

**Working Paper**

SWP Working Papers are online publications within the purview of the respective Research Division. Unlike SWP Research Papers and SWP Comments they are not reviewed by the Institute.

CENTRE FOR APPLIED TURKEY STUDIES (CATS) | WP NR. 02, APRIL 2021

# **Turkish Development Assistance as a Foreign Policy Tool and Its Discordant Locations**

*Yavuz Tüyoğlu*

## **Contents**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Key Concepts</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>A Brief History of Turkish Development Assistance</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Is Turkey a Traditional Donor?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>South-South Cooperation and Turkey</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Turkey as an Independent Donor</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Outlook</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>List of Tables and Figures</b>	<b>27</b>

Insofar as the future of Turkey's relations with the West is concerned, the analysis of Turkish Development Aid (TDA) offers an uncertain forecast. On the one hand, the AKP has been wrapping its development assistance into anti-Western, anti-colonial rhetoric, especially when addressing the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Yet on the other hand, it has retained Turkey's observer status in the OECD Development Assistant Committee. This foreign policy practice of keeping feet on both sides of the West-East dichotomy helps the AKP to derive one kind of 'concrete benefit' from its ties with the West while seeking others by distancing itself from the West. To some degree, TDA appears to be 'aimed at fulfilling the function of a mediator between Northern and Southern positions and players by placing itself in neither camp.' From another angle, it looks like the AKP wants to be in the West to the degree that suits its interests.

# Abstract

Over the past decade and a half Turkey's official development assistance (ODA) has grown remarkably. As a result, the country has consistently ranked among the most generous donors in the world in terms of ODA to gross national income (GNI) ratio in the more recent years. The operation of Turkish ODA now involves a plethora of governmental and non-governmental organisations. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), Ankara's flagship development agency, coordinates those involved through 62 offices in 60 countries across the world. The financial volume, geographical extent and institutional complexity of Turkish development assistance suggest that for the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) governments, it is a highly valued foreign policy tool. As well as generating significant 'soft power' returns such as visibility and prestige, it also often leads the way for other strategic linkages to be established at the bilateral level, such as trade relations and military cooperation.

Turkey's newfound enthusiasm for foreign aid is driven by its increased foreign policy activism following the end of the Cold War. However, political and economic turmoil that engulfed the country throughout the 1990s hindered Turkish development assistance (TDA). It was only later, when the AKP assumed office, that TDA really got into its stride. From the middle of the 2000s onwards, improved economic fortunes of the country certainly contributed to the increase in its aid flows. Given Turkey's search for alternative directions in foreign policy, many argued that it might now be more accurate to associate the country with other emerging powers such as China, Brazil and India. These countries have also recently become important development assistance donors. The so-called emerging or Southern donors follow a different set of principles than the traditional or Western/Northern donors. In searching for an independent foreign policy role in its surrounding regions, Turkey as an emerging aid donor follows this line and has deviated from its 20th-century Western orientation.

Yet as it is often the case with Turkey, things are less straightforward than they appear. While there are grounds to classify Turkey as an emerging donor, Ankara's development assistance policies have at least two characteristics that separate it from emerging donors. First, Turkey holds observer status in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) – the main organisational body of traditional donors. Unlike most of the Southern donors, it reports its development assistance data to the DAC, participates in its meetings at the highest level and cooperates with its members. To some degree, then, Turkey is a traditional donor or at least finds it beneficial to conform to the norms of the DAC system. Second, unlike traditional donors, Turkey delivers the bulk of its aid through bilateral arrangements. While this is common practice among emerging donors, it is also one that bars them from acting collectively.

As a donor Turkey wears several hats: a partner to the traditional aid structures, an emerging donor practicing development assistance differently and a middle-power trying to carve a sphere for itself in the international system. In other words, it operates from

several 'locations' in the international development landscape, all of which have different implications for its relations with the West. Therefore, a closer look into the trajectory of TDA in the past 15 years holds the promise of a keen insight into the motivations and objectives of the AKP's foreign policy. Where has Turkish ODA gone and when? And what does this tell us in terms of Turkish foreign policy? How do Turkish policy makers present Turkish aid? Will Turkey be able to continue its ODA at the same level?

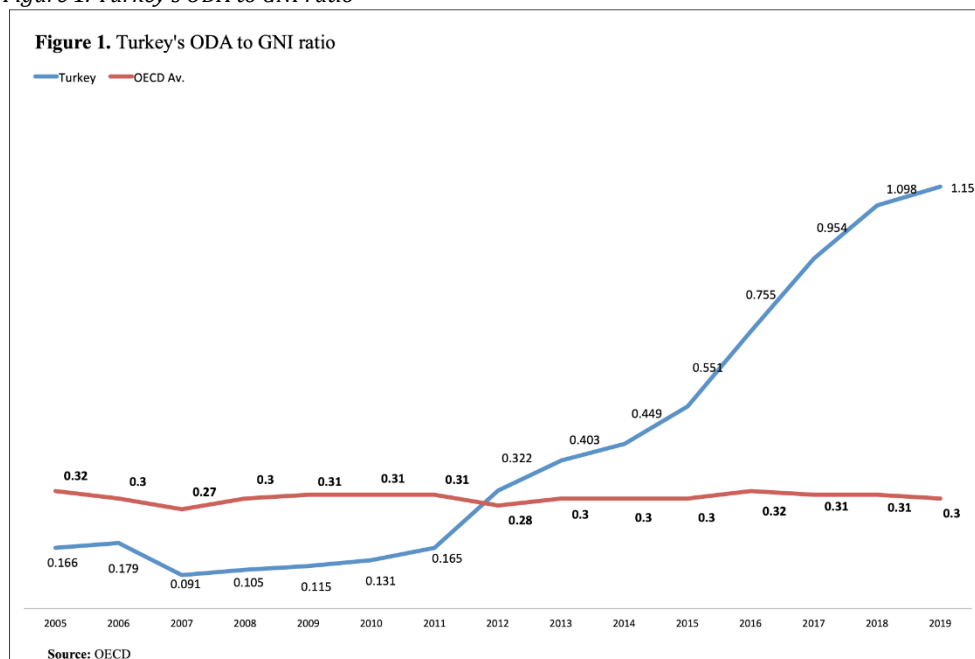
Three important issues are on the horizon for Turkish development assistance in the near future. The first is the current state of the Turkish economy. It is not good. And given that in the past the annual volume of Turkish ODA (excluding its humanitarian aid portion) decreased in the years the economy underperformed, it only follows that the size and effectiveness of TİKA's operations abroad might be adversely affected in the coming years. The second issue is that lately Turkish foreign policy has become increasingly based on the use or threat of its hard power resources – that is its military power. With this new posture in foreign policy and its hardening authoritarianism at home, Turkey has lost a great deal of its allure not only among its traditional allies in the Western world but also in the countries where Turkish ODA goes. Finally, despite all other complications, development assistance may be one of the few areas where cooperation between Turkey and the European Union and its member states remains a viable prospect.

The answers to these questions are bound up with the broader shifts in international politics that involve the emerging donors and the future of international development. Will the emerging donors such as China, Brazil and Turkey abide by established norms set by the traditional donors, seek a compromise or challenge the system? Critically, if they pursue a revision of the international development architecture, will they do it through alternative institutions or as individual states? And these questions are a subset to the 'emerging' international system and the future of liberal international order. In light of its yet unsettled location as an emerging donor, will Turkey undermine the liberal international order to try to negotiate a place in it for itself?

