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Analyses

A Vision for the Future of Turkish- Algerian Relations: Convergence, Cooperation and Coordination

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During the past few years, Algeria's foreign policy towards regional issues has been increasingly parallel to that of Turkey. [Turkish presidential press service]

As one of the key actors of the African continent in terms of its demography, geopolitical location and size, Algeria could be a key partner for Turkey in political, economic and military areas. There is a number of areas where both countries can be interested in long-term cooperation. With their similar approach to the regional crises, especially to the Libyan crisis, the two countries have a principled and inclusive stance thanks to their foreign policy principles. In this sense, the steps taken for the relations of these two Mediterranean countries with France and for the solution of the Libyan crisis are important, as they show the common aspects in their current agenda.

However, with an economy that is heavily dependent on natural gas and oil revenues, one of the main priorities of Algeria is to diversify its economy thus creating new job opportunities for its population of 44 million. To achieve these goals, the vision to be established for the future will include increasing the number of Turkish companies currently operating in Algeria, enhancing the commercial relations and encouraging mutual investment between the two countries. In addition, coordination in regional policies, cooperation in the defence industry and a common vision in foreign policy are of vital importance for the future of relations.

On the other hand, Turkey can increase its influence in the region and its volume of trade with Europe thanks to the cost-effective and secure trade routes through Algeria,

which has an important geopolitical position in the Mediterranean. Again, considering that Algeria is also a gateway to Sub-Saharan Africa, Turkey's access to friendly countries and developing markets in Africa within the scope of its African policies may reflect its strong cooperation with Algeria. (1)

A Turkish-Algerian Approach to Regional Issues

Historically, Algeria and Turkey had not diverged sharply in terms of foreign policy. During the past few years, Algeria's foreign policy towards regional issues has been increasingly parallel to that of Turkey. This is mainly a result of common foreign policy principles such as territorial integrity and non-interventionism in other countries' domestic affairs. There were also strong cultural and historical bonds that allowed the two countries to somewhat prevent foreign policy related differences. In order for Algeria and Turkey to initiate a rather constructive foreign policy direction, there has to be further integration in their regional policies in line with these common principles, policy choices and interests.

The Libyan Crisis

Algeria, which has opposed military intervention since the beginning of the Libyan crisis, has supported the political dialogue process between the parties and has taken a clear stance against any foreign intervention in Libya. Moreover, Algeria engaged in the Libyan crisis through regional and international umbrella organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU), but also strived to be a part of the local solution mechanisms with a separate emphasis on the regionalism of the crisis. As a matter of fact, the increasing conflicts and the emergent terrorist groups due to the power vacuum in Libya not only weakened the environment of trust and stability in the country, but also became a serious security threat to neighbouring states. In the following period, the active involvement of regional actors such as Egypt and Morocco in the Libyan crisis, as well as non-regional actors such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey and Russia, called into question Algeria's indifferent Libya policies. (2) The Algerian government, taking concrete steps in the face of this state of play, made some critical changes through a constitutional referendum on 1 November 2020. According to the relevant article in the new constitution adopted, the Algerian army will be able to participate in cross-border operations of the UN, the AU and the Arab League with the approval of two-thirds of the parliament. This constitutional amendment came to the fore as a necessary response against armed groups in Libya

and the Sahel as well as the wave of illegal immigrants that has become difficult to control. (3)

