

“Russia needs Turkey, Turkey needs Russia.” The Putin-Erdogan “Geopolitical Swing” in Sochi?

The last Sochi Summit shows that Türkiye and Russia insist on improving cooperation.

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Türkiye and Russia are two original Eurasian countries with their own unique characteristics. Russia is the largest country in the world with an area of more than 17 million square kilometers. Türkiye, on the other hand, sits in the world’s most valuable geopolitical location at the intersection of three continents.

The relations of both countries with Europe or the West in general have been problematic. The Western Imperialists, who had difficulty in seizing Russia and Turkey, historically envisaged to make these two fight and to remain enemies as the most practical solution. The two great revolutionaries who broke this “chain of happiness” were Atatürk and Lenin. The cooperation, albeit for a short time, against imperialism, the natural enemies of Turkey and Russia, has changed the shape and course of the world. The Black Sea, on the other hand, has always preserved its identity as a privileged and private sea by its northern and southern neighbors.

The Erdogan-Putin meeting in Sochi, located in the north of the Black Sea, was important. In fact, Erdogan had invited Putin to Turkey in August.

But this invitation remained in the air due to Turkey’s recent rapprochement with the West. There were very important issues on the agenda.

The first was the grain agreement, which was of great interest to Turkey in the axis of the Ukraine war and the second was the Turkish-Russian geopolitical relations in hot regions such as Syria, Karabakh, Cyprus, Libya, Iraq and the Black Sea. Of course, energy issues that will make Turkey an energy center were also one of the important agenda items. Before the meeting on September 4, Turkey’s new Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan had visited Kiev and Moscow.

He had made efforts to reactivate the grain corridor agreement, which was abused by the West. The main motive for the USA to sabotage this agreement was to draw a new route through Romania and bring Turkey and Russia face to face in the Black Sea. This manifested itself in both the bombing of silos on the Danube and the Russian raid on a Turkish cargo ship. Ankara expressed that this alternative is unacceptable in the Kiev and Moscow meetings. My guess is that the Sochi meeting was planned after this statement.

To summarize what happened in Sochi: While there was open support for existing energy projects and the construction of Turkey's energy hub, the Grain Corridor remained in limbo. Putin voiced the condition of removing sanctions on the West through Turkey. But the most important was Syria. Lavrov's reminder of last month's Adana Agreement was important, but the two leaders preferred to remain silent on Syria in their press release.

However, in Syria, the USA inflamed the events again, and with the HTS in Idlib and the PKK/YPG forces in the North, they moved against the regions held by Turkey in order to gain ground. Russia, on the other hand, brought in the Arab tribes together with Damascus. In Idlib, it started hitting HTS points from the air.

Putin, who did not go into the subject after the meeting, only said that they should strengthen the tripartite Astana process in Syria. The most similar thing to the development in the grain corridor was the idea of processing Russian grain to be sent directly to Turkey and distributed to poor African and global southern countries with the support of Qatar. Türkiye is the world's largest flour producer and exporter. However, it does this not with its own grain, but mainly with Russian and Ukrainian grain. That's why the grain corridor issue is very important for Ankara, which is suffering from the economic crisis.

But another issue that is at least as important as this is the great advantages that Turkey provides as a result of not participating in the sanctions against Russia. After February 2022, Turkish companies started to fill the commercial space emptied by the West.

Russia-Türkiye trade volume increased by 86 percent last year.

Many Turkish companies started operations in Russia.

During the meeting of the two leaders, the use of their own currencies in trade was also discussed.

This can be considered as an implicit invitation for the BRICS, which is gradually expanding with a focus on trading in local currencies.

According to some recent news, the project to establish a chip (computer chip) factory with a Russian-Turkish partnership is on the agenda. If this claim-size development is confirmed, it is very important, because Turkey has to buy all its digital chips from outside.

I suppose the most concrete development that emerged during the Erdogan-Putin meeting was in the field of energy. Noting that he expects Moscow and Ankara to conclude talks on the establishment of a natural gas transfer center (hub) in Turkey soon, Putin said,

“We have made progress and I hope that we will complete the negotiations soon, so that we will make the energy situation more stable and balanced in our region.”

The planned energy center will enable Russian gas to reach Europe via Türkiye. According to

the Russian RBK's claim, Gazprom gave the roadmap to Botaş (Turkish State Gas Co.) to establish a hub in Thrace.

The hub is planned to be close to Kiyikoy, where TurkStream reaches land. Nuclear energy was also an important item in the negotiations. Putin, stated that the the construction of Akkuyu, Mersin Nuclear Power Plant (NGS) project is progressing according to the schedule and the first power unit will be commissioned in 2024. After the first batch of Russian nuclear fuel was delivered to Akkuyu, Turkey became a member of the nuclear club. Erdogan, on the other hand, said that after the meeting, steps will be taken to establish a Nuclear Power Plant with Russia in Sinop (a city in Blacksea Region) after Mersin Akkuyu.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the two Eurasian countries are obliged to cooperate. The biggest fear of the "empires" UK and then the USA is the cooperation of Russia-China-Germany and Turkey, which are the main land powers of Eurasia. After the Second World War, they pulled the iron curtain and took control of defeated Germany. China and the USSR, on the other hand, were separated by the USA due to bilateral border problems and Beijing's pragmatic approach at that time. Türkiye was also removed from Russia, by NATO and the Western financial system.

Parameters that have changed gradually after 1990, present a brand new geopolitical landscape to us today. China and Russia cooperate. Germany, on the other hand, is paying for its dependence on the USA and NATO by destroying its huge economy with its own hands. It may experience a sharp turn to the point of bankruptcy, but that may not happen in the foreseeable future. The situation in Turkey is more complex. The post-1980 integration with the West and the neoliberal economic model based on hot money and privatization make it difficult for the country to go where it wants. At this point, NATO membership, even if it is a second class, is important not only militarily but also politically. However, geopolitical interests also impose cooperation with Russia.

Russia needs Turkey, Turkey needs Russia.

While optimistic observers say that Ankara pursues a kind of balance policy, more critical viewers like myself interpret it as a swing policy, that is, a foreign policy of approaching the USA and Russia at the same time or one at a time. In my opinion, these wrong swing policies have a great impact on the lack of concrete results expected from Sochi. However, under the current conditions, a contrary development to swing policy cannot be expected in the short term. Russia's strategy is also based on this: knowing the situation it is in, without offending Turkey, but without breaking relations in a way that minimizes the indirect damages that may come from there, to move forward in its own course. Putin is well aware that time is running in his favor and he is not a leader famous for his impatience.

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