# Key Concepts

Speaking before a scientific awards ceremony in Istanbul on 22 December 2019, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan complained that ‘certain [countries] are merely talking’ when it comes to providing aid to almost four million Syrian refugees in Turkey. In contrast, he boasted, his country leads the global chart in net official development assistance (ODA) share in gross national income (GNI), a significant portion of which is earmarked for Syrian refugees. Not content with just asserting the point, he enrolled the quantitative authority of the OECD in support. The organisation’s statistics plainly showed that Turkey is ‘number one’ in development assistance, he said.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the annually published figures for 2018 and 2019 put Turkey’s ODA to GNI ratio at 1.10 percent and 1.15 percent respectively; at the top of the list and well above OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) average of 0.30 (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Other figures are no less striking. From 2004–2019, Turkish ODA flows increased almost 18-fold. Turkey’s main government agency in charge of development assistance, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), opened its 62<sup>nd</sup> international office at the end of 2019 and its operation now spans a vast geography including the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1. Turkey's ODA to GNI ratio



<sup>1</sup> “Erdoğan: Eskiden Yurt Dışına Giden Bilim İnsanlarımızın Göçü, Artık Tersine Dönmüş Durumda”, *The Independent Türkçe*, 22 December 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all official development assistance related statistics provided in this paper are taken from <https://data.oecd.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> TİKA, “TİKA’s 62nd International Office Inaugurated in Nicosia”, 2019, [https://www.tika.gov.tr/en/news/tika%27s\\_62nd\\_international\\_office\\_inaugurated\\_in\\_nicosia-55039](https://www.tika.gov.tr/en/news/tika%27s_62nd_international_office_inaugurated_in_nicosia-55039).

Clearly, the AKP, continuously in power since 2002, has taken foreign aid seriously and treated it as an important foreign policy tool. Besides humanitarian considerations, the primary utility of foreign aid has been to enhance Turkey's visibility and prestige abroad. Other calculations have also been evident. In many cases, Turkish foreign aid arrived in a recipient developing country alongside the opening of diplomatic missions, establishing Turkish Airlines routes and building ties of trade and investment. In other words, Ankara often assigned development assistance a trailblazer role, leading the way for other interests to follow. On these terms, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that TİKA has built up a prominent profile for Turkey as an emerging donor in the changing international development landscape.<sup>4</sup>

*Foreign aid* is a capacious term that covers transfer of funds, material and expertise/knowledge that is not restricted to official development assistance. Military aid is one form of aid that belongs under the umbrella of foreign aid alongside ODA. Foreign aid can also include the activities of private donors. Where these distinctions are not reflected in official calculations of aid, as was the case with Turkey from 1992 to 2001, the term foreign aid can be used. It would, however, lack precision. On the other hand, official development assistance has a rather specific meaning. With the OECD's latest redefinition of 2018, ODA refers to the flows to countries in the OECD-DAC's ODA recipient list and to multilateral development organisations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). According to the OECD, 'the DAC List of ODA Recipients shows all countries and territories eligible to receive official development assistance (ODA). These consist of all low and middle-income countries based on gross national income (GNI) per capita as published by the World Bank (WB), with the exception of G8 members, EU members, and countries with a firm date for entry into the EU. The list also includes all of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as defined by the United Nations (UN)'.<sup>5</sup> These flows have to be provided by official agencies including state and local governments or by their authorised development agencies such as TİKA or the German Corporation for International Cooperation. The primary objective of development assistance is to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries, and each transaction has to be concessional in character. In other words, each ODA transaction must be a grant or a loan with a grant element. And the repayment of loans must be below the current market rates of interest.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, ODA can be divided into two main forms: *humanitarian aid* and *economic aid*. The former is extended to countries in the aftermath of manmade or natural disasters. It is generally short term and fully concessional. With *economic aid*, donors provide project and programme support in specific areas in money, resources or expertise. This type of assistance involves longer-term cooperation and coordination between the relevant

<sup>4</sup> The literature on the transformation of the international development landscape is voluminous. I particularly benefited from these two collections: Hany Besada, M. Evren Tok and Leah McMillan Polonenko, eds., *Innovating South-South Cooperation: Policies, Challenges, and Prospects* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2019); Sachin Chaturvedi, Thomas Fues and Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, eds., *Development Cooperation and Emerging Powers: New Partners or Old Patterns?* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> OECD, "DAC List of ODA Recipients", <http://www.oecd.org/development/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/daclist.htm> (accessed 8 August 2020). By these criteria Turkey is both an ODA donor and an ODA recipient.

<sup>6</sup> OECD, "Official Development Assistance – Definition and Coverage", <http://www.oecd.org/development/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinition-andcoverage.htm> (accessed 8 August 2020).

agencies of donor and recipient countries as well as non-governmental organisations and even business associations. We would do well to keep this distinction in sight when discussing Turkey's ODA, because a significant portion of its humanitarian aid goes to Syrian refugees in Turkey. Thus, Syria is an outlier case among the ODA recipients of Turkey, for when it is excluded Turkey's humanitarian aid remains rather low.<sup>7</sup> It is also important to note that the OECD started to calculate in-donor country spending (for example, Turkish humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees in Turkey) as part of ODA only with the 2018 revision mentioned above.

Table 1. The Share of Humanitarian Aid in Turkey's ODA (million USD)

Year	Total ODA	Humanitarian Aid	%
2010	599	91	15
2011	812	168	20
2012	1612	661	41
2013	2106	1037	49
2014	2446	1645	67
2015	3080	2151	69
2016	5235	4733	90
2017	7219	6388	88
2018	8612	7351	85

Source: OECD

Two caveats should be introduced before proceeding further. The first is that our attention will largely fall on Turkey's official development assistance organisation, TİKA. This will assign other public organisations such as the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency and the Turkish Red Crescent (*Kızılay*) or a plethora of non-governmental organisations to complementary references, where necessary. It is not that these organisations are not of sufficient significance. Quite the opposite is true. The AKP has invested considerably 'in combining statist foreign policy tools with sub-state and non-state actors' in order to practice a multi-stakeholder diplomacy.<sup>8</sup> The focus on TİKA is justified by the government's decision to vest a broadly defined coordination authority in the organisation, over all other development assistance actors of the country. With such powers TİKA operates as a *de facto* ministry,<sup>9</sup> thus generating some scrutiny over its not fully transparent or accountable operation.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Kerim Can Kavaklı, "Domestic Politics and the Motives of Emerging Donors: Evidence from Turkish Foreign Aid", *Political Research Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2018): 622, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917750783>. For the distinction between economic and humanitarian aid, see also Senem Aydın-Düzgüt, "Can Non-Democracies Support International Democracy? Turkey as a Case Study", *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2020): 264–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1636643>.

<sup>8</sup> Abdurrahman Korkmaz and Hüseyin Zengin, "The Political Economy of Turkish Foreign Aid", in *Turkey's Political Economy in the 21st Century*, ed. Emel Parlar Dal (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 136.

<sup>9</sup> Osman Gökhan Hatipoğlu, "Farklı Bir Kamu Kurumu Olarak TİKA: Örgüt Yapısının Dönüşümü Hakkında Bir Analiz", *Türkiye Siyaset Bilimi Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2018): 107.

<sup>10</sup> Burcu Karakaş, "TİKA Harcamaları Artıyor, Şeffaflık Azalıyor", *Deutsche Welle*, 25 October 2019, <https://www.dw.com/tr/tika-harcamalar%C4%B1-art%C4%B1yor-%C5%9Feffafl%C4%B1k-azal%C4%B1yor/a-50970818>.



The second caveat is that despite its observer status in and voluntary reporting to the DAC, Turkish development assistance remains notoriously non-transparent in terms of information made available on public domains. Indeed, according to the Aid Transparency Index 2020,<sup>11</sup> TİKA performs ‘very poorly’ in terms of aid transparency and the only institution that scores lower in the Index is China’s Ministry of Finance. Such a hurdle is precisely the reason why Turkish development assistance and its relevant ‘facts’ should not be taken at face value. In that sense, what is more pertinent here are the discordant foreign policy objectives involved in Turkey’s development assistance policies.

<sup>11</sup> Publish What You Fund, “Aid Transparency Index 2020”, 2020, <https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/the-index/2020/>.

