Turkey: MEPs raise the alarm on EU accession talks

- Turkey backsliding in the rule of law and media freedom
- Coup attempt condemned, but MEPs find government’s response disproportionate
- Suspension of EU accession talks if changes to the constitution go ahead

Turkey’s EU accession talks should be suspended if proposed changes to the constitution go ahead, as these go against EU membership criteria, warned MEPs on Thursday.

MEPs are concerned about Turkey backsliding in the rule of law, human rights, media freedom, and the fight against corruption. They condemn the repeatedly declared support for the reintroduction of the death penalty by the Turkish President, which would put into question Turkey’s membership in the Council of Europe and lead to an immediate end of EU accession talks.

Taking note of the outcome of Turkey’s recent referendum and the expansion of presidential powers, the resolution calls on the EU Commission and the EU national governments “to formally suspend the accession negotiations with Turkey without delay if the constitutional reform package is implemented unchanged.”

MEPs also note in their annual assessment of Turkey’s reform progress that 2016 was a difficult year for Turkey as a result of the war in Syria, the influx of refugees, a string of heinous terror attacks and a coup attempt.

They condemn the coup attempt and express their solidarity with the people of Turkey, but at the same time regret the Turkish government’s disproportionate response, resulting in large-scale dismissal of civil servants, the closing of media outlets, the arrest of journalists, judges and human rights defenders, and the closure of schools and universities.
The resolution also recognises the importance of good EU-Turkey relations and maintaining a constructive and open dialogue, which is key to addressing common challenges, such as migration, security or terrorism. MEPs support upgrading the EU-Turkey Customs Union, asking for human rights and fundamental freedoms to be a part of a new agreement.

The European Parliament supports a fair, comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem, based on bi-communal and bi-zonal federation. It calls on Turkey to show active support for a rapid and successful conclusion to the negotiations and to start withdrawing its troops from Cyprus.

The resolution was approved by 477 votes to 64, with 97 abstentions. The Parliament is planning to send an ad-hoc delegation to Ankara in the autumn with the aim of renewing parliamentary dialogue.

**Quote**

Parliament’s rapporteur Kati Piri (S&D, NL) said: "This Parliament speaks with one, clear and loud voice in condemning the Turkish government’s serious decline in democratic standards, and continues to support the Turkish population - millions of whom would like to continue to see the EU as an anchor for reforms in their country. Together with you [Turkish people] we hope “Adalet” (justice) will return to Turkey soon."

**Background information**

The procedure for suspending EU accession negotiations is set out in article 5 of the Negotiating Framework for Turkey. This stipulates that "in the case of a serious and persistent breach in Turkey of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on which the Union is founded, the Commission will, on its own initiative or on the request of one third of the Member States, recommend the suspension of negotiations and propose the conditions for eventual resumption".
Press release

Further information
Interview with rapporteur Kati PIRI
Adopted text will soon be available here (06.07.2017)
Video recording of debate (click on 05.07.2017)
Video recording of press conference (05.07.2017)
EP Research Service note on 2016 report on Turkey (June 2017)
Audiovisual material

Political groups
Press release by the EPP group
Press release by the S&D group
News pages of the ECR group
News pages of the ALDE group
Press release by he GUE/NGL group
Press release by the Greens/EFA group
News pages of the EFDD group
News pages of the ENF group

Contacts

Gediminas VILKAS
Press Officer
(+32) 2 28 46396 (BXL)
(+33) 3 881 64504 (STR)
(+32) 498 98 33 30
@EP_ForeignAff
gediminas.vilkas@europarl.europa.eu
MEPs are concerned about Turkey backsliding in the rule of law and human rights - © AP Images / European Union - EP