

Turkey Offers \$50 Million Loan to Ukraine and Urges Protection of Crimean Tatars

By [The Moscow Times](#)

March 21, 2015



Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko shakes hands with Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan after a signing ceremony in Kiev March 20, 2015

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan offered a \$50 million loan to Ukraine and called for the rights of Crimean Tatars to be protected during a trip to Kiev on Friday, but avoided outright criticism of trade partner Russia.

In a joint press conference with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Erdogan said Turkey was also offering \$10 million in humanitarian assistance on top of the loan, which is meant to help Ukraine cover its budget deficit.

"We have expressed our support for the territorial integrity, political union and sovereignty of Ukraine, including Crimea, in every platform," Erdogan said, voicing support for the Minsk

cease-fire brokered by Germany and France in February.

"We also wish for the continuation of Ukraine's stance of protecting the rights of all ethnic and religious minorities, especially Crimean Tatar Turks, who have proved their loyalty to their country during this crisis," he said.

Turks have close kinship bonds with the Muslim, Turkic-speaking Tatar minority in Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula Moscow annexed from Ukraine a year ago. Erdogan has repeatedly warned that the instability could have regional repercussions.

But Turkey has deepening trade ties with Russia and has been reluctant to openly criticize Moscow's actions in Ukraine. Erdogan spoke by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin this week, discussing energy deals and the Ukraine crisis.

Russian gas exporter Gazprom said in January it planned to build an undersea gas pipeline via the Turkish-Greek border — a project informally known as "Turkish Stream" — as it seeks to supply Europe while by-passing Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials had been expected to seek assurances from Erdogan and Energy Minister Taner Yildiz during their trip that those ties will not harm Ukrainian interests.

Asked at the press conference about the Turkish Stream project, Erdogan gave no new details, saying simply that Turkey found the Russian proposal "reasonable" and that Russia remained its biggest natural gas supplier.

A senior Turkish official said ahead of the visit that Ukraine's ambition to build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant on the Black Sea coast would be on the agenda, but that Ankara still opposes the project on environmental grounds.

"Nobody should expect from this visit a step from Turkey that could strain ties with Russia," a second official said ahead of the meetings with Poroshenko.

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