial rule following the Second World War, have followed a course of ups and downs. During the Ottoman period, there was continuity in relations especially with the countries in the north of the continent due to Ottoman dominance in the region. However, the relations with the countries in the continent were at minimum level from the foundation of independent Turkish Republic until the end of the 1990s. In fact, this situation is not only unique to Turkey. The African continent, particularly the sub-Saharan region, had remained as an area that is marginal and unworthy of investigation in the international system for many years. The end of the bipolar system that was the product of the Cold War at the beginning of the 1990s brought about the necessity of reviewing the foreign policy in Turkey as well as in the whole world and Turkey's economic, political and cultural relations, which were at minimum level, have gained a new momentum (Tepeciklioğlu, 2012:67).

The fact that Turkey's economic, political and cultural relations with countries in Africa had been at minimum level for many years has also been an important reason for the lack of academic interest towards the continent. For example, there is even no academic study at Turkish universities that will help to write a graduation thesis. It is seen around the world that there has been a remarkable development in the increase of academic publications on Africa (Tepebaş, 2013:363). There are criticisms in the literature that Turkish academics and universities still fail to grasp Africa's significance from scientific perspective and, similarly, this is also equally valid in African frontiers (Uchegara, 2008:45).

Unfortunately, Africa still remains at the forefront of the most neglected areas of expertise in academic field in Turkey. The number of academics and experts working on Africa is quite few and the number of works and articles on Africa is also quite limited. In addition, our lack of local language skills also shows the need for an intellectual academic community that knows and researches the continent and closely follows the developments there (Oba, 2008:265). It would be possible for Turkey-Africa relations to stand on a strong foundation and for the Turkish media to report the development in Africa to the public more realistically provided that the gaps in this area can be removed.

A study extensively dealing with Turkey-Africa relations was carried out by Tepeciklioğlu (2012). Turkey's Expansion Action Plan to Africa and its afterwards were reviewed after drawing attention to the growing importance of African continent in world politics and evaluations from the perspective of Turkey's desire to become a regional power were made in this study. In addition to carrying out a chronological follow-up of Turkey's relations with African countries, the article aimed to keep a record of progress of the policy pursued over the past fifty years and to question the reasons for this significant change in Turkish Foreign Policy (Tepeciklioğlu, 2012:60).

In another study carried out by Karagül and Arslan (2013), Turkey's policy on African expansion was examined and the emphasis was given on how the institutional foundation of the cooperation established on the basis of strategic partnership with the African Union would be shaped. In addition to the provision of opportunities by the expansion to Africa for Turkey in political and economic fields, various difficulties that will be encountered was also pointed out in the study.

Boztaş (2011) discussed the background of Turkey's African policy since the relations of the Ottoman era and analyzed the process that the Republic of Turkey went through until its Expansion Action Plan to Africa in the post-Ottoman era. In this context, the relations with the continent were attempted to be explained on the basis of critical and international society theories in the study aimed to present Turkey-Africa relations together with a theoretical analysis. A comprehensive study on our economic and commercial relations with African countries was conducted by Altan (2004) and developments in our trade volume with Africa between 1995 and 2004 became a subject of examination.

Tepebaş (2014), in his study on economic and commercial relations between Turkey and Africa, focused more on political relations and scarcely mentioned commercial relations. The determinants of Turkey's foreign trade with African countries were examined with the help of "panel attraction model" and which factors were influential on Turkey-Africa trade were attempted to be predicted in a study conducted by Doğan and Tunç.

It was seen when looking at the studies on relations with Africa in Turkey in general that their numbers were not only rather limited but also their contents were made up of reflecting works carried out by the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, most of them were studies that dealt with political and diplomatic relations. They fell short of conveying the economic and commercial potential of Africa and opportunities for cooperation to the public. Likewise, negative developments in the countries of the continent were emphasized at written and visual media and positive developments and success stories found no place on the agenda. Furthermore, the development conveyed consisted of the evaluations by western news agencies.

One of the biggest obstacles standing before the development of Turkey's relations with African countries is that this continent is not recognized and known adequately. Unfortunately, it is another reality that Turkey is not also known in African countries. In this case, a negative image of Africa is formed in the subconscious of Turkish society. It is necessary to examine the problems related to the continent from an objective point of view and to evaluate them in a unique way in order to solve this problem. It would also be possible to add concepts such as potential, partnership and development next to the key words such as famine, disaster and conflict if we approach Africa in a broader and scientific perspective (Tepebaş, 2013:361). It was stated that books, reports and articles published, workshops and conference-like activities organized by some research centers and researches at the individual level overshadowed the studies conducted at institutional level, but they were not adequate enough to know Africa as much as necessary (Oba, 2008:94).

Another problem observed in this area is the inability to ensure a sustainable information flow from Africa to Turkey. This may affect Turkey's plan and programs for developing its relations with Africa and causes some important developments not to be monitored and evaluated adequately and comprehensively. In particular, it is of utmost importance to analyze the expectations of Africans from Turkey correctly and to conduct studies that can be the basis for determining the correct strategies.

While Turkish academics and universities continue to ignore the issue of Africa with which we have a long and common history, the countries, with comprehensive policies in Africa, encourage their own undergraduate and graduate students to learn local native languages on-site through various initiatives. In particular, the People's Republic of China is seen to undertake an important mission in recent years through the Confucius Institutes. In addition, it is also observed that various activities related to the continent are carried out and exchange of academic publications and a rich information flow are accommodated at universities in the countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland which do not have historical ties with the continent except for the countries with colonial history in Western Europe (Tepebaş, 2013:366).