Thus, Algeria's indifferent policies towards Libya that prioritised diplomatic solutions were replaced by limited interventionism due to national security concerns. The increasing violent activities and the rise of terror groups in Libya has been one of the most serious security concerns for Algeria. The attacks on the Tiganurin oil field in In Amenas in January 2013 marked a turning point in the government's policies towards Libya. (4) The Al-Mourabitoun organisation, against whom Algeria has been fighting in the Sahara and Sahel regions for a long time, claimed responsibility for the attacks where 150 Algerian citizens were captured and 40 workers were killed. The strong ties between the leader of the organisation, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are also noteworthy to Algerian decision-makers. Therefore, the situation in the western and southern borders of the country urged Algeria to increase its border control measures and military spending. Algeria is said to have spent over \$500 million in order to prevent illegal immigration and terrorist activities on the Libyan border. (5) Following a meeting with the Prime Minister of the Government of National Accord (GNA), Fayeaz al-Serraj, in January 2020, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune stated that any attack on the capital city of Tripoli is a "red line" to Algeria. This comment was a direct message to Khalifa Haftar who has been trying to seize the Libyan capital from the GNA. Likewise, the memory of a bloody civil war in the 1990s highlights the national security concerns of Algeria, which is already fragile politically. The possibility of radical and so-called Islamist groups, which regained their habitat as a result of the civil war and conflicts in Libya, expanding their sphere of influence to and within Algeria reminds the almost every part of the country of the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) and the civil war experience.

On the other hand, the change in the Algerian military doctrine is somewhat similar to Turkey's political activism in Libya. In the beginning, Turkey, just like Algeria, approached all regional stakeholders in post-Gaddafi Libya at an equal distance and maintained its neutral stance, emphasizing the importance of the political process at every opportunity. The Turkish government, which supports the UN-recognised GNA in Libya with the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) signed in the city of Skhirat, Morocco under the auspices of the UN in December 2015, also signed the Deal for Maritime Jurisdiction and Security with the Libyan government in November 2019, against the violations of rights and breach of international law by the bloc led by the

Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean. Since then, the Turkish government has been providing military and logistical support to Tripoli, which has been subject to the increasing attacks and the coup attempt of Khalifa Haftar, in order to keep the legitimate administration in office and to protect its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean (i.e. the Turkey-Libya Maritime Deal), which it approaches as a national security issue. (6)

Likewise, Algeria approached Haftar with suspicion and concern, whom it saw as the main culprit of the loss of lives and the internal division until 23 October 2020, when the armistice was concluded. In fact, in the eyes of Algeria, Haftar turned the neighbouring state of Libya into an unstable region and a breeding ground for terror as a result of the conflicts on the Algerian border and the internal upheaval he caused. In addition, the involvement of non-regional actors such as the UAE, Russia and France in the Libyan crisis through Haftar is another issue that disturbed Algerian decision-makers who consider the crisis as a regional problem. Haftar's collaboration with Madkhali-Salafi groups, which gained popularity in the country after the operations against the Islamic State (IS), is perceived as a serious threat by Algeria due to the ideology that these groups represent and their potential for radicalisation in the future. This is due to the belief that the rise of the Madkhali-Salafists in Libya would encourage other members in Algeria with the same view and ideology, and in turn empower them. (7) For Algerian decision-makers, such a development would allow for the indirect intervention of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Algeria due to the relations of these groups with the latter two.

Relations with France

Algeria and Turkey's relations with France have taken a problematic turn following France's regional policies and the "bill against Islamist separatism" prepared after the initiatives of President Emmanuel Macron. (8) Because of his recent discourses and references, Macron, as one of the leading names behind increased Islamophobic rhetoric in Europe, has received strong reactions from both countries. The draft bill, which was put to the vote in the French parliament on 16 February, was adopted with 347 votes for; and 151 against. (9) The emergence of the bill is largely due to the fact that the Macron administration directly attributes the terrorist attacks that occurred in certain locations in France on religious motives. The law to be enacted in line with this approach aims at reducing the influence of Turkish, Algerian and Moroccan imams on the Muslim population in France, and provides for the strict supervision of mosques.

According to French officials, it is estimated that 1,800 of 2,400 mosques in France are under the influence of imams from these countries. (10) However, France's Operation Barkhane in Mali and Niger since 2014 has been increasing the influence of the so-called Islamist groups in the southern borders of Algeria. From the Algerian point of view, France is on one hand the source of the crisis environment in Libya due to its support for Haftar as well as its double standard diplomacy with Libya, and the main driver of radicalism in the southern borders of the country as a result of its military presence in Mali on the other.

