

*Research/Review Article*

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## Türkiye-Morocco Relations and the Dynamic Actions Taken by Both Sides to Address Emerging Issues

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**Abstract:** The article on Türkiye-Morocco relations analyzes the two countries together encompassing politics and economy. Türkiye-Morocco relations began in the 1950s after the independence of Morocco. However, there were relations between Turks and Moroccans before the establishment of diplomatic relations in the modern sense. In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire conquered Algeria and it began to have a border with Morocco. However, there was not any notable development in the relations until the end of the Cold War due to the interdependence of Morocco with France in domestic and external affairs. A new era was opened in Türkiye-Morocco relations during the Post-Cold War era. In 1998, notable developments began to take place in the relations and the affairs gained a new dimension during the 21st century. Since 2005, Türkiye has followed proactive policy in this continent thanks to the Africa Initiative and Morocco has been a key country to open a page with African countries. The relations have begun to develop and deepen in different fields in this new term and both countries created good and strategic affairs today despite the challenges coming from regional and international issues. This article analyzes how the relations between Türkiye and Morocco have been shaped according to different periods from the past to today by focusing on changing realities in the region and world system, and the basis of the relation.

**Keywords:** Türkiye, Morocco, Ottoman Empire, MENA

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### INTRODUCTION

Türkiye and Morocco are two Muslim countries that have had deep and historical relations for years. The first contact was established between Turks and Moroccans after the conquest of Algeria by the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. In modern times, the first diplomatic relations were set up after Morocco had gained its independence from France which took Morocco under control in 1912. Morocco was the protectorate of France for years, so it did not have any will to determine its fate in internal and external systems. Hence, there was no ground for Türkiye and Morocco to develop and deepen their relations until the independence of Morocco, although non-official relations were still active. However, 1956 was the year when the diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Morocco were set up in the modern history of world politics (Lazerq, 2021).

However, the atmosphere of the Cold War did not provide any ground for Türkiye and Morocco to deepen their bilateral relations further due to Morocco's procurements of Soviet arms and vehicles in addition to its close relations with the USSR (Gleijeses, 2002: 41).

In the late Cold War period, they began to develop bilateral relations through productive agreements in different fields. They have maintained these affairs by deepening in the years with the common heritage. Together with Türkiye's multidimensional foreign policy strategy trying to expand its influence, Morocco has become an important country for her to expand its influence in North Africa under the banner of the Africa Initiative of Türkiye

that started in 2005. Therefore, Türkiye and Morocco have good and deep strategic relations in today's world politics thanks to initiatives to constitute relations on the historical background, common heritage, and economic reality. That's why, if we want to understand the importance and codes of Morocco-Türkiye relations, we should look at the history and how the relations have changed from time to time.

In the following sections, relations from the Medieval Age to the independence of Morocco, relations during the Cold War period, and relations in the Post-Cold War term are examined in 3 subfields. By the case-centric process tracing methodology, the relations of the two countries are examined through historical events and tried to find the backgrounds of the issues. Additionally, policies and beliefs of the countries are assessed and attempted to create a linkage between those facts and visions. Finally, sought to answer the questions of what type of varieties are available today that affect the relations and how likely those varieties play a role in the decision-making processes of the two countries.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The article on Türkiye-Morocco relations analyzes Türkiye-Morocco relations, encompassing politics and economy. Türkiye-Morocco relations began in the 1950s after the independence of Morocco. However, there were relations between Turks and Moroccans before the establishment of diplomatic relations in the modern sense. In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire conquered Algeria and it began to have a border with Morocco. So, these relations are to be analyzed from the 1600s to the current period.

In accordance with the approach of the paper, the process tracing method is followed to emphasize the relation between the common history of the two states and emerging issues as well as cooperation. Additionally, as a subfield, case-centric process tracing is selected to unravel the similarities and differences between the foreign policies of the two states historically.

## 3. RELATIONS FROM THE MEDIEVAL AGE TO THE INDEPENDENCE OF MOROCCO

Arab conquests in the 7th century became dominant for the Islam religion in Morocco. Later, Muslims conquered some parts of Spain, and they established an Islamic state in some parts of Spain and Portugal as well as constituted an Islamic civilization there. However, after centuries, they had to flee from Spain to Morocco due to massacres of Spanish groups of Muslim and Jewish population to remove them from the European continent. Morocco maintained its survival as an independent country for centuries until the French control over Morocco from 1912 to 1956. Also, Morocco is the only North African country that did not live under the control of the Ottoman Empire which controlled most of North Africa for centuries (Brett, 1984).

In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire and Morocco became neighbors after the Ottomans had conquered Algeria. Then, similar interests were raised through commerce, trade, hadj, and cultural affairs due to the common issue namely the Spanish threat. By the way, the Spanish throne was also careful about not creating a united bloc between the Ottoman Empire, Morocco, and other North African divisions. Additionally, those Muslim countries and communities were aware of Al-Andalus' heritage. So, Spain's diplomacy was declining due to depending its relations on divisive policies (Corrales, 2021: 217-234).

