



## Ukraine's Policy Towards Turkey

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The current revival of Ukrainian-Turkish contacts stems from Ukraine's efforts to win over Turkey as an economic and defence partner in the face of Russian aggression. Both countries share the common goal of limiting Russian domination in the Black Sea. Turkey supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and stands up for the Crimean Tatars, persecuted by Russia. Close bilateral relations may make Turkey—after the EU and the U.S.—one of Ukraine's most important partners. However, the intensity of the political dialogue will depend on the state of Russian-Turkish relations.

**Context.** Their Black Sea coasts make Turkey and Ukraine neighbouring states, despite the lack of a direct border. Both countries share a common history, symbolised by the [Crimean Tatars](#), the indigenous people of the Crimean Peninsula and a Turkic nation that engenders special interest from Turkey. The latter is also a natural trade partner for Ukraine and a tourist destination for Ukrainians, especially since visa requirements were lifted for them in 2017 (more than 1.6 million Ukrainian tourist visits were recorded in Turkey in 2019).

Russia's aggression against Ukraine since 2014 and the occupation of Crimea has changed the balance of power in the Black Sea basin, resulting in [Russian military dominance](#). This has brought Ukraine and Turkey closer together as they seek to limit Russia's influence in the region. On international forums, Turkey supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and regularly speaks at meetings, including within the UN framework, on Russian aggression and the situation in Crimea. Turkey is one of the main countries supporting the creation of the Crimean Platform, a project to create conditions for the reintegration of the territory currently controlled by Russia into Ukraine. Turkey also supports Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership. In the latest [National Security Strategy of Ukraine](#), Turkey is identified as a strategic partner, which translates into close military cooperation.

Despite its support for Ukraine, Turkey is pursuing a multi-track policy towards Russia. Among other things, it has not

joined the sanctions against Russia for its aggression against Ukraine, and Turkish ferries still sail to the occupied peninsula. Turkey [cooperates closely with Russia in the energy sector](#), especially with regard to the transit of energy resources to the EU via the Blue Stream and TurkStream gas pipelines, which allow Ukraine to be bypassed. At the same time, however, the close contacts between the leaders of Turkey and Russia have enabled President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to personally negotiate the release of Ukrainian political prisoners from Crimea who were detained amid Russian repression on the peninsula.

**Political and Economic Cooperation.** Turkey remains one of the most active directions of Ukrainian foreign policy. This is reflected in, among other things, the number of meetings at the highest level. The presidents of the two countries met even despite the COVID-19 pandemic (in October 2020 and April this year). Cooperation is fostered by the existence of several bilateral formats, including the "Quadriga", initiated by Ukraine in 2020 to structure its security and foreign cooperation dialogue. The Ukrainian government's intensive efforts for rapprochement with Turkey translate into actions in the spheres of trade, security cooperation, and [programmes supporting the Crimean Tatars](#).

Since the start of the Russian aggression, Ukraine has been looking for opportunities to [diversify its foreign trade](#). Turkey is of particular interest and already is one of Ukraine's most important trade partners, ranking fifth

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(trade amounted to almost \$5 billion in 2020), after China, Germany, Poland, and Russia, with a positive balance for Ukraine. An element facilitating their bilateral trade is an agreement on a free trade area, currently under consultation. The Ukrainian side estimates that the agreement may double trade to \$10 billion a year.

**Military Cooperation.** Under constant military pressure from Russia since 2014, Ukraine has been working on strengthening its defence potential. Joint armaments projects with Turkey are one of the most important elements of the rapprochement between the countries. Equipping its armed forces is part of Ukraine's new [Military Security Strategy](#) from March this year, which assumes that due to its limited financial and technological capabilities, the country will seek cooperation with foreign investors in the joint production of armaments. For Ukraine, Turkey is also an attractive partner due to the compatibility of Turkish military technology with NATO standards.

This cooperation involves the procurement of weapons, updating military technologies, and the development of new projects. The most significant purchase by Ukraine has been Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial vehicles, which have both patrol and offensive capabilities. Joint production of Bayraktar Akinci heavy combat drones is also planned. The Ukrainian side would be responsible for the engines (AI-450). In 2019, a Ukrainian-Turkish joint venture, Black Sea Shield, was established to develop and manufacture drones and develop engine technology and guided munitions. The next step was the signing of a memorandum of understanding by representatives of both countries to build a plant to produce the Turkish drones in Ukraine. The Ukrainian contribution to the joint projects involves mainly engine technology, which replaces the previously planned Canadian input. Turkey lost access to some military technologies from NATO countries after [sanctions were imposed](#) on it for the purchase of Russian S-400 missile-and air-defence systems; in the case of Canada, military equipment export permits were revoked after Canadian technology was used in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

For Ukraine, an agreement with Turkey to build missile corvettes to bolster the weakened Ukrainian navy is particularly important. Other joint projects concern coded communications systems, rocket engines, precision weapons, and transport aircraft. In addition, Turkey

financially supports Ukraine's armed forces—in 2020, it allocated \$36 million for such assistance.

**Conclusions and Perspectives.** It is in the interest of both sides to deepen cooperation, but Ukraine is and will remain the initiator of the rapprochement. It will seek to further strengthen its political relations with Turkey, taking advantage of numerous cooperation formats. The price for Turkish support and intensive dialogue is concessions to the authoritarian rule of President Erdoğan, such as the extradition of individuals with links to [Fethullah Gülen, accused by Turkey of being behind the 2016 coup](#), or the lack of official recognition of the Armenian genocide. However, Turkey's ambiguous policy towards Russia also may be a problem in strengthening bilateral relations. Turkey will try to avoid direct confrontation with Russia, which may mean a periodic softening of rhetoric towards Russia's anti-Ukraine policy, or a lack of reaction to Russian military provocations in the Black Sea.

Cooperation in the armaments sector will remain key for Ukraine. In particular, the purchase of the Bayraktar systems—the [strategic importance](#) of which could be observed during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict—may help the Ukrainian armed forces control the situation on the contact line in Donbas where numerous provocations and shelling by the Russian-controlled forces continue. Both sides also will seek to speed up negotiations on a free trade agreement, although this will be a priority for Ukraine.

Security cooperation between Ukraine and Turkey is one element of Ukraine's integration into NATO structures. It is important for Poland as part of the strengthening of the Alliance's position in the Black Sea basin and the policy of deterring Russia in this region. It also fits in with the idea of the Polish-Romanian-Turkish Trilogue, the aim of which is to strengthen cooperation between the largest states on NATO's Eastern Flank.

Poland may consider initiating a forum for the exchange of experience and military cooperation with Ukraine and Turkey in the context of the operational use of unmanned aerial vehicles. The recent [purchase by Poland of the Turkish Bayraktar systems](#) opens up the possibility of this. Also, within the framework of enhancing the effectiveness of the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG), Poland could propose joint exercises with Turkey.