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## The Role of Media in the Bilateral Relations Between Turkey and West African French Ex-Colonies

Noufou OUEDRAOGO<sup>1\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D., Communication Faculty, Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail: [o.noufou@ymail.com](mailto:o.noufou@ymail.com)

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### Abstract

African events and developments gained more attention in Türkiye after the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) declared 2005 to be the “Year of Africa” (Incesu, 2020). Since then, Turkey has been actively engaged with African countries at the highest level. As a result, the number of Turkish embassies on the African continent increased from 12 in 2002 to 44 in 2024; concomitantly, the number of African diplomatic missions in Ankara has expanded from 10 to 39. The amount of commercial trade between the two regions grew from less than five billion US dollars to 41 billion dollars in 2023 (DEIK, 2023). The contribution of media being paramount in the promotion of a country’s image abroad; Türkiye’s official news organizations, such as Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT World) and the Turkish multinational news agency, *Anadolu Agency (AA)*, started setting up representative offices in a number of African countries, especially after 2010. The major goal of these initiatives is to improve Türkiye’s image in Africa, dispel Turkish people’s preconceived notions about the continent, and, in the long run, strengthen bilateral ties with African nations. Today, with the advent of digital media and social networks, information spreads far more quickly and in many different ways. As such, it is highly challenging to assess media impact within the existing context. This article analyses the contribution of both traditional and digital media in the bilateral relations between Türkiye and Sub-Saharan African countries. A critical look is also cast at how the abovementioned media make it possible to give a positive image of Turkey to African businessmen and the way of showing the African potentiality to Turkish investors, helping to reduce the cognitive biases about Africa and vice versa. Methodologically, it is a qualitative research based on content analysis, interviews, case studies, and archive data explorations.

**Keywords:** *Media, Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Sub-Saharan Africa, Türkiye*

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### 1. Introduction

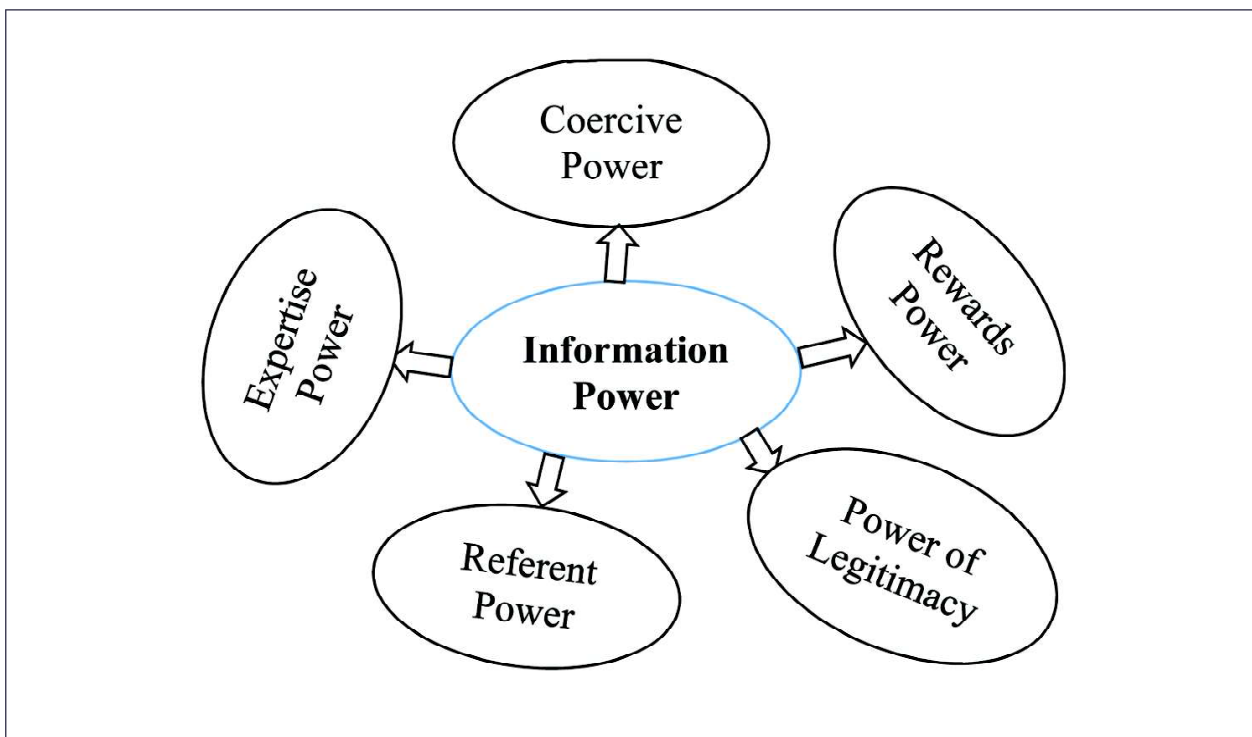
The contribution of media is paramount in the promotion of a country’s image abroad. The former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, contended that the United States was “losing the information war” when she spoke to the American Foreign Policy Priorities Committee in March 2011 (McNair, 2011). This demonstrates how crucial media information is to political power, especially foreign policy, in the current world. In fact, the “information society” in which we live today makes this remark extremely relevant (Castells, 2010). Interestingly, in this ‘digital era’, new information technologies and advancements in communication play a critical role in enabling significant societal transformations.

\* Corresponding author: Noufou OUEDRAOGO, Ph.D., Istanbul, Turkey, Marmara University, Communication Faculty, xxxxxxxxx. E-mail: [o.noufou@ymail.com](mailto:o.noufou@ymail.com)

The contemporary world is profoundly marked by the democratization and personalization of media information. Media news now spreads far more quickly and in many different ways. As such, it is highly challenging to assess the media impact within the existing competitive public diplomacy and global business. Nonetheless, the media ecosystem modifies and shapes people’s apprehension of information in any topic whatsoever. Hence, decision-makers use to control mass media landscape because the information changes public opinion and may impact the decision-making processes. Manuel Castells (2010) coined the phrase “information is power” to describe the crucial role that information plays in the contemporary society. In reality, we are now firmly persuaded that people who create or control information are the ones who possess [or finance] the media outlets. Hence, determining the relationship between political power (most importantly diplomacy) and information is crucial.

Speaking of the “power of information”, the British scholar Wheeler (1997) reminded us that, according to liberal theory, the media’s role as a fourth power is to challenge governmental authority. In fact, legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government are the three distinct branches under the “checks and balances”<sup>1</sup> system of governance. Wheeler (1997) then proposed that “media power” or “information power” be established in addition to them in order to monitor and regulate governmental activities; holding politics into account.

Likewise, legitimate power, reward power, coercive power, expertise power, and referent power are the five distinct bases of power that have been identified by psychologists John Robert French and Bertram Herbert Raven in 1959<sup>2</sup>. Six years later, in 1965, Bertram Raven added *informational power*, which is now thought to have a significant impact on all spheres of endeavor (Figure 1). This implies that all the forms, types, and bases of power rely on the power of information to get visibility and be more prominent.



**Figure 1: Schematization of the Bases of Power**

In point of fact, for the five bases of power – coercion, legitimacy, referent, rewards and expertise – to operate effectively, it is necessary to have information power which will give a powerful visibility and an impactful consideration

<sup>1</sup> The philosopher Montesquieu claimed in *The Spirit of Laws (1748)* that dividing the government into three separate branches – executive, legislative, and judicial – is the best way to prevent tyranny and arbitrary power. Hence, in democratic countries, the political power is split into ‘*trias politica*’, three separated and independent powers. According to Montesquieu, these three powers have to be distinct from one another and function independently in order to best advance liberty. For further readings, see *Montesquieu (1748). The Spirit of Laws*, Accessible online at: <https://media.bloomsbury.com/rep/files/primary-source-104-montesquieu.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> John, F. and Bertram, R. (1959). *The Bases of Social Power. Institute for Social Research*, pp. 150-167. Accessible and downloadable Online via the following link: [https://web.mit.edu/curhan/www/docs/Articles/15341\\_Readings/Power/French\\_&\\_Raven\\_Studies\\_Social\\_Power\\_ch9\\_pp150-167.pdf](https://web.mit.edu/curhan/www/docs/Articles/15341_Readings/Power/French_&_Raven_Studies_Social_Power_ch9_pp150-167.pdf).

to their actions. The truth is that politics is the only entity that has influence over information. In fact, media, politics, and citizens are three interwoven and interdependent tridimensional bodies that communicate symmetrically (McNair, 2011). This includes both the public's voices directed towards political figures and the elites' connection with them through the media. Hence, political communication is important because it emphasizes how mainstream media mediates both social and political messaging, according to McNair (2011). Policy-makers, thus, find a way to use mass media to advance a well-constructed public opinion.

In this study, I propose to analyze the contribution of both traditional and digital media in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Subs-Saharan African countries. As a matter of fact, I ponder on the crucial role of Turkish global media such as *Natural TV*, *Anadolu Agency*, *TRT World Français*, and *TRT World Afrika* in multidimensional sectors of development like trade, investment, education, culture, diplomacy, etc. Hence, a critical look is cast at how the abovementioned media make it possible to give a positive image of Türkiye to African businesspeople and the way of showing the African potentiality to Turkish investors, helping to reduce the *cognitive biases*<sup>3</sup> about African people and vice versa. In order to achieve this, it is appropriate to begin with the research background and the methodology adopted.

