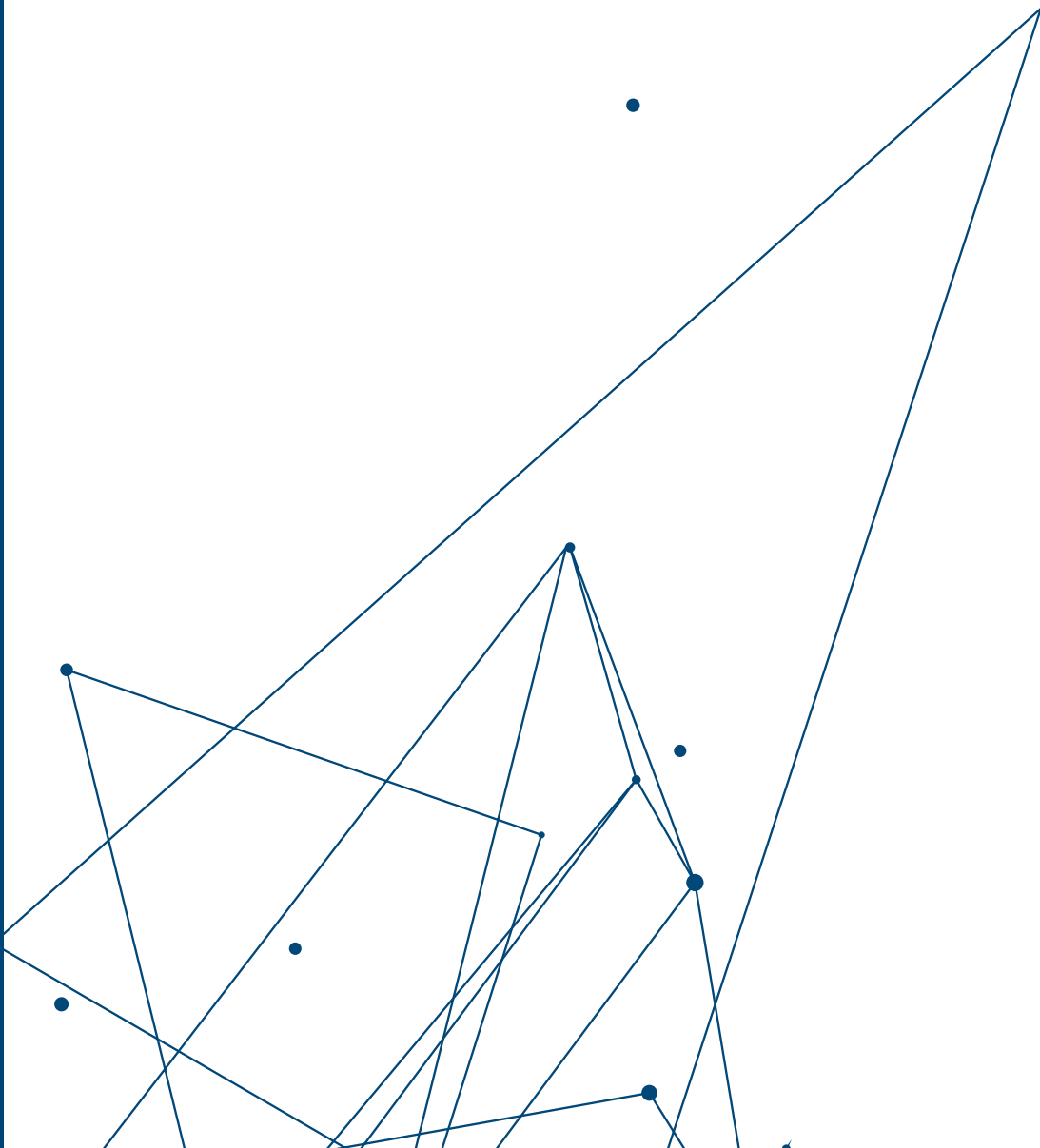


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Spain is Not Afraid of Turkey in Africa

Eduard Soler i Lecha



Compared to other European capitals, Madrid is not as concerned with Turkey's growing presence in Africa. The friendly bilateral relations between Ankara and Madrid and the fact that Turkey is less active in Spain's most sensitive diplomatic files helps soothe relations between the two countries.

This paper is part of a series of six CATS Network Papers assessing Turkey's engagement with Africa from the perspectives of Germany, France, Italy and Spain, complemented by analyses from Turkey itself and two major actors on the continent, Egypt and Ethiopia.

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1.

Why Spain Matters

Of all the countries in Europe, Spain is positioned geographically nearest to Africa making it especially exposed to the potential effects of changes coming from the continent. Therefore, significant transformations such as Turkey's renewed interest and growing presence across the African continent - including in areas that are geographically and historically closer to Spain such as the Maghreb and West Africa - do not go unnoticed in Madrid.

To what extent do Spain and Turkey's interests in Africa align or diverge? Have Turkey's policies in Africa impacted Spain's core priorities or are they likely to do so in the future?

Can Spain play a meaningful role in transforming the competitive and sometimes contentious relationship between Turkey and European Union countries in Africa toward a more collaborative one?

While Spain is aware of Turkey's growing interest in Africa, it does not perceive this presence as a threat or as a deliberate attempt to undermine Spanish interests. Both nations are active and invested across Africa and onlookers might posit that there is potential for vibrant cooperation. However, such cooperation has not yet taken place. The ways in which leaders in Madrid see tighter bonds being forged between Spain and Turkey will be fundamental in understanding how this complex geopolitical relationship could grow in the coming years.

This article is mainly based on 20 interviews with Spanish diplomats, politicians, officials, and other policy makers who have worked in Madrid and different regions of Africa. Depending on the profile and expertise of the interviewees, the anonymised conversations focus on the role of Africa in Spanish-Turkish relations, the connections between the bilateral relationship and the wider EU-Turkey relations. Conversations with policy makers range from the peculiarities of specific African countries to thematic priorities such as security and defence, trade and investment and international cooperation for development and humanitarian action. These inputs provide a granular assessment of the different perceptions that co-exist within the Spanish policy-making community regarding Turkey's role in Africa and the extent to which Ankara should be seen as a partner or a competitor.

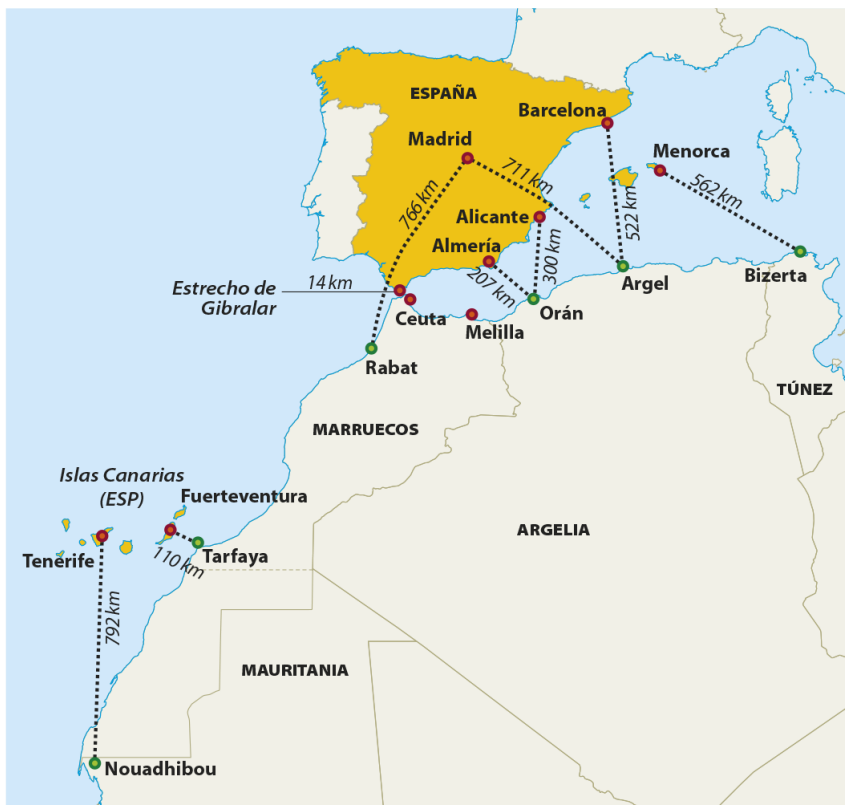
Before analysing the interviews, it will be important to trace some basic facts of Spain's policies toward Africa. Spain's main priorities as well as the contemporary evolution of Madrid's and Ankara's relations will be analysed in the greater context of increasingly tense frictions between Ankara and other European actors.

2.

Intimate History, Close Geography

The Iberian Peninsula and Africa are separated only by fourteen kilometres at the Strait of Gibraltar. Additionally, the two Spanish cities in North Africa – Ceuta and Melilla – serve as the EU's only land borders with an African country. Meanwhile, the Canary Islands are part of Africa and nearly hug the African continent.

Figure 1: Spain and the Maghreb: Geographical Proximities¹



Source: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs [CIDOB]² ©CIDOB

¹ The representation of lines on this map does not imply an endorsement or recognition of contested boundaries.

² Eduard Soler i Lecha and Martina Valls, *ESPAÑA Y EL MAGREB: vecindad, nearshoring y pospandemia*, (Barcelona: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs [CIDOB], July 2022),

This proximity explains why the Maghreb (a sub-region that comprises the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania as well as the disputed territory of Western Sahara) holds a distinct position in Spain's foreign policy profile. This shared connection translates into Madrid having deeper relations with the Maghreb than with other parts of Africa. When assessing Turkey's role in Africa, it will be significant to ascertain whether this region - particularly the nations of Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania - is among Ankara's priorities.

In the intersection between proximity and historical legacies, territorial disputes with some African countries have shaped Spain's relations not only with those nations but also with the whole of the continent. In the 19th century, when other European powers such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany were expanding their colonies and possessions in Africa, Spain was focused on preserving what it had left of its old empire. The loss of Cuba in 1898 was especially traumatic for Spain and Madrid became obsessed with not losing any more territories, even considering the Canary Islands to be at risk. By the end of the 19th century, Spain had established a colonial administration in Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea. By 1912, a French-Spanish protectorate was enforced in Morocco.

