



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

## MEMO

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### Key findings of the 2014 progress report on Turkey

The Commission's 2014 Progress Report on Turkey highlights a number of important steps taken by Turkey over the past 12 months. These steps include: the adoption of law implementing a democratisation package and the Action Plan for the Prevention of Violations of the European Convention on Human Rights, the signature and the entry into force of the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement and the simultaneous launch of the visa dialogue, as well as the continuation of the process aiming for a settlement of the Kurdish issue.

At the same time, the report emphasises a number of concerns. These concerns relate to the adoption of the legislation undermining the independence of the judiciary, massive reassignments and dismissal of judges and prosecutors and even detention of a high number of police officers, as well as blanket bans imposed on social media. The report welcomes that several of these decisions have been overturned by the Constitutional Court. The tendency to pass laws and decisions, including on fundamental issues for the Turkish democracy, in haste and without sufficient consultations of stakeholders is a matter of concern as well. All this stresses the need to engage in an effective dialogue, both within the country and with the EU to ensure that further reforms in the area of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms follow European standards.

### Political criteria

**Reform efforts continued**, notably several measures under the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> judicial reform packages, as well as measures announced in the September 2013 democratisation package were adopted and implemented. The adoption of an Action Plan on Prevention of European Convention of Human Rights Violations was an important step aimed at aligning Turkey's legal framework and practice with European Court of Human Rights case-law. The Constitutional Court continued applying the individual application procedure. It took a number of important decisions strengthening the protection of fundamental rights in the country, illustrating the resilience of the country's constitutional system.

The parliament also adopted a landmark law providing a legal framework to the process aiming for a settlement of the Kurdish issue. The law strengthens the basis for the settlement process and makes a positive contribution to stability and protection of human rights in Turkey.

However, specific developments in the area of the judiciary and freedom of expression were a matter of concern. Amendments – later reversed – to the Law on High Council of Judges and Prosecutors and subsequent dismissal of staff, as well as numerous reassignments of judges and prosecutors raised serious concerns over the independence, efficiency and impartiality of the judiciary, respect for the rule of law and the separation of powers.

Legislation limiting freedom of expression, including the Law on Internet, was adopted and the effective exercise of this freedom was restricted in practice, exemplified by blanket bans on YouTube and Twitter. These were later overturned by the Constitutional Court.

The political climate was marked by polarisation. Several pieces of legislation proposed by the ruling majority, including on fundamental issues for the Turkish democracy, were adopted without proper parliamentary debate or adequate consultation of stakeholders and civil society.

These issues underline the importance for the EU to enhance its engagement with Turkey on rule of law issues. It is in the interest of both Turkey and the EU that the opening benchmarks for chapters 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and 24- Justice, Freedom and Security, are agreed upon and communicated to Turkey as soon as possible, with a view to enabling the opening of negotiations under these two chapters.

With regard to regional issues and international obligations, Turkey supported the resumption of the fully-fledged settlement talks between the leaders of both communities in Cyprus under the good offices of the UN Secretary-General. Turkey is expected to follow up this support with constructive statements and concrete action. In addition, Turkey has still not complied with its obligation of full non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement.

## **Economic criteria**

**Turkey is a functioning market economy.** After slowing down to an annual GDP growth of 2.2% in 2012, the Turkish economy re-accelerated to 4% in 2013. However, unemployment has risen as a result of a strongly expanding labour force. The current account deficit has remained at an elevated level.

Turkey's recent economic performance illustrates both the high potential and continuing imbalances of its economy. On the external side, the continued reliance on capital inflows to finance a shrinking but still large structural current account deficit makes Turkey vulnerable to changes in global risk sentiment, resulting in large exchange rate fluctuation and boom-bust cycles in economic activity.

Relatively high inflation continues to be a major challenge. A rebalancing of the macroeconomic policy mix would be helpful to ease the burden on monetary policy. For the medium to longer term, it is essential that the functioning of the markets for goods, services and labour are improved through structural reforms to increase international competitiveness. These reforms should be coupled with improvements in the judicial system and of administrative capacity, enhanced transparency of state aid, and open, fair and competitive public procurement system.

## **EU legislation**

**Turkey's alignment efforts with the *acquis* continued.** In 2013, another negotiation chapter was opened. Progress was particularly noticeable on trans-European networks; and in key areas under chapter 24, in particular migration and asylum policy. The implementation of the EU-Turkey readmission agreement and of the Roadmap towards a visa-free regime is expected to continue. Further significant progress is needed especially in the area of judiciary and fundamental rights, social policy and employment, in particular in the areas of labour law and health and safety at work.

## **State of play on accession negotiations**

EU accession negotiations with Turkey began on 3 October 2005. In total, 14 out of 33 negotiation chapters have been opened, and one of the open chapters has been provisionally closed. As a result of Turkey not having fully implemented the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement, the EU decided in December 2006 that eight negotiating chapters could not be opened and that no chapter could be provisionally closed until Turkey meets its obligations.

## **Key dates**

September 1959: Turkey applies for associate membership of the European Economic Community (EEC)

September 1963: Signature of the Association Agreement, aiming at enhancing economic cooperation and achieving a Customs Union between Turkey and the EEC

April 1987: Turkey presents its formal application for membership of the European Economic Community

January 1995: Turkey - EU Agreement creating a customs union

December 1999: the European Council recognises Turkey as a candidate country

December 2004: The European Council agrees to start accession negotiations with Turkey

October 2005: Start of accession negotiations

December 2006: The Council decides that 8 negotiating chapters cannot be opened and no chapter can be closed until Turkey meets its obligation of full, non-discriminatory implementation of the additional protocol to the Association Agreement

May 2012: European Commission and Turkey start the implementation of the Positive agenda for Turkey

November 2013: Chapter 22 on Regional Policy and coordination of structural instruments becomes the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter on which negotiations are opened

December 2013: the EU-Turkey readmission agreement is signed in parallel with the launching of the visa liberalisation dialogue.

October 2014: the EU-Turkey readmission agreement enters into force.

## **More information at:**

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index_en.htm)