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**TURKISH-NIGERIAN RELATIONS (WITH A VIEW TO TURKEY'S POLICY TOWARDS BLACK AFRICA FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM) HASAN ULUSOY**

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**TURKISH-NIGERIAN RELATIONS TO DATE**

Although located on different continents, the peoples of Nigeria and Turkey seem to have much in common. Each of them consists of a great mosaic of different ethnic origins that assemble under one flag in the form of nation-state.

Throughout history the territory of modern Turkey has been the cradle of several civilisations embracing various cultures. Thanks to this geographical location and her historical background, Turkey is today endowed with the cultural richness of her people.<sup>1</sup> A similar richness manifests itself in Nigerian society even more remarkably as the people of Nigeria is composed of over 250 ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, this is not the only thing both countries have in common. Trade between these two peoples goes back centuries, long before the foundations of the present states of the Republic of Turkey and of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As early as the sixteenth century Turkish goods were traded on the streets of Kano, one of the northern states of modern Nigeria.

However, it was not only trade that brought the two peoples together but also a political-military alliance that was formed in the sixteenth century against third parties.<sup>3</sup>

These centuries-old relationships and contacts between the peoples of Turkey and Nigeria have been upheld and maintained by modern Turkey and Nigeria from the latter's independence from the British colonial rule in 1960.

Turkey established a consulate general in Lagos on the eve of Nigerian independence from the colonial rule with a view to opening up diplomatic relations with the new Nigerian state. This was in due course followed by the upgrading of the consulate to an embassy on 16 February 1961, only four months after the declaration of independence.

However, the Cold War and its repercussions and limitations inevitably entailed that both countries concentrated on their near vicinity rather than on formulating trans-continental foreign policy objectives.

Nevertheless, the collapse of the Communist Bloc marked the end of the Cold War era and brought new opportunities and challenges for expanding state relations that would make the ideological divide moribund. Coupled with Turkey's new outward-looking economic strategy (based on the promotion of foreign trade and joint ventures) a promising atmosphere for expanding Turkey's relations with old friends in remote continents like Nigeria emerged.

This new atmosphere materialised in 1996 with the Turkish Prime Minister's visit to Nigeria, at that time the highest-level state visit that had taken place between the two countries. Notwithstanding the controversy about its orientation, this visit brought a new momentum to bilateral relations.

During the visit and its follow-up a considerable number of bilateral agreements and protocols<sup>4</sup> were signed laying down the necessary legal ground on which beneficial economic relations could be promoted.

Indeed, this momentum is confirmed by developments in economic and political fields. Trade volume doubled between 1995 and 1997. Since 1996, 15 Nigerian ministers have visited Turkey. Similarly, five Turkish ministers have paid visits to Nigeria to date.

## PROJECTIONS

Against this background, what can we ascertain for the future of the Turkish-Nigerian relations? Answers to this question will be articulated below. These answers will be based on an analysis of observations and factual information rather than speculating on scenarios. The aim of this study is not to be exhaustive, but thought provoking.

### Similarities between Turkey and Nigeria

Any similarities between these countries would form a common ground that would no doubt help facilitate the advancement of bilateral relations. Luckily enough, one can see similarities between Turkey and Nigeria. Naturally, it goes without saying that the levels and patterns of development of the two countries are far from each other.

Present-day socio-cultural parameters in Turkey and Nigeria have similarities despite their different historical backgrounds. For example, issues such as gender and traffic problems occupy the daily agenda of social life of the Nigerian people as well as of the Turkish people.

In domestic politics, issues of human rights and democratisation remain on the agendas of both countries, despite the huge difference of progress between the two countries in these fields.

In foreign policy, both countries stand as regional powers in their respective regions. Their presence and active contribution is a key factor in the preservation of stability and peace in their turbulent surroundings. Likewise, their stability is vital for the stability of their regions. Inevitably, due to their position as regional powers they also face similar foreign policy tactics and pressures in the international arena.

Naturally, these similarities pave the way for a common understanding and sharing of experience between the two countries.

### General features of Nigeria

Beside these similarities, it is also important to ascertain the general features of Nigeria for, without elaborating on them it would be difficult to form a sound strategy for the advancement of bilateral relations.

