

# Turkish Foreign Policy Strategies In The Sahel Region

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*Abstract: This article focuses on the Turkish foreign policy strategies in the G5 Sahel countries in Africa. These strategies are based on political, economic, and sociocultural cooperation that complies with the 1998 Turkish government's "opening to Africa" policy. This study asserts that Turkish foreign policy strategies have recently evolved from diplomatic relations, humanitarian assistance, and sociocultural activities, (soft power) to economic and security cooperations (hard power) in the region. However, the latest growing influence of Turkey in this part of the continent parks not only the interest of International Relations scholars but also raises concerns for international actors already cooperating in this part of the continent. This study, therefore, finds that Turkish foreign policy strategies implementation in the Sahel geography are facing both local and international challenges where local governments and international actors, failed to promote, peace, democracy, and economic development.*

*Keywords: Sahel region, Turkish Foreign policy, Strategy, Influence, International actors.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the last decade, Turkey is trying to enlarge its circle of friends in Africa by signing agreements, assistance, and cooperation. This initiative is in line with the Turkish current government's policy to orient its foreign policy strategies toward the Middle East and Africa (Özkan and Akgün, 2010). Indeed, Turkey is becoming very active in working with the Sahel region in different areas including humanitarian, economic, political, and security. Simultaneously, the Sahel region is weakened by the austerity policies of international economic institutions of the IMF and World Bank, global warming, and chronic droughts. In addition, the region is paralyzed by the "Françafrique" neo-colonial political system, political instability, terrorism, and humanitarian crisis. Despite, its desert climate and hard living conditions, the Sahel region in Africa are attracting the interest of different international actors with different agendas. Notwithstanding the effort of international actors to promote development in

this part of the continent, many people from this region need immediate humanitarian assistance.

Nonetheless, Turkey is displaying a posture of economic partners, rather than economic competitors or a new colonizer in the region (Erdogan, 2016). The president asserts in Antalya that "we don't see Africa from a colonial perspective" and this distinguishes Turkey's relations with Africa from western countries' relations with the continent. This rhetoric aims to consolidate the relations between Turkey and the countries of the continent but is likely to provoke tension and competition between partners. This situation engenders the intervention of new international actors in the region. Today many Turkish politics, economic, and social institutions are very active in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. In these countries, Turkish foreign policy actors are more intervening in the humanitarian sphere. Indeed, Turkish foreign policy strategies are characterized by development aid and humanitarian assistance (Özkan, 2014). Over the years, this characteristic has developed from humanitarian to security through economic cooperation with the countries of the region. Indeed, Turkey has lifted the level of its relations with the countries of the region by signing military cooperation further at both regional and international levels. Therefore,

Turkey is conjugating soft power and hard power to position itself as an alternative political, economic, socio-cultural, and security actor in this part of the African continent.

## B. SCOPE, TIMEFRAME, AND METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the strategies established by the Turkish government to extend its area of foreign policy in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Certainly, diplomatic missions, economic activities, and humanitarian aids are the main elements driving the Turkish foreign policy in the region. However, the research focuses on the period from the early 2010s and head and does not prevent it from looking back at the previews submits, and meetings related to the discussion.

Methodologically, this article is subjected to an objective assessment of the relations between Turkey and the countries of the Sahel region based on different sources. These sources are multiple and diverse including primary and secondary sources. Indeed, primary data will be collected via the website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations report on the Sahel region in Africa, etc. However, the secondary data will be obtained through reports, articles, and books published by Turkish, African, and European scholars, experts, and research institutions. In addition to, both quantitative and qualitative research methods while analyzing different types of resources including group discussions, official governments document, and expert articles to illustrate the presence of Turkey in the Sahel region.

This research is a theoretical contribution to the discussion where the whys and the wherefores of Turkish foreign policy strategies will be subjected to empirical analysis. This contribution aims to examine the challenges and prospects of Turkish foreign policy in the region. Moreover, the work will help to show some reasons that push the Turkish government to be visible in the Sahel in competing with western countries. The unit of analysis of this research is Turkish Foreign policy strategies in the Sahel region, which is trying to break down the existing economic, and security status quo established earlier between western countries and Africa. However, nonprobability sampling is the type of sampling that will be used in this research because Turkish Foreign policy strategies in the Sahel countries are unique and delicately different from other international actors in the region. Indeed, a convenient sampling method will be used in this research because Turkish Foreign policy strategies are shifting from low politics to high politics in the region with military cooperation at regional and international levels. According to the research topic, “Foreign policy” is the identified variable that highlights the impact of Turkey in the Sahel region. Nonetheless, the independent variable is “the Sahel region” where Turkey is developing socio-economic and political relationships, and “strategy” is the dependent variable in the research because the achievement of this policy will depend on it. However, Sahel region is the intervening variable in the research since its sparked the interest of the study.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. OVERVIEW

Considering the recent social, economic, and security actions of Turkey in Africa, it is important to look at the prospects and challenges of Turkish foreign policy in the Sahel region. . Indeed, the Sahel region in Africa is nowadays raising the interest of international state actors, and international institutions including France, Russia, and the United States as well as the United Nation and the European Union. In the region, the country is engaged in different security cooperation with regional actors and international actors. In this regard, Turkish foreign policy strategies in the Sahel region are shifting from low politics to high politics. However, this article focuses on the strategies implemented by Turkey in bringing economic, social, and security stability to this part of the continent. Furthermore, the aim of this article is to show that Turkey is breaking down the economic, social, and security status quo established earlier by western countries in the region. But the objectives of this writing are to assess the role of Turkey as a new actor in the region that can help African Sahel countries to regain peace and economic progress. Nonetheless, the last military intervention of Turkey in Libya, and its role in NATO shows that Turkey has the potential to change the situation in the Sahel zone. There are limited resources on Turkish foreign policy strategies in the African Sahel region. This work represents an important contribution to the development of the relationship between Turkey and the countries of the region mainly Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger thereby forming the Sahel G5 bloc. This thesis also marks an important shift from one-sided political literature between the west and the rest by focusing on the relationship between Turkey and the countries in the Sahel area.

### B. PLACING THE AFRICAN SAHEL REGION ON THE TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

“The year of Africa” declared in 2005 by the Turkish government marks the beginning of a new era for Turkey and Africa relations. In this new era, Turkey aims to diversify both the areas and the tools of its foreign policy with its own styles of promoting politics, economics, social, and defense partnerships with the countries in the continent (Özcan, 2017). Indeed, Turkey in the last decades presented itself as a particular regional and global actor different from traditional European powers in terms of politics, economics, and security policy in Africa (Dahir, 2021).

Following the 2005’s forum, Turkey organized the “Africa Strategy paper” and the “Africa-Turkey” forum in 2010 and 2014 respectively (Uslu, 2015). Antalya Diplomacy Forum in March 2022 is the recent Turkey-Africa partnership summit to add to the list. As a result, Turkey obtains an observer status in the African Union and has established economic partnerships with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In addition, Turkey participated in the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali and has provided financial support for the Sahel G5 bloc for security and development in the region. This support seems to be

abortive in view of the performance and the future of this organization in the continent.

In the Sahel zone, Turkey has rapidly developed economic, political, social, and security relations with the countries of the region under the Justice and Development Party. In the early 2010s, Turkey established diplomatic missions in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali Mauritania, and Niger to strengthen its relations with the region. However, these countries gained their independence from France in the 1960s but continue to maintain economic, political, and security partnerships with their former colonial master.

Nevertheless, the Turkish government has recently developed significant relations in this part of the continent. These relations are based on bilateral and multilateral collaborations with the countries of the region on one hand and the institutions of the continent on the other hand. This situation has sparked the interest of other international actors such as Russia, the US, the United Nations, and the European Union. But the Turkish government has shown its interest to develop political, economic, social, and security partnerships with countries, regional organizations, and international organizations within the region.

