

## Türkiye: Infrastructure Provider for Africa with Benevolence

### Türkiye: Afrika İçin İyi Niyetli Altyapı Tedarikçisi

#### Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article



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#### ABSTRACT

Africa emerged as a region to which Türkiye has engaged enthusiastically since 2002 when the Justice and Development Party came to power. Although Türkiye's policy in Africa has many dimensions such as political, economic, religious, and cultural, this study focuses on its infrastructure investments. This paper argues that Türkiye's commitment in infrastructure development in Africa is related with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's grand narrative of "The world is bigger than five" in Turkish foreign policy. Türkiye does not aim to exploit African states but it seeks to strengthen the African states. Moreover, it aims to build a fairer world through reform initiatives. Türkiye brands itself as a benevolent enterprising actor in Africa. This study deals with Turkish infrastructure practices in Africa. Methodologically, this paper reviews the statements of the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other state officials to illuminate Turkish goals in Africa. It also uses comparative model in examining the activities of Türkiye's main competitors on the continent, China and France. While China engages in debt-trap diplomacy characterized by gaining stakes in shares of the infrastructures in exchange for debt forgiveness, France seeks to maintain its hegemonic status on the continent through infrastructure investments. Türkiye distinguishes itself from these actors with its sincere statements and responsible investments on the continent, raising its image among the African population.

**Keywords:** Infrastructure, Africa, Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, benevolence

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## ÖZ

Afrika, 2002 yılında Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin yönetime gelmesinden sonra Türkiye'nin etkileşimini arttırdığı bölgelerden biridir. Türkiye'nin Afrika politikası siyasal, ekonomik, dini ve kültürel birçok boyutu olmasına karşın, bu çalışma Türkiye'nin Afrika'daki altyapı yatırımlarına yoğunlaşmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin Afrika'daki altyapı yatırımlarına katılımı Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın Türk dış politikasındaki "Dünya Beş'ten Büyüktür" söylemi çerçevesinde hazırlanmıştır. Türkiye Afrikalı devletleri sömürmeyi amaçlamamakta aksine Afrika devletlerini güçlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra Türkiye reform girişimleriyle daha adil bir dünya inşa etmeye çabalamaktadır. Türkiye kendisini iyi niyetli bir girişimci olarak markalamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin Afrika'daki altyapı yatırımlarını incelemektedir. Metodolojik olarak bu çalışma Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın ve diğer devlet görevlilerinin açıklamalarını Türkiye'nin Afrika'daki faaliyetlerini aydınlatmak için gözden geçirmektedir. Ayrıca, karşılaştırma modelini Türkiye'nin Afrika'daki ana rakipleri olan Çin ve Fransa'nın Afrika'daki aktivitelerini incelemek için kullanmaktadır. Çin, borç karşılığında altyapılarda hisse alma şeklinde olan borç tuzağı diplomasisini uygularken, Fransa kıtadaki hegemonik statüsünü altyapı yatırımları aracılığıyla koruma peşindedir. Türkiye kendisini bu aktörlerden dürüst söylemleri ve sorumlu yatırımları ile farklılaştırmakta, Afrikalı nüfus arasındaki imajını yükseltmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Altyapı, Afrika, Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, iyi niyet

## Introduction

Infrastructure refers to a set of physical networks that enable the flow of goods, ideas, and people. Although they mainly aimed to move the military in the past, the role of infrastructures has been highlighted as the new phenomena of globalization became the new feature of world politics. The infrastructures are the basic and essential component of economic progress.

Realizing the significance of infrastructures in achieving national goals in a globalized world, states evaluated infrastructure development within the realm of national power. Infrastructure politics have increasingly gained importance, especially in the last two decades. Regionally and globally, the narrative on infrastructure initiatives dominated the international relations literature. The infrastructure does not mean building bricks. Instead, the developed nation promotes institution-building along with developing hard infrastructure through technical and capacity building, termed as soft infrastructure (Noort, 2021, p. 2). Since those elements are ways of extending a state's influence, the competition in providing infrastructure to developing countries has become one of the essential features of the race between countries.

