

Resolution on the Interim Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan

2009/2513(RSP) - 22/04/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 25 March 2009, the European Parliament adopted by 459 votes to 148 with 61 abstentions, a resolution on the Interim Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan. The resolution had been tabled by the EPP-ED, PES, UEN and ALDE groups. Parliament recalled that a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Turkmenistan was initialled in May 1997 and signed in 1998. Since then 11 Member States have ratified the PCA – France, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Greece still have still to do so – and the 12 new Member States will ratify it by means of a single protocol.

Parliament notes that after the change of president in Turkmenistan there are signs of an ambition to carry out reforms in key areas. It welcomes in particular the creation of a National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, and takes note of the process of revising the Constitution, which aims to strengthen democracy, together with Turkmenistan's accession to certain international conventions. Members call on the Turkmenistan Government to move swiftly towards democracy and respect for the rule of law, and calls, in particular, for open and democratic elections, freedom of religion, the development of a genuine civil society, the release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, the lifting of restrictions on travel, and access for independent monitors. The EU must further encourage these developments, and Members underline that the Turkmenistan Government's activities must be carefully and regularly scrutinised. They ask the Council and Commission to keep them regularly and substantively informed about the human rights situation in Turkmenistan.

Parliament deplores the fact that in several areas, particularly human rights and democracy, the situation is still unsatisfactory. It draws attention in particular to the need for all political prisoners to be unconditionally released, and underlines the importance of the removal of all obstacles to free travel and to free access for independent monitors, including the International Red Cross. There must be further improvements in civil liberties, including for non-governmental organisations.

Parliament sees the Interim Trade Agreement (ITA) as a possible stepping stone towards steady and sustainable relations between the EU and Turkmenistan and as a potential lever to strengthen the reform process in Turkmenistan. It underlines that the ITA is not a blank cheque for Turkmenistan. There must be strict monitoring and regular reviews of developments in key areas in Turkmenistan and, if appropriate, a suspension of the agreement if there is evidence that the conditions are not being met.

The resolution calls on the Council and Commission to do the following:

- include a clear suspensive human rights clause in the PCA, and to accept any request from the Parliament to suspend the agreement;
- to include a revision clause in the PCA, and for Parliament to be consulted on any revision of the PCA.

Parliament points out that the PCA requires Parliament's assent in order to come into force. Whilst the ITA unfortunately does not require assent, Members call for the points raised in this resolution to be taken fully into account, since otherwise Parliament's assent to the PCA might be jeopardised.