



INTERNATIONAL TRADE RELATIONS OF TURKEY AND SOUTH AFRICA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Bisharo Ali MOHAMUD

Istanbul Commerce University, Turkey

Cihat KÖKSAL

Istanbul Commerce University, Turkey

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Abstract:

South Africa attracted the attention of the world with its rich natural resources such as gold and diamonds, followed a closed foreign trade policy until the end of the apartheid period in the 1990s. With the transition to democracy, South Africa launched a forward-looking and comprehensive economic development by becoming a member of organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and BRICS. Moreover, international trade policies and financial transactions have been liberalized and simplified. In the early 2000s, Turkey began to build and develop its relationships overseas, such as with African Countries. Turkey has a long tradition of involvement in Africa. The aim of this study is to analyze the international trade relations between Turkey and Africa particularly South Africa from a historical perspective. The results conclude important policy recommendations for increasing the trade potential of the two countries under investigation.

Keywords:

South Africa, Africa, Turkey, International Trade, Trade Agreements

1. Introduction

In recent years, the increasing interaction of emerging countries like India, China, Russia, Japan, and Brazil has altered Africa's connection with western powers on the one hand and provoked a reevaluation of Africa's growth potential on the other (Bayram, 2020). It can be described as a global economy's transformation, which has increased the need for energy and mineral resources, turning Africa into a geopolitical frontline (Donelli, 2018). Turkey has emerged as one of the new players looking to strengthen its connection with African nations over the last few decades.

In the 21st century, the world's, especially emerging actors' interest in Africa, mainly in Sub-Saharan countries, has risen. Turkey started reorientating its foreign strategy in Africa. In order to strengthen its political, economic, and social connection with Sub-Saharan countries and Africa in general, the Ankara government invested in new political, economic, social and humanitarian aid mechanisms. In that context, Turkey introduced a programme called "Turkey's Opening to Africa" in 1998, it has proclaimed 2005 as the "Year of Africa" (Dinçer, 2019). Additionally, in 2008, Turkey joined the African Development Bank as a non-regional member (Wheeler, 2011). Since then, new embassies and trade consular were opened, several summits and forums were held that strengthen the economic, political and cultural connection between African countries and Turkey. Trade volume and foreign direct investment (FDI) between African countries and Turkey have increased afterwards. Likewise, African studies in academia have risen, although it is lower than expected. Due to the absence of colonial history in Africa, Turkey's relations with African countries have a positive economic and political dimension and are developing rapidly (Özkan, 2010).

This study tries to investigate the international trade between Turkey and African countries, South Africa in particular. In the second part, the historical and economic relations between Turkey and African countries are explained. The third part analyses the trade volume and FDI between Turkey and Africa. The fourth part investigates the bilateral trade balance between Turkey and South Africa and the international trade structure between these two

countries. The last section concludes the study with recommendations for strengthening and improving the economic ties between Turkey and African countries.

2. Economic Relations between Turkey and African Countries

With its abundant natural resources and a population of more than one billion, the African continent is the target of many countries to trade and invest (Arslan, 2012). Also, it is now a centre of economic concern for the major actors like European Unions and United States of America (USA) and many emerging nations like China, Brazil, India, Russia, South Korea and Turkey (Donelli, 2018). Considering the fact that many African countries have made predictable progress in human development and economic growth in recent years and can become a developing status in the next 20 years, it is expected that Africa will turn into an attractive market in the near future (Arslan, 2012). Moreover, Sub-Saharan countries have experienced a shift away from reliance on traditional colonial nations toward rising powers, including Turkey (Donelli, 2018).