Although Turkey has been criticized for a long time for being indifferent to the region, the existence of historical and cultural partnerships with countries in the continent based on the Ottoman Empire, Turkey's absence of a colonial past in the region and the favorable image brought by its aid to the region are considered as advantages of Turkey.

Therefore, there has been a significant emphasis on the availability of cooperation opportunities in every sector in the continent consisting of a virgin geography which is yet to be spotted despite transportation and some other difficulties. In addition to this, it is highlighted that Turkey's augmentation of academic and cultural activities towards the continent will help to eliminate the difficulties before the parties' recognition of each other by considering that economic and political convergence is directly linked to cultural convergence. Turkey, which shook off its inexperience and timidity in Africa, has to look at the continent from a more rational and broader perspective because African countries will not always remain as poor and underdeveloped as they are today. It is necessary for Turkey, which has completed its expansion in its relations with Africa and has risen to the level of partnership, to evaluate the benefits of partnership as well as its risks (Öztürk, 2004:16).

3. The Size and Foreign Trade Volume of African Economy

Africa is regarded as an actor whose gravity increases on the global stage as it is the world's second largest continent with an area of 30 million square kilometers, rich natural resources. In the last decade, six of the ten fastest-growing economies in the world have been from this continent. According to the data provided by World Bank, the average annual growth rate, which was not based on petroleum income, was % 5.4 in the last five years (www.mfa.gov.tr).

A study by the African Development Bank includes various estimates that the per capita income would reach \$ 5.600 from \$1.667 between 2010 and 2060, the middle-class population would increase to 42% from 34% and the average life expectancy, which is 56 years today, would rise to 70 years. Being home to 15% of the world's population with its population of exceeding one billion, Africa is expected to reach a population of 1.6 billion in 2030 and to constitute 19% of the world's population. While 40% of its total population was urban residents in 2010, it is recorded that this ratio will reach 50% by 2030 and 65% by 2060 (www.mfa.gov.tr).

Africa's voice has become more audible as a whole in international platforms. The African Union, which is a prominent international organization in terms of its number of members and international efficiency after the United Nations, tries to produce "African solutions to African problems" and is seen to reach the level of an organization which is increasingly dense, provides guidance to its members and is respected by other international actors. However, the picture presented by the African continent, which has yet to provide permanent and inclusive solutions to many problems arising from underdevelopment and poverty, also contains many negative factors. The factors of instability such as internal conflict, coup, terrorism and extreme violence, problems encountered during the process of democratization, poverty and overpopulation, inadequate resources and their ineffective use, serious setbacks caused by them in health and education services and problems such as epidemics and migration have yet to be resolved in Africa (Habiyaremye and Oğuzlu, 2014:68).

Despite all these difficulties and the challenges of doing business in the continent, the African Continent is the target of both our country and many countries desiring to grow in the world with its great human potential, its hunger for technology, development and modernization and its extraordinary underground wealth. Over the next 20 years, the continent is expected to be the most attractive market due to the fact that many countries in Africa will turn into the status of developing countries. Visionary entrepreneurs, who have invested in this continent, laid its foundation and endured various difficulties for many years, have already begun to gather the fruits of their investments in this market (Arda, 2013:101).

The values that render Africa an attractive in economic sense can be counted as its population, untouched raw materials and mine stocks, cheap labor and its easy access to world markets due to the fact that it is surrounded by sea in four sides. It is seen that the African countries, which recorded notable progress on the issues of economic growth, human development and political stability over a decade, are searching various ways to improve their economies. Carrying on business in non-traditional sectors, increasing product range and exports and creating new economic relations are some of the leading means of this search.

The African continent is quite small in terms of the nominal gross national product (GNP), which can be considered as an indicator of basic economic magnitude. All of Sub-Saharan Africa has an economic size of only one and half times that of Turkey. North African countries (Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia) constitute an economic asset close to that of Turkey (Arda, 2013:102). Africa, which has been making great efforts to overcome its problems in political, economic and social fields in the recent period, increases its strategic importance in the presence of both developed and developing countries with its rich natural resources and young population. Over the last five years, it is known that Africa has achieved growth rates that can be considered as consistent and increased its gains from foreign aids and investments. While it is possible to mention of the partial improvement in the continent as a result of the developments in question, it seems that these developments have a limited effect on poverty reduction and integration with the world economy.

Generally formed by boundaries drawn as a result of the colonial period, the African countries are very different in size. The Republic of South Africa, which differs from other countries in terms of its economic structure and level of development, alone provides the one fifth of all of the GNP of Africa. In 2011, the trade of 55 African countries with the world was a total of \$ 1 trillion and 96 million. Of this, \$595 billion came from exports whereas \$501 billion belonged to imports (Sürek, 2013:125). The first three countries of its trade with the world both in exports and imports are the USA, China and France. Although European countries lose their relative importance in Africa's exports, it still remains as the biggest targeted region. The colonial ties of the past and the trade facilities provided by the European Union accommodate this.

Oil is the most important item in Africa's exports as content. The prospect of oil is steadily increasing parallel to the developments in the world economy. Minerals also maintain their share of exports due to the effect of increase in quantity and prices in recent years, whereas the shares of agricultural and industrial products are gradually decreasing. In terms of imports, industrial products maintain a dominant role in Africa's imports. The group with the secondary importance is the food products. Africa conceives a serious deficit in staple food with the effect of its backwardness in agriculture and this deficit is compensated by imports. It is expected that demand will continue to persist and it will shift from basic staple food to processed food items as the region becomes richer.

The growth pictures displayed by Africa in recent years and especially new oil reserves have attracted new actors to the continent. New oil sources, discovered in many countries from South Africa to Angola, from Mali to Sudan, maintain their importance for China and India as well as former European colonialists which have never been able to pull their hands and arms out of this continent.

