Turkey must put democracy and fundamental rights first, foreign affairs MEPs say

Turkey must do more to fight corruption and enforce respect for media freedom, free expression and judicial independence, said Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs on Monday. In a resolution on the progress of reform in Turkey in 2014, MEPs also urge the EU to back Turkey's efforts to build solid, democratic institutions and ensure respect for fundamental freedoms, human rights and the rule of law. Finally, it advocates stepping up EU/Turkey foreign policy cooperation.

The Turkish government must commit itself « unequivocally » to respect democratic rules and principles, which are at the heart of the EU, MEPs said, inviting it to put the reform process at the centre of domestic policy choices. A new constitution, based on provisions promoting a pluralistic, inclusive and tolerant society, would underpin such a process, they added.

MEPs encourage the Turkish government’s efforts to conclude, in a sustainable way, the peace process with the Kurdish community but regret the Turkish decision to build the Ilisu dam, which in a region mostly inhabited by Kurds, is expected to have "devastating" social, environmental and political effects on the Kurdish population.

Step up foreign policy cooperation and people-to-people contacts

EU-Turkey foreign policy cooperation and counter-terrorism dialogue must be stepped up, and Turkey must use all its resources, to fight terrorist groups such as ISIL, say MEPs. Turkey should also do more to prevent foreign fighters, money or equipment reaching ISIL and other extremist groups through its territory, they add.

To bring about a progressive alignment of foreign policies, Turkey's foreign minister should be invited to EU foreign affairs Council meetings whenever relevant, MEPs suggest. They also think that opening of the currently frozen EU accession talks chapter on security and defence would be useful to that end

They also say more needs to be done to boost people-to-people contacts, not least through visa liberalisation. Turkish business people must have easier access to visas and student exchanges should meanwhile be actively promoted, MEPs underline.

Fight corruption, respect freedoms

Greater political will is needed to create a proper legal framework for the fight against corruption, MEPs say. They deeply regret failures to complete very serious corruption investigations in Turkey in December 2014. They also voice concern about the criminal proceedings brought against investigative journalists following these corruption cases and stress that the government must guarantee media freedom "as a matter of priority".

They also regret that Turkey’s “Law 6532”, passed in 2014, renders Turkish National intelligence Agency staff immune to legal proceedings and hence further undermines the freedom of the media and freedom of expression.

Turkish action against freedom of press and plurality of opinion is “incompatible with the fundamental rights of the EU” and “conflicts with a resumption of the negotiations process”, they say.
The committee condemns the Turkish government’s attempts to ban access to social media and websites, the intimidation of journalists and other pressures put on them, and the police raids and detention of journalists on 14 December 2014.

MEPs are also concerned about persistently high levels of violence against women in Turkey and failures to enforce legal measures to prevent it. They call for comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, including the prohibition of discrimination and hate speech on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender or gender identity.

Cyprus

MEPs call on Turkey and all parties concerned to actively support the resumption of talks on reunification of Cyprus, on the basis of the UN parameters for reunification. Turkey must take steps to normalise its relation with Cyprus, begin to withdraw its troops and transfer the Famagusta area to the UN, MEPs say. At the same time, the Republic of Cyprus should open the port of Famagusta under EU customs supervision and allow Turkish Cypriots to trade with the EU in a legal manner, they add.

Next steps

Parliament will vote on the text, drafted by Kati Piri (S&D, NL), when it meets in Strasbourg in May.

In the chair: Elmar Brok

Further information


Contact

Agnese KRIVADE
BXL: (+32) 2 28 43562
STR: (+33) 3 881 73612
PORT: (+32) 498 98 39 83
EMAIL: foreign-press@europarl.europa.eu
TWITTER: EP_ForeignAff