But the two states also fought against each other in different periods due to border issues between the Ottoman Empire-Morocco-Algeria border until the 19th century. Although Morocco was not under the direct control of the

Ottoman Empire, it had an obligation to pay taxes to the Ottoman Empire. This obligation continued for years because Ottoman Empire was one of the most powerful empires in the region as well as it was controlling most of the region (Andrew, 1968: 10-12).

However, when the Ottoman Empire began to lose power, it also began to lose control over North Africa in the first years of the 19th century inasmuch imperialist powers such as the UK, France, and Italy had desired to control North African Regencies that were under the control of the Ottoman Empire for centuries. That's why, the Ottoman Empire began to change its foreign policy strategies towards the region to keep its territories united. The main reason for loosening the relations between the Ottoman Empire and North African Regencies was the decentralist approach of the Ottoman administration. Additionally, before the spread of the Westphalian model of the modern state, the borders were loose and state control was limited over the distant areas (Atcil, 2013: 27-42).

1830 is the year when Algeria, which had been under the control of the Ottoman Empire since the 16th century, was invaded by France since France had colonial desires that began after the Industrial Revolution. That revolution encouraged advanced states to invade territories to find cheap labor force, and cheap raw materials and to create markets to sell their manufactured goods to make more profit (Falls, 2005).

In addition to domestic affairs, the priority of the empire was competition against Russia which began to threaten the existence of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, Caucasus, and Black Sea. This was the main reason why the Ottoman Empire could not resist Algeria against France to protect its existence by reason of it had to keep its troops in Anatolia, and the Balkans due to the Russian threat (Isci, 2014).

After the invasion of Algeria by France, Morocco became a very important state for the Ottoman policymakers to respond imperial desires of the Western powers like France, Britain, Italy, and Germany that were seeking new colonies around the world for their colonial desires. Because the main approach depended on that Morocco and the Ottoman Empire were Muslim states and they had common traditions, it would make collaboration between them more likely. Morocco was one of the trading partners of the Ottoman Empire, and the fez (Turkish:fes) issue should be taken into consideration. This hat was made in the city of Fez (Morocco), which is also the source of its name, and from there, it spread to the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, this city has been the center of the leather industry for centuries, and as a consequence of this, the Ottoman leather industry was affected by the Moroccan one (Awad, 1964: 56-64).

However, there was not any remarkable development in the relations between them until Abdulhamid II's term because the policymakers concentrated on domestic issues to protect territorial integrity against different ethnic groups that had lived under the protection of the empire as its non-Muslim subjects. So, it concentrated on new reforms to modernize the empire to catch the current trend of the world to be able to compete with other powers (Makdisi, 2002: 769-788).

Ottoman's priority in the 19th century was to transform the state into a modern one. The most important of these efforts began with the initiatives of Selim III and Mahmud II and then his successors tried to transform the empire. In this sense, the innovations in the military field, which started in the 18th century, gained new financial, administrative, social, and cultural content in the 19th century (Okmen, 2007: 5-14).

For instance, in the last years of Sultan Abdulaziz, great efforts were made to reform the civil service and turn it into a smoothly functioning institution through Mekteb-i Mülkiye (Civil Service School). However, the aforementioned

system was implemented by Abdulhamid II later on and efforts to train new types of civil servants began in this period (Findley, 1980: 168).

When Abdulhamid II came to the throne, he initiated pan-Islamic policies as the caliph of the Muslim world to unite the Muslim world against imperial powers like Britain, France, Italy, and Russia. However, it should be noted that in the 19th and 20th centuries, like today, instead of uniting with religious solidarity, Muslim states competed among themselves as rival dynasties. They formed strategic alliances with non-Muslims based on different interests and political agendas. So, the historically ongoing conflict between the Muslim world and the West is a major misconception (Aydın, 2017: 229).

Nevertheless, he paid attention to each Muslim country, and Morocco was one of them for the security of North Africa. In 1877, the Ottoman Empire sent an envoy whose name was Ibrahim Senusi. The envoy was welcomed by Mevlay I. Hasan who was the head of Morocco as a member of the Alawite Dynasty that has ruled Morocco since the 17th century and this dynasty comes from the prophet Muhammad's lineage. The envoy mentioned Abdulhamid's ideas and desires for a united Muslim world. The King of Morocco responded to this letter by stating its loyalty to the emperor of the Ottoman Empire and they agreed on the establishment of embassies mutually. This initiative of the Ottoman Empire was supported by Britain and Germany to balance France in North Africa, but France was a huge obstacle to this initiative. This initiative failed due to suppression coming from France over Morocco after the invasion of Tunisia in 1881. After this invasion, France concentrated on the invasion of Morocco (Deringil, 1991).