However, there are several factors explaining the visibility of Turkey's institutions in sub-Saharan Africa and particularly in the Sahel zone. Firstly, the presence of Turkey in the Sahel region underlines expansionist economics, political, and cultural plans developed by the Turkish former prime minister Mevlut Yilmaz in 1998 (Mbabia, 2011). Secondly, the willingness of the Turkish government to rid of its traditional foreign policy strategies by redefining its international identity (Özkan and Akgün, 2010). Thirdly, Turkey aims to continue its economic growth by looking for new energy resources to respond to the country's energy diversification strategies policy (Uslu, 2015). Fourthly, the Sahel region is a land with more than a hundred million people and is a new opportunity for business in basic domains including agriculture, housing, and medical treatment. Therefore, Turkey has positioned itself as sub-Saharan African countries' new alternative foreign ally and trading partner (Harte, 2012). Finally, the presence of Turkey in the Sahel countries is the expression of the government to provide a package for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) after the 4th UN Conference on LDCs in May 2011 (Haşimi, 2014). In addition, the anti-French feelings displayed by young Africans in the Sahel region are a favorable asset for Turkey to consolidate its relations. Today, many African intellectuals within and without the continent including Kemi Seba, Aminata Traore, PLO Lumumba, and Nicolas Agbohohou stand up against the economic and political relations of France vis a vis to sub-Saharan countries.

The abovementioned reasons are theoretical assumptions explaining the presence of the Turkish government in the region. The presence of Turkish politics, economics and sociocultural actors in the Sahel does not come as a major surprise according to the current situation in the Sahel region on one hand and the compliance of the Turkish government to redefine the country's international identity on pro-Western state to an active and global actor on other hand (Özkan and Akgün, 2010). In addition, the presence of Turkey in this part of the continent in terms of politics, economics, and security

strategies lets foresee momentum for partnership with the countries on one hand and obstrucater for western powers on the other hand.

### C. LISTING AND EXAMINING THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL COUNTRIES

The Sahel region is a belt of land enveloping some countries in Northern and Western Africa on one hand and Central and Eastern Africa on the other hand. The region covers more than 10 countries including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Mauritania, Eritrea, Senegal, and the two Sudan. These countries are independent and undertaking unilateral as well as multilateral relations with the Turkish current government. Nonetheless, this study aims to analyze the general situation in the Sahel thereby shortening the list to five countries including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. However, the 1885 Berlin conference provoked the creation of the AOF (Afrique Occidentale Française or French Western Africa) and AEF (Afrique Equatoriale Française or French Equatorial Africa) by France in the Sahel region for politics and economic purposes. Today, the Sahel G5 bloc formed with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger is the combination of the countries from the AOF and the AEF for security and development principles. Indeed, the Sahel G5 bloc has been supported by France to the extent that it is seen by many scholars as the founding father of this organization (International Crisis Group, 2017). However, from colonization to decolonization, France has tried to federate the countries of the region through military, economic, and cultural strategies. The AOF, CFA franc zone, and the Sahel G5 bloc are some key elements of France's foreign policy elements in the region. The countries of the region failed to develop since their independence due to diverse factors and de facto share the same fate.

#### a. BURKINA FASO

Burkina Faso is a part of the Sahel region with an area of 272.967 km<sup>2</sup> and populated by 21.497.096 persons with a 2.89 percent of Growth rate in 2021. This population is very young and nearly half of it is under 15 years old (World Population Review, 2021). However, nearly 40 percent of the population live below the poverty line and more than 65 percent of the people over the age of fifteen are not literate. Furthermore, the GDP of the country is 18,3 billion USD and the trade balance is in general deficit (World Bank 2021). The mining industry represents 10,85 percent of the GDP and is the country's leading export product. Cotton is the second-largest export product characterized by 4 percent of the country's GDP (AIB, 2019). In addition to this low economic development, the country since 2015 is faced with an ongoing terrorist threat thereby hampering its development. Indeed, the country currently has 1.501.775 internally displaced people including 61.48 percent of children, 22.39 percent of women, and 16.13 percent of men (Chahed, AA). The security situation of the country has created political instability where the 2020 elected president was overthrown by the national army on January 24<sup>th</sup>. 2022. This military regime was recently in turn

overthrown by a young military junta that aims to work with different partners for security, stability, and the development of the country. This situation threatens the interests of the traditional economic, social, and security partners of the country.

*b. CHAD*

The Republic of Chad is a part of the Sahel region with an area of 1,284,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is populated by 16,43 million people. The growth rate is estimated at 3 percent and about 46.49 percent of the population is under fifteen years old. However, nearly 32 percent of the population over the age of fifteen can read and write, and approximately, 63 percent of the population is living in poverty (World population review, 2020). The economic activities of the country are dominated by the exportation of Crude Petroleum. However, the country displayed a GDP of 10,829 billion USD in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). Like Burkina Faso, the Republic of Chad is confronted with terrorism and natural disaster that caused an internal displacement of more than 360.000 Chadians in 2020 thereby hindering its development (UN info, 2020). Unlike Burkina Faso, Chad is led by the son of the deceased president Idriss Deby since April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021, with the objective to ensure a peaceful political transition in the country.

*c. MALI*

The Republic of Mali is a part of the belt of land characterizing the Sahel region with an area of 1.246.814 km<sup>2</sup>. The country had 20.933.072 people in 2020 with a GDP estimated at 19,55 billion USD in 2021 (World Bank, 2021). The population is characterized by its young age where more than 50 percent of the population is under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2021). However, the unemployment rate in the country is 14 percent in 2020 and about 45 percent of the population is poor with 66 percent of illiterate adults (Afrobarometer, 2020). The primary economic activity of Mali is agriculture and the mining sector which contributes to 10 percent of the country's GDP (La Tribune Afrique, 2021). since 2012, the country has embarked on a series of internal crises including military coups and terrorist attacks. In this stage, the country has registered more than 358.212 displaced people in 2021 (OCHA, 2021). Like Burkina Faso, the security dilemma in Mali created a popular uprising and military coup in the country in 2020. Thus, the country is subjected to sanctions from ECOWAS and the international community.

*d. MAURITANIA*

Mauritania is counted among the Sahel countries with an area of 1.030.700 km<sup>2</sup> and is occupied by more than 4 million people (FIDA, 2020). This population is young, and 40% percent are under 15 years old, and they are almost unemployed. The literacy rate in Mauritania is low and nearly 53 percent of the people ages 15 and above can read and write (World Bank, 2017). However, the GDP of the country is 9,239 million USD in 2021 and the mining sector is one of the engines of the economy (IMF, 2021). Unlike other Sahel

countries, Mauritania has shown significant resistance to terrorist attacks. Indeed, the last terrorist attacks in Mauritania dated in February 2011 and were perpetrated by the AQMI group in Nouakchott. Since then, the government has taken measures to secure its borders and its population. Unlike Mali, Mauritania has been experiencing political stability since June 2019 under the newly elected president Mohamed Ould Cheich El Ghazouani.

*e. NIGER*

Niger is another country on the list that occupies an area of 1.27 million km<sup>2</sup> and is populated by nearly 24 million people in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). However, the literacy rate remains low, and only 26,56 percent of people at age 15 and above can read and write (USAID, 2017). Like other Sahel countries, the population of Niger is young and nearly 58 percent of people are under 18 years old (UNICEF, 2020). The country's GDP was estimated at 13.68 billion US dollars in 2020 and nearly 40 percent of its population is living in poverty (World Bank, 2020). since 1971, the country is one of the leading countries in Uranium production in the world with more than 4000 tonnes (Tertrais, 2014). Today, Niger has faced insecurity due to terrorism and more than 249.945 people were forced to leave their villages in 2021 (UNHCR Niger, 2021). In addition to insecurity, poor governance has recently provoked a popular demonstration in the country.

