2018 Commission report on Turkey

2018/2150(INI) - 13/03/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 370 votes to 109 with 143 abstentions a resolution on the 2018 Commission report on Turkey. The resolution noted that while the EU accession process was at its start a strong motivation for reforms in Turkey, there has been a stark regression in the areas of the rule of law and human rights during the last few years.

State of emergency

Whilst welcoming the decision of 19 July 2018 to lift the state of emergency, Parliament regretted that the new legislation introduced, in particularly Law No 7145, preserves many of the powers granted to the President and Executive under the state of emergency and basically enables it to continue, with all the limitations this entails on freedoms and basic human rights. The prolonged state of emergency has led to an erosion of the rule of law and to the deterioration of human rights in Turkey. Members were concerned that many of the procedures in force during the state of emergency are still being applied by police forces and local administrations and that there is serious backsliding in the areas of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and procedural and property rights.

More than 50 000 people remain in jail in the after the coup, 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, Parliament stressed the need for due process and administrative redress.

Suspension of accession talks

Parliament recommended that the Commission and the Council of the European Union, in accordance with the Negotiating Framework, formally suspend the accession negotiations with Turkey. Noting that the 2019 budget under which IPA II funds to Turkey will be cut by 146.7 million in view of the situation in Turkey as regards human rights, Members asked the Commission to use the funds currently allocated under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II and the future IPA III) to support, through a dedicated envelope directly managed by the EU, Turkey’s civil society, human rights defenders and journalists and to increase opportunities for people-to-people contacts. Members underlined 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.

Civil society and media freedom

Parliament expressed serious concern about the disproportionate and arbitrary measures curtailing freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information, and also expressed great concern at the shrinking space for civil society and the promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Turkey was called upon 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.

Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to increase their protection of and support for human rights defenders at risk in Turkey, including through emergency grants.

Upgraded Customs Union

Parliament 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. It 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 was 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, Parliament 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 resolution 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 was 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 was called on to play a more active role in bringing negotiations to a successful conclusion. Parliament asked 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.

Armenia

Lastly, Parliament called on Turkey and Armenia to pursue the normalisation of their relations, stressing that the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border could lead to improved relations, with particular reference to cross-border cooperation and economic integration.