It should be noted that the Mithat Pasha incident is a major reason behind the Ottoman Empire's inability to raise its voice against the invasion of Tunisia. Mithat Pasha, accused of the death of Sultan Abdulaziz, sought asylum from the French Consulate in Izmir and then Abdulhamid II asked Mithat Pasha to surrender, giving assurances of life and justice. Additionally, the French Government did not accept the Mithat Pasha's request for its further policies in Tunisia. This development led to a softening in Abdulhamid II's policies and facilitated the dispossession of Tunisia (Şimşir, 1970: 39-51).

Moreover, these initiatives were maintained after the reign of Abdulhamid II. During the period of the Union and Progress Party term, military assistance was provided by the Ottoman Empire for Morocco to improve its military capability against imperial powers, especially France. However, when Morocco signed the Treaty of Fez on 30 March 1912, France declared its hegemony over Morocco, and initiatives of the Ottoman Empire to achieve and complete pan-Islamic goals failed. This treaty also means the cut-off relations between Ottomans and Moroccans. Before that, the Ottoman Empire tried to organize a resistance movement in Morocco with the financial support of Germany, but the Tripoli War prevented this. After the 1912 French occupation, Morocco was divided into zones of influence between France and Spain with the agreement in 1913. The Ottoman State reacted to both agreements but could not impose any other sanctions (Yeşilmen, 2018: 117-118).

Thus, the relations between the Turks and Morocco ended at the beginning of the 20th century just before the First World War led to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and it led to the birth of the Republic of Türkiye was established on the heritage of the Ottoman Empire under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

When Morocco accepted the protectorate of France in 1912 after signing the Treaty of Fez, it entered a transition period. However, France did not treat Morocco as its protectorate, in that France allowed the Alawite Dynasty to protect its sovereignty. But its internal and external policies were determined by France and it maintained its

existence as a part of France. So Morocco had no right to express its will in domestic and foreign policy making independently. Moreover, France was not the only country to invade Morocco since Spain also took some parts of it under its control at the same time after negotiating with France in 1913. Under the control of France and Spain, Morocco concentrated on its independence. Although there were lots of initiatives against these imperial powers to gain independence, all of them were suppressed and failed. On the other hand, Türkiye was a newly established state in the 1920s. Its agenda was occupied reestablishment and modernization of the country in the new world system of the inter-war period. Until the independence of Morocco in 1956, there were no diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Morocco because of Morocco's dependent position. Moreover, Türkiye followed a pro-France stance due to the Cold War conditions when Moroccans increased the volume of the clash on France since Türkiye saw the issue as a domestic issue of France. Türkiye also followed the same strategy during Algeria's independence war process against France in the 1950s and 1960s (Hale, 2013).

Morocco declared its independence from France and Spain in March and April 1956, respectively. Then, diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Morocco were established with a joint statement made on the same day by the Governments of the two countries on April 17, 1956 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023a).

One of the main reasons for Türkiye's passivated strategy in this term is that Türkiye was not independent to apply different foreign policies due to the realities of the Cold War period because it had to shape its foreign policy according to the principles of its bloc. So it did not want to deteriorate relations with France which was the same ally as Türkiye.

#### **4. RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR PERIOD**

After the Second World War, world politics entered into a new term that was shaped according to the realities of the bipolar international system structure. The USA and the USSR were pioneers of the two opposite groups that were competing with each other. Moreover, there were new initiatives. For example, the UN was established on 24 October 1945 and lots of new agreements were issued under the banner of the UN. It means that new rules were introduced and the constitution of the international system namely the UN Charter was issued even though it was not efficient and influential (UN, 1945).

On the other hand, lots of countries like Morocco began to declare their independence because they were colonies or protectorates of the great powers for years due to their imperialist goals. Moreover, war was prohibited by the UN Charter that must be respected by the nation-states which are the main subjects of the international system. However, the world would be more likely to see a new world war due to the atmosphere of the Cold War period since the USA and the USSR were trying to establish and protect their hegemonies. This rivalry led to the clash of conflicts and division of the world. In this new structure, states couldn't follow independent foreign policies since pioneers of the two blocs would decide the strategies and they had to follow the leaders of the system to maintain their survival against members of the opposition bloc. Also, any nation-state must decrease the level of relations with parties of another bloc in the fields of economics, cultural and social interaction, and military cooperation. They had to be by the will of the leader of the bloc because it is a superpower and can change the order (Wagner, 1993). That's why, this period did not provide any ground for Türkiye and Morocco to develop and deepen their bilateral relations.