**D. SOCIO-ECONOMIC REALITIES IN THE SAHEL**

*a. MAIN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES*

Despite the huge potential in human and natural resources, the development of Sahel countries depends on international institutions (IMF and World Bank, 2020) assistance. However, agriculture and livestock are the main activities of the population in the region. These activities occupy more than 70% of the population in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger and over 50% in Mauritania. In addition, farming, and pastoralism represent approximately 40% of the GDP of the countries in the zone (Climate Change Profile, 2018)

| Country/<br>Agriculture<br>and<br>livestock | Burkina<br>Faso | Chad | Mali | Mauritania | Niger |
|---|-----------------|------|------|------------|-------|
| Population                                  | 82%             | 80%  | 79%  | 41%        | 87%   |
| GDP   | 35%             | 25%  | 33%  | 25%        | 40%   |

Sources: Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty (France), 2022.

Table 1: Shareholding of the agricultural population and agriculture performance in the Sahel countries

The above table shows the percentage of the population of Sahel countries in Agriculture and livestock on one hand and the participation of these activities in the countries' economy on other hand. These activities represent the lifeblood of the economy of the region according to the number of people involved in the sector. However, the coexistence between agriculturalists and herdsman has not been peaceful and recurrent conflict threatens the social stability in the region.



*b. ETHNIC PROBLEMS AND CORRUPTION*

In addition to the economic conflict between agriculturists and herdsmen, ethnic problems and corruption are the main ills in Sahel society. Indeed, these problems are very common in all sectors of political, and social-economic activities in the region. Already at the time of independence, the republic of Chad faced a major problem between the Arab Muslims of the North and the Christians of the south that broke out in a civil war in Chad in 1980 (Joffe, 1982). In the same way, the post-independent Mauritanian society is divided into Arab and black Africans which led to a series of tension in the country between 1966 and 2011 (Boukhars, 2012). In the 1990s, the northern part of the republic of Mali is challenged by a secessionist Tuareg ethnic group for an independent state (Lecoq and Klute, 2013). In 2018, the terrorist attacks in Yirgou in Burkina Faso broke out into an ethnic conflict between the Mossi and Fulani group which cost the lives of 270 people in the village (Hagbert and al, 2019).

Corruption is one of the main problems that threaten the development of the countries in the region. Indeed, corruption is present in both the public and the private sectors of the Sahelian society. In the Sahel region, corruption is more practiced in public services including health, education, and the judiciary, and the countries have the lowest score according to Transparency International. Indeed, Bribery is commonly practiced at all levels in Burkina Faso, and police officers, public officials, teachers, and health workers are most likely to solicit bribes from the people (Ardigo, 2019). In 2018, Transparency International has checked the level of public sector corruption in 180 countries around the world and the Sahel countries displayed a low score. This low score highlights the gravity of the situation on one hand and the consequences of the practice on other hand. Indeed, corruption decreases democracy including accountability, political campaign, free and fair elections, and table 2 shows the corruption situation in the region. accordingly, the countries have low scores and rank among the most corrupted countries in the world.

| Country | Burkina Faso | Chad | Mali | Mauritania | Niger |
|---------|--------------|------|------|------------|-------|
| Score   | 41           | 19   | 32   | 27         | 34    |
| Rank    | 78           | 165  | 120  | 144        | 114   |

Source: Transparency International, 2018

Table 2: Corruption perceptions Index in the Sahel countries

*c. SAHEL REGION: ORIGIN AND TRANSIT ZONE FOR SUB-SAHARIAN ILLEGAL MIGRANTS TO EUROPE*

In addition to ethnic problems and corruption, irregular migration to Europe is another challenge in the Sahel. Recently, the Sahel region has become the main origin and transit zone for sub-Saharan young African migrants to Europe in search of better living conditions. In 2014, Mali was among the top three countries of departure for migrants to Europe with 10.000 migrants. In addition, the city of Agadez in Niger is the main transit place for African migrants to Europe with more than 250.000 migrants in 2016. According to statistics, 84% of sub-Saharan countries' international

migrants originate from the ECOWAS area (Raineri and Rossi, 2017). From the Sahel region, they reach Italy and Spain through the Maghreb countries and the Mediterranean Sea.

However, the economic and social consequences of irregular African young migrants to Europe are disastrous. In Europe, illegal migration through the Sahel region to European countries threatens the stability and development of Europe. The 2015 "refugee crisis" in Europe led to the establishment of the EUCAP Sahel Niger in 2016 in response to the EU's broader security strategy toward illegal migration (Lebovich, 2018). In the Sahel region, the departure of youth provokes depopulation of rural areas on one hand and reduces agricultural production in villages on other hand. In addition, many young Sahelians have recently perished in the Mediterranean on their way to Europe.

III. TURKISH SOFT POWER STRATEGIES IN THE SAHEL REGION

A. TURKISH DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES

Turkish foreign policy strategies in Africa in general and the Sahel countries are based on diplomatic strategies. In 2008, the African countries including the Sahel supported Turkey in gaining a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This position brings more power and reputation to Turkey in the sphere of international politics. (Aral, 2009). In the following years, Turkey established diplomatic missions in the Sahel region to strengthen its relations with the countries of the region. Indeed, chapter one of our research shows that Turkey has inaugurated five embassies within three years in the Sahel region. This action could be seen as a mark of gratitude for their support of the victory of non-permanent members in the UNSC. In addition to diplomatic missions, Turkey's liberal visa policy allows privileged Africans including scientists, leading figures, and businessmen to benefit from flexible Turkish e-visa. (Açikgöz, 2015). The relationship between Turkey and the African Union (AU) on one hand and ECOWAS on the other hand facilitate the implementation of Turkish diplomatic strategies in the Sahel region. Indeed, Turkey became an "observer status" and "strategic partner" at the AU. However, Turkey is providing International Junior diplomats Training programs to the countries of the world including Sahel countries. (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Besides this program, Turkey initiates the Antalya Diplomacy Forum to bring countries together including Sahel countries to discuss issues related to global affairs. However, Turkey can rely on the support of Sahel countries in any eventual campaign for international politics.

B. TURKISH DIPLOMATIC ACTORS IN THE REGION.

In the annals of Turkish foreign policy, the relationship between Turkey and the Sahel countries is made in the context of the Turkish authority to redefine the country's international identity from a pro-Western state to an active and global actor. (Özkan and Akgün, 2010). The relationship between Turkey

and the listed above Sahel countries was drowned up recently with the establishment of different political representation in different capitals of the regions in response to the aim of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government. Since 2005, this government aimed at increasing its diplomatic relations with Africa by diversifying its foreign policy option. (Özcan, 2017). Among these five countries, Bamako is the first capital city to inaugurate a Turkish embassy in the Sahel in 2010 under the leadership of Kemal Kaygısız. Today, the interests of Turkey in Mali are defended by Murat Mustafa Onart since 2018. However, Nouakchott in Mauritania is the second capital city to receive Turkish authorities in the region. Therefore, in 2011 Musa Kulaklıkaya was assigned to guarantee the interests of Turkey in Mauritania. This mission is assured by Mehmet Cem Kahyaoğlu since 2019.

