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## **Turkey's COVID-19 Diplomacy : International Cooperation in the Age of Global Health and Economic Crisis**

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought very unexpected challenges in 2020 from health issues to economic and humanitarian crisis. These challenges make countries spend more energy to handle difficulties properly. In fact, no one has a capacity to confront those new or aggravated global challenges individually. International cooperation in the age of global health and economic crisis has become more imminent to diminish national and global repercussions. Turkey, as a rising middle power,<sup>1</sup> has also suffered a lot because of the global pandemic. On the other hand, Ankara has initiated active diplomacy and global engagement strategy to increase its globality<sup>2</sup> and to decrease its suffering with the help of international cooperation.

As many countries across the World, Ankara has faced the two big challenges because of the pandemic. The first one is a health crisis in the country. Despite growing concerns and questioning of transparency, Ankara was not that bad in its handling of the first wave of the pandemic from the mid-March to late May. Turkey put severe restrictions and partial lockdowns to take control of the pandemic in the first wave. Despite



International Trade  
and Cooperation



Turkey



2015



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1. Jeffrey Robertson, "Middle-power Definitions: Confusion Reigns Supreme", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 4, 2017, pp. 355–370.

2. Selçuk Çolakoğlu, "From Antalya to Osaka: Assessing Turkey's "Globality" and Performance in the G20", *The Global*, November 20, 2019.

declining state capacity, deinstitutionalization, and political polarization and mistrust between the government and the opposition in recent years, Turkey had relatively lower fatality rates than many “similar” countries.<sup>3</sup> Turkey’s hospital capacity and reaching a proper treatment was not a big issue in the first wave during last spring. According to the Turkish Ministry of Health, as of August 25, 2020, Turkey has a total 6.5 million COVID-19 cases with 6,163 fatalities. Ankara has closely followed the international community for their combat strategies against pandemic and is open to any kind of international cooperation.

The second big challenge for Turkey during the pandemic and so on is the shrinking economy. This has pushed Ankara to open more cooperation with big economies and international financial institutions to overcome economic difficulties at home.

Turkey has played highly active global engagements from the beginning of the pandemic for certain motivations. In fact, a number of state-endorsed Turkish institutions have assumed prominence in Turkey’s humanitarian diplomacy activities, together with a large number of humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This substantial investment in humanitarian diplomacy is evidenced by Turkey’s rise to 3rd place in recent years among donor governments delivering international humanitarian aid.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Ankara has pursued a dynamic humanitarian diplomacy in the pandemic to increase “soft power” capacity with its advantageous medical equipment production. Turkey’s self-sufficiency in those areas and the relative success in fighting the pandemic is a big advantage. The Turkish government has had three certain purposes for its active “corona diplomacy” during the pandemic.

### **1) Getting sympathy across the World and creating leverage to fix its problems with some EU & NATO countries**

By adopting a very active corona diplomacy, the Turkish government consisted by the Justice and Development Party, or AKP and the Nationalist Action Party, or MHP has tried to remedy damaged international relations

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3. Evren Balta and Soli Özel, “The Battle Over the Numbers: Turkey’s Low Case Fatality Rate”, *Institut Montaigne*, May 4, 2020.

4. “Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014”, *OCHA*, September 10, 2014. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2014>

as well as to reshape the image of the country globally. As Ankara sends medical aid to scores of countries, Turkey wants to improve ties with NATO and/or the European Union (EU) members like the United States, Italy, Spain, Britain, and France, which have soured over many issues including Turkey's active policies in the Eastern Mediterranean, the migration flows from Turkey to the EU, and Turkish military involvement in Libya.<sup>5</sup> With the United States, the political gains sought by Turkey through medical aid are not a secret. Ankara wants Washington to acquiesce to the Turkish government purchase of the Russian S-400 defense system while the United States wants Turkey to resolve several bilateral issues of contention and improve its human rights practices.<sup>6</sup> The move also helped fuel the AKP-MHP government's domestic narrative that Turkey is now in a position help major powers in Europe as well as the United States struggling to cope with the global outbreak.

