



Erdoğan Meets Putin in Sochi

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Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Sochi, Russia, on 5 August and met with Vladimir Putin. This was the first visit of the Turkish president to Russia since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Erdoğan, despite participating in the implementation of agreements to ship grain from Ukraine, failed to achieve his main goal of obtaining Putin's approval for Türkiye to conduct a new military operation in northeastern Syria. Nevertheless, he won a Russian declaration of the necessity to further implement the Istanbul agreement and an assurance about the intensification of bilateral cooperation in the economic and energy spheres.

Under what circumstances did the visit take place?

Erdoğan's visit took place during the ongoing Russian attack on Ukraine, 17 days after the Tehran summit where representatives of Russia, Türkiye, and Iran met under the tripartite Astana format, and shortly after negotiating [an agreement enabling grain exports from Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea](#). Moreover, the meeting also took place a few months after Erdoğan signalled the need for a new military operation in northeastern Syria. The last time the leaders of Türkiye and Russia met in Sochi was September last year.

What were Erdoğan's goals?

Erdoğan's main goal was to obtain Russian approval for a military operation in northeast Syria against People's Protection Units (YPG), which form the backbone of the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) but are considered by Türkiye to be an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The goal of the Turkish side is to complete the establishment of a 30-km security zone and gain control over the towns of Tel Rifaat and Manbij that are under the control of the SDF. Russia now conducts ground and air patrols in the area and aims to maintain the status quo, which is favourable to it. In addition, Erdoğan wanted a Russian declaration on the uninterrupted implementation of the grain shipping agreements and the strengthening of bilateral cooperation in the economic and energy spheres.

What was agreed?

The most important result of the meeting was an agreement that Türkiye will start paying for some of its Russian natural gas imports in roubles. Both Russia and Türkiye want to undermine the dollar. In addition, the leaders agreed that the Akkuyu power plant will be put into operation as scheduled next year. Erdoğan also received an invitation from Putin to the September meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Contrary to the high expectations of the Turkish delegation, Putin is still mulling allowing a new Turkish military operation in northeastern Syria, as he believes that the Turkish side should reach an agreement with the Syrian authorities.

What may be the consequences of the visit?

Erdoğan achieved limited success by obtaining the possibility to pay for some Russian gas in roubles and the declaration by the Russian side that it is necessary to continue the implementation of grain shipments. This will help Erdoğan mobilise the Turkish conservative-nationalist electorate, and in relations with the West, to partly repair the reputational damage resulting from its confrontational foreign policy in recent years. Considering the economic crisis in Türkiye, the upcoming elections next year, and the ruling AKP party's supporters view that foreign policy should be oriented more towards Russia and China than the EU and the U.S., Erdoğan's visit

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to Sochi may also result in Türkiye's application to join the SCO, which it has been signalling since 2016. After the unsuccessful coup that year, Erdoğan presented

membership in the organisation as an alternative to Türkiye's stalled candidacy for the European Union.