After the Second World War, there was a change in the distribution of power in world politics and new hegemon states like the US emerged. The UK and France which were the pioneers in world politics until the Second World

War began to lose their powers, so their colonies began to declare their independence. Morocco was one of these states that declared its independence after the Second World War. However, it was not easy for Morocco to gain its independence from France since Morocco was under the protection of France in 1912 after the signing of the Treaty of Fez. It had lots of attempts to gain its independence, but it was suppressed by France by using hard power. Hence, there was no initiative to establish and develop diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Morocco until the independence of Morocco in 1956. During the independence struggle of Morocco against France, Türkiye did not want to take a position against France in this war even though Türkiye and Morocco have common cultural, traditional, and religious heritages. The main reason, why Türkiye did not want to take a position in this war, was that Türkiye did not have independent foreign policy strategies due to the realities of the period (Denizeau, 2022).

That's why, Türkiye refrained from taking a position and stayed neutral through following non-interventionist policy. It did not have any chance to deteriorate the relations with France since Türkiye and France were the parties of the same bloc and alliance, so it was dangerous to have any clash or conflict between the members of the same alliance.

After a huge struggle against France, Morocco declared its independence in 1956 and Türkiye recognized Morocco as a sovereign country. Later on, diplomatic relations officially began between the two countries on April 17, 1956. Also, both countries opened embassies mutually. On April 2, 1957, Veysel İlkin, the first Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Morocco, started his duty (Turkish Embassy in Rabat, 2023). The first high-level visit to Türkiye was paid by the Moroccan Foreign Minister in 1987 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023b).

When Morocco declared its independence, it reshaped the structure of the country. Morocco adopted a monarchy under the leadership of the Alawite Dynasty that was ruling Morocco since the 17th century. During the French protectorate, the head of the dynasty Sultan Mohammed V was in exile and after negotiations with France, he came back to Morocco as the leader of the country (Levy, 1957).

Morocco is an Islamic state because Islam is the official state religion and Qur'an is applied as the source of law in Morocco. Moreover, the Alawite Dynasty is the maintenance of the Prophet Muhammad's heritage, so it is one of the main reasons why Morocco adopted Islamic rules. On the other hand, Morocco was a party of the Non-Aligned Movement which was established as a third way during the Cold War period to maintain their survival without any interdependence to two competitive blocs of the Cold War period which were the Capitalist Bloc led by the US and Communist Bloc led by the USSR. Already, Cold War realities would not allow states to follow independent foreign policy which means each state did not shape their foreign policy strategies individually because they had to shape together with members of the alliance that they belong. So, they were not able to develop their relationship with members of the opposition blocs. Hence, neither Türkiye nor Morocco had a primary interest in deepening relations. Both countries' priorities were very different and sometimes clashed because Türkiye was party to the Western Bloc and Morocco was party to the Non-Aligned Movement. Therefore, there was not any notable development in their relations until the Post-Cold War period despite some bilateral treaties that did not create any ground to deepen the affairs (Zoubir, 1995).

The common culture, tradition, and religion were important factors that made the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Morocco easy. Despite not having notable development in the relations, they maintained the relations and cooperation by signing treaties in technical, cultural, economic, and education fields. However, this cooperation was limited due to their priorities and the realities of the period. Moreover, the

Cyprus issue was another reason why Türkiye and Morocco could not deepen their bilateral relations during this term just because Türkiye interfered in Cyprus in 1974 to constitute the peace to protect the Turkish Cypriot people against EOKA terrorist organization's massacres (Adamson, 2001).

That operation led to the isolation of Türkiye from world politics. Additionally, Morocco was in a readiness period to sign an association agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC), which was realized in 1976. So, it was not keen on development and deepening relations with Türkiye due to suppression coming from the international community (World Bank, 1981: 58-59).

However, it did not last long, and they demonstrated the will that aims to develop and deepen relations. Hence, they signed some treaties in the last decade of the Cold War term to develop and deepen bilateral relations in different fields. As a first bilateral agreement, Türkiye and Morocco signed a treaty related to air transportation in 1985. In 1987, they signed a similar agreement related to sea transportation between the two countries. Also, they agreed on collaboration in fields related to trade, and law in 1989 (ORSAM, 2022: 9).

Türkiye and Morocco were two states that wanted to be part of the EEC in 1987, but according to Article 237 of the Treaty of Rome, only European states could join the community (Treaty of Rome, 1957: 102). For this reason, both states developed an argument explaining that they had a European past. Turkey's Europeanness became stronger with the acceptance of its application, while Morocco's application was rejected within three months (İpek and Türkes-Kılıç, 2019: 63-65)

Thus, initial steps were taken to increase collaboration that would enable them to develop and deepen their bilateral relations. However, collaboration was limited between the two countries during this term, despite initiatives to deepen and develop bilateral relations. However, it began to change in the Post-Cold War period due to the changing atmosphere and realities in world politics.

