



Key findings of the 2015 report on Turkey

Brussels, 10 November 2015

2015 enlargement package

The report on Turkey is part of the 2015 enlargement package adopted today by the European Commission. The Report highlights that the EU and Turkey continued to enhance cooperation in the areas of joint interest, which support and complement the accession negotiations. Political dialogue on foreign and security policy continued, including on counter-terrorism, against the background of Turkey joining the international coalition against Da'esh. Cooperation on visas, mobility and migration was pursued in the framework of the visa liberalisation dialogue launched in December 2013. Turkey continued to provide unprecedented humanitarian aid and support to refugees from Syria and Iraq. A Joint EU-Turkey Action Plan for refugees and migration management was welcomed by the European Council in October. The Commission and Turkey agreed to step up cooperation on energy. Developing further close economic ties was also a shared priority and both sides agreed to initiate procedures in view of a modernisation and extension of the Customs Union. Good progress has been made towards the opening of chapter 17 - economic and monetary policy - which would underpin the envisaged high level economic dialogue.

At the same time, the report emphasises an overall negative trend in the respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights. Significant shortcomings affected the judiciary as well as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Turkey saw a severe deterioration of its security situation. The settlement process of the Kurdish issue came to a halt despite earlier positive developments on the issue. It is imperative that the peace talks resume. The new government formed after the repeat election on 1 November will need to address these urgent priorities. Regarding the economic criteria, the Turkish economy is well advanced and can be considered a functioning market economy. Turkey has also a good level of preparation in acquiring the capacity to cope with the competitive pressure and market forces within the EU. Turkey has continued to align with the acquis, albeit at a slower pace, and has achieved a good level of preparation in many areas.

Political criteria

The pace of reforms slowed down over the past year in Turkey, also due to protracted elections and the continued political divide. The 7 June general election saw a record 84% turnout and all major political parties were represented in the new parliament. However, a government could not be formed by the constitutional deadline and repeat elections took place on 1 November, again with a very high turnout of 85 %. All major political parties re-won seats in the parliament with the ruling party securing enough votes to form a majority government. The security of the repeat election was ensured despite concerns due to the situation notably in the east and southeast of the country. There was an increased pressure on the media which gave cause for serious concern. Amongst the shortcomings in the legal framework regulating elections, the 10% threshold of votes to be represented in parliament need to be addressed as a priority.

Turkey saw a severe deterioration of its security situation. The authorities launched an extensive anti-terror military and security campaign against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which remains on the EU list of terrorist organisations, both in Turkey and in Iraq. The settlement process of the Kurdish issue came to a halt despite earlier positive developments on the issue. It is imperative that the peace talks resume.

Turkey was struck by the deadliest terrorist attack in its modern history, on 10 October in Ankara, claiming the lives of scores of demonstrators gathering for a peace rally sponsored by trade unions and opposition parties' youth branches. It is essential that swift and transparent investigations are conducted into these heinous acts which were aimed to destabilise and harm Turkey's democracy.

Turkey continued to express its commitment to EU accession. This commitment was, however, offset by the adoption of key legislation in the area of the rule of law, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly that ran against European standards. The President remained engaged in a wide range of key domestic and foreign policy issues, which led within Turkey to criticism that he was overstepping constitutional prerogatives.

Turkey has a strong public service and is committed to a user-oriented administration. However, impetus for a more comprehensive and modern reform is weak. Civil society has remained active, growing in numbers and continuing to be involved in many spheres of public life but restrictions to freedom of assembly continued to be a serious concern.

In the area of the judiciary, Turkey's justice system has reached some level of preparation. The independence of the judiciary and the principle of separation of powers have been undermined since 2014 and judges and prosecutors have been under strong political pressure. The government's campaign against the alleged 'parallel structure' within the state was actively pursued, at times encroaching on the independence of the judiciary. Substantial efforts are needed to restore the independence of the judiciary.

As regards the fight against corruption, Turkey has reached some level of preparation to effectively prevent and fight corruption. Turkey's track record in the fight against corruption remains inadequate. Corruption is perceived as widespread. The undue influence by the executive in the investigation and prosecution of high-profile corruption cases continues to constitute a major concern.

Turkey has achieved some level of preparation in the fight against organised crime, and needs to increase financial investigations and improve statistics. The absence of data protection legislation is an impediment for widened cooperation with EU bodies and Member States.

Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms had considerably improved over the past few years but major shortcomings remain. The enforcement of rights stemming from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) is not yet fully ensured. There is an urgent need to adopt a comprehensive framework law on combating discrimination in line with European standards. Turkey also needs to effectively guarantee the rights of women, children, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals and ensure sufficient attention to the social inclusion of vulnerable groups such as the Roma. There was significant backsliding in the areas of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Legislation on internal security contradicts the measures outlined in the March 2014 action plan on the prevention of violations of the ECHR by granting broad discretionary powers to the law enforcement agencies without adequate oversight. Most recently, the escalation of violence in the east and south east since July gave rise to serious concerns over human rights violations. Anti-terror measures taken in this context need to be proportionate. Turkey should widen the scope and improve the monitoring of the implementation of the action plan. After several years of progress on freedom of expression, serious backsliding was seen over the past two years, with some level of preparation in this field. Ongoing and new criminal cases against journalists, writers or social media users, intimidation of journalists and media outlets as well as the authorities' actions curtailing freedom of media are of considerable concern. Changes to the internet law are a significant step back from European standards.

Economic criteria

The Turkish economy is well advanced and can be considered a functioning market economy. In the reporting period, Turkey continued to face external and internal imbalances, calling for adjustments in monetary and fiscal policies as well as an acceleration of comprehensive structural reforms. The large current account deficit continued to contribute to the Turkish economy's vulnerability to shifts in global monetary conditions and risk sentiment. On the internal side, inflation continued to run at a relatively high rate, which is problematic in terms of macro-economic stability, resource allocation and re-distributive effects. It again exceeded the official target; nevertheless the central bank cut interest rates. Public debt has attained a sustainable level, but the general government structural balance has been significantly negative. Structural reforms need also to accelerate to improve the functioning of the markets for goods, services and labour.

Turkey has a good level of preparation in acquiring the capacity to cope with the competitive pressure and market forces within the EU. The quality of education and gender equality in education needs particular attention. Efforts are needed to ensure the transparency of state aid and to remove constraints and exceptions in the area of public procurement.

EU legislation

Turkey has continued to align with the acquis, albeit at a slower pace, and has achieved a good level of preparation in many areas. Turkey is well advanced in the areas of company law, financial services, trans-European networks and science and research. The country has also achieved a good level of preparation in the areas of free movement of goods, intellectual property law, enterprise and industrial policy, customs union, external relations, and financial control. In the area of justice, freedom and security, Turkey remained highly mobilised to tackle the extraordinary migration and asylum challenges. Turkey is only moderately prepared on public procurement and statistics. In all areas, more attention needs to be given to enforce legislation whilst many areas require further significant progress to achieve legislative alignment with the acquis.

State of play on accession negotiations

EU accession negotiations with Turkey began on 3 October 2005. In total, 14 out of 33 negotiation chapters have been opened, and one of the open chapters has been provisionally closed. As a result of Turkey not having fully implemented the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement, the EU decided in December 2006 that eight negotiating chapters could not be opened and that no chapter could be provisionally closed until Turkey meets its obligations.

Key dates

September 1959: Turkey applies for associate membership of the European Economic Community (EEC)

September 1963: Signature of the Association Agreement, aiming at enhancing economic cooperation and achieving a Customs Union between Turkey and the EEC

April 1987: Turkey presents its formal application for membership of the European Economic Community

January 1995: Turkey - EU Agreement creating a customs union

December 1999: The European Council recognises Turkey as a candidate country

December 2004: The European Council agrees to start accession negotiations with Turkey

October 2005: Start of accession negotiations

December 2006: The Council decides that eight negotiating chapters cannot be opened and no chapter can be closed until Turkey meets its obligation of full, non-discriminatory implementation of the additional protocol to the Association Agreement

May 2012: European Commission and Turkey start the implementation of the Positive agenda for Turkey

November 2013: Chapter 22 on Regional Policy and coordination of structural instruments becomes the 14th chapter on which negotiations are opened

December 2013: The EU-Turkey readmission agreement is signed in parallel with the launching of the visa liberalisation dialogue.

October 2014: The EU-Turkey readmission agreement enters into force.

More information at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/package/index_en.htm

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