

Turkish - Moroccan Relations In Lastdecades

Hakan Demir

PhD Student Chouaib Doukkali University

Abstract: Today, both Turkey and Morocco are governed by parties with the same name (Justice and Development Party) which are connected through strong diplomatic ties between each other. But despite well-intentioned rhetoric, Moroccan-Turkish relations are not at the desired level expected by both sides. After the 2000s Turkey has turned its face to the Middle East and Africa-especially to places that have special meanings in Turkey's historical subconscious-and tried to improve its relations with those countries through TUSKON (Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists' Confederation), KIZILAY (Red Crescent), TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency)(Besenyö ve Olah, 2012: 135). Despite this efforts in the past Turkey made several diplomatic missteps. At the United Nations General Assemblies in 1951 and 1953 when the independence of Morocco was on the agenda, Turkey voted to postpone instead of supporting Morocco, when the independence of Tunisia and Algeria was on the agenda, Turkey also said that these issues are an "internal" problem between France and its colonies Tunisia and Algeria (Tepeciklioğlu, 2012: 67). In 1957, the Republic of Turkey, opened an embassy in Morocco immediately after the independence of Morocco. 2005 can be considered the sort of a new phase in Turkish-Moroccan relations. On this date, Prime Minister Erdogan visited Morocco and some agreements were signed between the two countries. Through this visit, direct flights between Morocco and Turkey were initiated. The most interesting aspect of the visit was that Prime Minister Erdogan's trip to Morocco in 2005 was the first time a Turkish prime minister had visited Morocco. Even just this remarkable visit shows how inadequate Turkish-Moroccan relations are. Turkey's deportation of a Moroccan party leader in the recent past was covered extensively by the Moroccan media. But before that, Morocco closed Turkish schools (that connected with Gulen Movement) that operating in Morocco. Because of this some journalists are asking if Turkey and Morocco have made a deal to help each other about controlling opposition.

Keywords: Turkey, Morocco, Historical background, Justice and Development Party, visits

I. INTRODUCTION

After the 2000s Turkey has turned its face to the Middle East and Africa-especially to places that have special meanings in Turkey's historical subconscious-and tried to improve its relations with those countries through TUSKON (Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists' Confederation), KIZILAY (Red Crescent), TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency)(Besenyö ve Olah, 2012: 135). Despite this efforts in the past Turkey made several diplomatic missteps. At the United Nations General Assemblies in 1951 and 1953 when the independence of Morocco was on the agenda, Turkey voted to postpone instead of supporting Morocco, when the independence of Tunisia and Algeria was on the agenda, Turkey also said that these issues are an "internal" problem between France and its colonies Tunisia and Algeria (Tepeciklioğlu, 2012: 67). In 1957, the Republic of Turkey opened an embassy in Morocco immediately after the independence of Morocco. When it came to 1965, Turkey, formed "goodwill delegations" to explain the Cyprus problem and get support from young African countries and these delegations visited Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Senegal (Firat, 2007: 2). The purpose of these delegations is not just to describe Turkey's Cypriot thesis, but also to try to correct the foreign policy mistakes regarding made in the 1950s at the same time.

Why did Turkey turn its face to Africa? President Erdogan's chief adviser Ibrahim Kalın answers this question in his own article (2013);

“To say that Africa will rise in the 21st century with its young and dynamic population, open perspectives in the world, pluralistic structure and rich natural resources, is a more optimistic approach according to some. Africa is the poorest continent with more than one billion people. 2.5 percent in the world economy and the average income per capita is at the bottom of the world at \$ 1200. But all demonstrations show that Africa will strengthen its strategic position and economic potential after Asia.” (Kalın, 2013). Despite well-intentioned rhetoric, Morocco-Turkey relations are not at the desired and expected level.

New Moroccan-Turkish relations can be started from 2005. On this date, Prime Minister Erdogan visited Morocco and some agreements were signed between the two countries. Through this visit, mutual direct flights between Morocco and Turkey were initiated. The most interesting aspect of the visit was that; Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Morocco in 2005 was the first visit made from Turkey to Morocco at prime minister level. Even just this remarkable visit shows how inadequate Turkey-Moroccan relations are.

There were also those who responded negatively to the free trade agreement signed between the two countries in 2005. Some business associations say that Morocco is the biggest rival of Turkey in the European Union market and for this reason some arguments have begun about the free trade agreement with Morocco, like this agreement can cause serious damage to the Turkish economy etc. (İnternethaber, 2005). In 2006, the leader of the Republican People's Party, Deniz Baykal, launched a new debate: according to Deniz Baykal, Turkey transformed into Morocco, meaning that the country has gradually withdrawn from secularism. (İnternethaber, 2006). Such analogies are common in Turkish political literature but Morocco was the subject of such an analogy for the first time.