Moreover, as one of the main actors of the anti-Turkey camp in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean, France is seeking ways to consolidate alliances in these regions into a political bloc, and despite openly supporting putschist Haftar, criticises Turkey's relations with the legitimate government recognised by the UN and considers them illegal. Macron and the mentality he represents, whereby islamophobia and xenophobia are institutionalised as foreign policy principles of France, have also been trying to develop oppressive practices against the Turkish diaspora in France.

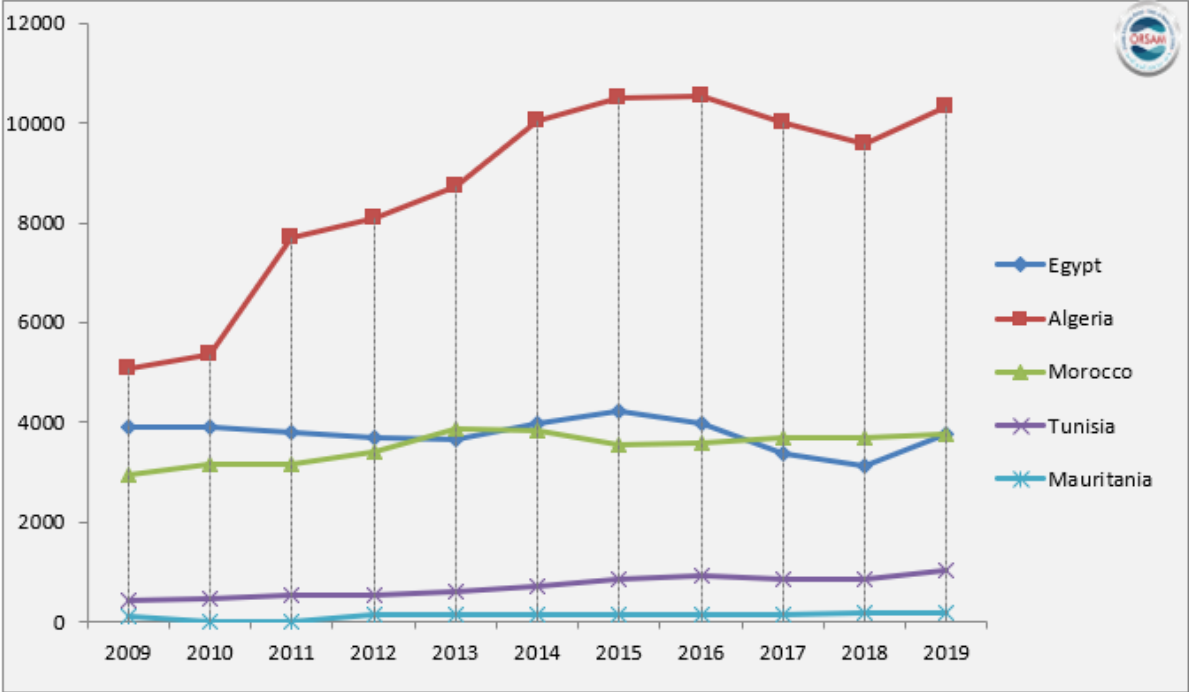
Turkish-Algerian Cooperation: A Future Perspective

Turkey pays special economic attention to Algeria within the framework of its African policy, and the country continues to be among the rising powers in the North African region thanks to its natural resources and demographic power. Turkey and Algeria can play a leading role in regional development through energy resources, new shipping routes and economic partnerships with other regional actors. Moreover, enhancing the military power of the two countries through cooperation in military training and the defence industry has the potential to change the regional balance in the Middle East and North Africa.

Military Cooperation

The most important area of cooperation for shaping a vision for the future shared by Turkey and Algeria and increasing their regional influence is partnership in defence and military. Algeria has one of the strongest armies in North Africa after Egypt and the most striking security establishment in the region with its institutional structure, equipment, armament data and trained soldiers. Regional instability, competition with Morocco, and the country's civil war experience shaped the approach of the Algerian army that prioritises security. In this context, Algeria has had the highest military spending in North Africa countries in the last decade.