Despite past tensions between the two countries, Turkey has made efforts to help Israel amid the COVID-19 outbreak, flying stranded Israelis and Palestinians back to their home country, and supplying Israel with medical equipment. Turkish medical aids were also sent to the Palestinian territories.<sup>7</sup>

China and Turkey have further strengthened their cooperation in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic and the solidarity will have a lasting effect on their relationship. Chinese President Xi Jinping said in April 2020 in a phone call with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that China would continue to support Turkey in its fight against the pandemic in line with its needs, and facilitate its purchase of medical supplies in China.<sup>8</sup>

The corona diplomacy does not necessarily bring always positive outcomes for Turkey. There were several cases where some extra problems with other countries were created. Yerevan denied in April 2020 a senior Turkish official's claim that it has asked Ankara to send medical supplies needed for tackling the spread of COVID-19 in Armenia. The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) insisted that its officials contacted with relevant Turkish authorities with the sole aim of evacuating Armenian

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5. Ronald Meinardus, "Mask diplomacy and power politics", *Qantara.de*, July1, 2020.

6. "An implausible list of demands behind Turkey's medical aid campaign", *The Arab Weekly*, May 11, 2020.

7. "Turkey aids Israel in time of coronavirus despite tense relations", *Jerusalem Post*, April 10, 2020.

8. "Chinese-Turkish ties grow stronger in fight against COVID-19, experts say", *People's Daily*, April 10, 2020.

citizens from Turkey.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, China's medical aids to Turkey's problematic neighbors, Armenia, and the Republic of Cyprus, created some sort of frictions with those countries and China. The boxes of the supplies were marked by a dedication, in English, reading: "May our friendship be higher than mountain Ararat and longer than the Yangtze river." Mount Ararat is a national symbol of Armenia, but it is located within the current borders of Turkey. One of the sensitivities of Armenian "genocide" recognition in Turkey is the fear that Armenia might use recognition to claim territory in eastern Turkey from which the Armenians were deported in 1915, and the Chinese inscription fed into that concern.<sup>10</sup> After reports emerged about the Chinese aid to Armenia, Turkey's MFA demanded an explanation from the Chinese embassy in Ankara. Ambassador of the China to Ankara, Deng Li, stated that the local Chinese authority prepared the English message without consulting the central government and added that the Beijing respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Turkey.<sup>11</sup>

Ankara did not allow to pass a Chinese cargo plane to the Republic of Cyprus over the Turkish airspace.<sup>12</sup> The Turkish MFA said that the Chinese cargo plane did not share its flight route before entering the Turkish air space. Ankara does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus as a legitimate authority on the island and refuses to allow flights over the Turkish airspace heading to Southern Cyprus. Ankara only recognized the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) on the island. However, Ankara allows planes heading to and from Southern Cyprus to use Turkish airspace and airports for humanitarian and emergency issues. In the case, the Chinese plane did not give enough time to the Turkish authorities to evaluate the situation as a "humanitarian" case.<sup>13</sup>

## 2) Relocating European supply chain from China to Turkey

The COVID-19 pandemic and increasing tensions and war of words between Beijing and Western capitals have carried out an imminent agenda

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9. "Armenia Denies Asking for Turkish Coronavirus Aid", *RFE/RL*, April 13, 2020.

10. Joshua Kucera, "Coronavirus exacerbates Armenia-Turkey rancor", *Eurasianet*, April 13, 2020.

11. Yahia H. Zoubir, "China's Health Silk Road Diplomacy in the MENA", *Med Dialogue Series*, No. 27, July 2020.

12. "Plane that landed in Moscow due to Turkey's actions eventually delivers aid to Cyprus", *TASS*, May 14, 2020.

