
Turkey's 'New' Engagements in Africa and Asia: Scope, Content and Implications

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Abstract

Since the AK Party assumed power in 2002, Turkish foreign policy has gone through a tremendous change both in its content and scope. The most striking and 'new' aspect of Turkey's foreign policy has been toward Africa and Asia. This article examines and offers a holistic view of these developments. African opening represents a perfect convergence of civil society and state cooperation and bear fruit in political, economic and social terms in a very short time. However, the most important implication is that it aims to conceptualize a 'new' Africa in Turkey by overcoming the image of two separate Africa: Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa. Ankara's Asia policy has been shaped with an intention of placing the existing relations "in a certain systematic" with the Turkic republics in Central Asia; to reach "a policy of normalization" with countries like China and India; and to follow certain political and economic policies to translate relations "from normal to deep cooperation" with countries like South Korea and Japan.

Key Words

Turkish foreign policy, Africa, Asia, China, India.

Introduction

Following the AK Party's accession to power in 2002, Turkey's foreign policy opening towards long-neglected regions has been gaining more depth and diversity. Among these initiatives, the most striking and in some aspects the most "novel" opening has been the relations developed with Africa and Asia. To place these relations within the general course of Turkish foreign policy is of importance in understanding both the general direction of these relations and their possible inclinations.

The purpose of this article is to place Turkey's post-2002 African and Asian openings in a framework and to develop a general perspective. Firstly the economic, political and intellectual foundations that have led these relations to develop will be discussed; following this, the economic and political course of the relations with Africa and Asia, including problem areas, will be examined in detail.

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The Intellectual, Economic and Political Foundations of the Openings

While it is not possible to separate Turkey's African and Asian openings from the general tendencies of Turkey's foreign policy, it is possible to evaluate the economic, political and intellectual foundations of this opening in three basic points. A correct understanding of the analysis of the intellectual basis for the openings will provide an answer to the question of why Turkey has started to undertake these openings towards different regions of the world that were previously neglected in Turkish foreign policy.

The major intellectual transition in Turkish foreign policy has been the visible prominence of a geographical perception in its outlook towards the whole world.

Especially following the AK Party's accession to power, the first foundation for change has been intellectual. The major intellectual transition in Turkish foreign policy has been the visible prominence of a geographical perception in its outlook towards the whole world. Turkey no longer construes the world as it was during the Cold War period, but has rather adopted new balances

of power while re-conceptualizing its understanding of international politics in a new framework. This intellectual transition and transformation has emerged as a result of foreign political circumstances as much as Turkey's own political dynamics.

Turkey is today looking at its region and the world with a new and different perspective and as a consequence there have been radical changes in its approach to Africa and Asia. According to this new perspective Africa and Asia are not regarded as distant and troubled regions but as possible partners with which relations in political and economic areas ought to be established and developed, and where unity of action should be undertaken when necessary.

The second transformation that constitutes the economic foundation of the openings has been Turkey's efforts to reposition itself in a changing global economy. Although Turkey's increasing engagement with the global economy started after 1980 with the efforts of Turgut Özal,¹ the systematic framework of a growing economic engagement was established after 2002 in the AK Party era, because Özal perceived the world as an area of opportunities rather than a land of perils and especially had tried to realize these new global economic opportunities..

The struggle to redefine a worldview which concentrated on economics has led the way and laid the foundations

for the definitions of a new “national role” and foreign policy orientation, which have manifested themselves even more during the AK Party era.² Yet even a short comparison of the AK Party and Özal eras clearly presents the basic differences between the two periods. Özal’s approach displayed both a structuralist and an opportunist character and regarded the economy as the principal component. As a result, in this period Turkey embraced a pragmatic approach. However, during the AK Party era, Turkey has been trying to develop a new regional and global perspective based especially on historical and cultural components. Ankara’s proactive and dynamic openings towards different regions of the world have been systematic and important initiatives rather than being appendages to its relations with the West.³ From this framework, Turkey’s definition of itself as a “central country” rather than a “bridge” is an indicator of this new vision.⁴ Turkey, when viewed from this standpoint, both started to open up towards other regions such as Asia and Africa with an institutionalized partnership and wanted to play a more active role in international relations.⁵ Therefore, the AK Party era’s foreign policy is more comprehensive and has more depth in both style and expression than that of the Özal era, and, as a result, will probably have long-term outcomes.