## 5. RELATIONS IN THE POST-COLD WAR TERM

When the USSR collapsed at the beginning of the 1990s, the world entered a new period in which American unipolarity existed, but this unipolarity did not last much because of changing powers and realities in the international system. It means that one of two great competitors of the Cold War disappeared, and dimensions began to change in international politics. That's why, the grounds of liberal policies became hegemon in world politics and interdependence between countries began to increase due to the spread of liberal economic models around the world. For example, Türkiye introduced the open-market economic model in the 1980s under the leadership of Turgut Ozal who came to power after the military regime's rule. However, the world faced new ethnic wars, especially in the Balkans. Hence, the agenda of the first years of this term was occupied by these conflicts and wars. On the other hand, the new structure of the international system allowed nation-states to follow independent and active foreign policies to increase their profits and ensure their security. Türkiye was also one of these actors, so it began to follow pro-active foreign policies in the Balkans, Middle East, and the Caucasus to increase its influence and to ensure its security against threats coming from its neighbors (Sayari, 2000).

Türkiye was dealing with some domestic problems like the economic crisis and terrorism in the 1990s. However, it began to pay attention to the region and played an active role in ethnic wars in the Balkans against Serbia together with the USA. It began to develop relations with Russia to balance the Western powers. It also maintained relations with Europe to become a member of the European Union (Onis, 1995).

In addition to Türkiye, Morocco also began to introduce a liberal economic model. It also followed moderate policies compared to other Arab countries and it generally sided with the Western world in the global and regional issues. Morocco has maintained close relations with France since its establishment to gain its support against Algeria (Zakhir and O'Brien, 2017).

Hence, the African strategy of Türkiye led to the development of bilateral relations with Morocco. 1998 was a year when the relationship between Türkiye and Morocco was moved to another stage since Türkiye introduced a new strategy that aims to develop relations and collaboration with African countries. Morocco was one of the key countries to encourage Türkiye's new initiative. Therefore, notable developments began to take place in the relations between Türkiye and Morocco. In July 1999, the president of Türkiye Suleyman Demirel paid an official visit to Morocco to join the funeral ceremony of the head of Morocco. This visit was very important in showing how the level of relations between Türkiye and Morocco was developing. Moreover, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ismail Cem paid another official visit to Morocco at the level of high-ranking state officials to deepen and expand collaboration areas between Türkiye and Morocco (Hazar, 2023: 18-20).

The increasing volume of trade between Türkiye and Morocco demonstrates how the relations between Türkiye and Morocco developed in the first years of the Post-Cold War term but that progress still was limited in different areas of cooperation.

On 13 December 1999, during Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit's term, Türkiye was granted the status of an applicant for EU membership after the Helsinki Summit by the European Council (EU, 200). This big step in Turkish foreign policy also changed the priorities and instruments. Additionally, after the government changed in Türkiye in 2002 and the new government added new stages to Turkish foreign policy by changing structures in the region, these changes contributed to the development of bilateral relations between the two countries during this new era.

	Turkish Export	Moroccan Export	Volume	Balance
1995	67.269	52.476	119.745	14.793
1996	52.290	82.116	134.406	-29.826
1997	51.905	52.597	104.502	-692
1998	99.427	46.896	146.323	52.531
1999	90.444	44.469	134.913	45.975
2000	70.413	71.466	141.879	-1.053
2001	98.149	38.194	136.343	59.955
2002	131.936	68.315	200.251	63.621
2003	179.603	76.989	256.592	102.614
2004	329.486	99.472	428.958	230.014
2005	370.825	143.231	514.056	227.594
2006	551.377	173.902	725.279	377.475
2007	721.595	198.460	920.055	523.135
2008	957.782	360.520	1.318.302	597.262
2009	600.638	234.727	835.365	365.911
2010	624.348	396.797	1.021.145	227.551
2011	777.509	372.038	405.471	1.149.547

Figure 1: Türkiye – Morocco Trade Volume (1000 USD) (Foreign, Economic Relations Board, 2011: 15)



When the AK Party (Justice and Development Party) came to power in Türkiye in November 2002, Türkiye entered a new stage that brought new changes to Turkish foreign policy in the 21st century. Türkiye began to follow more proactive policies by using its hard and soft powers in different parts of the world like Africa, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. Africa was one of these key regions for Türkiye's new policymakers to be more proactive in world politics (Özcan, 2017).

Türkiye added new stages to the Africa Initiative of Türkiye in 2005 and declared the year 2005 as the African Year. Africa Initiative consisted of two pillars which were economic reasons and deepening Türkiye's religious and cultural ties with African countries. Hence, Africa became a priority for Türkiye's government to achieve its goals in foreign policy and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid official visits to African countries including Morocco. Erdoğan's visit was named as the first visit at the prime minister level since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Morocco. During this official visit, the hope was emphasized to develop and deepen our bilateral relations with Morocco in different areas like culture, politics, defense, science, tourism, art, and trade (Tepeciklioğlu, 2012: 86-88).