# A Brief History of Turkish Development Assistance

Leaving aside previous sporadic aid sent to countries in need of relief in the aftermath of disasters, Turkey's commitment to foreign aid started in earnest in 1992 with the establishment of the Presidency of Economic, Cultural and Technical Cooperation (*Ekonomik, Kültürel ve Teknik İşbirliği Başkanlığı*) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its objectives were defined as providing foreign aid to developing states and initiating cooperative projects with them in various fields. The evident ambiguity of the term 'developing states' was clarified in practice by giving the priority of assistance to the newly independent Turkic countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. This geographic concentration clearly signalled Ankara's aspiration to cash in on its 'historical and cultural capital' revalued by the end of Cold War. Accordingly, popular adage at the time depicted a Turkic world stretching 'from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China' across which Turkey would act as model and show its brethren that 'Islam, democracy, human rights, and the market economy could coexist harmoniously'.<sup>12</sup> The United States, the sole superpower at the time, actively endorsed this prospect.

Despite the palpable sense of geopolitical optimism and the attendant enthusiasm among the Turkish foreign policy elite and their Western supporters, Turkey's first decade in foreign aid was underwhelming.<sup>13</sup> This much is attested by the fact that in early May 2001, the incumbent coalition government<sup>14</sup> brought a draft law in front of the parliament, proposing to 'restructure' and 'strengthen' the Presidency of Economic, Cultural and Technical Cooperation. By then its budget and personnel had been considerably downsized.<sup>15</sup> The criticisms levelled by opposition MPs during that parliamentary session, discussing its replacement by the Presidency of Turkish Cooperation and Development (*Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma Başkanlığı*), show that the early years of Turkish foreign aid did not impress. Senior bureaucrats tasked with TDA also shared this negative evaluation.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Aydın, "Relations with the Caucasus and Central Asia", in *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919-2006: Facts and Analyses with Documents*, ed. Baskın Oran, trans. Mustafa Akşin (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), 757.

<sup>13</sup> Güner Özkan and Mustafa Turgut Demirtepe, "Transformation of a Development Aid Agency: TİKA in a Changing Domestic and International Setting", *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 4 (2012): 648, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2012.746442>.

<sup>14</sup> The 57<sup>th</sup> government of Turkey (28 May 1999–18 November 2002) was a coalition of the main partner centre-left Democratic Left Party, the Nationalist Movement Party and the centre-right Motherland Party. It was the Nationalist Movement Party that advocated for the restructuring of the organisation. See Pınar İpek, "Ideas and Change in Foreign Policy Instruments: Soft Power and the Case of the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency", *Foreign Policy Analysis* 11, no. 2 (2015): 183, <https://doi.org/10.1111/fpa.12031>.

<sup>15</sup> Osman Gökhan Hatipoğlu, "Farklı Bir Kamu Kurumu Olarak TİKA: Örgüt Yapısının Dönüşümü Hakkında Bir Analiz", *Türkiye Siyaset Bilimi Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2018): 104.

<sup>16</sup> İpek, "Ideas and Change in Foreign Policy Instruments" [see note 14], 183.

Both domestic and international factors played their part in this largely failed early effort. Surely, when the Cold War ended, Turkey was quick off the block. In the early years, there were numerous high-level meetings and committees of politicians and business people shuttling back and forth between Turkey and the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, undersigning many promising cooperation agreements.<sup>17</sup> Ankara certainly wanted to display the seriousness of its aspirations. But by the middle of the decade, the Turkish economy was in tatters and the revolving coalition governments were far from stabilising the course of the country. In other words, throughout the 1990s Turkey did not possess the political *métier*, the material capabilities or the obligatory institutional arrangements to act as a model, let alone assume the mantle of regional leadership. Even though Central Asia and the Caucasus retained their strategic importance for Turkish foreign policy, the writing on the wall was clear to both Turkey and the recipient governments of the region that ‘there were significant geopolitical, economic and political obstacles for a greater Turkish role in post-Soviet Eurasia’.<sup>18</sup> Internationally, it certainly did not help that the 1990s turned out to be a decade of ‘aid fatigue’ among traditional donors when ‘the share of aid to GNP fell sharply from 0.33 per cent in 1990–1 to only 0.22 per cent in 2000’ for all DAC countries.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Turkey lacked not only the means but also the conceivable support from its traditional allies in the OECD to develop into the new donor it aspired to be.

The first decade of Turkish foreign aid may not have left behind much. Even the foreign aid statistics from this period are not completely reliable, because neither the State Planning Organisation nor the Turkish Statistical Institute – two state agencies responsible for the collection and reporting of Turkey’s foreign aid statistics before TİKA – used a standardised method.<sup>20</sup> Yet, for all their shortcomings these early attempts at turning Turkey into a donor seem to have achieved one thing. They powerfully impressed on the country’s political establishment the idea that development assistance could be a vital foreign policy tool. It was with that very idea that the opposition MPs in the above-mentioned parliamentary session demanded increased commitment to foreign aid, not less, from the government – both in terms of resources and personnel committed, and of a more extensive geographical scope.<sup>21</sup> The parliamentary minutes show a consensus among the political parties that the post-Cold War geopolitical reshuffling presented Turkish foreign policy with a window of opportunity. Yet in the same breath, they also lamented that it had not been sufficiently exploited by Ankara by means of development and humanitarian aid.

Then in 2001, the whole edifice of the Turkish economy came crashing down, leaving much of the country’s political establishment under the rubble. So showed the results of the 2002 general elections. Many of the established political parties were out of the parliament.

<sup>17</sup> Aydın, “Relations with the Caucasus and Central Asia” [see note 12], 750–71.

<sup>18</sup> Seçkin Köstem, “Geopolitics, Identity and Beyond: Turkey’s Renewed Interest in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, in *Turkey’s Pivot to Eurasia: Geopolitics and Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order*, ed. Emre Erşen and Seçkin Köstem (London: Routledge, 2019), 111.

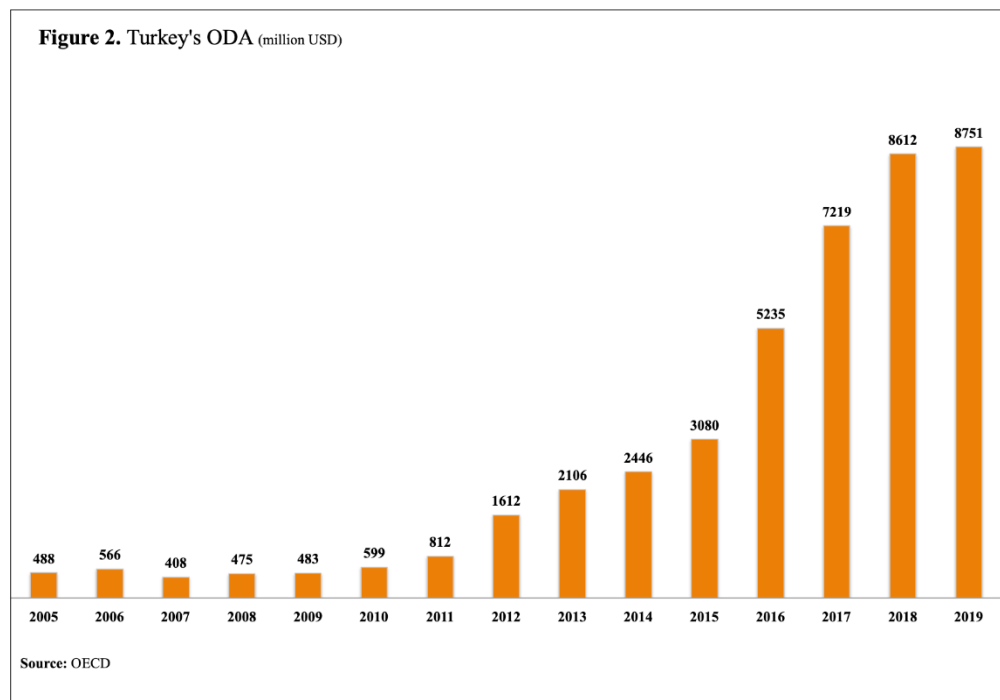
<sup>19</sup> Adam Szirmai, *Socio-Economic Development*, 2. ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 617.

<sup>20</sup> Güner Özkan and Mustafa Turgut Demirtepe, “Transformation of a Development Aid Agency: TİKA in a Changing Domestic and International Setting”, *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 4 (2012): 651, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2012.746442>.