Third, the political foundations of Turkey’s Africa and Asia openings, which

are parallel to the two aforementioned approaches, are to increase Ankara’s activities in all regions and international organizations, and to increase Turkey’s activities to contribute to regional and global peace. Today Turkey is not prone to crisis, but instead pursues a foreign policy with a specific vision and perspective.⁶ Within Turkey’s political vision, its relations with Asia and Africa are not only an alternative to its relations with the West, but also do not pose a contradiction. In a world where the international system is no longer bipolar, Turkey wants to display an active presence in all international and regional organizations and has determined its foreign policy inclinations within this framework.⁷ Turkey’s observer status in the African Union, its partnership of dialogue in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), its active stance in the G-20 and its non-permanent member status in the UN Security Council in the 2008-2010 term have to be evaluated in this framework. The African and Asian openings are part of these efforts.

African Dimension of ‘New’ Turkish Foreign Policy⁸

Until recently it could not have been thought that Turkey would show a deep interest towards Africa nor would it have been expected that a Turkish minister of

foreign affairs would stress that Africa is important with regards to a new foreign policy.⁹ However, there has been a drastic change in Turkish foreign policy after 2002 in this respect. Although Turkey's relations with the African continent have a long history, today, especially in economic areas, important steps have been taken within a short period of time. Whilst Turkey's interest in Africa in the post-Cold War era started in 1998, this relationship has moved forward and has undergone revolutionary transformations especially as a result of the efforts of AK Party. Africa, which 10 years ago was remembered with images of hunger, poverty and conflict, is today seen as a continent with which mutual cooperation could be developed in economic and political fields. In the following section, a short summary of the historical dimension of the relations will be given in order to better understand the contemporary Turkey-Africa relations, followed by an analysis of the economic and political relations that have been developed since 2002.

The Historical and Social Foundations of Turkish-African Relations

It is important to look at the African continent from a geographical perspective in order to better understand Turkey's historical relations with Africa. The geographical apprehension about Africa

in Turkey has been that Africa generally is divided into two: North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. This division has been shaped by historical developments, particularly the Ottoman legacy, and has also operated as a foundation for Turkey's outlook towards Africa with regards to foreign policy. The Ottomans had established considerably strong relations with North Africa and many states in contemporary Africa had been part of the Ottoman State in the 15th and 16th centuries. Therefore, North Africa is not a distant region from the context of the geographical contemplation of Turkish society basically for two reasons. The first is the historical proximity that arises from the Ottoman past of these North African nations and the Muslim population in these countries. This has caused Turkey to view North Africa as part of its immediate surroundings. From this perspective, the political and economic relations that have been developed with North Africa have never been questioned and the region has always been seen as an important part of diversifying Turkish foreign policy. The second is that because North Africa is regarded as part of the greater Middle Eastern region, Turkish society has always felt close to it.¹⁰

Sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, has always been seen as a distant geographical region and has generally been associated with poverty, hunger, epidemics and civil war. This approach is generally the principal component of

the identification of Sub-Saharan Africa in Turkish society. Although Turkey, due to its Ottoman past, has relatively important relations with Africa, this historical past has not drawn any academic or political attention. Following 1999, especially with the 700th anniversary celebrations of the establishment of the Ottoman state, researchers have started to pay attention to neglected areas in Ottoman history.¹¹ However, it is possible to say that the unfavourable image regarding Sub-Saharan Africa has started to change thanks to the work of the AK Party government and of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the recent period.

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When all is considered, Turkey's relations with Africa can be examined in three parts: The relationship starting from the final years of the Ottoman state to the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923; the relations between 1923 and 1998; and the relations after 1998. From a general perspective, there had been considerable relations with Africa in the Ottoman period,¹² and

then relations hit a record low during the Republican era. Relations have only been improved with the work that started after the approving of the Opening up to Africa Plan in 1998 and then gained momentum after 2005.¹³

In the first period, the Ottomans were involved in close relations with North Africa. Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and some other countries were completely or partially parts of the Ottoman state and were administered by the Ottomans. Furthermore, the Ottomans played an important role against Spanish interventions in North Africa and sent military assistance. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Eritrea, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somali, Djibouti and even Niger and Chad lived under Ottoman reign. The Ottomans actively worked to prevent the spread of Portuguese colonialism to West Africa. In the northern regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Ottomans played an important role within the balance of power system and developed relations of close companionship and cooperation with the Kanem-Bornu Empire, which was founded in the north of modern Nigeria, Niger and Chad. The Ottoman state signed a defence pact with the Kanem-Bornu Empire in 1575 under the reign of Murad III and sent military equipment and instructors to the Kanem-Bornu Empire.¹⁴ Also, after the opening of the first mosque in Lagos in 1894, the Ottoman state sent a special envoy to the region and rewarded

