

# The dynamics shaping Turkish African Policy and Turkey's Approach towards the Western Sahara Conflict

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## Introduction

Turkey has been one of the most significant strategic actors on the African politics over the last decade. The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) which has taken over the reins of the country designated the year 2005 as the year of Africa. This has ensued Turkey to take important action to widen and deepen its strategic relations with the African continent. It has to be placed on record that today the diplomatic missions across the continents stands at a staggering 41 compared to 12 before 2009. Likewise, Turkey's earlier total trade with Africa was only 5 billion dollars but has now reached an astounding 20 billion dollars (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey (n. d.)). The changing domestic dynamics in Turkey has opened new strategic opportunities for Turkey. Africa has been a new strategic environment for Turkey to diversify the parameters of the traditional Turkish foreign policy. The ruling AK Party government has aimed to reduce its high level of dependency on the Western world by establishing the new political and economic allies with the African countries.

Turkey has implemented the "Africa Action Plan" that was developed in 1998. The Action Plan explains Turkey's African policy comprehensively and provides a strategic guidance for Turkey's foreign policy towards Africa (Hazar, 2012). Accordingly, Turkey has strengthened its strategic security partnership with the African countries. In 2017, Turkey opened its largest overseas military training base in Somalia and it has signed security and defense agreements with more than 30 African countries (Sıradag, 2018). Turkey has also expanded its sphere of influence through the Turkish NGOs and its state institutions over the continent. For instance, Turkey has opened 21 Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) offices in the different countries in Africa in order to provide humanitarian and development assistance across the continent. The Turkish NGOs in cooperation with the state institutions have opened schools, hospitals, orphanages, water wells and they have also provided scholarship to thousands of the African students (Sıradag, 2016). This article raises a number of important questions to analyze the Turkish engagement with Africa: What are the strategic determinants shaping the Turkish foreign policy towards Africa? Does Turkey pursue a selfish foreign policy towards Africa? are some of questions which need to be elucidated.

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In the second part of the article, Turkey's policy towards the Western Sahara has been analyzed. Though Turkey has been developing its bilateral relations with the countries in the region of West Africa since 2005, it has not developed a proactive foreign policy in solving the Western Sahara conflict. This article discusses that there are important reasons and dynamics limiting Turkish foreign policy capacity in Africa and Western Sahara in particular. This apart, the article also highlights that Turkey has been pursuing a realpolitik foreign policy towards the Western Sahara conflict. The main aim in this part is to explore the question of why Turkey has been developing a passive foreign policy towards Western Sahara.

### **The Dynamics and the factors shaping Turkish Foreign Policy towards Africa**

The ruling AK Party government has used 'history' as an important power source to strengthen its relations with Africa. Turkey has a deep historical relationship with Africa dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Africa held a unique place in the Ottoman foreign policy due to its geo-strategic, geo-economic and geo-cultural importance. Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Niger, and Chad belonged to the territory of the Ottoman State in the past. Protecting and serving to the Holy Cities in Makkah and Madinah had been one of the most important responsibilities of the Ottoman foreign policy. Therefore, The Ottoman State controlled over the Red Sea and East Africa to secure the Holy Cities against the security threats and the challenges (Kavas, 2007).

The Ottoman State struggled against the Portuguese colonial power in Red Sea and in East Africa and it played a critical role in abolishing the penetration of the Portuguese colonial power in these regions. The Ottoman State particularly developed very close relations with the Muslim Sultanates in East Africa including the Sultanates of Harar, Zanzibar and Darfur and provided them political, economic, cultural and military support to balance the colonial power in East Africa. The strategic reasons behind the Ottoman State's active involvement in Africa were to stop the Portuguese colonial expansion in East Africa and in the Red Sea and to secure and control the trade routes in the Indian Ocean (ibid). In addition, the Ottoman State also struggled against the Spanish colonial power in North Africa and abolished its expansionist and imperialist policies over the region of North Africa. These developments demonstrate that the Ottoman State remained a critical power on African politics until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kavas, 2015).

