



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# By applying for BRICS, Turkey adds pressure to its dialogue with the West



Turkey's formal **application** for BRICS membership pleased the founders of this organisation, but at the same time caused concern among Ankara's Western partners.

Turkey is the first country from the circle of large growing economies, which typically includes countries such as Mexico, Indonesia, and Nigeria, to express interest in joining BRICS.

The BRICS summit, which will take place in the Russian city of Kazan in October, presents an opportunity to send a more serious signal about the speed of its accession. Five founders of the organisation and newly admitted members—Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, and Iran—would like to see Turkey join their ranks.

Turkey would be a real pearl in the BRICS necklace, with a population of more than 85 million, an economy of more than \$1 trillion, an extremely favourable geostrategic position, and, above all, significant political influence in the wider region, including parts of Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East.

However, enthusiasm about Turkey's application for membership does not seem to be the same among current members.

## Moscow is not overly enthusiastic

The head of Russian diplomacy, Sergei Lavrov, **said** at the end of June that the organisation will "take a pause" when it comes to accepting new members.

"By the overwhelming majority, the ten nations decided to 'take a pause' with new members to 'take in' the new members who have doubled the association," said Lavrov at the end of June.

At that moment, he must have been aware of Ankara's intentions to submit an official application for membership. Therefore, his story about a "pause" in further expansion indicates Moscow's lack of enthusiasm for Turkey's admission to BRICS.

At first glance, it might seem that Russia should be the leader in opening the doors of BRICS for Turkey's membership, since one of the most important NATO member states would join the organisation that wants to be an alternative to Western-led integrations.

## Moscow has serious, though less visible, reasons for Ankara to wait a bit before joining BRICS

Moscow, on the other hand, has serious, though less visible, reasons for Ankara to wait a bit before joining BRICS. Regardless of the chronic problems that the Turkish economy has been facing for years, particularly high inflation, entry into the BRICS would mean competing with Russia's influence.

And that influence has been declining, considering Russia's two and a half years of economic isolation due to its aggression against Ukraine, which is why its shares in BRICS, of which it is the founder, have been getting weaker.

Turkey would undoubtedly accelerate Moscow's decline in reputation with its joint partners, particularly China and India, which are also the biggest exit from Russia's economic troubles.

## Concern in NATO

On the other hand, Turkey's application for BRICS membership is one of the most convincing diplomatic warnings, if not a blow, to Western partners from whom Turkey has long expected more respect and stronger engagement.

The confirmation that Ankara has applied for BRICS membership came just a few days after the crucial **meeting** of Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan with EU colleagues in Brussels.

After five years, this was the first meeting of Turkish and European ministers, so the

meeting in Brussels rightly marked the return of the institutional dialogue between Turkey and the EU to a track from which both sides expect a lot.

However, a big shadow on the expected thawing and perhaps even faster integration of Turkey into the EU came with the confirmation, first from Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AK Party, that Ankara requested admission to the BRICS.

**“Turkey is seeking alternatives. It does not want to leave its NATO membership” - Asli Aydintasbas**

First and foremost, this raised the question of Turkey's position within NATO, where it is one of the largest and most influential members, significantly contributing to the strategic importance of the Alliance not only in Europe but also in its neighbouring regions, such as the Caucasus and the Middle East.

“This is something to which the transatlantic community should definitely pay attention,” said Asli Aydintasbas from the Washington DC-based Brookings Institute.

“Turkey is seeking alternatives. It does not want to leave its NATO membership. It does not want to shed its European aspirations. But it wants to diversify its set of alliances, hedge its bets, so to speak. It no longer sees its NATO membership to be the sole identity, its sole foreign policy orientation,” said Aydintasbas.

## Strengthening the negotiating position towards the EU

The diversification of alternatives he talks about certainly also regards strategic negotiating positions with the West, where Turkey, with its application for BRICS membership, undoubtedly puts pressure on its partners in the West to approach its many demands for greater respect and especially political and economic concessions more seriously.

Many of them regard relations with the EU, where Turkey has had a candidate status since 1987 but has made little progress. One of the concessions that Ankara is very interested in is visa liberalisation, which would score Erdoğan's policy big points at home, given that the huge Turkish emigration in Europe could live much more comfortably with that relief.



*Until Turkey becomes a member of BRICS, there is still a lot of room for its dealings with its Western partners - Hakan Fidan*

Ankara's BRICS application is also a move to strengthen its alliance with big countries in the east, particularly China and India, in order to gain support for its position regarding Cyprus and Middle East policies.

Although assurances coming from the West say that Turkey's possible membership in BRICS would not reduce its role in NATO, the Alliance would certainly suffer a small defeat with Turkey's entry into BRICS.

Regardless of the fact that this is primarily an economically motivated, loose organisation, over time BRICS has increasingly been taking on the contours of a political community in many aspects, and above all in offering an alternative model of international relations in which the Western powers would not be at the centre.

However, until Turkey becomes a member of BRICS, there is still a lot of room for its dealings with its Western partners, but now under pressure of the possibility that an important ally may find itself in the opposite camp. Ankara will likely be able to capitalise on the new circumstances, given that it created

them itself with its application for full BRICS membership.