Turkey and Africa have strong political, economic, and cultural links dating back to the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was closely connected to North Africa because they share the same history, religion and traditions (Gunn, 2020). This area became well known to the Ottoman, and their relationships developed for many years (Kaya & Warner, 2012). The Ottoman Empire and afterwards the Republic of Turkey have not given much attention to the other part of Africa for many years, particularly the Sub-Saharan region. During the Ottoman era, several, but not constant, relations were developed with African Kingdoms and Empires like the Kanem Bornu Kingdom and the Hausa nations (Gunn, 2020). In the south part of Africa, the existence of the Ottoman Empire was noticeable as the Ottoman Honorary Consulate was established in Cape Town in 1861, and the first Ottoman imam Abu Bakr Efendi, was also sent to Muslim society in South Africa (Özkan & Akgün, 2010).

In the nineteenth century, there had been close relations between Turkey and South Africa. Due to the start of the first world war (WWI), and then the foundation of the Republic of Turkey and South Africa of being under an apartheid system until the 1990s (Bishku, 2019), historical and political relations of both countries entered into recession (Özkan, 2010). It was due to the domestic conditions of both parties, such as (i) the emergence of the new state system and the establishment of democracy in Turkey (ii) after a successful Independence War (1919-1923), the Turkish Republic was established and "western vision" was made one of the principles upon which the new nation was to be based on (Tepeciklioğlu, 2017), (iii) for many years the African continent, in particular Sub-Saharan, remained in the international system a marginal and unworthy area (Dellal & Sara, 2018) and (iv) South African government of that time followed up a closed foreign policy (Özkan, 2010). Although this recession period started to move slowly in the early 1990s, it has regained its vitality during the 2000s (Özkan, 2010).

Following the Second World War, African countries began to have their independence after being separated from colonial rule. South Africa was excluded as it was under the apartheid system, and Turkey's relations have followed a bumpy course. (Dellal & Sara, 2018). The majority of these African countries were located in Northern Africa. The main reason that allowed Turkey to build better relationships with these countries was their historical, cultural and regional ties developed during the Ottoman Empire. The majority of Northern African countries were under non-colonial rule (Tepeciklioğlu, 2017).

On the other hand, in the late 1960s and 1970s, Turkey started to establish relationships through diplomatic relations with most sub-Saharan African countries. For example, Turkey provided humanitarian assistance to a number of countries, including Eritrea, Namibia and Zambia and signed bilateral trade and cooperation agreements with Sierra Leone and Somalia, including the "Technical and Economic Cooperation Treaty" in the 1970s and early 1980s, and made official travels to several countries in Africa, like Tunisia, Egypt and Ethiopia. (Tepeciklioğlu, 2017).

Nevertheless, all these efforts remained limited in the 1990s, when the Soviet Union was disintegrated (Bilgic & Nascimento, 2014). The government also initiated a more sustainable foreign policy, allowing the country to further incorporate into world markets (Wheeler, 2011). However, Turkey's first concrete step of comprehensive policy objectives in Africa was by accepting the "Africa Action Plan" in 1998 (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dış İşleri Bakanlığı [MFA], 2018). This plan laid the groundwork for the majority of bilateral relations established with Sub-Saharan Africa (Kedir, 2016). Conversely, due to the coalition management in Turkey's domestic politics and the global economic crisis, the actions on the Turkey's opening to Africa could not be initiated during this time.

In 2003, the Ministry of economy strengthened economic ties with African countries and implemented them as part of its policy, marking 2005 as the "Year of Africa" (Bağcı & Afacan, 2013). Thus, after 2005, Turkey has begun to

show an interest and commitment to become a leading player in Africa and started to play a critical role in resolving the continent's various problems (Ngwa, 2019). Also, it has increased its ties with Sub-Saharan countries through bilateral trade projects and agreements. It shows that political backing for the 1998 agenda became visible. (Donelli, 2018). A noticeable example of this recently changing attention to Africa has been the visit of the head of the government to Ethiopia and South Africa in 2005, which was the first visit to Sub-Equatorial Africa made by the Turkish Government (Karaoğan, 2018). For all of these efforts and improved relations between Turkey and Africa, Turkey was also given "Observer Status" by the African Union on April 12, 2005.