Furthermore, the Ottoman State developed diplomatic and security relations with the Kanem Bornu Empire which controlled countries like Niger, Chad, North Nigeria, and North Cameroon and sent military equipment to these Empire. The Kanem Bornu Empire particularly requested from the Ottoman State to ensure the safety of the pilgrimage routes from Central Africa to the Holy Cities (ibid). The strong relations between the two states show that the Ottoman State had a leadership position among the Muslims Empires and it was considered a significant military and political power on the world politics. The Ottoman State attached a significant importance to developing its socio-cultural relations with the continent. In this regard, the Ottoman State sent Imam Abu Bakr Effendi to the Cape of Good Hope in 1862 upon the request of the Muslims in order to teach the Islamic principles and strengthen the Islamic community among the South African Muslims. Moreover, when the Ottoman State during the reign of Abdulhamid II begun to construct a Hejaz Railway Project, the South African Muslims raised donations for the project. Today, the legacy of Abu Bakr Effendi in South Africa is still alive as he is a much respected and a well-known Islamic figure among the South African Muslims (ibid).

In addition, Abdulhamid II had a special relationship with Muslims in Nigeria. He sent a special representative for the ceremony of the opening of the first mosque in Lagos in Nigeria in 1894 and awarded Mohammed Shitta, who made a significant contribution to the spreading of the religion of Islam in the country, with the title of 'Bey' which was a higher civilian title in the Ottoman society (Ozkan and Akgun, 2010). After the First World War, the Ottoman State entered to the demolition process and lost Trablusgarp as its last territory in North Africa in 1912. With the collapse of the Ottoman State, the new Turkish Republic was established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923 which resulted in the cessation of the deep and historical relations between the Ottoman State and Africa (Orakci, 2007).

Analyzing the question of why the new secular state disengaged with Africa is essential for understanding the ruling AK Party government's active foreign policy towards Africa. The Kemalist elite adopted a Western and secular identity for the new state to transform the society. It was believed that westernization and secularization could modernize Turkey very quickly. The Kemalist elite imposed the new identity of the Turkish nation and used the 'hard power' to be able to build up the new identity on the Muslim nation. It can be said that the new identity construction project in the country emerged as a top-down identity construction project rather than a bottom up project. But the Turkish nation never accepted this top-down identity project because it was totally against its core values. The Kemalist elite who ruled the country for a long time rejected the Islamic and the multi-ethnic identities of the Ottoman State and endeavored to eliminate the Islamic identity of the nation from the society (Bozdaglioglu, 2003). However, the Kemalist elite failed to understand the role of the religion of Islam in Anatolia because the nation in Anatolia was strongly attached to it.

The Kemalist elite disengaged with the former territories of the Ottoman State and developed strong relations with the Western world but ignored that Turkey had a strong historical legacy in Africa. Furthermore, they saw the Ottoman legacy as a significant threat for its own security. It has to be noted that the new identity construction process during the Republican years (1923-1950) was a significant reason behind the beginning of the disengagement process between the Ottoman legacy in Africa and the new secular state. The enforcement of a new identity on the Muslim nation in Anatolia led to the emergence of deep social, economic, political and identity crises in Turkey (ibid). Until the 2000s, most of the Turkish governments developed its domestic and foreign policies in line with the Western and secular identity. Nevertheless, the AK Party governments did not conflict with the Ottoman legacy and it gave due respect to the values of the nation in Anatolia. The ruling AK Party elite redefined its historical legacy and began to see the Ottoman legacy as a significant value of the nation (Duran, 2013).

