

Parliament wants to suspend EU accession negotiations with Turkey

- MEPs want the Council and Commission to suspend EU accession talks with Turkey
- Modernising the 1995 EU-Turkey Customs Union should remain an option
- EU funds must be made available to support Turkish civil society

Following years of severe political and democratic backsliding, the European Parliament recommended suspending EU accession negotiations with Turkey.

The European Parliament remains seriously concerned about Turkey's poor track record in upholding human rights, the rule of law, media freedom and the fight against corruption, as well as its all-powerful presidential system.

In a resolution adopted on Wednesday by 370 votes in favour, 109 against with 143 abstentions, MEPs welcome Turkey's decision, last year, to lift the state of emergency introduced after the failed coup attempt in 2016. However, they regret that many of the powers granted to the President and executive following the coup attempt remain in place, and continue to limit freedom and basic human rights in the country. MEPs express great concern about the shrinking space for civil society in the country, as a large number of activists, journalists and human rights defenders are currently in jail.

Taking into account the human rights situation and the new Turkish constitution, the European Parliament recommends that the current EU accession negotiations with Turkey be formally suspended.

Parliament stands behind Turkish citizens

Despite the serious situation, MEPs express their will to stand behind Turkish citizens, and keep the political and democratic dialogue open. EU funds must be made available - not via Ankara, but to Turkish civil society - for human rights defenders, students and journalists to promote and protect democratic values and principles.

Modernising the EU-Turkey Customs Union

MEPs believe that to keep Turkey economically anchored to the EU, the possibility to upgrade the 1995 EU-Turkey Customs Union to include, for example, agriculture and public procurement, must remain an option, but only if there are concrete improvements in the field of democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

Visa liberalisation

Further, MEPs encourage Turkey to fulfil all 72 benchmarks for EU visa liberalisation, to benefit Turkish citizens, particularly students, academics, business representatives and people with family ties in EU countries.

Turkey's role in the migration crisis Finally, regarding the war in Syria, the resolution recalls Turkey's important role in responding to the migration crisis and the government's efforts to grant refugees temporary protection. The EP takes the view that the country and its population have shown great hospitality by offering shelter to more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees, but at the same time urges them to respect the non-refoulement principle. Member states, on the other hand, need to keep their promises regarding large-scale resettlement.

Quote

Rapporteur [Kati Piri \(S&D, NL\)](#) said: "If the EU takes its own values seriously, no other conclusion is possible than to formally suspend the talks on EU integration. Our repeated calls to respect fundamental rights have fallen on deaf ears in Ankara. On top of the severe human rights violations, the dismantling of the rule of law and the fact that Turkey holds the world record for the number of journalists in jail, the recently amended constitution consolidates Erdoğan's authoritarianism."

"I realize that stopping the accession talks is not a step which will help Turkey's democrats. For that, the EU leaders must use all possible tools to exert more pressure on the Turkish government. The Parliament, therefore, calls for dedicated funds to be made available to support civil society, journalists and human rights defenders in Turkey. In addition, modernising the customs union must remain conditional on clear improvements in the field of human rights. And more efforts must be put into people-to-people exchange programmes."

Background

The EU is Turkey's largest trading partner, while two thirds of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Turkey comes from EU member states. Negotiations on its EU accession started in 2005.

Further information

[Adopted text will be available here \(13.03.2019\)](#)

[Watch a video recording of the plenary debate \(12.01.2019\)](#)

[Watch a video recording of the press conference \(13.01.2019\)](#)

[Procedure file](#)

[Profile of rapporteur Kati Piri \(S&D, NL\)](#)

[EP Research briefing: Future EU-Turkey relations \(23.10.2018\)](#)

[Turkey and the EU \(European External Action Service\)](#)

[EP Foreign Affairs Committee](#)

[EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, video and audio material \(EU-Turkey\)](#)

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