Western Sahara - a sparsely populated strip of land in front of the Canary Islands - is still an unresolved conflict zone. Under Spain's colonial rule, Morocco launched a series of military and diplomatic initiatives to incorporate this territory. However, these efforts were met with resistance from part of the Sahrawi people who aspired to build an independent state in Western Sahara. This movement - organised around the Polisario Front - received the support of other states such as Algeria and Libya from 1972 onward. In the 1970s, Spain's priority was to avoid being dragged into a colonial war in a moment of domestic uncertainties as dictator Francisco Franco was nearing death. Consequently, in 1976, Spain withdrew its last troops from Western Sahara, a territory that the United Nations (UN) still considers to be a non-self-governing territory.³

Attempts by the UN to reach a mutually acceptable solution have seen no progress since the 1991 ceasefire between Morocco and the Polisario. The situation significantly deteriorated in 2020 when in November the ceasefire came to an end and hostilities intensified. In December that year, then-United States President Donald Trump recognised Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in return for the announcement of diplomatic normalisation between Morocco and Israel. Unsurprisingly, this coincided with the deterioration of bilateral relations between Morocco and Algeria and a visible arms race between the two powerhouses of the

https://www.cidob.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/253_EDUARD%20SOLER%20I%20LECHA%20%26%20MARTINA%20VALLS_CAST.pdf (accessed 24 June 2024)

³ United Nations (UN), *Non-Self-Governing Territories-Western Sahara* (last updated: 10 May 2022), <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsqt/western-sahara> (accessed 28 April 2023)

Maghreb region. Despite this recent escalation, the conflict in Western Sahara is not a major priority or a central conflict for most international players. However, for Madrid and several African countries, the strife in Western Sahara is a pressing diplomatic and security concern. The Polisario-led Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) is a member of the African Union (AU) and Morocco has increased its private and public presence across the continent, partly to regain support in this conflict.

Another unresolved dispute is that of Spanish territories on the North African coast. After becoming fully independent in 1956, Morocco claimed that Ceuta and Melilla, the two Spanish coastal cities enclaved by Morocco, should be treated as occupied territories and colonies of Spain. This is not only a historical grievance but one which recurrently leads to sparks between both countries.⁴ Together with those two cities, Spain also possesses small islets and rocks along the North African coast which Morocco considers theirs. Proof of these islets' relevance to the greater political discourse between Rabat and Madrid can be seen in the heightened tensions over the uninhabited islet of Perejil in 2002.

Tensions led not only to a diplomatic crisis in 2002 but also to the deployment of naval assets and the Spanish arrest of the Moroccan gendarmes that had landed on the Perejil islet. This conflict may sound familiar to Turkish readers, as there are parallels with the Imia/Kardak incident between Greece and Turkey in 1996. Both the Imia/Kardak and Perejil incidents were resolved through US mediation.⁵

Finally, the other area where sovereignty discrepancies persist relate to the delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean where Spain's claims conflict with those of Morocco and, to a lesser extent, Algeria. The negotiation and delimitation in the Atlantic Ocean are particularly sensitive because the EEZ around the Canary Islands - an area which is presumably rich in natural resources - borders with the waters of Western Sahara. A bilateral agreement reached with Morocco would imply recognising Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. Yet, in the absence of negotiations, the risk of unilateral fait accompli actions increases. Again, this is an area where relevant parallels can be drawn between the situation in the Western and Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, governments and diplomats from Western Mediterranean states have good reasons to monitor how diplomacy evolves in the Eastern basin.

⁴ Basma El Atti, "Madrid angry with Rabat after official remarks on Ceuta, Melilla occupation", *The New Arab* (online), 13 April 2023, <https://www.newarab.com/news/madrid-angry-rabat-after-remarks-ceuta-occupation> (accessed: 28 April 2023)

⁵ Richard Gillespie "This Stupid Little Island': A Neighbourhood Confrontation in the Western Mediterranean", *International Politics*, no. 43, (February 2006): 110–132, doi:10.1057/palgrave.ip.8800136

3.

Bilateral and Multilateral Diplomatic Engagement

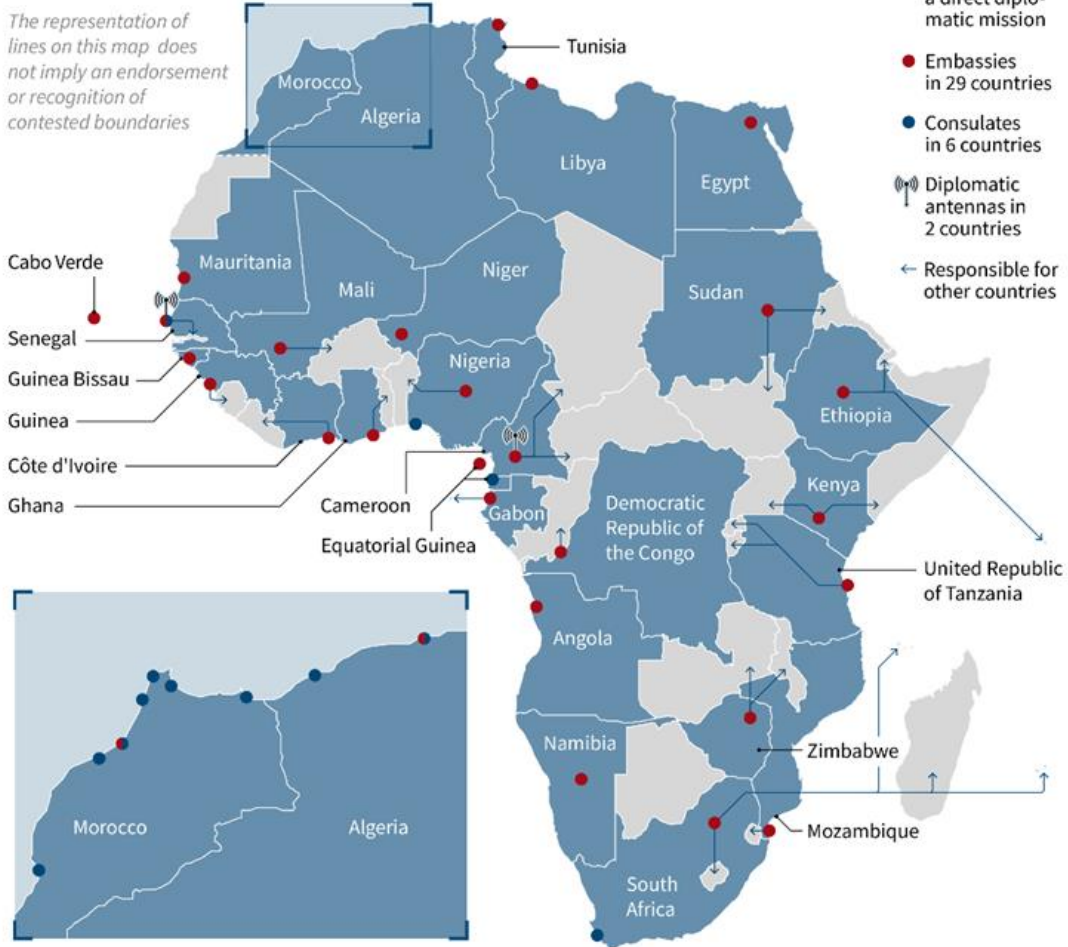
Madrid's efforts to build friendly relations with newly independent African countries in the late 1950s and early 1960s were crucial in breaking its international remoteness, given Spain's post-Second World War isolation and late entry into the United Nations in 1955. Seeking support from Global South countries in South America, Asia and Africa was a priority for Spain, particularly in the UN General Assembly. Madrid sought recognition of Gibraltar as a British colony and countered the rise of a pro-independence movement in the Canary Islands operating from Algiers, as well as irredentist claims from Morocco.

During the 1960s, Spain's charm offensive in Africa led to the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of numerous embassies in distant African nations. Though not as extensive as Turkey's current diplomatic outreach on the continent, Spain built one of the largest diplomatic networks in Africa in the 1960s, reaching thirty-five embassies and consulates today.

Figure 2

Spanish Diplomatic Missions in Africa

The representation of lines on this map does not imply an endorsement or recognition of contested boundaries



Missions responsible for other countries

- Cameroon, Yaoundé → Central African Republic
- Côte d'Ivoire, Abidjan → Liberia
- DRC, Kinshasa → Republic of the Congo
- Ethiopia, Addis Abeba → Djibouti
- Gabon, Libreville → Sao Tome and Principe
- Ghana, Accra → Togo
- Guinea, Conakry → Sierra Leone
- Kenya, Nairobi → Somalia
- Mozambique, Maputo → Swaziland
- Namibia, Windhoek → Botswana
- Nigeria, Abuja → Benin
- Senegal, Dakar → Republic of The Gambia
- South Africa, Pretoria → Comoros
- South Africa, Pretoria → Lesotho
- South Africa, Pretoria → Madagascar
- South Africa, Pretoria → Mauritius
- Sudan, Khartoum → Eritrea
- Sudan, Khartoum → South Sudan
- Tanzania, Dar es Salaam → Burundi
- Tanzania, Dar es Salaam → Rwanda
- Zimbabwe, Harare → Malawi
- Zimbabwe, Harare → Zambia

Source: Spanish Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation (Data as of March 2024)

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Turkey's anti-colonial narrative plays a visible role in its current projection in Africa. Ankara also presents itself as a representative of the Global South and African nations. While these developments have been viewed as adversarial in nature by other European nations (particularly France), Spain has not perceived Ankara's actions in the same way. Spanish officials state that they are aware of their fellow Europeans' sensitivities regarding Turkey's self-promotion in Africa, yet none of them

considered Turkey's strategy to be targeting Spain or harming Madrid's image and interests on the continent.

Having re-embraced democracy in the late 1970s, Spain joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1982 and subsequently in 1986 became part of the European Economic Community (EEC). The impact of EEC membership on Spanish policies toward Africa was pronounced given that, as a newcomer to the EEC, Spain had to adhere to the policies and adopt agreements previously signed by the EEC bloc governing trade and cooperation with African nations such as the 1975 Lomé Convention.⁶

Africa serves as one of the most prominent examples of the Europeanisation of Spanish foreign policy priorities – a process that has only intensified since 1993 when the EEC became the European Union (EU). In this process of EU Europeanisation, member states adopt and implement collective decisions while simultaneously seeking to promote their own national concerns and priorities at the EU level. In this way, an EU country can lobby for the EU institutions and partners to take on its own bilateral issues as shared priorities and concerns. This was the case in disputes of sovereignty with Morocco. Since 1986, Madrid has demanded that the priorities of Spain in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla become established EU policy.

Europeanisation has transformed Spain's relationship with North Africa which is framed within the context of the EU's Mediterranean and Neighbourhood policies, as well as with Sub-Saharan nations. In the former, Spain had a more prominent and active part leading an initiative such as the Barcelona Process for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in 1995 and playing a constructive role in pushing for deeper relations between the EU and some North African countries, namely Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania.⁷

Despite temporary crises, Spain reserves a special status for its bilateral relations with North African countries. Using as an example the relations it established with European states and neighbouring Portugal, Spanish policy makers have implemented holding intergovernmental summits with their North African counterparts to foster cooperation across various thematic areas.