Already, this official visit demonstrated how Morocco is important for Türkiye in Africa Initiative. Morocco will enable Türkiye to expand its influence over African countries by using its soft power. Also, developing relations with Türkiye is very important for Morocco to expand its relations over the Eurasia region. That's why, Türkiye and Morocco have been keen on the development of relations in different fields mutually. Hence, official visits between Türkiye and Morocco have continued increasingly so far to contribute to the development of bilateral relations. They have created good relations in different fields, and they have supported each other in their initiatives (Özkan, 2011: 121-122).

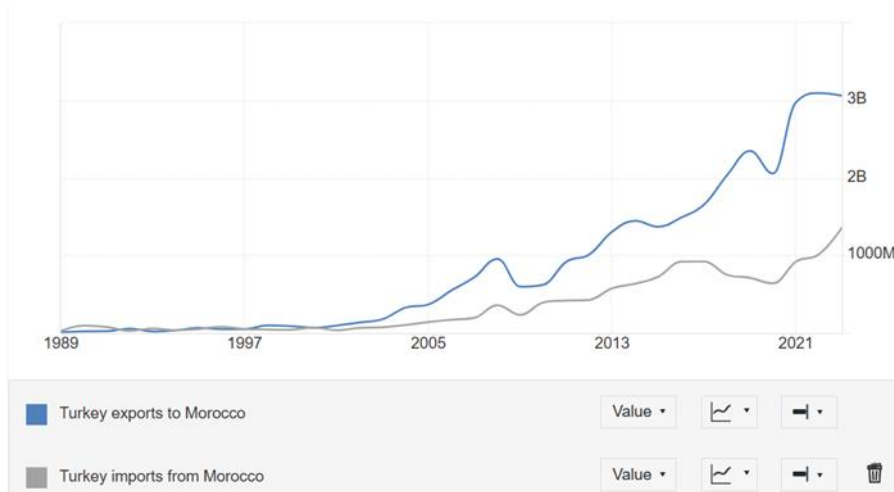
On the other hand, Türkiye has paid huge attention to the development of cultural relations with Morocco. For the same reason, Türkiye used state-owned institutes like TİKA, YTB, and other NGOs to build strong cultural relations with Morocco and its society (Sıradağ, 2022).

For example, TİKA carried out some restoration operations in Morocco. It set up some platforms to contribute to the development of mutual understanding between two countries' societies. It also delivered some aid to households having low income in Morocco. These activities carried out by this Turkish agency, contributed to the development of cultural relations between Morocco and Türkiye. Türkiye's bilateral official development assistance in Morocco realized as (Million US Dollars) 0.64 in 2015 (TİKA, 2015: 28), 1.59 in 2015 (TİKA, 2016: 26), 0.87 in 2019 (TİKA, 2019: 32), 0.77 in 2020 (TİKA, 2020: 33). Additionally, the Morocco University of Mohammed V was renovated by TİKA, student scholarships were granted by TÜBİTAK, medical doctors were trained by Ministry of Health of Türkiye, trainees were included to the training organization of Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, and workshops were organized by Turkish Water Institute (SUEN) for basin management (TİKA, 2015, 2016, 2019)

In addition to TİKA, YTB has concentrated on the development of education relations between the two countries, so it began to provide scholarships for Moroccan students to study. This initiative is very crucial for Türkiye since Türkiye would find a ground to express its realities and arguments and to demonstrate its rightness. So, these students would be aware of the background of Türkiye's steps in world politics and when they go back to their countries, they may contribute to development relations in different fields. This may also have impacts on the economic relations because these students would pre-advertise Türkiye, and this may bring benefits to tourism of Türkiye. Therefore,

Türkiye has paid a huge attention to these initiatives to develop cultural relations with Morocco and we see the results of these initiatives today in a good manner. While the total number of Moroccan students in Türkiye for Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral education was 1758 in 2019 (TGSP, 2021: 51), it increased to almost 4000 in 2023 (AA, 2023). Relations have developed increasingly by bringing profits mutually and these assisted countries demonstrate their support to Türkiye in international organizations. For instance, Türkiye got the position of provisional membership of the United Nations Security Council on October 17, 2008, with the support of 151 states (UN, 2008). Another example is their support for Volkan Bozkır's candidacy for the head of the UN General Assembly 75th session between 15 September 2020 to 15 September 2021 was crucial (GNAT, 2020).

Developing bilateral relations between Türkiye and Morocco brought huge economic profits to both Türkiye and Morocco despite global crises such as COVID-19. Good relations in politics and other fields provided a ground to enhance their economic relations. Hence, both Türkiye and Morocco would try to maximize their profits at every chance, so trade volume between Türkiye and Morocco has increased day by day so far. Thanks to Free Trade Agreement signed in 2006 between Türkiye and Morocco brought huge economic benefits to both.