The second dynamics shaping Turkish foreign policy towards Africa is Turkey's changing domestic issues. Since Turkey was established in 1923, Turkey underwent a major change in social, economic, political and security spheres. Economic, social and political crises had been a constant feature of Turkey for many years. Particularly, Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) had been actively involved in politics in the country and considered one of the most important and effective institutions of the Kemalist elite (Sakallioğlu, 1997). TSK carried out a number of military coups and played a key role in toppling the democratically elected governments in Turkey. TSK was the most important power in shaping domestic and foreign politics in Turkey until the 2000s and it saw itself as the most significant guardian of the secular country. TSK, the bureaucratic institutions, the constitutional court, the judicial power, and the Republic People's Party (CHP) had been known as the most important protector of the secular identity of the country (ibid). However, the

traditional institutions and the actors of the Kemalism in Turkey always looked down the social and cultural values of the nation in Anatolia, conflicted with the religious values and the history of the Turkish nation (Bozdaglioglu, 2003).

Turkey particularly adopted a military identity rather than a civilian or democratic one after the republic was established in 1923. It is important to highlight that the history of the emergence of identity crisis in Turkey goes back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Ottoman State. The Westernization process in the Ottoman State began in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Ottoman Sultans decided to implement a set of the reforms in many spheres in order to prevent the collapsing of the State (ibid). After the establishment of Turkey in 1923, the new secular state dictated the top-down identity construction project on the Muslim nation, which led to the emergence of a dual identity crisis over the society (ibid). The undemocratic role of TSK in politics and the institutions of the secular elite undermined the development of democratic and civilian culture over the country. For instance, the Constitutional Court in Turkey decided to shut down the National Oder Party (1970-1971), the National Salvation Party (1972-1991), the Welfare Party (1987-1998), and the Virtue Party (1998-2001). These banned political parties were established under the most important Islamic figure of Turkey Necmettin Erbakan (Yildiz, 2017). According to him, Turkey would strengthen its relations with the Islamic world and develop a national and independent foreign security. Furthermore, he was the most important supporter of the establishment of an Islamic Military Union and the Islamic Economic Union among the Muslim countries (ibid).

When Erbakan's Welfare Party came to power in 1997 by making a coalition with the Truth Path Party, the leader of the Welfare Party Erbakan established the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (Developing-8) to strengthen economic cooperation among the countries including Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, and Pakistan. In addition, when he was the Prime Minister, he made an official visit to Libya and Nigeria to develop bilateral relations with Turkey. However, the Constitutional Court in Turkey banned the party in 1998 and prevented the implementation of the strategic plans of the Welfare Party (Cizre and Cinar, 2003). Despotic and undemocratic practices of the Kemalist institutions in Turkey particularly was the most important driving force behind the birth of the AK Party government after the 2000s. The secular elite in Turkey formulated Turkish foreign policy (TFP) in line with the Western interests and ignored developing relations with the former territories of the Ottoman State (Bozdaglioglu, 2003). When the Turkish governments maintained diplomatic, economic, military and social relations with the West at the highest level, they kept their relations with Africa and the Middle East at the lowest level until the 1990s. In this regard, Turkey became a member of the Council of Europe in 1949 and NATO in 1952 in order to westernize the Muslim country (ibid).

The end of the Cold War era brought about significant changes in the traditional Turkish foreign policy. The new geopolitical structure in the region and in the world emerged after the Cold War era forced Turkey to revise its conventional foreign policy parameters. After the 1990s, Turkey began to take strategic steps to diversify its traditional foreign policy and to develop its relations with the former territories of the Ottoman State (Sayari, 2000). The eighth President of Turkey Turgut Ozal played a very crucial role in diversifying Turkish foreign policy and strengthening the civilian structure of Turkey. According to Ozal, Turkey should had a historical and geographical significance in world politics. Turkey would be a new regional and global actor if it reinterpreted its historical and geographical dynamics. Turkey began to play a more active role in the neighboring regions and engage more actively with the countries which were a part of the former territories of the Ottoman State. Moreover, he developed an export-oriented foreign policy. During

the administration of Turgut Ozal (1983-1993), Turkey took significant steps to increase economic relations with the neighbors and to democratize Turkey (Ataman, 2002).

