Report on Turkey's progress towards accession

2006/2118(INI) - 27/09/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution, by 429 votes in favour to 71 against with 125 abstentions based on the own-initiative report by Camiel **EURLINGS (EPP-ED, NL)** on Turkey's progress towards accession. It called on the government in Ankara to recognise the Republic of Cyprus, withdraw its forces from the island and lift its embargo on Cypriot vessels and aircraft. It reminded Turkey that a lack of progress in implementing the Ankara Protocol will have serious implications for the negotiation process, and could even bring it to a halt. It also called on both Greece and Turkey to refrain from tension-prone military activities. Moreover, Parliament stressed that Ankara has to introduce freedom of expression and amend Article 301 of its Penal Code.

However, Parliamentrejected the clause calling for the acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide a ″ precondition″ for Turkey's European Union accession. It nevertheless stressed that, although the recognition of the Armenian genocide as such is formally not one of the Copenhagen criteria, it is indispensable for a country on the road to membership to come to terms with and recognise its past. Parliament called on the Turkish authorities to facilitate the work of researchers, intellectuals and academics working on this question, ensuring them the access to the historical archives and providing them with all the relevant documents. Turkey was also urged to take the necessary steps, without any preconditions, to establish diplomatic and good neighbourly relations with Armenia, to withdraw the economic blockade and to open the land border at an early date, in accordance with the resolutions adopted by Parliament between 1987 and 2005, thereby fulfilling the Accession Partnership priorities and the requirements of the Negotiation Framework on 'peaceful settlement on border disputes' which are both mandatory for EU accession. A similar position should be adopted for the cases of other minorities (e.g. the Greeks of Pontos and the Assyrians).

Parliament stated, furthermore, that it hoped that the forthcoming visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Turkey would contribute to strengthening inter-religious and intercultural dialogue between the Christian and Muslim world.

With regard to Cyprus, Parliament reminded Turkey that recognition of all Member States, including the Republic of Cyprus, is a necessary component of the accession process. It called upon Turkey to take concrete steps for the normalisation of bilateral relations with the Republic as soon as possible. Turkish authorities should maintain a constructive attitude in finding a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus question within the UN framework, acceptable to both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots and based on the previous work of the UN. It went on to call on both parties to adopt a constructive attitude in finding a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus question.

Parliament welcomed the opening of broadcasting in Kurdish, while nevertheless noting the continued intimidation of civil society representatives in the South East of the country. The report strongly condemned the resurgence of terrorist violence on the part of the PKKandcalled on the PKK to declare and respect an immediate cea*se*fire. Parliament called on the Turkish Government to pursue a democratic solution to the Kurdish issue following Prime Minister Erdoan's encouraging statement of last year. It was essential to strike a balance between the need to control the situation as regards security, avoiding civil-military strains, and effectively promoting the political dialogue and the economic and social development of the south-east region through a comprehensive strategy supported by adequate means.

Despite the recent acquittal of the novelist Elif Shafak, Parliament remained troubled by the remaining barriers to freedom of expression in Turkey. It called for the abolition or amendment of those provisions of the Penal Code which threaten European free speech norms -such as Articles 216, 277, 285, 301 (which

foresees punishment for "denigrating Turkishness"), 305 and 318.These provisions allowed for arbitrary interpretations by judges and prosecutors leading to judgments which run counter to freedom of expression and freedom of the press and thus constitute a threat to respect for human rights and freedoms and negatively affect the progress of democracy.