

# **OPINION: Africa-Turkey relations must be moved to cooperate level**

**Even if the start of Turkey's African adventure goes back to centuries ago, a new era has begun with the end of the Ottoman Empire. During the Republican period of Turkey, early relations with several North Africa countries and Ethiopia as sub-Saharan African country had lasted superficially. Turkey's internal dynamics had a direct effect on Turkish foreign policy. Historical and cultural relations with Africa were forgotten. With the adoption of the African Action Plan in 1998, these relations entered a trade focus period.**

A renewed and prosperous relationship with "Turkey's Opening Policy towards Africa" by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2005 has developed in both commercial and political fields, and today Turkey draws attention as accepted power on the continent.

## **LEADERS DIPLOMACY**

With the developing relations thanks to Erdogan's personal efforts and initiatives in 2005, Turkey has become an important power on the continent. Erdogan's official visits to 31 different African countries after he entered Turkish politics is the main indicator of this situation. The fact that Erdogan visits those countries with high level ministers, large business delegations and respected journalists has made it clear that he intended to resolve the frozen relations between countries quickly.

During Erdogan's visits to Africa, thanks to the relations between the leaders of the countries has contributed to solve many bureaucratic problems. In addition, the sincerity among the leaders has provided great convenience to Turkish businessmen in African countries.

After the period of Arab Spring, due to the determinants of bilateral relations in the North Africa as the overthrow of dictators, the impact of Turkish businessmen and Turkey has reached its peak than ever before in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Morocco.

## **THE SITUATION IS NOT DIFFERENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

The strong presence of Turkish businessmen in Mauritania, Senegal, Nigeria, Mali and Ghana was established as a result of Erdogan's friendship with the leaders of these countries. Especially, the friendship between Senegal President Macky Sall and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has continued with the major construction contracts of Turkey in Senegal. The fact that Turkey is the investor of mega projects in Senegal has attracted the attention of France and China.

While the trade volume between Turkey and Mauritania was \$ 20 million in 2008, today the figure exceeded \$ 150 million. That made Mauritania an important country for Turkey. During his visit to Mauritania in 2018, President Erdogan said that they intended to increase the trade volume between the two countries to \$ 1 billion by 2020.

It is known that the new President Gazvani, who came to power after the elections held in Mauritania last month, is close to France.

In the coming days we see that how this closeness will affect the relations between Turkey and Mauritania.

The relationships has lost speed in South Africa after the dismissal of Zuma because of corruption allegations. However, the fact that President Cyril Ramaphosa has invited Turkey for BRICS Summit in Cape Town in 2018 was quite important.

The relationships between FETO, bureaucrats, ministers and even South African intelligence shows that the relationship with this country are not at institutional level. The country is still a base for the FETO terrorist organization. FETO has hundreds of companies, think tanks and religious centers in South Africa.

Especially after the political changes in Sudan, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania, most of the privileges, credits and facilities granted by these countries are no longer applied. Many problems of Turkish businessmen who have maximum capital as direct foreign investment in Ethiopia remain unsolved.

### **UNCERTAINTY IN SUDAN AFFECTS TURKEY**

The good relations between Erdogan and Omar al-Bashir had a direct impact on the commercial activities between the two countries. Between 2017 and 2018 more than 20 delegations have made numerous visits mutually. Several agreements have been made in many areas such as military, education, health, agriculture and banking.

Thanks to the friendship between Erdogan and Bashir, trade agreements exceeding \$ 1.5 billion were made in a country like Sudan where bureaucracy was a deterrent.

After months of demonstrations in Sudan, Omar al-Bashir was dismissed from the military coup. Bashir was replaced by generals close to Saudi-UAE-Egypt. This situation brought to mind the question of what deals and investments with Turkey would be in the future.

There is no answer yet. Since there is not yet any government in Sudan to decide on this issue. One of the major reasons for this uncertainty can be seen as bilateral relations.

### **ETHIOPIA: LEADER CHANGED, POLICY CHANGED**

During Prime Minister Meles Zenawi who came to power after the communist Derg regime the relations between Ethiopia-Turkey have flourished. Thanks to the support given to Turkish businessmen by Zenawi through loans and concessions, Turkey has become the owner of most foreign direct investment. After the death of Zenawi in 2012, the relations with new Prime Minister Desalegn was not as good as in the period of Zenawi but could be said almost good. Turkey has increased investments in Ethiopia until 2017.

In this period, when the former Ethiopian Ambassador to Ankara, Mulatu Teshome became President, trying to make relations returning to the Zenawi days, but the symbolic view of the President in Ethiopia's administration system did not carry forward the relations.

In Ethiopia after Prime Minister who resigned as a result large demonstrations starting 2018 and continuing in 2018, Abiy Ahmed the former intelligence and military members who took office, shown as the savior of Ethiopia in the World. However; He have not run a good relation with Turkey so far.

Since Abiy Ahmed took office, the two leaders have had no contact, including the phone. It is one of the reasons of such non contact that Abiy Ahmed's rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and UAE, creating a concept blocks against Turkey.

When Abiy Ahmed is shown as Ethiopia's 'savior' by USA and Europe, the relations with Turkey almost. This fact actually says a lot. The Ethiopian government is now creating difficulties for Turkish businessmen, whom it used to provide many facilities for. Once upon a time, Turkey was the largest investor in the country, now Turkey is afraid of entry the Ethiopian market.

## **RELATIONS SHOULD BE CORPORATE**

The aftershocks of the political change in Africa are still felt. The era of aged autocratic leaders in Africa seems to be over. What Turkey should do is importantly to take measures in the face of these changes in institutional capacity in Africa.

Turkey's economic relations with African countries carried out first at this point, should strengthen political sense. Businessmen in African countries should gather under one roof and be able to sit with the authorities in the country. Businessmen should open their way to the table in a collective and institutional manner with bureaucrats. The number of trade consultants should increase in countries where economic relations are developed and where there is potential for development. Ethiopia is the one of Turkey's most invested country since there is only one trade counsellor. It should establish relations with every actor in the country considering the political changes that may occur in African countries. Turkey must increase his contacts with the countries where is politically and economically strong.

It is clear that the wind of political change in Africa will continue in the future. If Turkey could not create a corporate ground in Africa, all of investments would be in danger. Turkey is not only making relations with the people to development of the continent, but also the development of relations between institutions may be placed on a more solid ground.