



Committee: United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Country: Turkey

Topic: Russia and Ukraine Crisis

Between Ukraine and Russia

Since the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian government has thanked Turkey at least twice for its support. At the start of the invasion, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for both his military and humanitarian support and his refusal to allow Russian warships passage to the Black Sea (in accordance with the 1936 Montreux Treaty), albeit the latter was premature. A few days later Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov thanked Turkey for the delivery of new Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UACVs/drones)² – in addition to those sold to Ukraine the previous year. For years, Turkey's stance on Ukraine has been pro-Western –in principle. Turkey condemned the Russian annexation of Crimea and the secession of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, and since 2015 has provided Ukraine a \$50 million loan and \$10 million in humanitarian assistance. Moreover, the two countries signed a military cooperation deal in 2020 and a free trade agreement in 2022.³ Finally, although with some delay, Turkey described the Russian invasion as a “war,” which gave them the legal basis for closing the Straits to the passage of belligerent vessels, and voted against it in the United Nations General Assembly of 2 March 2022.⁴ At the same time, however, Turkey has been careful not to upset Russia too much. Soon after the European capitals, and the European Union more specifically, adopted further sanctions against Russia, Turkey's presidential spokesperson, İbrahim Kalın, took a different approach: “We are not in the opinion of imposing sanctions against Russia. We have commercial ties such as natural gas, tourism and agriculture. We do not want to make a harmful move for our country [...] Here should be an actor who can talk to Russia. [...] We are not planning a sanction package in order to keep this channel open.”⁵ Ankara was very transparent about its strategic play, which by now is not unfamiliar: first, Turkey does not wish to compromise its relations with Russia in a way that could further affect its deteriorating economy and; second, it has been trying to remain as neutral as possible to present itself as a credible mediator (or “honest broker”) and agent of stability.

Key Points

- The war in Ukraine will have a great impact on the international order.
- In principle Turkey maintains a pro-Western stance on Ukraine but refuses to follow the rest of the West in sanctioning Russia.



- Turkey is looking to minimize the cost to its interests, but also aims to become a “third pole” in the emerging international order.
- Developments may present a chance for improved Turkish Western relations, but before this can be realized, the West must clearly understand Turkey’s strategic objectives and adjust its expectations accordingly.

1) **Peace Agreement** A peace deal is one of the likelier ways for this highly destructive war to draw to a close. Any viable peace deal between the two countries would likely rely on Ukrainian neutrality — in other words, Ukraine's promise not to join Western security groups like NATO. Putin says he views Ukraine's bid to join NATO as a threat to Russian security.

2) **Resolve “frozen” conflicts.** The ongoing and frozen conflicts in the former Soviet space and the Balkans, including Crimea, Kosovo and Donbas, all involve separatism of some sort. All should be resolved on the basis of some form of local democracy, that is, a vote to ascertain the will of the people in the separatist regions is the starting point, after which a series of technical agreements need to be reached to regulate issues that would necessarily grow out of any peaceful secession of a territory from a larger state. The exact form of the vote could be adapted to the specific circumstances of each conflict. It need not be a referendum on the issue of separatism. In the cases of both Crimea and Kosovo, the most prominent conflicts, regularly scheduled elections could serve this purpose, with the stipulation that victory would require that a qualified majority of the electorate vote for candidates who support separatism. The only requirement would be that the vote be internationally observed and then certified as free and fair to erase any doubt that it



was legitimate. Such votes would undoubtedly reaffirm what most impartial observers know to be the hard truths that Kosovo will remain independent and Crimea will never go back to Ukraine. A similar vote could be used to determine how to move forward with the Donbas separatist regions, including whether the Minsk agreements should form the basis of the resolution or whether some minor adjustments have to be made to take into account local preferences.