Africa is one of the regions that desperately need infrastructure upgrades. African Development Bank estimates that Africa needs \$170 billion a year by 2025 to cover its infrastructure deficit (Kato, 2021). The major powers contend with each other to provide the necessary infrastructure to increase their influence over the continent. China's increasing presence in the African countries within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative and the new opening of Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, which assumes a new responsibility to France in Africa, could be evaluated in this context. Yet, it could be claimed that these powers try to hide their sinister ambitions in Africa. While China weaponizes debt to infringe the sovereignty of the African countries, France wants to wipe away its colonial past.

On the other hand, Türkiye differentiates itself from the major powers in that Türkiye fashions itself as a benevolent actor who is not interested in Africa's natural resources while making infrastructure investments. The Turkish state officials emphasize that Türkiye is only concerned with realizing Africa's economic potential. Not having a colonial past strengthens Türkiye's arguments, offering an advantage to Türkiye vis-à-vis other powers in branding itself as a caring partner for the African countries.

### Infrastructural Power

In order to evaluate Türkiye's infrastructural engagements and its narrative concerning infrastructure investments in Africa, a brief introduction to infrastructure must be made. Infrastructures are "objects that create the ground on which other objects operate; when they do so, they operate as systems" (Larkin, 2013, p. 329). They are materials that enable the movement of other materials (Larkin, 2013, p. 329). These definitions assume that infrastructures are not just things, but they also enable the functioning of things.

If infrastructures create new configurations, then they produce political meanings. It allows societies to evolve.

The consequence is that politics emerges in the form of a general context that shapes, or somewhat mechanically 'seeps into', new infrastructures... The point is rather that by simultaneously (and massively) transforming material environments and such diverse things as living conditions, economic opportunities, accessibility of goods and services, or health risk profiles, infrastructures change worlds (Jensen & Morita, 2017, pp. 620–621).

In this sense, the infrastructure component does not just change the material environment but also affects how this environment operates.

Infrastructure facilitates the mobility and flow of goods, raw materials, people, and information. It is about the process of becoming and modernization. It enchants people because it optimizes time and speed. Rhythm is an important function of in-

infrastructures which transforms technical, bureaucratic, and economic dimensions (Noort, 2022, pp. 33–34). Roads and railways are not just technical objects, but they are the materialization of fantasy. They appeal to the senses of pride, desire, and frustration, which can have political meanings (Larkin, 2013, p. 333). New port developments are believed to generate new business opportunities. They also have a military aspect. Infrastructure projects are essentially bets on the future (Noort, 2021, p. 3). Thus, the realization of infrastructure projects entails a civilizational dimension.

This study examines Türkiye's infrastructure projects in Africa. Emphasizing global injustice in the world, Türkiye wants to elevate the African countries' status in the world. Türkiye's participation in Africa's infrastructure development projects serves this goal. Presenting itself as a benefactor for the African countries, Türkiye eschews from using political rhetoric for its infrastructure investments in Africa while organizing infrastructure, unlike the other major powers which want to increase their political or economic clout in Africa. This assigned role contributes to the enhancement of Türkiye's image in the African countries. Before presenting the Turkish narrative in infrastructure investment in Africa, the Turkish investments in infrastructure on the continent should be mentioned.

### **Türkiye's Engagement in Africa and Infrastructure Projects**

Although the Turkish presence in Africa dates back thousands of years, relations between Türkiye and Africa reached their lowest point during the first period of the Turkish Republic. This circumstance stems from the need to secure the borders of the newly founded republic and concentrate on the formation of the state structure (Karagül & Arslan, 2013, p. 24). The first opening to the African states occurred in 1978 with the promulgation of the Africa Action Plan. The 1998 Africa Action Plan document can be considered a continuation of the 1978 opening. Yet, until 1998, the Turkish Republic had only 12 embassies in Africa (Daban, 2021, pp. 934–935). Despite these openings, the low-level engagement with Africa indicates that Turkish foreign policy officials did not view the continent as a priority area.

Justice and Development Party changed this perception. In 2003, the "Strategy of Development of Economic Relationships with Africa" was introduced to boost Türkiye's economic relations with the continent. The designation of 2005 as the "Year of Africa" demonstrates Türkiye's new multidimensional foreign policy, which places equal emphasis on its relations with Africa and its efforts to join the European Union (EU). (Habiyeremye & Oğuzlu, 2014, p. 79). Between 2003 and 2020, Türkiye's trade with the African states increased four-fold. Türkiye's embassies on the continent rose from 12 in 2003 to 42 in 2021. While Turkish investments in Africa amounted to \$100 million in 2003, this number increased to \$6,5 billion in 2021. Türkiye's rate of growth in Africa surpassed the EU by five-fold (Tanchum, 2021, p. 4).



