

# Russia -Turkey Diplomatic Rapprochement, A Headache for the EU and US?

By [Michael Werbowksi](#)

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa, Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

*Ankara and Moscow are doing a diplomatic two step together. Conspicuously left out in the cold in this dancing duo, are two major power blocks which traditionally Turkey considers vital to its security needs: The United States and the European Union. The meetings between the Russian President Putin and his Turkish counterpart indicates a willingness on both sides to further consolidate economic, diplomatic and most importantly, and no doubt, also military ties . The downing of a Russian jet in 2015 by Turkish missile fire, and the assassination last December of the Russian ambassador in Ankara, brought the bi-lateral relations to a nadir, or an abysmal state of affairs.*

Despite these setback, issues of mutual regional interest gave brought the two reluctant partners together again. Unresolved questions such as the final outcome of the war in Syria ( perhaps based on partition) , or the fate of President Assad in the post-Syrian civil war period, and the on-going talks in Astana for a permanent peace arrangement, are likely to be high on the bi-lateral agenda. Economic issues related to energy deals are also set to be part of the discussions ( i.e. the lifting of trade restrictions on Turkey) . Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters a day ahead of the planned March 10th meetings at the Kremlin, that the bi-lateral agenda would be "as extensive as possible."

Such a face to face encounter, is a sure sign that both countries have more to gain in pursuing better relations with one another , than allowing them to drift aimlessly, or still, worsen to another dangerous low point as they have in in the recent past."This is a process of further normalization of our relations after certain crisis moments," Peskov said. On Friday, at the opening of the summit level meeting President Putin said:

"We are very much pleased that our interstate ties are being restored at a very fast pace... Trade and economic relations are also being restored. Yesterday, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev informed his Turkish counterpart about additional measures and steps aimed at restoration of our economic relations in the full-format mode,"(1).

## **Russian diplomacy: Towards a masterful position in the Middle East?**

The Russia Turkey meetings come precisely at a time when Israel (2) itself, seeks to improve ties with Russia in an attempt, to offset Iran's influence or military clout in the region. The courtship of President Putin by regional Mid East powers doesn't escape the attention of policy makers in western capitals. It must certainly rile them. The Russian president for his part, maintains according to international affairs analysts "flexible relationships" with all three old and would be allies: Iran, Israel and Turkey. In other words, Russia is deftly

positioning itself as the leading mediator or power broker in the region. Thus it seems, Russia is on the verge of attaining a potentially dominant (to US and EU discomfiture for sure) position in the Middle east. Hence Turkey's willingness or eagerness to play the "primus inter pares" role in this on-going process.

But perhaps even more crucially, President Tayyip Recep Erdogan's trip to Moscow signifies a perhaps definitive strategic shift away from the Atlantic alliance. Turkey is going beyond its geo-strategic dependency on the US within the context of the NATO alliance, in search of assuring its own security needs elsewhere. Seeking out a new strategic partnership like Russia, is apparently key to this policy. An excellent example of this strategy is the potential arms deals between the two regional powers. Turkey a linchpin in East -West relations has shown rather overtly its interest in purchasing latest S-400 air-defense system from Russia. This deal will be on the table at the summit (3). Moscow for its part, while deepening military co-operation with Ankara wishes to stabilize or strengthen its hand in the middle eastern region (in which for better or worse, Ankara it undoubtedly also a major power broker) and at the same time side-line American strategic influence (perhaps hegemonic in nature) interests in this war torn region. This would be a positive step in the creation of a multi-polar world order, not dependent on one sole superpower for its peace and stability.

*Michael Werbowski is a Canadian journalist currently based in Moscow, who specialises in geopolitics and international affairs.*

#### Notes

- (1) <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201703101051446714-putin-erdogan-russia-tuyrkey-relations/>
- (2) <http://tass.com/politics/934814>
- (3) <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/3/9/nato-member-turkey-looks-to-moscow--to-buy-air-defence-system>

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