The existence of a considerable number of non-OPEC oil producers in Africa has rendered this continent a center of attraction especially for Newly Industrialized countries. They compete with each other in order to benefit from trade and investment opportunities since oil and natural gas are more valuable to them than "diamond fields". For example, while China's direct investments in the continent were only \$56 million by 1996, it reached \$15 billion by 2011. Furthermore, it is stated that China's aid and investments, together with its official development aid for the continent, secured an important place in the 5% annual growth of the African economy. China utilizes the present gap quite well and manages its foreign exchange reserves as investments in black continent. This allows both Africa to participate in the world economy as a new actor and to take over China's cheap production character from it (Kakuchi, 2013).

Declaring 2006 as the African Year which was one year after Turkey, China was seen by many African leaders as an alternative to Western countries and a new friend of Africa. The factors such as, infrastructure projects it carried out, low-interest loans it provided and non-intervention in domestic affairs, have made China the new partner of African countries. There has been a growing notion among African policy makers and thinkers that African countries have not made enough profit from their relations developed with China.

China has faced with “new colonialist” accusations over the last few years as it appears that the political relations it developed and economic support and development aids it provided have not made a lasting contribution to the economic development of African countries (Alpay, 2009:16).

While the United States comes first in official development assistance to the countries in the continent apart from direct investments, next to EU institutions, France, England, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Japan and Canada also secure first places. The views that come to the forefront were that the sectors with the greatest potential for investment would relatively be mining and metals, oil and natural gas, management of natural resources, tourism, consumer goods, infrastructure and telecommunication (Otty and Sita, 2011:19). Despite the decline in energy resources and related reserves such as coal, oil and natural gas in the world, the new reserves discovered in recent years in East African countries indicate that the energy issue will continue to remain on the agenda.

The success of Africa’s policies towards industrialization is undoubtedly directly related to its ability to achieve economic transformation and to increase product diversity. However, it is obvious that there are some obstacles standing before this. The comparative advantages that the continent has today in particular are of lesser importance in the global competition and therefore, there is a need to increase product diversity. On the other hand, while the planning in the field of technology has been one of the most neglected issues in the development process, it draws attention as one of the issues that greeted the eye in recent years. The African Union also emphasizes more clearly that decisive steps will be taken in this respect (Yener, 2007:547).

Taking these factors into consideration, the African continent has become a region in which Turkey has attached special importance to its relations in recent years. It is also possible to consider this as an important indicator of our perception of multilateral foreign policy. Turkey makes tremendous efforts to improve its relations with African countries thanks to its experience in the international market in addition to its advanced industry and qualified workforce. In this direction, it is of great importance to increase our mutual trade volume with our partners in the continent and to develop the connections in question through new partnerships. The worsening of China’s image in Africa will undoubtedly make Turkey more advantageous in the continent and render it more valuable in the eyes of the countries in the continent (Boztaş, 2014:142).

4. Turkey-Africa Economic Relations and Trade Volume

Trying to prove for years that it has been a part of the community of Western states since the day of its foundation, Turkey has not accepted it as its foreign policy priority to develop its relations with many underdeveloped countries of Africa for many years. The steps taken by the major powers today to improve their relations with African countries have become influential in Turkey’s increasing interest towards the continent in political and economic arenas. Turkey, having an aim to become a regional power, has taken many steps in recent years to increase its influence in the continent. However, difficulties have been experienced in carrying out economic activities in the continent due to the absence of Turkish companies’ adequate knowledge on business and trade opportunities in the continent owing to geographical distance and economic and political instabilities in these countries.

Despite all these difficulties, Turkish companies have gained more experience in developing business relations with African countries and creating job opportunities in the continent and they have come a long way in relations with African companies and chambers of trade. In addition, agreements on Trade, Prevention of Double Taxation, and the Mutual Encouragement and Protection of Investments, were signed with many African countries. Besides this, fairs related to Turkish products began to be organized in African countries, Cooperation Agreements were signed between Chambers of Commerce and Industries, and reciprocal visits were undertaken between commercial delegations. Despite all these positive developments, the number of African countries that we engaged in intensive commercial relations is quite limited especially in Sub-Saharan countries. In 2016, the number of countries, with which we have total trade volume of over \$ 100 million among 55 African countries, does not exceed 8 countries (Algeria, Libya, South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria and Ghana) (Sorhun, 2013: 27).

Even though Turkey’s trade volume with African countries has risen considerably especially after the implementation of the “Expansion Action Plan to Africa” and “Strategy for the Development of Economic Relations with African Countries”, but this is still behind most of the regions with which we have commercial relations. The phenomenon of “equality” determines the main axis of our relations with the African countries with most of which we have begun to develop new relations in many fields. As a result of being engaged in a colonial or opportunistic approach with Africa throughout history, the economic and political dimensions of our relations with African countries have been steadily improving and developing rapidly.

However, the share of Sub-Saharan Africa or Africa in the South of Sahara (SAGA) in Turkey's trade with Africa is still quite low. The main reason for this is the fact that these countries have been neglected by Turkey for many years and the North African countries, with which we have historical and cultural ties, are among the traditional markets of Turkey. Therefore, the African Continent is seen to be collected in two groups as "North Africa" and "Other Africa" even in the websites of official institutions such as the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) and the Under-secretariat of Foreign Trade (DTM) which include data on the volume of trade with the continent (Tepeciklioğlu, 2012:81).

