



EU-TURKEY JOINT PARLAMENTARY COMMITTEE

75th Meeting

11 November 2014

European Parliament Brussels

DRAFT MINUTES

Tuesday, 11 November

09:00-12:30

Mr Manolis KEFALOGIANNIS, MEP and Mr Afif DEMIRKIRAN, MP, Co-Chairs of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) in the chair.

Opening remarks

The meeting started with welcome remarks by Mr Manolis Kefalogiannis. He made an overview of the achievements of the accession negotiations, which, in his view, are not impressive and called for both sides to be ambitious. He underlined that the objective of the negotiations is Turkey's accession to the EU. Then the meeting continued with the remarks by Mr Afif DEM RKIRAN, Co-Chair of the EU-Turkey JPC. He also welcomed the guests and congratulated the newly-elected members of the European Parliament. He emphasized that the cooperation between the two parliaments would be fruitful and constructive during the upcoming period. He added that the JPC meetings would serve as a platform to strengthen the dialogue between Turkish and European parliamentarians, contribute to the Turkey's accession process and speed up the efforts towards Turkey's membership. He highlighted that EU membership is a strategic objective for Turkey and Turkey will continue to pursue this strategic objective with greater determination. He strongly emphasized that accession process is supposed to be a technical process and should not be blocked with political reasons. He

assured the members that Turkey is ready to negotiate chapters as soon as political objections are lifted. He underlined that "Chapter 17 - Economic and Monetary Policy" should be opened. Additionally, he expressed that "Chapter 23 - Judiciary and Fundamental Rights" and "Chapter 24 - Justice, Freedom and Security" should also be opened as soon as possible in order to pave the way for the reforms on justice. He finally highlighted the importance of the opening the chapters; "Chapter 15 - Energy", "Chapter 31 - Foreign, Security and Defence Policy" and "Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment".

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The draft agenda was adopted.

2. Adoption of the draft minutes of the 74th meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, 10 April 2014, Brussels

The draft minutes were adopted.

3. EU-Turkey Relations and State of Play of the Accession Negotiations

Mr Johannes HAHN, Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, began by stating that he had no doubt about the European perspective of Turkey and the next five years should be used to prepare for it. He underlined that Turkey is a key strategic partner for the EU. He recalled the positive remarks made by the 2014 Progress Report, democratisation package and the reforms regarding the Kurdish issue in particular. He also highlighted the areas of concern such as the crackdown on judges over the corruption allegations and the independence of judiciary as well as freedom of expression. He renewed Commission's call upon the Council to open Chapters 23 and 24. He made it clear that the Commission expects Turkey to respect the EEZ of Cyprus and to avoid any more statements or actions that could cause friction. Regarding the foreign and security policy, Commissioner Hahn welcomed the intensification of the dialogue and called on Turkey to compliment to and act in coordination with the foreign policy of the EU. He praised Turkey's efforts to accommodate refugees fleeing their homelands in Northern Iraq and Syria. Finally, he welcomed Turkey's new EU accession strategy.

Mr Volkan BOZKIR, Minister of European Affairs and Chief Negotiator, on behalf of the Government of Turkey, introduced the new EU strategy, which aims to accelerate the relationship between the two sides, a kind of "new constitution" for Turkey's relations with the EU. Minister underlined that EU membership is a strategic objective for Turkey. The EU strategy has three pillars: political reform process, socio-economic transformation, and

communication strategy. He noted that six judicial reform packages were adopted in addition to the democratisation package in a few years' time. Moreover, he argued that the introduction of new domestic judicial remedies led to the decrease in the number of applications from Turkey to the ECtHR. He renewed his call to open the Chapters 23 and 24. On TTIP, he emphasised that in case Turkey is excluded from the agreement its loss would be 2.5% of the GDP. Furthermore, he recalled that Turkey has already fulfilled 62 of the 72 benchmarks for the implementation of the readmission agreement put forward by the Commission. Lastly, he said that Turkey is committed to protect vulnerable people fleeing their countries. Regarding the EP's motion for resolution entitled "Turkey's actions in the EEZ of Cyprus", Minister Bozkir warned that it could result counterproductive in the moment when there were efforts to restart the talks on resolving the conflict.

