



EU-Turkey relations: MEPs call for renewed engagement from both sides

Committees Committee on Foreign Affairs [21-03-2013 - 11:03]

Renewed mutual engagement is needed to maintain constructive relations between the EU and Turkey, said the Foreign Affairs Committee in a vote on Thursday. In their resolution, on the 2012 progress report on Turkey, MEPs praise talks which might help settle the Kurdish issue and call for negotiations to be opened on the judiciary, fundamental rights and home affairs.

The committee commends the Commission and Turkey for their work on the "positive agenda" launched in May 2012 to support and complement the accession negotiations. Through mutual engagement and clear objectives, the EU and Turkey can produce positive change and needed reforms, it says.

Judicial reform

Reforming Turkey's judicial system is vital to its democratic consolidation and modernisation, MEPs stress. While welcoming the third judicial reform package, they insist that a fourth package is needed to narrow excessively broad, definitions of criminal offences, particularly of the act of terrorism, shorten excessively long pre-trial detention periods and circumscribe the powers of special courts.

MEPs underline that introducing benchmarks would accelerate the reform process and call on the Council to open negotiations on the judiciary and fundamental rights (chapter 23) and justice, freedom and security (chapter 24).

Violence against women

The committee welcomes Turkey's efforts to end "honour killing", domestic violence and the phenomenon of forced marriages and child brides but is concerned that despite these efforts, violence against women is still regularly reported. Those failing to protect and assist victims must be prosecuted, MEPs insist and call for active promotion of women's rights, education and participation in the labour market and politics.

Southern neighbourhood and Syria

Turkey and the EU should cooperate more closely in the southern neighbourhood, which is critically important for both, MEPs say. They encourage Turkey to develop its foreign policy in closer dialogue and coordination with the EU than in 2012. Beyond humanitarian assistance to the increasing number of Syrian refugees, Turkey and the EU should develop joint strategic vision allowing for the end of the tragic crisis in Syria, MEPs underline.

Settling the Kurdish issue

MEPs welcome direct political dialogue between the Turkish government and former PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. This might open up the prospect of an historic agreement settling the Kurdish conflict in a peaceful and democratic way, they stress. The text also welcomes new legislation allowing for the use of native languages in trials, as well as discussion on

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the use of Kurdish in education.

Next steps

The resolution, prepared by Ria Oomen-Ruijten (EPP, NL) and passed by 54 votes to 4, with 8 abstentions, is set to be put to a vote by the whole House in Strasbourg during the 15-18 April plenary session.

In the chair: Elmar Brok (EPP, DE)

Contact

Václav LEBEDA

BXL: (+32) 2 28 32971

STR: (+33) 3 881 73839

PORT: (+32) 498 98 33 27

EMAIL: foreign-press@europarl.europa.eu