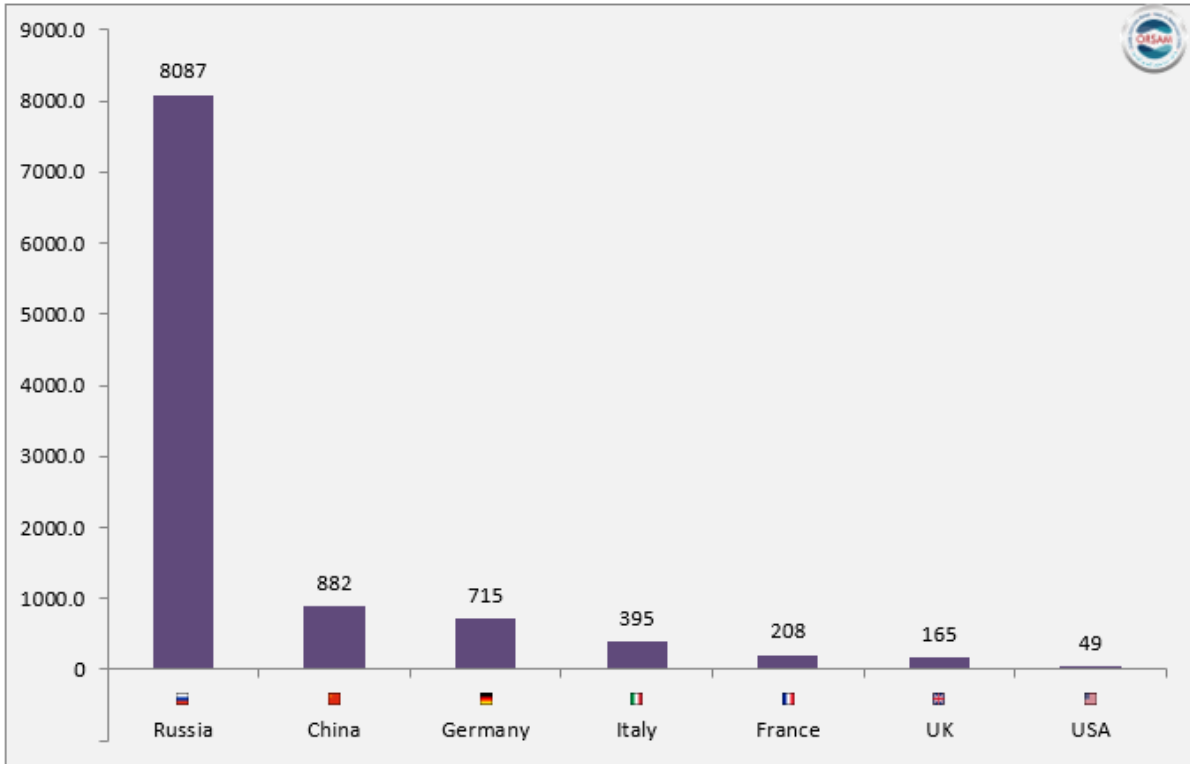
Military Spending of North African Countries (2009-2019)



SIPRI (million dollars)