## 2. Research Background and Methodology

In Africa, we are witnessing a paradigmatic shift in the colonial tectonic plates. France's image is further stained in the eyes of its former colonies. This leads most of African countries to seek to diversify their bilateral relations with other foreign powers such as Russia, China and Türkiye which do not have a colonial past on the continent. As a matter of fact, what is commonly referred to as the 'anti-French sentiment' or 'gallophobia'<sup>4</sup> – which is growing all over African francophone countries – is a signal that the diversification of partnership is more than a necessity for France's ex-colonies.

In this regard, new emerging countries like Turkey, Russia, China and more or less India are now presenting themselves as new partners for many African states. Each of these new partners constitutes an alternative to Western powers and pronounces rather soft, seductive and reassuring discourses. These soothing speeches are delivered via their new transnational media – such as the Russian channels RT [Russia Today] and Sputnik, the Chinese channel CCTV, and the Turkish global media group TRT World, Natural TV, Anadolu Agency, etc. – which opened their representative offices in several African countries.

Therefore, this research pursues several main purposes. Among others, the study aims to:

- (i) Show the interest in consolidating partnerships between Sub-Saharan African states and Türkiye.
- (ii) Demonstrate that Turkish transnational media contribute in giving a positive image of Türkiye to African audiences and in showing the African potentiality to Turkish businessmen and investors.

Hence, I cast a critical glance at the contribution of Turkish global media in the bilateral relations with West African countries. As a matter of fact, it is a question of investigating the editorial policy and the framing methods of *Natural TV*, *Anadolu Agency*, *TRT Français* and *TRT World Afrika*. This academic work follows a rigorous narrative research methodology. It is a qualitative research based on interviews, case studies, and media content analysis. The study's interpretative method complies with Erving Goffman's research design conceptualized as "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974). This consists in categorizing the media contents into relevant thematic frames for the matter of interpretation and analysis. Thus, it is closely related to Braun and Clarke's (2006) "thematic analysis" method which includes identifying the interpretative patterns, describing them and eventually analyzing them in the light of the research objective.

<sup>3</sup> Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman first proposed the idea of cognitive biases in 1972. In fact, cognitive bias is a methodical way of thinking brought on by the brain's propensity to simplify information processing by applying a filter based on preferences and personal experience. The brain uses the filtering process as a coping mechanism to quickly digest and prioritize vast amounts of information. An individual's conduct in the environment might be determined by how they construct reality, not by the actual input. Thus, visual distortion, imprecise judgment, incorrect interpretation, and irrationality can occasionally result from cognitive biases. See KAHNEMAN, D. & TVERSKY, A. (1972). Subjective Probability: A Judgment of Representativeness; COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY 3. Available online at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20191214120047/http://datacolada.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Kahneman-Tversky-1972.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The fear, prejudice, discrimination, or hostility directed against France, the French people, their culture, the French government, or the Francophonie is known as 'anti-French feeling' or 'anti-French sentiment', sometimes known as 'Francophobia' or 'Gallopobia'.

### 3. Literature Review

In this study, the literature review concentrates exclusively on how the media play a starring role in polishing the image of a nation abroad, as well as the role of public diplomacy and its corollary concept of soft power in bilateral relations process. In this perspective, it is worth mentioning that the African continent has been undergoing a significant flood of Western transnational media for several decades. Indeed, for Chalaby (2005), the term ‘transnational television’ can be defined as trans-border channels that operate within different national borders. To illustrate it, BBC, France 24, CNN, VOA, etc. are some examples of transnational channels available in almost all territories, operating in different foreign languages including English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Pidgin, Arabic, etc. This represents journalistic values of free speech and a strong commitment to democracy. Yet, arguably, this viewpoint is controversial since these global broadcasting media express a particular narrative, ideology and cultural identity. In an academic work published in 2018, Jenner Mareike argued that the relationship between television, ideologies of ‘the nation’ and national identity has been adjacent since the early years of the birth of TV channels. She used the term “*Nation*” to describe “a network of cultural relations, an ideological construct linked to nationalism and shaped by national media systems” (Mareike, 2018: 206).

Consequently, global media channels and some transnational programs may represent, depict, explain or even justify a historical, political or cultural system or may adapt particular ideology to their narratives. The very first research on transnational television studies conducted by Katz and Wedell (1978) focused on the amount of imported material or the genre mix of prime-time programming. This brought about the questions of *cultural imperialism* discussed as a *one-way* or *West-to-rest* pattern.

In fact, the television ecosystem in Sub-Saharan African countries remains characterized by hegemony of Western channels; including some programs imported from some Latin American countries. Several authors such as Katz (1978); Sinclair *et al.* (2008); Nordenstreng and Varis (1974) investigated the relationship between distribution and reception, as well as the direction of the TV news flows. Indeed, the debates raised by these scholars about TV flows, cultural imperialism, and cultural synchronization remind us of the notion of “complex and ambivalent interconnectedness” (Giddens, 1991) while discussing the issue of cultural internationalization.

Notwithstanding the challenging circumstances, Sub-Saharan Africa is actually on the cusp of a new media explosion, the effects of which are seen everywhere with the rise of hypermedia professionals such as YouTubers, bloggers, web activists, and citizen journalists. In his scholarly work entitled “*We, The Media*”, Gillmor (2004) explains how technology allowed for a “trustworthy information ecosystem” – a participative and democratic media – in the context of globalization and internationalization of information and communication networks. In this context, it is necessary to understand how Turkish global media – namely Anadolu Agency, Natural TV, and TRT World, as well as the new digital platforms TRT Français and TRT Afrika – operate in Sub-Saharan African countries.

In 2018, Anadolu Agency released an academic book entitled “*Africa Rising*,” which offers in-depth analysis about the continent. The book’s authors include Turkish illustrious institutions such as Anadolu Agency (AA), Turkish Airlines (THY), Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), the Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK), the Turkish Diyanet Foundation (TDV), Turkey’s Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA); all engaged in the promotion of Turkish public diplomacy and soft power in Africa. Ideologically, the writers claim that since the Ottoman era, Africa and Türkiye have had close historical and cultural relations. For this reason, Africa and Turkey have established close cultural, diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian relations during the past 15 years. In a consequence, African politicians, businessmen, and authorities highlighted the value of Turkey’s investments in Africa.

As a reminder, my analysis will focus henceforth on the role of Turkish global media – i.e. Anadolu Agency (AA), Natural TV, TRT World, TRT Français, and TRT Afrika – in bolstering Turkey’s public diplomacy and soft power in Africa.

### 4. The Contribution of Natural TV in the Public Diplomacy Initiatives

Natural TV (NTR TV) was created in 2017 by a group of Turkish businessmen in Ankara to cover 22 West and Central African countries in both English and French languages. It reached more than five million audiences on the African continent (see Table 1 below).

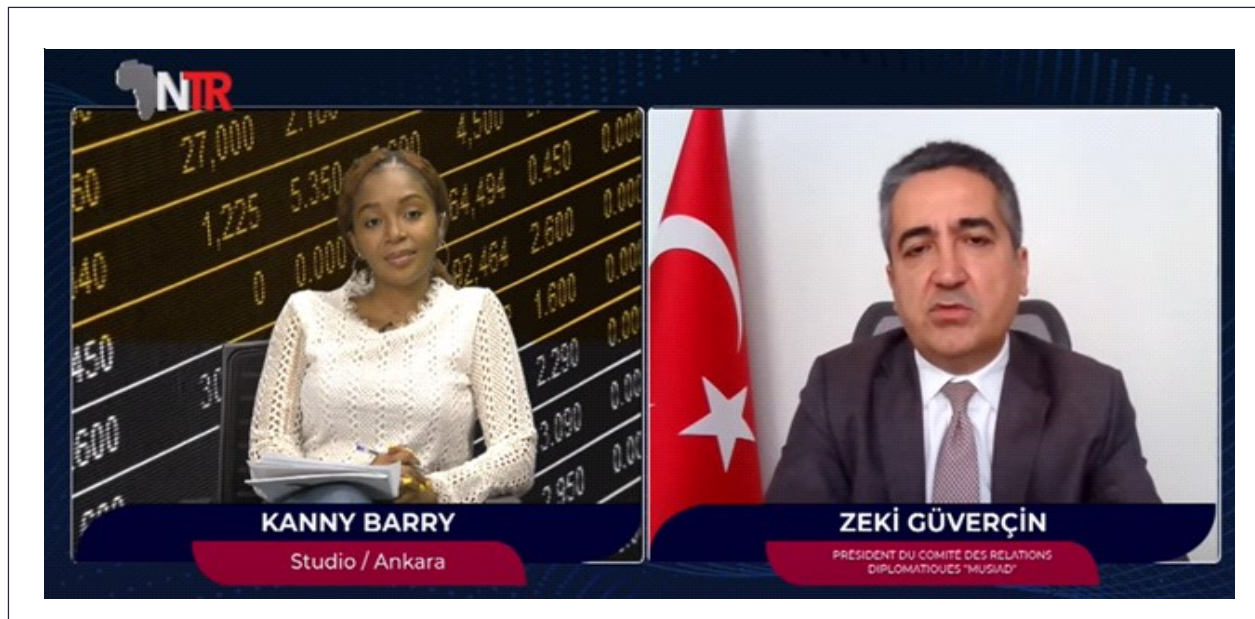
NTR TV, which started its broadcasting programs in 2017 in 22 African countries, has several programs that make it possible to fulfill its objectives. These various programs include general news, health, education, music, discovery, culture, technology, diplomacy, Turkish learning programs, documentary, cinema, gastronomy, and business; just to name few.

