2020 perspective for women in Turkey

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The European Parliament adopted by 590 votes to 28 with 53 abstentions a resolution on a 2020 Perspective for Women in Turkey.

Parliament 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 it has proposed a series of actions to improve the situation in this country.

Legislation, coordination and civil society: in the legislative sphere, 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.

They call for greater emphasis on the need to consider regional disparities when addressing women's rights, 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:

- 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.

Parliament particularly wishes to know what progress the Turkish government has made in 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), 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**.

Members also suggest the following measures:

- the introduction of dissuasive and severe punishments for the perpetrators of violence against women;

- 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 as well as Ankara;

- guarantee effective legal assistance for victims ;

- create a shelter in every municipality with at least 50 000 inhabitants;

- combat sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, domestic violence, poverty, illiteracy and the exploitation of girls.

Parliament calls on the Turkish government to **criminalise forced marriage** and to draw women and men's attention, by means of information campaigns, to the right to freely choose one's partner. It underlines the importance of awareness-raising in schools and for parents on the unlawfulness of forced marriages.

Members are deeply concerned over the **inferior status of single women**, divorcees, women who marry with a religious ceremony only, meaning that their marriage has no legal status, and women from minority groups.

Education: Parliament underlines the importance of education in empowering women and ensuring gender mainstreaming gender at all educational levels. It welcomes the fact that the participation of girls in primary education has been increasing and that the gender gap in primary education is now virtually closed, but considers it regrettable that the gender gap in secondary education has slightly widened.

Parliament asks the Turkish government to do the following:

- to allocate sufficient resources for the extension of affordable childcare services to enable women to work;

- strengthen initiatives such as the Social Risk Mitigation Project (conditional cash transfer), and fight against dropping out of school;

- increase the proportion of pre-school enrolment among children in the 0-5 age group is still very low;

- to intensify its efforts and awareness-raising campaigns with a view to eradicating illiteracy and poverty among millions of women, especially those of Kurdish origin or from immigrant or Roma communities, and to pay specific attention to women living in rural areas;

- eliminate sexist language, pictures and expressions from educational material and society in general.

Parliament stresses that 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, it is crucial that the entirety of the formal compulsory primary education system should consist of a block.

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) combating all forms of discrimination in the workplace; (iii) participation of women in union activities; (iv) combatting the underground economy which affects mainly women.

With regard to **maternity leave**, Parliament notes that whilst Turkey has recently improved its maternity leave legislation (with a rise from twelve to sixteen weeks), this should be followed up with a pay increase, in order to better guarantee that families and women are not financially penalised for having children. It notes that **paternity leave exists only for civil servants and not for other workers,** and that a widely applicable parental leave scheme is essential to ensure that parents share rights and responsibilities regarding childcare and for the reduction of gender inequality on the labour market. It calls on the Turkish government to put in place a paid parental leave scheme for all workers, allowing fathers to fulfil their equal responsibility in childcare.

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: Parliament recalls that **Turkey is an EU candidate country** and that it is currently negotiating several Chapters in view of EU accession. It emphasises that the **Positive Agenda**, as introduced by the Commission to complement the accession negotiations with Turkey, should be utilised as a leading forum for promoting women's rights and gender equality in Turkey. It calls on the Commission to ensure that in all the working groups of the Positive Agenda gender mainstreaming is secured. It also stresses the importance of facilitating the opening of Chapter 23 of the accession negotiations, on the judiciary and fundamental rights, and in support of Turkey's reforms on women's human rights under that chapter.

Members 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 ; 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, Parliament stresses the importance of gender budgeting, since none of the reforms can be implemented without adequate funds.