

2016 report on Turkey

During its July plenary session, the European Parliament is expected to vote on a resolution on the Commission's 2016 report on Turkey. Long-standing EU-Turkey relations, despite being a priority for both sides, have recently reached a low point, and accession talks risk being brought to a halt.

Background

Turkey's EU accession talks started in 2005, but progress has been slow. Turkey and the EU are [key trade partners](#), with a customs union in place since 1995, which the Commission [proposed](#), in December 2016, to modernise. In March 2016, the two agreed upon a [refugee deal](#) that helped [curb migration](#) towards Europe in exchange for securing EU funds and visa liberalisation prospects. In June 2016, the EU opened one more negotiation chapter, but [relations](#), instead of being re-energised, have gone awry since. After a failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016, and a declared state of emergency in Turkey, the EU informally suspended the talks. [Visa liberalisation stalled](#), as Turkey had not met all criteria, particularly revision of anti-terror legislation. Talks on reinstating the death penalty, and pressure on the freedom of expression were seen as ['extremely worrying developments'](#). In April 2017, Turkey held a referendum, which by a narrow majority allowed for constitutional changes to forge a strong presidential system, and the situation thereafter remains [difficult to predict](#).

European Commission 2016 report on Turkey

The [2016 report](#) which for some is ['the harshest'](#) ever written, recognises the coup as a direct attack on democracy. It highlights EU criticism of the ensuing events, and its full support for Turkey's democratic institutions. Also, it notes that the emergency measures (suspensions, dismissals, arrests and detentions over alleged links to the Gülen movement, and involvement in the coup) severely violated basic rights and freedoms, affecting all of society. These measures are being [scrutinised by the Council of Europe](#). The report underlines the situation in south-east Turkey as one of the most critical challenges at present. After the 2015 collapse of the Kurdish settlement process, the security situation worsened, and allegations of human rights violations intensified. The report points to backsliding in key reform areas, such as public administration reforms, the judicial system (the judiciary's independence), [freedom of expression](#), and even the economy. It also notes that corruption remains a serious problem. As regards legislation, the adoption of a law that allowed the lifting of the immunity of a large number of MPs and their ensuing detention, is seen as alarming. The application of an anti-terror law, not aligned with the EU *acquis*, also raises serious fundamental rights concerns. Conversely, the adoption of [a law on the human rights and equality institution](#) is a positive step.

European Parliament position

In 2016, the Parliament adopted resolutions on the [situation of journalists](#) in Turkey and on [EU-Turkey relations](#), calling for a temporary freeze of the accession talks after the coup. On 20 June 2017, the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) adopted a report on the Commission's 2016 report on Turkey. It condemns the coup and the emergency measures, as undermining fundamental freedoms. As regards the referendum outcome, it stresses that the proposed constitutional changes are not in line with the Copenhagen criteria, and calls for suspension of the accession talks if they remain unchanged. An immediate end to talks is also foreseen if the [death penalty is reintroduced](#). It calls for lifting the state of emergency and for fair political settlement of the Kurdish question. It highlights the strategic importance of good EU-Turkey relations for both sides, and the commitment to keeping an open dialogue on shared challenges and interests (counter-terrorism, migration, energy, trade). It supports the proposal for upgrading the customs union, and welcomes Turkey's hospitality to refugees. It calls on the Commission to ensure long-term investment in refugees and host communities in Turkey, and stresses that a settlement of the Cyprus issue is key for the entire region.

Own-initiative report: [2016/2308\(INI\)](#). Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Kati Piri (S&D, the Netherlands).

