Report on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Turkey

2019/2176(INI) - 19/05/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 480 votes to 64, with 150 abstentions, a resolution on the 2019-2020 Commission reports on Turkey.

General assessment of the accession process

Parliament noted with concern that in recent years the Turkish government has increasingly distanced itself from EU values and standards. In addition, unilateral actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and provocative statements against the EU and its Member States have brought EU-Turkey relations to a historical low.

Within the framework of accession negotiations, only 16 of the 35 chapters have been opened and only one chapter has been provisionally closed. Under the current circumstances, **Turkey's accession negotiations have effectively and regrettably come to a standstill**.

The resolution underlined that Turkey's lack of progress on convergence has evolved into a total disengagement, marked by a **stark regression** in three main areas: (i) backsliding in relation to the rule of law and fundamental rights, (ii) adopting regressive institutional reforms and (iii) pursuing a confrontational foreign policy, notably towards the European Union and its Member States, in particular Greece and Cyprus.

Members are deeply concerned about the '**continued hypercentralisation of power**' within the Presidency, to the detriment not only of the parliament, but also of the Council of Ministers, in the context of the reform of the constitutional model, which does not ensure a sound and effective separation between the executive, legislative and judicial powers.

In this context, Turkey is invited to reassess and credibly demonstrate the sincerity of its commitment to closer relations and alignment with the EU and the European path, as this is a prerequisite for the sustainability of the whole accession process. Members stressed that if the current negative trend is not reversed, the Commission should recommend **formally suspending** Turkey's EU accession negotiations.

While deploring the current lack of understanding between the EU and Turkey, Parliament reiterated its firm belief that **Turkey is a country of strategic political, economic and foreign policy importance**, a key partner for the stability of the wider region, and an ally with which the EU wishes to have the best possible relations, including within NATO.

Rule of law and fundamental rights

Members are concerned about the serious **decline in fundamental freedoms**, which reveals the dramatic human rights situation in Turkey and the continued erosion of democracy and the rule of law. The deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Turkey predates the period of the state of emergency introduced after the 2016 coup attempt, which Parliament again condemned.

Parliament deplored that the misuse of **anti-terrorism measures** now forms the backbone of a national policy of repression of human rights and all critical voices in the country. It stressed that the systemic **lack of independence of the judiciary** and the chilling effect of mass dismissals by the government in recent years pose serious threats to the rule of law.

Members are also concerned about the disproportionate and arbitrary measures restricting freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information in Turkey. They called for the release of all journalists, writers, media workers and social media users illegally detained for exercising their profession and using their civil rights. The Commission and Member States are called upon to strengthen their protection and support for human rights defenders at risk in Turkey, including through emergency grants.

Parliament is also concerned about the situation in south-east Turkey and the Kurdish question, which deserves more attention, especially as regards the protection of human rights, political participation, freedom of expression and freedom of belief. It called on the Turkish government to **protect the rights of minorities** and vulnerable groups and condemned the Turkish government's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, which seriously undermines its commitments to prevent violence against women and to promote women's rights.

Wide EU-Turkey relations and Turkey's foreign policy

Parliament recalled the important role that Turkey has played and is still playing in hosting almost **four million refugees**, including some 3.6 million Syrian refugees and some 360 000 registered refugees and asylum seekers from other countries. It welcomed the efforts made by all the authorities concerned, in particular the municipalities, to improve the integration of refugee populations.

Members felt that the EU should continue to provide the necessary support to Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey but stressed that the **instrumentalisation of migrants and refugees** for political pressure and blackmail was unacceptable.

Parliament condemned Turkey's illegal activities in Greek and Cypriot waters and its violations of Greek airspace, which constitute a violation of the sovereignty and sovereign rights of an EU Member State and of international law. It also condemned Turkish military interventions in Syria. It expressed concern about the transfer of fighters from jihadist groups in northern Syria to Libya and the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Members encouraged Turkey to recognise the **Armenian genocide**, so as to pave the way for genuine reconciliation between the Turkish and Armenian peoples.

Way forward for EU-Turkey relations

Parliament called for serious reflection on the state of the EU’s relations with Turkey and to **draw up a comprehensive, unified and coherent strategy** for the medium and long term, among all EU institutions and Member States. It invited Turkey to engage in constructive dialogue, including on issues of foreign policy with a view to once again finding common ground to relaunch process of reforms in Turkey, with particular reference to the area of fundamental rights.

Members considered that the EU should continue to pursue all possible instances of dialogue and convergence of positions with Turkey, but reiterated that, failing that, and in the event of renewed unilateral actions or provocations in breach of international law, the EU should use all the instruments and the options at its disposal, including targeted sanctions as a last resort.