Resolution on the 2015 report on Turkey

2015/2898(RSP) - 14/04/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 375 votes to 133 with 87 abstentions a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the 2015 Progress Report on Turkey. It recalled that on 3 October 2005 accession negotiations with Turkey were opened.

State of play in EU-Turkey relations: in the light of the backsliding on respect for democracy and rule of law inside Turkey, Parliament was deeply concerned, that the **overall pace of reforms in Turkey has slowed down considerably in recent years**. In certain key areas, such as the independence of the judiciary, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and respect for human rights and the rule of law, it considered that there has been a **regression** moving increasingly away from meeting the Copenhagen criteria to which candidate countries must adhere.

Members underlined that Turkey is a key strategic partner for the EU, and they strongly supported a structured, more frequent and open high-level political dialogue on key thematic issues of joint interest such as migration, counter-terrorism, energy, economy and trade. They took note of the results of the **parliamentary elections** held on 1 November 2015 and the formation of a new government, reiterating their call for the 10 % electoral threshold to be lowered, and for more transparency in the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns.

Parliament welcomed the activation of the **EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan on refugees and migration management** on 29 November 2015, and regarded this as part of a comprehensive cooperation agenda based on shared responsibility, mutual commitments and deliver. It emphasised that **EU-Turkey cooperation on migration should not be linked to the calendar, content and conditionality of the negotiation process**.

Respect for the rule of law, democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms: Members deplored the serious backsliding, over the past two years, on freedom of speech, expression and opinion both online and offline in Turkey, which is ranked 149th out of 180 countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. They condemned the **violent and illegal takeover of several Turkish newspapers**, including Zaman most recently, and expressed concern about the decision of Digiturk, allegedly based, inter alia, on political grounds, to stop transmitting television channels. The Turkish Government was asked to end the political and economic pressure on independent media.

The resolution also stressed the need for reforms in the areas of the **judiciary and fundamental rights and of justice, freedom and security**. It called for the Council to propose, once the official opening benchmarks are met, the opening of chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (justice, freedom and security) and to ensure that the reform process in Turkey is shaped on the basis of EU values and standards. The fight against **corruption** should also be one of Turkey's priorities.

A **new Constitution** should be based on widespread consensus, with full respect for the rights of minorities, irrespective of their cultural or religious background. Members emphasised the need to enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation.

Kurdish peace process and the situation in the southeast of Turkey: Parliament expressed deep concern about the **deteriorating situation in the southeast of Turkey**, stressing that security measures must be conducted with respect for the rule of law and human rights. It expressed particularly grave alarm at the situation in Cizre and Sur/Diyarbakr, and condemned the fact that civilians are being killed, wounded and left without water, food and medical attention. Members were deeply concerned about the

rising number of civilian deaths and the fact that around 400 000 people have become internally displaced. They were dismayed by the actions of special operations police forces known as 'Esedullah teams', which appear to be responsible for the deliberate killing of civilians in the southeast of Turkey, and demanded a thorough investigation by the Turkish authorities

They did not find justified the return to violence by the PKK, which is on the EU's list of terrorist organisations, and stressed that there is no violent solution to the Kurdish question. Calling on the PKK to lay down its arms, Parliament also urged the Turkish Government to resume negotiations with a view to achieving a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the Kurdish issue.

Parliament went on to state that it was concerned that the Turkish authorities might not have taken all possible measures to stop and prevent ISIL/Daesh activities, in particular to **combat illegal oil trafficking across its borders**. The EU should further exchange information and to cooperate closely with the Turkish authorities in this matter in order to give more support to combating smuggling networks. Members noted shortcomings in the arrest of foreign fighters and in controlling borders with Iraq and Syria.

Turkey cooperation on the refugee / migration crisis: Parliament acknowledged **Turkey's great humanitarian contribution in hosting the largest refugee population in the world**, and commended the recent decision of the Turkish Government to open its labour market to Syrian refugees. It praised the Turkish Government for providing Syrian refugees with free health services and education, and for unilaterally filling the financial gap as regards UNHCR's unmet appeal for funds. The resolution called on Member States and the EU to increase funds to the UN agencies and their partner NGOs in Turkey. It also stressed that the EUR 3 billion, and additional funding, of the Refugee Facility for Refugees in Turkey will have to be properly utilised in order to swiftly and directly benefit refugees and their host communities.

Parliament went on to state that **outsourcing the refugee crisis to Turkey is not a credible long-term solution to the problem** and called on EU Member States' solidarity to increase the number of countries that will accept refugees for resettlement in a spirit of burden and responsibility sharing.

On **visa policy**, Parliament commended the entry into force of new rules in the Turkish visa regime, but stressed that a much stricter visa policy, in line with EU visa policy, must be applied vis-à-vis countries representing a major source of illegal migration, in order to curb the influx of migrants who are in no need of international protection via Turkey into Europe. Turkey must take effective measures to stop traffickers of human beings and the flow of refugees towards the Greek islands resulting in severe humanitarian, political, social and security issues within the EU. There must be more cooperation between Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece in the area of search and rescue operations in the Aegean Sea, and Parliament called on Frontex to offer its support.

Parliament also encouraged the government to meet in a non-discriminatory manner the criteria identified in the **visa liberalisation roadmap vis-à-vis all Member States**. Only when the standards have been met, will visa-free travel be possible for Turkish citizens, and the Commission should provide more technical assistance for the fulfilment of the conditions of the visa liberalisation roadmap.

Progress of the Cyprus reunification talks: Members praised the **considerable progress achieved in the Cyprus reunification talks**, and supported the evolvement of the Republic of Cyprus into a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with single sovereignty, a single international personality and single citizenship with political equality between the two communities. Welcoming the possibility of a new referendum on reunification, they underlined the importance of the solution of the decades-long Cyprus problem for the whole region, and for Europe/the European Union.

Lastly, Parliament called on Turkey to fulfil its obligation of full, non-discriminatory implementation of the **Additional Protocol** to the EC-Turkey Association Agreement vis-à-vis all Member States, including Cyprus, the fulfilment of which could provide a significant boost to the negotiation process.