Mr Alberto CUTILLO, Deputy Director General/Principal Director for European Integration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Italy, on behalf of the Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, concentrated on the need of political will and courage to advance in the negotiation process. This could only be reached by completely respecting all the contractual obligations and fulfilling all the benchmarks of Chapter 5.

He welcomed the important role of the Constitutional Court and stated that he looked forward to progress in the areas covered by Chapters 23 and 24 with a view to their future possible opening. He also noted that the new EU strategy is a positive signal. Moreover, he welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the readmission agreement as well as the Kurdish issue. He expressed his concerns about the government's response to the corruption allegations as well as Turkey's activities in the Mediterranean. He called upon Turkey to respect the EEZ of Cyprus.

Ms Kati PIRI, MEP, EP Rapporteur on Turkey, informed members that she would use the JPC as an input to her next report on Turkey. The first draft of her report will be available in January and it is expected to adopt it in April. She welcomed the ambition of the new Turkish government regarding the accession negotiations and underlined that progress can be made even if negotiations itself are stalled. She also welcomed Commissioner's commitment to keep the positive agenda on track. She added that it is important to insist on opening the Chapters 23 and 24, because these have to do with the improvement of democratic rule in Turkey. She emphasized the following issues: visa liberalization dialogue, alignment in

foreign policy, cooperation in energy matters, and upgrading the trade and economic relations. She praised the peace talks between the Turkish government and the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, as well Turkey's open-door policy towards refugees from Syria and Iraq. On the other hand, she drew attention to the concerns related to the recognition of Cyprus, media freedom, and the rule of law. She said that the JPC should serve as a platform to cooperate on these matters.

Mr Takis HADJIGEORGIOU, MEP, Vice-Chair, recalled that Mr Demirkiran and Mr Bozkır expressed Turkey's willingness to open new chapters, but he argued, if Turkey wants progress there is only one way of achieving this; that is to find a solution to the Cyprus question. He added that there is no need to look back at what happened on 2004 on the island anymore. He also recalled the violation of the EEZ of Cyprus by Turkey. He took the view that the JPC may not be able to proceed in a constructive manner.

Mr Umut ORAN, MP, expressed his frustration about the Cyprus issue, and noted that in every JPC meeting the discussions are dominated by Cyprus. He further argued that both sides are to blame, because the EU took Cyprus in without waiting for the UN decision, while Turkey did not show willingness to genuinely solve the problem.

Ms Elissavet VOZEMBERG, MEP, asked if the new strategy means a new approach towards the neighbouring countries. She also asked what the Turkish government would do about the violations of the EEZ of Cyprus. She asked the Commissioner what measures the Commission would take to prevent Turkey from further violating the EEZ of Cyprus.

Mr Ali AH N, MP, Vice-Chair, said the JPC is used as a platform to create obstacles for Turkey. He said that it is unfair to face the Cyprus question in every single JPC meeting. He added that it is not particularly encouraging to hear about the Cyprus issue in the very first session of this JPC.

Mr Costas MAVRIDES, MEP, reminded that Turkey is obliged to recognise Cyprus if it wishes to progress in negotiations. Moreover, he asked how is it possible to hold talks with a country that does not recognise his country. Finally he asked the Turkish government to withdraw their vessels from the EEZ of Cyprus.

Ms Eleni THEOCHAROUS, MEP, recalled that Turkey is obliged to recognize the Republic of Cyprus if it wants progress in accession negotiations. She asked how it is possible to hold talks with a country, which illegally occupies the territories of the EU.

Mr Yıldırım M. RAMAZANO LU, MP, asked if there is actually any concern about a potential migration flow from Turkey to the EU in case of accession. If there is, he argued, it is a misperception. He added that it is important to understand that the migration flow threat simply does not exist.

Mr Nedzhmi ALI, MEP, asked how the EU-Turkey relations will evolve during the next five years, considering President Juncker's statement on the absence of enlargement in that period. Additionally, he asked Minister Bozkır what steps the government is planning to take in relation to data security, which was mentioned in the visa liberalization roadmap.