In the Sahel, Turkey's International Identity operated on the same principle in 2012 with two new embassies in Ouagadougou and in Niamey. Aydin Sefa Akay is the first Turkish ambassador in Ouagadougou and Nilgül Erdem Arı is the current Turkish official representative in Burkina Faso. In Niamey, Hasan Ulusoy set up the basis of Turkish relations and Mustafa Türker Arı ensure the sustainability of these actions since 2019. Following the establishment of Turkish representatives in Ouagadougou and Niamey, N'Djamena is the last city in the region to hold Turkish political representation. Therefore, Ahmet Kavas was sent in 2013 to represent the Turkish government in Tchad but today this function is assured by Kemal Kaygısız since 2020. These state authorities aim to promote a sustainable relationship between Turkey and these countries by defending their country's interests at political, economic, and cultural levels. Turkey's commitment to reorienting its International Identity is also characterized by the recent visit of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Tchad in 2017, and to Mali and Mauritania in 2018. However, Turkey's foreign minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu made a diplomatic visit to Niger in July 2020. (Republic of Turkey Foreign Affairs, 2020). Nonetheless, the quick spread of Turkish representations in the region in the last decade underlines the principle of "Domino Theory" not in ideological means but in political and economic aims.

### C. TURKISH HUMANITARIAN STRATEGIES IN THE REGION

In the humanitarian sphere, Turkey has already proven its worth in Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, etc. Indeed, the country is one of the top three donor countries in the world after the UK and the US with US\$ 1.6 billion in 2013 (Gilley, 2015). Consequently, Turkey has successfully established a prominent humanitarian strategy in the Sahel region and Burkina Faso. This strategy is characterized by humanitarianism to provide assistance and better living conditions to the people of the region. However, this strategy is primarily the combination of both humanitarian aid and development aid. The humanitarian aid strategy develops through the concurrence of local authorities and aims to deal with emergency basic needs issues in the region to save people's lives.

Expanding the geographical scope and increasing the volume of official aid is an indispensable part of Ankara's

proactive foreign policy (Haşimi, 2014). In the Sahel region, droughts and famines are permanent due to unfavorable climate conditions. Additionally, the Sahel countries suffer from terrorist attacks, economic vulnerabilities, inequality, and political instability. This situation necessitates an immediate humanitarian response and therefore fosters the implementation of Turkish humanitarian strategies. In fact, both Official and Non-Official Development Assistance policies are applied since they have the same end. In the context of Humanitarian aid, Turkey's foreign policy institutions developed short-term actions in collaboration with the local partners of the region to help the people of the region. The actions are numerous and diverse and therefore extend to many areas including subsistence, and health care. In the area of subsistence, Turkey's NGOs distribute food during the Ramadan period, the "Kurban" period organization as well as "Adak", "Akika", and "Şükür", etc. "Kurban, Adak, Akika, and Şükür" are specific animal scarification for religious beliefs. Moreover, they currently organize missions for free cataract operations in the region. These aids are personal and temporary initiatives but have a positive impact on the people of the region.

However, the humanitarian-development aid strategies in contrast seek to deal with the problem of the region with a long-term plan. This strategy aims to combat poverty and bring change to the region. This strategy is gradually developing in the Sahel region with the presence of the Turkish Maarif foundation schools in Niger, Mali, Chad, and Mauritania. Moreover, Turkish local NGOs have provided many water wells, mosques, etc to the people of the regions.

Turkey's humanitarian strategies in the Sahel and Burkina Faso somehow respond to the basic needs of the people. This credit goes to Turkey's civil society organizations which are committed to assisting vulnerable people with basic human needs in the Sahel zone and Burkina Faso. The list of Turkish NGOs working in the Sahel is very long, but it is important to mention some popular names (see table 3).

| Area of Interventions                        | Institutions (Humanitarian actors) | TIKA | IHH | YUNUS EMRE INSTITUTE | DIYANET FOUNDATION | MAHMUT HÜDAYİ ASSOCIATION | SADAKATASI |
|--|------------------------------------|------|-----|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| Educational aid                              |                                    | Yes  | No  | Yes                  | Yes                | Yes                       | No         |
| Orphan projects                              |                                    | Yes  | Yes | No                   | No                 | No                        | No         |
| Ramadan food packages and iftar distribution |                                    | Yes  | Yes | Yes                  | Yes                | Yes                       | Yes        |
| Ration distribution projects                 |                                    | Yes  | Yes | No                   | No                 | Yes                       | No         |
| Social infrastructure                        |                                    | Yes  | Yes | Yes                  | No                 | Yes                       | Yes        |
| Hernia and cataract surgeries                |                                    | Yes  | Yes | No                   | No                 | No                        | Yes        |
| Education assistance project                 |                                    | Yes  | No  | Yes                  | Yes                | Yes                       | No         |
| Eid al-Adha aid                              |                                    | Yes  | Yes | Yes                  | Yes                | Yes                       | Yes        |
| Water wells                                  |                                    | Yes  | Yes | No                   | Yes                | Yes                       | Yes        |
| Vocational and Technical training program    |                                    | Yes  | No  | Yes                  | No                 | Yes                       | No         |

Sources: Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), report, 2018

Table 3: Turkish main humanitarian actors and activities in the Sahel Countries in 2018

Table 3 shows a list of Turkey’s main humanitarian institutions and organizations and their activities in the Sahel region. Their areas of activity are different and aim to reduce poverty by strengthening the relations between Turkey and the countries of the region. However, these institutions and organizations are very active in short-term plan projects such as Ramadan food packages and Eid al Adha cattle meat distribution. In addition, they are very active in water well drilling which helps to reduce the problem of water in the region. Furthermore, TIKA is outstanding among the other actors for its long-term plan project activities such as training and infrastructure building in the region. Nonetheless, Turkish foreign policy actors enable the international visibility of their country in this part of the continent and therefore favors the relations between the people on one hand and both government on the other hand.

The humanitarian aid and development aid strategies engagement of Turkish humanitarian actors in the region highlights the Turkish foreign policy’s “Soft power” paradigm in International Relations. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Turkey does not adopt humanitarian intervention strategies in the region in its foreign policy strategies. Humanitarian intervention differs from humanitarian aid and development aid by its “illegitimate” character. Indeed, humanitarian intervention is a military intervention that aims to save the life of innocent people in other countries from massive violence. But this intervention is seen as an abusive action and the diktat of the powerful institution (Heraclides and Dialla, 2015, p.1). For instance, many humanitarian interventions took place around the world under the UN security council or not, mainly in the Central African Republic in 1979, Rwanda in 1994, Kosovo in 1999, etc. However, 67% of the general ODA provided by Turkey in 2014 was devoted to the humanitarian field (TIKA, 2014)

In Burkina Faso, Turkish humanitarian policy strategies are more focused on humanitarian aid rather than development aid strategies. Indeed, the humanitarian approach developed by Turkish humanitarian organizations in this country is very limited compared to Niger and Chad. Certainly, the Official Development Assistance provided by Turkey to the country is insignificant in statistics at 0,89 Million USD compared to Niger’s 5,4 Million USD (TIKA, 2019). However, this approach is also characterized by a “moral mission” and aims to support Muslim communities in the region. Indeed, “Turkey’s intervention in Africa is framed as a moral mission, on the grounds that its citizens alone can intervene meaningfully in lives of certain (Muslim) populations in vulnerable countries where Euro-Americans are socially and culturally inept” (Venkatachalam, 2019:9).