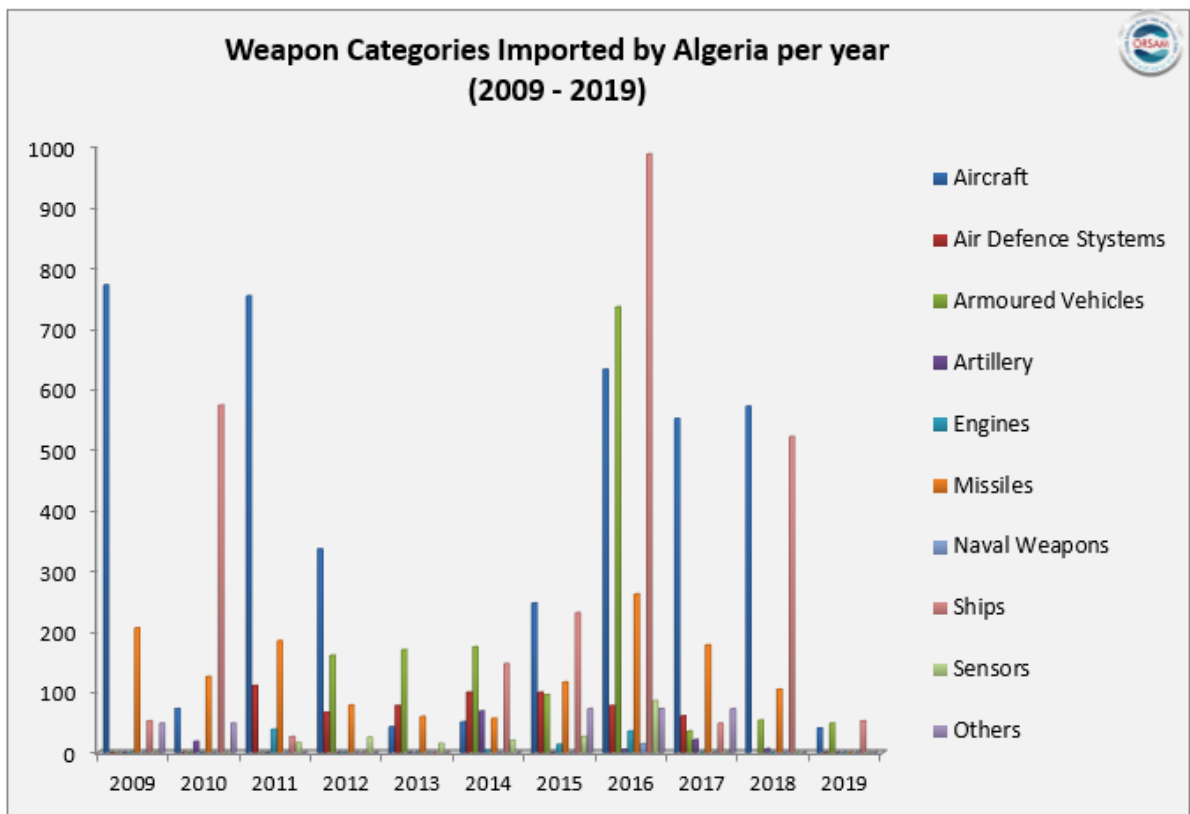
At the same time, Algeria aims to take steps in the area of defence industry in line with its evolving military doctrine and is in search of new suppliers in addition to actors such as Russia, China and Germany, from whom it supplies the majority of its armament. Algeria, which has an annual average of \$ 10 billion in military expenditure, imports approximately 67% of its arms from Russia. For Algeria, which signed a deal with Russia for SU-35 and SU-57 aircrafts, air force equipment makes up the largest share in the arms imports in the last ten years. (11) In addition to making agreements with China for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), frigates and corvettes, Algeria also conducts arms trade with Germany in areas such as special military equipment and military land vehicles. (12) Looking at the weapon categories in the weapons import data of Algeria, it is seen that aircrafts, ships, armoured vehicles and missiles have a large volume. Against the increasing armament efforts of Morocco, Algeria imports more weapons due to national security concerns and pays special attention to equipping its army with modern weapons.

Arms Exporters to Algeria (2009-2019)



SIPRI (million dollars)

Weapon Categories Imported by Algeria per year (2009-2019)