Türkiye's engagement in Africa is multi-dimensional. It has diplomatic, economic, political, educational, and religious aspects. However, this study limits itself by examining only the infrastructural dimension. The Turkish state's endeavours in Africa have been initiated in tandem with Türkiye's business associates and civil society organizations. In 2005, Türkiye gained observer status in the Africa Union (AU) and was declared a strategic partner. In 2008, the first Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Summit was held in Istanbul. In this summit, Türkiye and the African states adopted the documents "The Istanbul Declaration on Africa-Türkiye Partnership: Solidarity and Partnership for a Common Future" and the "Framework of Cooperation Africa-Türkiye Partnership" (Habiyeremye & Oğuzlu, 2014, p. 80). The Turkish business circles and civil society organizations take active part in these initiatives. Humanitarian Relief Foundation (İHH) has been in Africa since 1996. Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), Turkish Exporters Assembly (TİM), The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB), İzmir Chamber of Commerce (İZTO) have become part of Türkiye's African engagement. Three hundred businessmen went to Africa with the then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during his state visit to Gabon, Niger, and Senegal (Karagül & Arslan, 2013, pp. 36-37). The Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) and other civil society organizations have also been active in Africa (Habiyeremye & Oğuzlu, 2014, p. 80). The close collaboration between the state and the private sector has been an important aspect of the Turkish engagement in Africa.

In the "Framework of Cooperation Africa-Türkiye Partnership" promulgated in 2008, most of the headings are related to infrastructure development. The headings mentioned infrastructure upgrades, transport, water management to develop agriculture, and communication technology (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). African leaders embrace Turkish endeavours to improve infrastructure on the continent. Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix Tshisekedi said: "Türkiye is showing special interest in Africa. We shall overcome challenges together. There is much to be done in the infrastructure sector. We have established an African continental free trade area and for that, we need better connectivity" (Tavsan, 2021). Türkiye did not remain aloof in respect to this call.

In 2019, there were 452 large infrastructure projects in Africa, whose value approximated \$500 billion. The total size of the African construction market is \$10 trillion. This number is expected to increase to \$22 trillion (Istanbul Africa Trade Company, 2021). In light of the close collaboration with the Turkish state's strategic aim of establishing close ties with Africa, the construction companies are increasingly involved in Africa's rebuilding efforts. At Türkiye-Afrika Economic and Business Forum, President of the Turkish Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, declared that the value of Turkish construction companies' projects in Africa exceeded \$70 billion in Africa. Furthermore, he said that Türkiye's investments reached \$6 billion. According

to Erdoğan, Turkish companies played a vital role in the infrastructure development of Africa. Erdoğan lauds the expertise of Turkish firms by referencing the Blaise Diagne International Airport, whose construction was begun and then abandoned by a non-Turkish firm. It was completed by a Turkish firm in eight months. (DEİK, 2021). Turkish contracting services in Africa, which amount to \$72 billion, correspond to 17 per cent of the total volume of \$428 billion (Berneunion, 2021). Thus, Africa has been evolving into an area of significance for the Turkish infrastructure sector.

Despite the challenges such as political and economic stability in Africa and lack of local knowledge concerning the African states, Turkish companies engaged in several small and big projects across 31 countries in Africa in different areas: Transportation construction, Industrial construction, Commercial construction, Residential construction, and Energy and Utility construction. Turkish companies operate even in landlocked countries in Africa (Istanbul Africa Trade Company, 2021). Turkish construction companies have undertaken the construction of East Africa’s largest indoor sports facility in Rwanda, a 400 km railway in Ethiopia, a 336 km high-speed railway in Tanzania, and a 51 km railway in Senegal (Dahir, 2021, p. 33). Turkish companies also engaged in building an expanded port in Mogadishu, an Olympic swimming pool in Senegal, and a large mosque in Djibouti (Fabricus, 2021). Turkish construction company, Yapı Merkezi, is currently building the Dar es Salaam-Morogoro-Makutupora Railway Line. Summa, another Turkish construction company, completed more than five projects in Senegal, including Blaise-Diagne International Airport, Dakar Arena, and Dakar International Center (Istanbul Africa Trade Company, 2021). The table below demonstrates the main companies that engaged in infrastructure projects in Africa:

