2020 perspective for women in Turkey

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality unanimously adopted the report by Emine BOZKURT (S&D, NL) on a 2020 Perspective for Women in Turkey.

The report notes that Turkey is making limited progress in improving and implementing the legislative framework so as to ensure equal participation by women in social, economic and political life. Hence the reason why they have proposed a series of actions to improve the situation in this country.

Legislation, coordination and civil society: Members call on the Turkish Government to uphold and strengthen the principles of equality and women's rights by adopting and amending its legislative framework, including the planned process for a new constitution.

The report calls for greater emphasis on the need to consider regional disparities when addressing women's rights and to formulate policies accordingly, while recognising that the problems and inequalities encountered by women of Kurdish origin are, in general, all the greater. In this regard, Members call on the Turkish Government to engage in all necessary reforms and to cooperate with local councils in order to ensure that all women, including those of Kurdish origin, enjoy equal rights.

In spite of improvements in certain areas, adequate measures are also called for in the following areas:

- the Turkish government should adopt further strategies, with the active and non-discriminatory participation of civil society, aimed at guaranteeing and effectively monitoring the implementation of full equality, including the elimination of the gender pay gap, and to put the results of this cooperation into practice;
- the need to translate existing gender-sensitive legislation into practice throughout the country;
- the need for consistent and systematic collection of gender-specific statistics in order to monitor progress in the sphere of the implementation of legislation or loopholes in national laws;
- the importance of recognizing the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in public life.

Violence against women: official data from the Turkish Statistical Institute shows that **39% of Turkish women have encountered physical violence at some point of their lives**. Concerned at the regularity and severity of violence against women (honour killings, early and forced marriages, etc), Members call on the Turkish government to take more effective action in combating honour killings, in the form of legislative, legal and financial measures to prevent such killings and punish the perpetrators, as well as all family members who silently condone violence against women, especially in the case of honour killings, and to assist the victims.

They call on the Turkish government to undertake a thorough investigation of the phenomenon of 'honour suicide' (families pressurising women into committing suicide). They take the view that **any violence against women is unacceptable** and call on the Turkish government to adopt and implement a zero-tolerance policy towards violence against women, by adopting, supervising and implementing appropriate legislation to protect victims, punish perpetrators and prevent violence.

Members also suggest the following measures:

- the introduction of dissuasive and severe punishments for the perpetrators of violence against women;
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advanced training for police officers, health personnel, judges, prosecutors, religious personnel and other persons in official positions on the prevention of domestic violence;
- setting up a mechanism to identify and investigate those who fail to protect and assist victims and for the allocation of sufficient budgetary resources to protection measures;
- establish specialised public prosecutors' bureaus to deal with domestic violence in all the country's provinces;
- guarantee effective access of victims to suitable legal information, legal aid and appropriate judicial proceedings through which they can obtain justice;
- create a shelter in every municipality with at least 50 000 inhabitants;
- criminalise forced marriage.

Education: the report underlines the importance of education in empowering women and ensuring gender mainstreaming gender at all educational levels. The government is urged to take all necessary action to diminish the gender gap and to introduce further measures to ensure that all children attend school. It is also called upon to combat sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, domestic violence, poverty, illiteracy and the exploitation of girls, etc. Sufficient resources should be made for childcare. The report also stresses that the elimination of gender bias from textbooks in all levels of education and training requires further efforts, and Members therefore ask the Turkish government to review the progress being made to eliminate gender bias from educational material.

In order to guarantee the participation of girls in compulsory primary education and to prevent them being deprived of their chances to study or being forced into early marriages, Members consider it crucial that, as is currently the case, the entirety of the formal compulsory primary education system should consist of a block which cannot be replaced by open learning or distance education. They are concerned about introducing the possibility to opt for open learning alternatives after the first four years of primary education.

Participation in the labour market: Members underline the very low female participation in the Turkish labour force. They call on the Turkish government to establish a national plan of action in order to ensure the greater participation of women in the labour market. Turkey should dedicate more funding from its budget to getting unemployed women into work.

The following measures are also proposed: (i) promoting, inter alia, measures to ensure better working conditions, equal pay for equal work, lifelong learning, flexible work schedules and a fair balance between family life and work; (ii) putting in place a paid parental leave scheme for all workers, allowing fathers to fulfil their equal responsibility in childcare; (iii) combating all forms of discrimination in the workplace; (iv) participation of women in union activities; (v) combatting the underground economy which affects mainly women.

Political participation: Members welcome the increase in the number of female members of the Turkish Parliament, from 9.1% in the 2007 elections to 14.3% following the 2011 elections. They note, however, that this percentage is still low, and call for a mandatory quota system ensuring the fair representation of women on electoral lists. There is also a need to revise the current election law, with a view to the equal and democratic participation of men and women in politics. All Turkish political parties are invited to make sure that this situation changes with the 2014 local elections. Therefore, in view of the fact that only 1% of Turkish municipalities have a woman mayor, women's involvement in politics should be encouraged.

A 2020 perspective: Members recall that **Turkey is an EU candidate country** and that it is currently negotiating several Chapters in view of EU accession. In this regard, Members call on the Commission to make the issue of women's rights central to the negotiations with Turkey. They call on Turkey to increase its efforts in the sense of comprehensive reforms to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria, for the sake of its own modernisation, and to establish a climate of mutual understanding and respect with all 27 EU Member

States, thus making it possible to exchange best practice in the field of gender equality with all, for the benefit of the women of Turkey.

They also call on the country to:

- fulfil all its obligations stemming from the EC-Turkey Association Agreement and its Additional Protocol, which it has still not implemented for the sixth consecutive year, so that it shows its true commitment to becoming a fully-fledged pluralist democracy, with respect for and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of both men and women at its core;
- promote awareness-raising campaigns to be organised, targeting all of society and focusing on women's rights and gender equality, the prevention of gender-based violence;
- promote the statute of social partners in the promotion of women;
- introduce, at all levels of education, gender equality and tolerance as compulsory subjects in school curricula;
- contribute to a change in mentality;
- focus in particular on the social inclusion and empowerment of women in rural areas, unemployed women and women living in poverty;
- encourage the inclusion of gender equality in the in-service training of media organisations.

Lastly, the report stresses the importance of gender budgeting, since none of the reforms can be implemented without adequate funds.