13. "Turkey defends denying overflight clearance to aircraft", *Anadolu Agency*, May 15, 2020.

for G7 countries to change global supply change from China to regional countries. Turkey would be a perfect alternative of China for European countries particularly for its strong textile and manufacturing industry. Turkey's next step is to position itself as an alternative to China for supplying medical equipment and supplies to European countries, taking advantage of adaptive industry, especially within the defense sector.<sup>14</sup>

This claim was mostly based on the European intention of reallocating supply chains geographically closer. Clearly this is very valid within the debate of strategic autonomy and the new industrial policy. The possibility of getting a juicy part of the repositioning of the supply chains would be an important advancement for the already troubled Turkish economy. Turkish officials think that the country is a great candidate for it with existing economic ties and the EU Customs Union already in place. Turkey's geographical proximity to Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East, and North Africa will be its strongest part to move some European investments from China to Turkey.<sup>15</sup> Turkey's geographical proximity to Europe is not only advantage for Ankara for relocating European supply chain from China. Turkish strong textile and manufacturing industry is already competing with Chinese products for years for the European market. Furthermore, being part of the EU's Customs Union, Turkey will have more superior position against China, if the EU Commission decides to impose extra tariffs on Chinese goods.

Ankara has also claimed that the quality of Turkish medical supplies is higher than the Chinese ones. It was claimed that faulty Chinese equipment with insufficient filters and failing to fit the mouths adequately increased COVID-19 cases in hospitals in recent months.<sup>16</sup> However, Turkey has faced familiar quality and delivery failure critics during the pandemic. A commercial shipment of ventilators to Spain was delayed over export licenses. Another commercial shipment of 400,000 protective suits to Britain was criticized after some failed quality checks, but both Ankara and London said that was not a government-to-government shipment, and that there had been no problem with aid sent directly by Turkey.<sup>17</sup>

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14. Marc Pierini, "Emerging From the Pandemic, Turkey Rolls Out a More Assertive Foreign Policy", *Carnegie Europe*, June 3, 2020.

15. İlke Toygür, "No coronavirus diplomacy could solely revitalize Turkey-EU relations", *Elcano Royal Institute*, June 24, 2020.

16. Megha Gupta and Mansheetal Singh, "COVID-19: China's 'Health Silk Road' diplomacy in Iran and Turkey", *ORF*, April 13, 2020.

17. Tuvan Gümrükcü, "Turkey turns to medical diplomacy to heal damaged relations", *Reuters*, May 11, 2020.

### 3) Getting fresh financial funds and loans to vitalize its crisis hit economy during the pandemic

The Turkish economy has been hit hard by the pandemic. Turkey's already fragile economy, undermined by external debt, dwindling foreign reserves, and growing unemployment rates, has placed the country's recovery prospects in a precarious situation. Turkey has announced a \$15.5 billion stimulus recovery package and launched a nation-wide voluntary donation campaign to enhance solidarity in combatting the pandemic. The tourism sector, which accounts for 12 percent of the economy, is particularly in trouble. Turkey was the sixth most visited country in the world in recent years. The near to \$26 billion Turkey earned from tourism in 2019 will not likely be realized in 2020. Anticipating that some 2.5 million people are expected to lose their jobs between April and October in this industry alone, Turkey is aiming to boost its tourism income with a new initiative aimed at certifying tourist attractions, such as restaurants, hotels, museums, and historical landmarks, as "COVID-19 free".<sup>18</sup>

Turkey is heading for its second recession in less than two years. As of August 2020, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects to see the Turkish economy contract by 5%.<sup>19</sup> The Turkish lira has been under pressure after the beginning of the pandemic, hit by rising investor concern over the country's economic strength and ability to defend its currency during a turbulent period for global financial markets. The latest drops in early May and early August pushed the lira below the previous trough hit during the 2018 currency crisis, which triggered Turkey's first recession in a decade.

The Turkish central bank has used up roughly a quarter of its freely available currency reserves in recent months and with huge dollar-denominated liabilities to service there are question marks about what its policy response is. Turkey's net currency reserves have fallen to nearly \$25 billion from \$40 billion so far this year. Turkey's economy needs to refinance close to \$168 billion over the next 12 months. That equates to 24% of Turkey's GDP.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, there were further declines of Turkey's exports in recent months, because of halting some factories under lockdown measures.

