Relations with Turkey: developments since the entry into force of the Customs Union. Annual Report

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Adopting the report by Mr Edward McMILLAN-SCOTT (PPE, UK) on customs union between the EU and Turkey, the European Parliament considered that customs union was working satisfactorily. It did, however, call for the social impact of customs union on Turkish society to be monitored. It supported proposals from Turkish civil society aimed at achieving improvements in Turkish democracy and human rights and stressed that Turkey?s application to join the EU, like that of every other applicant country, would be examined in the light of the Copenhagen criteria. It hoped that the dialogue for which provision was made in the Association Agreement would continue and asked for contacts between Parliament and Turkish political parties and foundations and the organisations of civil society to be encouraged. However, it regretted that some of the ministerial meetings between Turkish and European representatives in the trade and transport sector had not yet been held since customs union entered into force in 1995. The European Parliament reiterated that only projects approved by the Commission/Parliament interinstitutional working party could be granted a financial commitment under MEDA. The European Parliament called on the Council to inform it of any initiatives taken with the Turkish authorities allowing adoption of the financial regulation concerning special aid for Turkey to go ahead. It called on the Commission to consider if a specific budgetary item for Turkey should be included in the MEDA programme on democracy. It also called on the Commission to continue publishing an annual report on relations between the EC and Turkey without showing any indulgence. Noting that future relations between the European Union and Turkey cannot develop without financial intervention on the part of the European Union, it stated that the financial impact of proposals to consolidate customs union will be decided by the budgetary authority during the annual budgetary procedures. Welcoming the huge efforts made by Turkey to align its legislation and preferential regime with that of the European Union, it supported current and future initiatives to improve the implementation of all the administrative procedures of customs union. In order to help Turkey in its effort to adapt and restructure its economy, the European Parliament asked for priority to be given to sectors such as energy, the environment, vocational training and reform of the civil service. It also called on the Commission to assess the programmes for applicant countries with which Turkey might be associated (especially Socrates, Leonardo, Youth for Europe, Kaleidoscope, Raphaël, LIFE, SAVE, AIDS Prevention and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women). The European Parliament called on Turkey to assist the resumption of intercommunal talks on the basis of the UN resolutions and the agreements on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation and to withdraw its military forces from Cyprus. It also supported the action described by the Commission in its report on democratization, safeguarding human rights and political control of the armed forces; the establishment of good neighbourly relations Greece and Turkey; respect for the principles of international law in resolving differences in the Aegean and the Cyprus question. As far as the Kurdish question was concerned, it stated that there could be no military solution to this question and asked the authorities to begin negotiations with organisations representing the Kurdish people in order to respond to their demands for freedom and autonomy. It pointed to the need for a ceasefire and asked the Turkish authorities to seek a peaceful negotiated political solution to the Kurdish question. Condemning the invasion of northern Iraq and the unstable political situation in the Kurdish security zone, it asked for the immediate release of Leyla Zana and other political prisoners. Finally, it insisted that political dialogue with Turkey should be relaunched.