**D. TURKISH SOCIO-CULTURAL STRATEGIES IN THE REGION**

Alongside the humanitarian strategies developed by Turkey in the Sahel countries, social and cultural strategies are also important and need to be considered in the Turkish foreign policy agenda. Indeed, there are many Turkish institutions working to promote social and cultural activities in the Sahel countries. Among those TIKA, the Foundation for Human rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH),

and Diyanet Foundation are some main Turkish actors in the field (Birol and Özkan, 2010, p.64). The activities are diverse, but education is the most significant and therefore arouses attention to the country’s international education goals. The most prominent educational organization is the Maarif Foundation created in 2016 by the Turkish government to promote Turkish cultural interests abroad. These goals aim to provide quality education on one hand and to promote access to education for people within and without Turkey. The promotion of education policy by Turkey in the Sahel region is composed of direct and indirect investment. Direct investments are determined by the actions undertaken by Turkish institutions on the ground to foster education and development. In this sphere, the Turkish Maarif Foundation is a leading institution that provides schools and dormitories in the region. (See table 4)

| Countries Infrastructures | Burkina Faso | Chad | Mali | Mauritania | Niger |
|---------------------------|--------------|------|------|------------|-------|
| Schools                   | 0            | 6    | 31   | 9          | 9     |
| Dormitories               | 0            | 1    | 1    | 0          | 2     |

Source: Turkish Maarif Foundation digital report, 2022

Table 4: The Turkish Maarif Foundation Schools and Dormitories in the Sahel Region

Since 2016 Turkish Maarif Foundation has directly administrated 55 schools and 4 dormitories in the region. Indeed, the foundation is a state entity and has the power to conduct educational activities in name of Turkey abroad (Akgün and Özkan, 2020). In the region, Mali has the highest number of schools and Niger has the highest number of dormitories. However, Burkina Faso has neither schools nor dormitory that is administrated by Turkish institutions. The reasons seem to be political, rather than social. In addition to the activities of the Turkish Maarif Foundation, TIKA supported cultural festivals in Niger and encouraged reforestation in Burkina Faso in 2014 (TIKA, 2014). In 2018, Turkey’s total investment in social infrastructure and services in the world was 635,5 Billion USD. In the list of countries with a high rate of investment, Niger accounted for 6,8 billion USD (TIKA, 2018)

Indirect investment is another strategy that promotes Turkish foreign strategy in the region. This strategy is well implemented by Turkish government and civil society actors mainly the YTB (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities), Aziz Mahmud Hudayi Vakfi, Diyanet Vakfi, and others. These actors work to provide educational opportunities to students of the region. Indeed, every year these organizations provide scholarships to students around the world including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Along with these institutions, many students from these countries are pursuing their studies at different universities in Turkey. (See table 5)

| Countries Students | Burkina Faso | Chad | Mali | Mauritania | Niger | Total |
|--------------------|--------------|------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| Male               | 231          | 1644 | 408  | 414        | 208   | 2905  |
| Female             | 22           | 307  | 142  | 109        | 63    | 643   |
| Total              | 253          | 1951 | 550  | 523        | 271   | 3548  |

Source: Council of Higher Education statistics (Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi), 2020-2021.

Table 5: Number of students from the Sahel region enrolled in Turkish universities 2020-2021



Table 5 shows the number of male and female students from the Sahel countries that are studying in Turkey. Indeed, there are 3548 students in total in 2021 from these countries who are taking education in Turkey. However, Chad has the higher number of students, in 1951, and Burkina Faso had the lowest number 253 students. Nonetheless, the total number of females taking education in Turkey is very low and is 643 students. Many of these students are enrolled in Turkish public universities and therefore benefit from the help of Turkish scholarships and sponsors. This policy helps to promote education in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) which is in line with the objectives of the “United Nations Millennium Development Goals on education”. However, the educational activities of these Turkish institutions toward international students in general and Sahel region students particularly help to promote a positive image of Turkey abroad by emphasizing cultural and educational diplomacy. (Birol and Özkan, 2020). The development of social media has affected not only the social, economic, and political areas but also the areas of world politics and diplomacy (Donelli, 2019). The Turkish film industry is also another cultural instrument that helps to spread Turkish culture around the world. This industry has already proven its worth in the Middle East and is now extended to sub-Saharan African countries in general and Burkina Faso particularly.

Indeed, the cinema industry is the instrument that emerging powers such as India, Brazil, and Turkey are using to export peacefully their culture abroad by influencing other cultures. Recently in Burkina Faso, many of these Turkish series such as *Dark Love (Kara Sevda)* by Karem Çatay, *Mother and Daughters (Fazilet Hanım ve Kızları)* by Murat Saraçoğlu are broadcasted. These reality shows help to promote Turkish culture in the region. This strategy is known as cultural diplomacy in International Relations terms. Cultural diplomacy is a peaceful and cheapest way of exporting language, food, and way of life to different geography (Donelli, 2019). But the most significant aspect of cultural diplomacy is that people will learn the Turkish culture with less effort and without either a passport or a visa. However, the Social and cultural approach developed by Turkey in Burkina Faso gained success in television rather than in classrooms. Indeed, the ineffectiveness of the Maarif Foundation in the country reduces the opportunities for investments in education. As a result, the Turkish film industry is working to fill the gaps in terms of Social and cultural diplomacy.

#### IV. TURKISH HARD POWER STRATEGIES IN THE SAHEL REGION

##### A. TURKISH ECONOMIC STRATEGIES IN THE REGION

###### a. TURKISH MAIN ECONOMICS, AND SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE REGION

The rapid growth of Turkish political representation in the Sahel during the 2010s expresses the desire of the Turkish government to make up for lost time and accelerate their

relations with Africa. Generally, the driving motives of Turkish relations with Africa and the Sahel region are more economics rather than politics (Özkan, 2010). Indeed, the volume of trade between Turkey and Burkina Faso totaled 72 million USD for the first nine months of 2021, a 65% increase as compared to the corresponding period of 2020. (Jeune Afrique, 2021). In Mali, the trade activities between the two countries increased from 5 million dollars in 2003 to 57 million dollars in 2019. (International Crisis Group, 2021). In addition to economic cooperation with the countries of the region, the Turkish government had also paid official visits to many countries in the continent. These visits are very significant and thereby facilitate the relations between the countries.

| Countries                 | Burkina Faso | Mali | Chad | Niger | Mauritania |
|---------------------------|--------------|------|------|-------|------------|
| Embassy                   | Yes          | Yes  | Yes  | Yes   | Yes        |
| Turkish Maarif Foundation | No           | Yes  | Yes  | Yes   | Yes        |
| TIKA                      | No           | No   | Yes  | Yes   | No         |
| Yunus Emre Institute      | No           | No   | No   | Yes   | No         |
| Turkish Airlines          | Yes          | Yes  | Yes  | Yes   | Yes        |
| Turkish Army              | No           | Yes  | No   | No    | No         |
| Official visit            | No           | Yes  | Yes  | Yes   | Yes        |

Source: Anadolu Ajansı, 2021

Table 6: Analytical Framework of Turkish main actors in the region

The above table informs us that Turkish embassies and Turkish airlines are the only two actors operating in all these countries in the region. However, the Turkish Maarif Foundation is represented in all these countries except Burkina Faso, and TIKA is operating only in Mali and Niger. But Yunus Emre Institute and the Turkish army are only present in Niger and Mali respectively. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government official visits and the presence of Turkish institutions express the determination of the Turkish government to deepen its relations and cooperation with the countries of the region. Humanitarian aid is one of the most visible actions leading the Turkish foreign policy strategies due to the critical economic and social situation of the population in the region.