On the other hand, as seen in Table 1, there has been no significant increase in our trade with African countries over the last five years. It can be said when considering it from an optimistic point of view that some stability has been achieved since the last three years. However, it is observed when looking at it with a more realistic approach that our trade with African countries did not increase in the period of 2012-2016, but, on the contrary, it decreased in 2015 and 2016 compared to previous years. This revealed that the target of foreign trade volume of \$ 50 billion which was envisaged for 2015 was not a realistic target in the current conjuncture and the target in question was shifted to 2018. However, it is obvious that it would not be easy to increase our trade volume to those levels within the remaining 2 years.

It can be seen from the examination of Table 1 that our trade volume with African countries was \$ 16.7 billion in 2016. Of this, \$ 11.4 billion was our exports and \$ 5.3 billion was our imports. Turkey's major trading partners in Africa have not changed in this process. While Egypt, with which our political relations has been undergoing a painful period, maintained its first place with \$ 2.8 billion, this country is followed by Morocco (\$ 1.5 billion), Libya (\$ 0.9 billion), Tunisia (\$ 0.9 billion), South Africa (\$ 0.5 billion), and the Republic of South Africa (\$ 0.5 billion) and Nigeria (\$ 0.3 billion) respectively.

On the other hand, it is of great importance to diversify our trade partners in African continent. In this regard, no promising progress has been recorded in our trade with countries with great potential such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Sudan and Tanzania. It is certain that our foreign trade volume must be moved further considering the current potential due to factors such as the increase in African flights of Turkish Airlines, our membership of the African Development Bank and the enlargement of the scope of TİKA's activities in the continent as well as the Turkish Embassies and Commercial Consultancies which have been opening mutually with African countries since 2009.

Table 1. Turkey's Foreign Trade with African Countries (2012-2016)

	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Turkey's Total Exports (\$ Million)	142.557.355	143.838.871	157.610.158	151.802.677	152.461.737
AFRICA	11.408.754	12.448.924	13.754.398	14.145.544	13.356.850
North Africa	7.756.473	8.527.126	9.757.935	10.041.750	9.433.604
Other African Countries	3.652.281	3.921.798	3.996.463	4.103.794	3.913.246
Turkey's Total Imports (\$ Million)	198.610.256	207.234.359	242.177.117	251.661.250	236.545.141
AFRICA	5.355.533	5.099.351	5.937.961	6.031.109	5.921.790
North Africa	3.200.760	3.006.965	3.435.769	3.508.479	3.308.343
Other African Countries	2.154.733	2.092.386	2.502.192	2.522.630	2.613.447

Source: TURKSTAT Foreign Trade Statistics

Our direct investment in the African continent, which was quite low until recently from an investment perspective, is estimated to have already reached \$ 6 billion. There is also a certain upward trend in the overseas contracting services sector. The value of 50 projects undertaken in Africa in 2013 was worth around \$ 3 billion. The cumulative total of 1.076 projects undertaken in Africa until today reached \$ 56 billion (www.mfa.gov.tr).

The African expansion of our country was completed with the implementation of the "Africa Strategy Document" which was adopted in 2010 and there has been a new period in which our relations began to deepen and diversify in all areas and which can be defined as "Turkey-Africa Partnership". It will be possible to reach the targets set in this period if Turkey continues to share its own historical experience, social, political and cultural heritage, and the potentials and resources it has with African governments and people within the principle and framework of "African Solutions to African Problems" and on the basis of mutual benefit.

On the other hand, another reason behind Turkey's turn towards Africa and its attempts to develop its relations not only in the commercial area, but also in the political and cultural areas is closely related to its desire to become a regional power. Regional power, in the broadest sense, can be defined as a country which is active in the geography where it has the ability to identify and influence regional politics (Beck, 2006:12). Turkey, which claims to be a regional power, has no luxury to ignore Africa. However, at least for now, it is not in a position to compete with the great powers on the African continent because the African countries have become one of the important areas of competition in international politics (Aydın, 2014:12).

From the perspective of African countries, Africans regard Turkey as a powerful country that is a member of Islamic world and can establish Western associations and that can be taken as an example by them. The fact that Turkey does not have a history of colonialism also influences this. The fact that Turkey acts by putting its reconciliatory attitude in the events in Africa renders it different compared to other countries.

Even though the policies that Turkey follows in Africa in general can be said to form positive reference, however, it cannot be said to have reached a sufficient level and experience compared to other countries because a large number of countries, such as USA, China, India, Brazil and Japan, appear as actors in the field in addition to European countries. There is a need for Turkey to establish a national partnership in which all socio-economic factors, such as government agencies, private sector, universities and the media, will be included in order for Turkey to a more visible position in such a competitive environment. The steps to be taken in this direction will support Turkey's Expansion Policy to Africa and will render it more visible to African people (Tepebaş, 2013:380).

The convergence of African countries in various economic integration movements requires that this continent should not be considered as divided markets consisting of individual countries, but rather it should be evaluated as two or three main markets where customs taxes among them were removed and each market contains a large consumer mass. African continent is seen to offer significant opportunities for our entrepreneurs when considering it in this way. The African continent is expected to become an important center of attraction for Turkish companies because these countries are included in the EU's preferential trade system in addition to the relatively cheap raw material and manual labor in these countries.

There is no doubt that good relations and foundation established with African countries will affect political relations in the long run and they will bring significant advantages to Turkey in foreign policy. It is clear that this initiative should be financed with an adequate source in order to achieve the expected outcomes from the "Expansion Move to Africa". In this case, it is possible that our bilateral relations can be further enhanced by initiatives such as technical assistance to African countries, exchange of experts, and giving courses and seminars to African people by departing from the fact that Africa is in need of increasing investment and trade opportunities rather than aid. In this regard, the transfer of our country's experiences to African countries especially in irrigation, agriculture, forestry and energy issues will make important contributions to our relations (Güçlü, ty, sfy.).