Table 1: Main Turkish companies in infrastructure upgrade in the African states			
Company name	Number of countries operating in Africa	Countries	Type of Projects
Summa International Co. Inc	8	Libya, Senegal, Niger, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Eswatini	International Airport, Hotel, Conference & Congress & Expo Center, Mall, Residential Complex, Government Buildings, Sports Arena
Dorce Inc.	11	Mauritania, Guinea, Mozambique, Gabon, Sudan, Algeria, Congo, Djibouti, Libya, Niger, Nigeria	Housing & Residences, Hospitals & Clinics, Business Centers, Industrial Facilities, Shopping Malls, Aircraft Hangars, Sporting Halls, Military Camps

(Istanbul Africa Trade Company, 2021).



This table demonstrates that the activities of Turkish construction companies in Africa extended to most African states. Its projects are related to the economic development of the African states and improving the living conditions of the citizens of these states. Thus, the Turkish engagement in upgrading African infrastructure also enhances the African people's welfare.

While analysing Turkish companies' participation in the infrastructure sector in Africa, the role of Türk Eximbank, which is the sole export creditor agency of Türkiye, must be mentioned. All the big infrastructure projects in which Turkish companies participated in Africa were accomplished under the International Loans Program, a buyer's credit scheme. The railway project in Ethiopia was the largest undertaking that Türk Eximbank has financed. In total, Türk Eximbank's support to Africa totalled \$1,3 billion. The support is in the form of a direct loan to sovereigns or under a sovereign guarantee. Moreover, Türk Eximbank collaborates with major international financial institutions in its activities in Africa. Türkiye is a shareholder of the African Development Bank. Türk Eximbank expanded its cooperation with African financial institutions such as Afreximbank, Ecowas Bank, Trade Development Bank, and African Trade Insurance. The cooperation areas include risk-sharing and extension of credit lines (Berneunion, 2021). A meeting was held between Benedict Oramah, President of Afreximbank and Adnan Yıldırım, CEO of Türk Eximbank in April 2019. In this meeting, the parties agreed to ease transactions for Turkish companies in Africa (Afreximbank, 2019). Türk Eximbank also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank (TDB). This deal encompasses mutual financing and guarantees cooperation for infrastructure projects that Turkish companies would undertake (Daily Sabah, 2020). These financial collaborations pave the way for the greater involvement of Turkish companies in African infrastructure projects. Besides creating favourable conditions for Turkish construction companies in Africa, it provides loans for African countries' infrastructure projects. In 2017, Tanzania requested loan from Türk Eximbank to complete the railway project, which plans to connect its Dar es Salam port to landlocked African states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Rwanda, and Uganda (Logistics Update Africa, 2017). Thus, Türk Eximbank has emerged as an important financial partner for African states.

Besides Turkish private companies and financial institutions, the role of TİKA should also be investigated. Especially in health infrastructure, TİKA constructed Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Hospital, Libyan Physiotherapy Hospital in Somalia, and Niger-Türkiye Friendship Hospital. It provided medical supplies to the African states, built sanitary units, and mask production facilities (Kayalar, 2021). TİKA renovated the National Centre of Orthopaedic Equipment in Senegal, including the departments of the body mass index rehabilitation hall, physical therapy and rehabilitation, and the care of children with cerebral palsy. It built a waiting room for patients (TİKA, 2022). Moreover, the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay) opened artesian wells in Chad,

Uganda, Somalia, and Niger for the African population to reach drinking water (Türk Kızılay, 2021). These are a few examples of how Türkiye contributed to health and water infrastructure in Africa.

Türkiye has introduced several tools to improve infrastructure in Africa. Diplomatic agencies of the Turkish state, Turkish construction companies, civil society organizations, and financial institutions act with a greater degree of accord in infrastructure projects in Africa. While accomplishing the big infrastructure projects, the narrative of Turkish infrastructure provision also enhances the image of Türkiye in Africa.

