



Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee

MISSION REPORT

which included the

78th EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) meeting

Ankara, 19-20 December 2018

Participating Members

1. Mr Manolis KEFALOGIANNIS, Chair	EPP, Greece
2. Mr Miltiadis KYRKOS, 1 st Vice-Chair	S&D, Greece
3. Mr Takis HADJIGEORGIOU, 2 nd Vice-Chair	GUE/NGL, Cyprus
4. Ms Michaela ŠOJDROVÁ	EPP, Czech Republic
5. Mr Costas MAVRIDES	S&D, Cyprus
6. Mr Javi LÓPEZ	S&D, Spain (Substitute)
7. Ms Eleni THEOCHAROUS	ECR, Cyprus
8. Mr Nedzhmi ALI	ALDE, Bulgaria (Substitute)
9. Ms Marietje SCHAAKE	ALDE, Netherlands (Substitute)
10. Mr Jordi SOLÉ	Greens/EFA, Spain
11. Ms Ana MIRANDA	Greens/EFA, Spain (Substitute)
12. Ms Bodil VALERO	Greens/EFA, Sweden (Substitute)

Background

The EP delegation visited Ankara for the 78th EU-Turkey JPC. This was a second JPC meeting in 2018 marking a return to normal inter-parliamentary relations, following a 3-year standstill before finally holding the 77th meeting in Brussels in April 2018.

The following meetings/visits took place:

-) Briefing by the EU Ambassador and exchange of views with Member States Ambassadors** (jointly with the SEDE delegation).

Discussion focused on both internal (elections, new constitution, end of the state of emergency (SoE)) and external (situation on the Syrian-Iraqi border, relations with Russia and the US) aspects of the Turkish politics. MEPs were particularly interested in Turkey's and EU's role in

Syria, relations with Cyprus, situation of minorities and the new situation following the termination of the state of emergency.

) **Meeting with the civil society organizations (CSOs)**

Delegation Members met with representatives of CSOs representing human rights activists, citizens' associations, women- and LGBTI rights defenders, trade unions and the former President of the union of judges. Main messages from them included rapidly shrinking space for the civil society, erosion of the rule of law, intimidation of Human Rights defenders, journalists and civil activists and a total unawareness of most of the public about the situation in the country due to the governmental control of the media. CSO representatives asked the EU to continue supporting them through Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds and by facilitating contacts with NGOs, trade unions and CSOs in the EU and to use its economic leverage to help them improve the situation in Turkey.

) **Meeting with Ambassador Kaymakçı, Director for EU Affairs, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (jointly with the SEDE)**

Ambassador underlined that despite the inclusion of the former EU Affairs ministry to the MFA, the Directorate for EU Affairs remained the locomotive of Turkey's accession process and the only autonomous unit of the MFA. He presented the 3 main pillars of Directorate's work – political affairs and reform, accession negotiations, financial cooperation. Regarding Syria, he explained Turkey's views on the Democratic Union Party/People's Protection Units (PYD/YPG). As for relations with Russia, Ambassador explained its importance as neighbour, trade partner, source of natural gas and tourism, but assured that this did not challenge Turkey's alliance with the West and NATO.

) **78th EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) meeting**
venue: Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT)

EU-Turkey relations and state of play of accession negotiations

Mr Maciej POPOWSKI, Deputy Director General (DG NEAR), on behalf of the European Commission

Ambassador BERGER, on behalf of the European External Action Service;

Ambassador Ulrike TILLY, on behalf of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU;

Ambassador Faruk KAYMAKÇI, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director for EU Affairs, on behalf of the Government of Turkey.

M. Popowski described the EU-Turkey relations as "complex and challenging" - while Turkey is a strategic partner for the EU and both parties work together in areas of common interest, Turkey has not shown enough progress in such areas as the rule of law and freedom of expression. As candidate country, Turkey has committed to the European standards, but reforms have not been sufficient for the accession process. The EU is aware of the difficulties related to the post-coup situation and fight against terrorism, but Turkey needs to ensure proportionality of the measures. On visa liberalization, Turkey needs to meet the remaining criteria, especially the Turkey's Anti-Terror Law needs to be harmonized with the EU

standards. Turkey needs to work in close cooperation with the Council of Europe (CoE) to reverse the negative trends.

Ambassador Berger underlined the critical moment in EU-Turkey relations, which are currently on a more positive note. There is mutual interest in intensifying political dialogue in sectoral areas, improved relations with Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and the cooperation on fight against terrorism and on the CFSP.

Austrian Ambassador Ulrike Tilly also underlined Turkey's strategic importance for the EU, common interests, challenges and history. Migration is one of the most important issues in our collaboration and the EU will fulfill its commitments. The EU has fully and strongly condemned the coup attempt, but is worried about the scale of measures. Turkey should step up cooperation with the CoE and address all concerns.

Ambassador Kaymakçı regretted the absence of Commissioner Hahn, but welcomed the "courageous step" by JPC Co-Chairs to restart inter-parliamentary cooperation. He expressed the perception of "little solidarity shown after the direct assault on our democracy on 15 July 2016". Turkey also notices that Western Balkans are currently the focal point of the EU's enlargement policy, and asks not to be discriminated against. Turkey would be open to launching at least 25 EU accession chapters, but is "being hindered by political constraints". "We feel that accession is the backbone of our relations with the EU. Don't come to us with proposals of a privileged partnership or a special relationship. We already have that. The relationship we have today is privileged and is special."