Turkey has developed two types of economic strategies with the countries of the Sahel region based on state and private sectors. Indeed, Direct investment and indirect economic investment are the two economic strategies developed by Turkey to promote its foreign policy in this geography. The indirect investment begins with the economic forums and meetings organized by Turkey to improve economic cooperation between the African countries in general and Sahel countries. From this perspective, the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK) spared no effort to establish “business diplomacy” based on bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the countries of the region. In the framework of multilateral economic cooperation, Turkey organizes every two years, an economic forum with African countries in general. In 2016, the countries held the



first Turkey-Africa Economy and Business forum. Following the 2016 meeting, Turkey held economic meetings with Africa in 2018, 2020, and recently in 2022. In addition, DEIK has organized an economic meeting with one important regional institution in Africa. In 2016 and 2018 Turkey organized an economic and business meeting with ECOWAS to foster economic dynamism and cooperation. This meeting highlights the institutionalization of Turkish economic strategy in its economic policy. However, DEIK has established bilateral business councils with the countries of the Sahel region within the scope of the African Union. The first DEIK bilateral business agreement within the Sahel region was signed with Mauritania in 2011. In 2017 Turkey and Mauritania signed economic cooperation in different areas including mining, fishing, agriculture, and education sectors (DEIK, 2018). However, Turkey-Chad; Turkey-Mali, and Turkey-Niger Business councils were created in 2015. Burkina Faso is the latest country in the region to establish a business council with Turkey in 2018.

The first DEIK bilateral business forum was held in Istanbul with Mali in 2015. The second Sahel country to hold a meeting with DEIK is Chad in 2017. However, in 2019 DEIK and Burkina Faso organized a bilateral economic meeting in Ankara. These meetings aim to improve the economic relations of the Turkish private sector with the countries of this part of the African continent. The outcome of these meetings was made evident by the presence of direct investments in Turkish private sectors in the region.

Direct investment is another economic strategy favoring the development of Turkish foreign in the area. This investment takes different forms including job creation, concessional loans, technical cooperation, support for National NGOs, etc. Nonetheless, the infrastructure building sector and mining sectors spark the intention of many. In Niger, SUMMA İNŞAAT company is directing the construction of Diori Hamani International Airport and Radisson Hotel. In addition, TIKA has provided a solar energy system in Burkina Faso in 2016 to empower the country's economic infrastructures and services. In addition to the construction sector, Turkish companies are very active in the mining industry. Indeed, the Turkish TOYA Gold company is operating in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger (Tanchum, 2021). Like TOYA Gold, Turkish Airlines is represented in the region with five official agencies headquartered in the five countries of the region. This dynamism contributes to reducing unemployment by increasing economic development in the region. Indeed, Turkey has increased its trade volume in the region and reached almost 500 million US dollars in 2019. This economic performance aims to increase in the future. However, Turkey's main export products to the region are food, textile, furniture, and construction products (Turkey Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

**b. TURKEY AND SAHEL COUNTRIES TRADE SITUATION**

The trade balance between Turkey and the countries of the region has not been stable. In 2016, the total trade volume between Turkey and Chad was estimated at 42 million USD. The main exportation products are wheat flour, steel, food

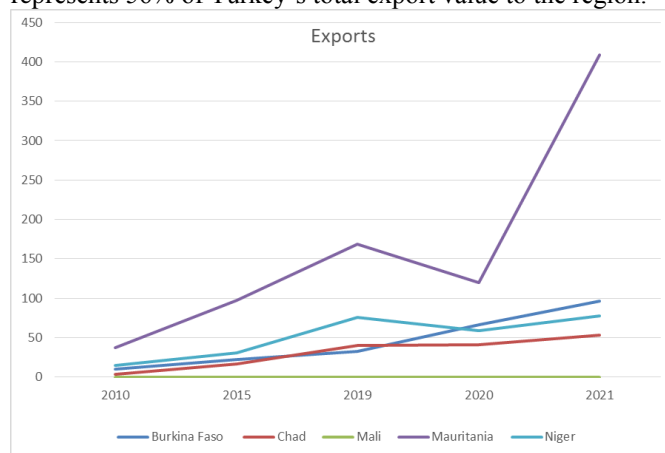
product, and carpets which were estimated at 19 million USD. However, the importation was 23 million USD and Fish, fish oil, marine animal meals, meat, and animal skin. The trade balance is 4 USD in favor of Chad (DEIK, 2016). In 2017, the total trade volume between Turkey and Mauritania was estimated at 132 million USD. The main exportation products are Iron, Food products, cement, and construction products. The exportation, however, was evaluated at 87 million USD while the importation was 45 million USD and the country needs basic food products such as fish, fish oil, marine animal meals, meat, and animal skin (DEIK, 2017). The Trade balance is 42 million USD in favor of Turkey (DEIK, 2016). However, the following table and graphs address the economic situation between Turkey and the countries of the region including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger. Reliable data were not available for Mali.

|              | 2010 | 2015 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | Total |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Burkina Faso | 10   | 22   | 33   | 66   | 96   | 227   |
| Chad         | 3    | 17   | 40   | 41   | 53   | 154   |
| Mali         | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    |       |
| Mauritania   | 37   | 97   | 168  | 120  | 409  | 831   |
| Niger        | 15   | 31   | 76   | 59   | 78   | 259   |
| Total        | 65   | 167  | 317  | 286  | 636  | 1471  |

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade, 2022

Table 7: Turkey's Total Exports to the Region in Millions USD

The above table represents the total export value in USD of the Republic of Türkiye to the Sahel countries in the year 2010, 2015, 2019, 2020, and 2021. In fact, Turkey's export values have constantly increased in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger. In 2010, the total value of Turkey's exports in the region was 65 million USD and has increased nearly by 5 in 2019 and by 10 in 2021, an increase of 21,51% and 43,23% respectively. During these periods of time, Turkey's export value was very important in Mauritania than the rest with 831 million USD. This value is 3 times higher than the export value in Burkina Faso and Niger and 5 times more than in Chad. Indeed, this value of export in Mauritania represents 56% of Turkey's total export value to the region.



Source: Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Trade, 2022

Figure 1

The above figure is associated with the information on Turkey's export value and expresses, the evolution of Turkey's export values in the region in different periods of

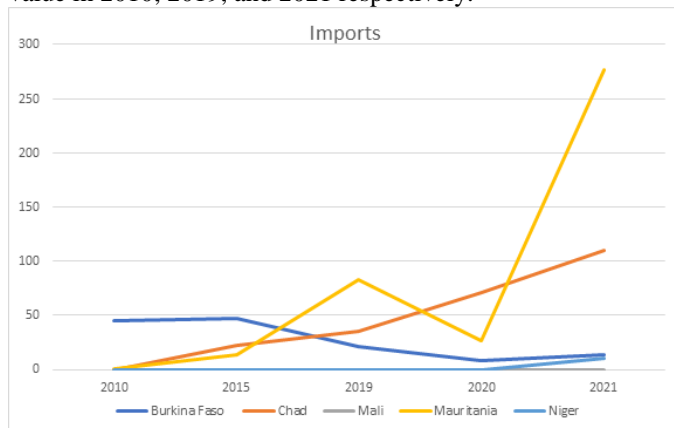
time. This evolution has two phases in three different moments. The first phase is an increasing phase and is extended from 2010 to 2019 and from 2020 to 2021. This phase shows the increase in Turkey's export value in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger. However, the period between 2019 and 2020 is a decreasing second phase and represents a diminution in Turkey's export value in the region, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mauritania.

|              | 2010 | 2015 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | Total |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Burkina Faso | 45   | 47   | 21   | 8    | 14   | 135   |
| Chad         | 0    | 22   | 35   | 71   | 110  | 238   |
| Mali         | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    |       |
| Mauritania   | 1    | 13   | 83   | 27   | 277  | 401   |
| Niger        | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 10   | 10    |
| Total        | 46   | 82   | 139  | 106  | 411  | 784   |

Source: Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Trade, countries profile 2022

Table 8: Turkey's Total Imports from the Region in Million USD

The information indicated in the above table corresponds to the values of Turkey's imported products from the Sahel region in five different years. These values were very important in 2021 with 411 million USD, an increase of nearly 9 times more in 2010 and 3 times more in 2019. This represents 5,86%, 17,72, and 52,42 %, of the total imports value in 2010, 2019, and 2021 respectively.



Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade, 2022

Figure 2

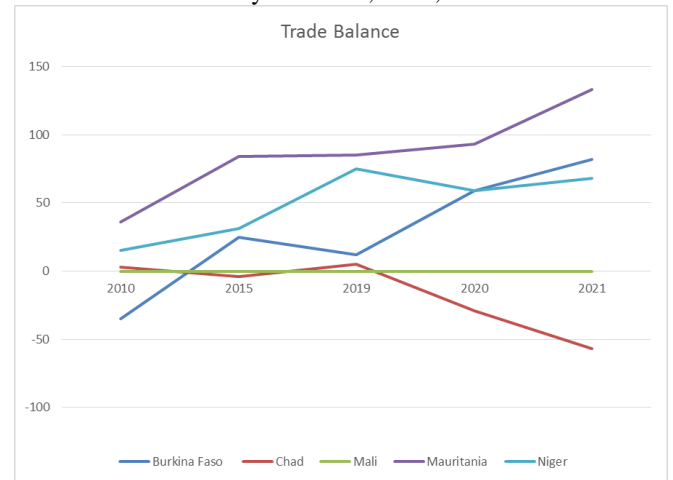
The information indicated in the above table corresponds to the evolution of values of Turkey's imports from the Sahel region in 2010, 2015, 2019, and 2020. These values have steadily increased within 5 years from 22 million USD to 110 million USD in Chad and from 1 million USD to 401 million USD in Mauritania. Even though the imports were constant in Niger with 10 million, they decreased in Burkina Faso between 2015 and 2020.

|              | 2010 | 2015 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | Total |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Burkina Faso | -35  | 25   | 12   | 59   | 82   | 143   |
| Chad         | 3    | -4   | 5    | -29  | -57  | -82   |
| Mali         | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -     |
| Mauritania   | 36   | 84   | 85   | 93   | 133  | 431   |
| Niger        | 15   | 31   | 75   | 59   | 68   | 248   |
| Total        | 19   | 136  | 177  | 182  | 226  | 740   |

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade, 2022

Table 9: Turkey's Total Trade balance in the Region in Millions of USD

Table 9 represents the difference between Turkey's import and export value in the region between 2010 and 2021. In 2021, the total trade balance of Turkey with the countries of the region was 226 million USD. This represents 12 times higher than the value obtained in 2010 and nearly 2 times more than the value of years 2015, 2019, and 2020.



Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade, 2022

Figure 3

The evolution of Turkey's trade balance in the Sahel region is represented in graph 4 in different periods of time. Generally, the trade balance is positive between Mauritania, and Niger but was negative in 2010 with Burkina Faso and from 2019 to 2021 in Chad.

### c. INTERPRETATION

Table 8 and 9 shows that both Turkey's total import and total export value in the Sahel region steadily increased between 2010 and 2021. In this sense, both demands and supplies are increasing and the economic results are in general positive in the Sahel region according to Tables 13 and 14. These positive results reveal that Turkey's trade activities with almost the countries of the region generate additional financial resources beyond its borders and the same time increase the GDP of the country. Indeed, these positive results can be seen as an achievement rather than a failure for the country. However, the economic strategies aim to stimulate the country's economic growth through exports. The objectives of this economic strategy are to bring back foreign resources by increasing the foreign trade volume.

In addition to different economic activities, Turkish Airlines is one of the dynamic economic agents with multiple direct flights per week to different capitals of the region. Indeed, a direct flight refers to a non-stop plane trip between two different places. However, a direct flight allows passengers to save energy and time and ensure rapid exportation of goods. Unlike an indirect flight, a non-stop plane trip prevents the loss and damage of luggage.

### B. MILITARY STRATEGIES

According to the security dilemma in the Sahel, the relationship between Turkey and the Sahel countries has

drastically reshaped in the last decade. Indeed, Turkey has taken steps to accompany the Sahel countries to regain peace and security through stabilization and development rather than military intervention. However, the stability and development strategies adopted by Turkey are based on bilateral, and multilateral peace cooperation. These strategies are part of the Turkish Official Development Assistance program for the continent. Nevertheless, peace and security are troubled in this part of the continent by illegal armed groups and terrorist groups. These groups became stronger after the collapse of the Kadhafi regime in Libya which was able to control and secured the borders and arms trafficking in the region.

At the bilateral level, Turkey established military cooperation with some countries in the region for reinforcing security and peace. In July 2020 a defense accord was signed between Turkey and Niger to enhance peace and security in the region. This agreement will allow Turkey to provide a military training program to Niger with the option to establish a military base in the future (Ramani, 2021). In addition, on July 6<sup>th</sup> 2021, the national press of Burkina Faso informed the public that the country maintains a security partnership with Turkey. This information is supported by the international press. Indeed, on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021, "The Defense post" published that Turkey's Active in both the Operations Area and Defense Industry (ASFAT) company will export Mechanical Mine Clearing Equipments to Burkina Faso (Reyes, 2021). Due to the multiple improvised explosive device war technic of terrorist groups in the northern and eastern parts of the country, these types of equipment will help to prevent and reduce the loss of lives during military operations in risk areas.

At the multilateral level, Turkey is engaged to support regional and international institutions to bring security and peace to the Sahel zone. In the illustration, the Turkish government advocated in 2018 to support the G5 Sahel joint forces with 5 million USD for peace and security in the Sahel (Siradag, 2018). In fact, the G5 Sahel bloc was initiated in 2014 and come into existence in 2017 through the effort of five countries including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. The G5 Sahel bloc aims to form a common army to promote security and development in the Sahel.

At the international level, Turkey joined in 2013, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) for peace and stability in the Sahel (Grigoriadis and Fusiek, 2022). In fact, the MINUSMA is a peacekeeping and state-building plan of action established by the United Nations in 2016 to ensure security and peace in Mali and the Sahel region. However, Turkey is also active in supporting regional institutions for peace and security in the region. Today, the bloc has many regional and international partners including ECOWAS, AU, France, Germany, Turkey, European Union (EU), the UN, etc. However, this bloc is strongly supported by France whose military presence in the region raises many questions. Indeed, France is the main partner of this organization in terms of military capacities with 5.000 soldiers (Cold-Ravnikilde, 2018,)

## V. THE MAIN CHALLENGERS IN THE SAHEL REGION

In the Sahel region, there is the presence of two types of challengers with various motivations and aims.

### A. LOCAL CHALLENGERS

Respective governments and armed band groups are the main local challenges for international cooperation and sustainable development in the region. Certainly, the Sahel countries failed to promote good political and economic system for the shake of their population Since their independence, the respective governments fail to enforce the law, promote free and fair elections, and establish an independent judiciary system. However, the region is one of the hottest spots in Africa and there are many armed band groups and terrorists that promote insecurity and favor a secessionist state. In the northern part of Mali, the National Liberation Movement for Azawad (MNLA) waged a secessionist war against the Malian government. Following the chaos in Libya, the Azawad movement aims to establish an Islamic state in the Sahel. (Aynaou, 2015). In addition, Mali is a place of interest to combatants from Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Ansar Eddine. However, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) terrorist group is operating in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. But Boko Haram is operating in Chad and Niger (Barkindo, 2020). The main activities of these groups in the Sahel are kidnapping, arms, and drug trafficking.