Meanwhile, Spain has adopted a follower role when it comes to EU relations with Sub-Saharan Africa. Madrid tends to align its policies and priorities with those developed by European institutions or more proactive member states, rather than taking the lead

⁶ The Lomé Convention is a series of agreements between the European Union and African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries, signed in 1975 in Lomé, Togo and revised multiple times over the years, aimed at promoting economic and political cooperation.

⁷ Eduard Soler i Lecha and Pol Morillas, *Middle Power with Maghreb Focus: A Spanish perspective on Security Policy in the Southern Neighbourhood*, Analysis (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [FES], June 2020), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/16307-20200722.pdf> (accessed: 28 April 2023)

or independently shaping its approach toward the region. In fact, this is a common result of EU Europeanisation. When a member state gets its foreign policy objectives recognised in Brussels, this same state tends to constructively follow the EU consensus on areas in which it has less stakes.

To date, Spain has not been a major player in Sub-Saharan Africa or in the definition of the EU's policy toward the continent. Yet, this could change in the future. Interviewees expressed a sustained willingness to upgrade these relations, at least with a select group of countries. It is worth noting that in 2022, the Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez visited Senegal, Kenya and South Africa and that in February 2023, the royal couple Phillippe VI and Queen Letizia, visited Angola in their first state visit to a Sub-Saharan country.

The increased interest in African affairs also materialised in the publication of three strategic documents known as Africa Plans.⁸ The first of those plans was approved in 2006 by the Spanish government of then - Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero following a surge of irregular crossings of African migrants toward the Canary Islands. This initial Africa Plan recognised the importance of addressing the challenges posed by migration. One of the responses was to promote economic development and cooperation between Spain and African countries, focusing on sectors such as energy, water, infrastructure, good governance and the fight against poverty and inequality. It also vowed to upgrade Spain's diplomatic presence, intensifying Madrid's involvement in the implementation of European strategies.

In 2009, the Spanish government released its second Africa Plan.⁹ This plan shared similar goals and built on the lessons learnt from the 2006 plan. Migration and the aspiration to upgrade Spain's presence were central but this second version emphasised the promotion of trade and investment relations. The strategic priorities of the second Africa Plan corresponded with Spanish interests, especially in fishing and energy sectors. Also, the second plan discussed the strategic relevance of origin and transit countries regarding the refugees and immigrants arriving in Spain.

The Spanish government adopted its third Africa plan in 2019. One of its novelties is Madrid's willingness to increase the involvement of civil societies and private sector companies in Spain's outreach to Africa.¹⁰ It identifies Madrid's geographical

⁸ Óscar Garrido Guijarro, *Plan África: balance de quince años de compromiso español*, Análisis 53/2021 (Madrid: Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos [IEEE], 15 December 2021), https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2021/DIEEEA53_2021_OSCGAR_PlanAfrica.pdf (accessed 28 April 2023)

⁹ Spanish Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, *Plan África 2009–2012* (Madrid, 2009), https://www.casafrica.es/sites/default/files/old_cms/casafrica/Inicio/PlanAfrica2009-2012.pdf (accessed 11 September 2023)

¹⁰ Spanish Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, *III Plan África: Spain and Africa: challenge and opportunity* (Madrid, 2019),

priorities, which have been reduced to ten countries, more clearly than the previous two plans. The plan identifies three anchor countries - Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa - due to their demographic significance, political-economic projection and influence on the stability of their subregions. The 2019 plan also recognises seven other priority countries or partnership countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Senegal, Ghana, Angola, Mozambique and Tanzania.

Overall, the third Africa Plan represents a renewed ambition. As president of Spain's government, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez declared the 2020s to be the decade of Spain in Africa.¹¹ In the foreword to the third plan, the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs and now High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy-Vice President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, stated that Spain can be considered a bi-continental country, as a significant part of its population and territory is in Africa. Borrell added that: "No one outside the African continent is more interested in the success of Africa than Spain. Our immediate national interest is in Africa, almost as much as it is in Europe."¹²

https://www.exteriores.gob.es/en/PoliticaExterior/Documents/2019_PLAN%20AFRICA%20ENG.pdf
(accessed 28 April 2023)

¹¹ La Moncloa, "Intervención del presidente del Gobierno, Pedro Sánchez, en la presentación del programa Foco África 2023", Madrid, 29 March 2021a, <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/intervenciones/Paginas/2021/prsp29032021.aspx> (accessed 28 April 2023)

¹² Spanish Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, (2019): 7

Figure 3¹³

Priority Countries of Spanish Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa



- Anchor countries:** Countries that Spain intends to maximise relations with considering these nations to have the potential to flourish economically, absorb intra-African migratory flows and export stability to their neighbours.
- Partnership countries:** Spain seeks to enhance relations with these countries it perceives as stable and in possession of significant growth potential.
- Pilot countries:** Countries with which Spain has privileged institutional dialogue aiming at enhanced cooperation in the fields of economic and civil society development. New programmes in pilot countries should be transferable to other nations.

The representation of lines on this map does not imply an endorsement or recognition of contested boundaries

Source: Spanish Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, III Plan Africa

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More recently, the UN has emerged as a platform of engagement between Spain and African nations. An example of this is the joint initiative by Spain and Senegal to launch the International Drought Resilience Alliance with 25 other countries on the sidelines of the Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Sharm-el-Sheikh. Interestingly, Senegal is listed in another public policy document titled Focus Africa 2023. In Focus Africa 2023, policy makers state that Senegal is to be one of two pilot countries (together with Morocco) with whom several Spanish ministries should implement new cooperation measures. Also, the Focus Africa 2023 document stresses that Spanish stakeholders must learn lessons from the upgraded engagement with Senegal and Morocco and then replicate those lessons in other contexts with other African countries.¹⁴

¹³ North African pilot countries are not included in Figure 3; Source: Ibid: 20

¹⁴ Spanish Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, *Focus Africa 2023* (Madrid, 2021), <https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/Comunicacion/Noticias/Documents/DOCUMENTOS%20FOCO%20AFRICA/ENG%20DOCUMENTO%20FOCO%20AFRICA%202023.pdf> (accessed 28 April 2023)

4.

Madrid's Agenda in Africa

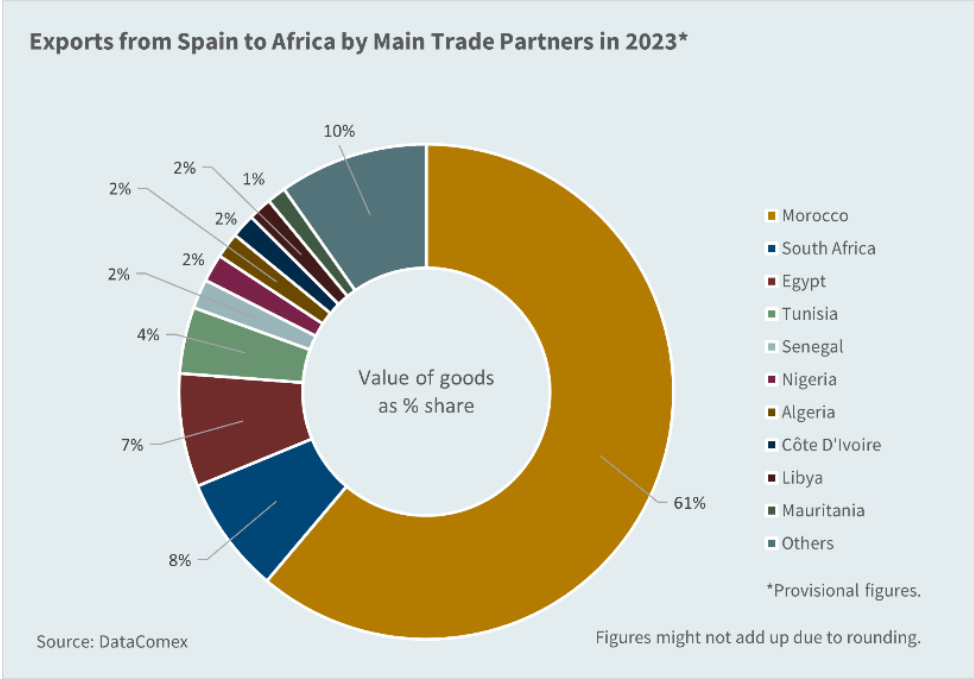
Spain's outlook in dealing with African partners has evolved over time, responding to changes occurring not only in Africa but also in Spain. In general, the agenda has become increasingly diversified, including economic cooperation, migration, security and defence and development cooperation. Most importantly, this multifaceted agenda adapts to the specificities of each country.

4.1

Economic Relations

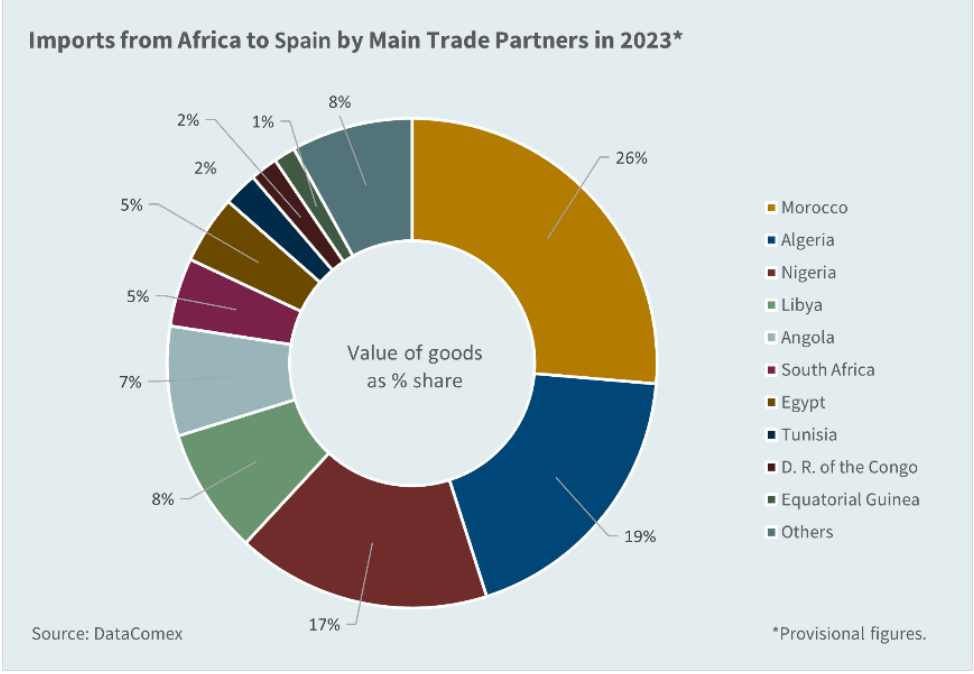
The closer the geographical proximity, the more intense economic relations tend to be between Madrid and African nations. In terms of trade, Morocco accounts for 50 per cent of Spanish exports to Africa, followed by Algeria and Egypt with 10 and 9 per cent respectively. Regarding imports, Morocco tops the list with 29 per cent and Algeria takes the third position with 19 per cent. While Morocco's imports to Spain are quite diversified, Algeria - like most African countries in the top 10 - primarily sends energy exports to Madrid.

