Resolution on the 2011 progress report on Turkey

2011/2889(RSP) - 29/03/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 517 votes to 66, with 63 abstentions, a resolution tabled on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the 2011 Progress Report on **Turkey**.

It stresses the **interdependence between the EU and its Member States and Turkey.** It notes Turkey's strategic role in the region and says the EU and Turkey should **step up their cooperation on shared foreign and neighbourhood policy priorities and in the area of energy.**

It believes, however, that such interdependence can only produce positive results if it is framed in a context of mutual commitment, strategic dialogue and effective cooperation, successful delivery in the reform process and the implementation of reforms and good relations between Turkey and neighbouring Member States. Members support the Commission's efforts to **develop a fresh positive agenda** aimed at a new dynamism in EU-Turkey relations, and to move Turkey closer to fulfilling the criteria for accession. They take the view that renewed efforts should be invested in creating the conditions for the opening of chapters in the field of justice and fundamental rights, and also insist that relations between Turkey and its neighbouring Member States are a key factor in revamping negotiations and dialogue.

Noting that Turkey is the only candidate country that does not have visa liberalisation, Parliament stresses the importance of facilitating access to the EU for business people, academics, students and representatives of civil society. It urges Turkey to **sign the EU-Turkey readmission agreement** without further delay and takes the view that, once the readmission agreement is signed, the Council should mandate the Commission to initiate the visa dialogue and define the roadmap for visa liberalization.

Fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria: Parliament expresses its full support for the drafting of a new civilian constitution for Turkey as a unique opportunity for **true constitutional reform**, calling on all actors concerned to take a positive and constructive approach to the negotiation of the new constitution, based on consensus and constructive compromise. It recalls the need to continue work on the **implementation of the 2010 constitutional reform package** and calls on the Commission to include a detailed analysis of the progress of the implementation process in the 2012 Progress Report. The resolution encourages Turkey to use the constitutional drafting process as an opportunity to develop a more realistic and democratic identity allowing for the full recognition of all its ethnic and religious communities, to acknowledge that **modern citizenship should be of a non-ethnic nature**, and to include the protection of mother-tongue language rights in the new civil Constitution.

It stresses that the **reform of the judicial system** is an indispensable prerequisite for Turkey's modernisation, reiterating its concern that judicial procedures have still not been sufficiently improved. Members are concerned about the **excessively long periods of pre-trial detention**, which can currently go up to ten years and become de-facto punishment without a trial. They are also concerned about the practice of bringing criminal prosecutions against human rights defenders, activists and journalists who communicate evidence of human rights violations or raise other issues in the public interest as a contribution to the debate of a pluralistic society.

Parliament went on to raise concerns about **media freedom and pluralism**. It expresses its support for the Commission's new approach as regards tackling issues related to the judiciary and fundamental rights and to justice and home affairs early on in the negotiation process, with the **opening of related chapters** on the basis of clear and detailed action plans, and the closing of such chapters as the very last ones on the basis of fully convincing good track records. Given the vital importance of continued reform of the judicial system in Turkey and full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular

freedom of expression and freedom of the press, **renewed efforts should be made** for the delivery of the screening report under Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights. Parliament calls on the Commission, in line with the positive agenda, to consider steps conducive to the opening of Chapter 24 on Justice and Home Affairs.

Members recall the urgent need to continue vital and substantial reform in the area of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, in particular by enabling **religious communities** to obtain legal personality, by eliminating all restrictions on the training, appointment and succession of clergy, by recognising Alevi places of worships and by complying with the relevant judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and reflecting the opinions of the Venice Commission in the legal framework.

Parliament encourages the government: (i) to make gender equality a priority of its reform efforts, tackling poverty amongst women and increasing women's social inclusion and participation in the labour market; (ii) to adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards violence against women; (iii) to ensure that equality, regardless of gender, gender identity, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, is guaranteed by the law and effectively enforced, including respect by the police.

Lastly, Members call on Turkey to demonstrate resilience and intensify its efforts towards a **political solution to the Kurdish issue** and ask all political forces to work in alliance towards the goal of reinforced political dialogue and a process of further political, cultural and socio-economic inclusion and participation of citizens of Kurdish origin. They consider, in this connection, that the **right to education in one's native language** is essential.

Building good neighbourly relations: Parliament regrets Turkey's statements that it will freeze relations with the Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2012 if a solution to the Cyprus issue is not found by then. It strongly supports the negotiations on the reunification of Cyprus under the auspices of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and calls on Turkey and all the parties concerned to work intensively and with good will for a comprehensive agreement. Members call on Turkey to **begin withdrawing its forces from Cyprus** and to transfer Famagusta to the United Nations in accordance with Resolution 550 (1984) of the UN Security Council. At the same time, they **call on Cyprus to open the port of Famagusta under EU customs supervision** in order to promote a positive climate for the successful solution of the reunification negotiations and allow Turkish Cypriots to trade directly in a legal manner. Turkey is also asked to **refrain from any new settlement** of Turkish citizens on Cyprus, as this would continue to change the demographic balance.

Advancing EU-Turkey cooperation: the resolution deplores **Turkey's refusal to fulfil its obligation of non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol** to the EC-Turkey Association Agreement towards all Member States, stating that this refusal continues to deeply affect the process of negotiations, and calling on the Government of Turkey to implement the protocol in full without further delay. Members also note that Turkey is not implementing the Customs Union fully and maintains legislation that violates its commitments on removing technical barriers to trade.

In view of Turkey's strategic role as the EU energy corridor for Caucasian and Caspian oil and gas resources and its strategic proximity to Iraq and its developing crude oil market, Parliament feels that initial consideration should be given to the value of **opening negotiations on Chapter 15 on energy** with a view to furthering the EU-Turkey strategic dialogue on energy.

It goes on to discuss **Turkey's strategically important role for EU foreign and neighbourhood policy**, and Turkey's role as a source of inspiration for democratising Arab States in significant policy areas. Members support Turkey's firm stance on democratic forces in Syria and recall its important role in the protection of Syrian refugees. They ask the Commission, the Member States and the international

community to support Turkey's efforts to cope with the growing humanitarian dimension of the Syrian crisis. Lastly, they encourage Turkey to progressively align its foreign policy with that of the EU, with a view to creating valuable synergies and reinforcing the potential for a positive impact.