However, Turkey faced important regional security threats and the challenges by entering the first Gulf War in 1990-1 along with the coalition powers against Iraq. After the first Gulf War, Turkey lost its biggest economic partner in the Middle East and the terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), began to attack Turkey (Bozdaglioglu, 2003). Even though Ozal's role was historic and remarkable in changing the traditional foreign policy, the secular elite and its institutions remained as the main threat and obstacle against his new domestic and foreign policy. After the death of Turgut Ozal in 1993, a period of the coalition governments in Turkey began but it damaged political and economic stability and created deep social and economic issues over the country.

Importantly, the coalition party in 1998 adopted a new Africa Action Plan, which aimed to strengthen its relations with the African countries and with the African regional organizations. The Plan was the most important strategic plan to revitalize the relations between Turkey and the African continent in many spheres (Hazar, 2012). The disappointment of Turkey regarding its membership for the EU in 1998 was a significant reason for developing a new foreign policy orientation towards Africa. Even though the Africa Action Plan was prepared in a strategic plan, the coalition government failed to implement it because of the economic and political crises in the country (Ozkan, 2010). After the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power in November 2002, Turkey underwent a major change in many spheres. The constant economic, political, and social crises in Turkey led to the birth of the AK Party as an important civilian power in the general election of 2002. Since then, the AK Party Governments have achieved to maintain political and economic stability despite the many challenges. Turkey emerged as a significant economic and political power during the administration of the AK Party Governments, and became the sixth largest economic power among the European countries and the 17<sup>th</sup> largest one in the world. Moreover, Turkey has become a more active regional power in maintaining peace and security in the Middle East.

When the AK Party came to power, the biggest challenge for the party was the traditional institutions of the Kemalist elite. For instance, the Supreme Court of Appeals applied to the Constitutional Court for the closure of the AK Party in 2008. It was decided that the party would not be shut down but the treasury assistance would be cut at a certain rate. Despite these undemocratic challenges against the AK Party, the founder and the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan achieved to remove the army from politics (Altunisik, 2011). The overwhelming public support, the strong leadership under Erdogan, and the strong relations with the EU played very critical roles in reducing the traditional power of the military bureaucracy in politics.

The AK Party elite redefined Turkey's historical and geographical depths from a strategic perspective rather than an ideological perspective, and perceived that Turkey has an Afro-Eurasian identity. According to the AK Party elite, Turkey needs to develop a multilateral foreign policy rather than a western-oriented foreign policy (Davutoğlu, 2008). In this regard, historical and geographical profound of Turkey have been among the key dimensions of the new Turkish foreign policy parameters. From the perspective of the ruling AK Party elite, the historical depth means that the Ottoman legacy should not be seen as a threat by the state. On the contrary, it should be seen as a strategic asset by the state. According to the ruling AK Party, the state should particularly put big efforts to restore its damaged relations with the former territories of the Ottoman State. Accordingly, Turkey has taken significant steps to restore the damaged relations with the African continent. For instance, Turkey has been playing a very critical role in

rebuilding Somalia since 2011. It became the first country to open its diplomatic mission in Mogadishu in 2012 among the European and Asian countries (Ozkan and Orakci, 2015). In the view of the AK Party elite this means that Turkey needs to take advantages of its geographical depth. It is a fact that Turkey is not only a neighbor of Europe but also a neighbor with the Middle East, Asia, Caucasus, and Africa. In this regard, Turkey needs to develop a balanced relationship with its neighbors and to diversify its strategic relations with different regions and continents in line with its national interests (Davutoğlu, 2008). Turkey has established a joint economic council with the many African countries and thus paving the way to provide diplomatic and financial support to the Turkish businessmen and the business associations to engage more actively with Africa. Apart from Turkey's increasing diplomatic and economic relations with Africa, it has developed the notion of non-Western humanitarian diplomacy in Africa (Sıradağ, 2015). This new model in Africa has not only aimed to provide humanitarian assistance to the African people directly but also provide development assistance to the African countries. In this regard, Turkey has provided scholarships for more than 15 000 African students since 2002 and established hospitals, schools, mosques, and new roads, etc. (ibid).