In January 2008, Turkey was accepted as an African Union strategic partner at the African Union Summit in Ethiopia (Özkan, 2008). The fact that African nations viewed Turkey as an important international actor has been reinforced by high levels of participation in the subsequent diplomacy summits. The first one was held in August 2008 in Ankara under the phase "Solidarity and Partnership for a Common Future" that participated forty-nine African nations, including the South African Deputy President Mr. Mlambo-Ngcuka. It was highlighted the importance that economic opportunities, civil rights, democracy and social equality between the continent and Turkey needed to be established. Also, such summits and meetings are expected to introduce Turkey and many African countries as they have little to no prior experience and increase the opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties and explore new avenues for cooperation. On the other hand, if one looks at the participation in the summit, most of them were foreign ministers and senior representatives except few countries. It is a strong display that Africans themselves have not understood the advantages of the Turkish openness to Africans (Özkan, 2008).

The same year, Turkey was approved as an out-of-region partner by the African Development Bank. By which time, its financial status had significantly improved (Wheeler, 2011). That year was seen as the start of a stable and sustainable phase of cooperation. Additionally, Turkey strengthened its relations with the regional economic communities like the East African Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Sub-Continental organization like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) (Dinçer, 2019). Additionally, to improve the cultural ties and allow the spread of knowledge between the two countries, Turkey started to give African students scholarships, some of them provided great value in Turkey and to their home countries. It shows that the current relationship of Turkey with Africa is far more than just another nation that is approaching Africa like traditional colonial actors. Colonial actors interested in Africa mainly for raw material resource for their industries and market for their final products, do not provide a win-win strategy for African nations, unlike Turkey.

Since 2008, the number of embassies increased to 42 by the end of 2019. Similarly, the number of African Embassies in Ankara, which was ten at the beginning of 2008, has risen to 36 (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişler Bakanlığı [MFA], 2020). Also, the insufficient number of diplomatic representations have been increased. Additionally, the relation between Turkey and Sub-Saharan countries has been strengthening, reflecting the progressive development of trade and investment between both sides. For example, Arçelik's acquisition of Defy is the most significant investment made by a Turkish company in South Africa to date. Arçelik is the leading home appliances producer of Turkey, and Defy is home appliances industry leader of South Africa. On the other hand, in 2013, South African Company Metair purchased Turkey's biggest battery manufacturer Mutlu Akü, with a value of 280 million dollars. It has been the largest investment in Turkey coming from South Africa (Yetkin, 2018).

3. Trade Volume of Turkey And Africa

Although most of the African countries have experienced some problems like internal conflicts, terrorism, poverty, inefficient use of resources that have emerged during the decolonization process and that most of these challenges are still waiting for solutions, its potential natural resources, young population, workforce, emerging technology and modernization made the continent inevitable destination market for developed and developing countries including Turkey. (Arslan, 2018).

Like other emerging nations, Turkey relies on external markets to maintain its economic development. Since Turkey declared its opening to Africa in 1998, it began to increase its trade volume and investment with African countries, mostly in agriculture, construction and textile fields (Donelli, 2018).

Turkish exporters started to think that Africa has a large capacity to fulfil the interest of their business as an alternative export market besides Balkan, Middle East and European Union. In 2011 Turkish companies maintain 19% of their business volumes in African countries, particularly those in the areas of construction and infrastructure

(Armagan, 2011). For example, in 2015, Limak Holding started to establish in Mozambique a cement factory with a yearly capacity of 2 million tons, worth 40 million US dollars. Since 1970, such infrastructure and construction companies have been involved in projects in North African countries like the ones in Libya, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco. However, these projects have recently started in sub-Saharan African countries such as Ethiopia, Congo, Nigeria, Cameroon and Senegal (Tepeciklioglu, 2017).

Although the amount of trade between Turkey and Africa has been risen since "opening to Africa plan" in 1998 and Africa year (2005), it has tripled after Turkey's opening mutual embassies with African countries, increasing the number of Turkish Airlines flights to Africa, Turkey's entrance to the African Development Bank and expansion of business scope by opening trade consultants with the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) are some factors that considered the potential increase of Turkey's trade with Africa since 2009 (Bishku, 2019).

