



Turkey urged to reinvigorate reforms and admit Cypriot planes and vessels

The Foreign Affairs Committee remains firmly committed to accession as the goal of EU negotiations with Turkey, but says that both in Turkey and in the EU important reforms are needed in order to achieve this outcome. In a report adopted on Monday, the committee welcomes the start of the accession negotiations with Turkey, but expresses regret that the reform process in Turkey has slowed down. The text will be debated by the whole Parliament during the plenary session of 25-28 September.

The report, prepared by Camiel Eurlings (EPP-ED, NL) and adopted by 53 votes in favour to 6 against with 8 abstentions, notes "persistent shortcomings" in areas such as freedom of expression, religious and minority rights, the role of the military, policing, women's rights, trade union rights and cultural rights. It urges Turkey to "reinvigorate" the reform process.

MEPs also urge Turkey "to take concrete steps for the normalisation of bilateral relations" with Cyprus "as soon as possible". They refer to the Council declaration of 21 September 2005, which said that continuing negotiations would depend on Turkey opening its borders to Cypriot vessels and airplanes and that the situation would be reviewed in 2006. Regarding Cyprus itself, MEPs welcome the meeting between Mr Papadopoulos and Mr Talat, which led to the agreement of 8 July.

On other issues, the Foreign Affairs committee call on Turkey to recognise the Armenian genocide as a precondition for accession. And it called for a lowering of the threshold of ten percent of the votes below which political parties cannot enter the Turkish parliament.

MEPs repeat that negotiations do not lead automatically to accession and said that whether or not negotiations are successfully concluded, Turkey must remain "fully anchored in European structures."

Before the start of the vote, Mr Eurlings said that "unfortunately, reforms have clearly slowed down." He hoped that the Turkish government would regard his report "as a signal and an incentive to reintroduce the vigorous speed of reform it had shown in the year before accession negotiations started."

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