<b>Table 1: Data of the Countries Where NTR TV Broadcasts (NTR TV, 2024)*</b>		
<b>Languages and Populations of African countries where NTRTV is broadcast</b>		
<b>Country</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Language</b>
Angola	32 Million	Portuguese
Benin	12 Million	French
Botswana	2.5 Million	English
Burkina Faso	21 Million	French
Burundi	12 Million	English – French
Cabo Verde	550 Thousands	Portuguese – Creole
Djibouti	1 Million	French – Arabic
Chad	16 Million	French – Arabic
Equatorial Guinea	1.5 Million	Spanish – French
Eritrea	3.5 Million	French – Spanish
Eswatini	1.2 Million	English – Swati
Ethiopia	113 Million	Arabic – Tigris
Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire)	26 Million	French
Gabon	2.5 Million	French
Gambia	2.5 Million	English – French
Ghana	31 Million	English
Bissau Guinea	2 Million	English – Portuguese
Guinea	13 Million	French
South Africa	57 Million	English
South Sudan	12 Million	Arabic – English
Cameroon	26 Million	French – English
Kenya	55 Million	English
Comoros	850 Thousands	Creole, Arabic, French
Republic of Congo	5.5 Million	Swahili – French
Congo DRC	87 Million	French
Lesotho	2.2 Million	Sesotho – English

<b>Table 1 (Cont.)</b>		
<b>Country</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Language</b>
Liberia	5 Million	English
Madagascar	27 Million	French – Malagasies
Malawi	17 Million	English
Mali	20 Million	French
Mauritius Islands	1.5 Million	English – French
Mauritania	4.6 Million	Arabic – French
Mozambique	31 Million	Portuguese
Namibia	2.5 Million	English
Niger	23.5 Million	French
Nigeria	201 Million	English
Central African Republic	5 Million	French – Sango
Rwanda	13 Million	English – French
Sao Tome and Principe	215 Thousands	Portuguese
Senegal	16.5 Million	French
Seychelles	98 Thousands	English – French
Sierra Leone	8 Million	English
Somalia	15.5 Million	Somalian language
Sudan	43 Million	English – Arabic
Tanzania	58.5 Million	English – Swahili
Togo	8.2 Million	French
Uganda	44.5 Million	English – Swahili
Zambia	18 Million	English
Zimbabwe	15 Million	English
<p><b>Note:</b> *NTR TV (2024). <i>E-catalogue</i>; p. 25. Available online at the following link: <a href="https://ntrtv.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/KATALOG-YENI-2021-sikistirildi.pdf">https://ntrtv.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/KATALOG-YENI-2021-sikistirildi.pdf</a></p>		

#### **4.1. Business Program**

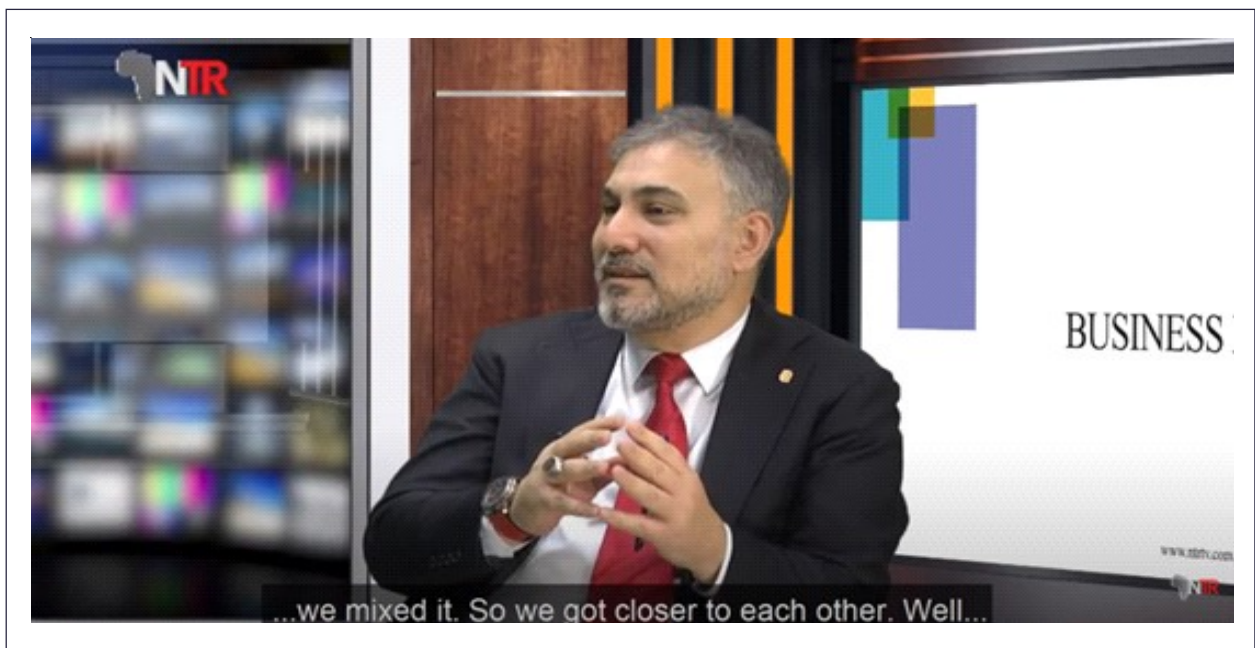
The program features a famous and successful businessperson guest in each episode. Original interviews initiated by Dr. Yavuz Selim Silay are realized with inspiring names like well-known investors, businesspeople and Entrepreneurs. These famous guests are deemed to be influential businessmen who have played a crucial role in Türkiye, Africa, or in the world. For example, NTR TV welcomed Turkish businessman Zeki Güvercin, president of diplomatic relations at MUSIAD, to discuss their efforts in Africa in the first episode of the Business Inside Program (Visual 1). For him, their businesses – which involve more than 100 partners in Africa – include several domains such as voluntarism, investment, partnership, etc.



**Visual 1: Turkish Diplomat Zeki Güvercin was the Guest of Business Inside Program on Natural TV\***

**Note:** \* NTR TV. (2021). Business Inside with Zeki Güvercin. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebGMBzL2FMI&list=PLILUIQ4SorR2mYIFwOReIDV9O3EkdLpaV&index=12>

In addition, the Turkish businessman Bülent Sen was invited at *Business Inside* in April 2022 to talk about the importance of investing in the energy sector in African countries (Visual 2).



**Visual 2: Turkish Energy Businessman Bülent Sen was the Guest of Business Inside Program on Natural TV**

**Note:** \* NTR TV. (2022). Business Inside with Bülent Sen. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A32oRx7Y6Ag&list=PLILUIQ4SorR2mYIFwOReIDV9O3EkdLpaV&index=2>

In a similar vein, on June 15, 2022, Ozay Ipek, CEO of Neuvatec, appeared on the *Business Inside* program to talk about the reasons for worldwide fire disasters and how to stop fires in Africa in light of climate change (Visual 3).

Apart of business, Natural TV also gives visibility to other sectors of Turkish public diplomacy such as education. As a matter of fact, a special education program has been initiated to address this crucial issue.



**Visual 3: Turkish Businessman Ozay Ipek, CEO of Neuvatec, was the Guest of Business Inside Program on Natural TV**

**Note:** \* NTR TV. (2022). Business Inside with Ozay Ipek. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeMDT9a-ZSU&list=PLILUIQ4SorR2mYIFwOReIDV9O3EkdLpaV&index=1>.

#### 4.2. Education Program

Natural TV plays a significant role in promoting Turkish educational diplomacy. In this regard, NTR TV initiated the “Turkish learning program”<sup>5</sup> since 2017 to allow African audience to learn some business words, phrases and expressions in the Turkish language. Called “*I’m Learning Turkish*”, the program is directed to English and French speaking African countries since the instructors are English and French speakers. The aim is to teach the Turkish language to NTR TV’s audiences living in the West and Central African regions; helping to reach the most accurate information about Türkiye, to increase both social and cultural interactions, and to create a sort of symbolic interactionism<sup>6</sup>. Thus, this enables the opening of new horizons that allow various communities to interact and communicate better with Turkey. In doing so, the thrilling ‘*Possibility of Life Program*’ has also been prepared in this sense. Besides, “Discover Türkiye Program” has been deliberately prepared to introduce Türkiye to the viewers.

#### 4.3. Discover Türkiye Program

In this program prepared to introduce the historical, sociological and local traditions of Türkiye, the anchors sometimes go beyond the borders of Türkiye and broadcast from the Middle East and even European Union countries. This weekly “Discover Türkiye” program shares with the both Turkish and African audiences what they deem to be “important game-changing topics that cannot be heard in many places” (NTR TV, 2024). The aim of such program is deliberately to give to African audiences a positive image of Türkiye and make them get confidence with Turkish communities. This will definitely ease mutual social interactions and bilateral cooperation between the two communities; since the main issue is to create trust in the social exchange process (as discussed in the theoretical framework). When the topic is related to African societies, the program can help reduce the biases and misinterpretations in the mind of Turkish businessmen and investors. It might also allow them to discover the potential sectors of investment in Africa.

Since the role of Natural TV is to give visibility to Turkish soft power and public diplomacy, a particular program titled ‘*Diplomacy Program*’ has been introduced to address diplomatic issues.

<sup>5</sup> NTR TV (2021). I am learning Turkish. Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W75c0qJL0EM>.

