

## EU-Turkey: A crucial but challenging partnership

The EU and Turkey face common and major problems, from the fight against ISIL/Da'esh to the management of displaced Syrian people. But in its latest report, the European Commission points out a number of shortcomings in the fields of freedom of expression and independence of the judiciary.

### Turkey at the forefront of counter-terrorism and the migrant crisis

Since the Commission's previous Turkey [report](#), in 2014, the situation has changed dramatically. In parliamentary [elections](#) in June 2015, the ruling Justice and Development Party ([AKP](#)) did not gain the majority needed to form a government. Repeat elections took place in November 2015, resulting in a [majority](#) for the AKP in the Grand National Assembly. At the same time, the security situation deteriorated, following the [extensive](#) anti-terror campaign against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the stalled internal peace process. Turkey faces terrorist attacks from both the PKK and [ISIL/Da'esh](#). On [10 October 2015](#), the country experienced the worst terrorist attack in its history with 102 deaths and more than 400 wounded people. On [17 February](#) and [13 March 2016](#), similar attacks killed around 70 people in Istanbul and Ankara. Investigations are still ongoing. Turkey's [involvement](#) in Syria, primarily against Assad's regime but also against ISIL/Da'esh, and its welcoming policy makes the country home to [2.7 million](#) Syrian displaced people. Meanwhile, Turkey also became the [main transit country](#) for Syrians wanting to reach the European Union. This has led Turkey and the EU to discuss possible ways to stem the flows of migrants to Europe.

### Turkey-EU cooperation in foreign affairs

The agreed [EU-Turkey Action](#) plan from October 2015 provided €3 billion to assist Ankara in coping with the integration of migrants and to cooperate more fully. On 7 March 2016, leaders at the informal EU-Turkey [summit](#) agreed that Turkey would accept the return of all migrants apprehended in Turkish waters and on the Greek islands in exchange for various EU commitments such as accelerating the visa liberalisation process, allocating an extra €3 billion, preparing for the decision on the opening of new chapters in the accession negotiations and the resettlement of Syrian refugees on a [one-for-one basis](#). The European Council ([17-18 March](#)) decided to use 'all means to support the capacity of Greece for the return of irregular migrants to Turkey in the context of the Greek-Turkish readmission Protocol and the EU-Turkey readmission [agreement](#) as of 1 June 2016'.

### Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU

In this context, the European Parliament's [resolution](#), due to be voted in the April 2016 plenary session, on the Commission's 2015 Turkey [report](#) is crucial in the current context of EU-Turkey negotiations on the effects of the Syrian crisis. The European Commission points out that the diminished independence of the judiciary and the increasing control on the freedom of speech and the press are sources of concern. On the Cyprus issue, Turkey supported the resumption of the talks in May 2015 but has still not normalised its relations with the Republic of Cyprus, refusing to ensure the full implementation of the [Additional Protocol](#) of the Association Agreement regarding free movement of goods. Concerning the economic criteria, the Commission points out that Turkey is well advanced, but that external and internal imbalances should be corrected in the medium term. Turkey's ability to cope with the obligations of membership is assessed favourably in many areas, but its progress in the implementation of the EU *acquis* has slowed down.

Recently, the European Parliament has held a number of debates on the EU-Turkey relationship, including the situation in [south-east Turkey](#) and the [financing](#) of the refugee facility for Turkey. The Parliament called on Turkey to play a [positive](#) role in Syria, including towards Christian minorities, and condemned the [moving](#) of the mass graves of the missing persons of Ashia in Ornithi village in the occupied part of Cyprus.