### **Türkiye's Great Narrative in International Politics and Its Implications in Africa**

Türkiye's branding itself as a benevolent actor in Africa is related to Türkiye's grand narrative outlined by the President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Erdoğan claims that the current structure of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) does not bring the justice and equality that the United Nations (UN) promises to bring. The five permanent members dominate the agenda of the UNSC, offering a minimal role to the temporary UNSC members, who are elected for two-year periods. He especially points out the absence of an African voice in the UNSC. Therefore, to accomplish a just world, a reform, which would reflect the multipolar world in the UNSC, is necessary (Erdoğan, 2021, pp. 4-5). President Erdoğan, in his speeches addressed to the national and international public, has repeatedly touched upon this issue by declaring that "The world is bigger than five." This maxim became the vision of the new Türkiye (Erdoğan, 2017). This maxim is against the status quo in a world characterized by injustice and conflict. Instead, he puts forward a new reformed world order branded by justice and equality (Açıklık, 2021, p. 107).

Erdoğan's grand narrative shapes Türkiye's African policy. According to Erdoğan, the interests of Africa are not represented in the UN. During his visit to Africa, he urged the African states to join his efforts to reform the UN. From this angle, Turkish development policy in Africa is a strategic goal for Türkiye to mobilize 54 African states to reach a fairer world by reforming the UN (Dahir, 2021, p. 33). In 2016, during his visit to Uganda, Erdoğan again stated that the world is bigger than five by claiming that Africa does not have a representative in the UNSC. According to Erdoğan, this injustice must be rectified (Al Jazeera, 2016). In 2018, after his visit to Africa, Erdoğan reiterated, "We want to walk with Africa while a new world order is being established" (Kenyon, 2018). During his state visit to Senegal in 2020, Erdoğan emphasized Türkiye's position in Africa. "We see the people of Africa as our brothers, with whom we share a common fate. We approach their suffering without political, strategic, or self-interested motives, but humanely and conscientiously." (DW, 2021). Instead of pursuing neo-colonial goals, Türkiye's interests in Africa are aligned with the goal of creating a fairer world.





Another theme that Erdoğan emphasizes is Türkiye's absence of a colonial past in Africa. In 2016 in Uganda, Erdoğan stated that Türkiye did not colonize Africa in its history. Türkiye wants to build a partnership on the basis of mutual gain (Al Jazeera, 2016). In 2021 in Angola, Erdoğan stressed that Türkiye did not have the shame of a colonial past. Türkiye's struggle is characterized by its demand for a fairer world. In this respect, Türkiye's investments in Africa should be regarded in this light (Yeni Şafak, 2021). Erdoğan argued that Türkiye does not look to secure short- or medium-term gains in its African investments. Türkiye wants the partnership to benefit both Türkiye and the African states (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye's Directorate of Communications, 2021). Türkiye has repeatedly emphasized that its presence in Africa is not intended to exploit or take advantage of the African states. In his visit to South Africa, Erdoğan said that:

We are committed to providing a win-win-based investment and trade environment that will benefit both countries... What our African brothers have longed for years are true friends who respect their history, culture, traditions, and languages. As Türkiye, we want to be true friends of Africa (Kazancı, 2018).

In his visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Erdoğan praises TİKA's activities in developing social and administrative infrastructure in the Democratic Republic of Congo, emphasizing Türkiye's adherence to goodwill in conducting economic activities (Tosun & Beyaz, 2022). His approach in Africa is summarized as "revival and construction" (Duran, 2022). Highlighting Türkiye's clean past in Africa, characterized by not engaging in colonialism, offers trust and hope for the African states. Türkiye's general goal in its foreign policy, which is a fairer world, is also appealing to the African states, which continue to be victimized by the current international system. With its rhetoric, Türkiye brands itself as a benevolent actor in Africa's development at the level of the presidency. Thus, its infrastructure investments on the continent are essential components of Erdoğan's foreign policy tenets.

Acknowledging the significance of Africa in the world politics, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye outlines its approach to Africa:

Türkiye shares its own historical experience, social, political and cultural accumulation as well as its opportunities and resources with African countries under the principle of "African solutions for African problems" and the on the basis of mutual benefit...With our Africa Partnership Policy, which is the product of an integrated understanding that includes the activities of public institutions, private sector, non-governmental organizations and humanitarian aid organizations, we aim to contribute to peace, stability, economic and social development of the Continent, and develop our bilateral relations on the basis of equal partnership and mutual benefit (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Türkiye, wrote an article in 2018 on May 25, African Day. In this article, he argues the following:

We have every reason to be proud as a partner of the African nations. Türkiye's engagement is based on building lasting relationships. Our principal purpose is to establish deep-rooted cooperation with our African counterparts in a sustainable and mutually productive manner. In so many instances, I have been encouraged to hear that Türkiye's goodwill and determined outreach resonates with our African partners. Africa considers Türkiye, a vigorous partner in its progress toward comprehensive and sustainable development and its consequent influence on global affairs (Çavuşoğlu, 2018).