<sup>6</sup> George Herbert Mead first proposed symbolic interaction in 1932. Following his passing in 1931, his pupils collected lecture notes and discussions with their advisor to publish “*Mind, Self and Society*” under his name. Mead contended that although people’s identities are social products, they are also purposeful and creative, and that a theory’s true test should be whether or not it is “useful in solving complex social problems”. Thus, both verbal and nonverbal modes of communication are initiated by language. According to Blumer, this source of meaning is a bond that results from social interactions between individuals. See Mead, G. H. (1932). *Mind, Self, and Society. From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. University of Chicago press. Available online at: <http://tankona.free.fr/mead1934.pdf>.



#### 4.4. Diplomacy Program

Natural TV’s “Diplomacy program” is specially designed to be an information tool between Türkiye and the African countries on various sectors. The sectors of activity discussed in this program are related to politics, economy, education, humanitarian aid, culture, law, and business opportunities between both parties. In this regard, different diplomats from both sides (Turks and Africans) are regularly invited as guests to discuss topics concerning bilateral cooperation between Türkiye and African nations. Thus, according to Natural TV’s promoters, such program offers insights from continental and global levels that can “bring reliable information from the right sources that can promote a better relationship” between Türkiye and the African continent (NTR TV, 2024). As a matter of fact, guests such as diplomats, ambassadors, ministers, heads of important institutions (e.g. Yunus Emre Institute<sup>7</sup>), governors, and many other influential personalities from both sides are regularly invited to talk about their expertise in the aim of consolidating the bilateral ties between Türkiye and African states.

Similar TV programs are also being broadcast alongside ‘Diplomacy Program’. This is the case of the ‘Coffee is the Reason’ program which allows carrying out business diplomacy.

#### 4.5. Talk Show Program

At NTR TV it is possible to find everything about life and business in the talk show program called “Coffee is the Reason” with coffee-like conversations with businesspeople, entrepreneurs, and investors. This weekly program is followed with great interest by African viewers on Natural TV with the presentation of the Turkish anchor Murat Ersekeri. On November 19, 2021, for example, the Rwandan entrepreneur David Ngarambe, managing director of “Rwanda Famers Company”, was invited at NTR TV to talk about their business related to the support of the coffee bean production in Kigali (Visual 4).



Note: \* NTR TV (2021). Coffee is the Reason: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COVByylzyOY>

Visual 4: Entrepreneur David Ngarambe, Managing Director of “Rwanda Famers Coffee Company” was the guest at NTR TV’s Coffee is the Reason Program\*

#### 4.6. News+ Program

Natural TV’s “News + Program” is a fast-paced discussion and news analysis program. According to the initiators, it covers “unbiased topics so that only the truth comes out” (NTR TV, 2024). Hence, both Turkish and African personalities

<sup>7</sup> With 88 Cultural Centers spread across 66 countries, Yunus Emre Institute, a nonprofit organization affiliated with the Yunus Emre Foundation, has been in operation since 2009. Its mission is to promote Turkey, the Turkish language, literature, history, culture, and arts, as well as to strengthen the bonds of friendship and shared cultural heritage between Turkey and other countries. As a cultural institution in Turkey, the Yunus Emre Institute works to preserve major Anatolian civilizations and spread this region’s cultural legacy around the globe. It is responsible for spreading awareness of Turkish historical and cultural legacy as well as for restoring the ancient Turkish language throughout the world.

with expertise in diverse domains are frequently hosted at Natural TV to have discussions and analysis on matters that concern both parties' interests. For instance, on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, Mustafa Efe, president of the Center for Africa Strategic Studies (CASS), was invited by Natural TV's anchorman Dr. Yuvuz Selim Silay to talk about the political crisis situation that was prevailing in Nigeria. His expertise and responsibility is to provide accurate and trustful information regarding issues in the African continent (Visual 5).



**Visual 5: Mustafa EFE, President of the “Center for African Strategic Studies (CASS)” was the guest at NTR TV’s News+ Program\***

**Note:** \* NTR TV. (2021). News+: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0synm--bSg>.

#### **4.7. Music Program**

Since art, culture and music are part of the soft power tools; Natural TV initiated a music competition program that allows many artists from Africa to participate by sending their video clips to the television’s presenters. The winner of the competition is voted through WhatsApp messages from 49 Sub-Saharan African countries. Still concerning music, “Afrovibz” is another program of this type initiated by Natural TV to give more focus on African artists. This kind of TV programs can give more visibility of African culture to Turkish audiences who did not have much idea about Africa. In this regard, the heart of African music beats can be discovered through the program “Afrovibz” every week. NTR TV’s anchors compile the most listened to and the most liked music clips among hundreds of clips and propose them to the viewers. The choice is based on the first the messages received from NTR TV viewers. There is also a music competition within the scope of this program during which surprise awards are given to the winners amongst the viewers. In addition to ‘Music’ and ‘Afrovibz’ programs, there is also another cultural program called ‘Fun Facts Program’. Besides, there is another cultural program which deals with gastronomic issues.

#### **4.8. Gastronomy Program**

Gastronomy is part of a country’s culture. It plays an important factor in the attractiveness of the country abroad, as claimed Joseph Nye in 1990. Thus, TV programs such as “Taste and Spices” broadcast by Natural TV can promote Turkish culinary traditions abroad. Aware of this state of fact, NTR TV invites its audience to (re)discover different dishes on a gastronomic journey adventure through “Taste and Spices” program. Hence, Turkish delicious dishes, sweet dessert, and kitchen tips are displayed on the viewers’ screens every week.

Yet, culture covers a wide range of activities including music, cuisine, as well as cinema. Thus, Natural TV initiated a ‘Cinema Program’ as a matter of fact.

#### **4.9. Cinema Program**

Uncontestably cinema is also part of the soft power mechanisms that raise attractiveness and promote a positive perception of a country in the eyes of its foreign peers (Nye, 1990). Natural TV initiated, thus, its “Cinema program” to

this end. In this program, various films are carefully selected from the cinema ecosystem and presented to the cinephiles. There are world-class movies which range from Action, Adventure, Romance and Drama to animation content types. Famous stars are also invited on NTR TV to talk about their knowledge related to the presented movies.

Additionally, one of the most crucial aspects of bilateral collaboration is corporate diplomacy. Thus, Natural TV has launched a program called “Agriculture Time” in addition to the previously announced “Business Inside Program.”

#### **4.10. Agriculture Program**

Regarding business between Türkiye and African countries, “Agriculture Time” program on Natural TV can be useful to both Turkish and African audiences. In this program, existing agricultural technology, agrarian methods, organic and natural production technics, agronomic strategies and tips that can make works easier for farmers and useful suggestions to increase productivity are all addressed on NTR TV screens for the benefit of its five million audiences.

Business not only concerns investment, production, and commercial activities but also it deals with other sectors such as health tourism. In doing so, ‘*Health Program*’ is prepared by NTR TV to address these matters.

#### **4.11. Health Program**

Through this program, health problems and their solutions are discussed on Natural TV, with the explanations of Turkish specialist doctors working in the Turkey’s most important health institutions, hospitals, and clinics. According to NTR TV founders, this kind of programs can help promoting “health tourism opportunities and the high standard hospital services provided in Türkiye which become the gateway to healing for Africa” (NTR TV, 2024). As a participant observer, I have also witnessed lots of African officials choosing Türkiye for their medical check-up and health treatment destination in the recent years. To illustrate it, as a participant observer, I have worked as a translator for six month in some Turkish well-known hospitals and I have met with several African high ranking officials including diplomats, ministers, military officers, deputies, businessmen, political personalities, etc. Therefore, while promoting Türkiye and Turkish hospitals with the “health programs” on Natural TV, the promoters can attract several patients and health specialists from Africa.

Arguably, Türkiye being a big producer of TV series, some social issues can be addressed indirectly in the aim of attracting the attention of the viewers. For example, it is common that in TV Series some actors get sick or after an accident they go to the hospitals; thus, framing Turkish health institutions’ facilities is a way of showing the sophisticated medical equipment to the viewers. Understanding this importance, NTR TV has a program specifically devoted to TV series.

#### **4.12. Soap Opera Program**

Similar to cinema, TV series can also enhance the image of a country abroad. Thus, Natural TV brings the most watched TV series to the audience with new episodes every day. They carefully select outstanding Turkish TV series and the most watched international TV shows and bring them to their audiences’ screens. In fact, Türkiye made \$500 mn in earnings from the export of TV shows as of 2018 (Anadolu Agency, 2018). Among Turkish TV shows, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century) was exported to the majority of countries and garnered over 500 million viewers from 70 different countries. *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (Resurrection: *Ertuğrul*), *Kara Para Aşk* (Dirty Money Love), *Adını Feriha Koydum* (I Named Her Feriha), *Gümüş* (Silver), and *Fatmagül’ün Sucu Ne?* (What is the Fault of Fatmagül?) were some of the most profitable Turkish TV shows.

Together with the United States, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, Türkiye is one of the first five nations to export TV shows via mainstream broadcast and the internet media. Turkish TV shows that are accessible on the internet streaming services like Netflix, Puhutv, and YouTube attract younger audiences more readily and facilitate exporting. Interestingly, Turkish soap operas are being watched in more than 20 countries in Africa. As mentioned in the research methodology, the main purposes of such TV programs are to create a positive perception of Turkey in Africa, to eliminate the biases related to African society in the mind of the Turkish people, and to increase the bilateral cooperation between African countries and Turkey in the long run.

Another cultural program broadcast by Natural TV beside TV Series, Music, Cuisine, and Cinema is ‘*Documentary Program*’.