Muammer Shitta, the leader of the northern Nigeria Muslim community with the highest rank as “Bey” and decorated him with the Ottoman Medal of Honour. Members of the Shitta-Bey family still play an important part in Nigerian social and political life and preserve their influence.¹⁵

In the southern part of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Ottomans had diplomatic relations since 1861. After the appointment of PE de Roubaix on 18 February 1861 as honorary consul to Cape Town, which remains within the borders of the contemporary Republic of South Africa, the appointment of permanent consuls was continued. On 21 April 1914, Mehmet Remzi Bey was appointed as the first diplomat to the region and passed away there on 14 February 1916. Mehmet Remzi Bey’s grave is located in Johannesburg, South Africa, in the Braamfontein cemetery.¹⁶

The religious dimension also gained prominence from time to time in the Ottomans’ relations with Africa. For example, in 1863 the Muslim community in Cape Town petitioned for an imam from the Ottoman state through the honorary consul at the time, PE de Roubaix. Because the region was under British rule, this request of the Muslim community was delivered to the Ottoman state by the British Monarch. The Ottoman Sultan at the time ordered for an imam to be sent and Ebu Bekir

Effendi was sent to Cape Town. With the arrival of Ebu Bekir Effendi, strong relations between the Muslims of the region and the Ottoman state were established. The best example of this is the contribution made by South African Muslims to the Hejaz railway campaign. Between 1900 and 1907, the Muslim community raised approximately £366,551 and this money was sent to Istanbul.¹⁷ In return, the Ottoman state awarded contributors with over 200 golden, silver and copper medals. Some members of the Effendi family entered politics and played an active role in South Africa. While the Effendi surname is still widely used in South Africa, some family members have come back to Turkey, whilst others have immigrated to Canada, Australia and New Zealand.¹⁸

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In the period between 1923 and 1998, Turkish-African relations experienced a record low level. The main reasons for this are internal problems, such as the struggle against colonialism and the subsequent process of nation-state building experienced by both sides.

Although Turkey gradually started to show some interest in Africa during the Cold War, this remained rather limited to North Africa. Turkey, which approached the region with the logic of the Cold War, pursued a policy that was in some places in contradiction with historical and social realities. For example, in the UN General Assembly vote on Algeria's independence in 1956, Turkey's "no" vote is remembered as a historical mistake.¹⁹ Although Turkey's relations with North Africa remained limited, some developments in the economic and political sense were exhibited within the context of the multi-dimensional foreign policy efforts in the 1970s; however, no special significance had been attributed to Sub-Saharan Africa in that period. Despite this, Turkey had a role, albeit a limited one, in Zimbabwe's and Namibia's independence. Similarly, when Ghana won its independence in 1957, Turkey officially recognized Ghana and appointed an ambassador. Turkey recognized the independence of all African nations in the post-colonial period of the 1950s and 1960s and established diplomatic relations with them.²⁰ In this context, Turkey's first official permanent diplomatic mission in Africa was the consulate in Lagos that was opened in 1956.²¹ Whilst noting that Turkey generally showed some, albeit not very much, effort to establish political, cultural and economic relations, it is nevertheless necessary to emphasize that

these projects were not based on long-term goals or plans and that Turkey did not have any plans to undertake a comprehensive opening towards Africa.

The ongoing process, namely the third period in Turkey-Africa relations, first started in 1998 with the approval of the Opening up to Africa Plan.²² However, both the coalition government and the economic crisis of 2000-2001 delayed the implementation of this plan to the post-2002 AK Party government era.

Contemporary Turkish-African Relations

The Opening up to Africa Plan has been addressed in a serious manner by the AK Party since 2002 and has been implemented, with the support of a number of NGOs such as TUSKON (Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey) and İHH (Human Right and Freedoms Humanitarian Aid Foundation). The year 2005 was declared as "the Year of Africa" in Turkey and diplomatic, political and economic preparations were made accordingly. In this context, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visits to Ethiopia and South Africa in March 2005 were a turning point as they were the first visit of a Turkish prime minister below the equatorial line in the country's history. This tour was subject to criticism by many reporters, retired diplomats

and certain media organizations and was interpreted as wasting Turkey's limited energy.²³ However, despite these criticisms, with the political and economic returns gained from the work of especially non-governmental organizations and the initiatives that the AK Party government took, it is now possible to say that the image of Sub-Saharan Africa has changed.