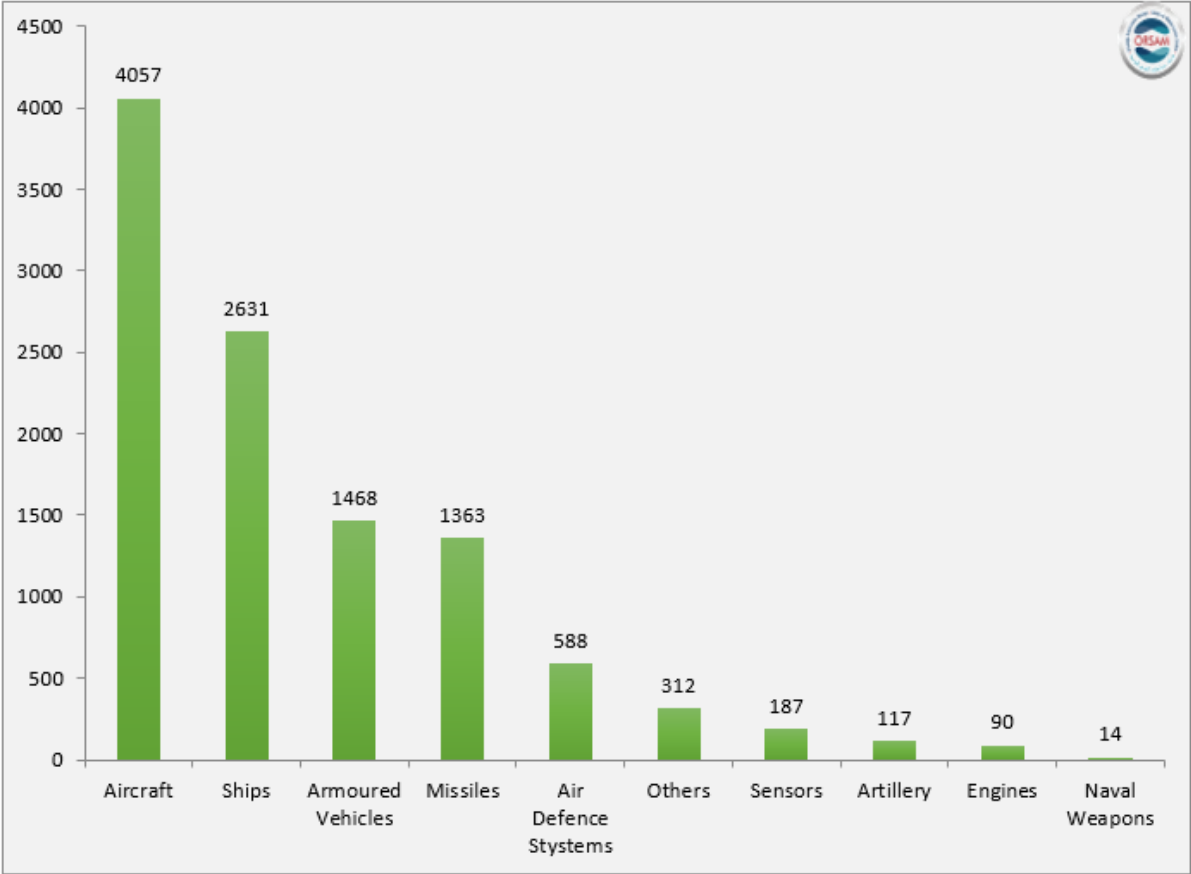


SIPRI (million dollars)

At this point, it is critical for Algeria to expand its inventory, especially in terms of UAVs, which are important game changers in modern battle fields and will be of great importance for Algeria's national security. Turkey has made significant progress in this

technological field in recent years, and could be one of the potential suppliers for Algeria. As in the case of Turkey’s similar trade with other friendly nations, Ankara would be willing to make technology transfers to Algeria, which in the future can develop its own aerial defence equipment systems.

Weapon Categories Imported by Algeria per year (2009-2019)



SIPRI (million dollars)

Algeria attaches importance not only to armament, but also to having a dynamic military force and an active army. In this context, the Algerian army, having restructured its special forces in 2015, organises and oversees trainings in countries such as Russia, Germany and Turkey within the framework of military cooperation agreements. The military training cooperation agreement between Turkey and Algeria, outlined in 2003 and signed in 2009, covers issues such as officer training, joint exercises and exchange of intelligence between the two countries. (13)

On the other hand, the announcement by the Turkish and Algerian authorities of the joint action aimed at establishing stability by combating armed organisations and warlords in the Libyan crisis and the objectives of increasing cooperation in the defence industry, show that the two countries consider military and security cooperation to be strategic and critical. (14) Especially in North Africa, where France

has lost its previous influence in the region and the environment of instability is widespread, the cooperation between Turkey and Algeria has the potential to change the regional balances thanks to their strong militaries and defence industries. It can be maintained that the success of the Turkish Armed Forces and the Turkish defence industry in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh will make Algeria's military rapprochement to Turkey easier. Also, the common concerns of the two countries about the policies of similar actors and about the regional crises make military cooperation even more strategic.