In 2008, when Turkey hosted the Turkey-Africa summit with the initiative of President Gül, Morocco was one of 50 African countries which participated. At this meeting senior managers met to make an effort to negotiate and cooperate, in the following years as a result of this meeting, Turkey was elected to the United Nations Security Council Temporary Membership (Özkan, 2011: 579). In 2009, Moroccan politician Mustafa Mansuri visited Ankara and he expressed satisfaction with Turkey because it did not support separatist movements in the Western Sahara and Mansuri also reaffirmed their support to Turkey on Cyprus issue (BesenyöveOlah, 2012: 138). Within the scope of the EURO-Med project in 2010 between eastern and southern countries of the Mediterranean (North African countries) signed free trade agreements and after this step Turkish products became very visible in Morocco and other North African countries:

“This partnership is based on the emphasis on social and cultural issues, emphasizing the strategic importance of the Mediterranean and mentioned about a partnership in political matters and security issues; according to the Barcelona Declaration that adopted by representatives of the European Union and 12 Mediterranean countries, Algeria, Morocco, Israel, Cyprus, Lebanon, Malta, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Tunisia, Turkey and the Palestinian Authority. It focuses on establishing a common area of peace and stability here.” (Kazgan, 1999; akt.Öğüt, 1997: 5).

For example, the visit of the Moroccan Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Minister Osmani to Turkey in 2012 was the first visit to Turkey of a Moroccan minister of foreign affairs in 25 years (Turkish Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 2017).

Prime Minister Erdogan made his second official visit to Morocco on 3-4 June 2013 and the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council was established between the two countries during this visit (Turkish Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 2017). This council, despite its imposing name, it has not had concrete results; because goodwill and hopefulness are not enough for the development of relations between the two countries, there is a need for more than those acts.

Erdogan's visit will give us a clue about some points. Because, the timing of Erdogan's visit is interesting. Erdogan, who traveled abroad -to Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria- during the Gezi Park protests, could not find what he expected in these places. For example Erdogan could not meet King of Morocco during his visit and despite Turkish media's predictions about that Erdogan would be given an honorary doctorate during his visit to Morocco, this did not happen. Moreover, concrete gains were not achieved in Tunisia and Algeria (2013). At the time of his last visit Erdogan was a man whose power was disputed in his own country; it is a fact that Erdogan travels abroad whenever he has trouble in Turkey. In addition, the Arab Spring, while raging Arab countries Turkey used to act as an apostle of democracy and this, have been disturbed many Arab countries administrations.

Turkey was not able to develop a clear policy on how to act during beginning of Arab Spring, which was in itself an unexpected occurrence. Afterwards, however Turkey rose to an important role in the eyes of the people of Middle East; especially by making the right move in Egypt when protests has started, (Kibaroglu, 2011: 32). But in the following years, Turkey was not able to balance its reactions and it has begun to lose its importance in the eyes of both Arab governments and their peoples.

In December of 2014, the King of Morocco Muhammad VI chose Turkey over his usual as a holiday destination, not France as he often did, because of the crisis experienced between Morocco and France (Hürriyet, Timeturk 2014). This visit was not official, however President Erdogan invited the King Mohammad VI of Morocco to flashy Dolmabahce Palace, Erdogan's office that full of history and power, so they had a meeting.

There are also different events that bring the two nations closer together. For example, on July 15, 2016, a Moroccan citizen who died on the streets in order to react against the coup attempt in Turkey was killed and this has attracted the attention of the people in Turkey.

On January 5, 2017, editor-in-Chief of Mesa Newspaper Aziz Magri talked about the changing perception of Turkey in the Arab World during the interview with me. According to Magri, Turkey used to be a good example for Arab countries because of its established democracy and strong economy, but the same thing can not be said for Turkey in recent times.

Turkey is generally implementing foreign policies consistent and relative with US and EU foreign policies (Akbaş, 2012: 65). Indeed, Turkey has not been able to build a peaceful and productive foreign policy without any conflict with any country or ethnicity for the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

Therefore, it is not possible to talk about any effective Turkish presence in these regions other than Turkish soap operas and products.

When talking about Moroccan-Turkey relations, it is important to talk about students too. Especially the state scholarships that Turkey has provided to foreign students have made it possible to a significant number of students from Morocco to go to Turkey for studying. In recent years, students have been attracted to Turkey, which allows foreign students to study there with a scholarship. An important part of arriving students is Moroccan students. The Turkish courses are trying to teach Turkish language and introduce Turkish culture in Morocco and dozens of students graduate each year from these centers.

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