Somalia, in particular, is a unique case for practicing Turkey's new non-Western humanitarian diplomacy in Africa. When a severe drought began in Somalia and East Africa in 2011, Erdogan the Turkish President, at that time the prime minister, was the first statesman visiting Somalia among the European and the Asian countries. Turkish government in cooperation with the Turkish NGOs initiated a joint national campaign to raise donation for the people who were affected by the severe drought in Somali. More than 350 million dollars were collected among the Turkish people (Sıradağ, 2018). Turkey has also organized international conferences on Somalia along with the international organizations such as the UN. In addition, Turkey established a military training base in Mogadishu in 2017. The main objective of the Turkish military training base is to train the Somali soldiers, to create the independent Somalia army and fight against the terrorist organizations. Parallel to this new security cooperation with Africa, Turkey initiated to train the soldiers from many African countries and intensified security relations with the continent (ibid). The strategic implication of increasing security relations between Turkey and Africa ensued to acclaim Turkey as an important strategic partner for the African countries in the military and security fields. This apart, the African countries have seen Turkey as an important actor to diversify their foreign and security policy and to decrease their dependency on the Western countries. Even though Turkey has been a new actor on the continent, it has established very strong relations with the African countries quickly due to Turkey's akin geo-cultural and geo-strategic structure with the many African countries and the lack of its colonial history on the continent that facilitated developing its relations with the continent.

The third dynamics is the regional dynamics that affect Turkish foreign policy towards Africa profoundly. Turkey is located in a very vibrant geographical point in world politics. Political, economic and security problems in the region have directly affected Turkey's political and economic stability. After the Arab Spring began in 2011, new social, political and security dynamics have emerged in the region of Middle East and North Africa (MENA). War in Syria has continued since 2011 and posed political, economic, social and security threats to Turkey. Developing strategic relations with the neighbors in all the spheres has been a key objective for the AK Party Governments (Oğuzlu, 2018). However, the emergence of the new geo-political structure in the region of the MENA has forced Turkey to revise its foreign and security policy and to adopt the new conditions according to the Turkey's strategic interests. Especially, the new security structure in the region has

damaged its political and security relations with Syria and Egypt. Political and economic instabilities in Iraq have also damaged its multilateral relations with this country. The new security landscape in the region has been a significant driving force for Turkey to play a more active role beyond the region and to find the new strategic allies and the new economic partners worldwide.

The last dynamics is Turkey's shifting identity and globalization. Turkey had formulated its foreign and security policy in line with its Western identity during the Cold War era. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey developed a new foreign policy identity that aimed to develop relations with different regions. Until the 2000s, the traditional institutions of the Kemalist elite mainly controlled the foreign policy. The Kemalist elite in Turkey always supported to maintain a Western-oriented foreign policy. The traditional foreign policy identity went through a significant transformation under the administration of the ruling AK Party governments. Turkey has intensified its strategic relations with the non-Western actors, including Russia, China, Africa and Latin America in many aspects (Oğuzlu, 2018). Multilateral foreign policy has been a significant dimension of the new foreign and security policy. In this regard, Turkey decided to buy S-400 missile from Russia and construct its first nuclear power plant in cooperation with Russia (ibid). Furthermore, Turkey has been one of the most active players in sustaining peace and security in Syria and conducted two important military operations in the Northern Syria against terrorist organizations by developing a profound strategic relation with Russia (ibid).

