



Turkey

Return of a major player



Dossier



Turkey, the former Ottoman Empire, was a sleepy agricultural society until reforms spurred development in the 1980s. In the 21st century, it is a pragmatic regional power straddling Europe and the Middle East; a player to be reckoned with.

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Introduction

The Republic of Turkey is a power at the crossroads of the Balkans, Caucasus, Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean. Its population exceeds 86 million.

Turkey boasts a fast-growing economy and a diversified manufacturing base. Its nominal gross domestic product (GDP) topped \$1.1 trillion in 2023, ranking 17th among all countries. About 95 percent of Turkish exports are manufactured products, and around 53 percent of them go to G7 countries. International trade and cooperation have turned the sleepy agrarian country of the 1960s into a dynamic industrialized economic player in the 2020s. This economic development is due mainly to close relations with the European Union. However, Turkey charts its own course in domestic and foreign policy, one that is often distinct from its neighbors or larger influential allies like Europe or the United States.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was reelected in May 2023 to a third five-year term. He announced that he would not seek another after the end of his current term in 2028, when he will be 74 years old. This defies the image of Mr. Erdogan so frequently propagated in Europe and the U.S.: that he is an autocrat seeking lifelong rule.

His detractors tend to underestimate the challenges that modern Turkey faces. The principles of secular state, isolationism and noninterventionism that defined the republic's policies in the 20th century were no longer working so well in the 2000s. Its neighbors in the Middle East have become increasingly unstable, while the political influence of contemporary Islam has grown vastly more powerful. As the region's significant power, Ankara could no longer remain inactive.

Often caricatured in Washington, as well as Brussels and other European capitals, as a spoiler for NATO and a maverick who is not sufficiently aligned with them, Mr. Erdogan has a consistent record of foreign policy effectiveness in a complex region.

Until these capitals seriously consider Turkey's growing regional role, they cannot effectively cooperate with Ankara.