There are two options for Ankara to overcome its balance-of-payment

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18. Ayça Arkılıç, "What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Turkey and its corona diplomacy?", *The Big Q*, May 26, 2020.

19. "Turkey", *International Monetary Fund*. <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/TUR>

20. Marc Jones, "The Turkish lira's perfect storm", *Reuters*, May 7, 2020.

problems in months. The first option is signing a bailout deal with the IMF and initiating structural reforms to start remedying Turkey's economic woes. However, the AKP-MHP government is reluctant to sign a "Stand-By Arrangement" with the IMF since such a bailout deal would come with strict policy conditionalities concerning good governance, transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption. The AKP-MHP government believes that these conditions make it impossible to pursue an independent policy and undermine its grip over the economy.<sup>21</sup>

The second option is signing swap deals with the United States, Britain, and the EU. On 19 April 2020, Turkish officials reported their outreach to Britain. Ankara has likely been in contact with other Western central banks, as indicated by the 30 April announcement by the Turkish central bank governor that they are holding talks on swap lines with several central banks. However, initial signs indicate that Turkey is unlikely to get its expected swap amount. Turkey could only receive a U.S. Federal Reserve (FED) swap line for "geopolitical reasons" as Ankara's need for dollar liquidity. This is the only hope for Ankara that Washington will allow a FED financial lifeline to Turkey for political reasons.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, Turkey's central bank tripled its currency swap agreement with Qatar in May 2020. The Turkish-Qatari deal amended the original limit of \$5 billion on the two countries' initial swap agreement in 2018, raising it to \$15 billion.<sup>23</sup> Turkey's central bank allowed the payment of Chinese imports to be settled using the yuan in June 2020, the first time under a currency swap agreement between Turkey and China's central banks. According to the Turkish central bank, all payments made for imports from China via the bank were settled in the yuan, a move which will further strengthen cooperation between the two countries.<sup>24</sup>

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21. Aykan Erdemir and Saeed Ghasseminejad, "COVID-19 in Iran and Turkey: Mismanagement, Crackdowns, Economic Crises, and Corona-Diplomacy", *FDD Insight*, June 5, 2020.

22. "Bar high to Fed swap line for Turkey but Trump could weigh in says former top central banker", *bne IntelliNews*, May 13, 2020.

23. Natasha Turak, "Turkish central bank triples Qatar currency swap line to \$15 billion as economy flounders", *CNBC News*, May 20, 2020.

24. Yang Kunyi, "Turkey uses Chinese yuan for import payment 1st time under swap agreement", *Global Times*, June 21, 2020.

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## Turkey's delivered COVID-19 aids

The pandemic offered Turkey the opportunity to project its soft power abroad. Thanks to well-prepared textiles and manufacturing sectors, Ankara was able to provide around 140 countries all around the world (see Table 1).<sup>25</sup> From Asia to Africa, from Europe to America cargos with Turkish flags were welcomed in countries hard hit by COVID-19.<sup>26</sup>

According to the 2019 World Trade Organization (WTO) data, Turkey is the world's fourth-largest textile exporting country after China, India, and the United States. Its sufficient raw material capacity, supported by the textile infrastructure, allowed the country to produce up to two million/day disposable masks.<sup>27</sup> Turkey has mainly donated tons of surgical masks, N95 masks, test kits, drugs (hydroxychloroquine and tamiflu), ventilators, respirators, overalls, aprons, protective glasses, gloves, face shields, visors, and disinfectant. Turkey has also delivered EKG devices, patient monitors, central oxygen flowmeters, 12-channel EKG devices, infusion pumps, defibrillators, PCR devices, surgical intervention kits, mobile X-ray device, diagnostic kits, UV devices, and ambulances to some countries in the Balkans, Eurasia, and Africa. Turkey has sent medical aids to Balkan and Central Asian countries more than one time.