Ms Pelin GÜNDE BAKIR, MP, claimed that Turkey is a pluralist multi-party democracy with free market economy. She also argued that within the last twelve years the country has achieved remarkable progress. Moreover, she called for the opening of the Chapters 23 and 24.

Ms Costas MAVRIDES, MEP, asked whether Turkey has the intention to respect the rule of law of the EU in the light of the recent requests from the Council on the violation of EEZ of Cyprus.

Mr Ebubekir G ZL G DER, MP, argued that JPC is not a platform to discuss the Cyprus issue. He proposed to hold separate talks for that. He asked if Turkey will join an EU without the UK, bearing in mind the recent statement by Angela Merkel.

Ms Renate SOMMER, MEP, argued that Cyprus should be discussed here, because it is an EU member state. She said that sending Turkish vessels to the EEZ of Cyprus was a strategy to put the talks on hold.

Ms Ay e Eser DANI O LU, MP, noted that the newly established institutions such as the Human Rights Institution are under the control of executive body, which makes supervision impossible.

Mr Richard HOWITT, MEP, said he respects the concerns of the Cypriot MEPs about the Turkish vessels. Also, he asked why there is only one woman minister in the new cabinet.

Ms Nursuna MEMECAN, MP, stated that Turkey's accession to EU is vital and mutually beneficial. It is also crucial to communicate the benefits of Turkey's potential accession for both Turkey and EU. She underlined the importance of pursuing the accession process officially, not unilaterally by the Turkish side, and asked Mr Hahn about his expedited contributions to accelerate the process, specifically for chapters 23 and 24. She asked Minister Bozkir to elaborate Turkey's New EU Communication Strategy, to highlight a few potential benefits of Turkey's accession to the EU for EU members.

Mr Miltiadis KYRKOS, MEP, expressed his support for Turkey's accession process. Furthermore, he drew attention to Turkey's bad record in occupational accidents. He asked Minister Bozkır what results have been achieved as a result of government's efforts to implement reforms in that area.

Mr O uz OYAN, MP, on behalf of the Republican People's Party, said that JPC could improve relations between the EU and Turkey unless it is dominated by the issue of Cyprus. He added that the EU should regret that they allowed Cyprus to join the Union with all its political problems.

Mr Ihan YERL KAYA, MP, argued that journalists were not detained for doing their jobs and that Turkey does have freedom of press. He said that the JPC should engage in more constructive discussions than focusing on the Cyprus issue every time.

Mr Ernest MARAGALL, MEP, emphasized that the JPC should not be used as a blockage mechanism against Turkey's accession. It should discuss real issues such as human rights and well-being of Turkey's people.

Mr Volkan BOZKIR, Minister of European Affairs and Chief Negotiator, on behalf of the Government of Turkey, stated that Cyprus was allowed to become a member of the EU as a divided island and the terminology used in the EU system for the Northern part was "the part where the EU *acquis* is not implemented" Moreover, he demanded for the accession

negotiations not to be tied to the Cyprus issue. He recalled that the Annan Plan, which could have decreased the number of Turkish soldiers on the island to around 600, was rejected by the Greek Cypriots. On the gender issue, he said that out of four deputy-speakers of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, there are three woman deputy speakers. With respect to the Customs Union (CU), he underlined that Turkey is the only non-EU country that has CU with the EU. He repeated the government's willingness to be included in the TTIP negotiations.

Mr Alberto CUTILLO, Deputy Director General/Principal Director for European Integration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Italy, on behalf of the Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, emphasized that it is up to Turkey to show commitment on the opening of Chapters 23 and 24. Also, he explained that a unanimous agreement in the Council is required to progress with the negotiations.

Mr Johannes HAHN, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations, underlined that both Turkey and the EU can only gain from a closer cooperation. He added that it would be naive to expect that there would be accession without a solution to the Cyprus question. The only way, he concluded, is to politically move forward to find a solution.

Tuesday, 11 November

15:00-18:30 Manolis KEFALOGIANNIS, **MEP** and Mr Afif Mr DEMIRKIRAN, MP, Co-Chairs of the **EU-Turkey** Joint

Parliamentary Committee (JPC) in the chair.