<sup>21</sup> TBMM, “21. Dönem, 95. Birleşim”, *Tutanak Dergisi* 62 (May 2, 2001), <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem21/yil3/bas/b095m.htm>.

The successive AKP governments ruling Turkey since 2002 answered the call for an increased foreign policy activism and sought to geopolitically relocate Turkey from ‘the tail end of Europe into the centre of its own newly emerging world’.<sup>22</sup> With its expanding operation, Turkey’s development assistance organisation went through two more rounds of restructuring. In 2005 it was relocated under the Prime Minister’s office on the rationale that its mandate included the coordination of complex development assistance programmes involving several ministries and non-governmental organisations. This move effectively authorised the organisation as a *de facto* ministry.<sup>23</sup> In 2011 it was re-founded, under its current name, as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı*, hereafter TİKA) with its organisation divided into four regional departments<sup>24</sup> and another for projects spanning more than one region.

Figure 2. Turkey ODA



In this period of institutional restructuring and geographical expansion of its operation, Turkey’s development assistance has grown in leaps and bounds. In 2004, Turkey’s reported ODA to OECD-DAC was 488 million US dollars. In 2011, in the early phase of the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War, it reached to 812 million US dollars. Turkey’s ODA figures from 2019, latest available at the time of writing, have reached 8.751 million US dollars (Figure 2). This almost eight-fold increase is one of the key elements in support of the AKP’s claim that Turkey is ‘The Most Generous Donor Country in the World’. And TİKA acts as the key vehicle to disseminate this image.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Muhittin Ataman, “Leadership Change: Özal Leadership and Restructuring in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 1, no. 1 (2002): 147.

<sup>23</sup> Hatipoğlu, “Farklı Bir Kamu Kurumu Olarak TİKA” [see note 15], 107.

<sup>24</sup> The regional departments are i. Central Asia and the Caucasus, ii. the Balkans and Eastern Europe, iii. the Middle East and Africa and iv. East and South Asia, the Pacific and Latin America.

<sup>25</sup> Erman Akıllı and Bengü Çelenk, “TİKA’s Soft Power: Nation Branding in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Insight Turkey* 21, no. 3 (2019): 135–52.

What kinds of factors have facilitated the growth of Turkish development assistance over the past 15 years? The first, as noted before, is the favourable geopolitical context of the post-Cold War period. Indeed, TİKA's official history expresses this in no uncertain terms: 'The world went through significant changes in 1991 with the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Many new nation-states emerged and these states, which we shared common historical and cultural values with, had great expectations from Turkey'.<sup>26</sup> The end of the Cold War released a variety of potential interstate alignments that are not constrained by the dictates of bipolarity. What proved equally important was a new foreign policy vision with an appealing set of principles and goals, coherently formulated and pursued by a 'new' foreign policy elite.<sup>27</sup> A reasonable case can be made, and has been made by analysts before, that Ahmet Davutoğlu and a select few around him assumed this role.<sup>28</sup> Development assistance became one of the critical elements in this multi-dimensional and proactive foreign policy. Davutoğlu not only entrusted TİKA with a key role in his foreign policy, but also frequented the institution to hold numerous meetings over the years. TİKA acted as a forum for the socialisation of new foreign policy cadres.<sup>29</sup>

Thirdly, to some degree it can be argued that Turkish development assistance grew on the back of country's economic fortunes. Surely, in the years the Turkish economy performed well, it had more resources to invest into development assistance. Nonetheless, looking at the relationship between economic growth and development assistance in this way alone can obscure a lot from view. We must also bear in mind that the AKP's 'entrepreneurial constituencies' (i.e., groups that seek profits through trade and investment abroad) tend to closely follow the geographical movements of TİKA offices and seek to establish links on the back of the goodwill established by Turkey's development assistance.<sup>30</sup> This search for economic return from development assistance has been most evident in Turkey's African policy. Thus, the relationship between national economic growth and development assistance can be more intricate and multi-directional.

Finally, certain 'conjunctural' developments can be said to have emboldened Turkish foreign policy to be more audacious in its search for establishing newer bilateral connections and deploying development assistance along these linkages. One such development has been the worsening relations between the EU and Turkey. The other was the so-called Arab Spring. It was only after 2009, one perceptive observer notes, that then Prime Minister Erdoğan drew TİKA close to himself and in 2011 entrusted its administration to Serdar Çam, his chief of staff from 2002 to 2009.<sup>31</sup> An argument can be made that around this time the AKP's foreign policy elite sensed an opening to turn their

<sup>26</sup> TİKA website, "History of TİKA", [https://www.tika.gov.tr/en/page/history\\_of\\_tika-8526](https://www.tika.gov.tr/en/page/history_of_tika-8526) (accessed 29 August 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Günter Seufert, "Foreign Policy and Self-image: The Societal Basis of Strategy Shifts in Turkey", *SWP Research Paper* 12 (2012).

<sup>28</sup> Burak Bilgehan Özpek and Yelda Demirağ, "The Davutoğlu Effect in Turkish Foreign Policy: What If the Bowstring Is Broken?", *Iran and the Caucasus* 16, no. 1 (2012): 117–28, <https://doi.org/10.1163/160984912X13309560274217>; Bülent Aras, "Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy Revisited", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 4 (2014): 404–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2014.938451>.

<sup>29</sup> İpek, "Ideas and Change in Foreign Policy Instruments" [see note 14], 183.

<sup>30</sup> Seufert, "Foreign Policy and Self-image" [see note 27], 16.

<sup>31</sup> Jeannine Hausmann, "Turkey as a Donor Country and Potential Partner in Triangular Cooperation", Discussion Paper (Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, 2014), 20.

grandiose vision (popularly termed as neo-Ottomanism<sup>32</sup>) into reality and used development assistance as one of the key tools to pursue that.

TDA has several distinguishing characteristics. Similar to other Southern donors, Ankara does not attach political conditionality to its aid. When making statements on Turkey's 'generosity', the country's foreign policy elite often make a virtue out of this and highlight it to separate Turkey's practices from those of Western donors.<sup>33</sup> For Ankara the absence of aid conditionality is a sign of its respect for the sovereignty of the recipient countries and the alignment of its practice with the principles of South-South Cooperation (SSC) as outlined by the UN.<sup>34</sup> Related to this, Turkish aid officials underline the importance of the central state for development. They question aid policies that circumvent the active participation of the recipient states. Consequently, a good amount of TDA has been directed to state-building projects that seek to enhance the capacity of various state functions, whether in the centre or at the municipal level. Therefore, TDA concentrates more on technical cooperation and capacity building than financial aid. According to Turkish aid officials, the focus on capacity building and infrastructure projects alongside humanitarian aid has the added benefit of reinforcing the capabilities of the conflict-afflicted state. They therefore criticise the traditional donors' practice of 'sequencing', which sends in humanitarian assistance but waits for a recipient country to become stable to extend technical assistance. What Turkey does, they argue, is to perform both functions simultaneously; in other words, to 'invest in stability'.<sup>35</sup>

The focus on the recipient state informs TDA in other ways as well. As the volume of aid has grown over the years, the AKP has chosen to use it to bolster its bilateral ties with recipient governments. Therefore, the bulk of Turkey's aid is dispensed bilaterally and only a little goes through multilateral organisations. This bilateralism also informs decision-making. Close interpersonal relationship with key government officials is central to funding decisions, and specific projects are often agreed upon in such high-level meetings, at the behest of the recipient countries' officials.<sup>36</sup> In the minds of Turkish aid officials, this makes TDA more efficient and responsive. Another distinguishing characteristic of TDA is that Turkish aid actors often operate with 'boots on the ground' rather than dispensing aid from behind the walls of secure zones or compounds, isolated from conflict areas. This helps 'build trust with national authorities and local communities'.<sup>37</sup> If presented with the question 'Why does Turkey give aid?', the answer would very likely involve references to 'idealistic and cultural terms established through history and based on a humanitarian sensitive generosity in aid-giving, particularly in neighbouring regions'.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Nicholas Danforth, "The Nonsense of 'Neo-Ottomanism'", *War on the Rocks*, 29 May 2020, <http://warontherocks.com/2020/05/the-nonsense-of-neo-ottomanism/>.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Wheeler, *Turkey's Role and Interests in Central Asia* (London: Saferworld, 2013), 9.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations. *Outcome Document of the High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation*, A/RES/64/222 (New York: United Nations), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Kathryn Achilles, Mohammed Enow, Onur Sazak, Thomas Wheeler and Auveen Woods. *Turkish Aid Agencies in Somalia: Risks and Opportunities for Building Peace* (London: Saferworld, 2015), 25.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>38</sup> R. Melis Baydağ, "Middle Powers in International Development Cooperation: Assessing the Roles of South Korea and Turkey", in *The Palgrave Handbook of Development Cooperation for Achieving the 2030 Agenda: Contested Collaboration*, ed. Sachin Chaturvedi, Heiner Janus, Stephan Klingebiel, Xiaoyun Li, André de Mello e Souza, Elizabeth Sidiropoulos and Dorothea Wehrmann (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 441.

