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Astana Summit and Türkiye’s diplomatic achievements

The 6th summit of the Conference on Cooperation and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) held on October 12-13 recently attracted the attention of the world media. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Kazakhstan at the invitation of his Kazakh counterpart President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Erdogan’s visit to Kazakhstan and Türkiye’s foreign policy achievements at the summit can be analyzed in two different contexts: first is Türkiye’s new agreements with Kazakhstan and further development of bilateral relations and the second is Erdogan’s meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin during the summit.

Meeting of Erdogan and Tokayev

Erdogan and Tokayev co-chaired the 4th meeting of the Kazakhstan-Türkiye High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council and had one-on-one talks. One of the important results of Erdogan’s visit to Kazakhstan was six agreements in different fields signed by the two countries.

In terms of trade, both sides confirmed their commitment to improving economic ties. Trade volume between Türkiye and Kazakhstan has increased by 66% and reached $3.5 billion. Both countries are willing to increase it to $5 billion in the short term, and $10 billion in the longest. In addition to trade, Turkish companies are keenly interested in investing in Kazakhstan’s different sectors. According to the Industry and Infrastructure Minister Kairbek Usskenbayev, there is already news that Turkish investors intend to invest $200 million in the agro-industrial complex of Kazakhstan.

Strengthening economic relations creates mutually beneficial conditions for both countries.

First, Türkiye's developing economic relations with Kazakhstan may help Ankara to diversify its import and export routes and reach its economic growth target. Secondly, new opportunities help Turkish companies to strengthen their market position in Kazakhstan and spread their potential to the Central Asian market which has a different investment opportunity. Finally, both countries improving relations help them to reduce their vulnerability to any external economic shock.

Besides the economy, another important topic of the meeting was the transportation sector. Given both countries play key roles in the Middle Corridor, President Erdogan's announcement that Türkiye is ready to assist Kazakhstan in the construction of a shipbuilding facility is a strategically significant development. Despite the distinct advantages of the Middle Corridor, one of the biggest problems is the shortage of ships. In the near future, possible cooperation in shipbuilding between Türkiye and Kazakhstan could solve the congestion problem in the Caspian Sea and optimize the Middle Corridor.

Meeting of Erdogan and Putin

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin met on the sidelines of a regional summit in Kazakhstan on Thursday. Since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye has balanced relations with both Ukraine and Russia, and acted as a bridge between Russia and the West. As a result of these efforts, it played a leading role in the grain deal and prisoner swaps between Russia and Ukraine. At the summit, President Erdogan emphasized that Türkiye's aim is to stop the bloodshed in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war as soon as possible despite obstacles.

As a result of the meeting, two important developments took place that could strengthen Türkiye's political, economic and strategic positions. The first development is on the grain

deal which President Erdogan confirmed that Türkiye will continue grain exports and Russian grain and fertilizer transfers under the Istanbul agreement. However, he stressed that Ankara attaches importance to grain and fertilizer exports to poor countries rather than rich ones. While the grain deal with the mediation of Türkiye increases Ankara's both strategic and political importance between the West and Russia, its attitude to export grain to less developed countries, especially to African countries, also strengthens its soft power through the Global South.

The second important development has become President Putin's proposal on transforming Türkiye into a regional "gas hub" that controls the flow of gas to Europe. Putin said that if Türkiye and other countries are interested, Russia can build a new gas pipeline and establish a gas center in Türkiye for export to other countries, especially to Europe. President Erdogan announced that Ankara and Moscow will work jointly on building a natural gas hub in Türkiye's Thrace region this week.

The construction of a new gas pipeline may create both economic and strategic opportunities for Ankara. In terms of economic implications, by the way of building a new pipeline and distribution system, Türkiye can enjoy more transit fees. Furthermore, a new project can create spillover effects and lead to opening new employment opportunities.

In the context of the strategic opportunities, firstly, the construction of a new pipeline will consolidate Ankara's position as an energy hub as Türkiye already hosts multiple natural gas pipelines from Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran. Secondly, the new pipeline ensures Türkiye's energy security and creates the chance to diversify its energy import routes and balance its needs from different countries even in the crisis time. Finally, playing the role of an energy hub may minimize any possibilities of conflicts through increasing interdependency with Russia. Furthermore, the new project may strengthen Ankara's

position vis-a-vis both Russia and the EU, and creates new opportunities for Türkiye to follow a flexible, balanced, and multi-vector foreign policy.

To sum up, as a result of the Astana Summit, Türkiye further strengthened its strategic position in Eurasia. By the way of the new agreements with Kazakhstan, Ankara enforced its economic and political position in Central Asia. As a result of meeting with President Putin, Türkiye consolidated its political, strategic and economic importance, and increased its bargaining power between the West and Russia.

Main Sources: Anadolu Agency