Economic Cooperation

Algeria has important economic potential in North Africa with its large surface area stretching from the Mediterranean to the Sahara Desert, its hydrocarbon resources and mines, and its young population of 44 million. Algeria's economy is heavily dependent on the energy sector. Hydrocarbon products constitute 97% of the country's export revenues, 45% of the gross national product (GNP) and two-thirds of the budget revenues. (15) This dependency results in a fragile economic structure that is easily affected by fluctuations in oil prices. Algeria, which has to buy many products from abroad due to insufficient agricultural production and industrial infrastructure, has been importing more and more over the years to meet its needs. However, although its traditional trade partners are France and EU countries, there has been an increase of trade with and investment from China and Turkey in recent years. (16)

Currently, the trade volume between Turkey and Algeria is around \$2.5-3 billion. Turkey has a %5 share in Algeria's imports and approximately %2 in exports. In 2018, although Algeria was Turkey's second largest trading partner in the African continent, Turkey's share in Algerian foreign trade was not at the targeted level. The authorities of the two countries stated that they aim to increase the trade volume to \$5 billion in the short term, (17) and underlined the necessity of an increasing impetus in economic relations. In this context, President Erdogan made a speech to Algerian businesspeople as part of his visit to Algeria, which he visited twice in the last three years, and said that necessary steps should be taken for a free trade agreement and the enhancement of economic relations in line with "the desire to produce and move forward together". (18)

One of the latest examples of these developments was the ratification of Algerian government of the maritime agreement, which was signed by the two countries 23

years ago, on 25 May 1998. While the agreement was approved by Turkey years ago, the Algerian leadership did not approve it until the recent decision of President Tebboune who signed the agreement and sent it for publication at the official gazette on 5 May 2021. This move could be a turning point in the trade between the two countries as they will be able to allow the transportation of passengers and commercial goods. The agreement also includes ports investment activities which Turkey has a good record of abroad. (19) After this development, it is expected that the commercial relations between the two countries will develop in a way that includes different dimensions and will reach the targeted level of \$5 billion in a short time.

It is observed that investments and foreign trade largely shape the economic cooperation between Turkey and Algeria. While Turkey mainly imports hydrocarbon resources such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Algeria, exports consist of automotive sub-industry products, piston engines, construction materials, iron and steel products, petrochemical products, textiles and food products.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention the increasing role of energy in the trade cooperation between Turkey and Algeria. In recent years, there have been new partnerships between the two countries in the field of energy and the trade of industrial products. At this point, Turkey wants to diversify its LNG supply and, in this context, attaches great importance to Algeria. Turkey imported the most natural gas from Algeria with 2 billion and 991 million cubic metres between January and June 2020. (20) Increasing the share of LNG in natural gas imports will advance the Turkish-Algerian partnership in the field of energy. Additionally, in the energy sector, an agreement was made in 2018 between Algeria's national energy company, SONATRACH, and Turkish companies Rönesans and Bayegan for an investment of \$1 billion in petrochemicals in the Yumurtalık Free-Trade Zone in Adana. (21) With the raw materials from Algeria, the objective is the annual production of 450 thousand tons of polypropylene in the free-trade zone. Polypropylene is a thermo-plastic polymer used in various industries such as automotive spare parts, textile and food packaging (22).