The emphasis on mutual gain and equal partnership by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is compatible with Türkiye's African policy outlined by President Erdoğan. The choice of the name of forums held between Türkiye and the African states reflects this policy. The second forum held in 2018 was named "Investment on the Sustainable Future Together." Turkish rhetoric has been strategically used to strengthen the Turkish image in Africa as a caring and trusted partner.

The Turkish ambassadors in Africa also reiterate Türkiye's role in providing infrastructure for the continent's benefit. Elif Ülgen, Türkiye's then-Ambassador to South Africa, claimed that Türkiye had no colonial baggage, but Türkiye's expansion in Africa did not have any hidden ambition such as asserting power or making Türkiye great in Africa. Türkiye deals with each country on its own merits (Fabricus, 2021). Turkish Commercial Undersecretary in Uganda stated that Turkish companies were involved in construction projects, including a bidding proposal for the railway project that would connect Tanzania's ports to Inner Africa. Kerem Alp, Türkiye's Ambassador to Uganda, argued that Türkiye's endeavours in infrastructure aimed to offer the Turkish model of development in Uganda instead of colonial ambitions (Özbil, 2021). Alp Ay, Türkiye's Ambassador to Angola, emphasized the role of infrastructure in Angola's development:

An Angola that embraces the global world with an active foreign policy and a stronger economic structure will benefit Angolans and the whole region. Hence, Türkiye is ready to contribute to the reform process, especially in terms of diversifying economic resources, strengthening the infrastructure and creating new employment opportunities (Durmaz, 2021).

Aside from Turkish policymakers, auxiliary organizations such as TİKA emphasize the importance of Turkish infrastructure investments in Africa in disseminating Türkiye's quest to establish just order in the world. The President of TİKA, Serkan Kayalar, argued that Türkiye is different from other actors in the world in that it brings a



“Turkish-Type Development Cooperation Model” in which the collaborative and people-oriented approach is prevalent in the fulfilment of the needs of the African states rather than hierarchical model between donor and recipient. Instead of interest-oriented policies, Türkiye looks for equal partnership with the African states based on mutual and equal gain. In this respect, TİKA implements developmental projects that prioritize people and enable Africa to tell its own story rather than be part of the agenda imposed on it. Indeed, the construction of hospitals, vocational training centres, schools, agriculture development projects, and women’s educational centres aim directly to improve African states' lives (Kayalar, 2021).

The African states appeared to embrace Turkish rhetoric. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, stated that: “Türkiye does not have a colonial past, and this brings an advantage to you. We are cooperating as equals” (Tavsan, 2021). İbrahim Bachir Abdoulaye, a Nigerian researcher at the University of Bayreuth in Germany, argued that the Turkish development model is different from those of other major powers in Africa in that it emphasizes a humanitarian approach and is impactful on the daily lives of the citizens of the African states (Durmaz, 2021). Ahmed-Kheir Abdi, Somalia's state minister for foreign affairs, commends Turkish presence in Somalia: “Türkiye came to Somalia first in 2011, when no one dared to go to Somalia. There was a drought, there was a famine, there [were] terrorist activities there, and everyone stayed away” (Kenyon, 2018). A survey conducted among 2,400 opinion leaders, including politicians, business people, religious leaders, athletes, intellectuals, and artists from over 12 African states, indicates the rise of the Turkish image in Africa. According to respondents, Türkiye is in 8th place, rising from eight percent in 2020 to 15 percent in 2021, one of the countries with the best image (Marbot & Toulemonde, 2021). Considering that Türkiye has actively been involved on the continent only for two decades, Türkiye is conquering the minds of African elites. This survey demonstrates that its image in Africa has improved as time passes. Infrastructure investments play a significant role in this improvement. Yet, Türkiye is not the only infrastructure supplier on the continent. It has major competitors such as China and France. What distinguishes Türkiye from these powers is that Türkiye promotes its infrastructure investments as a mutually beneficial and equal partnership framework. The analysis of the infrastructure activities of China and France will enable us to see the difference between Türkiye and these two states in their infrastructure investments.