# Is Turkey a Traditional Donor?

Insofar as the OECD is concerned, Turkey is a founding member and has held an observer status in its key development assistance body, the Development Assistance Committee, since 1991. With 30 members (20 of which are EU member states) the DAC acts as a forum where its members discuss and develop strategies to tackle the issues of aid, development and poverty reduction in the developing world. It holds high- and senior-level meetings every two to three years, which Turkey has attended in the past. Moreover, as an observer, Turkey reports its development aid figures to the DAC periodically and they are published in the OECD's annual Development Co-operation Reports.

Alongside its observer status in the OECD-DAC framework, Turkey also opts in to the EU's *acquis communautaire* in the policy area of development assistance. TDA and the EU's development assistance policy show harmony under two headings: institutional structures and the quantity of aid. In terms of institutional structures, the country's participation in the DAC scheme has made its aid practices resemble those of the EU and distinguishes it from other emerging donors. The annual country reports of the European Commission have made recurrent mention of this over the years and the relevant EU officials consider 'Turkey's level of alignment in the field of development and humanitarian aid policy [to be] satisfactory'.<sup>39</sup> That Turkey does this while its accession process is effectively frozen could be construed as an instance of 'external differentiated extension'. It is through this particular type of 'integration' that a non-EU member state voluntarily complies with the Union's rules and regulations in specific policy areas.<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, one commentator notes that the reason Turkish development assistance, despite its remarkable increase, has received less attention in comparison to other emerging donors could be that its 'cooperation does not differ fundamentally from that of traditional donors and has therefore not drawn the same negative reactions as the aid activities of other emerging economies (most of all China) have in certain circles'.<sup>41</sup> To a considerable degree, TDA owes its 'maturation' to its observance of the OECD-DAC procedures. Musa Kulaklıkaya, a former president of TİKA, corroborates this in an article he co-authored with Rahman Nurdun in 2010. They note that Turkey's ODA figures from 2003–2004 sharply increased 'thanks to the adequate data collection methods in accordance with DAC Guidelines'.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Damla Cihangir-Tetik and Meltem Müftüler-Baç, "Turkey's Compliance with the European Union's Development Policy: A Pattern of External Differentiated Integration?", *Journal of European Integration* 40, no. 7 (2018): 947, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2018.1482291>.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 941.

<sup>41</sup> Hausmann, "Turkey as a Donor Country and Potential Partner in Triangular Cooperation" [see note 31], 3.

<sup>42</sup> Musa Kulaklıkaya and Rahman Nurdun, "Turkey as a New Player in Development Cooperation", *Insight Turkey* 12, no. 4 (2010): 138.



Much has changed since then in Turkey's relations with the West, of course. Especially after the failed *coup d'état* of 2016, the relationship has soured in an unprecedented manner. These days it may not come easy to the members of the Turkish development assistance community to publicly praise Western achievements or to acknowledge Western contribution to Turkey's institutional development. Nonetheless, two researchers report from the field (i.e., Somalia) that Turkish practitioners they interviewed commended 'structural abilities, especially the networked nature and internal coherence to conventional North/Western strategies and methodologies due to careful multi-lateral coordination'.<sup>43</sup>

One concrete way in which Turkish development assistance can find common ground with the traditional donors is the so-called Triangular Cooperation (TriCo). This modality of development 'typically involves the participation of a traditional donor in a South-South technical cooperation in expectation that the former's contribution would strengthen SSC'.<sup>44</sup> The roles in a TriCo collaboration are sometimes referred to as the 'facilitating partner' (i.e., the traditional donor), the 'pivotal partner' (the emerging donor) and the 'beneficiary partner' (the recipient country).<sup>45</sup> The traditional donor in the scheme is often a member country of the OECD-DAC, but it can also be a multilateral organisation or even rarely a private foundation.

Generally, development actors associate two sets of benefits with TriCo.<sup>46</sup> The first are the 'programmatically-thematic benefits' that lead to the improved effectiveness of development policies. From the point of view of an emerging donor, it can bring to the arrangement a comparative advantage, a quality that the traditional donor does not possess or that it would be too costly to attain. That comparative advantage is usually defined as 'common socio-cultural factors that make the Southern provider [i.e., the emerging donor] better able to respond to the development challenges of the beneficiary country'.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, the emerging donor in a TriCo arrangement can benefit from the expertise of a traditional donor in a certain area of development policy. But given that TİKA has been advised by UNDP over the years, thereby strengthening its capabilities in development assistance –not to mention that Turkey has been a participant in the DAC system – Turkey may have 'little demand for this type of know-how from DAC donors'.<sup>48</sup> In so many words, having institutionally come of age within the traditional donor regime, Turkey may not be 'Southern enough' on this score.

The second set of benefits is political-strategic. Beyond its potential to enhance the effectiveness of projects, actors in international development cooperation expect TriCo to help harmonise the fragmented structure of their policy domain. Given that not all of the

<sup>43</sup> Chuck Thiessen and Alpaslan Özerdem, "Turkey in Somalia: Challenging North/Western Interventionism?", *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 11 (2019): 1985, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1619074>.

<sup>44</sup> Christina S. Lengfelder, "Triangular Cooperation: Another Option for South-South Cooperation?", in *Innovating South-South Cooperation: Policies, Challenges, and Prospects*, ed. Hany Besada, M. Evren Tok and Leah McMillan Polonenko (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2019), 89.

<sup>45</sup> The Global Partnership Initiative (GPI) on Effective Triangular Co-operation, *Triangular Co-Operation in the Era of the 2030 Agenda: Sharing Evidence and Stories from the Field* (Paris: OECD, 2019), 12, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/triangular-co-operation/triangular-co-operation-library.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> Marcus Kaplan, Dennis Busemann and Kristina Wirtgen. *Trilateral Cooperation in German Development Cooperation* (Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, 2020), 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Hausmann, "Turkey as a Donor Country and Potential Partner in Triangular Cooperation" [see note 31], 44.



emerging donors observe DAC norms and those that do (for example, Turkey) only do so selectively, TriCo is ordinarily vested with the expectation that traditional and emerging donors will work out negotiated modalities in development assistance. In this sense, TriCo can help bridge differences between the North and the South, and act ‘as a sort of unofficial platform through which DAC donors and providers of SSC interact and negotiate principles and practices of international cooperation for development’.<sup>49</sup>

In the case of Turkey, this second dimension of TriCo appears to be the more feasible route to cooperation. Turkey can certainly bring into TriCo its extensive development assistance experience in its neighbouring regions with which it has strong cultural and linguistic affinities.<sup>50</sup> More specifically, the Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (German Development Institute, DIE) has listed Turkey among the ‘anchor countries’. According to the criteria of the DIE, an anchor country such as Turkey is distinguished from other countries in the same region by its economic size. The anchor countries ‘play key roles with respect to security and the maintenance of peace and stability in their regions [and] usually take mediating positions in times of conflict and assume responsibility for regional peace missions, not least because they enjoy substantial diplomatic influence’.<sup>51</sup> TriCo projects involving Germany and Turkey could therefore have the facility to extend the reach of German development cooperation into regions where Turkey has accumulated significant experience. Given the current poor state of Turkey’s relations with the West, collaborating in development projects with Germany (or another Western donor) can lead to improvement on this score. As a recent report from the German Development Institute notes, TriCo is well suited for the pursuit of such political-strategic objectives.<sup>52</sup> It must, however, be noted that so far Turkey has been reluctant to enter into many TriCo arrangements. And when it does engage, it has chosen to cooperate with Japan more than any other OECD-DAC member.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Geovana Zoccal, “Triangular Cooperation: Enabling Policy Spaces”, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Development Cooperation for Achieving the 2030 Agenda: Contested Collaboration*, ed. Sachin Chaturvedi, Heiner Janus, Stephan Klingebiel, Xiaoyun Li, André de Mello e Souza, Elizabeth Sidiropoulos and Dorothea Wehrmann (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 590.