These characteristics can be listed roughly as follows:

- From a socio-cultural perspective, the colonial background is important. Hence, nationalism and national pride is strong, especially among the social and political elite. Equal treatment and partnership are of prime importance rather than aid programmes, which remind Nigerians of the old times when they lived at the mercy of their ‘masters’.

- In political life, one witnesses the dominance of the state strata ruled by the military over all facets of the society. This leads to the non-existence of an effective civil society.

- The economic consequence of this structure is a state-controlled economy. Due to the lack of an efficient system of revenue collection and distribution there is an insufficient infrastructure, a high level of unemployment and low personal incomes that result in a very low standard of living despite huge oil reserves. Ironically, Nigeria ranks eighth amongst the leading crude oil exporters and she has very high quality (if not the highest quality) petroleum. The government relies to a great extent on crude oil export revenue. Therefore, the gradual decrease and volatility of oil prices on world markets has impaired the welfare of the country.

- There is a problem of instability. This risk is part of life where the functioning of the state is dependent on a country’s leadership rather than on an impersonalised system of governance.

The risk of instability is of prime importance particularly at present as Nigeria approaches the end of a political transitional period, at the end of which civilian rule and the election of a civilian president is promised.

The sudden death of the Head of State, General Sani Abacha, in June 1998 unavoidably thickened the mist over the political future of the country. The new military regime led by the new Head of State, General Abubakar, has expressed its commitment to the restoration of civilian rule in accordance with the transitional programme.<sup>5</sup> Yet, at the present time, uncertainty about the near future, which is supposed to witness historic changes, prevails. However, whatever might happen, given the political history of Nigeria, the influence of the military will remain in the governance.

The above characteristics, to a greater or lesser extent, can be attributed to all other countries of Black Africa,<sup>6</sup> given the similar historical backgrounds of those countries. The most common parameter of those countries seems to be the presence of military regimes or their heavy influence and control of civilian regimes that in the main themselves emerged from military governance. Therefore, regardless of the type of the regime, be it civilian or military, power remains in the hands of an elite backed or dominated by the military. This is because throughout the history of Black Africa only the military has had the capacity to shape the governance of Black African countries. The military is the most organised institution in the absence of civil society. Even President Clinton seems to have acknowledged the role of the military in the destiny of those countries. During his African visit in spring 1998, he commended, “military leaders who have taken over chaotic situations in African countries, but moved towards democracy.”<sup>7</sup>

#### Gains from the advancement of bilateral relations

In view of the above, what gains might Turkey derive from the advancement of the bilateral relations? This is the core of the matter. The furtherance of bilateral relations can only be viable should they prove beneficial.

Generally speaking, in inter-state relations, state interests are divided into economic and political. However, in the present setting of international affairs, it is understood that the economic interests of a country cannot be pursued in isolation from its political interests or vice versa. In the era of globalisation, economic and political interests have become heavily intertwined and complementary to one another. Economic power effects political power. Similarly, the economic influence of a country in another country duly impinges on its political influence therein. This is particularly valid in African countries as they attach the utmost importance and priority to their economic development as a means of disentangling themselves from long persisting patterns of poverty. What matters is to find the right combination to channel economic power in the service of political interests.

With this understanding, due attention will be given below to an analysis of Turkish-Nigerian economic relations and their potential.

With her estimated population of 120 million, Nigeria is the largest market in Black Africa. Nigeria constitutes almost one-fourth of the total population of Black Africa. Similarly, her GDP forms almost one-fourth of the total GDP of the all Black African countries.<sup>8</sup>

The trade volume between the two countries is around US\$30 million. However, this constitutes only 0.1 per cent of the total trade volume of Nigeria. Turkey's major export items are clothing, food (biscuits and pasta), engine and automobile parts, and pharmaceuticals. In return, Turkey imports sesame seeds, raw and semi-processed leather, and rubber from Nigeria.

However, beside these official figures and items, there is also a considerable amount of suitcase trade that adds to the level of Turkish exports. These mainly consist of luxury consumer goods, such as clothing, house ware, etc.

The establishment of a Turkish-Nigerian chamber of commerce will be of great importance because it can bring together the right buyers and suppliers to optimise trade. This body will provide a formidable and credible forum for trade promotion and it will help alleviate the problem of fraud, which remains a serious obstacle to the realisation of the real potential for bilateral trade. In fact, such a body is in the pipeline in Nigeria. Once it comes into existence, the second stage should be relate this body to its counterparts in Turkey.