**Figure 2: Foreign Trade Between Türkiye and Morocco (Trading Economics, 2023a and 2023b)**

For instance, when we look at the statistics belongs to 2023, Türkiye exported almost 3 billion dollars to Morocco while 20 years ago it was under 100 million dollars. The main products that Türkiye exported to Morocco were semi-finished products, cars, planes, helicopters, and Bayraktar TB2 combat drones due to destabilizing threats in the neighboring countries (Zoubeidi, 2021). While Morocco's exports to Türkiye were 53 million dollars in 1995, it reached more than 1 billion dollars in 2023. The products that Morocco generally sells to Türkiye are cars, phosphoric acid, and calcium phosphates (Trading Economics, 2023a and 2023b).

These statistics show us that Türkiye and Morocco have paid huge attention to the development of their relations, and they have advanced their relations in different fields by also making profits with respect to mutual interests so far. Hence, I think that the relations between Türkiye and Morocco will deepen and develop more because they have never given up this desire despite challenges and crises in the region and around the world.

To analyze the political dimension between the two states, we should remember the 2013 incident in which King Mohammed VI didn't accept Prime Minister Erdogan when he was visiting Morocco. But this incident was atoned in

2014 with the acceptance of the same Moroccan King by President Erdoğan. Additionally, the Moroccan Justice and Development Party (JDP) had a powerful relationship with Türkiye's JDP, but the other coalition members preferred to keep Türkiye at a distance in similar years (Pellicer and Wegner: 2015). But this stance was also resolved with the shutdown of the FETO schools after the coup attempt in Türkiye in 2016 (AA, 2017).

Another political topic that is interesting to both countries is the Libyan conflict. While both countries are recognizing and supporting the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya, Morocco is declaring herself as one of the main mediators because of the close geography and rising threats such as extremist groups and militias. So, on the one side Türkiye has been developing relations with Libya through the agreements, on the other side Morocco has been compartmentalizing the dialogue between EU countries, Türkiye, Egypt, BAE, Russia, and other interested countries. Morocco has been named by Italy as the main partner for dealing with the issues in the region after the Libyan crisis (Pavia et al., 2022: 37).

The historical rivalry between Morocco and Algeria is also another critical factor that shapes the relationship between Türkiye and Morocco. The Sahara crisis and the support of Algeria to the Polisario militias against Morocco is the key point that surrounds the relations. In this sense, raising Turkish-Algerian trade and good relations between them are concerning points for Morocco. As a response to similar approaches of Algeria, Morocco increased its effectiveness in the Sahel and West Africa through religious diplomacy. To stop the expansion of Wahhabi Islam and extremism, Morocco promoted its approach, an Islam with Sufi tendencies and a Sunni Maliki brand, moderately. So, with this understanding, lots of Imams and students from Sahel countries were educated in Morocco. When Turkish-Moroccan religious styles are analyzed, it is easy to catch the common points of them which are enabling the relations to continue (Baudais et al., 2021: 12-18).

## 6. RESULTS

In the 21st century, we have observed lots of developments and changes around the world. There have been developments in technology, industry, and human rights, but challenges that led to crises around the world have been also there. Hence, states have begun to review their strategies and they have added new approaches according to requirements of the world system.

One of the challenges that led to a change in politics was the Arab Spring since it brought instability to MENA. When the Arab Spring began in Tunisia in 2011, it spread over the region and public movements began to demand democracy, human rights, and economic welfare. Morocco was one of the countries that faced protests all around the country. Protests in Morocco began on 17 January 2011 and on the 20th of January, it became a political protest. Protests in Morocco began due to an increase in unemployment and the price of some essential products. Also, they would demand democratization. There was a similar scene in other North African and Middle East countries. However, Morocco differs from other region countries since it succeeded in peacefully tackling the crisis by meeting the demands coming from the Moroccan people thanks to the announcement of the king of Morocco, Mohammed VI on 21 January 2011. The aforementioned relationship between the Moroccan JDP and the Turkish JDP played also a role in this democratization period. A referendum for constitutional reforms took place in Morocco in the summer of 2011 and the King restricted his power. Human rights were enhanced, and the power of the parliament was expanded. Thus, Morocco completed the transition without any violence. On the other hand, Türkiye and the European Union supported Morocco's democratization process (Al-Akhssassi, 2017).

After the outbreak of the Arab Spring, lots of conflicts took place in the MENA region. Libya was one of these countries where issues were raised due to protests against the undemocratic regimes that did not prioritize the interests of the society. Protests began and the regime began to use hard power to suppress protestors. Later, the regime began to lose control and Qaddafi lost its power and he was killed in 2011 by protestors. Then, stability in Libya has not been achieved due to conflict between opposition groups and there is ongoing war in Libya, so Libya is not at peace. This crisis also contributed to the development of the relations between Türkiye and Morocco because the attitudes of Türkiye and Morocco towards the Libya crisis were the same. Both would try to find a ground to constitute peace and stability in Libya between fighting groups. Türkiye has supported peace initiatives of Morocco for Libya. Morocco provided a ground between fighting groups of Libya to ensure peace and several meetings were held under the leadership of Morocco. In addition, there was a huge contribution of Morocco for the signing of the Skhirat Agreement in 2015 between two opposition groups in Libya's civil war (Yaakoubi, 2015).