5. Opportunities to Increase Trade with African Countries

Turkey has learned the African fact since 2005 and begun to take its place among new players in Africa in recent years. Turkey is seen to be in first places together with Brazil, India and China when making a ranking of the countries with the highest rate of presence in Africa in the last ten years (www.mfa.gov.tr). This has emerged as an important choice in Turkish foreign policy and has contributed to the intensification of the attention of the economy and business world through the hand of the state. As a result, the interest of private sector and non-governmental organizations towards Africa has increased and new business opportunities have been created.

Turkey's economic expansion to Africa has a mission beyond economic and business relations. Business circles do not only follow the mission of the government in relations to be established like elsewhere, but they also begin new initiatives. Turkey's humanitarian aspect is strong and its African mission is ideological to a certain extent. A rising Turkey perception, especially in the countries where the Muslim population is in majority, can open doors to both the business world and Turkish Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO).

However, our economic relations, which gained momentum with the expansion policy in Africa, have some advantages and disadvantages. Our country's indifference towards the region for a long time is the main criticism. But, the existence of our religious and cultural partnerships rooted in the Ottoman Empire, the absence of our colonial past in the region and the favorable image of our aids to the region are among our advantages. Undoubtedly, Turkey's economic relations with African countries will also continue to increase in the upcoming period. It is targeted that Turkey's share in the total foreign trade of the African countries will increase from 1.5% to 3% by the end of 2018.

In the same period, it is predicted that Turkey will reach a foreign trade volume of almost \$ 50 billion by increasing the share of African countries in Turkey's foreign trade by raising it two-fold (Çolak, 2012:p.y). This goal is difficult to achieve but not impossible in today's conditions. The Turkish entrepreneur, who made Turkey reach a foreign trade volume of \$ 20 billion in African continent within a short period of time in 2014, and has succeeded in selling all kinds of products, can also achieve this goal.

Increasing trade figures indicate that Turkish companies are successful in finding and developing business opportunities across Africa and have gained considerable experience in trade with the countries in the continent. The number of our companies that established representative offices in African countries and participated in international fair in these countries in order to develop and strengthen trade relations is increasing year by year. "Turkish Export Products Fair" is held every year in the various countries of Africa. Our Chambers of Commerce sign Cooperation Agreements with the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of African countries, arrange visits in order to explore business opportunities in Africa on the spot and invite African delegations to our country (Hazar, 2008:p.y).

A new development in our economic relations is that our contracting companies began to undertake commitment projects with North African countries such as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia and in some other African countries. In this context, increasing the market shares of our contracting, consulting and engineering companies in African countries is one of our priority targets.

Even if the size of the trade with African countries seems so small, the increase since 2003 is quite significant in terms of revealing how long the African countries have been neglected until today; the extent to which relations have improved; as well as how high the trade potential with the continent is and what kind of opportunities it can create in the future. Undoubtedly, there is a natural limit to exports that Turkey will make to African countries where the per capita income level is rather low. Nonetheless, the Turkish goods, which entered the retail market in all of Africa from East to West, increased Turkey's visibility, recognition and reputation in Africa. For this reason, it is possible for Turkish exporters to sell all kinds of products, to operate mines, to enter these markets by making investments and production and to benefit from cheap labor and energy opportunities. All of these can be realized by analyzing the continent well, participating in fair and exhibitions, staying in touch with purchasing delegations mutually, right and strong storing, and distribution networks and retail chains (Özkan, 2012:20).

On the other hand, the African countries have an important place in Turkey's target of \$ 50 billion exports by 2023. Egypt, Algeria, Libya, South Africa and Nigeria are the countries in the continent that come to the forefront within the scope of the target in question. However, as of today, we have a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with only four countries in the continent and have agreements on the prevention of double taxation with seven countries. Wishing to increase intra-continent trade volume, to establish local industries and to produce basic food and consumer goods, the African countries remain at a distant on the issue of FTAs on the account of the fact that they will have a negative impact on their national development initiatives. Under these circumstances, it has become a necessity to start negotiations on FTAs with the economic unions that shape the African economy. The trade agreements to be signed with these communities will be a step to facilitate trade with all member countries (Afacan, 2012:12).

In order to be able to examine our economic and commercial relations with African countries in a healthy way, our relations with North Africa and SAGA (Africa on the south of Sahara) countries, whose economic structures, levels of developments and economic-social problems show significant differences even though they are located in the same continent, need to be dealt separately. The main reasons for the greatness of the shares of North African countries in our foreign trade with African countries are that these countries are our traditional markets and they have historical and cultural ties with our country. In addition to these reasons, importing oil from Libya and LPG from Algeria with long-term contracts causes our trade figures to grow with North African countries.

There are many wide areas of cooperation in Africa that have not yet been adequately utilized. The technology and experience that almost all African countries require is currently available in Turkey. The lack of infrastructure, superstructure and qualified manpower, poverty and weakness are quite common throughout the continent. In addition to this, they also had to struggle with political instability and regional conflicts. However, a relatively more stable situation has begun to show itself and the economic activities that were postponed for long, and the supply of demand that was at very low level, tended to rise in recent years. Such activities are expected to increase further in the coming years.

Thanks to the vision of “fair trade through free trade” it has, Turkey is the ideal country to assist African countries to break the vicious circle of poverty they are in and to develop economic and commercial relations. Because in addition to the proximity between Turkey and African countries at the point of development of economic and commercial relations, the historical ties that it has with some African countries will also be of critical importance (Öztürk, 2004:38). In addition, Turkey’s industrial and foreign trade base is complementary to African economies.