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## Turkey's received COVID-19 aids

Turkey has received medical aids only from China and Taiwan during the pandemic. Turkey sent its first shipment of medical aid to China in early March, then China sent medical aids to Turkey in late March. Taiwan launched in early June a humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees in Turkey to fight the novel COVID-19 pandemic. Medical aids were distributed among Syrian people in Turkey's southern provinces of Kilis and Hatay, which host many Syrians, while there are nearly 4 million

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25. "Turkey to send medical aid to Serbia, Algeria, Paraguay to fight coronavirus pandemic", *Daily Sabah*, July 23, 2020.

26. Valeria Talbot, "Turkey's Coronavirus Diplomacy and its Impact on Relations With the EU", *ISPI*, June 1, 2020.

27. Ali Demirdağ, "How Turkey was able to send Coronavirus Aid to 55 Countries", *The National Interest*, May 25, 2020.

Syrians across Turkey.<sup>28</sup> Turkish diplomatic sources refuted Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif's claim in May 2020 that Tehran sent 40,000 advanced Iran-made test kits to Germany, Turkey, and others.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 1.**  
**Turkey's Aid Diplomacy**

	Turkey's Aid to Third Countries-	Third Countries' Aid to Turkey
<b>Africa</b>	Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Lesotho, Libya, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda	
<b>America</b>	Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Venezuela, United States	
<b>Asia</b>	Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Myanmar, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Qatar, Syria, Yemen	China, Taiwan
<b>Eurasia</b>	Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan	
<b>Europe</b>	Albania, Andorra, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Cyprus, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Spain, UK	

Source: Made by the author by collecting country names from separate news. There is no certain list released by the Turkish government showing how many countries benefited from Turkish medical aids. The number of countries which received Turkish medical aid might be higher than Table 1. Pro-government media claimed in August 2020 that Turkey sent medical aids to around 140 countries without naming all.

## Evacuation & repatriation of Turkish and third countries citizens

Turkey also actively engaged in evacuation of its citizens from third countries and repatriation of third countries citizens from Turkey. By late

<sup>28</sup>. "Taiwan, Turkey cooperate to aid Syrians amid pandemic", *Anadolu Agency*, June 4, 2020.

<sup>29</sup>. Aykan Erdemir and Saeed Ghasseminejad, "COVID-19 in Iran and Turkey: Mismanagement, Crackdowns, Economic Crises, and Corona-Diplomacy", *FDD Insight*, June 5, 2020.

April, around 40,000 Turkish citizens living abroad had been transferred back from 75 countries. Turkey has introduced new programmes and services to address the needs of the Turkish diaspora. These include the creation of hotlines for emergency situations, the deepening of communication between the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) in Ankara and Turkish local diaspora organizations, regular COVID-19 updates from Turkish consulates, the improvement of social media channels, the digitalization of the diaspora engagement tools, and the establishment of new funding and donation programs for those affected by the pandemic, such as the “Diaspora COVID-19 Program for Support and Cooperation.” Turkey’s other diaspora institutions, such as the Yunus Emre Institute, has also joined forces with the YTB to establish workshops on mask and medical uniform production in Europe.<sup>30</sup>

Ankara was also able to fly back 120 stranded Israeli Arabs and Palestinians from that were studying in Turkey to Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion Airport. This was a clear example of successful cooperation in the pandemic between Turkish, Israeli, and Palestinian authorities.<sup>31</sup>

Ankara and Yerevan made a joint effort to repatriate Armenians who had been living in Istanbul who wanted to return to Armenia despite closed borders. Turkey is home to tens of thousands of Armenian citizens, mostly labor migrants, and some of them sought to return home as the COVID-19 outbreak rapidly began to spread. In April 2020, 73 Armenian citizens were able to make the trip, by bus via Georgia.<sup>32</sup> Turkey also helped some stranded third countries’ citizens in other parts of the World to fly back to their home countries with the help of a large network of evacuation flights by Turkish Airlines.

