

Erdogan says Turkey's place is in Europe before EU summit

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says Turkey sees itself as a part of Europe, but he has called on the European Union to keep its promises on issues such as Turkey's membership bid and refugees.



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan addresses the leaders of the G20 Leaders' Summit with an introductory video message from his Vahdettin Pavilion, in Istanbul, Saturday, Nov. 21, 2020. Saudi Arabia is hosting the virtual meeting of G-20 leaders on Saturday and Sunday in line with coronavirus restrictions. (Turkish Presidency via AP, Pool) (Photo credit: AP)

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Sunday that Turkey sees itself as a part of Europe, but he called on the European Union to “keep your promises” on issues such as the country's membership bid and refugees.

He spoke before an EU summit due to be held next month. In recent weeks, EU members have raised the prospect of sanctions against Turkey over its gas

exploration missions in the eastern Mediterranean.

“We always see ourselves as part of Europe,” Erdogan said in a virtual speech to ruling party members. “We chose to favor Europe as long as they don’t force us to look elsewhere.”

He added: “Keep your promises to our country, from full membership to the issue of refugees. Let’s establish a closer and more efficient cooperation together.”

Turkey applied for membership in the bloc in 1987 and four years ago signed a deal with the EU to manage the flow of migrants to Europe.

However, claims of democratic backsliding have seen its application effectively suspended while both sides have accused the other of not properly implementing the refugee agreement.

Ankara has dispatched research and drillships to waters claimed by EU members Greece and Cyprus, sparking a military escalation over the summer.

Prior to an EU summit in September, Turkey withdrew the Oruc Reis research vessel from the eastern Mediterranean. The ship later returned and on Saturday Turkey announced it was extending its mission until Nov. 29.

European heads are due to meet in Brussels on Dec. 10 and 11 and have voiced concerns over Turkish activity in parts of the Mediterranean that Ankara unilaterally claims as its economic zone. Tensions have also been stoked by Erdogan’s insults against French President Emmanuel Macron and Turkey’s foreign policy in northern Cyprus and Azerbaijan.

Last week, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas urged Turkey to stop “provocations” in the Mediterranean or face possible sanctions. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc was “approaching a watershed moment in our relationship with Turkey.”

In a bid to patch up relations, Erdogan dispatched his spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, who often takes a role in foreign affairs, to Brussels on Friday.

Over the last two weeks, Erdogan has talked about plans for judicial and democratic reforms to accompany a change in economic policy, a sign that some have suggested is a bid to win over Europe and the incoming administration of

President-elect Joe Biden in the U.S.

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