

Will Turkey succeed with its new charm offensive?

MENEKSE TOKYAY

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ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is downplaying Ankara's tensions with a host of countries as he launches a charm offensive on a variety of fronts.

Meeting with the ambassadors of EU member states in Ankara on Jan. 12, Erdogan said that he expects to "turn a new page" in ties with Europe and "set a positive agenda" in 2021.

However, his comments came at the same time as Brussels draws up an expanded sanctions list targeting Turkish individuals over Ankara's decision to drill for offshore natural gas near Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean. The punitive measures are set to be announced in March.

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Gallia Lindenstrauss, senior research fellow at the **Institute for National Security Studies** in Israel, said that the drivers behind Turkey's overtures to Israel include: Preparations for the incoming US administration; tensions in the eastern Mediterranean, and the desire to drive a wedge between Israel, Cyprus and Greece; the Abraham accords and the end of the blockade on Qatar which requires Turkey to rethink its policies toward the Middle East; and the recent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan that reminded Ankara of the advantages of cooperating with Israel.

Although the return of diplomatic ties is a feasible aim, she doesn't expect any change before the Israeli elections in March and the formation of a new government.

"However, this will not fundamentally improve relations as there is deep suspicion between the two states," Lindenstrauss told Arab News.

"Also Israel will likely make additional demands from Turkey to show that its overtures are sincere, such as Ankara halting Hamas military activity organized on its soil and directed against Israel and the West Bank, as well as more transparency about Turkey's projects in East Jerusalem," she added.

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