Furthermore, Africa is an important market for Turkey in order to reach its 500 billion export target in 2023 (DEİK, 2018). Within the scope of this target, Turkey has to increase its trade link with developing countries on the continent like Egypt, Libya, Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia.

From that point of view, as shown in Table 1, this increase in Turkey and Africa relations reflected in the amount of trade and between 2016-2020. Turkey's total trade activities with African countries have increased compared to previous years except 2020. However, this change cannot be described as a sharp increase. For example, Turkey's exports to Africa was 11.9 billion US dollars in 2016 and rose to 16.6 billion US dollars in 2019. Unfortunately, the impact of COVID-19 on the global economy decreased the number to 15.2 billion US dollars in 2020. On a more optimistic view, bilateral trade was strengthened between 2016 and 2019. Nevertheless, Turkey's 50 billion trade target with Africa seems like an unrealistic goal, and it is clear that it would not be able to achieve it in the near future considering the rate of annual growth (Arslan, 2018).

Table 1. Trade of Turkey with Africa (2016-2020)

Total Exports of Turkey	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
(Thousand US \$)	149,246,999	164,494,619	177,168,756	180,832,722	169,669,410
Total Africa	11,903,389	12,237,301	15,088,949	16,623,201	15,240,951
North Africa	8,069,446	7,918,462	9,915,077	10,828,878	9,224,276
Other Africa	3,833,943	4,318,839	5,173,872	5,794,323	6,016,675
Total Import of Turkey	202,189,242	238,715,128	231,152,483	210,345,203	219,509,837

(Thousand US \$)					
Total Africa	5,404,555	7,182,389	7,137,423	5,820,748	7,306,375
North Africa	3,252,568	4,203,460	4,685,547	4,009,992	4,753,849
Other Africa	2,151,987	2,978,629	2,451,876	1,810,756	2,552,526

Source: TÜİK International Trade Statistics 2021

As shown in the Table 1, total trade volume between Turkey and African countries in 2020 is 22.5 billion dollars. 15.2 billion dollars of it are exports, and import was 7.3 billion dollars. Although, Turkey's exports to Africa has been increasing since 2009, in 2020, compared to the previous year, Turkey's imports to Africa increased, while exports showed a decline. It is due to Turkey's trade deficit with Sub-Saharan countries like South Africa increased as they export natural resources to Turkey. On the other hand, Turkey's main trade partners in Africa has not changed. With 2.8 billion US dollars Egypt ranks first, followed by Algeria (\$ 1.8 billion), Morocco (\$ 1.5 billion), Libya (\$ 0.9 billion), Tunisia (\$ 0.9 billion), RSA (0.5 billion dollars) and Nigeria (0.3 billion dollars) (TÜİK, 2020).

As the table made pretty clear, the trade volume is behind the expectations in many regions, especially in Sub-Saharan countries. Throughout the last decade, Turkey's interest towards countries in Sub-Sahara increased trade volume. Still, this link remained limited according to the northern part of the continent, where Turkey has the same historical, cultural, and religious aspects during the Ottoman era. From this perspective, it is very important for Turkey to diversify its trading partners in the African continent, for example; with the countries like Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria Kenya and South Africa. These countries are the biggest economic actors in the continent and have great potential in trade, but their bilateral trade with Turkey is lower than expected. The main reason is Turkey has ignored most of the Sub-Saharan countries because of not having historical, cultural and religious links like North African countries. The other reason is that Turkey has not much information about the countries as they are a lot of clan-group that speaks several languages and have different cultures. The greatest example we can show is that even on official websites like the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) and Ministry of Trade (DTM) categorize the continent into "North Africa" and "Other Africa" instead of splitting it regionally like north, south, west and east (Arslan, 2018).

