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Turkey's Erdogan Vows Not to Recognize Crimea as Russian

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said Ankara will not recognize the Crimean peninsula as Russian territory during talks with his Ukrainian counterpart on Wednesday.

Russia annexed the Black Sea territory from Ukraine in 2014, incurring several rounds of Western economic sanctions. Moscow maintains that an overwhelming majority of Crimean residents voted to join Russia in a referendum.

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"Turkey has not recognized Crimea's illegal annexation, nor will it recognize it" in the future, Erdogan said at a briefing following talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in Ankara.

"Our Crimean brothers and sisters are an important element of the historic and human

connections between Ukraine and Turkey," he said, calling the plight of Crimean Tatars a "priority" for Turkey.

Turkey is home to a sizeable diaspora of Crimean Tatars, according to a U.S.-based nonprofit. The Tatars, a predominantly Muslim community that makes up about 15% of Crimea's population, have largely opposed Russian rule and say the 2014 annexation was illegal.

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Russia's Crimea-based senator Sergei Tsekov said Moscow "understands but isn't really worried about" Turkey's position.

A NATO ally, Turkey has imported Russia's S-400 advanced missile defense systems in defiance of sanctions warnings from the U.S. Erdogan has vowed to continue the country's defense cooperation with Moscow.

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