#### **4.13. Documentary Program**

Documentary is in essence a very powerful and realistic cultural diplomacy tool; since it helps tackling real social life without taboos as it appears. On Natural TV screens, there are documentaries dealing with various topics every week. Such program gives insights about both Turkish and African societies, sciences and technology, unsung heroes,

cultural lifestyles, etc. Thus, this strengthens social integration, human relations, general cultural knowledge, and mutual understandings between communities.

### 5. The Contribution of Anadolu Agency in the Public Diplomacy Initiatives

The Turkish Republic’s founding father, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founded the international Anadolu Agency (AA) with its headquarters in Ankara on April 6, 1920. Turkish international news agency’s leading representatives declare that they are committed to speaking up for the world’s oppressed and disadvantaged people. According to its current Director General, Anadolu Agency has grown over the past century to rank among the most significant news organizations in the world and has established itself as a global symbol of Türkiye abroad; thus, contributing to the promotion of Turkish soft power.

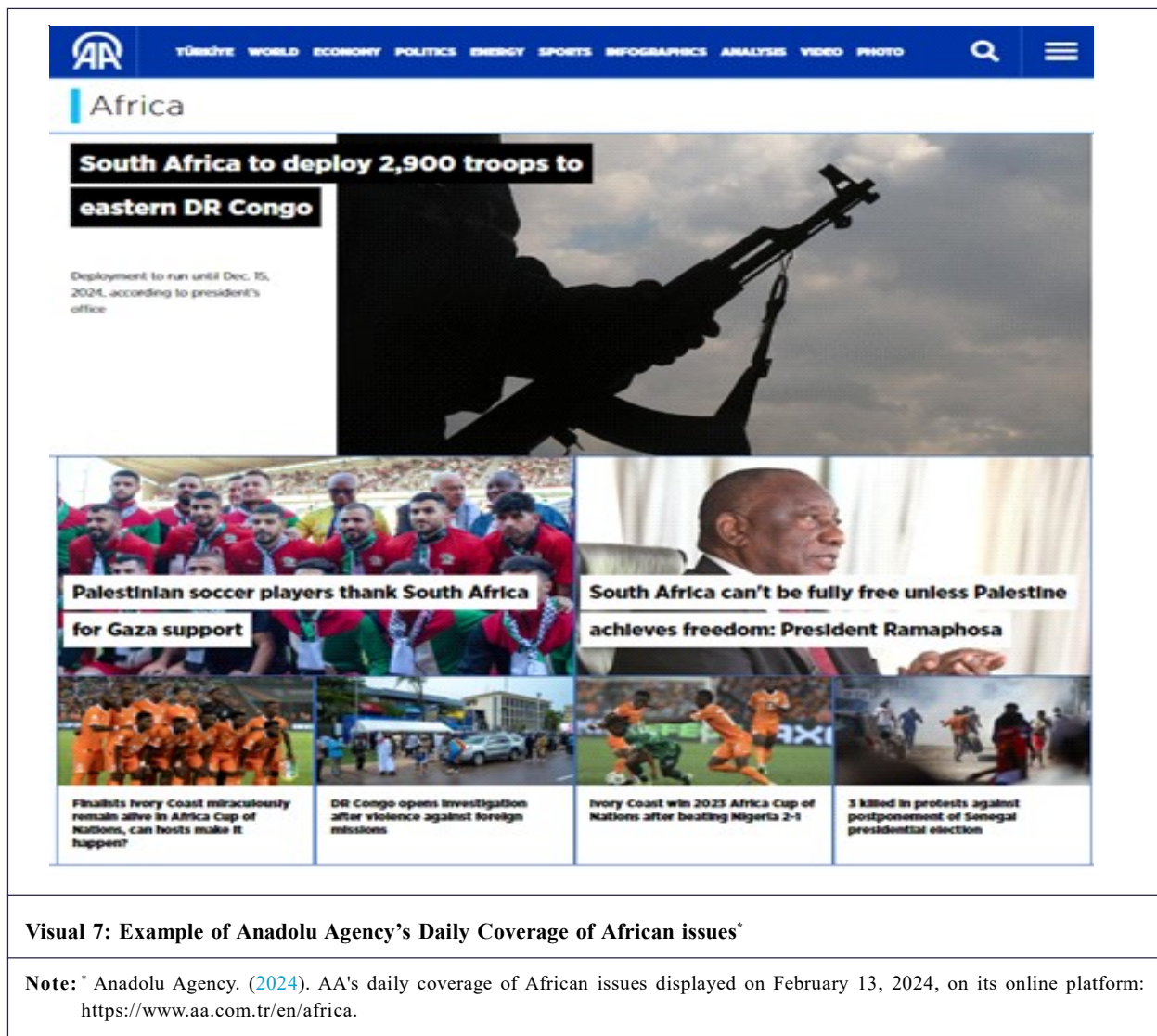
In 2014, Anadolu Agency opened its first African office in Addis-Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia (Visual 6). The choice of Addis-Ababa is not by random because it is where the headquarters of the African Union (AU) is located. Former AA’s Director-General and Board Chairman Kemal Ozturk officially opened the representative bureau with Ethiopian State Minister Ewnetu Bilata, who is in charge of the Government Communication Affairs Office. During the ceremony, Ozturk stated that Africa’s news will be produced in English, Arabic, Turkish, and French at the new Addis Ababa office. Osman Riza Yavuzalp, a former Turkish ambassador to Ethiopia, stated that all African matters would be covered by the newly established Addis Ababa office. He claimed that other African nations are also covered by this office in addition to covering news on Ethiopia and the African Union.



**Visual 6: Anadolu Agency (AA) Opened its First African Office in Ethiopia in 2014\***

**Note:** \* Anadolu Agency. (2014). AA officially inaugurates Ethiopia regional bureau: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/archive/aa-officially-inaugurates-ethiopia-regional-bureau/160240>.

Later on, Anadolu Agency (AA) has also opened its representative offices in different African countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, and Senegal. In fact, Anadolu Agency’s online platform counts in total 10 sections as follows: Türkiye, World, Economy, Politics, Energy, Sports, Infographics, Analysis, Video, and Photo (Visual 7). According to its Director General, Senol Kazanci, the news agency serves around 6,000 customers from 100 countries and is available in 13 languages, including English, Arabic, French, Spanish, Persian, Russian, Bosnian, Indonesian, Sorani, Albanian, Macedonian, and Kurmanji. For the agency’s Director General, “the agency continues to provide coverage of the rightful resistance of Palestine, survival struggle of Bosnia, pain of the Rohingya, cries of oppressed Syrians, and untold stories of Africans” (Anadolu Agency, 2024).



Visual 7: Example of Anadolu Agency’s Daily Coverage of African issues\*

Note: \* Anadolu Agency. (2024). AA's daily coverage of African issues displayed on February 13, 2024, on its online platform: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa>.

On average, statistically Anadolu Agency generates 2,000 news stories, 2,350 images, and 435 videos every day. With the assistance of over 3,000 staff members from 124 different countries, it also broadcasts live to the entire world 18 times. In the Agency’s general director’s opinion, a nation’s capacity to create news, information, and knowledge and disseminate it swiftly, accurately and precisely on the global scene is as crucial as its ability to be a powerful political, economic, and military force.

Differently articulated, while Türkiye made significant progress toward becoming a powerful player in the world economy, politics, and military, Director General Senol Kazanci noted that Anadolu Agency also participated in this holy march and emerged as the most potent and successful vehicle for spreading Türkiye’s messages and perspectives throughout the globe. In this regard, Anadolu Agency’s General Director is thrilled to represent and embody a “growing Turkey” as it observes and chronicles history leading up to 2023, the Turkish Republic’s centennial (Anadolu Agency, 2024). This comes down to considering the media as the lungs of Turkish soft power in the international arena. Thus, Anadolu Agency’s contribution to the promotion of Türkiye’s image abroad is as much appreciated as that of the Turkish international broadcasting television TRT World.

## 6. The Contribution of TRT World to the Public Diplomacy Initiatives

TRT World was reorganized on May 18, 2015, to offer news and current affairs from around the world with an emphasis on Türkiye, Europe, Africa, Western and Southern Asia. In fact, TRT World is a fruit of the reconfiguration of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) established in 1964 and which held the monopoly on TV broadcasting in Türkiye for several decades. Amongst its multiple programs available on the channel, the main Africa program on TRT World, called “Africa Matters”, is hosted by Adesewa Josh and features narratives from the African continent. According to the initiators of this program, “untold and underreported stories from all throughout the African continent are brought

to both Turkish and African audiences and the rest of the world by *Africa Matters*” (TRT World, 2024). This program addresses various topics including politics, security, economics, education, culture, business, agriculture, etc.

To illustrate it, the *Africa Matters Program* examined the difficulties, advancements, and prospects of farming in Africa on March 25, 2023, with a focus on Kenya, Zambia, and Malawi (Visual 8). According to the World Bank, around 70% of Africa’s 1.5 billion workers are employed in agriculture, which continues to be the continent’s principal economic engine. Additionally, it contributes around one-third of the GDP of the continent. However, the *Africa Matters Program* shows that millions of Africans continue to suffer from malnutrition and hunger, a situation made worse by the continent’s supply disruptions, rising food costs, conflicts, and climate change (TRT World, 2023). This kind of TV programs help addressing crucial issues that can allow investors to make a judicial and rational choice while deciding to invest in any sector on the African continent.



**Visual 8: Broadcasting Stage of Africa Matters Program on March, 25, 2023\***

**Note:** \* TRT World (2023). *Africa Matters*. Available online at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rKaiznikus>.