Ambassador Kaymakçı also underlined that Europe had responsibility to share Turkey's burden on migration. He urged to expedite the flow of funds. On Syria, he said that Turkey had been the target of criticism for its operations in the north of Syria, adding that the operations against terrorist organizations were also intended to protect the EU and NATO's borders. On visa liberalization, it would encourage Turkey to continue carrying out its reforms. The current counter-terrorism law was instrumental to Turkey's fight against numerous terrorist organizations, including the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Daesh and FETO: "It's not easy for us to align our counter-terrorism law with the counter-terrorism laws we see in Central and Western Europe. Our European friends should understand this thoroughly and they should give us room for flexibility on this matter."

During the debate most MEPs underlined that relations with Turkey should keep going, but the EU would not compromise nor spare any criticism on democracy, rule of law and human rights issues. They regretted the way EP reports on Turkey had been treated by the counterparts. Turkish MPs mainly questioned the objectivity of membership criteria, compared Turkey's SoE measures with those applied in France, expressed regrets about the discrimination Turkey and its citizens were facing in Europe.

Economic cooperation between Turkey and the EU

- **Mr Gabriel MUNUERA VINALS**, Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, on behalf of the European Commission/European External Action
- **Mr Mehmet TAN**, Deputy Director General at the DG for EU and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Trade

EU is Turkey's first economic partner, Turkey is EU's 5th economic partner and both are committed to deepening the economic cooperation. The two economies and their value chains are deeply integrated. 70% of FDIs to Turkey come from the EU. A High-Level EU-Turkey economic dialogue is scheduled to take place on 28 February to discuss the prospects. EU and Turkey form a Customs Union (CU) established by the Ankara agreement. In late 2016, the Commission proposed a modernisation of the CU, however, the negotiating mandate is still pending in the Council.

Turkey has adopted an economic reform program focusing on several priorities, e.g. promoting domestic savings, increasing price stability, improving business environment and reforming the labour market to combat shadow economy.

According to the Turkish MFA representative, there are serious systemic problems in the functioning of the CU and it is outdated comparing to modern DCFTAs concluded by the EU. Through its FTAs, the EU is now more integrated with 3rd countries than with Turkey, which leads to asymmetry. Main issues concern the exclusion of Turkey from decision-making regarding the CU, road transport quotas, conclusions of FTAs and granting autonomous trade preferences by the EU without any consultation with Turkey and lack of an effective dispute settlement mechanism.

In the ensuing debate, Members agreed that upgrading of the CU would boost both economies and would be beneficial for the citizens. The Turkish side called for a depoliticisation of economic relations and emphasised the need to see a bigger picture in order to face the global economic challenges. The MEPs mostly argued that the EU's trade policy is value-based and cannot be decoupled from political considerations. In all of its trade negotiations, the EU applies human rights' conditionality, seeks assurances against corruption (for access to public procurement), non-discrimination and independent judiciary (for protection of investments), as well as assurances against internet censorship (for digital trade), against child labour and for environmental protection (Turkey is yet to ratify the Paris climate agreement). MEPs expressed hope that the economic reform program would deliver concrete results and that the prospect of the CU modernisation would be an incentive for further reforms. MPs also mentioned the cutting down of the IPA funds, which have been a life-line for many Turkish SMEs. Visa liberalisation was repeatedly mentioned as a tool to boost mutual trade.

Security challenges

- **Mr Gabriel MUNUERA VINALS**, Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, on behalf of the European Commission/European External Action Service
- **Mr Alper CO KUN**, Ambassador, Director General for International Security Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

EU and Turkey are facing common security challenges and have mutual understanding on the importance of this cooperation. Turkey and EU are pursuing concrete actions to increase cooperation to counter the threat of terrorism in an effective manner. Recent High-Level Dialogue (HLD) underlined the intention of both sides to intensify this cooperation. The PKK and the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C) remain on the EU list of persons, groups and entities involved in acts of terrorism. Negotiations for an operational cooperation agreement between the European Union and Turkey on exchange of personal data between Europol and the Turkish authorities competent for fighting serious crime and terrorism

have started on 30 November 2018, and this will significantly improve efficiency of our joint efforts. Regarding the CFSP, the EU is committed to continue constructive engagement with Turkey. Turkey's contribution to the CFSP missions (3rd largest contributor) is an excellent example of cooperation.

Ambassador CO KUN also underlined significant need for the EU-Turkey dialogue on all issues, but the country feels that in the EU, the culture of working with Turkey has gone backwards, as in the past the interaction used to be more intense. Meanwhile, challenges, risks and threats are increasing. Turkey's fight against terrorism needs to be better understood, "it is not fair to knock on Turkey's door asking for help with migrants, while ignoring terrorism-related problems the country is facing". The US and some EU Member States "are cooperating with terrorists Turkey is fighting against". Nevertheless, Turkey is and will continue to be a security provider, also by contributing to NATO missions, and working closely with the EU.

During the debate MEPs acknowledged the specificity of the region surrounding Turkey and the problems it creates, and the additional strains on security that were created by the attempted coup. They called, however, for more flexibility and dialogue on the Kurdish issue. They also expressed concerns regarding the planned intervention in northern Syria. Reasons for imprisonment of Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) leaders and members were widely questioned by MEPs.

There is no "Kurdish issue" or "minority", according to most Turkish MPs from across the political spectrum, underlining that Kurdish people are equal and have the same rights. (Only one HDP MP participated at the JPC.) Regarding the rule of law, security, minorities, terrorism, most MPs expressed the opinion that the EU had poor information and did not clearly understand the situation on the ground.

Conclusions

Important and timely delegation visit. Interesting and informative exchanges with the civil society, as well as lively debates between the MEPs and MPs.

Possible follow-up

Further normalization of inter-parliamentary relations with Turkey, continuation of dialogue and organization of 79th JPC in Brussels on 18 February 2019.

Attachments:

-) Program
-) List of participants