Resolution on the Turkish military operation in northeast Syria and its consequences

2019/2886(RSP) - 24/10/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Turkish military operation in northeast Syria and its consequences.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled as a joint resolution by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL groups.

Following the decision by US President Donald Trump to withdraw US troops from the northeast of Syria, on 9 October 2019, Turkey launched a military invasion, in breach of international law, into areas of Syria controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). This has resulted in a grave number of civilian and military casualties on both sides of the border and, according to UN sources, the displacement of at least 300 000 citizens.

Violation of international law

Parliament strongly condemned the unilateral Turkish military intervention in northeast Syria, which constitutes a grave violation of international law, is undermining the stability and security of the region as a whole. It urged Turkey to put an immediate and definitive end to its military operation in northeast Syria and withdraw all of its forces from Syrian territory. It expressed its solidarity with Kurdish people, underlining the important contribution made by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and women in particular, as an ally in the fight against Daesh.

Advocating a strong and comprehensive EU response to the crisis, Members called on the EU to enter into a dialogue with the Turkish authorities with a view to achieving a rapid de-escalation of the situation and to consider all available options for collaboration with its international partners, within the framework of the United Nations. They asked the VP/HR, as long as the Turkish military operation and presence in Syria continue, to launch an initiative to impose a full EU-wide arms embargo on Turkey.

United Nations-controlled security zone

Parliament firmly rejected Turkey’s plans to establish a so-called ‘safe zone’ along the border in northeast Syria, stressing that any forcible transfer of Syrian refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) to this area would constitute a grave violation of conventional international refugee law. Taking note of the US-Turkish agreement of 17 October 2019 on a temporary ceasefire, Members expressed its concern that its provisions legitimise the Turkish occupation of the ‘safe zone’ in northeast Syria.

Member States were called on to ask the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution which will allow the Council to act in a targeted manner, ultimately aiming at a UN-led security zone in northern Syria for the benefit of the people living there.

The Commission is called on to ensure that no EU funds are used to finance the ongoing military operation or to facilitate any forced returns of Syrian refugees to the so-called ‘safe zone’.

Risk of ISIS resurgence

Parliament expressed its deep concern about reports that hundreds of ISIS prisoners, including many foreign fighters, are escaping from camps in northern Syria amid the Turkish offensive, which increases the risk of a resurgence of ISIS. It called on the EU Member States to prepare contingency plans on the security threats posed by the possible return of ISIS foreign fighters, and called on national intelligence agencies and security services to increase vigilance as regards the possible return of foreign fighters and their families.

Targeted sanctions

Parliament welcomed the EU's commitment to ongoing humanitarian aid to Syria's neighbours, notably Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, which continue to host millions of refugees. It deemed it unacceptable that the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoan is weaponising refugees and using them to blackmail the EU.

Members called on the Council to introduce a series of targeted sanctions and visa bans to be imposed on Turkish officials responsible for human rights abuses during the current military intervention alongside a similar proposal for the Turkish officials responsible for the internal crackdown on fundamental rights. They also called for the suspension of the trade preferences under the agreement on agricultural products and, as a last resort, the suspension of the EU-Turkey customs union.