Moreover, the Turkish international Radio and Television broadcasting channel (TRT World) ambioned to give more space and news covering content to African issues. In this sense, TRT World began in 2017 to broadcast in the Hausa language which is spoken by 45 million people in the West and Central African regions. Likewise, in 2020 TRT World began airing in the Swahili language which is spoken by over 150 million people in the Eastern and South-eastern Africa (Sýradaĝ, 2022). In April 2022, TRT World launched its French-language news platform, called *TRT Français*. Few months later, in March 2023, *TRT Afrika* platform was also launched.

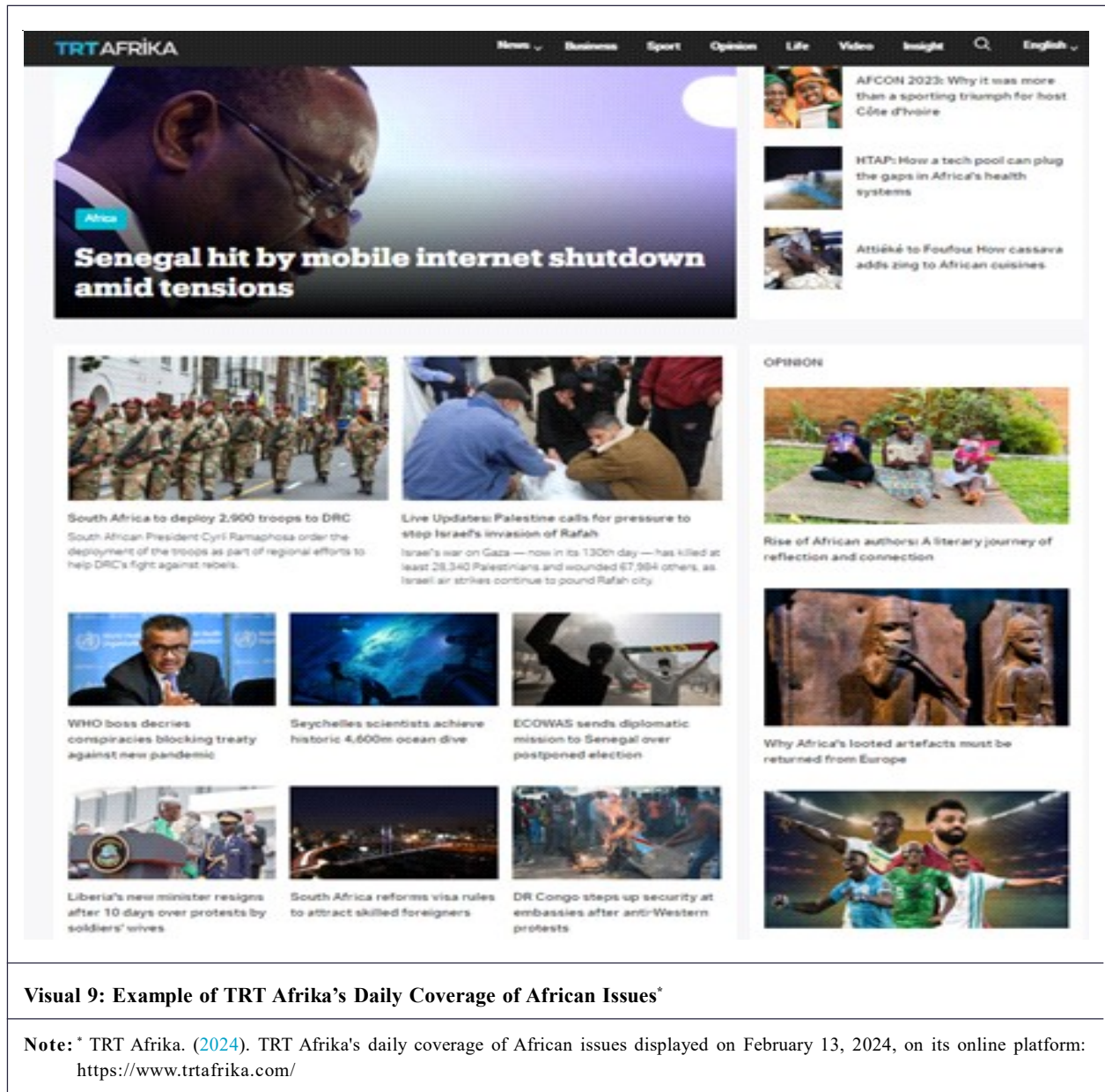
### 6.1. *TRT Afrika Platform*

According to *TRT Afrika*’s promoters, the channel operates in four languages (i.e. English, French, Swahili, and Hausa) and strives to portray “Africa as it is” through assiduous reporting (TRT, 2023). *TRT Afrika*’s objective also includes covering the untold public and typically narrating the low-profile stories, as well as highlighting the strategic cooperation between Turkey and the African continent. *TRT Afrika* employs media workers from fifteen different countries throughout the African continent as a whole. In fact, *TRT Afrika* is the newest addition to the TRT World family, which also includes *TRT World English*, *TRT Arabic*, *TRT Russian*, *TRT Deutsch*, *TRT Français*, and *TRT Balkan*. Together, these broadcasting networks offer a variety of viewpoints and voices to various audiences throughout the world.

On March 31, 2023, the *TRT Afrika* channel was launched as part of the inaugural summit between the African Broadcasting Union (AUB) and TRT World, which was held in Istanbul, Türkiye. The purpose of the event, which had as its theme “*Towards a Digital Future: Reshaping Public Service Broadcasting*”, was to improve media cooperation between Turkish and African media outlets (Anadolu Agency, 2023). The joint media summit featured talks on ideological topics and panels such as follows:

Talks and panels on ideological subjects were included at the joint Africa-Türkiye Media Summit, and they were articulated in the following terms: *Tools to be used against the Western ethnocentric approach; Africa-Türkiye Relations in the Mirror of Public Service Media: Shared Vision and Future Challenges; Telling African Stories with Vision; and How Can African and Turkish Public Service Media Stay Sustainable in the Digital Age?* (TRT World, 2023).

In fact, *TRT Afrika* frames various topics in Africa such as politics, economy, business, education, culture, sports, etc. (Visual 9).



By placing the distinctive fusion of the African population and African diaspora's values at the center of global events, *TRT Afrika* gives voice to stories from the African continent and the African diaspora. In doing so, TRT Afrika, which employs people from fifteen different nations, wants to establish itself as a reliable news source on the continent by presenting international news that matters to African consumers and creating excellent social media content for young people who are linked to the rest of the world. It seeks to satisfy the information demands of the African diaspora across the globe by offering distinctive digital content, exclusive stories, investigations, and documentaries of regional African topics to both African and international audiences.

Talking about the contribution of *TRT Afrika* in the bilateral relations between Türkiye and African countries, Türkiye's Presidency Communications Director, Fahrettin Altun, put it in the following terms:

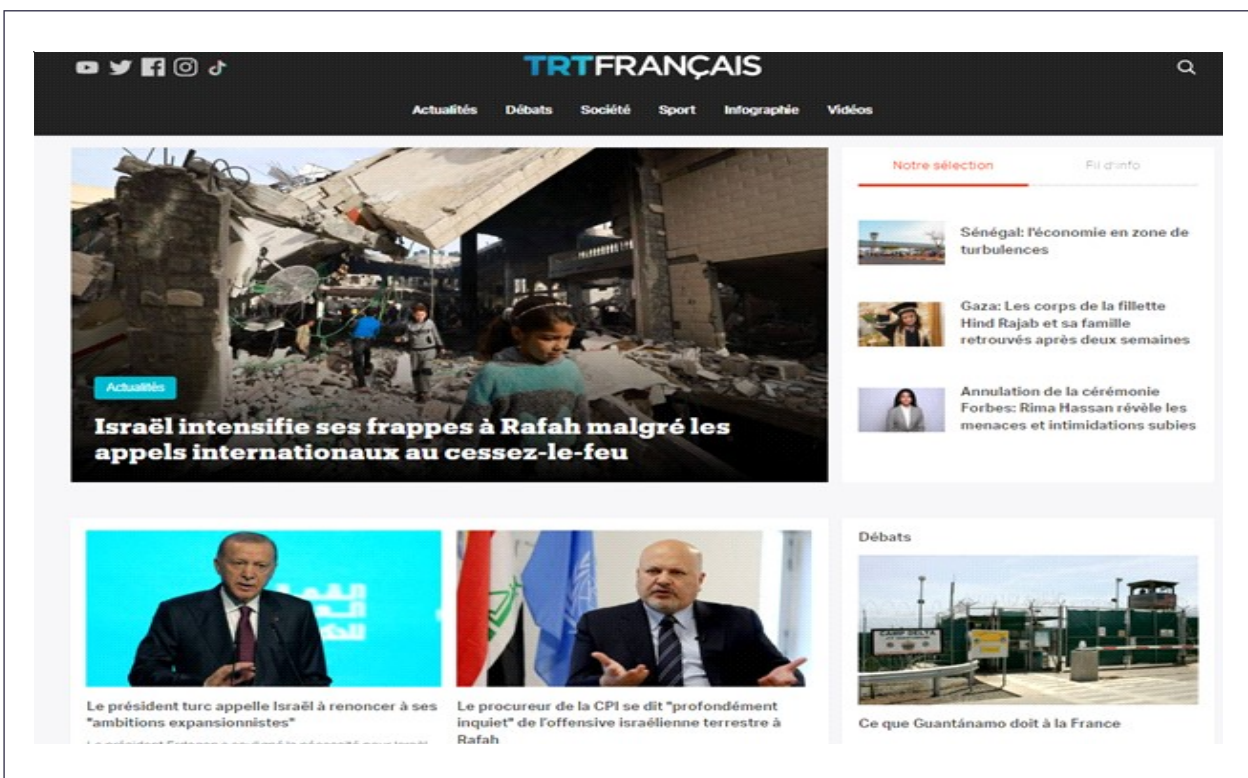
I believe that *TRT Afrika* will make an important contribution to the strong relations between Turkey and African countries and will play a serious role in explaining the true face of Africa to the world, stated Türkiye’s Presidential Communications Director, Fahrettin Altun, during the launching ceremony (TRT, 2023).