Figure 4



Source: Own elaboration through data from DataComex ¹⁵

Figure 5



Source: Own elaboration through data from DataComex ¹⁶

¹⁵ Government of Spain Ministry of industry and tourism, DataComex (Foreign trade statistics of goods from Spain and the EU), <https://datacomex.comercio.es/>

¹⁶ ibid

The importance of proximity can be seen again when discussing Spanish foreign direct investments (FDI) in Africa. Out of the six destinations in Africa for Spanish investors, five are in North Africa and the only Sub-Saharan country to make the list is South Africa. Morocco again tops the list, yet Spain is surpassed by five other countries in terms of total FDI: the US, France, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and the Netherlands. Overall, Africa does not – at the present time – appear to be an attractive destination for Spanish companies. Spanish investors continue to put the majority of their money into Europe (including Turkey) and Latin America.

Table 1: Top African Destinations of Spanish Investment Flows 1993–2023 (in thousands of Euros)

Morocco	4,366,993.63
Egypt	1,063,825.70
South Africa	969,736.95
Libya	582,544.93
Tunisia	559,943.42
Algeria	524,297.10

Source: Own elaboration with data from DataInvex¹⁷

4.2 Migration

Traditionally a country of emigration, Spain became in the 1990s a transit and destination country for migrants from Africa, South and East Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. According to official statistics, there are 5.5 million foreigners living in Spain. Of these, 1.2 million are from Africa. Yet, the overwhelming majority came from one country: Morocco, with almost 900,000 migrants. Only two other African countries have more than 50,000 residents legally residing in Spain: Senegal (83,260) and Algeria (63,964) in 2022.¹⁸

Another dimension of the migration agenda involves irregular migration. Spain’s key concern is what is known as the Western route, which is mainly used by migrants from West African countries to enter Europe through the Strait of Gibraltar, the

¹⁷ Government of Spain Ministry of industry and tourism, *DataInvex (Foreign Investment Statistics)*, <http://datainvex.comercio.es/>

¹⁸ This data is publicly available: National Statistics Institute (INE), *Main series of population since 1998* (Madrid, 2022), <https://www.ine.es/jaxi/Datos.htm?path=/t20/e245/p08/l0/&file=02005.px#!tabs=tabla> (accessed 28 April 2023)

Canary Islands or crossing the land borders of Ceuta or Melilla. Migration control, readmissions and maritime surveillance play a leading role in the relations of Spain with these countries. Among them, Morocco stands out as the country that has leveraged migration control most actively and powerfully as a means of signalling to Spain its level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the state of their cooperation and political relations in other areas. This was epitomised in the 2021 Ceuta migration crisis. Morocco complained against Madrid's decision to host the leader of the Polisario Front for medical treatment in a Spanish hospital. Rabat's subsequent relaxation of border controls was the way Morocco used to convey its discontent. In the same vein, the normalisation of Madrid's and Rabat's relations in March 2022 also implied a temporary decrease in the number of illegal border crossings in the Atlantic and the Western Mediterranean.

Spain's and Morocco's migration relations resonate with the centrality of migration policy in EU-Turkey and Turkey-Greece relations since 2015. Although migration is not directly related to Turkey's presence in Africa, both Spain and its North African neighbours are attentive to Turkey's policies and tactics on the other side of the Mediterranean. Turkey has obtained compensation from the EU and individual European states by restricting or increasing its cooperation in the field of migration. As evidenced by Morocco's actions in moderating illegal migration to Spain, other North African countries may be tempted to emulate the Turkish strategy with their European neighbours across the western Mediterranean.

4.3 Security and Defence

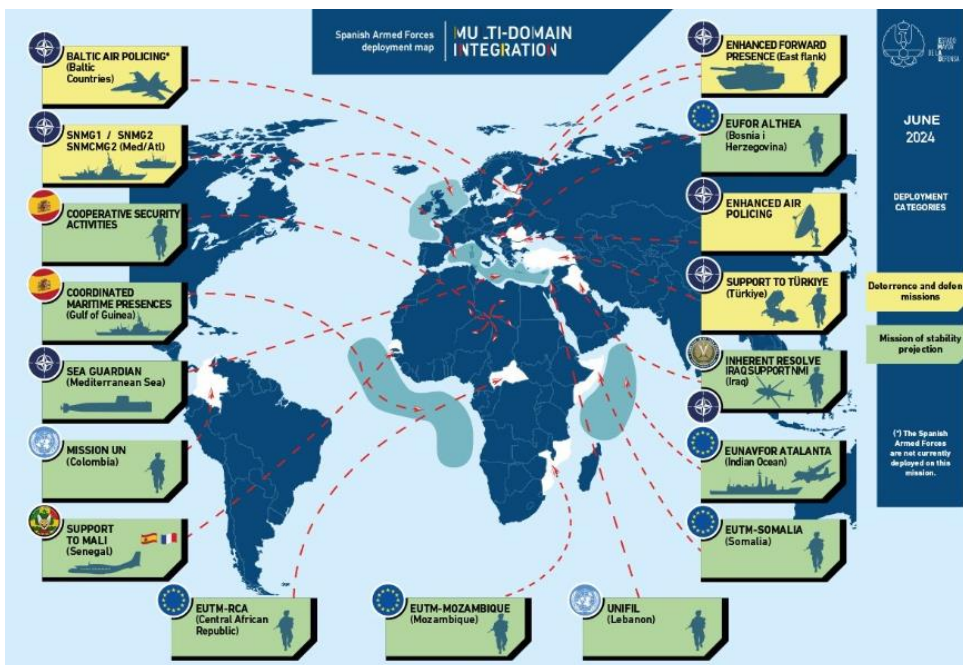
Spain understands that Africa's stability or destabilisation will affect Spain due to geographical proximity and migratory routes. Aware of the inadequacy of its national capabilities, Spain can only welcome a more active multilateral engagement on the continent, be it at the level of the UN, the EU or even through Africa's regional initiatives such as the AU and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Spain's long-standing commitment to multilateralism and (inter)regional cooperation has further reinforced this assessment. Spain's first participation in a peace operation abroad was in Angola in 1989 under the United Nations Angola Verification Mission. Since the 2000s, Spain has been involved in EU-led peacekeeping and training missions such as EUNAVFOR Atalanta (2008-present). As of May 2024, Spanish men and women actively integrate international missions in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Mozambique, and the Central African Republic.¹⁹

¹⁹ Updated data on Spain's participation in international missions can be found on the webpage of the Spanish Ministry of Defence: https://www.defensa.gob.es/misiones/en_exterior/

5.

Spain's Participation in International Missions Abroad

Figure 6: Spanish Armed Forces Deployment Map June 2024²⁰



Source: Spanish Government Ministry of Defence²¹ © Ministry of Defence - Defence Staff

Active engagement and support of multilateral efforts in Africa do not exclude the implementation of bilateral initiatives. Since the 1990s, Spain has aimed to strengthen and elevate its bilateral relations with several North African countries through the establishment of regular government-to-government summits. These summits have been held together with Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt. However, there have been prolonged intervals between these meetings due to bilateral political

²⁰ Note on the Figure 6: The original figure on the website of the Spanish Ministry of Defence is interactive.

²¹ Spanish Government Ministry of Defence, *Foreign Operations*, <https://emad.defensa.gob.es/en/operaciones/operaciones-en-el-exterior/#:~:text=The%20Spanish%20Armed%20Forces%20are,temporary%20exercise%20of%20command%20over=>

crises (in Morocco and more recently Algeria) or political instability (in Tunisia and Egypt).

5.1 Development Cooperation

Spain remains a relevant donor and actor in the realm of Official Development Assistance (ODA) despite the severe budget cuts that were introduced in the early 2010s due to the effects from the financial and sovereign debt crisis in Spain in the form of austerity measures. The Spanish government has vowed to increase the ODA funds it will allocate. The law on international cooperation passed by the Spanish Cortes Generales in 2023 aims at reaching an increase of 0.7 per cent by 2030.²²

Africa is one of the areas, together with Latin America, where Spain's development cooperation has been active. Spain's Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), is currently present in several African countries such as Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Cabo Verde, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique and - with a different status - Western Sahara supporting the Sahrawi population.²³

Taking into consideration Turkey's growing presence in this field and the fact that Turkey's Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), is also present in countries such as Senegal, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tunisia, it will be relevant in the future to assess whether Spain's and Turkey's priorities and strategies in this field align, follow parallel tracks or eventually clash.

²² Spanish Government Ministry of the Presidency, Justice and Judicial Relations, *Ley 1/2023, de 20 de febrero, de Cooperación para el Desarrollo Sostenible y la Solidaridad Global*, (Madrid, 20 February 2023), <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/2023/02/20/1/con> (accessed 28 April 2023)

²³ Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), *Países y territorios en los que estamos presentes*, <https://www.aecid.es/ES/d%C3%B3nde-cooperamos> (accessed 28 April 2023)

6.

A Comprehensive Friendship: Relations between Ankara and Madrid

The relationship between Spain and Turkey has been shaped by both countries' political and economic developments, as well as the status of Turkey's relationship with the EU and NATO. Despite recurrent crises in Turkey-EU relations and Ankara's bilateral spats with other EU and NATO allies, Spain has consistently been perceived in Ankara as a friendly partner and one that has been eager to reinforce bilateral and multilateral links.²⁴

Spain has been a part of the Friends of Turkey, an informal group of countries including Italy, Finland, the United Kingdom, Spain and Sweden. In 2011, the Friends of Turkey proposed a three-step plan to revive Ankara's EU accession talks. Although the group has been inactive since then, Spain's support for Turkey's EU membership has remained unchanged. This is in part due to the absence of political and social debates on the topic, giving the Spanish government more freedom to pursue its policies toward Turkey.