<sup>50</sup> Hausmann, “Turkey as a Donor Country and Potential Partner in Triangular Cooperation” [see note 31], 47.

<sup>51</sup> Lengfelder, “Triangular Cooperation” [see note 44], 92.

<sup>52</sup> Kaplan et al., *Trilateral Cooperation in German Development Cooperation* [see note 46], vii.

<sup>53</sup> OECD, “Triangular Co-operation Repository of Projects”, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/dac-global-relations/triangular-co-operation-repository.htm>

# South-South Cooperation and Turkey

In the past two decades a number of Southern countries have registered striking economic growth rates. Improvement in their economic indicators is followed by their subsequent efforts in development cooperation with other Southern countries. This phenomenon is known as South-South Cooperation (SSC). SSC involves ‘the transfer and exchange of resources, technology and knowledge, set within claims to shared colonial and post-colonial experiences and identities, and anchored within a wider framework of promoting the collective strength and development of the global South’.<sup>54</sup>

Although SSC has become a hot topic in international development recently, it does have an earlier history. It can be traced back to the post-war decades – roughly between 1945 and the mid-to-late 1970s – when many newly decolonised and/or developing countries built links of economic and political cooperation. The Non-Aligned Movement, established in 1961 on the principles of the Bandung Conference in 1955, is perhaps the best-known example of South-South Cooperation during the Cold War years. In the same period, SSC’s economic dimension found expression in the call for the establishment of a new international economic order (NIEO) by the Group of 77, named after the number of non-aligned developing countries present at the founding of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964. Throughout the 1970s calls for an NIEO ‘were successful in provoking a considerable degree of debate in the global North’.<sup>55</sup> In 1978 the United Nations adopted UNCTAD’s ‘Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries’. This was a landmark agreement, which ‘signified a collective recognition of, and commitment to, the idea of Southern states charting their own development path’.<sup>56</sup> It was also in 1978 that the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation was established with the mandate to promote SSC and TriCo.

By the 1980s South-South Cooperation as an international political project had lost a good degree of its momentum and allure due to a variety of reasons. Cold War geopolitics drove a hardened and seemingly insurmountable wedge between developing countries and made it more costly to cooperate across the division. The economic fortunes of the postcolonial world dwindled in parallel with the recessionary downswing of global capitalism in the 1970s. With the collapse of commodity prices, import-substitution industrialisation, in

<sup>54</sup> Emma Mawdsley, “South–South Cooperation 3.0? Managing the Consequences of Success in the Decade Ahead”, *Oxford Development Studies* 47, no. 3 (2019): 259, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2019.1585792>.

<sup>55</sup> Kevin Gray and Barry K. Gills, “South–South Cooperation and the Rise of the Global South”, *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (2016): 557–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1128817>.

<sup>56</sup> Urvashi Aneja, “South–South Cooperation and Competition A Critical History of the Principles and Their Practice”, in *Routledge Handbook of South-South Relations*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Patricia Daley (London: Routledge, 2019), 144.

which many a developing state anchored its development, ran out of steam, pushing many into an odious cycle of indebtedness. The Third Debt Crisis wiped out much of the hard won achievements of post-war decades<sup>57</sup> and, as if this damage was not enough, the Structural Adjustment Programmes dealt a further crippling blow. By the end of the decade, the channels of cooperation across the Global South were largely drained.

In a clear testament to the fast pace of changes in our contemporary world, the first decade of the new century not only witnessed the economic revival of certain countries from the Global South, but also their attempts to institutionalise SSC. The establishment of the New Development Bank by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) is one notable example. Alongside the BRICS, a number of middle-income countries, Turkey among them, also experienced sharp but varying improvements in their national economic indicators and started to provide development assistance to other countries in the South. As a result, before the end of the 2000s SSC was back on the international agenda with certain avowed goals and principles.

In the field of development assistance, emerging donors claim to exercise principles of horizontality, solidarity, reciprocity and mutual benefit, and emphasise these principles as markers of distinction from aid given by traditional donors.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the practice that most clearly distinguishes emerging donors such as Turkey is that unlike the members of the OECD-DAC, they refrain from attaching economic (for example, financial accountability and structural reforms) and political (for example, governance and institutional reforms) conditionalities to aid.<sup>59</sup> They make a virtue out of this as a sign of their respect towards the sovereignty of a recipient country.<sup>60</sup> This inevitably draws the criticism from the traditional donors that aid without conditionalities ends up bolstering non-democratic regimes and their questionable practices.

Possibly the most convincing and the best-known example of Turkey's claim to the moniker of a Southern donor is its tenacious presence in Somalia since 2011. It is here that Turkish development assistance is clearly distinct from the practices of traditional donors. And this claim is not supported on cultural/civilisational distinctions alone, but on the actual way of 'doing development'. A short vignette that prefaces a recent study from the field gives an accurate glimpse into this distinction:

[c. 2015] A Turkish NGO aid worker openly working in a field outside Mogadishu together with local farmers looks up to see a plane descending into the heavily defended Mogadishu International Airport. The plane carries a United Nations official from her headquarters in Nairobi for a 1020 km journey to meet with

<sup>57</sup> In 1982 and 1983, the World Bank reported, 'almost as many developing countries have had to reschedule loans [...] as in the previous twenty-five years'. Quoted in Robert E. Wood, "The Debt Crisis and North-South Relations", *Third World Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1984): 703, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436598408419794>.

<sup>58</sup> Isaline Bergamaschi and Arlene B. Tickner, "Introduction: South-South Cooperation Beyond the Myths—A Critical Analysis", in *South-South Cooperation beyond the Myths: Rising Donors, New Aid Practices?*, ed. Isaline Bergamaschi, Phoebe V. Moore and Arlene B. Tickner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 7.

<sup>59</sup> Yijia Jing, Alvaro Mendez and Yu Zheng, "New Development Assistance in the Making: An Introduction", in *New Development Assistance: Emerging Economies and the New Landscape of Development Assistance*, ed. Yijia Jing, Alvaro Mendez and Yu Zheng (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 8.

<sup>60</sup> The observance of this principle is neither universal nor consistent among emerging donors. For example, in line with its 'one China' policy, Beijing prohibits the recipients of its aid from recognising Taiwan. Meredith J. DeBoom, "Who Is Afraid of 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy'? Geopolitical Narratives, Agency and the Multiscalar Distribution of Risk" *Area Development and Policy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2019.1703556>.