TRT Afrika, according to its Director General, showcases this vast continent’s culture, history, social life, political advancements, and endlessly rich and lovely face. Numerous African nations, including the Gambia, Morocco, Nigeria, and Cameroon, host *TRT Afrika* programming. This furthers Türkiye’s long-standing dedication to Africa by giving African voices a global platform for recognition and celebration.

Mehmet Zahid Sobaci, the director general of TRT World, stated that *TRT Afrika* will represent Turkish policy in Africa “on the basis of a win-win situation” (TRT, 2023). Comparing TRT Afrika to Western global media channels, Mehmet Zahid Sobaci claimed that *TRT Afrika* is “addressing a very special audience because Africa for decades has been subject to the subjective broadcasting policies of the West” (TRT, 2023). He claims that colonialism has been disregarded for a long time and that Africa has only ever been evaluated in terms of the interests of the West. In practice, both *TRT Afrika* and *TRT Français* follow the same ideological policy.

### 6.2. TRT Français Platform

Launched in 2022, TRT World’s new digital news platform aims at reaching a large audience in 28 French-speaking nations worldwide, with a special focus on African francophone countries. The Turkish media organization said in a statement that TRT World is still expanding and bolstering its foreign-language transmissions. The online platform “*Trtfrancais.com*” is where the new digital news platform posts news and analysis concerning politics, diplomacy, economy, culture, and daily life (Visual 10).



**Visual 10: Example of TRT Français’ daily coverage of African issues\***

**Note:** \* TRT Français. (2024). TRT Français' daily coverage of African issues displayed on February 13, 2024, on its online platform: <https://www.trtfrancais.com/>

The platform’s advocates claimed that their goal is to expose French-speaking readers worldwide to swift, accurate, and transparent journalism through a variety of content types, including opinion pieces, interviews, and videos in addition to breaking news. TRT World’s General Manager, Dr. Mehmet Zahid Sobaci, claimed that:

Like TRT World’s other international platforms, *TRT Français* will pursue journalism that gives its followers a deep perspective on the outside world, observing only the principles of impartiality and justice. We will continue to bring you the news in the most balanced way, keeping our global followers at the center. As a public broadcaster,



we provide reliable information and inspiration. We will continue to empower our followers with inspiring content (TRT World, 2022).

Furthermore, Dr. Sobacı asserted that the proliferation of the communication tools has led to a significant increase in misleading and biased news. Consequently, he believes that accurate, reliable, and robust information sources are more important than ever, particularly in the fight against disinformation and “smear campaigns waged against Turkey abroad” (TRT World, 2022).

TRT Français’ target audience comprises 274 million French-speaking followers worldwide and 76 million native French speakers. Similar to TRT World’s other global platforms, *TRT Français* publishes content not only on “*trtfrancais.com*”, but also on other social networks like YouTube, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram. In this regard, President Erdogan believes that TRT World is “retelling the story with a new language, extending the microphone to those who were not allowed to speak, turning the camera to those who are not seen” (TRT World, 2022). TRT Français, like TRT World’s other overseas services, aims to provide journalism that not only upholds the principles of objectivity and justice but also gives readers a comprehensive view of the outside world; a world (i.e. the African world) which was not well-known by Turkish society. Likewise, Turkish TV series also play a starring role in this process.

## 7. Discussion

Initially this study aimed, among other objectives, to investigate the evolution of Türkiye’s soft power in Africa through the contribution of the media, especially in the light of the country’s evolving bilateral relations with its Sub-Saharan African partners. This helped assessing the efficiency of Turkish public diplomacy in Africa as well as evaluating how Turkish soft power affects ties in the areas of diplomacy, business, education, and culture.

Throughout this research, I have analyzed how important Turkish international media outlets like *Natural TV (NTR TV)*, *Anadolu Agency (AA)*, *TRT World*, *TRT*, *Français*, and *TRT Afrika* are to the multifaceted development of sectors like commercial trade, investment, education, culture, public diplomacy, etc. Critically scrutinizing, it was possible to notice that the aforementioned media enable the presentation of a favorable image of Türkiye to African businessmen as well as showcasing the potentiality of Sub-Saharan African countries to Turkish investors and businesspeople; helping to lessen cognitive biases about African people and vice versa.

Eventually, all this contributed, on the one hand, to show the interest in consolidating partnerships between Sub-Saharan African countries and their new partner – namely Türkiye – which does not have a colonial past in Africa; and on the other hand, to demonstrate that Turkish transnational media contribute actively in polishing Türkiye’s foreign policy initiatives towards Sub-Saharan African countries. However, these new bilateral relationships between Sub-Saharan African countries and their new partner – unlike the previously established relations with the former colonial powers – should be based on the principles of openness, transparency, mutual respect, equality, and win-win mindset in the bilateral cooperation process.

## 8. Palliative Solutions to Cleanse the Counteractions

The visa restrictions, the hostile fight against migratory flows, and the hate speech against immigrants from certain left-wing political leaders who are hostile to immigration, etc. are experienced negatively across the African continent. Dehumanizing attitudes towards Sub-Saharan African migrants and expats living in Türkiye and ill-timed statements often made for domestic political reasons can have negative consequences on Türkiye’s image in Africa; especially in Sub-Saharan African countries. These countries have already experienced some condescending attitudes on behalf of their former colonizers and, subsequently, are no longer willing to cooperate with a country employing similar attitudes.

The number of international students in Türkiye, which number reached 60 thousands in 2024, face “occasional instance of xenophobia” (Kavak, 2024). This xenophobic sentiment, according to Gokhan Kavak, is felt among African students studying in the country. Consequently, the Turkish researcher, Gokhan Kavak put it in the following terms:

This situation poses a risk of rapidly losing the gains achieved over many years in relations with African countries (...). When the political and economic turmoil in Türkiye turns into xenophobia, it leads to the emergence of negative views among African students against Turkey, jeopardizing Turkey’s Africa policy (Kavak, 2024).

To put it briefly, xenophobia about foreign students in Türkiye is a relatively recent phenomenon. While the impact of this animosity on international students is novel, the presence of international students in the country is not new. Expats, refugees, merchants, businesspeople, tourists, and even ambassadors may fall within this category, or can be categorized “under the xenophobia pillar” (Tasci, 2023).

Consequently, for relations between Türkiye and Sub-Saharan African States to be successful in the long term, the Turkish authorities must know how to avoid the mistakes made by colonizing countries like France. Indeed, France is accused of sometimes giving too many lessons in matters of democracy and human rights in Africa; but what is more frustrating, it does so with double standards. For example, French government applauded the military regimes in Chad and Gabon, but in the meantime condemned the military regimes in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. This posture does not appear to be coherent. Likewise, any country that aims to set trustful and friendly bilateral relations with Africa must avoid supporting leaders who have been in power for several years (illegitimately) and who are contested by African youth.

Several Sub-Saharan African youth movements such as ‘Yen a Marre’ in 2011 and ‘Frapp France Dégage’ in 2017 in Senegal, ‘Balai Citoyen’ in 2014 in Burkina Faso... in Burkina Faso, the ‘Filimbi Movement’ in Congo, ‘Lyna Movement’ in Chad, etc. declared that they are fighting against what they consider as corruption, violation of human rights, and violations of the constitution; but above all, they fight against the interests of the former colonial power in Africa. Consequently, these African youth movements will not fail to denounce the actions of the new partners if they notice that the latter are new settlers in disguise. It is these youth movements which forced the African elites to reconsider the question of their inequitable relations with France. What is admirable is that this comes from people from several countries who share a pan-Africanist vision. They are conscious, they are not hotheads or people who want to destroy everything; but rather, they just demand that things change for the well-being of the African communities.

In the light of all what has been elaborated above, it is necessary to take into account certain suggestions and perspectives for the development of the African continent.

## 9. Suggestions and Perspectives

Soft power mechanism should not focus exclusively on economic and political issues. For the unflinching success of the social exchange theory, states wishing to have long-lasting relations with the Africa continent must create the conditions for free speech without taboos. This dynamic must aim to collect expectations, bring out strong proposals for the future as well as sustainable directions for both parties. This entire process should help to highlight and take responsibility for the young generation at the forefront of the concerned countries. It is also important to engage in debates with the new African generation on topics and themes as diverse as health, education, climate change, environment, biodiversity, the eradication of poverty in all its dimensions, the fight against food insecurity and malnutrition, investment, entrepreneurship and innovation, immigration, digital transition, cultural industries, and sports, etc.

On the African continent, especially in the Sub-Saharan African region, debates must be organized in the form of “dialogues”, with varied profiles bringing together professionals, students, academicians, entrepreneurs, athletes, lawyers, historians, journalists, psychologists, bankers, insurers, association leaders, civil society actors, artists and various experts. The vast majority of the key participants must be composed of young people whose ages vary between 20 and 45 years old.

