

2016 Commission report on Turkey

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Kati PIRI (S&D, NL) on the Commission's 2016 report on Turkey.

Members stressed that 2016 was a difficult year for the Turkish population as a result of the continuing war in Syria, the large number of refugees, the conflict in the south-east of the country, the series of heinous attacks and the attempted coup in which 248 people were killed. They reiterated their firm condemnation of the coup attempt of 15 July even though they recognised the right and responsibility of the Turkish government to take steps to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Coup d'etat and state of emergency in Turkey: Members stressed that the measures taken under the current state of emergency have had a disproportionately negative impact on a large number of citizens. They condemned a number of measures taken against public freedoms and called for the immediate release of all prisoners detained without proof.

Political situation in Turkey: Members regretted that the accession instruments have not been used to the fullest extent and that there has been a regression in the areas of rule of law and human rights in Turkey. They are determined to cooperate and to maintain an open and constructive dialogue with the Turkish Government in order to work on common challenges such as regional stability, the situation in Syria, migration and security.

Taking note of the outcome of the referendum held on 16 April 2017, Members expressed concern about the allegations of irregularities and general electoral fraud highlighted in the conclusions of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). They therefore called on Turkey to respect its commitments as a member of the Council of Europe.

Members firmly condemned the fact that the Turkish President and several other political figures have repeatedly spoken in favour of restoring the death penalty. Once again, Members underlined their unequivocal rejection of the death penalty and stated that this is an essential requirement for accession to the European Union.

Turkey's accession process to the EU: Members recalled that in November 2016 they called for the freezing of Turkey's accession process. They therefore called on the Commission and the Member States to formally suspend the accession negotiations with Turkey without further delay if the constitutional reform package currently provided by the Turkish Government is implemented as it stands.

They also invited the Commission, Member States and Turkey to hold an open and frank discussion on areas of common interest for which enhanced cooperation would be possible.

According to Members, any new political commitment between the EU and Turkey should be based on conditionality provisions concerning respect for democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms: Members regretted all the measures taken following the introduction of a state of emergency, as well as the detention of many opposition Members. They called on the Turkish government to immediately lift the state of emergency and thoroughly investigate allegations of the serious ill-treatment of prisoners.

They pointed out that, since July 2016, more than 100 000 complaints have been lodged with the Turkish Constitutional Court, which has declared itself incompetent on matters relating to the emergency decree. Measures are therefore needed to ensure that judicial review can be applied.

In general, Members stressed the continuing violations of freedom of expression and serious violations of media freedom in Turkey, including in the Kurdish language. They also deplored the repression of several foreign journalists arrested illegally. In particular, they called on the government to allow the former Member of the European Parliament and chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, Joost Lagendijk, to return to his family in Turkey.

Kurdish-majority region: Members deplored the continuing deterioration of the situation in south-east Turkey, especially in areas where curfews have been introduced. They recalled the responsibility of the Turkish Government to protect of all its citizens, irrespective of their cultural or religious origins, and their beliefs.

They are convinced that only an equitable political settlement of the Kurdish issue can bring lasting stability and prosperity to both the area concerned and the country as a whole.

Minorities: Members condemned discrimination against many religious minorities, including the Christian and Alevi minorities. They called on Turkey to respect the importance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and to recognise its legal personality.

They also urged Turkey to protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups and persons belonging to minorities and deplored the fact that the LGBTI marches in Ankara and Istanbul were banned for the second consecutive year. They also encouraged the authorities to remedy the main obstacles to the social inclusion of Roma.

EU-Turkey relations: Members called for the deepening of EU-Turkey relations in important areas of common interest such as the fight against terrorism, migration, energy, economy and trade, and encourage dialogue and cooperation with that country, provided that commitments to fundamental freedoms and rights are respected.

Convergence efforts are therefore required between the country's foreign policy and that of the Union, as well as the improvement of the customs union with Turkey. Members stated that the full potential of the customs union shall not be achieved until Turkey fully implements the Additional Protocol vis-à-vis all Member States.

Improvements are also required as regards:

- the liberalisation of the visa regime;
- the fight against corruption.

At the same time, Members called for the suspension of pre-accession funds if the accession negotiations are suspended and to use these funds to support Turkish civil society and refugees in Turkey.

In general, Members condemned all the attacks in Turkey and stressed that close cooperation between Europol and the Turkish law enforcement authorities is essential to effectively combat terrorism.

Refugees: Members welcomed the mobilisation of the Turkish government and local NGOs and the hospitality shown by the population in hosting around three million refugees. They called on the Commission to ensure long-term investments for refugees and their host communities in Turkey.

President Erdoğan: Members strongly condemned President Erdoğan's statements accusing some EU leaders of 'Nazi practices' and their citizens being 'Nazis'. According to Members, such statements are unwarranted and undermine Turkey's credibility as a political partner. They also called on the Turkish Government to refrain from systematically seeking to mobilise the Turkish Diaspora in the Member States for its own needs. They also condemned the Turkish authorities' oversight of citizens holding dual citizenship residing abroad.

Turkish-Greek and Turkish-Cypriot bilateral relations: Members called on the Turkish government to put an end to the repeated violations of Greek airspace and Greek territorial waters and to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all its neighbours.

They also pointed out that a settlement of the Cyprus issue would have a positive impact for the whole region, which would benefit first and foremost the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. They therefore pleaded for the continuation of the process of reaching an agreement acceptable to both parties regarding the reunification of the island.

Syria: Members are convinced that only a credible political solution will ensure the stability of Syria and allow the decisive defeat of Daesh and other UN-designated terrorist groups in Syria. They urged all guarantors, including Turkey, to honour their commitments to ensure the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement and to advance unhindered humanitarian access to the entire country.

It should be noted that the parliamentary committee has expressly requested the translation of the present report into Turkish.