Somali project managers inside a secured airport meeting room before flying back to Nairobi. After finishing his work, the Turkish worker drives himself back to his rented home where he lives with his spouse and children.<sup>61</sup>

In Mogadishu, Turkey is one of the few countries with an embassy outside the heavily secured airport. Even China, the largest and the most influential of Southern donors, has its embassy within the airport premises. Turkish development practitioners in Somalia work with their 'boots on the ground', side by side with Somalis and taking significant risks in the process.<sup>62</sup> As a result, they 'believe they have travelled an alternative path to/in Somalia compared to conventional [i.e., Western/Northern] counterparts'.<sup>63</sup> Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, the president of Somalia from 2012 and 2017, had this to say in response:

They [i.e., the Turks] taught the Somalis to drive the vehicles – that's what makes the difference. We have been constantly preaching to our international partners – 'Don't do the work for us, do the work with us'. This is the difference – the Turks are doing the work with us. They are training the Somalis, improving their capacity and introducing a new work culture to Somalia.<sup>64</sup>

One complication in classifying Turkey alongside other emerging donors is the exceedingly heterogeneous make-up and objectives of the group. For example, if in the past decade or so it was intriguing to ask whether the BRICS amount to a cohesive group with an at least minimally definable shared agenda,<sup>65</sup> that earlier sparkle around the group seem to have dimmed. The institutionalisation of the BRICS has still vast distances to travel to match the complexity and efficiency of the global aid architecture of the traditional donors. Furthermore, serious disagreement has emerged among individual members of the BRICS group, at times leading to actual armed clashes as is the case with Sino-Indian border disputes.

A similar assessment can be made of other emerging powers. One case in point is MIKTA: a collaborative group of middle-power countries that brings together Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia. More than a year after its formation, one analyst, unconvinced of MIKTA's track record, pointed out the apparent nonexistence of 'public awareness and ownership of this formation' in Turkey, 'even among specialists'.<sup>66</sup> Now in 2021, after its eight years of existence, there are reasons to *partially* moderate this earlier negative evaluation. Based on the information provided on the MIKTA website (<http://mikta.org/>, officially launched in 2015), it is clear that the organisation's governance has not lost steam over the years. Its key forums, Foreign Ministers' Meetings and Senior Officials' Meetings, have met periodically and the organisation continues to publish its key documents (joint statements and joint communiqués).

<sup>61</sup> Thiessen and Özerdem, "Turkey in Somalia" [see note 37], 1976.

<sup>62</sup> Ahmed Ali, "Turkish Aid in Somalia: The Irresistible Appeal of Boots on the Ground", *The Guardian*, 30 September 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/sep/30/turkey-aid-somalia-aid-effectiveness>.

<sup>63</sup> Thiessen and Özerdem, "Turkey in Somalia" [see note 37], 1979.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Mehmet Özkan. "The Turkish Way of Doing Development Aid? An Analysis from the Somali Laboratory", in *South-South Cooperation beyond the Myths: Rising Donors, New Aid Practices?*, ed. Isaline Bergamaschi, Phoebe V. Moore and Arlene B. Tickner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 64.

<sup>65</sup> Leslie Elliott Armijo, "The BRICs Countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as Analytical Category: Mirage or Insight?", *Asian Perspective* 31, no. 4 (2007); Ramesh Thakur, "How Representative Are BRICS?", *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 10 (2014): 1791–1808, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2014.971594>.

<sup>66</sup> Mehmet Arda, "Turkey: The Evolving Interface of International Relations and Domestic Politics", *South African Journal of International Affairs* 22, no. 2 (2015): 206, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2015.1050448>.

However, its projects in the form of exchange programmes, workshops and outreach activities are evidently lagging behind with the latest of these, the MIKTA Young Leaders Camp, having taken place back in late 2017. Thus, at the level of intergovernmental relations the project seems to have grown legs, but in terms of its wider social outreach and establishing connections across various sections of member societies, it does not look like the MIKTA has kept up its pace. It may very well be the case that when it comes to allocating their constrained diplomatic resources, the middle powers tend to prioritise bilateral, regional and more traditional relationships. Therefore, newfound middle-power platforms such as the MIKTA 'are likely to be short-lived and suffer from weak member commitment, resource constraints, forum-shopping risks, and a leadership vacuum'.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Sung-Mi Kim, Sebastian Haug and Susan Harris Rimmer, "Minilateralism Revisited: MIKTA as Slender Diplomacy in a Multiplex World", *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 24, no. 4 (2018): 486, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02404001>.

# Turkey as an Independent Donor

One conclusion from the previous section is that the agenda of the emerging donors, if we could attribute one to them, suffers from weak institutionalisation. Therefore, the label of emerging, non-DAC donors ‘works essentially *ex negativo*’.<sup>68</sup> It is a marker of distinction from traditional donors rather than the designation of a collective group of states with well-defined and adhered-to principles and goals. Having noted this shortcoming, it still remains the case that emerging donors matter individually, and traditional donors have taken notice. As the former widen the scope of their cooperation across the Global South, the traditional donors are making an effort ‘to keep a “foothold” in the global South’.<sup>69</sup>

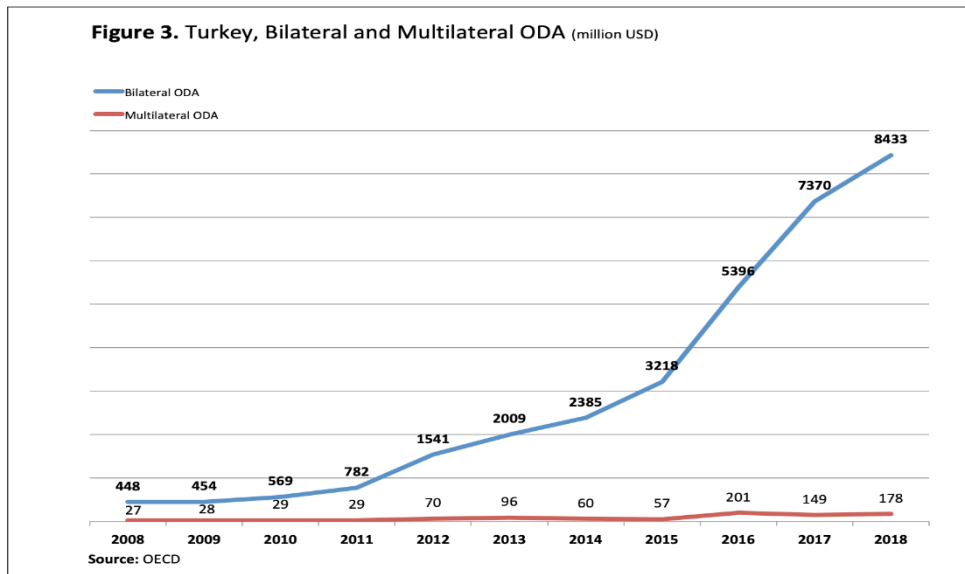
Turkey actively retains institutional ties with the traditional donors through the OECD-DAC mechanisms. It also assumes the mantle of a Southern or emerging donor. This is more so as a discursive identification to differentiate itself from traditional donors than a coherent commitment to the burgeoning Southern development frameworks or institutions. In a way, the Turkish development assistance community identifies itself with the Global South insofar as this helps to distance it from the Global North. In most cases, Turkish development assistance shuns collaboration with other donors, traditional or emerging. It seeks, wherever possible, to act independently.

The most compelling evidence towards that end would be the predominantly bilateral content and operation of TDA (Figure 3). Both in terms of share of its ODA and its actual operation in the field, TİKA actively circumvents multilateral organisations and deals directly with the recipient countries and their designated agencies. Although an observer in the OECD-DAC, which influences Turkey’s aid behaviour in other ways, the AKP governments have opted for establishing aid relationships directly with the recipient countries rather than through the facilities of international organisations such as the WB or the UNDP.

<sup>68</sup>Valeria Lauria and Corrado Fumagalli, “BRICS, the Southern Model, and the Evolving Landscape of Development Assistance: Toward a New Taxonomy”, *Public Administration and Development* 39, no. 4–5 (2019): 216, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1851>.

<sup>69</sup>Adriana Erthal Abdenur and João Moura Estevão Marques Da Fonseca, “The North’s Growing Role in South–South Cooperation: Keeping the Foothold”, *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 8 (2013): 1487, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.831579>.