Turkey, under the auspices of President Abdullah Gül, hosted a Turkish-African Summit for the first time between 18 and 21 August 2008 with the participation of top officials from over 50 African countries. Only Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland failed to send a representative to the summit. Morocco, which is not a member of the African Union due to the Western Sahara conflict, also participated. During the summit, Turkish leaders carried out numerous senior level meetings and petitioned for support in Turkey's bid to gain non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council election for the period of 2008-2010. Commercially, following this summit, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey and the Union of African Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture and Professions took a joint

decision to set up the Turkey-Africa Chamber and have laid the institutional foundations for developing commercial relations between the two countries. The next summit was decided to be held in an African country in 2013.²⁴

Since 2008, Turkey has been in an effort to increase its diplomatic presence in Africa and decided to open 15 new embassies. Currently Turkey has a total of 23 honorary consulates in Africa and has 24 embassies, half of which were established in 2009-2010. At least nine more embassies are already in preparation. While some of these ambassadors have been appointed already, they are busy finding building and organizing other logistics; for others, the official procedures are almost complete.

In 2005 Turkey gained observer status in the African Union and Prime Minister Erdoğan was invited as an honorary guest to the 2007 African Union Summit. In May 2008 Turkey, which was named as a strategic partner by the African Union, became a member of the African Development Bank.²⁵ In addition to the progress of Turkey's institutional relations with Africa, economic relations have also shown a significant development.

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Along with formal relations, the activities of public bodies, such as the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA), have played an important role in the development of relations. Muslim religious leaders coming from 22 different African countries met from 1-3 November 2006 in Istanbul as guests of the Presidency of Religious Affairs. The meeting took place with the participation of representatives from Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon, Madagascar, Rwanda, South Africa, Mali, Kenya, Congo, and numerous other countries. During the three-day meeting, various topics such as “Religious Identity in the Globalization Process”, “Religious Education and Opportunities in the Educational Field”, and “The Basic Approaches and Stances in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage” were discussed. However, more than the topics, the real merit of the meeting was to create for the first time a platform for sharing religious experience and knowledge between Turkey and Africa. In the meeting, many African participants openly demanded Turkish-style mosques and imams trained in Turkey. Although the importance of the continuity of such meetings was stressed, the fact that there has not been a second meeting since 2006 is an indicator that Turkey is not adequately utilizing its soft-power opportunity in Africa.

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The priority in Turkish-African relations is economic development. TİKA, especially with its three offices in Ethiopia, Sudan and Senegal, has played an important role in this respect. Through these offices, TİKA has operated in 37 countries in Africa and has particularly supported economic development projects. For example, in 2008, TİKA started the African Agricultural Development Program with the aim of assisting agricultural development in Africa and has undertaken projects in 13 countries, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Senegal, Comoros, Madagascar, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.²⁶ Turkey also gives direct economic support to Africa's development through both the Turkish Red Crescent and other international organizations.

Non-governmental organizations have played a crucial role in Turkey's presence in Africa and in the development of relations. Among many Turkish NGOs operating in Africa, the most active ones are TUSKON and İHH. TUSKON, especially through the World Trade Bridge meetings, has pioneered in

bringing African businessmen to Turkey and encouraging Turkish businesses to expand to Africa. Such meetings have been conducted without interruption since 2006 with increasing participation each year. TUSKON also sends several delegations to Africa to examine investment opportunities on site.²⁷

IHH, one of the leading humanitarian aid organizations in Turkey, along with the developmental work it has done in 43 countries in Africa, is especially helping thousands of people to gain sight with its Cataract Project conducted throughout hospitals in Sudan. IHH, in addition to its well-drilling projects and its support for technical and vocational education, directly contributes to numerous projects, including setting-up of schools and hospitals in numerous African countries.²⁸

The principal difference that has distinguished the AK Party era openings from that of previous ones is that they have assigned equal value to both Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, overcoming the image of two separate Africas. Moreover, in the new era there are efforts to establish a united apprehension of Africa in Turkish foreign policy. From this perspective, it can be said that today in Turkey, the negative image of Sub-Saharan Africa has been replaced by a community of potential partners of economic and political cooperation.

Another element that distinguishes the AK Party era policy on Africa is the close work of the state and non-governmental organizations that was not witnessed before.²⁹ Business associations and relief agencies are especially at the forefront. The newly-founded African Institute also contributes with information and document support.

Turkey's Asian Openings

Although Turkey previously paid senior level visits to Asian countries, there has been a visible increase in presidential, prime ministerial and other ministerial visits in the 2000s. President Abdullah Gül paid visits to Pakistan in 2007, Japan in 2008, China in 2009, South Korea, India, and Bangladesh in 2010, and Indonesia in 2011. Similarly, Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Pakistan in 2003, Japan and South Korea in 2004, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Mongolia in 2005, Indonesia in 2006, India in 2008, Pakistan in 2009 and Bangladesh, Pakistan and South Korea in 2010. Generally, visits are made to East and South Asia at least once or twice a year at the head of government and presidential level. This is an indicator that Ankara, unlike in the past, has a more systematic interest in Asia. In this section, the general framework of this systematic approach will be explained.

