Turkey's progress towards accession. Recommendation and 2004 report

2004/2182(INI) - 30/11/2004

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Camiel EURLINGS (EPP-ED, NL) on Turkey's progress towards accesssion. It concluded that the opening of membership negotiations with Turkey would be "the starting point for a long-lasting process that by its very nature is an open-ended process and does not lead 'a priori' and automatically to accession".

MEPs expressed support for the political reform process in Turkey and the adopted constitutional and legislative changes, but said that Turkey, like any other candidate country, must fully meet the political criteria laid down at Copenhagen in 1993 for accession by any new country -especially in the area of human rights and full fundamental freedoms.They welcomed the Commission's commitment to recommend the suspension of accession negotiations in the event of "serious and persistent" breaches of those principles, and urged the Commission and the Council to consult Parliament thereon. MEPs warned that the Turkish authorities should fully implement a 'zero tolerance' approach with respect to torture.They also called for six important remaining pieces of legislation identified by the Commission to be brought into force (the Law on Associations, the new Penal Code and the Law on Intermediate Courts of Appeal) or adopted (the decision on the Code of Criminal Procedure, the legislation establishing the judicial police and the law on execution of punishments and measures) before negotiations start.

The committee welcomed the release of Leyla Zana, a former winner of the Sakharov Prize, and called for "the immediate release of all imprisoned persons sentenced for the non-violent expression of opinions in Turkey". It also called on Turkey to put an immediate end to all activities discriminating against religious minorities and communities and to protect the fundamental rights of all Christian minorities and communities in the country.

The report highlighted the importance of the opinion of EU citizens about a possible accession agreement and urged the Commission and the Turkish government to conduct campaigns "to inform citizens of both the EU and Turkey (...) and foster mutual understanding".

On the international front, Turkey was asked inter alia to pursue its efforts at reconciliation with Armenia and to reopen the borders with that country. But above all MEPs wanted to see greater efforts from the Turkish authorities on the Cyprus issue so that "an equitable solution" could be negotiated "on the basis of the Annan plan and the principles upon which the EU is founded".They also believed that a withdrawal of Turkish forces was "a necessary step forward" to easing tension. Since membership negotiations would take place between Turkey on one side and the 25 Member States - including Cyprus - on the other, MEPs said that "the opening of negotiations obviously implies the recognition of Cyprus by Turkey."