

# POLICY UPDATE

February 2017 | GPoT PU № 13

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ERDOĞAN'S VISIT TO EAST AFRICA

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On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan embarked on another tour of three East African countries, Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar. These visits bring his total trips to 10 in Sub Saharan Africa, the most by any Turkish president. Earlier in 2016, he visited Ghana, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Somalia. These trips to a much larger extent signify the increasing policy attention Turkey is giving Africa.

Before embarking on his trip, Erdoğan declared his optimism in expanding Turkish embassies in Africa to every capital. Turkey has already chalked significant progress on the diplomatic front in Africa. For instance, Turkish embassies in Addis Ababa, Abuja, Dar-es-Salaam, Lusaka, Libreville have been given accreditations to various institutions in the respective countries. They include the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Partners Forum (IGAD)- Ethiopia, Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS)- Abuja, East African Community (EAC)- Tanzania, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)- Zambia and Economic Community of Central African States- Gabon.

Additionally, from a paltry 12 Turkish embassies in Africa in 2009, the number has increased to 39 on the continent with a further 26 commercial consulates in 19 African states. African embassies on the other hand have moved from 10 to 32 in Turkey.<sup>1</sup>

As transportation is key in both trade partnerships and travel, the Turkish Airlines has stepped up its operations in Africa in this regard. It now flies to 41 countries, that is a rise from previously 38 destinations in 23 countries. Per this, Turkish Airlines has the widest network in Africa. The fact that Istanbul is a main international transit point for many African travellers also accounts for this

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Asiedu. (October, 2016). Turkey as a Development Partner in Africa. Global Political Trends Center (GPoT), Policy Brief No. 44. Retrieved from <http://www.gpotcenter.org/dosyalar/PB%2044.pdf>

development; further substantiated with Turkey's seamless online visa system and relatively cheaper air tickets.

Of intrinsic value with regards to Turkey's growing relationship with Africa is also the fact that, it is largely hinged on Africa's immense economic potential and Turkey's quest for an alternative market beyond its immediate neighbors. Bilateral trade reached \$19.5 billion in 2015, that's a significant increase compared to 2003. Added to this Erdoğan embarked on the trip with Turkish businessmen seeking to land major deals for instance Tanzania's proposed international railway project. The Tanzanian government has subsequently sought a loan from the Türk Eximbank. Mozambique on the other hand has rich reserves of liquefied natural gas (LNG)- these business opportunities if won by Turkish contractors could further solidify Turkish-Africa economic prospects.<sup>2</sup>

Among African countries too, Turkey has enjoyed unrivalled prominence in Somalia. For instance, Erdoğan's visit to Mogadishu in 2011 was the first by a non-African president in almost a couple of decades. This was fomented by the opening of a Turkish embassy in the capital and Turkish Airlines flying to same. This projected Turkey as the leading international actor in Somalia's reconstruction. Subsequently, Turkey further inaugurated Mogadishu's largest hospital which it funded. Furthermore, due to the immense humanitarian work done by Turkish humanitarian organization Kızılay (Red Crescent) in Somalia, Turkey now enjoys huge affection from the Somali people. The Somalia cabinet voted Erdogan as "Man of the People". Also, the Somali Ambassador to Turkey, Nur Sheikh Hamud Mursal described Turkey as "a savior sent by God to Somalia".<sup>3</sup>

On his part the UN deputy humanitarian coordinator in Somalia, Kilian Kleinschmidt once proffered regarding refugees and internally displaced people in Somali that, "these are the only displaced people in all of Somalia who do not need to worry how they will eat or sleep or worry that they will be raped during the day". In few months, Turks accomplished more than any other nation or aid group in 21 years, he added.<sup>4</sup> Turkey's immense support to Somalia is also much reflected in its aid donations. In 2011 Turkey's private sector provided donations amounting to \$365 million dollars while the Turkish government donated \$49 million; this contributions are more than any other European country apart from the United Kingdom.

Irrespective of the challenges Turkey is facing both domestically and internationally, Erdoğan's visit clearly portrays its unflinching desire to acquire greater significance on the African continent. It must however be noticed that, Turkey has fallen short of its targets as noted by the AU chair at the Second

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<sup>2</sup> Alex Vines and Daragh Neville, President Erdogan's Africa Agenda: From Business to Embassy-building. Newsweek. Retrieved from <http://europe.newsweek.com/erdogans-agenda-turkey-africa-548136>

<sup>3</sup> Julia Harte. (Winter 2012/2013). Turkey Shocks Africa. World Policy Journal. Retrieved from <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/winter2012/turkey-shocks-africa>

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit<sup>5</sup> in Equatorial Guinea back in 2014 by Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, “many of the outcomes of the first Africa-Turkey summit are yet to be realized”. This may partly explain Turkey’s unsuccessful bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2015-2016 as it received the backing of all but two African countries for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2009-10 but not the latter.

Going forward, Erdoğan’s visit gives a projection of what is to come in the future. Thus, increasing Turkish-Africa relations especially cooperation in areas such as trade, diplomacy, education, health, agriculture and other development areas. These are significant because it builds on the progress Turkey has made since launching its “Year of Africa” policy in 2005 followed by the first and second Turkey-Africa Summits that sought to forge a new model of partnership to enhance a sustainable development and integration for both partners.

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<sup>5</sup> For details about the Second Turkey-Africa Summit, see Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs comprehensive review: [http://afrika.mfa.gov.tr/turkey\\_africa.en.mfa](http://afrika.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_africa.en.mfa)

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