Turkey was chosen as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council between the 2008-2009. African countries provided a substantial support to the membership of Turkey at the UN Security Council. Turkey has also become a member of non-Western regional and sub-regional organizations in the different parts of the world, including Africa, Asia and Latin America. It has increased its global visibility within the framework of these regional and global institutions during the AK Party Governments. According to the AK Party elite, developing relations with the important non-western global and regional institutions will diversify its foreign policy and facilitate developing its relations with the different states in the world (Tepeciklioğlu, 2012). It can be said that the objectives of the new Turkish activism in the globalized world are to get more global responsibility against poverty and structural problems of the world, to establish new strategic allies, to diversify Turkish foreign policy, and to find the new economic partners.

Globalization has also played a catalyzing role in transforming the traditional foreign policy (Ozkan, 2010). While the state bureaucracy and the military bureaucracy were the most important entities in shaping Turkish foreign policy before 2000, but this traditional structure has changed and non-state actors have been more actively involved in shaping Turkish foreign policy. For instance, the Turkish NGOs, the Turkish businessmen and the Turkish business associations, the religious communities, the academic institutions in collaboration with the different states institutions have been playing a very active role in increasing political, economic, military and socio-cultural relations with the African continent.

### **Turkey's Approach toward the Western Sahara Conflict**

During the Cold War era, Turkey developed its foreign policy in line with the Western interests. For instance, Turkey rejected the demands for independence of Morocco and Algeria at the UN General Assembly in the 1950s and in the 1960s (Hazar, 2016). From the perspective of Turkey, France as a colonial power of that time would solve these problems in line with its own interests. Turkey's Western-oriented foreign policy towards

the continent damaged its historical, political and economic relations with the African continent (Bozdaglioglu, 2003). While the old Turkey had an ideology-oriented foreign policy towards Africa, the ruling AK Party has developed a new strategic perspective towards Africa that aims to develop political, economic, socio-cultural, military and historical relations with the continent comprehensively. In this regard, while Turkey rejects a unilateral approach to the Western Sahara conflict, it supports an institutional approach under the leadership of the UN, believes that the UN should play a leading role on this conflict and solve this problem by working with all the stakeholders including the Polisario front, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania. Whereas Turkey does not recognize the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as an independent state, it also does not accept Morocco's unilateral approach towards the Western Sahara.

Though Turkey has been a new emerging power on the African continent in the last decade and playing an active role in the rebuilding process in the different countries in Africa including Somalia and Libya since 2011, it does not pursue a proactive foreign policy towards the Western Sahara conflict (Kavas, 2018). Why Turkey does not play an active role in solving the conflict in Western Sahara? Turkey follows a realpolitik foreign policy towards the Western Sahara. It is important to emphasize that North Africa is the most important economic partner for Turkey in Africa. The ruling AK Party government has been strengthening its strong economic and political relations with Morocco. It is a fact that Turkey does not want to damage its bilateral relations with one of its most important economic partners in the region. When Mr. Erdogan, the current Turkish president, paid an official visit to Morocco in 2013, his counterpart particularly underlined that developing strong economic relations between Turkey and Morocco were the interests of the both countries (Morocco on the Move, 2013).

**Table 01** – Exports by the Countries in North Africa (Thousand US \$)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Morocco	1 337 555	1 469 043	1 657 718	1 989 610
Algeria	1 825 875	1 736 371	1 712 901	2 031 706
Tunisia	819 061	910 613	912 703	904 618
Libya	1 419 760	906 107	880 729	1 498 484
Egypt	3 124 876	2 732 926	2 360 734	3 054 402

**Table 02** – Imports by the Countries in North Africa (Thousand US \$)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Morocco	710 636	918 164	924 062	715 715
Algeria	740 547	463 820	766 803	1 137 914
Tunisia	144 077	214 383	206 466	182 080
Libya	195 796	161 021	247 965	367 010
Egypt	1 215 905	1 443 397	1 997 503	2 190 937

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute.

According to Table 1 and 2, Turkey's total trade with Morocco has been increasing since 2015. While Turkey's total trade with Morocco in 2015 was about 2 billion dollars, it jumped to 2,238 billion dollars in 2016. Likewise, Turkey's total trade with this country was roughly 2,581 billion dollars in 2017; it reached to 2,702 billion dollars in 2018. Morocco is the most important economic partner for Turkey in North Africa after Egypt and Algeria.

