2018 Commission report on Turkey

2018/2150(INI) - 26/02/2019 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Kati PIRI (S&D, NL) on the 2018 Commission report on Turkey.

State of emergency

The state of emergency introduced after the 2016 coup attempt was extended 7 times. According to Members, the prolonged state of emergency has led to an erosion of the rule of law and to the deterioration of human rights in Turkey. They are concerned that many of the procedures in force during the state of emergency are still being applied by police forces and local administrations and there is serious backsliding in the areas of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and procedural and property rights.

They are deeply concerned that over 150 000 people were taken into custody in the post-coup crackdown and 78 000 have been arrested on the basis of terrorism charges, while more than 50 000 people remain in jail, in most cases without conclusive evidence. With lengthy pre-trial detention and judicial proceedings and the widespread practice of cancelling the passports of the relatives of detainees and suspects, Members stressed the need for due process and administrative redress.

Moreover, since the introduction of the state of emergency more than 152 000 civil servants - including teachers, doctors, (peace) academics, lawyers, judges and prosecutors - have been dismissed. Turkey is called on to ensure that all individuals have the right to due process and to have their cases reviewed by an independent judicial court in accordance with international standards that can ensure compensation for the material and moral damage caused by their arbitrary dismissal.

Media freedom and independence

This is called as one of the core values of the EU and a cornerstone of any democracy. Members expressed serious concern about the disproportionate and arbitrary measures curtailing freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information. Turkey is urged to guarantee media freedom as a matter of priority and to immediately release and acquit all unlawfully detained journalists.

In general, Turkey is called on to:

- release all imprisoned human rights defenders, journalists and others who have been detained on unsubstantiated charges, and to drop those charges and enable them to carry out their work without threat or impediment in all circumstances;

- protect the fundamental rights of all citizens, including ethnic, religious and sexual minorities;

- adopt a hate crimes law that can protect all members of minorities from physical and verbal attacks and fulfil the Copenhagen criteria for accession countries with regard to respect for and protection of minorities;

- take serious action to fight all manifestations of anti-Semitism in society;

- take adequate measures to prevent and punish hate speech or crimes targeting disadvantaged groups such as Roma and Syrian refugees and asylum seekers;

Members recommended that the Commission and the Council of the European Union, in accordance with the Negotiating Framework, formally ***suspend the accession negotiations*** with Turkey. The report stressed that any political engagement between the EU and Turkey should be built on conditionality provisions concerning respect for democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

Upgraded Customs Union

Members stressed that the modernisation of the Customs Union would further strengthen the already strong ties between Turkey and the EU and would keep Turkey economically anchored to the EU. They considered that a door should be left open for the modernisation and upgrade of the 1995 Customs Union between the EU and Turkey, to include relevant areas such as agriculture, services and public procurement, which currently are not covered.

The Commission is called, in this regard, to:

- start preparatory work for the upgrade of the Customs Union as soon as the Turkish Government attests to its readiness for serious reforms;

- include a clause on human rights and fundamental freedoms in the upgraded Customs Union making human rights and fundamental freedoms a key conditionality;

Visa liberalisation

Given that visa liberalisation is of great importance for Turkish citizens, particularly for students, academics, business representatives and people with family ties in EU Member States, Members encouraged Turkey to fully comply with the 72 criteria identified in the visa liberalisation roadmap. The revision of Turkey's anti-terrorism legislation is a key condition for ensuring fundamental rights and freedoms.

Migration

The report recalled the important role played by Turkey in responding to the migration crisis resulting from the war in Syria. Turkey and its population have shown great hospitality by offering shelter to more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees. Turkey is urged to respect the non-refoulement principle.

NATO

Turkey is a longstanding member of the NATO alliance and sits at a key geostrategic location for maintaining regional and European security. The EU and Turkey continue to cooperate on issues of (military) strategic importance within the NATO framework. Members called on Turkey to resume its cooperation with EU NATO members under NATO's rolling programme of cooperation with non-EU countries.

Cyprus

Welcoming the efforts under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General to resume negotiations on the reunification of Cyprus, Members reiterated their support for a fair, comprehensive and viable settlement on the basis of a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with a single international legal personality, single sovereignty and single citizenship and with political equality between the two communities.

The EU is called on to play a more active role in bringing negotiations to a successful conclusion. Members called on Turkey to begin withdrawing its troops from Cyprus and to refrain from actions altering the demographic balance on the island through a policy of illegal settlements.