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Erdogan Tells Putin Won't Accept Moves on Ukraine's Sovereignty

By AFP

February 23, 2022



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. **kremlin.ru**

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told Russian leader Vladimir Putin in a phone call on Wednesday that Turkey would not recognize any move against Ukraine's sovereignty, and warned against a military conflict.

Erdogan told Putin that Turkey would "not recognize any step against Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," his office said, adding that this was Ankara's "principled approach."

President Vladimir Putin has defied an avalanche of international sanctions to put his forces on stand-by to occupy and defend two rebel-held areas of eastern Ukraine, after recognizing the two regions as independent.

NATO member Turkey, which has friendly ties to both Russia and Ukraine, has sought to position itself as a mediator in the crisis.

During the phone call with Putin, Erdogan said "a military conflict would not bring benefit to anyone," and that Ankara placed priority on diplomacy and dialogue, the presidency said.

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"Turkey is ready to do its part to reduce tensions and maintain peace," he told Putin.

The Kremlin said Putin told Erdogan about the "necessity" of his decision to recognise east Ukraine's rebel Donetsk and Lugansk republics — a move that opens the door to the presence of the Russian army there.

Putin said the decision was taken "in the conditions of the aggression of Ukrainian authorities in Donbas and their categorical refusal" to abide to a peace agreement, the Kremlin said.

Erdogan cut short his trip to Africa amid the flurry of diplomacy over the crisis between Russia and Ukraine and returned Turkey late on Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters on the plane from Africa, Erdogan said Turkey did not want to make a choice between Russia and Ukraine, in comments published in Turkish media on Wednesday.

"It is not possible for us to give up on both," he said.

"We have political and military relations with Russia. We also have political, military and economic ties with Ukraine," he added.

"We want this issue to be resolved without us having to choose between the two."

Erdogan has proposed a trilateral summit in Turkey with Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

The Turkish leader told Zelenskiy in a phone call on Tuesday that "Putin's recognition of so-called republics" was unacceptable.

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