

What does Turkey's application to join BRICS mean?

Barış Demir
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In early September, Yuri Ushakov, Vice-President of Russia, the chair country of BRICS, announced that “Turkey had applied for full membership and that BRICS countries would consider Ankara's request”.

The statement came ahead of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's participation in the BRICS summit in Kazan on October 22-24. Erdoğan had previously announced his intention to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2022.

Discussion of Turkey's possible membership of BRICS comes amid US plans to authorize Ukraine striking deep into Russia with NATO long-range weapons, bringing the two nuclear-armed powers to the brink of direct war. US preparations for war against China are also intensifying and trade war is escalating. Under these circumstances, Turkey would be the first NATO member to join the BRICS group.

Turkey has yet to make a clear statement on its official application to join. Ömer Çelik, spokesman for Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), said in response to a question: “Our request on this issue is clear, this process is underway. But there is no concrete development in this regard.”

BRICS was established in 2006 by Brazil, Russia, India and China to develop economic cooperation between member countries. South Africa joined the group in 2010. At the BRICS Summit in 2023, the leaders of the member countries decided to expand the group and Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates joined on January 1, 2024. Azerbaijan and Malaysia have formally applied for membership.

The BRICS countries are home to around 45 percent of the world's population. They account for 36 percent of the world's total gross domestic product, ahead of the G7 comprising the United States, Canada, France, the UK, Japan, Germany and Italy.

Ankara argues that its possible membership in BRICS would not change Turkey's position as a critical military-strategic ally of US-NATO imperialism in the Middle East. The Erdoğan government, which tries to manoeuvre between its imperialist allies and Russia and China, sees the development of relations with BRICS as a means of promoting the economic interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie.

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said in June: “When we look at the BRICS issue, we have to follow very closely how alternative economic platforms are being formed in the world and how markets are being formed... All these alternative platforms, in fact, we should see them as complementary rather than alternative to each other, and we are making serious efforts to evaluate these platforms in favour of our country.”

Turkey has been a member of NATO since 1952 and the Council of Europe since 1949. It is a member of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), a long-standing candidate member of the European Union and has Customs Union and Association agreements with the EU.

The regime of Russian President Vladimir Putin is paying special attention to BRICS to ease the sanctions imposed by the US-led imperialist powers and to strengthen the “multipolarity” he has declared as his goal. Within the BRICS, China and Russia are trying to develop an alternative to the dollar in foreign trade. For some time, the Russian Central Bank has been emphasising in its reports that the share of the Chinese currency, the yuan, in foreign trade transactions continues to increase, while the share of the dollar and the euro continues to decrease.

The weakening of the dollar's position in world trade is seen by the US as an unacceptable challenge to its

domination. Washington is trying to offset the continuing decline of its economic position by resorting to military force, as it has done for more than 30 years in the imperialist wars in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa. The US is now targeting Russia and China in the name of “great power rivalry”.

Commenting on assertions that Turkey has applied for membership of BRICS, European Commission Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Spokesperson Peter Stano said, “We expect candidate countries to share the EU’s values and align their foreign policies with ours”.

US Ambassador to Turkey Jeff Flake said in an interview in June that he hoped Turkey would not join BRICS and that he believed Ankara was “firmly anchored in the West”.

A representative from the European Commission was more direct, stating that Turkey must understand that moving towards the European Union is incompatible with joining BRICS, and vice versa. EU candidates are required to align with a unified foreign and security policy, which implies that Turkey would need to join anti-Russia sanctions if it wishes to pursue EU membership.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, “The United States, if I recall correctly, has suggested that BRICS membership is incompatible with NATO affiliation.” He added that “The growing number of countries expressing interest in cooperating with the association now exceeds 30. This truly reflects the multipolar nature of the global landscape.”

As part of the NATO alliance, the Turkish ruling class is desperately trying to pursue a policy of balance to protect its interests. But the consequences of the US wars that have devastated the Middle East, with the complicity of the Turkish ruling elite, have led to various conflicts between Ankara and its NATO allies.

The US’s use of Kurdish nationalist forces (YPG/SDF) as its proxy force in the war for regime change launched in 2011 against the Russian-backed Syrian government, and growing tensions as Ankara sought to strengthen its ties with Moscow, were among the main causes of the NATO-backed coup attempt on July 15, 2016. Erdoğan responded to the failed coup by purchasing S-400 air defence systems from Russia and further strengthening ties with the Putin regime. But for all his rhetoric, he has remained a critical ally of US-NATO imperialism.

Turkey and Russia have kept the path of dialogue open, even though they are on opposing fronts in areas of conflict such as Libya, Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh. In the war in Ukraine, Ankara tried to pursue a policy of mediation between NATO and Russia because of the Turkish bourgeoisie’s strong commercial and military ties with both sides and its fear of the consequences of an expansion of the war.

Ankara supports Ukrainian war aims in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia but favours a negotiated settlement with Moscow and does not participate in sanctions against Russia. In February 2022, Ankara announced the closure of the Black Sea straits to NATO and Russian warships.

In a statement on August 31, Erdoğan explained his government’s policy of balance as follows: “While strengthening our relations with the East, we will look for ways to improve our deep-rooted cooperation with the West. Turkey can be an effective country if it develops its relations with the East and the West simultaneously. Any other path will leave Turkey out of the equation. We are not choosing between the EU and Shanghai. We do not have to choose.”

However, the US escalation of the war against Russia and its Zionist ally Israel’s genocide in Gaza and preparations for war against Iran are narrowing Ankara’s room for manoeuvre. A direct war between the US-NATO and Russia, which would inevitably spill over into the Black Sea, or a war between the US and Israel against Turkey’s neighbour Iran, would force the Erdoğan government to take sides.

Ankara’s pragmatic policy of manoeuvring between the US-NATO and Russia and China is in any case a way of advancing the reactionary interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie and offers no way forward against imperialist war and genocide.



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