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## Turkey’s received COVID-19 loans

Turkey has also developed a close cooperation with international financial institutions to cover up its economic difficulties during its fight against the pandemic (see Table 2). The European Bank for Reconstruction and

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<sup>30</sup>. Ayça Arkılıç, “What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Turkey and its corona diplomacy?”, *The Big Q*, May 26, 2020.

<sup>31</sup>. “Turkey aids Israel in time of coronavirus despite tense relations”, *Jerusalem Post*, April 10, 2020.

<sup>32</sup>. “Armenia Denies Asking for Turkish Coronavirus Aid”, *RFE/RL*, April 13, 2020.

Development (EBRD) has committed processing loans worth €1 billion to Turkey in 2020. The President of the EBRD, Suma Chakrabarti, said Turkey could emerge stronger from the COVID-19 crisis in a world of increased regionalization of economic activity, shortening supply chains and geopolitical uncertainty. Depending on developing of closer relationships between Turkey and the EU, the EBRD has invested €12.4 billion to Turkey over the past decade. In the first five months of 2020 alone, the EBRD has channeled funds worth €870 million to the Turkish economy. A large portion was provided to the banking sector to boost lending to small and medium-sized enterprises.<sup>33</sup> As a part of this commitment, the EBRD delivered a €40 million (\$47 million) loan to Aklease, a leasing subsidiary of the top-tier Turkish lender, Akbank. The new funds would enable Aklease to increase the availability of funding to Turkish businesses for their crucial capital investments to mitigate the medium- to long-term negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>34</sup> Another big loan of the EBRD was to Garanti BBVA, the second-largest private lender in the country, to boost Turkey's banking sector amid the COVID-19 pandemic with a \$55 million.<sup>35</sup>

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) approved \$500 million in loans in July 2020 for the Development Investment Bank of Turkey (TKYB) and the Industrial Development Bank of Turkey (TSKB) to reduce the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The AIIB granted a \$300 million loan to TKYB and \$200 million to TSKB under the guarantee of the Turkish Treasury and Finance Ministry.<sup>36</sup>

The EU has approved in July 2020 sending Turkey €485 million for ensuring urgent humanitarian aid to refugees. The funding cleared by both the Council and the European Parliament will allow the EU to extend two flagship humanitarian programmes in Turkey until the end of 2021. These programs have been running as part of the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, meant to stop irregular refugee flows to the EU and improve the conditions of Syrian refugees in Turkey.<sup>37</sup>

The World Bank provided a €316 million (\$353 million) loan in June 2020

33. Olga Rosca, "Turkey could emerge stronger from coronavirus crisis, EBRD President says", *EBRD*, June 17, 2020. <https://www.ebrd.com/news/2020/turkey-could-emerge-stronger-from-coronavirus-crisis-ebrd-president-says.html>

34. "European bank loans \$47M to Turkish leasing company", *Anadolu Agency*, July 28, 2020.

35. "EBRD announces new \$55m loan to Turkey's Garanti BBVA", *World Finance Inform*, May 22, 2020.

36. "Asian bank loans \$500 million to Turkish banks", *Anadolu Agency*, July 2, 2020.

37. "EU approves €485 mln in financial aid to Turkey for refugees", *Duvar English*, July 12, 2020.

to the TKYB that would help refugees and Turkish citizens in accessing formal employment opportunities in creditworthy enterprises in provinces with a high number of Syrian refugees.<sup>38</sup>

**Table 2.**  
**Turkey's received loans in the pandemic**

	<b>Turkey's Received Loans</b>
<b>EBRD</b>	<p>€1 billion in total in 2020</p> <p>€870 million to the Turkish companies from January to May 2020</p> <p>\$55 million loan to Garanti BBVA in May 2020</p> <p>€40 million loan to Aklease in July 2020</p>
<b>AIIB</b>	<p>\$300 million loan to Development Investment Bank of Turkey (TKYB) in July 2020</p> <p>\$200 million to Industrial Development Bank of Turkey (TSKB) in July 2020</p>
<b>EU</b>	€485 million in July 2020
<b>World Bank</b>	\$353 million loan to TKYB in June 2020