4. The New Situation in the Middle East

Mr hsan Mustafa YURDAKUL, Deputy Director General for the Middle East, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, said that the Turkish government sees the Syrian regime as the sole responsible for the instability in the country. He added that policies based on sectarian concerns should be abandoned, because they often help the extremist groups in gaining ground. Moreover, he claimed that the moderate opposition forces in Syria are the first to fight the IS. It is essential, therefore, that the international community supports them and avoids that the current vacuum is filled by the fundamentalist forces. He underlined that various other extremist groups supported by the regime commit similar crimes to that of IS. He stressed that as long as Assad remains in power, stability in the region cannot be achieved. Furthermore, he urged the Syrian opposition groups to have one voice on the international stage in order to be able to make impact. He also touched upon the necessity to create a nofly zone as well as to signal the Syrian regime that things will not remain the same after three and a half years of conflict. Also, he underlined the logistical support that Turkey has been providing for the fight against IS in Iraq. The reciprocal visits by the Iraqi and Turkish PMs will bring a new impetus for the relations between the two countries, he added.

Mr Giles PORTMAN, Turkey Advisor, European External Action Service, underlined that EU and Turkey need to address the common threats. He made three main points on Syria: first, he praised Turkey's humanitarian response to the crisis on its south-eastern border; second, he underlined the need to work more closely to counter the ISIL and recalled the need for more cooperation in preventing foreign fighters from joining it; thirdly, he said that there was a need for close political dialogue for political change. Regarding Iraq, he urged Turkey to develop good relations with the newly elected central government in the country. On Libya, he underlined that the EU and Turkey share their priorities in establishing peaceful settlement. In addition, he praised Turkey's role in humanitarian assistance to Gaza. Finally, he stated that EEAS wants to see Turkey being aligned with the EU foreign policy.

Mr Ali AH N, MP, Vice-Chair, criticised the EU for its inaction with regard to the Syrian crisis. He also touched upon the battle in Kobanê, as a result of which thousands of refugees arrived in Turkey.

Mr Takis HADJIGEORGIOU, MEP, Vice-Chair, expressed his willingness to hear the thoughts of Turkish MPs on the Kurdish question as part of the tragedy in Kobanê. He asked how the Turkish-Kurdish peace process and the situation in Kobanê are interlinked.

Ms Pelin GÜNDE BAKIR, MP, claimed that PYD is no less dangerous than IS, and therefore it is not acceptable to see them as the representative of the Syrian Kurds. She said that no country in Europe should train and equip terrorists.

Ms Costas MAVRIDES, MEP, reminded that Minister Bozkır publicly defended the exchange of hostages with IS.

Mr Nazmi GÜR, MP, argued that among those people who came from Kobanê there are also non-Kurdish people. He added that the battle in Kobanê is not fought only on behalf of Kurds but everyone.

Ms Ska KELLER, MEP, said that officials need to be specific when they call for more action, and make clear what they exactly mean by this.

Ms Çi dem ÖKTEN, MP, said that she disagrees with the general approach taken on Syria. She also asked why the international community remained blind right from the beginning of this tragedy. She then talked about what the Turkish government has been doing for the Syrian refugee children and asked what the UN and UNICEF did for them.

Mr Umut ORAN, MP, asked when the EU aid package to Turkey in connection with the refugee crisis was going to be formalised. Secondly he also asked if the EU and UN had any plans to take account of the number of refugees in Turkey.

Mr Ebubekir G ZL G DER, MP, argued that the situation in the Middle East should be taken as a whole. He reminded the invasion of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli activists, which, he suggested, was a breach of international law. Moreover, with regard to the remarks made on how to deal with terrorist organizations, he reminded that some European countries supported the PKK terrorist organization.

Mr Faruk I IK, MP, referred to a UN report, which states that there are around fifteen thousand foreign fighters in the Syria and Iraq. He also stressed the importance of the town of Kobanê for the Turkish government, and in this connection, reminded the opening of a corridor for the peshmerga forces in efforts to fight the IS.