### B. INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGERS

There are bilateral international forces that work to promote stability and development in the region. Indeed, France, the United States, Germany, Denmark, and Russia are some international forces intervening in the Sahel. In addition to that, the United Nations, European Union, and NATO are also some international actors that pay attention to the situation in the Sahel. In fact, European countries and international institutions have established multilateral and bilateral cooperation with the Sahel countries. Recently, the Danish government sought to deal with four main issues in the Sahel including security, migration, growth, and governance. Indeed, the government provides troops to the MINUSMA, Assistance to displaced people, and gives support to non-governmental organizations in the region (Boserup and Martinez, 2018). Following the 2011 Chaos in Libya, NATO is tackling the security issue in the Sahel region based on cooperation. Indeed, NATO is committed to dealing with the UN, the EU, the AU, Sahel G5, and ECOWAS to enhance dialogue and improve coordination for stability in the region (Berger, 2021). In addition to its engagement with regional and international actors for stability, NATO supports the EUCAP Sahel mission to train Malian in Nigerien armies against terrorist groups present in the region. (Aynaou, 2015).

Like NATO, the relationship between Russia and the Sahel region is based on security cooperation. In fact, the Russian mercenary group (Wagner) is present in the Sahel at the side of the Malian army to restore security in the country.

Even though this presence is opposed by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, it is said that Wagner aims to reduce the influence of western powers in the Sahel by securing Russian interests and developing military cooperation in the area.

In the last two decades, the United Nations (UN) has intensified its presence in the region to enhance security, good governance, and development based on “hybrid peace” (Tardy, 2014). To this end, the UN is represented by the MINUSMA which has proven difficulties to promote human rights, justice, security, and sustainable assistance to refugees in Mali and beyond.

### C. FORMER COLONIAL POWER; FRANCE, A DIRECT CHALLENGER?

The presence of Turkish diplomatic, economic, and social institutions in the region which is known as the French sphere of influence due to its colonial legacy does not exclude direct competition between the two countries in the region. Turkey is in competition with France by intervening in its sphere of influence (Grigoriadis & Fusiek, 2022). The recent verbal altercation between the French president and the Turkish president is an ongoing geopolitical rivalry opposing Ankara and Paris (Jabbour, 2021). But Turkish foreign policy strategy is unique and selective. Unlike France, Turkey is more influential in humanitarian activities rather than in Sahel countries’ politics. In 2021, France, supported the candidacy of the former Chadian president Idris Deby by interfering the country’s domestic political affairs (TV5MONDE, 2021). These practices are common in France and African countries relations and have today create an anti-French sentiment in the region. This sentiment de facto diminish the influence of France in the Sahel region and open the region to new economic and security partners such as Turkey, Russia, and China.

The economic, social, and defense cooperation established between France and the countries of the region is based on France’s foreign policy strategy toward its former colonies. This strategy is based on three principles (Ongouya, 1980). The first principle is to spread French culture in the region and the second is to help the countries to develop by protecting French economic interests in the region. the third principle is to provide technical assistance by sending civil servants to maintain their independence. Considering this, France is one of the main political, socio-cultural, economic, and military partners of the countries of the region due to the strong past colonial bond between them. Politically, France supported the military coup in Chad and condemn it in Mali, and Burkina Faso. Socio-culturally, the countries of the Sahel region are members of the French-speaking community (Francophonie). This community is a group of 21 countries that have adopted officially the French language in their constitution (Breton, 2004). Economically, the currency (CFA franc) of four countries in the region is made in France since 1947 and the country is granted the right to export raw materials within the region. In addition, France’s multinational business companies such as Total, Bolloré Transport & Logistics, and Canal +, dominate the market in the region. In the area of defense, France is granted the territorial integrity of

its former colonies and established a training program for the armies within (Smith, 2013). In addition, the country is the main partner of the region with Official Development Assistance estimated at 314,1 million euros in 2021 and was normally apportioned as followed: Burkina Faso:92, Chad:53,3, Mali: 39,7, Mauritania: 31,9, and Niger: 97,2 (AFD, 2021)

In Burkina Faso, there is a complex historical military cooperation between France and the country tracing back to the 1950s. In the 1950s French military troops were sent to build armies within the colonies based on the French military aid policy adopted in 1957. This policy led to the creation of Burkina Faso’s National Army in 1960 (Ongouya, 1980). However, France is the first economic partner of the country due to its colonial past. Indeed, the amount of bilateral trade between the two countries reached 342 million euros in 2014 (L’economiste du Faso, 2016). According to the French General Directorate of the Treasury, the import volume of Burkina Faso from France was 264,2 million Euro against 22,8 million of exportation in 2019. The country imports industrial and agricultural equipment, pharmaceutical products, electronic devices, and modern modes of transportation. However, the country exports agricultural products (cotton and Fruits) to France. France is a long-term partner of the country and since 1958 it supports the government to meet the demand for basic services through the AFD institution. France’s Official Development Assistance to Burkina was estimated at 84,8 million euros in 2021. According to this institution, France had financed different development projects in Burkina Faso including water and sanitation, food security, health, etc. (see table 5)

| Projects                                    | Number             | Value       | Year |
|---|--------------------|-------------|------|
| Dam construction (Ziga II)                  | CBF1186            | 30 MEUR     | 2019 |
| Electrification (renewable energy Zagtouli) | CBF 1257           | 22,5 MEUR   | 2020 |
| Road constructions                          | N/A                | 19 MEUR     | 2015 |
| Education and training                      | CB1259 and CB 1299 | 111,22 MEUR | 2022 |
| Health system                               | CBF 1248           | 9 MEUR      | 2017 |

Sources: AFD reports on Burkina Faso, 2021

Table 10: AFD projects in million euros in Burkina Faso

Table five shows that France is supporting the development of Burkina Faso through education, health, energy, and infrastructure in different periods of time with different values. Education and training projects are the priorities based on the value invested in 2022 and was estimated at 111,22 million Euro. In addition, water, energy, infrastructure, and health projects were also respectively supported with 80,5 million Euro in five years by France in promoting development in Burkina Faso.

To promote development through education and science in the country, France is annually delivering, more than six hundred student visas to Burkina Faso. (Le Faso.net, 2021). Indeed, the country is the favorite destination for students in terms of education and learning (Campus France, 2019). France is the first favorite destination country for education and training for Burkina Faso students with 1420 Burkinabe students in 2017. However, Turkey is ranking 10 with 144



Burkinabe students in the same year. Indeed, it is behind countries like Senegal, Morocco, Tunisia, Canada (Campus France, 2019)

## VI. CONCLUSION

The relationship between Turkey and the countries of the Sahel region is not a contested one. But does the presence of Turkey represent a threat or an opportunity for the region? The answer to this question requires a bit of nuance thinking by considering different levels of analysis. Nonetheless, the growing presence of Turkey in the Sahel region offers the latter the opportunity to loosen economic dependence ties with former colonial powers and international financial institutions. Building economic relations with Turkey, the Sahel countries aim to move from the status of passive beggars of international financial institutions to not only active players in the economic system but also arbiters in the competition between the international actors present in the region. Undoubtedly, they are growing confident and have started to diversify their relationship with new other partners. However, the relationship between Turkey and the countries of the region does not guarantee any sustainable development of the population of the area in such circumstances where military coups, rule of law, and lack of an independent judiciary system failed to consolidate. In addition to state-state cooperation in certain domains such as security where agreements are often secretly concluded, Turkey's relations with the Sahel region are driven more than humanitarian actions by consolidating "people-people" relations. Turkish model is mixed and does not respond to the expectation of the population in the region in a short-term period. But it is time for the people and their respective governments to define their own development strategies model to take advantage of the situation to the great delight of their population that failed to realize with their former colonial power's relations.

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