Source: Made by the author

## Turkey's COVID-19 diplomacy in international organizations and forums

Turkey has actively aligned itself with international organizations and forums for fighting against the pandemic in worldwide. The G20 is one of the forums in which Turkey has deeply engaged. The G20 emergency virtual leader's summit was held on March 26, 2020 under the presidency of Saudi Arabia. Turkey warned the world's 20 major economies in the virtual summit that no one can afford to implement protective and unilateral policies during the COVID-19 outbreak. Turkey also stressed that the experience in controlling the pandemic and diagnosing and treating the disease should be shared. Turkey urged the countries must act immediately as they did during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis and all measures to

<sup>38</sup>. "Turkey signs \$353M World Bank loan for job creation", *Anadolu Agency*, June 2, 2020.

tackle COVID-19 should be compatible with WTO rules and encourage global cooperation. Turkey reiterated the importance of cooperation and reconciliation in the G20 and urged countries to share their experiences with controlling the pandemic and diagnosing and treating the disease and drew attention to the importance of helping developing countries, Africa in particular.<sup>39</sup>

MIKTA, a middle power grouping consisted by Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Turkey, and Australia, is another unofficial forum in which Ankara has shared its strategy against the pandemic. The 17th MIKTA Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held virtually on July 17, 2020 under Seoul's leadership as the chair of grouping to discuss ways to strengthen multilateralism amid the COVID-19 situation. The foreign ministers of the five MIKTA countries underscored in one voice the urgent need to strengthen multilateralism for cooperation and solidarity of the international community against the pandemic. MIKTA countries agreed to further cooperation on the multilateral stage, including the United Nations (UN).<sup>40</sup>

Turkey has also engaged in corona diplomacy with its NATO allies. The COVID-19 aids have been channeled through the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), the Alliance's primary civil emergency response mechanism.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, this emergency delivery is possible using NATO's Rapid Air Mobility (RAM) measures and granting of priority handling by EUROCONTROL, which handles the flow of all air traffic over Europe. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Turkey has helped 15 NATO allies and 21 NATO partner countries. Allied solidarity in response to COVID-19 takes place in different forms, through bilateral assistance as well as through the EADRCC.<sup>42</sup> NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed this example of NATO solidarity in action and thanked Turkey for its responsible actions.<sup>43</sup>

Turkey has also used the Turkic Council for its COVID-19 strategy. The secretary-general of the Turkic Council, Baghdad Amreyev, praised

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39. "Erdoğan warns G20 leaders against unilateral policies in COVID-19 fight", *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 27, 2020.

40. "Minister of Foreign Affairs Hosts 17th MIKTA Foreign Ministers' Meeting", *Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. [http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m\\_5676/view.do?seq=321166&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&multi\\_itm\\_seq=0&itm\\_seq\\_1=0&itm\\_seq\\_2=0&company\\_cd=&company\\_nm=&page=1&title=Nm](http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=321166&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&multi_itm_seq=0&itm_seq_1=0&itm_seq_2=0&company_cd=&company_nm=&page=1&title=Nm)

41. Gönül Tol and Dimitar Bechev, "Can corona diplomacy cure Turkey's foreign policy isolation?", *Middle East Institute*, April 29, 2020.

