
ERDOGAN VISITS CROATIA TO BOLSTER TURKEY'S EU ROLE

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is visiting Croatia for the first time this week, aiming to firm up Turkey's position in the EU - and raising hopes of trade spin-offs for Croatias exporters.

Erdogan will visit Zagreb on Tuesday and Wednesday, meeting Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic and Prime Minister Tihomir Oreskovic.

He will also attend events marking the 100th anniversary of the formal recognition of the Islamic faith in the Austro-Hungarian Empire of which Croatia was then part.

Retired university professor and political analyst, Zarko Puhovski, says the visit will be used also to show that Croatia has a second option to the EU.

Turkey always acts as if it plays a major role in Europe and that Europe needs them. Therefore, both of them [Croatia and Turkey] have tactical reasons for such a visit, he told BIRN.

Puhovski said the visit was likely to improve Turkey's position. It already plays a major role in Europe, managing the flow of migrants to the continent from the war zones of the Middle East.

What has attracted most attention in Croatia is that Erdogan will reportedly bring six ministers and 90 businessmen with him, some of them senior officials in leading Turkish companies who will take part in an economic forum with some 150 Croatian counterparts.

Croatia's National Bank says Turkey has invested only 212 million euros in Croatia since 1993, or only one per cent of all foreign investments in Croatian economy.

Croatia exported goods worth 104.4 million euros to Turkey in 2015, only 1 per cent of all exports, while Croatia imported from Turkey goods worth 244.4 million euros, also around 1 per cent of total imports.

Damir Novotny, an economic expert, told BIRN that while Turkey is not a major consumer of Croatian products, it has made investments in tourism on the Adriatic coast.

Turkey made smaller investments in other sectors, but tourism remains the most important sector for their investments, he said.

Novotny explained that Croatian products are not interesting to Turkish buyers, since both countries produce similar products, while the costs in Turkey are lower than in Croatia and the two

countries are often direct competitors.

The Turkish confectionery industry is a direct competitor to Croatian one, the Turkish furniture industry is a direct competitor to the Croatian one - Turkish agriculture as well, he observed.

Besides the economy, Erdogan and Grabar Kitarovic will discuss bilateral issues including Croatias potential support for Turkeys EU membership negotiations.

Both presidents will also discuss security topics - the terrorism threat, the situation in Syria and Iraq, the migrant crisis and energy security.

Sven Milekic BIRN Zagreb

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