Mr Giles PORTMAN, Turkey Advisor, European External Action Service, indicated that the aid package had been presented to the Turkish government, and the reaction was awaited. He made it clear that PYD needs to distance itself from the Assad regime and join the

moderate opposition forces in Syria. He also stressed the significance of cooperation with Turkey in preventing foreign fighters from joining IS.

Mr hsan Mustafa YURDAKUL, Deputy Director General for the Middle East, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, claimed that Kurds and Turks see themselves as sisters and brothers. In this respect, the peace process shall continue, he added.

5. The Visa Liberalisation Process and the Implementation of the Readmission Agreement

Ms Esen ALTU, Deputy Director General for Migration, Asylum and Visa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, extensively talked about the state of play of the visa liberalisation process. She noted that only 10 out of 72 benchmarks were not fulfilled, while the others were fully or partially fulfilled.

Mr Atilla TOROS, Director General, Directorate General of Migration Management, Ministry of Interior, said that the new law on Foreigners was a significant step. He also recalled that Turkey signed fourteen readmission agreements with the third countries thus far. Moreover, he presented the plans to establish new removal centres in various places in the country. Finally, he underlined the importance of burden-sharing in Turkish migration policy.

Ms Marta CYGAN, Director for Strategy and Delivery Steering, DG Home Affairs, European Commission, stated that the assessment of the implementation is not always black and white. She acknowledged that great results achieved by Turkey with regards to this issue. She called upon the Turkish MPs to support the process.

Ms Renate SOMMER, MEP, acknowledged that a lot had been done by the Turkish government with regards to the implementation of the readmission agreement. She also urged the government to implement the legislations passed recently. She added that if Turkey required further funding then it needed to explain its needs. She also recalled the concerns over the migrants who are pushed back to Turkey.

Ms Pelin GÜNDE BAKIR, MP, recalled the new law on foreigners. She argued that the recent Commission progress report on the implementation of the readmission agreement is

very positive, even though EU's call on Turkey to lift the geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention has no legal basis.

Mr Ernest MARAGALL, MEP, said that the EU should not see Turkey as an ally, but a central ally. He asked if it would be possible to introduce a visa-free regime for Turkish students participating in the ERASMUS+ programme.

Mr Ebubekir G ZL G DER, MP, said that the idea behind the readmission agreement is to secure Europe's borders through securing Turkey's borders. He asked how Turkey will be helped exactly in its fight against irregular migration and in modernizing its border management system.

Mr Ihan YERL KAYA, MP, urged the Commission officials to focus on the financial burden that Turkey is bearing.

Ms Ska KELLER, MEP, expressed the concerns of the Greens/EFA about the readmission agreement. She then acknowledged that the new law on foreigners is an important step, regarding the situation of migrants and asylum-seekers in the country. She said that the Commission is wrong in putting emphasis on the removal centres instead of investing in fixing the migrant reception procedures. She added that in fact, the readmission agreement and the visa liberalization is not interlinked, therefore this carrots and sticks policy is not a way forward in this case. Finally, she advocated visa liberalization regardless of the implementation of the readmission agreement, on the grounds that most of the EU citizens may enter into Turkey without any restriction.

Ms Esen ALTU, Deputy Director General for Migration, Asylum and Visa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated the government together with the Commission is working to fulfil the benchmarks for the implementation of the readmission agreement.

Mr Atilla TOROS, Director General, Directorate General of Migration Management, Ministry of Interior, emphasised the limit to the pre-accession instrument funding, which is the only existing financial resource from the Commission. He added that the IPA funding needs to be used in a limited time frame, which creates problems when it comes to the construction of reception centres. He said that very often EU officials come to Turkey and

praise the government on its efforts to accommodate Syrian refugees, but they also ask Turkey to prevent refugees from leaving Turkey for Europe. He underlined the importance of burden-sharing in this context.

Ms Marta CYGAN, Director for Strategy and Delivery Steering, DG Home Affairs, praised the new regulation on the rights and duties of the persons receiving temporary protection in Turkey. She added that the one of the priorities of the Commissioner is resettlement by the Member States. She underlined that the best way of tackling irregular migration is to enhance the ways of legal migration. Lastly, she pointed out that the new president of the Commission has very clear priorities, one of which is home affairs and migration.