From now on, many Sub-Saharan African activists want their countries to move towards other potential international partners – such as Russia, China and Turkey, etc. – even if they are sometimes reluctant about the seriousness and the intentions of these new partners. According to Takilal Ndolassem, Chadian politician and founding President of the *Popular Liberation Front*<sup>8</sup> party:

It is often said that you should love the devil you know and beware of the angel you don't know. Despite everything, we know the French well. But we must not throw ourselves into the arms of China, Russia, Turkey or anyone else out of love. A lot of people amongst us love France, because we lived in France, we studied French, and we speak French almost 90% of the time in our daily lives ([Le Monde, 2023](#)).

Through this excerpt, we understand that the new African generation does not hate French people or the France's Republic *per se*, but what they do rebuke vehemently is France's neocolonial approach and imperialist policy. Subsequently, the new partners should keep in mind this state of fact because state foreign policies and approaches can change overtime. Therefore, constructing transparent, respectful and trustworthy bilateral relations based on a win-win cooperation spirit should be put forwards.

<sup>8</sup> During the First Chadian Civil War, a tiny rebel force known as the *Popular Front for the Liberation of Chad* (also known in French as the *Front Populaire pour la Libération du Tchad*, or FPLT) was active. Awad Mukhtar Nasser founded the party in 1968, and it operated along the border between Sudan and Chad. Its headquarters were in Sudan. The party abandoned armed resistance when François Tombalbaye's government fell in 1975 and its commanders made peace with Félix Malloum's new administration. The FPLT reappeared in 1979, always with Nasser at the helm.

This implies that Africa's new partners should avoid false pretenses, hypocrisy, and bad lyricism to cooperate with Africans as equals. This entails that to maintain healthy and credible relations with Sub-Saharan African countries, it is necessary to get rid of the very restrictive, reductive and condescending ideas about Africans. Any other attempt will be counterproductive; because any other contrary approach is like setting up a slaughterhouse in a vegetarian environment. The more operational the slaughterhouse is, the more absurd its existence becomes. The young Sub-Saharan African generation [i.e. the new trend of African activists] is aware that the second colonization of the African continent could be done with bouquets of flowers instead of weapons. This denotes, *de facto* and *de jure*, the mechanical replacement of hard power by soft power without profound strategic considerations. And for this, the pan-Africanist movements cited above are constantly sounding the alarm. These pan-African activists know that they are in a world of interests and no one will come to fight for the interests of the other; each country, each society must fight for their own interests.

To paraphrase the German philosopher Hannah Arendt, it is possible to claim that every society and every nation, without consideration of their color and origins, have "the right to have rights" (Arendt, 2005). This right must be recognized, respected and even valued if we follow the logic of attractiveness and subjugation as recommended by soft power theorists. Human rights, equity, and respect are intangible values of humanism; and as a result, they occupy a prime place in human and societal relations. These values cannot be violated for any reason whatsoever.

Like other emerging countries present in Africa, Turkey tends towards a pragmatic attitude worthy of the realpolitik of the twenty-first century. However, as its African commitment strengthens, it will be more difficult for Turkey to play on several fronts at the same time without appearing opportunistic in the eyes of Africans. Some West African countries – such as Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, and Senegal – find themselves torn between a difficult dilemma: how to sustainably reconcile the expansion of Turkish interests in West Africa with the discordant objectives of their privileged western partners?

This above mentioned dilemma brings about another corollary challenge in line with Turkey's presence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, if the Turks benefit from a non-colonial past, their proximity to the West (i.e., through NATO) and a propensity for the division of labor with traditional actors, colonizers or not, risks provoking suspicion, even distrust, among Africans as to their true intentions. In November 2010, France proposed to Turkey to join a tandem with Great Britain in order to face Chinese competition snatching up contracts on the continent. This so-called tandem was similar to the trilateral relation treaty signed in 1939 and reaffirmed in 1949 between Great Britain, France and Turkey for *Mutual Assistance*<sup>9</sup>.

Most of the emerging powers that are initiating bilateral partnerships with African countries are looking for potential markets to evacuate the massive productions of their giant firms. Notwithstanding, Africa should not be considered as a marketplace but as a business partner with whom one can collaborate in an equitable way for mutual benefits. This entails investing in sustainable development sectors such as energy, infrastructure, water supply, industry, agriculture, etc. This will certainly generate thousands of jobs in Africa, reducing *de facto* unemployment on the continent, and increasing the countries' GDP and their communities' life standards. In fact, according to the interview data collected from some African policy-makers, there are three fundamental things that need to be considered in this process:

- The transfer of knowledge and technology;
- The development of energy and transportation infrastructures;
- The implementation of environment-friendly companies.

All this should be done with a win-win business partnership state of mind and mutual respect, because development is a dynamic process. As the African historian and philosopher, Ki-Zerbo (1972), put it in his masterpiece titled *History of Black Africa*<sup>10</sup> published a decade after the process of decolonization:

The African past is not only a repository of memories, it is also a pool of values, a source of inspiration, and a guide to the future (...) Development is the affirmation of the dignity of peoples, it is the guarantee of their freedom, it is the assertion of their rights, it is the promise of a better tomorrow (...) Africa's development cannot

<sup>9</sup> The main purpose of the October 19, 1939, *Treaty of Mutual Assistance* between Great Britain, France, and Turkey is for Britain and France to promise to provide Turkey with "all aid and assistance in their power" in the event that Turkey is attacked by a European power. The treaty was reaffirmed by the British and French in 1949. More information on the following link: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v05/d643>.

<sup>10</sup> Ki-Zerbo, J.(1972). *Histoire de l'Afrique Noire*. Edition Hatier, Paris - Published online by Cambridge University Press in 2018; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0395264900163553>.

be achieved through imitation or blind adherence to external models. It must be grounded in our own realities, our own histories, and our own aspirations (...). The future of Africa lies in the hands of its youth. They are not only the leaders of tomorrow; they are also the architects of Africa's destiny today (Ki-Zerbo, 1972).

This goes without stating that Africa's new bilateral partners should abandon their irrational ultra-nationalism and adopt neo-internationalist attitudes. In fact, by making investments in vital infrastructure and encouraging innovation and technology, African nations can gain from the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and become new emerging states that compete on the world stage. Unprecedented obstacles are currently confronting the world economy, such as trade disputes, problems with logistics and transportation, the effects of climate change, geopolitical tensions like the ongoing conflicts between Russia and Ukraine on the one hand, and on the other hand the war between Israel and Hamas, and their effects on food security, etc. Making African economy viable and competitive can alleviate such problems in the future.

Put differently, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a ray of optimism, providing enormous commercial potential for companies all over the continent. More than a thousand policymakers, corporate executives, and important stakeholders gathered at the AfCFTA Business Forum in Cape Town, South Africa, from April 16–19, 2023, to talk about the prospects of this ambitious effort.

According to Nardos Bekele-Thomas (2023)<sup>11</sup>, CEO of the African Development Agency, the Cape Town forum was held during a period of declining trust in the multilateral trading environment and rising anxiety over the unfair sharing of advantages and disadvantages, poor decision-making processes, erosion of national sovereignty, and politicization of global governance. The ongoing debate about bilateralism and multilateralism's efficacy emphasizes how crucial it is to find domestic answers to problems facing the African continent, especially in light of the recent changes in the geopolitical and economic landscape. In all eventualities, it is crucial for Africa's new bilateral and multilateral partners to support the initiatives of the AfCFTA in order to boost the economy of the continent.

## 10. Conclusion

The engagement of non-Western powers with the African continent has grown significantly over the last decade, prompting analysts to wonder if this revived interest from foreign powers is a "new scramble for Africa" and, if so, what that would mean for Africans (Davutoglu, 2018). Thus, it is crucial to evaluate the dynamics of the bilateral ties African governments establish with rising countries in order to determine Africa's place in global politics. One of the main driving forces for the Türkiye's 1998 Africa Action Plan was the desire for worldwide influence. Turkey's case makes a compelling point in this discussion.

Türkiye has emerged as a major player in Sub-Saharan Africa over the last two decades, fortifying its diplomatic, cultural, and economic links with the continent's governments and offering development projects and humanitarian aids to populations around the Horn of Africa and beyond. The tone for the Türkiye-Africa collaboration was set by then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statement that "Africa belongs to Africans, we [Türkiye's businessmen] are not here for your gold" (Anadolu Agency, 2014). This persuaded several East, Central and West African decision-makers and stakeholders about the sincerity of the Türkiye-Africa bilateral cooperation. Because of this strategy, scholars have classified Ankara as a new soft power state that differs from other developed countries and so-called conventional powers operating on the continent.

Together with the processes of multi-centered globalization and multipolarization, Türkiye's model offers plurality, diversity, and distinctness. This broadens Türkiye's soft power, as it intensifies the media coverage that the country gets. The fundamental role of Turkish global media – namely TRT's new digital platforms (i.e., TRT Français and TRT Afrika), Anadolu Agency, Natural TV, as well as Turkish soap operas – is to contribute in cleansing the biased narrative about Türkiye abroad. Throughout literature reviews, participant observation, and media content analysis, this study has assessed the impact of Turkish soft power on diplomatic, economic, educational and cultural relations, as well as the various public diplomacy initiatives deployed by Türkiye in Sub-Saharan Africa in order to consolidate its bilateral ties with this region.

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<sup>11</sup> Nardos Bekele-Thomas is the CEO of The African Union Development Agency-NEPAD. She was appointment and endorsed as the new Chief Executive Officer of AUDA-NEPAD by the African Union Heads of State and Government during the Thirty-Fifth Ordinary Session of the African Union summit, in February 2022. African Union (2022): <https://au.int/fr/node/41789>.

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