Spain and Turkey have also established a strong partnership within NATO. The two countries have collaborated in NATO peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Amid the Syrian civil war, Turkey requested NATO's support to

²⁴ For more detailed information on Spain-Turkey relations see: Melike Janine Sökmen and Eduard Soler i Lecha, *FEUTURE EU 28 Country Report: Spain* (Madrid: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs [CIDOB], March 2017), <https://feuture.uni-koeln.de/en/eu-28-country-reports/spain> (accessed 28 April 2023); Ilke Toygür, *Turkey and Spain: bilateral relations and the road ahead for Customs Union modernization*, ARI 113/2020 (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 29 September 2021), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/turkey-and-spain-bilateral-relations-and-the-road-ahead-for-customs-union-modernisation/> (accessed 28 April 2023); Eduard Soler i Lecha, *¿Qué horizonte estratégico a 10 años para las relaciones hispano-turcas?*, *Estrategia Exterior Española* 17/2014, (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 26 May 2014), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/que-horizonte-estrategico-a-10-anos-para-las-relaciones-hispano-turcas/> (accessed 28 April 2023)

safeguard its borders and deter potential threats. In response, Spain's 74th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment deployed a Patriot contingent consisting of six missile launchers and their accompanying radar system to Adana's Airport in south-central Turkey.²⁵ While other NATO allies, such as Germany and the US, withdrew their support, Spain continued to provide steadfast aid to Turkey. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu publicly acknowledged this unwavering support, referring to Spain as a "true friend".²⁶ Turkey has also responded favourably to Spanish requests. When the COVID-19 pandemic erupted, Turkey was one of the first countries to respond to Spain's request for medical assistance through NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC).²⁷

Madrid also has a record of trying to facilitate multilateral agreements and cooperation with Ankara. In 2002, for instance, Spain, in its capacity as the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU, played an active and constructive role in the negotiations that led to the "Berlin Plus" agreement between the EU and NATO, which set out the basis for cooperation between the EU and NATO. The agreement seeks to enhance the cooperation and coordination between the two organisations to improve their effectiveness and efficiency in addressing common security challenges. Madrid also hosted the decisive NATO summit of June 2022. This summit focused on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Sweden and Finland's request to join NATO and the negotiations with Turkey to lift its veto to the Nordic accessions.

At the bilateral level, Spain and Turkey have institutionalised their relationship through yearly governmental summits, known as High-Level Meetings. These meetings bring together not only the heads of government and foreign ministers but also representatives from various ministries to explore new areas of cooperation. The first of those meetings took place in April 2009 in Istanbul, and the 8th took place in Madrid in June 2024. In that meeting the Spanish Prime Minister Sánchez qualified Turkey as a "a partner, friend and ally" and 13 Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to strengthen co-operation between ministries and specialised agencies were signed.²⁸ The summit reiterated the messages of friendship and cooperation that had been expressed earlier. For instance, during the 7th summit that was hosted in Ankara in November 2021. This was the setting in which Spanish Prime Minister Sánchez stated that relations with Turkey were "extraordinary" and where both governments

²⁵ Spanish Government Ministry of Defence, *Patriot deployment*, https://ejercito.defensa.gob.es/en/misiones/asia/turquia/98_DESPLIEGUE_PATRIOT_TURQUIA.html (accessed 28 April 2023)

²⁶ Alhi Murat Alas, "Turkey's top diplomat hails Spain as 'true friend'", *Anadolu Agency* (online), 30 November 2011, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkey-s-top-diplomat-hails-spain-as-true-friend/1660264> (accessed 28 April 2023)

²⁷ NATO, *Coronavirus response: Turkish medical aid arrives in Spain and Italy* (Brussels, 01 April 2020), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_174826.htm (accessed 28 April 2023)

²⁸ La Moncloa, "Pedro Sánchez: "Turkey and Spain have a common past, a dynamic and ambitious present and a promising future", Madrid, 13 June 2024. <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/presidente/news/paginas/2024/20240613-spain-turkey-intergovernmental-summit.aspx> (accessed 18 July 2024)

thanked each other for the support received in times of crisis.²⁹ The two governments then backed the development of an increased cooperation in the sector of defence.³⁰ Moreover, the joint declaration coined the term “Integral Partnership” to reflect the intensified, diversified and cooperative relations between both nations.³¹

In the economic domain, Spain and Turkey have experienced rapid growth in their relationship, particularly since the expansion of the Turkish economy in the 2000s and the implementation of the EU Customs Union with Ankara in 1996.³² The absence of bilateral disputes between the two countries and booming people-to-people relations have contributed to consolidating these relations. Turkey has become an important trade and investment partner for Spanish firms. The best-known example of this is the acquisition of Turkey’s Garanti Bank by Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA), one of Spain’s largest banks. According to data from the Spanish government, trade between the two countries reached \$15 billion in 2021.³³ Turkey is Spain’s fifth largest trade partner outside the EU, after the UK, the US, China and Morocco. Frequent flight connections, friendly relations and both countries’ cultural and geographic assets have translated into an increasing flow of tourists and students visiting each other’s countries. The Turkish Consul in Barcelona, Selen Evcit, shared data showing that not only is Turkey a destination for Spanish tourists (298,165 in 2022) but that a similar number of Turkish citizens (280,151) visited Spain the same year. Evcit also mentioned the investments of Turkish firms in Spain, particularly in the logistics sector.³⁴

The bilateral relationship between Spain and Turkey, despite its strengths, is not immune to external factors that may hinder progress. The close relationship between both countries is threatened by Turkey’s complicated relationship with the EU and its members - particularly with Greece and France. Being a full member of the EU, Spain is bound by the Union’s solidarity and collective decision-making, which makes Spain cautious not to create unnecessary tensions with other EU member states. This can be

²⁹ La Moncloa, “Comparecencia del Presidente de Gobierno, Pedro Sánchez, junto al Presidente del Gobierno turco, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, ante los medios De comunicación en el marco de la VII Reunión De Alto Nivel Turquía-España”, Ankara, 17 November 2021b, <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/intervenciones/Documents/2021/211117%20RdP%20RAN%20Turqu%C3%ADa-Espa%C3%B1a.pdf> (accessed 28 April 2023)

³⁰ Miguel González, “Turquía ofrece a España cooperar en construir un ‘megaportaaeronaves’ y nuevos submarinos”, *El País* (online), 17 November 2021, https://elpais.com/espana/2021-11-17/turquia-ofrece-a-espana-cooperar-en-construir-un-megaportaaeronaves-y-nuevos-submarinos.html?event_log=oklogin (accessed 28 April 2023)

³¹ La Moncloa, “Declaración conjunta VII Cumbre Intergubernamental Turquía-España”, Ankara, 17 November 2021c, https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/actividades/Documents/2021/171121-%20Declaraci%C3%B3n_VII_CumbreHispano-Turca.pdf (accessed 28 April 2023)

³² Ilke Toygür, 2021

³³ España Exportación Inversiones (ICEX), *Turquía* (Madrid, April 2022) <https://www.icex.es/content/dam/es/icex/documentos/todos-nuestro-servicios/informacion-mercados/publicaciones/2022/04/DAX2022905068.pdf> (accessed 29 April 2023)

³⁴ Selen Evcit, “Las relaciones empresariales Turquía-España, cada año más fuertes”, *Expansión* (online), 21 April 2023, <https://www.expansion.com/catalunya/2023/04/21/6442588de5fdea63298b4662.html> (accessed 29 April 2023)

particularly challenging when countries like Greece feel threatened by Turkey and seek support from the EU or if France perceives Turkey as a destabilising force in the Mediterranean and African regions. In a possible future scenario where tensions increase between some EU members and Ankara, Spain may be forced to adopt a stance that aligns with a common EU position, potentially at the expense of its bilateral relations with Turkey. This could limit the possibility of exploring new areas of cooperation between the two countries, in Africa and elsewhere.

7.

Turkey in Africa: Implications for Spain

Turkey's growing presence in Africa is widely seen as part of a broader effort by Turkish authorities to increase their influence in global and regional affairs. Ankara has sought to expand its reach beyond its immediate neighbourhood and be recognised as an emerging power with a global vision. This is not exclusive to Africa as evidenced by Turkey's growing interest in different regions such as Latin America.³⁵ One of the peculiarities of Turkey's geopolitical moves is that these ambitions have translated into the deployment of diversified instruments that range from defence cooperation to cultural and educational diplomacy as illustrated in the CATS mapping.³⁶

This increased engagement with Africa has not gone unnoticed by Spain. Although the topic of Turkey in Africa has yet to be widely discussed in Spain's media discourse, Turkey's new role in Africa has been covered by specialised Spanish publications focusing on security and defence³⁷ as well as African affairs.³⁸ Indicative of a bubbling

³⁵ İmdat Öner, "Turkey's Ambitious Overture to Latin America", *InstituDE* (online), 30 April 2022, <https://www.instituDE.org/opinion/turkeys-ambitious-overture-to-latin-america> (accessed 29 April 2023)

³⁶ Hürcan Aslı Aksoy, Salim Cevik and Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, *Visualizing Turkey's Activism in Africa* (Berlin: Centre for Applied Turkey Studies [CATS], 03 June 2022), <https://www.cats-network.eu/topics/visualizing-turkeys-activism-in-africa> (accessed 29 April 2023)

³⁷ Andrea Chamorro, "Turquía se expande por el Sahel: nuevas oportunidades y antiguas rivalidades", *Descifrando la Guerra* (Blog), 10 November 2021, <https://www.descifrandolaguerra.es/turquia-se-expande-por-el-sahel-nuevas-oportunidades-y-antiguas-rivalidades/> (accessed 29 April 2023); Felipe Sánchez Tapia, "'Turkafrica', virtuous power in action", Analysis Paper 29/2020, (Madrid: Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos [IEEE], 23 September 2020) https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2020/DIEEEA29_2020FELSAN_TurcAfrica-ENG.pdf (accessed 29 April 2023)

³⁸ Óscar Mateos Martín and Eduard Soler i Lecha, "Turquía, un jugador veterano sobre el tablero continental", *Mundo Negro* (online), <https://mundonegro.es/que-busca-erdogan-en-africa/> (accessed 29 April 2023); David Soler, "Escuelas islámicas e inversiones millonarias: la expansión de Turquía en África", *El Orden Mundial* (online), 15 July 2021, <https://elordenmundial.com/escuelas-islamicas-e-inversiones-millonarias-la-expansion-de-turquia-en-africa/> (accessed 29 April 2023)

public interest, the Spanish mainstream media has begun to publish reports on Turkey in Africa.³⁹

In principle, African nations could steer Spain and Turkey toward either competition or cooperation. Yet, there is no Africa-related file in which the two countries have clashed or where both countries are engaged in open competition. This is a major difference compared to Turkey-France relations in Africa. Nonetheless, the friendly relations between Ankara and Madrid and the willingness to expand bilateral cooperation between the two nations have not, to date, extended to Spain's and Turkey's positions on the African continent.