Türkiye also supported this initiative, but the treaty did not help the constitution of peace in Libya. On the other hand, Türkiye and Libya signed a maritime agreement regarding to delimitation of an exclusive economic zone in the eastern Mediterranean Sea in 2019. There was also a military agreement between Türkiye and Libya, so Turkish troops landed in Libya to fight against Khalifa Haftar (Arab Center for Research, 2020: 1-2). Türkiye's step was welcomed by Morocco. That's why, we can say that there was not any problem stemming from the Libya crisis and Türkiye and Morocco have kept developing their bilateral relations in different fields despite challenges that lead to deterioration of relations between states in the region.

While the bilateral relations between Türkiye and Morocco were developing and deepening, new challenges were continuing to emerge domestically. For example, a military coup attempt took place in Türkiye in 2016 and it failed. Furthermore, Türkiye received lots of criticism from Western countries like France because of thinking that Türkiye does not follow democratic principles and values, it limits fundamental rights and freedoms. That's why, Türkiye's relations with the Western world began to deteriorate. However, Morocco stood with Türkiye and was one of the first countries that condemn the coup attempt that took place on 15 July 2016. After that, Türkiye carried out military operations into Syria by using its right stemming from article 51 of the UN Charter that defined self-defense right. Due to these operations, western countries put sanctions on Türkiye, but Morocco did not follow the same policy and it aimed to preserve its bilateral relations with Türkiye despite these challenges (Al-Taheiri, 2017).

Hence, we can say that there is a huge solidarity between the two countries, and they always keep developing and deepening their bilateral relations in different fields. Thus, Türkiye's Africa Initiative is going to benefit Türkiye and Morocco and Türkiye is going to expand its influence over Africa despite troubles stemming from both domestic and external issues.

The region which is called as Western Sahara is in the south of Morocco and surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean in the west. It is a disputed area between neighboring countries. It came under the control of Spain after the Berlin Conference in 1884. In 1975, Spain withdrew from Western Sahara by signing the Madrid Treaty (Seddon, 1987). However, it left a territorial dispute in the region. Morocco has demands on the region, but a local power named as Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) controls about 20% of Western Sahara. In the 1990s, there were armed conflicts between Morocco and SADR. On the other hand, the Western Sahara issue led to a conflict between Morocco and Algeria because Algeria saw Morocco's actions as expansionist acts. So, if Morocco controls Western

Sahara, it may try to expand its influence over the region, and Algeria does not want to accept Morocco's hegemony (Hasnaoui, 2017).

The Western world generally sided with Morocco and some of them opened consulates in Western Sahara, but Türkiye tried to follow a balanced policy between Morocco and Algeria since it has good relations with both. Hence, Türkiye prioritizes a peaceful solution between Algeria and Morocco.

## **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

There is a historical background in the bilateral relations between Türkiye and Morocco and these two states have developed their affairs since the establishment of diplomatic relations in modern history. When the Ottoman Empire established its hegemony in North Africa in the 16th century, the first relations were established between Turks and Moroccans after the conquest of Algeria by the Ottoman Empire. The relations between Ottomans and Moroccans began to deepen in the 19th century due to imperial threats over North Africa. However, it failed and the relations between them could not find any ground to develop due to the colonial position of Morocco under France. And it continued from 1912 to 1956 when Morocco gained its independence from France. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Morocco in 1956, a new page was opened, but there was not any notable development in the relations until the end of the Cold War term due to the realities of the system. However, the relations began to develop and deepen in the post-Cold War term and Türkiye and Morocco have good and strategic relations today. In different fields such as economy, politics, education, military, and culture, they have strategic relations, and they are keen on the development of their relations despite challenges coming from both international and regional spheres and they have always tried to act jointly against challenges, especially in the region to tackle. That's why, I firmly believe that Türkiye and Morocco will continue to develop and deepen their bilateral relations and more likely we will see that Türkiye and Morocco begin to play key roles in Africa by enhancing their relations and influence over Africa by the reason of Türkiye has paid huge attention to Africa Initiative, and it tries to develop its relations with African countries in different fields. These initiatives bring huge benefits to both Türkiye and Morocco, so it will also provide a ground for Türkiye and Morocco to act jointly more, and they will have a chance to deepen their relations further.

As a result, this article analyzes how the relations between Türkiye and Morocco shaped and developed according to different periods from the past to today by focusing on changing realities in the region and world system, and the basis of the relation. According to the findings of the research, despite the differences and difficulties, Türkiye-Morocco relations have developed in the historical process. The assumption that the future relations between the two countries may progress in parallel with the developments, especially in MENA, Sahel, and West Africa is a separate discussion topic. In this context, the aforementioned regions can be examined in all their dimensions and their impact on the foreign policies of the two countries can be revealed.

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## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

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