The Nature of Economic, Political and Institutional Relations

Turkey's Asian opening is making progress and taking shape in accordance with the aforementioned foundation and philosophy. While a special importance is attached to developing the existing institutional relations in the region, it is possible to examine Turkey's policy towards Asian states in three basic categories. First,

the political and economic policies toward placing the existing relations "in a certain systematic" with the Turkic republics in Central Asia, which lacked a shared vision despite working relations, have been pursued.

Second, "a policy of normalization" has been pursued and gained prominence in relations with countries like China and India, because, due to several instances in the past, Ankara's relations with Beijing and New Delhi could have been regarded as problematic. Third, certain political and economic policies to convert relations "from normal to deep cooperation" have gained prominence with countries like South Korea and Japan with which Turkey has had a history of good relations.

Since 2002, in addition to generally improving economic and political relations with the Turkic republics, a framework for foreign policy is also being pursued with these countries. Central Asia does not only introduce a new dimension for Turkey, but it also opens a new space in Turkish foreign policy, increases Turkey's strategic importance, and presents opportunities in the field of energy. It contributes to Turkey's relations with Russia, Iran and China as well. Strengthening the independence of

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the Turkic republics and supporting reforms has been one of Turkey's core foreign policy aims in the region since 2002. Turkey's approach does not assume the role of a big brother, as it did during the 1990s but instead operates on

the basis of equality and maximization of mutual interests. Also, in the AK Party era, Turkey has abandoned the rhetoric of "Unity of the Turkic World" since it caused misunderstanding and has instead prioritized cultural unity. From this perspective, during their visits, Turkish leaders especially emphasized the linguistic, historical, cultural and religious unity between Turkey and the Turkic republics. In this context, efforts to improve multidimensional

cooperation by utilizing mechanisms such as the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSÖY), Turkish Language Speaking Countries' Heads of State Summit, the Friendship, Fraternity and Cooperation Council of Turkic States and Communities are underway. TİKA's projects to increase social ties will help institutionalize the relationship.

In 2009, during the 9th Turkish Language Speaking Countries' Heads of State Summit, which has been held at regular intervals since 1992, certain decisions were taken to deepen and place relations in a systematic framework. One decision was the formation of a Council for Cooperation Amongst Turkish Speaking Countries. In addition, in line with the Nakhchivan agreement, a consultancy mechanism composed of the Council of Heads of State of Turkish Language Speaking Countries, the Council of Foreign Ministers of Turkish Language Speaking Countries, the Senior Civil Servants' Committee, the Council of Elders and a secretariat headquartered in Istanbul were decided to be formed. It was also decided that the summit meetings, which had been held at irregular intervals, would be organized every two years with the next summit to be held in Kazakhstan in 2011.

The increasing role of China and India in world politics and especially the speed of their economic development have aroused Turkey's interest like many

other countries, and steps to improve bilateral relations have been taken accordingly. There are two main reasons for Turkey's desire to become closer to China and India: Whilst the desire to act together with rising powers in certain areas at the international level constitutes the political reason, the real motive of Turkey's interest in Beijing and New Delhi is economic. India, having the 12th biggest economy in the world with a population of 1.1 billion, has a special place in the information technologies sector. Gaining a greater share for Turkish companies investing in construction, communication and the energy sectors in India and its development in the international system is a priority in terms of Turkish foreign policy. The same applies to the foundations of its foreign policy stance towards China.

Turkey's relations with India and China during the Cold War could be seen as somewhat problematic. Turkey's special relationship with Pakistan for India and its possible support for the struggle of independence of the Uyghur people in China have been sources of concern in relations. Within the context of its Asian opening, Turkey has addressed its relations with India separately from its relations with Pakistan and tried not to let other states be influenced by these relations. Similarly, the Uyghur question, although still forming an important part of Turkey's perception of China, no longer constitutes a primary element.