The joint declaration agreed upon during the 2021 high-level summit in Ankara included a point on Africa. It stated: "The parties agree that bilateral cooperation in Africa can contribute to the economic transformation and sustainable development of the continent."⁴⁰ The mention of Africa is indeed significant as it signals the importance both countries place on the continent. However, the brevity and vagueness of the reference suggest that, despite the willingness to collaborate, there are no concrete initiatives. As the joint declaration shows, while there is a mutual recognition of the potential for cooperation, it appears that further efforts need to be made to turn this shared interest into tangible action.

In examining the potential impact of Turkey's African policies on Spain, it is crucial to consider three subject areas: the Maghreb region, the Sahel and trade and investment. While there were certainly other topics discussed during the interviews with public policy makers in Madrid, these domains represent critical points of interest and concern for Spanish policy makers. By delving deeper into Spain's priorities and sensitivities in these areas, we can better understand how Turkish policies may influence or intersect with Spanish interests.

7.1

The Maghreb

Turkey's stance regarding Morocco-Algeria hostility and the Western Sahara issue could have a direct impact on how Madrid perceives Ankara's newfound interest in Africa. If Turkey were to take a clear position in support of one of the parties, or if Ankara were to actively intervene to bring North African actors closer together, this would certainly attract Spain's attention and, most likely, would cause concerns. Up

³⁹ Jordi Joan Baños, "Turquía se vuelca en África", *La Vanguardia* (online), 24 October 2021, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20211024/7811956/turquia-vuelca-africa.html> (accessed 29 April 2023)

⁴⁰ La Moncloa, 2021c: 8-9

until now this has not been the case and Turkey has opted for a low-key profile on these sensitive North African topics, attempting to balance its relations with the two main players, Morocco and Algeria.

Turkey-Morocco relations are generally cordial, but neither country is a major partner for the other. Spanish observers see a mix of tensions and the exploration of new avenues of cooperation between Rabat and Ankara. In November 2020, Morocco introduced restrictions on imported Turkish goods, citing its trade deficit, and since 2020 there have been cross-accusations of protectionism between the two nations.⁴¹ In contrast, cooperation is particularly visible in the defence sector. Morocco has purchased Bayraktar Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) from Turkey, as well as armoured vehicles to modernise its ground forces.

Political changes in Morocco and broader regional transformations are also impacting this relationship. Under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, Turkey viewed the Islamist Moroccan Justice and Development Party (PJD) as a natural ally, given the Moroccan party's open inspiration from the AKP,⁴² and the fact that PJD led the Moroccan government from 2011 to 2021. However, PJD suffered a major blow in the 2021 elections, which can be seen as a loss for Turkey's influence in Rabat. Another element of Turkish-Moroccan relations observed by Spanish onlookers is the implications in the coming years of Morocco's normalisation with Israel, which is particularly visible in defence matters.⁴³ Yet, this process of normalisation could be compromised by the violence following the October 7th Hamas attacks and Israel's brutal retaliation.

Turkey-Algeria relations also have a nuanced dynamic in which both countries enjoy cordial relations, while also experiencing some challenges. In the last decade, there has been an increase in economic and defence cooperation between Algiers and Ankara, with Turkey being one of the top investors in Algeria, and Algeria being Turkey's fourth-largest supplier of natural gas.⁴⁴ In terms of regional issues, there have been some converging priorities, such as Turkey's and Algeria's support for

⁴¹ Wiam Markhouss, "Accord de libre-échange: le Maroc désarmé face à la déferlante turque", *La Vie Éco*, (online), 28 January 2019, <https://www.lavieeco.com/affaires/accord-de-libre-echange-le-maroc-desarme-face-a-la-deferlante-turque/> (accessed 02 May 2023);

Yasmina Allouche, "Morocco's restrictions on Turkish goods raise suspicions it's joined Saudi boycott", *Middle East Eye* (online), 21 October 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/morocco-turkey-saudi-arabia-boycott-goods> (accessed 02 May 2023)

⁴² Feriha Pereki, "The Applicability of the "Turkish Model" to Morocco: The Case of the Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD)", *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 3 (2012): 85-108, <https://www.insightturkey.com/articles/the-applicability-of-the-turkish-model-to-morocco-the-case-of-the-parti-de-la-justice-et-du-dveloppement-pjd> (accessed 29 April 2023)

⁴³ "Morocco, Israel signs first-ever defence agreement in Rabat", *Al Jazeera*, (online), 24 November 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/24/morocco-israel-sign-first-ever-defence-agreement-in-rabat> (accessed 29 April 2023)

⁴⁴ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Relations between Türkiye-Algeria*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye%E2%80%93algeria.en.mfa> (accessed 29 April 2023)

Palestine and a shared distaste regarding Khalifa Haftar's role in Libya. However, Algiers has been wary of Turkey's activism and direct involvement in Arab affairs, especially in Tunisia and Libya. This is even more problematic as some within Algeria's power structure view Turkey's post-2011 activism to be a projection of Islamist ideology.⁴⁵

When it comes to Western Sahara, Turkey maintains a low profile, particularly when compared to its active engagement in other regional crises. Despite Turkey having offered its mediation efforts in other conflict zones, there is little evidence of Ankara taking diplomatic steps toward supporting a resolution of the 50-year-old Western Sahara conflict. Recently, Turkey has expressed a willingness to facilitate dialogue between Morocco and Algeria, although the Polisario Front was not mentioned as part of the mediation efforts.⁴⁶

Official statements regarding Western Sahara from Turkish officials are rare. For instance, President Erdoğan commented in 2013 that Turkey does not, and will never, recognize the Polisario front.⁴⁷ Interestingly, following Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu's press conference in Rabat in May 2022, there was a report in the Moroccan press that Ankara was backing Morocco's positions regarding the Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara.⁴⁸ Then Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Tanju Bilgiç, issued a clarifying statement. The statement explained Turkey's support for a political solution of the Western Sahara issue within the framework of the relevant UN resolutions and through dialogue between the parties. Bilgiç's statement also emphasised Turkey's support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries in the region within their internationally recognised borders.⁴⁹ This incident was reported in the Algerian press as an attempt to "trap Turkey" and "harm Turkish-Algerian relations", with a Turkish official in charge of relations with the Maghreb being quoted on the matter.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Interview with an Algerian security expert (I17), February 2023

⁴⁶ Safaa Kasroui, "Turkish Ambassador: Western Sahara Dispute is 'Purely Artificial'", *Morocco World News*, (online), 16 November 2022, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2022/11/352413/turkish-ambassador-western-sahara-dispute-is-purely-artificial> (accessed 29 April 2023)

⁴⁷ "Turkey doesn't and will never support "Polisario front": Erdogan", *Morocco World News* (online), 03 June 2013, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2013/06/93232/turkey-doesnt-and-will-never-support-polisario-front-erdogan> (accessed 02 May 2023)

⁴⁸ Ouimaima Latrech, "Turkey Reaffirms Support for Morocco's Territorial Integrity", *Morocco World News* (online), 12 May 2022, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2022/05/348979/turkey-reaffirms-support-for-moroccos-territorial-integrity> (accessed 02 May 2023)

⁴⁹ T.C. Cezayir Büyükelçiliği / Ambassade de Türkiye à Alger, Facebook (online), 12 May 2022: <https://www.facebook.com/100064412480853/posts/377983631025383/?d=n> (accessed 02 May 2023)

⁵⁰ S. Oud Brahim, "Sahara Occidental: Comment le Maroc a voulu piéger la Turquie", *Le Jeune Indépendant*, (online), 13 May 2022, <https://www.jeune-independant.net/sahara-occidental-comment-le-maroc-a-voulu-pieger-la-turquie/> (accessed 02 May 2023)

7.2

The Sahel

The Sahel region represents an area of critical importance for Spain due to its proximity and its role as a major transit and origin point for migratory flows that reach the country's shores, particularly in the Canary Islands. Furthermore, since the 2010s the Sahel has been plagued by multifaceted crises which include security, environment, governance and underdevelopment issues. These challenges make the region a major security concern for Spain as manifested in the coverage of the Sahel in Spain's National Security Strategy released in 2021.⁵¹

Despite the withdrawal of French troops from Mali in 2022 and announcements from other countries such as Germany and the UK to follow suit,⁵² Spain maintained a significant presence in the region with 135 personnel integrated into the EU-led EUTM mission until May 2024. In fact, Spain had even taken a leadership role in the EU mission since January 2021. However, recent developments indicate a shift, as the European Union collectively decided not to extend the mandate of the EUTM Mali mission beyond May 18, 2024. This decision followed a strategic review and consultations with Malian authorities. Despite the withdrawal of Spanish forces, Spain remains concerned about the spiral of instability in the countries of the Sahel. The obvious tensions between two of Spain's main partners, France and Turkey, also do not help Spain's geopolitical position. French authorities, including President Emmanuel Macron, have accused Turkey of spreading anti-French sentiment in Africa with Macron referring to Turkey's agenda as "imperial" and "neo-colonial" during a visit to Algiers.⁵³ Turkish authorities have swiftly rejected these allegations.⁵⁴ In the interviews conducted with Spanish officials, Turkey was not viewed as a spoiler - or a stabiliser - in the Sahel. Madrid's perception of Turkey in the Sahel is more positive than the prevalent one in Paris.

In terms of soft and hard diplomatic power, Spain has limited capacities not only in the security situation in the Sahel but also in softening the tone of French-Turkish relations. Carefully navigating these complex relationships, promoting regional

⁵¹ Department of National Security of the Office of the Presidency of the Government (DSN), *National Security Strategy 2021* (Madrid, 2021), <https://www.dsn.gob.es/es/file/7272/download?token=miLM79u6> (accessed 02 May 2023)

⁵² Gabriel Rinaldi, "Germany to withdraw troops from Mali in 2024", *Politico* (online), 22 November 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-military-bundeswehr-pull-out-mali-olaf-scholz/> (accessed 02 May 2023)

⁵³ "Des déclarations de Macron en Algérie irritent la Turquie", *TSA* (online), 27 August 2022, <https://www.tsa-algerie.com/des-declarations-de-macron-en-algerie-irritent-la-turquie/> (accessed 02 May 2023)

⁵⁴ Adlène Meddi, "Ankara juge « inacceptables » les propos de Macron à Alger", *Le Point* (online), 28 August 2022, https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/ankara-juge-inacceptables-les-propos-de-macron-a-alger-28-08-2022-2487587_3826.php#11 (accessed 02 May 2023)

initiatives that will stabilise the Sahel and assuring the attention of the EU and even NATO on what Spain refers to as the alliance's "Southern Flank" is of utmost importance to Madrid.