The exports of Africa are essential for unprocessed raw materials, such as oil and minerals. The value of oil increases steadily with the growth of the world economy. Recently, mines preserved their share in exports with volume and price increases, while the percentage of agricultural and industrial products decreased. African imports are dominated by industrial products. Although African countries have significant agricultural resources, they import food products to cover the fundamental food deficit. For example, between 2010 and 2015, the biggest share in total imports of Africa was vehicles and transportation vehicles with 63%, while the share of food products was 15%. (UNECA, 2017).

While Turkey's trade volume with Sub-Sahara in 2003 was \$5,47 billion dollars, this figure increased four times in 2014 and reached 23 billion US dollars, also it rised to \$16.7 billion dollars in 2016. Turkey's total investment in Africa is expected to exceed \$6 billion dollars. In order to effectively advance economic relationship with Africa, Turkey has also signed trade and economic relations with some African Countries and established 26 commercial representation offices in 26 African Countries. Turkey has signed some agreements like preventing double taxation

and free trade agreements with Some African nations, most of them in North Africa (Karaođan, 2018). Turkey aims to increase the number of such agreements in the near future.

4. Bilateral Trade Balance of Turkey and South Africa

While Turkey has historical links with South Africa during the Ottoman Empire like other African countries, this link remained very small after of the fall of the Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and South Africa's apartheid era (1948-1994) (Bishku, 2019). Since the 1970s, the Turkish government put effort to diversify its economic and political ties with Africa. This way, Turkey could improve its connection with North Africa in a restricted way but neglected Sub-Saharan African countries.

Although Turkey and South Africa established diplomatic relations only about a decade ago, contact between Turks as Ottomans and South Africa dates back to the second half of the 19th century. The existence of a muslim population in South Africa combined with the discovery of massive gold and diamond deposits likely motivated the Ottomans to look more carefully at the region at that time (Ayđın, 2003).

Over the past 20 years, Turkey and South Africa have had critical political, social, and economic transformations. Both Turkey and South Africa have taken significant steps to improve their bilateral relations. There are several important reasons behind the increasing ties between the two countries. One of these reasons is that the traditional foreign policies of the two countries have changed, and they have adopted foreign trade-oriented policies. In 1994 South Africa and in 2002, Turkey had begun to develop their diplomatic and trade relation with strategic actors in global politics (Bishku, 2019).

Turkey's ties with South Africa have changed significantly since the 2000s. For example, in 2000, their trade activities that were less than \$250 million dollars exceeded \$2 billion in 2017. With the Turkish Lira depreciating its value against the US dollar in 2018, imports dropped to \$1.9 billion dollars. Their bilateral trade was at the highest level in 2007 and 2008. Although these values could not be preserved for several years due to the global economic downturn in 2008, in the last twenty years, the increase in the total amount of trade between the two countries has undoubtedly been a great success (Sırdag, 2017). This success is impressive despite the absence of Turkey's Africa policy before the 2000s.

The total exports of South Africa increased from \$51,6 million dollars in 2005 to \$81 million US dollars in 2015 and \$90 million dollars in 2019 (Trade Map , 2020). Similarly, Turkey's total exports increased from \$73.47 million dollars in 2005 to \$150.98 million dollars in 2015 and to \$180.83 million dollars in 2019 (Trade Map, 2020). When these data are taken into consideration, it is clear that the international trade of the two countries have increased, and it is expected to increase further in the upcoming years.

Table 2. Exports and Imports between Turkey- South Africa (RSA) (1.000\$)

Years	Turkish exports to RSA	Turkish imports from RSA	Trade Balance
2002	87,206	211,032	-123,826
2003	121,528	335,713	-214,185
2005	315,739	1,259,978	-944239
2010	369,235	889,635	-520,400

2015	489,167	918,541	-429,374
2016	405,990	1,058,114	-652 124
2017	485,070	1,744,438	-1,259,368
2018	534,230	1,381,537	-847,307
2019	552,282	757,524	-205,242

Source: TÜİK International Trade Statistics 2021

When Table 2 is analyzed, we can say that trade ties between Turkey and South Africa have strengthened each year. For example, in 2002 Turkey's export to RSA was \$87,2 thousand and imports was \$211 thousand. However, when Turkey declared the year of Africa in 2005, the trade volume between the two countries have risen five times. Thus, the amount of export and import exceeded \$313,7 thousand and \$1,2 million respectively. But the effect of having a coup attempt in Turkey in 2016 caused a decline in exports compared to the previous year. Bilateral trade has increased again between 2018 and 2019, and the bilateral trade of the two countries reached \$1.30 billion in 2019 and South Africa accounted for 18% of Turkey's total trade volume with Sub-Saharan Africa (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2020).

