

Turkey 2014: Work in progress

2014 got off to a seemingly good start: then Prime Minister, and current President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared it the 'Year of the European Union', demonstrating Ankara's commitment to its EU path. However, several challenges strained Turkey's ties to the EU over the course of the year. Accordingly, the Commission's 2014 progress report highlights various political concerns.

Key findings and related developments

The October 2014 [progress report](#) on Turkey cites sharp contrasts. On the positive side, the report hails the adoption of law implementing a 2013 [democratisation package](#); the 2014 'European Union Strategy' to revive the accession process; the entry into force of the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement and the launch of the visa dialogue. The report also recognises Turkey's key role in its wider neighbourhood, particularly humanitarian assistance to large waves of **Syrian refugees** (approximately 1.7 million). The report also welcomes progress towards settling the **Kurdish issue**.

On the negative side, shortcomings in the March 2014 local elections and the August presidential elections spark concerns. The Commission criticises the **lack of independence of the judiciary and the rule of law** in connection with the 2013 **corruption** allegations against government members and their families, where Ankara reassigned or dismissed judges, prosecutors and police officers. The report voices concern over hastily passed laws aimed at restricting **freedom of expression**, including amendments to the 2007 [internet law](#) that led to [social media bans](#) to prevent the circulation of leaked recordings in the 2013 corruption scandal. On 6 April 2015, two months ahead of the 7 June general election, access to social media was [blocked](#). The relevance of the report's criticism of Ankara's political **pressure on the media** gained visibility in December 2014, in a large-scale media crackdown which the EP condemned in its January 2015 [resolution](#). Responding to [criticism](#), President Erdoğan told the EU to '[mind its own business](#)'.

Another bone of contention is **Cyprus**. The report regrets the lack of progress on normalising bilateral relations. Although Turkey supported resumption of negotiations over Cyprus, Ankara continued to issue statements questioning Cypriot rights to exploit hydrocarbon resources in its exclusive economic zone; a development the EP deplored in a 2014 [resolution](#). The Council's December 2014 conclusions stress that 'recognition of all Member States is a necessary component of the accession process', and call for progress 'without any further delay'.

EU and Turkey: a long-standing relationship with limited progress

The EU and Turkey formally began [accession talks](#) in 2005, but progress has been limited. The opening of a new chapter (22, regional policy) in 2013 was an exception. Until Turkey applies to Cyprus the Additional Protocol of the Ankara Association Agreement, eight chapters will not be opened, and none provisionally closed. The 2014 report (which Turkish EU Minister, Volkan Bozkır called 'balanced and objective in general', but experts say is one of the [most negative](#) progress reports on Turkey), notes that Turkey's **alignment efforts with the *acquis* continued**. It recommends opening chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (justice, freedom and security) to offer Ankara a 'roadmap for reforms' to meet EU standards.

The **European Parliament** is preparing a [Motion for Resolution](#) on the 2014 Progress Report on Turkey, drafted by Kati Piri (S&D, the Netherlands). The text stresses Turkey's strategic importance for EU energy security and calls for a high-level economic EU-Turkey dialogue. It expresses concern over social media bans, increasing corruption and growing political polarisation. It also urges Turkey and Armenia to actively improve their ties. Turkish EU Minister, Volkan Bozkır [declared](#) an April 2015 EP [resolution](#) urging wider recognition of the Armenian genocide 'null and void for Turkey and the Turkish nation ... a slander'.