In order to open a new chapter in relations, Prime Minister Erdoğan in November 2008 and President Abdullah Gül in February 2010 visited India with a large delegation. Although India did not return any visits, it is nevertheless possible to say that these visits have radically changed India's perspective on Turkey and played an important role in increasing trade between India and Turkey and developing bilateral relations.³⁰ In the following period, the biggest problem with India was caused by India's reaction to Turkey's decision

not to invite it to the Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral meetings organized under the leadership of Turkey. India's participation in subsequent meetings and the trilateral meetings that turned

into an international forum helped overcome this complication. For Turkey, India has the potential to become the second biggest market in Asia after China. Moreover, Turkey has potential to increase its market share in India. Also, Turkey and India, by improving bilateral trade and political relations, are creating opportunities for regional and strategic cooperation. From the scope of regional cooperation, Turkey and India could cooperate in the areas of trade, energy and security in Central Asia.³¹

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In the context of Turkey's Asia opening, it could be said that a new era in relations with China has begun.³² President Gül paid a formal visit to China on 24-29 June 2009 with a large delegation, the first for 14 years. Significantly, for the first time in history, a Turkish president visited the Xingjian-Uyghur Autonomous Region. Also, seven bilateral agreements worth 3 billion dollars were signed in the presence of Gül and President Hu. President Gül's visit was productive and the trade volume between the two countries has

shown a significant increase and China has become Turkey's biggest trading partner in the Far East. Turkey's strong criticism of Chinese violence in Eastern Turkistan immediately

following President Gül's visit caused a low-level of tension but relations have nevertheless gained stability. In October 2010, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabo visited Turkey and signed several agreements. The most important development was the trade agreement between the two countries that stipulated the use of the lira and yuan instead of the dollar in trade exchanges.³³

Similarly, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's six-day China trip at the end of October 2010, which started from

Kashgar, was interpreted as improving the mutual understanding between Turkey and China with regards to the Uyghur question.³⁴ In September 2010, Turkey's relations with China were diversified with a military dimension as Chinese military jets were invited to the Anatolian Eagle manoeuvre conducted in Konya. This event, which was criticized by the West, was the first military manoeuvres that the Chinese forces conducted with a member of NATO.³⁵

Turkey has had a long-standing history of good relations with South Korea and China. This situation has manifested itself in Turkey's policy to deepen relations with these countries, especially in the economic field. Relations with South Korea, which had started as one of a military nature during the Korean War, gained a strong political foundation during the Cold War, with both countries being a strong ally of USA. The fact that South Korea was one of the countries which provided the most aid to the victims of the Marmara Earthquake of 1999 and the very amicable conditions in which the 2002 World Cup match for third place between Turkey and South Korea took place strengthened the Turkish-South Korean friendship at an emotional level.

During Prime Minister Erdoğan's South Korea visit in 2004 and the South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun's 2005 visit to Turkey, concrete steps towards establishing comprehensive

political relations were taken. Although economically the bilateral relations are seemingly intensive, the trade imbalance against Turkey's favour constitutes a risk which hinders the deepening of bilateral economic relations.³⁶ However, social relations, especially the significant increase in the number of South Korean tourists, made important progress which is likely to contribute to cultural cooperation. To carry relations further, President Gül visited South Korea in June 2010. This was first presidential visit to South Korea in 28 years and gave a chance for the evaluation of possibilities for cooperation in the energy field. Lastly, Prime Minister Erdoğan participated in the G-20 summit held in South Korea and met his South Korean counterpart.

Similarly, deepening economic ties constitutes the backbone of Turkish-Japanese relations. Prime Minister Erdoğan in April 2004 and President Gül in June 2008 visited Japan, the first such visit since Turgut Özal's in 1990. The year 2003 was celebrated as the "Turkish Year" in Japan while 2010 was celebrated as the "Japanese Year" in Turkey. Japan is currently one of Turkey's largest trading partners in the Far East. Today Japan is seen as not only an indispensable creditor, as the third biggest economy in the world, but also as an ally for Turkey. In 2010 several events were organized in Turkey within the context of the Japanese Year towards the deepening of economic and political

relations. Along with economic relations, progress in social relations is manifesting itself more clearly. For example, in recent years there has been an explosion in the number of tourists who visited Turkey. In 2010 alone, nearly 200,000 Japanese tourists came to Turkey and this number has been on the rise.³⁷

Turkey's accession to ASEAN was a historical step in the process of Turkey's Asian opening as Turkey for the first time established an institutional relationship with ASEAN and gained the opportunity to further deepen its political, economic and cultural relations with the region.

Another important part of Turkey's Asian opening has been the development of relations with the regional institutions and increasing its presence in the area. In this context, Turkey applied for observer status in ASEAN, which was accepted in 2010. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu signed the ASEAN certificate of participation on 23-24 July 2010 in Vietnam's capital Hanoi during the 43rd ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting. Turkey's accession to ASEAN was a historical step in the process of Turkey's Asian opening as Turkey for the first time established an institutional relationship

with ASEAN and gained the opportunity to further deepen its political, economic and cultural relations with the region. ASEAN, which was founded in 1967, is not only a summit in which Southeast Asian countries meet, but has also become an organizational headquarters for all of Asia. During the annual ASEAN summits, South Asian Summits are also held with the participation of 16 countries.