7.3 Trade and Investment

The economic arena represents a crucial area where Spain and Turkey could either cooperate or compete, particularly concerning their increasing presence in Africa through trade and investment. The quality of Turkey's products has vastly improved in recent years while Spain's production costs remain lower than those of wealthier European nations. As a result, Spain and Turkey could potentially be competing for the same markets in Africa, particularly for African consumers who seek well-made products at an affordable cost.

However, this economic competition might give rise to joint endeavours, particularly if the respective strengths of companies lie in complementary fields. Inversely, Spanish firms already producing in Turkey with established Turkish partners may be able to develop new markets in Africa if those Turkish partners are doing business in Africa. While there is currently no clear evidence of major initiatives in the field of joint Turkish businesses and Spanish businesses working together in Africa, the dynamics of economic competition and the potential for cooperation are frequently mentioned in interviews with Spanish stakeholders based in Madrid and Africa. Due to Spain's geographical proximity to Africa, there is a genuine interest in Madrid for the continent's sustained economic growth. As such, Spain's perception of Turkey's role in Africa will not only depend on whether Turkish economic actors are viewed as partners or competitors for Spain, but also whether Turkey's policies and initiatives contribute altruistically to Africa's development. Many interviewees genuinely seek to understand if Turkey's presence in Africa is a stabilising force and whether Ankara is a partner for African countries in creating sustainable conditions for continued prosperity. As one Spanish official states: "Spain may have preferences on who the investors in Africa should be, but for us, it is even more important that Africa develops economically and socially."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Interview with an Africa-based Spanish diplomat (I2), January 2023

7.4

Beyond Traditional Priorities

The security situation affecting Morocco, Algeria and Western Sahara, stability and conflict in the Sahel and continental trade and investment represent the core of Spain's interests in Africa. However, it is important to stress that Turkey's presence in Africa extends beyond these areas. For instance, Turkey's involvement in Libya and the Horn of Africa, as well as its cultural, religious and educational diplomacy are of great significance when evaluating Ankara's presence on the continent. While these issues are also mentioned in interviews with Spanish officials, they are not considered areas where Turkey's and Spain's interests are either convergent or colliding.

Spanish stakeholders view these additional issues as worthy of exploration, but not necessarily as driving forces shaping Spain's perception of Turkey in Africa. Yet, these other regions of interest for Ankara might become relevant if they have an impact on the priorities of Spain's EU partners or the EU as a whole.

8.

Spain's Perceptions: Awareness but not Anxiety

While there is no single, unified position from Spanish policy making respondents, almost all see Turkey as a visible and active player on the African continent. Spanish interviewees stress that Turkey's presence in Africa has not gone unnoticed by any actor with an interest in Africa. Despite varying views on the implications of Turkey's moves in Africa, the respondents all agree that Ankara's presence is a significant factor in the continent's geopolitical landscape.

8.1

The Big Picture

Some interviewees emphasise an instrumental approach to Turkey's presence in Africa, pointing out that Turkey is in Africa to defend its interests and expand its markets.

Meanwhile, other interviewees highlight reputation and status as key drivers of Turkey's engagement on the continent. From this perspective, Turkey wants to be perceived as a global actor and presents itself as such in regions where it has been historically less present, such as in Sub-Saharan Africa. To that end, some Spanish respondents mention a more ideational and ideological dimension to Turkey's presence in Africa. Under President Erdoğan, Turkey is seen to position itself as a member of the Global South and/or the Muslim world, depending on the issue at hand.⁵⁶ From this perspective, Africa, and particularly Muslim Africa, can look to Turkey as a potential ally.

Lastly, some respondents stress that Africa could, consciously or not, serve as a substitute for Turkey's frustrations with the West. Turkey is more present in areas

⁵⁶ Interview with Turkey-based Spanish diplomat (I5), January 2023

where it feels welcomed and where it can share grievances with African leaders regarding Europe and the West – even though Turkey is a member of NATO and still aspires to become an EU member.

Perceptions of the challenges posed by Turkey’s engagement in Africa vary depending on the time frame considered. A seasoned Spanish ambassador specialising in African affairs suggests that, in the short term, competition with Turkey appears more visible with politics and ideology playing a bigger role than before – especially given Erdoğan's personality and political style.

However, when thinking about Turkey’s long-term engagement in Africa and its implications for Spain’s interests, the ambassador’s outlook is mainly positive, stating that:

“Spain's interest lies in the development, growth and job creation across the entire African continent. If Turkey’s investment contributes to these objectives, it is good for us.”

The ambassador further underscores:

“Africa requires massive investments that Europeans alone cannot provide. If Turkey is willing to invest, it should be welcomed. In any case, I would prefer the Turks to the Chinese.”⁵⁷

This ambassador is not the only respondent to express a more favourable view of Turkey’s engagement in Africa compared to China and Russia. Several interviewees have similar ideas regarding Turkey’s role in Africa. Yet, respondents also acknowledge that there are more critical European perspectives on Turkey’s presence in Africa coming from capitals such as Paris and Athens. Nonetheless, many Spanish policy makers continue to stress that Spain’s strong relationship with Turkey means that Madrid is less likely to view Ankara as a threat in Africa.⁵⁸

According to a Madrid-based Spanish diplomat, Spain is also paying attention to Turkey’s role in Latin America where Spain has a more established presence. Yet, the diplomat states, “Spain and Turkey share a true friendship, and we genuinely want things to go well for Turkey.”

A Turkish diplomat also confirmed this sentiment but regretted that Spain does not play a more vocal role in defending this cooperative approach in EU settings.⁵⁹ Giving a slightly more nuanced opinion, a Spanish diplomat who specialises in African affairs says: “Turkey goes its own way in Africa and elsewhere”, adding that: “[...] our two

⁵⁷ Interview with an Africa-based Spanish diplomat (I2), January 2023

⁵⁸ Interview with a Turkey-based Spanish diplomat (I4), January 2023

⁵⁹ Interview with a Turkish diplomat (I18), February 2023

countries pursue parallel paths that do not necessarily converge but also do not collide.”⁶⁰

While Turkey and Spain are generally on friendly terms, they have found themselves, at times, competing against each other on the global stage. One example of this was the vote in 2014 for the non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2015-16, in which Turkey, Spain and New Zealand competed. Despite Turkey’s active engagement in Africa, Spain ultimately won the seat, which bolstered Spain’s confidence in its diplomatic relations in Africa. Had African countries voted overwhelmingly in favour of Turkey, Spain’s perception of Turkey’s role in Africa could have become more complex and constrained.⁶¹

8.2 Security and Defence

Turkey's growing role in security and defence has been particularly noticeable in Africa. However, Africa-based Spanish diplomats comment that Turkey does not have a major presence in the areas and countries that Spain cares about most – Morocco, Algeria, the Sahel and West Africa – adding that if onlookers focus on Libya and the Horn of Africa, the view may be less positive, as Turkey is seen as a force supporting conflicting parties and even involved in regional competitions with Egypt and the UAE through proxy actors.⁶²

Another Africa-based Spanish diplomat notes that Spain’s perception of Turkey could be affected if Ankara becomes too “intimate” with Russia regarding Moscow’s and Ankara’s African policies.⁶³ Similarly, a Madrid-based Spanish diplomat expresses concerns that “Turkey seems to be able to tolerate Russia’s security policies, which Spain cannot.”⁶⁴ From these responses, it is clear that Spain perceives Russia as a major destabilising force in Africa and that Turkey’s role in Africa is likely to be assessed depending on the level of convergence between Turkey and Russia in their actions on the continent.

Regarding arms exports, Turkey is one of Spain’s main clients and, as such, Spain has a vested interest in maintaining positive relations with Turkey in this field. Moreover, a Turkey-based Spanish diplomat highlights that the two countries have different areas of specialisation when it comes to arms exports stating: “Spain’s exports are

⁶⁰ Interview with a Madrid-based Spanish diplomat (I8), January 2023

⁶¹ Interview with an Africa-based Spanish diplomat (I2), January 2023

⁶² Interview with Africa-based Spanish diplomat (I2, I3, I4, I10), January 2023

⁶³ Interview with a Madrid-based Spanish diplomat (I8), January 2023

⁶⁴ Interview with an Africa-based Spanish diplomat (I3), January 2023

strong on naval and Turkey on drones, we are not competing.”⁶⁵ Another Africa-based Spanish diplomat argues that Turkey’s export of UAVs is a positive development stating:

“It is preferable for African governments to have drones than not to have them, and it is preferable for them to be of a certain origin, like Turkish for example, rather than from other origins such as Iranian. And it is preferable that governments in the Sahel explore military cooperation with certain countries, like Turkey, rather than with hostile actors like the Russians.”⁶⁶

Madrid’s view of Turkey’s role in Africa is part of a broader analysis that identifies competitive and conflicting attitudes among emerging great or middle powers, including China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, India, Qatar and Turkey.⁶⁷ These countries compete for resources, influence, and political status on the African continent and also attempt to gain ground over actors that have an older presence and vested interest in Africa, such as Western European nations. This narrative of the "new scramble for Africa" is one way of looking at Turkey’s influence in Africa, as well as that of other emerging powers.

However, a different assessment of Turkey’s presence in Africa is one that emphasises African countries’ agency as African leaders choose their own partners and seek to diversify their own alliances. According to a Spanish diplomat with extensive experience in African affairs, Africans are aware that even good deals can become undesirable if they lead to over-dependence and noted that Turkey skilfully takes advantage of Western Europeans’ arrogance, rigidity and inability to promote themselves in Africa.⁶⁸

An Africa-based Spanish diplomat draws a comparison between Turkey’s involvement in Libya and its low-key approach to the Western Sahara conflict and tensions between Morocco and Algeria.⁶⁹ While Turkey is a key player in Libya and its actions could have major consequences for countries such as Italy and France, Ankara has a low profile regarding Morocco–Algeria tensions and its policies do not raise any warnings in Madrid. This point is also confirmed by a senior official working in an international organisation.⁷⁰ In the same vein, Turkey’s presence in Equatorial Guinea – one of Spain’s main points of interest in Sub-Saharan Africa – has been growing but remains mainly focused on education and trade, two issues that are not politically loaded.

