

2016 Commission report on Turkey

2016/2308(INI) - 06/07/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 477 votes to 64, with 97 abstentions, a resolution on the Commission's 2016 report on Turkey.

Parliament stressed that 2016 was a difficult year for the Turkish population as a result of the continuing war in Syria, the large number of refugees, the conflict in the south-east of the country, the series of heinous attacks and the attempted coup in which 248 people were killed. It reiterated its firm condemnation of the coup attempt of 15 July even though it recognised the right and responsibility of the Turkish government to take steps to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Coup d'etat and state of emergency in Turkey: Parliament stressed that the measures taken under the current state of emergency have had a **disproportionately negative impact** on a large number of citizens. It condemned a number of measures taken against public freedoms and called for the **immediate release** of all prisoners detained without proof.

Political situation in Turkey: Parliament regretted that the accession instruments have not been used to the fullest extent and that there has been a **regression in the areas of rule of law and human rights in Turkey**. It is determined to cooperate and to maintain an open and constructive dialogue with the Turkish Government in order to work on common challenges such as regional stability, the situation in Syria, migration and security.

Taking note of the outcome of the referendum held on 16 April 2017, Parliament expressed concern about the allegations of irregularities and general electoral fraud highlighted in the conclusions of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). It therefore called on Turkey to respect its commitments as a member of the Council of Europe.

Parliament firmly condemned the fact that the Turkish President and several other political figures have repeatedly spoken in favour of **restoring the death penalty**. Once again, Members underlined their unequivocal rejection of the death penalty and stated that this is an **essential requirement for accession to the European Union**.

Turkey's accession process to the EU: Parliament recalled that in November 2016 it called for the **freezing of Turkey's accession process**. It asked the Commission and the Member States to formally **suspend the accession negotiations with Turkey** without further delay if the package of constitutional reforms currently provided by the Turkish Government is implemented as it stands. Parliament also pointed out that the proposed constitutional reform in Turkey does not respect the fundamental principles of the separation of powers, does not offer sufficient checks and balances and does not comply with the Copenhagen criteria. For the Parliament, any new political commitment between the EU and Turkey should be based on conditionality provisions on respect for democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

It called on the Commission, the Member States and Turkey to hold a fair and open debate on areas of common interest for which enhanced cooperation would be possible.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms: Parliament regretted all the measures taken following the introduction of a state of emergency, as well as the detention of many opposition Members and measures taken against the alleged members/supporters of the Gülen movement.

Parliament called on the Turkish government to immediately lift the state of emergency and thoroughly investigate allegations of the serious ill-treatment of prisoners.

It pointed out that, since July 2016, **more than 100 000 complaints have been lodged with the Turkish Constitutional Court**, which has declared itself incompetent on matters relating to the emergency decree. Measures are therefore needed to ensure that judicial review can be applied.

In general, Parliament stressed the continuing violations of freedom of expression and serious violations of media freedom in Turkey, including in the Kurdish language. It also deplored the repression of several foreign journalists arrested illegally. In particular, Members called on the government to allow **the former Member of the European Parliament and chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, Joost Legendijk, to return to his family in Turkey.**

Kurdish-majority region: Parliament deplored the continuing deterioration of the situation in south-east Turkey, especially in areas where curfews have been introduced. It recalled the responsibility of the Turkish Government to protect of all its citizens, irrespective of their cultural or religious origins, and their beliefs.

It is convinced that only an equitable political settlement of the Kurdish issue can bring lasting stability and prosperity to both the area concerned and the country as a whole.

Minorities: Parliament condemned discrimination against many religious minorities, including the Christian and Alevi minorities, as well as violence on religious grounds, including verbal and physical attacks. It called on Turkey to respect the importance of the Ecumenical Patriarch and to recognise its legal personality.

It also called on Turkey to protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups and persons belonging to minorities and regretted that the **LGBTI marches** in Ankara and Istanbul were banned for the second consecutive year. It expressed serious concern about gender-based violence, discrimination, hate speech against minorities, hate crimes and human rights abuses of LGBTI persons.

It also encouraged the authorities to address the key obstacles to the social inclusion of the Roma.

Parliament also welcomed the steps taken by some Member States to accelerate asylum procedures for Turkish nationals persecuted under emergency decrees.

EU-Turkey relations: Parliament called for the deepening of EU-Turkey relations in important areas of common interest such as the fight against terrorism, migration, energy, economy and trade, and encourage dialogue and cooperation with that country, provided that commitments to fundamental freedoms and rights are respected.

Convergence efforts are therefore required between the country's foreign policy and that of the Union, as well as the improvement of the **customs union** with Turkey. Members stated that the full potential of the customs union shall not be achieved until Turkey fully implements the **Additional Protocol** vis-à-vis all Member States.

Improvements are also required as regards:

- the liberalisation of the visa regime;
- the fight against corruption.

At the same time, Parliament called for the **suspension of pre-accession funds** if the accession negotiations are suspended and to use these funds to support Turkish civil society and refugees in Turkey.

In general, Parliament condemned all the attacks in Turkey and stressed that close cooperation between Europol and the Turkish law enforcement authorities is essential to effectively combat terrorism.

Members deplored the decision of the Turkish Government to prevent German MPs from visiting the German Federal Armed Forces in Incirlik, which means that they will now be relocated to a non-NATO country, representing a **major setback for effective cooperation between NATO allies** in the fight against terrorism.

Refugees: Parliament welcomed the mobilisation of the Turkish government and local NGOs and the hospitality shown by the population in hosting around three million refugees. It called on the Commission to ensure long-term investments for refugees and their host communities in Turkey.

President Erdoan: Members strongly condemned President Erdoan's statements accusing some EU leaders of 'Nazi practices' and their citizens being 'Nazis'. According to Members, such statements are unwarranted and **undermine Turkey's credibility as a political partner**. They also called on the Turkish Government to **refrain from systematically seeking to mobilise the Turkish Diaspora** in the Member States for its own needs. They also condemned the Turkish authorities' oversight of citizens holding dual citizenship residing abroad.

Turkish-Greek and Turkish-Cypriot bilateral relations: Parliament called on the Turkish government to put an end to the repeated violations of Greek airspace and Greek territorial waters and to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all its neighbours.

It also pointed out that a settlement of the **Cyprus issue** would have a positive impact for the whole region, which would benefit first and foremost the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. It therefore pleaded for the continuation of the process of reaching an agreement acceptable to both parties regarding the reunification of the island.

Syria: Parliament is convinced that only a credible political solution will ensure the stability of Syria and allow the **decisive defeat of Daech** and other UN-designated terrorist groups in Syria. It urged all guarantors, including Turkey, to honour their commitments to ensure the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement and to advance unhindered humanitarian access to the entire country.

Parliament called for the translation of this resolution into Turkish.