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Democratisation in Turkey

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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The Turkish accession process remains of strategic importance for the European Union.

- Democratic reforms and transformation of Turkey reinforce stability and security in Turkey and in the wider neighbourhood of the EU and Turkey. Progress in Turkey, in turn, inspires reformers and acts as a catalyst for democracy and human rights in the whole region.
- Obviously, progress is not always straightforward. With positive developments we see also developments that give reason to be concerned. When that is the case, we raise these issues with the Turkish authorities.
- When a society is experiencing fundamental political changes, it rarely is the case that there is all the time full clarity of the direction in the middle of events.
- The democratic opening is an example of such a development. In summer 2009, the Turkish government launched the democratic opening, aiming at raising democratic and living standards for all Turkish citizens.
- This important initiative addresses the Kurdish issue through dialogue and within the framework of Turkey's democratic institutions.
- A number of landmark reforms have been carried out to this day. Some of them were next to impossible only a few years ago. Kurdish language TV programmes by private and public broadcasters are a telling example of such welcome changes.
- But the recent setbacks in the democratic opening are indeed reason for serious concern. We regret the decision of the Constitutional Court in December to close the Democratic Society Party – DTP.
- Following the DTP closure, several party members, including mayors, were arrested, in the context of an anti-terror investigation.
- Simultaneously, PKK terrorist attacks continue unabated in the Southeast and put the life of Turkish soldiers at risk.
- The tense political climate has also been fuelled by celebrations in the wake of the return of PKK members and sympathisers coming from Northern Iraq. Nationalist circles have grabbed this opportunity to attack the government on its policies.
- Following this backlash against the democratic opening, I welcome last week's announcement by the Turkish government to carry the democratic opening further.
- The democratic transformation of Turkey is a forceful testimony of the continued soft power of the EU accession perspective, when used firmly and fairly, and with rigour.
- It is not an easy process, but one in which the journey is as important as the destination. Let's keep it alive and make it work for the joint benefit of the EU and Turkey.