Another regional structure ASEAN leads is the ASEAN Regional Forum that is organized with the participation of important world powers such as the USA, Russia, and the European Union. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu joined the ASEAN Regional Forum on 24 July 2010 and with the signing of a partnership agreement Turkey has become the 28th member of the Forum. Turkey's ASEAN membership and its attendance at ASEAN meetings are seen as critically important steps towards making Turkey's Asian opening more permanent.

Likewise, Turkey is also resuming its active participation in another regional association, the 21-member Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia (CICA). Turkey's active participation in this organization gained greater significance with its chairmanship of the official summit held on 21 June 2010 which increased Turkey's presence and influence.

Relations with Muslim Countries and the Uyghur Question

It is possible to evaluate Turkey's relations with the Muslim countries in Asia under three categories. First, steps to strengthen Turkey's relations with countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, with which Turkey generally has good relations, have been taken. Second, contributing to the economic development of countries like Bangladesh which experiences economic difficulties has been amongst Turkey's priorities. Third, relations with Afghanistan, never seems to leave the international and the Pakistan-Turkey relations, which were in a complicated state after the invasion of Afghanistan, have historically been positive and strong. Turkey has worked to assume a problem-solving role and to contribute to these countries within this context.

Following Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to Indonesia in 2005 to deepen economic relations, the trade volume between the two countries has shown a significant rise compared to previous years. For example, in 2008 the trade volume increased by 64% compared to the previous year. Efforts to make the Developing 8 (D-8) more active and Turkey's partnership of dialogue with ASEAN have the potential to deepen Turkish-Indonesian relations.

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Similarly there have been efforts to deepen relations with Malaysia. Relations between Turkey and Malaysia have developed on mutual trust, cooperation and sympathy, and these two countries have supported each other in several international organizations where possible. Generally there are no political problems that would adversely affect Turkish-Malaysian relations.³⁸ Malaysia, which is a leading member of ASEAN, has played an influential role in regional organizations in South Asia. The cooperation between Turkey and Malaysia in the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the D-8 is also strong. Malaysia is Turkey's seventh largest trade partner in the Far East and the bilateral trade volume has risen from a modest 242 million dollars in 2000 to 1.1 billion dollars in 2009. In this context, during Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's visit to Turkey in February 2011, there was a joint decision to abolish the visa requirements between the two countries, which is expected to further strengthen the bilateral relations.

Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh's independence and has placed a particular importance on the country. However, the transition of this importance into a meaningful economic and political partnership has only been possible in recent years. Within the context of Turkey's Asia opening, President Gül visited Bangladesh in February 2010. During this visit, meetings on new cooperation opportunities were held and decisions especially towards improving economic relations were made. In December 2010 Turkish Airlines started direct flights to the capital Dhaka. The bilateral trade volume, which amounted to only 47 million dollars in 2002, increased to 658 million dollars in 2009, and 3 billion by 2015 is targeted. Prime Minister Erdoğan, who visited Bangladesh in November 2010, was the first Turkish Prime Minister to visit this country in 21 years. Following the meetings a joint decision to further increase relations in health, education and the defence industry was made.³⁹

Although Turkish-Afghan relations have always been good due to the strong ethnic and historical ties between the two countries, relations between Turkey and Afghanistan have reached a new level since 2001. Hamid Karzai, who visited Turkey for the first time in April 2002, attended meetings with the then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and President Ahmet Necdet Sezer. Prime Minister

Erdoğan, who visited Afghanistan in November 2005, was the first Turkish prime minister to visit Afghanistan. Turkey sent troops to the region within the context of the International Security and Aid Forces (ISAF) conducted by NATO following the 11 September terrorist attacks. Turkey, which contributed with 300 troops in 2001 when ISAF was founded, has, unlike other NATO countries, identified its troops as non-combatant forces.⁴⁰

The trilateral summit among Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey, which was initiated by Turkey, has become an important platform towards finding solutions to problems.

Turkey took command of ISAF twice, between June 2002 and February 2003 and again between February and August 2005, and increased its number of troops during the process. Also, former Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin served for two terms as NATO's Senior Civilian Representative between January 2004 and August 2006, and Turkey's success in this period led to an increase in support for Turkey's greater role in this process in both Afghanistan and in international public opinion. Today Turkey contributes around 1,800 personnel to ISAF. In this context, Turkey took over the Kabul Regional Command for the second

time for one year in November in 2009 and has agreed to extend one more year later on. Turkey leads active operations in the fields of development and urban planning besides its contributions to securing safety. Set up in Wardak province 40 km west of Kabul, the Turkish Provincial Reconstruction Team, the only provincial reconstruction team in Afghanistan managed by a civilian diplomat, has, with the support of TİKA, undertaken around 200 projects in the last four years.