Taking the first step in 1998 with its comprehensive African policy, the Republic of Turkey has succeeded to include its name among the strategic partners of the African Union by means of the distance it has covered over the past fifteen years. Issues such as new diplomatic missions, high level traffic of visits, development in the transport system, increasing trade and investments, scholarship opportunities and support for the UN’s missions in the continent come to the forefront when conducting a general assessment. The Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit, which is supposed to be carried out every five years alternately, present opportunities for the assessment of the current situation in relations and the planning of future goals. At this point, the developmental potential of the African continent and the complementary features of both parties are important reasons that render the economic and commercial cooperation attractive (Alkan and Mercan, 2013:27).

In this framework, Africa is the target market for Turkish companies, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises. It is not only a lively market for Turkey in exports, but also provides cheap raw materials for the Turkish industry. Our political relations with African countries have been based on friendship for centuries. Today, Turkey manifests all its efforts to further its existing trade and investment relations with African countries by means of its developed industry, qualified workforce and its experience in international markets.

These determinations have led us to design and implement a new Development Strategy for African countries which we commenced in 2003. In this context, the target countries were grouped by considering the factors such as political stability, economic situation, trade volume, foreign trade regime, natural resources, potential for growth, strategic location, and regional integration processes within the scope of “Strategy for Strengthening Economic and Trade Relations with Africa” that was implemented in 2003. Country and region-based studies related to North Africa and Sub-Saharan countries were initiated under the strategy (Kızılarşlan, 2009:7).

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

Turkey achieved a certain success in establishing strong ties again with Africa after about ninety years with the continent with which it has historical, religious and cultural ties through African expansion. It can be said that the foundation of our long-term existence in Africa was provided by Turkey’s political, economic, cultural and human-dimensional policy since the adaptation of Expansion Plan to Africa in 1998.

There is an appropriate environment historically as well as conjecturally for more intense development of bilateral-regional relations that provided benefits from every aspect within the framework of mutual expectations. This needs to be developed as much as possible and should be carried to different areas. Even though the growing interest of many countries, particularly the USA, EU countries, Japan, China and India, in Africa will bring about some difficulties in terms of Turkey, the global-based searches of restructuring and balance brings together some opportunities as well. The fact that a significant majority of Western countries seeks to obtain a share of the riches of countries rather than producing permanent solutions and providing help for the basic problems of the African countries, renders Turkey different and makes it perceived as a more reliable partner by the countries in the region.

The continent’s potential for domestic production and job creation due to its openness for any kind of manufacturing investments brings opportunities for the future development and modernization of the continent. In addition, Turkey’s industrial and foreign trade base is complementary to African economies. In this context, Africa is the target market for small and medium-sized enterprises in particular.

On the other hand, it is seen that the steps taken in order to develop economic relations and increase foreign trade volume in Turkey’s Africa expansion play an important role in two levels. First, there is a need to find alternative markets for Turkish exporters due to the global economic recession and the shrinking western markets. Second, the companies in Anatolia, which consist of small and medium-sized enterprises, gained a significant momentum with the African countries. In this way, the developments attained for the benefit of both parties make it possible to be more optimistic for the future of Turkey-Africa relations.

In this context, it is necessary to put emphasis on the following issues regarding the development of our economic relations with Africa:

- It is essential to collaborate with African countries academically in developing relations with these countries in order to be more active in the region. Studies on the continent should be increased by bringing together specialists at Africa institutes in universities in Turkey especially in history, anthropology, political science, geography and theology. In addition to this, young academics in universities should be encouraged to conduct studies on Africa and financial support for research should be provided. As it did in Western countries, Turkey should provide support for the establishment of Turkish chairs at prestigious universities in the continent by signing agreements with these universities and academicians who want to work on Turkey should be offered research scholarships for encouragement purposes.
- “Turkey-Africa Relations” courses should be included in the curriculum of the International Relations departments of especially the Turkish universities which admitted students from Africa and the need for academicians should be resolved within the framework of staff exchange programs with African universities.
- Developments related to Africa do not occupy sufficient place in written and visual media in Turkey. Progress made in Africa expansion should be explained to the public and they should be discussed in TV programs that academicians, bureaucrats and business will participate.
- Another issue that has been emphasized since the beginning of Turkey’s African expansion and in which the least progress has been made is the lack of trained experts on Africa.
- Although African Research Centers have been opened in various institutions, they mostly conduct analysis based on the African literature present in the West. In this respect, it is an important necessity for Turkey to follow and interpret the developments in the continent on-site. In addition, intellectuals in the continent should be given the opportunity to know Turkey closely by inviting the leading academicians of Africa through Africa chairs or research centers established in the universities in Turkey.
- When examining the agricultural potential of African countries, it will be possible to import products such as cotton, cocoa, coffee, banana, gold etc., from these countries as raw materials. In contrast, all kinds of products can be exported at the same time. African countries have very simple industrial plants (small-scale production of textile fabrics, cement, and flour) and have to import many products.
- The agricultural sector in the continent is underdeveloped and shows a lot of promise for future. Procuring significant development in the field of agriculture, Turkey will be able to transfer its experience to Africa in this field, areas of cooperation can be determined and the development of this sector in Africa can be ensured through private sector. Thus, new investment and market areas can be created for Turkish companies.
- Turkish contractors should make intensive efforts to receive infrastructure, housing or public contracts in countries with rapid growth rate by closely following certain countries in the continent. Increase in the renewal of infrastructure, the buildings of state institutions, new buildings and the construction of new buildings and houses as a result of the increase in foreign aid constitutes a great opportunity for Turkish contractors. Turkish companies operating in the building materials sector have the opportunity to expand their market in Africa. Apart from these, Africa is a large and promising market for Turkish companies operating in many sectors such as textile and ready-wear, automotive and sub-industry, white goods, chemistry, food, trade and transportation.
- Small commercial steps to be taken in order to know the country markets and visits to the region are of great importance for companies wanting to invest in different countries. The importance of developing trade relations with Africa is obvious for Turkey to reach its export target by 2023.
The fact that the public sector is doing its part for the African market as THY becomes the airline company that flies the most destination in Africa after Air France and the government is increasing the number of embassies in Africa should also encourage the private sector for the same market.
- The population in African continent is expected to exceed 2 billion by 2050. Therefore, one out of every four people in the world will be African in 2050. The problem of immigration that will emerge as a result of urbanization will occupy an important place in Africa’s agenda in the coming year. The ratio of population living in cities is 40% according to the statistics of 2010. It is predicted that this ratio will reach 50% by 2030 and 65% by 2060. In parallel with the rapidly increasing population, the construction industry draws attention as a sector that is inevitable to develop in the future. At the same time, the construction sector stands out as one of the potentially most important areas when considering the need for infrastructure and superstructure that emerged as a result of economic developments.
- There is a high demand in African countries in terms of consumption materials especially for all types of processed food, construction materials, plastic household goods and textile products. At the same time, it is observed that these countries are at the beginning phases of their industrialization initiatives and, therefore, they are interested in products such as agricultural machinery, textile machinery and generator, and thus, there is a high