42. "Coronavirus response: Turkey delivers medical aid to the US", *NATO*, April 28, 2020. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_175550.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_175550.htm)

43. "Coronavirus response: Turkish medical aid arrives in Spain and Italy", *NATO*, April 1, 2020. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_174826.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_174826.htm)

Turkey for helping member and observer countries to reach the necessary capabilities for diagnosing and treating the people suffering from COVID-19.<sup>44</sup> An extraordinary summit of the Turkic Council was held through a video conference on April 10, 2020 by the chair country Azerbaijan on the topic of combating the COVID-19 pandemic. The heads of state and government of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, as well as observer countries Hungary and Turkmenistan and the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus joined the virtual summit. The parties informed each other about the situation and the fight against COVID-19, shared their experiences and agreed on further actions. The Turkic Council has also strengthened economic, political and technical cooperation among its member states, presently applying to government, private, academia and NGO sectors, as well as international partners, such as the UN, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) during the pandemic.<sup>45</sup>

Following the summit, cooperation efforts among Turkic Council members have gained new momentum in health, transport, economy, trade, customs, and migration under the auspices of the Istanbul-based Secretariat. In the area of health, member countries decided to launch systematic cooperation for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of other dangerous infections in the future, including by the establishment of a new Health Coordination Committee. Transport Ministers also agreed on coordinating the uninterrupted flow of food, medical products, and humanitarian aid to maintain supply chains, including by the launch of a “green corridor.” Meanwhile, Turkic Council economy ministers have decided to review import taxes in view of maintaining contactless trade while upgrading digital trade solutions and e-commerce as a crisis response. The establishment of a Turkic Investment Fund was also on the agenda, which will serve as an important financial tool to boost intra-regional trade. The Turkic Council countries have also decided to establish a Migration Coordination Group as they agreed to mutually facilitate the issuance of visas and residence permits for citizens who were strained in other member states’ territories after the closure of borders.<sup>46</sup>

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44. “Turkic Council praises Turkey’s aids in COVID-19 fight”, *Anadolu Agency*, July 14, 2020.

45. “Turkic Council discussed coronavirus”, *Contact.az*, April 11, 2020.

46. Ömer Kocaman, “Need for regional cooperation amid COVID-19 pandemic: Op-ed”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, May 29, 2020.

WHO Regional Director for Europe Hans Kluge thanked Turkey for helping many countries and showing “international solidarity” during the pandemic.<sup>47</sup> The WHO has also backed establishment of a helpline which supports those affected by mental health issues in Turkey in the wake of the pandemic. This psychosocial health support line was established to help people cope with stressors caused by changes to the lives of health workers and the public from the pandemic. According to the Turkish Ministry of Health, the service reaches all of Turkey’s 81 provinces and has provided more than 80,000 consultations to health workers and citizens since its launch in March 2020. A guide for the helpline staff was developed jointly by the WHO and the Turkish Ministry of Health, and prior to the launch of the service, 418 staff were trained to offer advice on how to protect against COVID-19, manage stress and access mental health services.<sup>48</sup>

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## Conclusion

Turkey as a middle power has pursued an active diplomacy during the pandemic to increase its global role. By reaching 140 countries across the globe, Ankara did a great job to create further leverage for international cooperation. Turkey has become a leading global donor for pandemic-hit countries across the World. With the help of corona diplomacy, Ankara has mostly intensified its diplomatic cooperation with many countries. Turkey’s rising international role during the pandemic has also provided further influence on it in international organizations and forums. This has made Turkey more influential global player as a rising middle power.

On the other hand, successful corona diplomacy did not prevent Turkey’s economic suffering. Turkey’s already fragile economy has grasped Ankara unready to the pandemic and the Turkish lira plunged two times in a three-month period. These economic difficulties have also urged Ankara to increase its international cooperation efforts for signing swap deals with strong economies and getting loans from international financial institutions. All in all, the pandemic has urged Turkey to open more to international cooperation for political and economic reasons.

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<sup>47</sup>. Jeyhun Aliyev, “Turkey sent aid to at least 57 countries to fight virus”, *Anadolu Agency*, April 27, 2020.

<sup>48</sup>. “WHO-backed telephone counselling in Turkey for those dealing with COVID-19 stress”, *World Health Organization*, June 30, 2020. <https://www.euro.who.int/en/countries/turkey/news/news/2020/6/who-backed-telephone-counselling-in-turkey-for-those-dealing-with-covid-19-stress>

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