

Turkey's 2007 progress report

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own initiative report by Ria **OOMEN-RUIJTEN** (EPP-ED, NL) on the 2007 report on Turkey's progress towards accession, welcoming the commitment of Prime Minister Erdogan that 2008 is going to be a year of reforms. MEPs now urge the Turkish government to fulfil its promises and to transform Turkey into a modern and prosperous democracy based on a secular state and a pluralistic society.

Reforms towards a democratic and prosperous society: MEPs underline their belief that only a society which is guided by respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and which is based on democracy and a socially oriented market economy, can develop into a peaceful, stable and prosperous society. They, therefore, welcome the fact that, in 2007, democracy prevailed over attempts by the military to interfere in the political process. Turkey must now make further efforts to ensure that the democratically elected political leadership bears full responsibility for formulation of policies and that the armed forces respect this responsibility by fully and unambiguously acknowledging civilian control. In particular, the Turkish government is called upon to respect the pluralism and diversity of Turkey and to engage itself in modernising the country. While they welcome the amendment to Article 301 of the Penal Code (article on denigrating Turkish identity or insulting the country's institutions which was introduced in 2005 to replace Article 159 of the former Penal Code and regularly invoked to prosecute human rights defenders, journalists etc), they believe that it is merely a first step towards freedom of expression by recalling that the number of persons prosecuted under legal provisions allowing for arbitrary restrictions on the expression of non-violent opinion continues to increase. In particular, MEPs call for further progress regarding human rights and religious freedom, even though significant reforms were made as regards the latter in 2007. MEPs particularly call for the immediate re-opening of the Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary and the public use of the ecclesiastical title of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

- **The Kurdish issue:** MEPs urge the Turkish government to launch a political initiative favouring a lasting settlement of the Kurdish issue, based on tangible improvements in cultural, economic and social terms. The democratic Kurdish parties are called upon to distance themselves clearly from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and to engage constructively in the quest for a political solution to the Kurdish issue within the democratic Turkish state. They deplore, in particular, the many court cases brought against elected mayors and other politicians for using the Kurdish language, as well as the conviction of Leyla Zana (Kurdish activist). As for the Commission, it should link the regional component of assistance given under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to the drawing-up of a comprehensive strategy of the Turkish authorities as regards this region. Furthermore, MEPs condemn the violence perpetrated by the PKK (for example, the attack in Diyarbakir in January 2008) and reiterate their solidarity with Turkey in its fight against terrorism, once again calling on the PKK to declare and respect a ceasefire.
- **Women and secularism:** aware of the current development of a new secular Turkish constitution, MEPs believe that this is the time for the issue of women in civil society to be brought to the forefront. To make this reform a success, MEPs urge all political parties, ethnic and religious minorities and social partners to work together in the development of this text. They ask that the future constitution avoid the use of vague criteria such as "General Morality" and note the disappointment and concern of part of the population that the lifting of the ban on wearing headscarves in universities was not part of a broader package of reform based on a wide-ranging consultation of civil society. Overall, MEPs welcome the progress made by Turkey on protecting women against violence. However, further efforts must be made in this area through a sustained public campaign, and by providing more shelters for victims and stepping up training for law enforcement bodies. Turkey has also made good progress by giving a considerable number of

women the opportunity to hold important positions in economic, political and academic spheres. However, the overall rate of employment is still considerably low at just 23.8% and there has been scarcely any increase in the participation of women in politics. Therefore, further efforts are required in order to increase women's active involvement in politics.

- **Minorities:** MEPs are concerned about the welfare of certain minority groups. They urge the Turkish authorities to carry out a full investigation into the murders of Hrant Dink and of the three Christians in Malatya, as well as all other cases of politically, religiously or racially motivated violence. Turkey is also urged to pursue investigations into the Ergenekon criminal organisation.
- **Torture:** although there has been a continued downward trend in the number of cases of torture reported, MEPs fear that the anti-terror law and the law on police powers may weaken this positive record. Turkey must also step up its fight against torture perpetrated outside and inside its detention centres.

Towards a growing economy: MEPs welcome the positive development of the Turkish economy. However, considerable efforts are required to tackle the problem of the black economy and to place the social security system on a sustainable footing. In addition, efforts must be made in terms of social dialogue, the respect of International Labour Organisation conventions and access to education. MEPs express their concern about the level of corruption in Turkey and about the high extent of development disparities among Turkish regions (with sometimes very large differences between rural and urban areas). In terms of cohesion, MEPs call on Turkey to apply European standards to the construction of dams in the Munzur valley, the Allianoi, the Ilisu and to gold-mining in Bergama.

Regional issues and external relations: MEPs recall Turkey's commitment to good neighbourly relations with Greece (e.g. the Aegean continental shelf) and Bulgaria (e.g. the property rights of Bulgarian Thracian refugees). In particular, they stress the need to arrive at a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus question based on the principles of the EU. In this respect, MEPs welcome the official visit to Turkey of the Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Kostas Karamanlis, which gives hope for further improvement of bilateral Greek-Turkish relations. They also call on the Turkish government to end the economic blockade with Armenia and to start a process of reconciliation with this country, allowing for a frank and open discussion of past events. At the same time, MEPs urge Turkey to sign the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

- **Turkey – Iraq:** MEPs reiterate their appeals to the Turkish government not to engage in any disproportionate military operations violating Iraq's territory. They urge Turkey to respect Iraq's territorial integrity and urge the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq not to allow Iraqi territory to be used as base for terrorist acts against Turkey.
- **Darfur and Afghanistan:** MEPs regret Turkey's objections to the implementation of the EU-NATO strategic cooperation based on the Berlin Plus Agreement. They are concerned about their negative consequences for the protection of the EU personnel deployed, notably the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan and the EULEX Mission in Kosovo. Therefore, they call for those objections to be withdrawn by Turkey at the earliest possible date.

EU-Turkey relations: MEPs urge the Turkish government to implement fully and without delay the provisions stemming from the EC-Turkey Association Agreement and the Additional Protocol thereto, recalling that non-fulfilment of Turkey's commitments will continue to seriously affect the process of negotiations. MEPs recognise Turkey's ambition of becoming a Eurasian energy hub and encourage the country to join the European Energy Community as a full member. They call on Turkey to fully support the Nabucco pipeline project (a European priority project). They reiterate the importance of bilateral and trilateral cross-border cooperation programmes (Turkey-Greece-Bulgaria) and also those carried out under the ENPI/CBC Black Sea Programme. Lastly, MEPs call on the Commission and the Turkish government to start negotiations on an EU-Turkey visa facilitation agreement.