demand for these products. Almost all of these products are supplied through imports. The price level is quite high although product quality is low in proportion to the purchasing power of the public.

- Distribution channels are very fragmented and show an individual structure in almost all countries. It is necessary to cooperate with a few businessmen whose numbers are a few but who hold all of the major trade. However, it should be taken into consideration that the trade with these countries may initially be very small.
- Even though Sub-Saharan African countries are rich in terms of raw materials, but they are not in strong position in terms of technology and industry. The potentials for sectors such as construction, textile, food, infrastructure and mining, and fruit processing are quite high in Sub-Saharan region. This region is quite an important market in terms of Turkey's current position and dynamism. It is particularly interesting in terms of the number of countries and is a growing market in addition to number of countries.
- It is necessary to promptly finalize the main agreements that would constitute the legal framework for our relations with African countries; to sign Free Trade and preferential trade agreements, to provide technical assistance to African countries in parallel with international practices in the preparation and implementation of laws related to trade policy instruments, to create favorable conditions for initial activities such as fairs, exhibitions, trade and purchasing works, to establish Trade Advisory offices in African countries, to assist Turkish technical consulting firms to structure in target countries and to pave the way for structuring of new projects in African countries through these companies by providing gratuitous assistance and loans, to strengthen the activities of Turkish banks in African countries and to provide technical assistance and educational support to African countries in areas where Turkey has immense experience.
- Relations with regional institutions should be developed with the awareness that these institutions are important in resolving problems in Africa. It is necessary to know the blocs collected in four main groups and to know the commercial relations of these blocs with Turkey well. These groups are ECOWAS / Mautinia Bloc in West Africa, CEMAC / STP Bloc in Central Africa, ESA Bloc in South East Africa, and SADC Bloc in South Africa. In addition to these four main groups, CARIFORUM bloc, formed by the countries of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP), need to be taken into consideration.
- Although the regional organizations in the continent have focused more on security issues rather than on the development of trade, the importance of increasing intra-regional trade is becoming increasingly prominent. For example, the East African Union has proceeded into the customs union in 2005 and the goods that will enter into the region can be freely distributed to the markets without the customs barriers between the member countries.
- It is not possible for our exporters who wish to do business in African countries to know Turkey's relations with these blocs. The courses that they should refer to in this regard will be country desks at the Ministry of Economy, DEIK and the Exporters' Unions. These organizations are required to carry out work on trade agreements, trade barriers, standards, packaging information, quotas, customs duties between Turkey and the potential country in order to inform our exporters.
- Knowing the people, customs and traditions of the countries to be traded is a situation that renders Africa special. Different cultures, religions, languages, dialects and forms of clothing are quite common in Africa where very diverse mass groups such as Blacks, Whites, Indians and Arabs live. Portuguese, Arabic, French and English are most spoken languages in Africa in addition to African tribal languages (almost 2000 local languages). It is initially enough to know French and English in order to be able to do business. The language barriers can be solved by African students studying in Turkey.
- The biggest challenge that our exports experience in African countries is the limited storage and distribution facilities and retail chains. The easiest way to facilitate is to give priority to coastal countries. There is no doubt that sea transportation will provide both easy and cheaper shipping possibilities. Of these countries, the selection of countries with storage, distribution and retail chains will take precedence.
- Possible competitors, sales patterns and market prices of the product in the market to be selected are of critical importance. The most accurate and easiest way to obtain information in this matter is to participate in general and private exhibitions and to establish close relations with purchasing delegations. Turkish exporters are no strangers to countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya which are the countries of North Africa. These countries are Mediterranean countries although they are in the African continent. In addition, our historical ties are still alive and the predominant part of our exports is to these countries. In this case, the way to increase our exports in Africa should be the land of Africa or Sub-Saharan African countries. Therefore, it is very important to conduct separate foreign market research on Sub-Saharan countries on a country basis and present it to the benefit of our exporters.

- The acceleration of the steps for the provision of mutual visa facilitation with the countries in the continent will also have a positive impact on future targets and accelerate our economic relations with Africa.