Having said that, one should also mention the difficulties in further increasing Turkish exports. The present Turkish export items are mainly directed to the well-off sections of Nigerian society and these constitute only ten percent of the Nigerian populace. Another obstacle is the cost of transport because of the distance between the two countries.

A way to surmount these two obstacles could be to establish firms in Nigeria through either joint ventures or direct investment. In this regard, setting up small and medium-sized enterprises aimed at serving the basic needs of the lower and middle classes would be beneficial. Manufacturing electrical appliances and household items in addition to automobile spare parts seems to be promising and reliable areas of investment. Establishing such firms in Nigeria would reduce the cost of transport and of labour, thus increasing the competitiveness of these products. The low cost of these products would facilitate trading with neighbouring African countries. An agreement on the avoidance of double taxation would be instrumental in promoting such investments given the fact that an agreement on the mutual protection and promotion of capital investments has already been signed and its adoption is pending.

Beside trade between the private sectors, one should also explore the possibility of inter-state trade. In this regard, the exchange of Nigerian crude oil—97 per cent of total Nigerian exports—for Turkish goods and services should be assessed. In such an exchange, the Turkish side could contribute to the improvement of Nigerian public services by providing, for instance, public transport vehicles, health equipment for hospitals, educational materials for schools and even military equipment, once civilian rule is restored. A similar path could be followed for natural gas from Nigeria. In fact, Turkey has already signed an agreement to buy liquefied natural gas from a consortium in Nigeria. As the majority of the shares of the said company belong to the Nigerian government such an exchange can be arranged.

Another promising area is the construction sector. The whole country, particularly, the federal capital requires numerous construction projects. Some Turkish firms have already bid for various projects. The estimated total value of the said projects amounts almost to the total value of US exports to Nigeria, the leading exporter to Nigeria.

The public sector is in need of infrastructure and dwellings. Everything lies in the hands of the state and its officials. Therefore, special strategies for securing state patronage are to be deliberated that must be well known by the private sector.

Similarly, given the magnitude of the need, there is an increased demand for cement. In this respect, exporting cement or establishing cement factories should also be explored.

There is no doubt that the penetration into the economic life of Nigeria would also increase the economic influence of Turkey and thus its political importance and relevance in the eyes of the Nigerian leadership.

Such increased political importance would be translated into Nigerian support in international fora wherever voting matters. In the organisations of which both countries are members, Turkey could more easily secure the support of Nigeria because of Turkey's increased political relevance. Likewise, Nigeria's positive interventions would facilitate the voicing Turkey's views and securing Turkish interests in international fora of which Turkey is not a member but Nigeria is, such as the group of the non-aligned countries.

Naturally, any inter-state relation can be advanced if it is mutually beneficial. Therefore, when attempting to analyse the possible benefits for Turkey one should also ask what Nigeria could gain from opening its economy to Turkey. This is extremely important because to enter the Nigerian economy requires the consent of the Nigerian leadership and state. Therefore, appropriate incentives should be provided to the Nigerian side.

In this regard the following can be evaluated:

- In the economic field, special funds for construction projects and Eximbank credits could be provided. Turkish experience in the implementation of free market economic policies would be very useful for the restructuring of the Nigerian economy. This experience could be made available through technical visits and contacts between public and private sector representatives of both countries. The Protocol of the Joint Economic Commission provides a proper channel that can be further explored.

- In the socio-cultural field, the number and coverage of scholarships for Nigerians could be increased. Enabling more Nigerian students to study in Turkey would help build the image of Turkey in the minds of the Nigerian people. It would also in the long-term increase the number of influential friends of Turkey in Nigeria because those students would eventually join the upper levels of Nigerian society.

- In the field of politics, showing understanding for the existing problems in Nigerian domestic politics, such as difficulties in improving her human rights record and democratisation, would be conducive. In addition to such understanding, offering the experience of Turkey on these problems would be helpful to the leadership and society as a whole.

On the other hand, Nigeria would appreciate the voicing of support in international arenas wherever appropriate. Under the West's heavy sanctions and the critical state of Nigerian-Western relations, Nigeria has had to reconsider her foreign policy options.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Nigeria has been trying to expand into new areas and partnerships. This reorientation is conducive to the advancement of political co-operation between Turkey and Nigeria. In this context, the establishment of the already agreed political consultation mechanism between the foreign ministries would be worth considering.