On the other hand, another area that stands out regarding the trade between the two countries is the iron and steel industry. Tosyalı Holding, one of the leading companies in Turkey in the iron and steel industry, has made and is still making investments in Algeria since 2013 through the "Mega Project" of \$500 million in the first stage, \$250 million in the second stage and \$1.6 billion in the third stage, and meets the various

needs of Turkey and Algeria in the steel industry, especially in the construction sector. (23) Likewise, ÖZMERT, a Turkish-Algerian company, has been investing in the Tammazoura industrial zone in Ain Temouchent since 2017 in the iron and steel sector. (24)

Turkey also has significant investments in Algeria's textile industry. In this context, the investments of Taypa company draw attention. With the initiative, Tayal Spa, founded in partnership with Algeria, a textile production facility worth approximately \$1.5 billion was established in the industrial zone of Sidi Khettab in the Relizane province of Algeria. (25) The facility, which is the largest textile production centre in Europe and the Mediterranean, aims at providing employment to 10 thousand people in the first stage, and 25 thousand people in ten years. (26)

Lastly, one of the areas that can act as an important catalyst in the trade cooperation of the two countries is the construction sector. At this point, Turkey, with its world's leading contracting companies, desires to share its experience with Algeria. (27) For Algeria, cooperation with Turkey is important due to its developing economy and young population, and the subsequent need for housing which is increasing and diversifying. In this context, more than 30 Turkish construction companies in Algeria have undertaken various superstructure and infrastructure projects and made investments in the housing projects that Algeria needs. (28)

In addition to this, Algeria is an important actor together with Tunisia for the Europe-Africa sea routes to be established between Italy and Turkey. With the route defined as the Turkey-Italy-Tunisia trade corridor, Algerian products will reach different markets via these countries and Turkish and Italian products will reach Sub-Saharan African countries via Algeria. (29) This sea route, which has great geopolitical and geostrategic potential, will allow the development of trade in the Mediterranean and the enrichment of riparian countries. The strategic location of Turkey and Algeria with regards to the Europe-Africa-Asia transport routes should be considered as another factor that will present opportunities for economic cooperation.

Conclusion

Issues such as the Libyan crisis, the power struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean, China's growing influence in Africa, the wave of immigrants to EU countries, France's gradual loss of influence in Africa, as well as the instability and the fight against armed organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa called into question Algeria's regional position. Algeria's geopolitical position between the Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa, its natural resources, its young and large population and its strong army in the region make its position strategic in the regional context.

The growing importance of Algeria during the past decade has been changing the regional power structure. This is also in parallel to the Turkey's rise as a regional power while France's influence in the region diminishes. In this equation, it can be observed that Turkey and Algeria have common regional interests and the two countries' foreign policies have been overlapping in many respects. Turkey's involvement in the Libyan crisis for energy security reasons in the Eastern Mediterranean and its support for the GNA in line with the "Blue Homeland" doctrine, and Algeria's perception of the instability in neighbouring Libya as a threat to its national security bring the two countries together in the context of security.

As a result, Turkish-Algerian relations play a regionally critical role for the future thanks to their common perspectives and security concerns, as well as the opportunities of military and economic cooperation of great potential. Thus, the utilisation of cooperation opportunities on common ground and the construction of a vision for the future by decision-makers will both end regional instability and change the balance of regional power. Enhancing cooperation and customising their regional policies will serve the interests of both Turkey and Algeria in the face of growing uncertainty in the wider MENA region as well as the Mediterranean.

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(27) "Türk müteahhitleri dünyanın en iyileri arasında" ("Turkish contractors are among the best in the world"), *Anadolu Agency*, 23 August 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turk-muteahhitleri-dunyanin-en-iyileri-arasinda/1237859> (accessed 6 August 2021).

(28) "Müteahhite yurt dışından iş var: Cezayir'deki konutlar tamamlandı" ("There is work for the contractor from abroad: Housing in Algeria is completed"), *Yeni Şafak*, 4 July 2020, <https://www.yenisafak.com/ekonomi/muteahhite-yurt-disindan-is-var-cezayirdeki-konutlar-tamamlandi-3547852> (accessed 6 August 2021).

(29) Michaël Tanchum, "Italy and Turkey's Europe-to-Africa Commercial Corridor," *AIES*, 25 August 2020, <https://www.aies.at/download/2020/AIES-Fokus-2020-10.pdf> (accessed 6 August 2021).