Mr Edouard FERRAND, MEP, said he is not in favour of the visa restrictions. He then advised the Turkish MPs to stay away from the EU, thereby keeping their Turkish identity.

6. Date and Place of the Next Meeting

The co-chairs provisionally agreed to hold the next EU-Turkey JPC meeting in the third week of February 2015.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ANNEX

TURKISH DELEGATION

Mr. Volkan BOZKIR Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator

Members of Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)

	Title	Party	Constituency
Mr Afif DEM RKIRAN	Co-Chair	AK Parti	Siirt
Mr Ali AH N	Vice Co-Chair	AK Parti	Gaziantep
Ms afak PAVEY	Vice Co-Chair	CHP	stanbul
Ms Halide NCEKARA	Member	AK Parti	stanbul
Ms Sevim SAVA ER	Member	AK Parti	stanbul
Ms Mehmet S. TEKEL O LU	Member	AK Parti	zmir
Mr Yıldırım M. RAMAZANO LU	Member	AK Parti	K.Mara
Ms Pelin GÜNDE BAKIR	Member	AK Parti	Kayseri
Mr Cem ZORLU	Member	AK Parti	Konya
Mr lhan YERL KAYA	Member	AK Parti	Konya
Ms Çi dem M. ÖKTEN	Member	AK Parti	Mersin
Mr Faruk I IK	Member	AK Parti	Mu
Mr Ebubekir G ZL G DER	Member	AK Parti	Nev ehir
Ms M.Nursuna MEMECAN	Member	AK Parti	Sivas
Mr Ercan CANDAN	Member	AK Parti	Zonguldak
Ms Aylin NAZLIAKA	Member	CHP	Ankara
Ms Ay e E. DANI O LU	Member	CHP	stanbul
Mr Umut ORAN	Member	CHP	stanbul
Mr O uz OYAN	Member	CHP	zmir
Ms Zuhal TOPÇU	Member	MHP	Ankara
Mr Ahmet K. TANRIKULU	Member	MHP	zmir
Mr Nazmi GÜR	Member	HDP	Van

Abreviations:

AK Parti :Justice and Development Party (JDP)
CHP :Republican People's Party (RPP)
MHP :Nationalist Movement Party (NMP)
HDP :People's Democratic Party (PDP)

Grand National Assembly of Turkey-JPC Secretariat

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Ms Sinem RANLI Ç FTÇ

Ms Demet ÜLKER

Ms Ay egül SAKA

JPC Secretariat

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JPC Secretariat

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Ms Esen ALTU Deputy Director General for Immigration,

Asylum and Visa

Mr hsan Mustafa YURDAKUL Deputy Director General for the Middle East

Mr O uzhan ALBAYRAK Second Secretary

Permanent Representation of Turkey to European Union

Mr Selim YENEL Permanent Delegate, Ambassador Ms Gül BÜYÜKER EN ORAL Deputy Permanent Delegate

Mr Mustafa Cem GÜNDÜZ

Ms Pınar Deniz YAPICI

Mr Cemil TAHRALI

Mr Özgür KAYA

Ms ebnem MANAV

Counsellor

First Secretary

First Secretary

Second Secretary

Ministry of Interior

Mr Atilla TOROS Director General, Directorate General of Migration Management

Mr Ahmet APAN Deputy Director General, Directorate General of Migration Management

Mr Fikret GÖREN Head of Department for Victims of Human Trafficking

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Mr Dr. Fatih HASDEM R Deputy Permanent Delegate, Perm Repr of

Turkey to EU

Mr . Anıl TURPÇU Chief of Cabinet,

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Ms Elif KUR UNLU Director for Accession Policy

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Johannes HAHN, European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, on behalf of the European Commission

Marta CYGAN, Director Immigration and asylum, DG Home Affairs, European Commission Patric PAQUET, Deputy Head of Unit, Turkey

EEAS

Giles PORTMAN, Turkey Advisor

Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Alberto CUTILLO, Deputy Director General/Principal Director for European Integration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Italy, on behalf of the Presidency in office of the Council of the European Union