As a result, in comparison to the past, the great powers which are aware of the potential of the continent and follow the developments in the region carefully have begun to follow policies towards having more comprehensive and high-level relations with the countries in the continent. Therefore, the African continent has become one of the most important competitive areas of the twenty-first century and this does not seem to change at least in the near future.

Turkey has a great opportunity to develop its economic and commercial relations with 55 small or large countries in African continent by utilizing various advantages that come from the past and still continue today in order to develop its relations with the African countries. The economic and commercial cooperation on the basis of the achievement of the foreign trade target of \$ 50 billion will bring benefits to businessmen and investors from both sides through economic and commercial cooperation to be made in the forthcoming period and contribute to the sustainable development of friendly and brotherly African countries.

Turkey, which is not one of the exploitation forces of the West and not among the backward countries of the East, is one of the exceptional countries among the states of the world that can command “confidence” in the African continent. The Ottoman monuments in Africa have proven how much value Turkey has bestowed upon the continent since its history and that it has never been there for the purpose of exploitation. Turkey wishes to be a country that aims to gain the trust of people in the region rather being an exploitative power in the African continent by developing projects that will contribute to the development of the people of the region such as human rights, education of the people in the region and infrastructure on the subject of developing its relations with Africa on the win-win principle. African countries, which have small and medium-sized economies, need partnerships in order to ensure their economic transformation. In this context, strong partnerships with African countries will be an important step to prevent the exploitation of the rich resources and human capacity of the continent.

Turkey is in a struggle to develop its trade and economic relations with African countries as well as with all countries. Economic concerns and interests lie behind the desires of other countries to establish relations especially with Sub-Saharan countries. Turkey has shown its difference from very beginning and has won the friendship and love of Africans through gratuitous aid. Henceforth, it will become a country which will bring benefits to whole Africa and emerge beneficial within the framework of “win-win” policy. This made Turkey more advantageous compared to other countries. These advantages have rendered Turkey more reliable and preferential before the African countries.

Turkey began to recall the regions with which it has historical and cultural ties within the changing social and political balances in the world after the “Cold War”. In this context, one of the regions with which Turkey has started to develop relations has become the African continent. In particular, the importance of Sub-Saharan Africa, which will increase more in the upcoming period, requires Turkey to become more active in the region in every area. In order to improve economic relations with this region, it is necessary to develop an effective Sub-Saharan Africa expansion vision covering the entire continent especially over the North African line and going down into the depths of Africa.

In this new environment where competition in international markets has become challenging, countries try to obtain a greater share of global trade by utilizing both opportunities and threats ideally. It becomes increasingly important to become pro-active in trade relations, to enter into new markets under increasing conditions of competition and to increase their share in existing markets. Turkey is in a much more advantageous position with Sub-Saharan Africa than global powers such as China and India in terms of historical ties and geographical proximity. It is possible for Turkey to reach a much more influential position in the African continent than China provided that it uses this advantage that comes from the depths of history in the best possible way. At this point, in order to be successful, it will be sufficient for Turkey to approach the region within the balance policy by taking the economic, political and ethnic differences between the countries of the region into consideration and to give priority to the relations with countries in the region.

Turkey’s relations with Africa have obtained qualification today and Turkey has taken significant steps towards becoming an important dynamic of global competition in Africa. It is possible for Turkey to compete with China, USA, Russia and other active forces in Africa economically, politically and militarily. But it should be able to show its difference and to tell this to African people, their governments and businessmen.

What Turkey needs to do at this point is to ensure the sharing of mutual goodwill and all kinds of resources by not adopting a particular attitude like USA-China-Russia or European countries which are alternative to each other. It should be expressed well that we want to engage in business cooperation not for exploitation like other countries that want to establish economic hegemony. Otherwise, it will be impossible for Turkey to compete with China's cheap labor force and current investments.

The twenty-first century has become the "African-century". The African continent has had to leave all the wealth it has up to now outside its border without enriching itself. Today, changing production, consumption and marketing forms as well as changing concept of business cooperation has evolved into a structure that no longer allows unilateral beneficiaries. The form of business and partnership in the new century is shaped within the principle of both by economic and political benefit. Therefore, the relations to be established with Africa need to be built in accordance with the principle of bilateral benefit not on the principle of unilateral benefit.

The collective memories that the past relations with the EU and USA left in the African minds of the African countries impede a significant obstacle to the approach of the Black Continent to these countries. The realization of the aid and investments of the EU and USA in accordance with certain conditions is perceived as intervention in the internal affairs of African countries and is defined as "new colonialism". For this reason, the African countries are closer to forming business cooperation with regions that do not have a bad past in their collective memories. For this reason, countries that have no problems with the continent have a significant advantage.

The process of relationship known as "Partnership Policy with Africa" replaced the process of Expansion to Africa when Turkey became a country that provided solutions to regional problems. Taking its national values and interests into consideration, Turkey must put forth the required initiative to actively use its image that has not been stained with colonialism in any period of history. Turkey's continuance to approach its historical experience, social, political and cultural heritage, and the opportunities and resources it has with African governments and people within the framework of "African solutions to African problems" principle and on the basis of mutual benefit must be the foundation of its partnership policy.

In this case, it would be possible for us to develop our relations with African countries in every field. Today, it is possible to interpret Africa as a source for the re-emergence of the new world order. No system has the ability to be fair, balanced and sustainable now. Therefore, the old model that interprets Africa as a one-sided transfer of resources and places the relationship on dependency has come to an end. The multi-faceted relationship that keeps mutual benefit as base, dignifies human being with its capacity to be human and therefore, that is not only economic, but spread in political, cultural, social and every area will be a positive approach in Turkey's expansion in Africa.

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