⁶⁵ Interview with a Turkey-based Spanish diplomat (I4), January 2023

⁶⁶ Interview with an Africa-based Spanish diplomat (I10), January 2023

⁶⁷ Interviews with Madrid-based officials and diplomats (I2, I8, I9), January 2023

⁶⁸ Interview with a Madrid-based Spanish diplomat (I11), February 2023

⁶⁹ Interview with an Africa-based Spanish diplomat (I4), January 2023

⁷⁰ Interview with senior officials working for two distinct international organisations (I15, I16), February 2023

8.3

Economy

Turkey's growing economic presence in Africa is a key area where Spain may view Turkey as either a partner or a competitor. Although Spanish officials and stakeholders acknowledge Turkey's ambitions and the support Turkish companies receive from their government, some Spanish companies see Turkish policies as unfair competition.⁷¹ According to some trade experts, Turkish businesspeople have the full support of their state – sometimes even at the highest level – and certain sectors are heavily subsidised.⁷² It is noteworthy that Turkish Airlines has played a significant role in enhancing Turkey-Africa relations, particularly in trade and investment. Many interviewees express disappointment at the lack of direct flight connections between Spain and Sub-Saharan Africa.

While Spanish economic interests are more concentrated in North Africa, views on Sub-Saharan Africa vary. Some interviewees see it as an emerging destination with ample opportunities,⁷³ while others believe that most companies still prefer destinations with lower risks and higher returns.⁷⁴ This may explain why Spain is not particularly concerned about Turkey's economic presence in Africa. However, respondents identify the infrastructure and civil construction sectors as areas where competition between Spanish and Turkish companies may be more apparent. Due to lower costs, political influence and the desire to diversify partners, Turkey may have an advantage over other competitors, including Spanish firms.

Partnering with experienced companies could be a smart strategy to mitigate the perceived risks of investing and trading in Africa. Some interviewees suggest that this argument could facilitate joint ventures between Spanish and Turkish firms. However, there are only a few examples of this type of collaboration, except in cases where Spanish companies are already established in Turkey and have forged alliances with Turkish counterparts who are active in Africa. Moreover, Turkish firms are not the only potential partners available to Spanish businesses seeking to enter African markets. According to multiple interviewees, Moroccan companies are also well-positioned to serve as viable partners, particularly in West Africa and the Sahel.⁷⁵ In fact, discussions on how to actualise this triangular cooperation (Morocco-Spain-Africa) appear to be more advanced than those involving Turkey.⁷⁶ A Turkey-based

⁷¹ Interview with a Madrid-based diplomat and a senior official specialised on trade and investment (I8, I12), January and February 2023

⁷² Interviews with Madrid-based governmental officials specialised on trade and investment in Africa (I12, I14), February 2023

⁷³ Interview with a senior official specialised on international trade (I12), February 2023

⁷⁴ Interview with Madrid and Africa-based diplomats, (I2, I11), January 2023

⁷⁵ Interview with Africa-based Spanish diplomat (I10), January 2023

⁷⁶ Interview with senior officials specialised on international trade (I12, I14), February 2023

Spanish diplomat adds that the competition in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa takes place between Morocco and Turkey rather than between Spain and Turkey.⁷⁷

An area where trade policy makers may see Turkey as a potential competitor is in fisheries. Spain's fleet has traditionally fished along the West African coast. Since 2017, Turkey's presence in that area has increased as reported in the Turkish press.⁷⁸ However, none of the interviewees stated that maritime fishing competition is a contentious issue between Ankara and Madrid. In contrast, respondents underscore other fishing nations such as China as a far more imminent threat to the sustainability of Spain's fishing sector and its presence in Africa.⁷⁹

Finally, a case that raises interest in Spain is that Turkey is one of the fastest-growing economic markets for Equatorial Guinea, a country tied to Spain by a joint colonial past. Yet, despite Ankara showing interest in Equatorial Guinea, Turkey only accounts for 2.9 per cent of Malabo's total imports and lags behind traditional trade partners such as Nigeria, Spain, China and the US.⁸⁰ A Spanish diplomat notes the global geopolitical competition between the US and China in Equatorial Guinea. This diplomat discusses China's potential interest in opening its first naval base in the Atlantic in Equatorial Guinea and posits that the possible building of this military base may explain Turkey's desire to invest in the Atlantic-African nation.⁸¹

8.4

Soft Power and Development Cooperation

In discussions about Turkey's role in Africa, one theme that frequently emerges is Ankara's use of soft power. Across multiple interviews, diplomats and officials point to Turkey's diversified foreign policy toolbox which includes everything from school-building and cultural diplomacy to religious outreach and even soap operas. These efforts, they say, have allowed Turkey to establish a significant presence in many African countries and to wield creative influence across many fields.

⁷⁷ Interview with a Turkey-based Spanish diplomat (I5), January 2023

⁷⁸ "Turkish fishermen hear the call of the seas in Mauritania", *Hürriyet Daily News* (online), 24 August 2017, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-fishermen-hear-the-call-of-the-seas-in-mauritania-117142> (accessed 11 September 2023)

⁷⁹ Interview with an Africa-based diplomat and a senior official specialised on international trade (I12, I14), January and February 2023

⁸⁰ Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), *Equatorial Guinea: Observatory of Economic Complexity-Imports (2023)*, <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/gnq?flowSelector1=flow1&yearlyTradeFlowSelector=flow1> (accessed 11 September 2023)

⁸¹ Interview with an Africa-based Spanish diplomat (I6), January 2023

Spanish diplomats and aid officials are aware of Turkey's activism in some areas (education, health, humanitarian assistance) and report that coordination between the two countries is rare. This is partly because Turkey is absent from many of the international meetings that Spanish policy makers attend with other EU representatives and non-European representatives in Africa such as Canada and Japan.⁸²

Interviewees also point to significant differences between Turkey and Spain when treating gender-related issues. This divide became more apparent in 2021 after Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – an area in which Spanish international aid has been particularly active. Similarly, Africa-based Spanish diplomats explain that Turkey will rarely be a partner when denouncing human rights abuses in African countries, as Ankara's policy on the continent is marked by non-interference and preservation of the status quo.⁸³

Experts on international development note that there are significant differences in the models utilised by Turkey and Spain in Africa. Turkey tends to focus on bilateral cooperation that delivers short-term results and occasionally incorporates cultural and heritage initiatives. In contrast, Spain's aid agency prefers multilateral actions that take a longer-term view and aim to promote structural transformations.⁸⁴ While these approaches could be complementary, there has been little discussion or joint action to explore their potential synergy.

One area in which Turkey's influence is growing rapidly is in education. Respondents stress that education is a key field in which Turkey seeks to increase its visibility and reputation among Africa's emerging elites.⁸⁵ However, the education sector is not an area where Spain is present in Africa, so interviewees report there is little sense of competition between the two countries.

Spanish onlookers relate that Turkey's government has been determined in recent years to eliminate the influence of Gülen Movement schools in Africa and has been quick to integrate former Gülenist school networks into the Erdoğan-allied Maarif foundation.

In 2018, the government of Equatorial Guinea transferred schools in that country which had been operated by the Fethullah Gülen educational network to the Maarif Foundation. This move by Malabo resulted in Ankara publicly thanking the African

⁸² Interviews with Madrid and Africa-based diplomats (I4, I13), January and February 2023

⁸³ Interviews with Africa-based diplomats (I4, I10), January 2023

⁸⁴ Interview with a Madrid-based diplomat (E13), February 2023

⁸⁵ Interviews with Madrid and Africa-based diplomats (E2, E6, E8, E10, E11), January 2023

nation.⁸⁶

Respondents discuss religious diplomacy in conjunction with Turkey's massive investment in education and cultural cooperation. Again, this was seen as an area where Spain and Turkey are unlikely to coincide. Yet, two of the interviewees explain that even if religious diplomacy in Africa is a file that Madrid will never work on, they prefer "Turks doing it rather than other Muslim countries," implicitly referring to Wahhabi extremism popular in Gulf countries.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ "Thanks from Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Çavuşoğlu to the Government of Equatorial Guinea for Maarif Schools", *Türkiye Maarif Vakfı* (online), 27 July 2020, <https://turkiyemaarif.org/uploads/editions/files/164367683e2bd3.pdf> (accessed 02 May 2023)

⁸⁷ Interview with Madrid-based diplomats (E8, E11), January and February 2023

9.

Ankara's Growing Relevance and Madrid's Limited Leverage

Madrid's relaxed perception of Ankara's actions in Africa is due to four main factors: Turkey's limited activity in areas that are sensitive to Spain (the Morocco-Algeria rivalry and the Western Sahara conflict in particular); the genuine friendliness inherent in Turkish-Spanish relations; the divergence within their priorities in Africa (which avoids colliding interests) and the fact that Spain does not have the capacities or the ambition to engage in geopolitical competition in Africa with other global or regional powers.

Yet, Spain's present stance cannot be taken for granted. Spain's view will be shaped by the perceptions of other EU countries as well as by Turkey's potential presence in areas that are more central to Spain's interests. As such Madrid's and Ankara's priorities may one day clash. Moreover, Spain is aware that an antagonistic relationship between Turkey and some of its European allies could entail a threat to Madrid's own interests, particularly if such antagonistic relations would contribute to destabilising its immediate vicinity (the Maghreb) or the neighbours of its neighbours (the Sahel). Consequently, Spain will likely monitor closely the position of Turkey in Africa to prevent such destabilisation from occurring.

While events and geopolitical moves in Africa used to have minimal impact on EU-Turkey and Spain-Turkey relations, in recent years much has changed. Africa's growing impact on international affairs and the positions of non-African powers on the continent will continue to grow. Africa could either be an opportunity for cooperation between Turkey and Spain or an area for unhealthy competition and hostile actions. As explained, Spain would prefer the former and if the key actors were to allow it, could even foster the creation of dialogue spaces and cooperation to prevent the latter. This goal, fully within the scope of Spain's interests, goes beyond what the country can achieve on its own.

Abbreviations

AECID	<i>Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation</i>
AKP	<i>Justice and Development Party</i>
AU	<i>African Union</i>
BBVA	<i>Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria</i>
COP27	<i>Climate Change Conference</i>
EADRCC	<i>Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre</i>
ECOWAS	<i>Economic Community of West African States</i>
EEC	<i>European Economic Community</i>
EEZs	<i>Exclusive Economic Zones</i>
FDI	<i>Foreign Direct Investments</i>
NATO	<i>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</i>
ODA	<i>Official Development Assistance</i>
PJD	<i>Islamist Moroccan Justice and Development Party</i>
SADR	<i>Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic</i>
TİKA	<i>Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency</i>
UAV	<i>Unmanned Aerial Vehicles</i>
UN	<i>United Nations</i>

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