### **China and France’s Infrastructure Investments in Africa**

Chinese leaders consider Africa a special region. It has been a tradition that Africa would be the first foreign visit of new leaders. Xi Jinping visited South Africa, the Republic of Congo, and Tanzania. Since then, every year, they have witnessed the visits

of high-ranking Chinese officials (The Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2018, p. 11). Since the 2000s, China's presence in Africa has increased dramatically. Foreign direct investment on the continent and infrastructure financing constituted the main policy tools for China (Calabrese & Tang, 2020, p. 9).

The White Paper that outlines China's Africa policy defines the main parameters of this policy as "equality and mutual benefit, solidarity and common development" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Ghana, 2006). The Belt and Road Initiative, announced in 2013, which unveiled a global infrastructure plan to connect China with the rest of the world, enhanced China's presence in Africa. The Belt and Road Initiative offered China a \$1 billion infrastructure development fund to construct roads and improve infrastructure in the African states. There are approximately 10,000 Chinese construction companies in Africa valued at \$2 trillion. In 2017, 50 per cent of the African continent's engineering, construction, and procurement contract was awarded to Chinese construction companies. In 2018, Chinese funding comprised a quarter of the more than \$100 billion in commitments to develop infrastructure (Adeshokan, 2021). Daan Roggeveen, the founder of MORE Architecture, argued, "Right now, you could say that any big project in African cities that is higher than three floors or roads that are longer than three kilometres are most likely being built and engineered by the Chinese. It is ubiquitous" (Shepard, 2019). Although trade flows are bilateral, African investments in China are much smaller than Chinese investments in Africa (Calabrese & Tang, 2020, p. 12). Trade deals have primarily been based on swapping large infrastructure projects for access to natural resources. Chinese oil companies such as China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), and China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec) have increased their presence in Africa (Habiyeremye & Oğuzlu, 2014, p. 77). Despite the official proclamation that promises equal partnership, trade deals and infrastructure agreements with China are tied with Chinese energy deals in Africa.

Another concern for the African states regarding Chinese investments on the continent is the infringement that debts would bring to their sovereignty. The term debt-trap diplomacy was coined by Indian political scientist Brahma Chellaney. According to Chellaney, the main goal of China's infrastructure investments in the developing world is to extend huge loans. Through these loans, China acquires strategic infrastructures in these countries and harms their sovereignty (Chellaney, 2017). The most striking example is China's acquisition of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port. China Harbor Engineering Company undertook the construction of the Hambantota Port Development Project. When Sri Lanka struggled to pay the debts accumulated, China took over the administration of the port and 15,000 acres of land around the port for 99 years in exchange for writing off the debts. Although China claims the deal is strictly commercial, the port's strategic location raises the possibility of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) being stationed there (Abi-Habib, 2018). Seventy-five per cent



of the stakes of the China-built dam in Nepal was handed over to China Three Gorges Corporation (Chellaney, 2017). These examples demonstrate that debt has become an instrument of the Chinese state as a way of gaining control of infrastructures in developing states.

This threat is very much relevant for the African states. Uganda's only international airport, Entebbe International Airport, is under threat of being taken over by China. In 2015, Uganda received \$207 million from China's Export-Import Bank (Exim) with a two per cent interest to upgrade Entebbe International Airport. While taking this loan, the Ugandan government gave up international immunity in the loan agreements it signed, leaving Entebbe International Airport vulnerable to takeover without protection. In November 2021, the Ugandan government sent a delegation to Pekin to discuss the repayment. In this meeting, it was suggested that the Chinese lenders take over management of Entebbe International Airport (WION, 2021). It is also rumored that Kenya's Mombasa port was mortgaged for the \$3.2 billion debt received for improving railway infrastructure. The Kenyan authorities denied these rumours (The EastAfrican, 2021). However, Chinese practices raise the possibility that these claims are true. Another African country grappling with Chinese debt is Zambia. Zambia needs to re-negotiate its \$14.4 billion debt, \$6 billion of which is owed to China. Stanley Kuku-ba, Zambia's Foreign Affairs Minister, stated that the Zambian government is re-negotiating with the Minister of Finance in China (Reuters, 2021). China's use of debt loaned for infrastructure development in Africa as a weapon to infringe on the sovereignty of the African states will raise controversies concerning Chinese participation in the infrastructure projects in Africa. People in Africa have already been complaining about increasing Chinese presence. Wonde, a 30-year-old taxi driver from Ethiopia said, "China is bad for us. They bring China here -- workers, food, women -- and leave nothing for the Ethiopians" (Irish, 2019). It is likely that Chinese practice of taking advantage of infrastructure investments will be questioned in Africa in the future.