#### FINAL REMARKS

In summing up, Turkey's overall gains from opening up to Nigeria should no doubt be assessed on the basis of a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis that would cover all interest areas taking into account the risk of instability in Nigeria and its environs. It would be better to carry out such an analysis once the outcome of the political transition period in the country is clear.

In so doing, one should not forget that once the overall gain is attained in respect of Turkish-Nigerian relations this would be equivalent to one-fourth of Black Africa, given the proportions of the population and the GDP of Nigeria.

Moreover, in view of the similarities in the parameters of Black African countries, the maximisation of gains from Turkish-Nigerian relations would definitely provide the necessary guidelines for the development of Turkey's relations with the rest of Black Africa.

Following the end of the Cold War, the changing global system has offered both opportunities and challenges to Black Africa. The greatest challenge seems to be to find an answer to the question of how Black Africa can cope with these changes and build sustainable relevance in the international economic and political system. In the face of total marginalisation from the global political economy, Africa's only viable option for survival appears to be the redoubling of its participation in international relations. In this period, the main task awaiting Black African countries is to find a solution to their chronic poverty. According to a recent report of the African Development Bank, the average annual GDP growth in Black Africa is estimated at 4.8 per cent. However, it is stated that this growth needs to be increased to seven per cent in order to make significant gains in reversing the patterns of poverty.<sup>10</sup>

This poverty is not only a matter of economic development, but also the result of a series of intertwined predicaments such as mismanagement, corruption, and clientelism.

Therefore, assistance and co-operation to Black Africa can be rendered on two tracks. On the one

hand, technical assistance can be provided for the reformation of state functions. Turkey's experience and expertise on this issue could be channelled to those countries. On the other hand, the increase of economic co-operation and the expansion of trade could be sought.

One should not forget that increasing economic influence would also be reflected in an increase in political influence. The fact that Turkey was never a colonialist state is conducive for Turkey advancing her relations with the Black African countries.

Rising Black Africa, despite all the difficulties, represents a big market of almost 50 countries that are free from all ideological and religious constraints, but eager to increase their welfare through co-operation. It remains as an appropriate test case for Turkey to assess her role as a Global State<sup>11</sup> in international relations. The motto is 'partner not patron'. The prerequisite is to ensure a solid preparation before the take-off. As in an African saying: "If you want to know the end, look at the beginning".

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1 Yalçın-Heckman lists 47 ethnic groups in Turkey. See Yalçın-Heckman, "Türkiye'de Etnik Gruplar", *Hürriyet* (Turkish daily), 6 May 1991. See also Peter Alford Andrews (ed.) (1989), *Ethnic Groups of the Republic of Turkey*, Wiesbaden, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag.

2 Newton, Alex and David Else (1995), *West Africa*, Lonely Planet Publications, p. 680.

3 The Musketeers of the Sultan of Borno (one of the Northern States of the modern Nigeria) were trained by Turkish instructors against the Sultan of Morocco. See Michael Crowder (1980). *The Story of Nigeria*, p. 35.

4 The list of the texts signed is as follows: Trade Agreement, Maritime Agreement, Agreement on the Mutual Protection and Promotion of Capital Investments, Second Protocol of the Joint Economic Commission, Memoranda of Understanding on Telecommunications and Transportation.

5 "The official announcement to nation of Head of State", *New Nigerian* (Nigerian daily), 10 June 1998.

6 The term "Black Africa" in this essay is used to refer to all African countries except for Northern African States as their parameters differ from the rest. Similarly, the Republic of South Africa is also kept outside the scope of the essay because its parameters are different from the rest of the Black African countries although it remains a part of Black Africa in terms of geography and race.

7 "Clinton supports Abacha", *Daily Times* (Nigerian daily), 28 March 1998.

8 See *New African Yearbook 1995-1996*, London, IC Publications.

9 "Foreign Policy Implications", *Vanguard* (Nigerian daily), 6 June 1998.

10 "ADB Survey", *The Guardian* (Nigerian daily), 27 May 1998.

11 See HE İsmail Cem, "Turkey: Setting Sail to the 21st Century", *Perceptions*,

September-November 1997, Volume II - Number 3.

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