After the Arab Spring in 2011, the geopolitical structure in the Middle East and North Africa has changed significantly. In particular, the conflict in both regions have created new economic, political and security threats and challenges for Turkey. The Libyan civil war has damaged Turkey's economic activities in this country. At the same time, the Syrian conflict has also created many threats for Turkey. For instance, Turkey has accommodated the largest Syrian refugees in the world spending more than 34 billion dollars since 2011 (CNN Turk, 2018). Turkey's active involvement in the conflict in Syria and Libya has limited the development of an active Turkish involvement towards the Western Sahara. The essential question is that while Turkey is an active player in Somalia, why is Turkey not playing a constructive role in solving the Western Sahara conflict? First, the growing economic relation between Turkey and Morocco has prevented its active involvement in solving the Western Sahara issue.

Second, there are many regional and global actors involved in the conflict which slowed down and complicated its involvement on the conflict. Third, the security issues around Turkey has limited its foreign policy power towards the Western Sahara. Turkish NGOs have also played a very little role in proving humanitarian assistance in the refugees' camps in Algeria. It should be stated that the political motivations have been a significant driving force behind the Turkish NGOs' active involvement in many African countries (Sıradağ, 2015). Since 2011, many significant high-level visits between Turkey and Somalia have happened, which has motivated Turkish NGOs' to work in this country but there is a lack of strong political motivation that will prompt the Turkish NGOs in solving the conflict in the Western Sahara. It should be underlined that Turkey has a significant potential to play a constructive policy in solving the conflict in Western Sahara. First, Turkey has an Islamic identity and Turkish NGOs and state institutions have a significant international experience in rebuilding peace and security in the different parts of Africa. What Turkey should ensure is to develop a more active diplomacy rather than a passive diplomacy with the countries involved in the conflict as well as to actively engage with the UN, EU and the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in this regard. Lastly, Turkey's growing economic relations in the region of North Africa is more likely to force itself to play a more constructive role on the Western Sahara conflict in the near future.

## Conclusion

This article has established that there are four important dynamics shaping Turkish foreign policy towards Africa, namely domestic, regional, global and historical. Domestic dynamics means that Turkey has underwent a significant transformation under the leadership of the ruling AK Party governments. In particular, Turkey's growing economic power has opened new economic and political opportunities for the country. Turkey's historical and geopolitical dynamics have forced Turkish foreign policy to accomplish a more active role in the continent. Furthermore, the new geopolitical landscape emerged in the region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) after the 2011 provided a new impetus to diversify the traditional parameters of the Turkish foreign policy and to develop its economic and political relations with the African countries. Globalization has

also produced the new incentives for Turkey and facilitated the Turkish NGOs to play a more active role in the field of humanitarian diplomacy in the different parts of the world. This article has observed that Turkey has different foreign policy with the different regions in Africa. For instance, while Turkey has been one of the most active players in sustaining peace and security in Somalia, it has not pursued an active foreign policy towards the Western Sahara conflict. This article argues that Turkey's economic relations with Morocco has limited its active involvement on the Western Sahara conflict. Furthermore, there are many actors involved in the Western Sahara conflict. This has also complicated the evolution of the Turkish foreign policy towards the Western Sahara. It is more likely that Turkey will continue to deepen its strategic relations with the African countries and strengthen its institutional capacity in the coming years over the continent.

This research has also identified some obstacles and challenges that undermine the Turkish foreign policy towards Africa. First, even though the Turkish universities have opened the new African research centers, but there is a lack of experts, academicians, and politicians understanding the African dynamics. The second assumption is that even though Turkey has opened many diplomatic missions in the continent, there is a lack of diplomatic experts on Africa. The source of significant educated people in African politics is necessary to make a long-term strategic plan in Africa.

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