Another major power which shifted its focus to infrastructure development in Africa is France. France's hold over Africa even after the independence of the African states should be evaluated in the context of neo-colonialism, which can be defined as the "continuation of external control over African territories by newer and subtler methods than those exercised under formal empire (Krupova and Cech, 2020, pp. 294-295). In 2017, in Burkina Faso, President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron declared that France had ended its strategy of exerting military, political, and economic influence over its former colonies in Africa, announcing a new chapter in relations with African states. This new chapter focuses primarily on building partnerships with African states, with a particular emphasis on French involvement in infrastructure projects. (Mallet et al., 2020). He mobilized development agencies for this purpose. Currently, 50 per cent of Agence Française de Développement (AFD) activity has been diverted to Africa. It operates in 54 states on the continent and is implementing projects in 44 of

them (AFD, 2022). He summarized new French engagement as “The idea is to change the profound software of our relationship” and to “get out of the logic structured by past representations, for better or for worse” (Pollet, 2022). Macron wants to redesign France’s relations with Africa by seeking to erase the effects of its colonial past.

France expanded its infrastructure investments not only in Francophone Africa but also in Eastern Africa. In the first visit at the heads of state level to Kenya since its independence in 1963, Macron announced €3 billion worth of deals. The French engagement in Kenya includes improving Kenya’s transport networks. French consortium was awarded a railway project which would link Nairobi, Kenya’s capital, to other railway stations (Monteine, 2019). While investing in infrastructure in Africa, France and China have a relationship characterized by both competition and collaboration. The main goal of the French policy of focusing on infrastructure development in Africa is to counter the rising Chinese presence. The French government introduced a bill that would increase the French aid budget to 0.55 per cent of its GDP. Jean-Yves Le Drian, the French Foreign Minister, said, “We’re fighting China in a battle for influence – and a battle over what system of government countries should see as their model.” President Macron stated, “I wouldn’t want a new generation of international investments to encroach on our historical partners’ sovereignty or weaken their economies” (Sauvage, 2021). Yet, Macron also has ambitions in Africa. He wants to reassert France as a global power, maintaining the French hold in Africa (Monteine, 2019). Thus, France’s infrastructure investments in Africa have also hegemonic aspirations.

## Conclusion

Türkiye has increased its presence in Africa since 2003, when the Justice and Development Party came to power. The grand narrative that shaped Türkiye’s Africa policy has been drawn by the leader of the party and the Turkish state, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. “The world is bigger than five” targets the hegemonic power of the five permanent members of the UNSC. This policy suggests replacing this order with a fresh order characterized by justice and equality.

Africa is an important part of realizing this grand strategy of Türkiye. Infrastructure investments offer significant powers to the investors. Türkiye uses this influence gained through its infrastructure investments on the continent to mobilize the African states to build a more equal and fairer world. Because it is not a colonial power and is strictly committed to improving the lives of Africans, Türkiye’s infrastructure investments introduced a novel development model to the continent, which has been exploited and abused. President Erdoğan and other state officials constantly emphasize that Türkiye does not come to Africa for exploitation, but it aims to build a shared future together.

Türkiye has two main competitors in the infrastructure field: China and France. Both countries have obscure agendas with their infrastructure investments. China ties its infrastructure investments with energy deals in the African states, thus, securing energy flow from the continent. More importantly, it uses debt as a weapon to acquire stakes in vital infrastructures in the states. In the long-term, these practices will alienate the African states, which want to preserve their political and economic sovereignties. France, on the other hand, competes with China to maintain its influence on the African states by diminishing its military and political power and increasing its investments in the infrastructure of the continent. French policy could be considered a new way of hegemonic aspirations. Türkiye neither seeks to enslave the African states through debt nor establish or maintain hegemony over them. It distinguishes itself from these powers by emphasizing its selfless goals on the continent. Türkiye succeeded in translating its rhetoric into policies in Africa, thus presenting itself as a benevolent actor.



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