Turkey, with its contributions in Afghanistan, has become a country whose expertise is sought in the world. The fact that Turkey is invited to numerous international meetings, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's March 2009 Afghanistan special meeting, is an indicator of this. Also the trilateral summit among Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey, which was initiated by Turkey, has become an important platform towards finding solutions to regional problems.⁴¹

Turkey has historically attached a great importance to its relations with Pakistan, the only Islamic country with nuclear weapons. President Gül visited Pakistan in December 2007. Just a year later, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari visited Turkey. In the past few years, Turkey has shown a strong political will in diversifying and furthering bilateral relations. With Turkey's active efforts, during Prime Minister Erdoğan's 24-26

October 2009 visit to Pakistan, for the first time, relations between the two countries were elevated to a strategic level with the founding of a Council of High Level Strategic Cooperation. On the other hand, President Gül visited Pakistan between 30 March and 2 April 2010 and held meetings towards improving bilateral economic and commercial relations.

Turkey, through TİKA, runs several projects for the economic development of Pakistan. Numerous Turkish non-governmental organizations operate in Pakistan. For example, Turkish relief agencies played an important role in dealing with the catastrophic flooding of August 2010. In the same period, Prime Minister Erdoğan visited the area and promised aid and assistance. However, the real contribution Turkey tries to make to regional and global peace is the trilateral meeting that brings together Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the annual Afghanistan-Turkey-Pakistan Trilateral Summit meetings that started in 2007, countries are represented at the head of state level. Whilst the agenda is shaped by different issues each year, dialogue, economic cooperation, security and education stands out. Following the Fifth Summit, organized in Istanbul on 24 December 2010, concrete steps in much wider areas were taken. The real goal of the Trilateral Summit Process is to prevent Afghanistan's isolation and

to produce permanent solutions in the areas of security and stability with the help of neighbouring countries.

One of the most perplexing subjects in Turkish foreign policy is the Uyghur question. The development that has clearly caused this is Turkey's attitude towards the events in which more than 150 Uyghur people were killed in East Turkistan on July 2009. This event increased East Turkistan's weight in Turkey's agenda. Turkey refrained from political statements to avoid raising tensions with China but criticized China using stringent and precautionary language towards the region. In accordance with its general foreign policy understanding of not meddling into other countries' internal affairs, Turkey used careful language, but approached the matter from a human rights perspective and respect for China's territorial integrity. It is necessary to emphasize that this approach was appreciated by China, the clearest indicator of which was the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to Turkey not long after the events and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's visit to East Turkistan and China in November 2010.

Conclusion and the Future of the Openings

Turkish foreign policy during the AK Party era has entered a new process

of opening to all regions of the world with the goal of redefining Turkey's role in the world in accordance with the changing political and economic conditions and increasing its influence. Africa and Asia are important in the sense of globalizing these openings, which not only led Turkey to improving its relations with distant regions but also globalising Turkish politics in a real sense. The fact that economic relations especially have been deepening with key countries, like China and India in Asia, and South Africa and Nigeria in Africa, is an indicator that these openings and convergences will have a long-term effect on Turkish foreign policy.

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When compared with Sub-Saharan Africa, Turkey's image in Asian countries has been favourable all along. However, as a result of the active openings undertaken since 2002, Turkey's image in Africa has radically changed and its positive image amongst Asian countries

has been reinforced. Some of the key countries in both continents, such as South Africa, China and India, whilst previously adopting a cold stance towards Ankara, have changed their approaches in the past years. The fact that these countries have a special interest in Turkey shows that the current foreign policy and public diplomacy have been exceptionally successful.

Despite positive developments in commercial, political and other areas, the biggest problem that still persists in Turkey's relations with Asia and Africa is lack of information. Both the fact that the number of experts and academics

working on Africa and Asia is very limited and that Turkish resources are insufficient are the principal problems to be dealt with in the future. Especially, the lack of information and contiguity with Turkey in the Far East and Sub-Saharan Africa can cause the countries in the region to view Turkey with caution and misinterpret Turkey's well intentioned policies. Especially student and academic exchange programmes are the easiest way to solve this problem. Given the rising interest in Africa and Asia, organizing festivals, conferences and concerts in various fields will strengthen the social foundations of these openings.

Endnotes

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