South Africa ranks 44th at Turkey's total imports and 59th at total exports (Trade Map, 2020). As shown in Table 2, Turkey has trade deficit against South Africa, but in recent years, Turkey is close to cover the deficit by increasing its exports to South Africa.

Turkey's leading export products to South Africa are machinery, mechanical appliances, nuclear reactor, mineral fuels, mineral oils, vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling stock, and parts and accessories, electrical machinery and equipment and parts thereof; sound recorders and reproducers, television, rubber and articles thereof. Leading import products are machinery, mechanical appliances, nuclear reactors, vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling stock, mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation, natural or cultured pearls, precious or semi-precious stones, precious metals, iron and steel (Trade Map, 2020). The imported items and exported items of both countries are almost the same. Therefore, we can comprehend that the industrial structure of the two countries is similar.

South Africa's investment in Turkey remained limited on the investment side, while Turkey's investments in South Africa are increasing but not as desired. About twenty Turkish firms have investments in South Africa and currently around 70 Turkish companies operate in RSA. It is estimated that the amount of investment made by these companies exceeds \$500 million (Sırdağ, 2017).

Tourism is a newly discovered area of interaction between South African and Turkish people. The number of tourists travelling between the two countries is increasing every year. Especially, since the start of direct flights of Turkish Airlines between Istanbul-Capetown in October 2015, Istanbul-Durban in November 2015 and Istanbul - Johannesburg September 2007 the exchange of tourists between the RSA and Turkey have increased significantly (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dış İşleri Bakanlığı [MFA], 2018).

5. Conclusions

There is an increasing interest in Africa by developing countries like China, Brazil, India, South Korea and Russia. In the last 20 years, Turkey is also one of those emerging actors with a keen interest in African affairs. The primary reason behind this interaction is that Africa is home to natural resources for their industries and market for their final products.

Although Turkey has historical links with Africa over most developing countries, its economic capacity is not as big as China and India. Despite Turkey push to open its door to Africa in 1998 with the plan of "Turkey's opening to Africa", it made a full connection with the northern part of the continent. It ignored the part below of the maghrib of the continent. The primary factor behind this is that Turkey shares the same culture, history and religion with these countries also, geographically, it is nearby to Turkey. Sub-Saharan countries are ignored in Turkey's international trade because either Turkey is mainly following the footsteps of the Ottoman Empire or does not have enough information and infrastructure to enter the markets of Sub-Saharan countries. Turkey is an export-driven country which has a target of \$500 billion export for 2023. To achieve this goal, Turkey needs to pay full attention to Sub-Saharan Countries as this part of the continent has the most emerging countries and the most prominent young population.

In order to strengthen its relation with Sub-Saharan, the authors recommend Turkey to arrange summits and forums to interact with Sub-Saharan Africa and organize intense bilateral meetings and conferences one by one with these countries. Sub-Saharan countries have big actors like South Africa, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya and sub-regional organizations like IGAD, ECOWAS, SADC. It would be suitable for Turkey to have bilateral agreements like it has done with North African countries or inter-continental agreements like BRICS that other emerging actors signed previously. In order to learn the culture of these countries, Turkey needs to link their exporters with the region. It is clear that it is not easy to have a solid and reliable connection with these societies as they have several cultures and languages. However, promoting tourism activities and establishing new means of exchange programmes for students may help the societies know each other better and will have positive long term effects.

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