Figure 3. Turkey, Bilateral and Multilateral ODA



This policy preference is by no means specific to Turkey and can be viewed as motivated by several factors. First and most pertinently, bilateral aid increases the visibility of Turkey in the recipient countries and contributes to its international prestige.<sup>70</sup> Second, in return for the aid, recipient countries tend to purchase goods and services from the donor country's firms. This arrangement need not be formal. Indeed, the OECD has been trying to roll back the so-called 'tied aid'. Nonetheless, an understanding often develops between the parties in a bilateral aid relationship that the aid requires the responsibility to purchase, even at uncompetitive prices. Current research shows that Turkish development assistance (excluding humanitarian assistance) correlates positively with trade.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, bilateral aid relationships 'reward particular political positions'. For example, the recipient country aligns its voting in the UN Security Council with the donor's choices.<sup>72</sup> The former president of TİKA was candid on this score in his preface to the agency's 2008 Annual Report. He pointed out that TİKA's projects played an immensely crucial role for Turkey to garner 151 votes out of 192 in support of its bid to become a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the cycle of 2009–10.<sup>73</sup> Whatever the particular motivation, in the eyes of traditional donors the Turkish development community in the field is 'isolationist as it circumvents most conventional coordination structures'.<sup>74</sup> It is in this manner, for example, that TİKA has kept its operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina out of the reach of the Donor Coordination Forum established in 2005.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Hüseyin Zengin and Abdurrahman Korkmaz, "Determinants of Turkey's Foreign Aid Behavior", *New Perspectives on Turkey* 60 (2019): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2019.1>.

<sup>71</sup> Kavaklı, "Domestic Politics and the Motives of Emerging Donors" [see note 7].

<sup>72</sup> Nilima Gulrajani, "Bilateral Donors and the Age of the National Interest: What Prospects for Challenge by Development Agencies?", *World Development* 96 (2017): 376, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.03.021>.

<sup>73</sup> TİKA, *2008 Faaliyet Raporu* (Ankara: Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, 2009), 5.

<sup>74</sup> Thiessen and Özerdem, "Turkey in Somalia" [see note 43], 1977.

<sup>75</sup> Faris Kočan and Jana Arbeiter, "Is TİKA Turkey's Platform for Development Cooperation or Something More? Evidence from the Western Balkans", *International Journal of Euro-Mediterranean Studies* 12, no. 1 (2019): 183.

# Outlook

There is no doubt that Turkish development assistance has made a name for itself in the past 15 years. It now possesses an extensive network of offices and has made inroads into many countries. Its operation, by the accounts of its key administrators, has rationalised significantly thanks (at least partly) to Turkey's participation in the OECD-DAC scheme. Curiously, however, Turkey has so far refrained from applying for a full membership to the DAC despite fulfilling the membership criteria. It may be that the AKP government sees it as more beneficial to its profile as a Southern donor if it retains a certain distance from the traditional donors. This may also go some way to explain Turkey's preference for Japan as its partner in TriCo rather than the EU member states. One inescapable consequence is that development assistance, the area where Turkey and the EU have most in common, in terms of procedures and practices, nonetheless remains unused as a domain of cooperation.

This lack of enthusiasm for cooperation can be explained by the over-politicisation of Turkish development assistance. As noted above, in the past Recep Tayyip Erdoğan kept a direct channel of influence in the agency's direction and often approved 'development projects during his trips abroad'.<sup>76</sup> The personalisation of decision-making has come at a cost however. Relative to the size and geographical extent of its operation, TİKA remains institutionally underdeveloped and is in need of established procedures and regulations. As one analyst recently notes, Turkey's development assistance remains 'ad hoc and has not yielded structured planning'.<sup>77</sup> The bulk of TDA funding goes to projects that are typically small-scale and isolated from one another. This does not mean that these independent projects are ineffective.<sup>78</sup> But in two crucial respects they fall short. They do not cohere around an overall strategy and TDA is in need of systematic, country-specific studies to guide its policies. Indeed, TİKA's Annual Report from 2019 sets out its two top policy priorities as the preparation of a 'national strategy document' and the development of 'country strategies'.<sup>79</sup>

In certain ways, TİKA's operations in the field have benefited from under-institutionalisation and regulatory austerity. The agency carries out its tasks with a certain agility, speed and visibility. But this quality also makes the viability and sustainability of projects beholden to political stability in Turkey.<sup>80</sup> If decisions to give aid are made and unmade at the senior political level (for example, between the heads of states), then they are all the more prone to reversals at that level. And there are indications that development assistance might be put on the back burner of Turkish foreign policy in the

<sup>76</sup> Hausmann, "Turkey as a Donor Country and Potential Partner in Triangular Cooperation" [see note 31], 20.

<sup>77</sup> Xiaoli Guo, "Turkey's International Humanitarian Assistance during the AKP Era: Key Actors, Concepts and Motivations", *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 14, no. 1 (2020): 139, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2020.1728974>.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Murat Bayar and Enver Arpa, "South-South Cooperation in Africa: The Niger-Turkey Case", *Journal of Global South Studies* 37, no. 1 (2020): 31-56, <https://doi.org/10.1353/gss.2020.0003>.

<sup>79</sup> TİKA, *2019 Annual Report* (Ankara: Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, 2020), 29.

<sup>80</sup> Thiessen and Özerdem, "Turkey in Somalia" [see note 43], 1985-86.



coming years. During the transition to the presidential system in 2018, the Prime Minister's office was annulled and its executive powers were transferred to the President. Yet this transfer of power left out certain elements. TİKA was one of them. Though attached to the Prime Ministry since 2001, it was transferred to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism during the transition, rather than to the President's office. In a culture of statecraft where being in the proximity of the person and the office of the President means a great deal, this clearly indicated a demotion. Additionally, past practice shows that Turkey provides less development assistance when its economy is not doing well, but humanitarian assistance is exempt from this effect.<sup>81</sup> Given that the country's economic health has been worsening rapidly in the past few years, it could be expected that its development assistance stamina will suffer accordingly.

Insofar as the future of Turkey's relations with the West is concerned, the analysis of TDA offers an uncertain forecast. On the one hand, the AKP has been wrapping its development assistance into anti-Western, anti-colonial rhetoric, especially when addressing the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Yet on the other hand, it has retained Turkey's observer status in the OECD-DAC system. This foreign policy practice of keeping feet on both sides of the West-East dichotomy helps the AKP to derive one kind of 'concrete benefit' from its ties with the West,<sup>82</sup> while seeking others by distancing itself from the West. It may be for that very reason that Ankara does not pursue DAC membership even though it qualifies for member status. It has indeed been eligible for many years and the OECD offered DAC membership to Turkey back in 2012. To some degree, then, TDA appears to be 'aimed at fulfilling the function of a mediator between Northern and Southern positions and players by placing itself in neither camp.'<sup>83</sup> From another angle, it looks like the AKP wants to be in the West to the degree that suits its interests.

<sup>81</sup> Kavaklı, "Domestic Politics and the Motives of Emerging Donors" [see note 7], 621.

<sup>82</sup> Seufert, "Foreign Policy and Self-image" [see note 27], 16.

<sup>83</sup> Paolo de Renzio and Jurek Seifert, "South-South Cooperation and the Future of Development Assistance: Mapping Actors and Options", *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 10 (2014): 1868, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2014.971603>.

# Abbreviations

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DIE	Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (German Development Institute)
GNI	Gross national income
MIKTA	Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia
NIEO	New International Economic Order
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SSC	South-South Cooperation
TDA	Turkish development assistance
TİKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WB	World Bank

# List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1. Turkey's ODA to GNI ratio .....	5
Table 1. The Share of Humanitarian Aid in Turkey's ODA (million USD) .....	7
Figure 2. Turkey ODA .....	11
Figure 3. Turkey, Bilateral and Multilateral ODA .....	22

Yavuz Tüyoğlu holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of Sussex, where he is currently a Research Associate. His research interests are Turkish foreign policy with a focus on contemporary and historical Turkey-Iran relations.

© Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2021  
**All rights reserved**

This Working Paper reflects the author's views.

**SWP**  
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for International and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3–4  
10719 Berlin  
Telephone +49 30 880 07-0  
Fax +49 30 880 07-100  
[www.swp-berlin.org](http://www.swp-berlin.org)  
[swp@swp-berlin.org](mailto:swp@swp-berlin.org)

10.18449/2021WP04

The Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) is funded by Stiftung Mercator and the Federal Foreign Office.

**STIFTUNG  
MERCATOR**



Federal Foreign Office