

Visa liberalisation for Turkey: EU criteria must be met, say MEPs

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The EU should make sure that all its requirements are met before granting Turkey visa-free access to the Schengen area, stressed Civil Liberties Committee MEPs in a debate with the EU Commission on Monday. Most MEPs criticised the Commission for proposing a visa waiver for Turkish nationals even though the country has not yet fulfilled all the criteria. Turkey should not be discriminated, but neither should it receive preferential treatment, they agreed.

Speakers pointed to the statements by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that Ankara will not change its antiterrorist legislation – one of the pending requirements - and voiced worries about the political situation in the country following the resignation of Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, as well as threats to press freedom and human rights. Cypriot MEPs also reiterated that Turkey does not recognise their country.

On Monday evening, MEPs were also presented with the opinion of the Parliament's legal service on the legal aspects of the EU-Turkey deal on migration. Since the agreement was concluded on 18 March, MEPs have voiced concerns about its compatibility with EU and international law and have complained about the lack of an opportunity to subject it to democratic scrutiny.

The legal experts said that the March statement merely reflects a political commitment by the two parties and that it can in no way be considered an international agreement, since it is not legally binding. They underlined that all legal changes stemming from this deal will have to follow the usual procedures, which in some cases involve Parliament, such as visa liberalisation or disbursing funds for assisting refugees in Turkey.

Many MEPs protested over what they saw as a “shady” deal with serious implications, which was reached at the highest EU level but left Parliament aside.

Note to editors

As part of the EU-Turkey deal reached on 18 March to manage migration and refugee flows better, EU leaders offered visa liberalisation for Turkish nationals by June 2016, provided that all EU benchmarks are met. Parliament will have to decide on an equal footing with the Council on the visa exemption under the co-decision procedure.

In its third progress report, presented on 4 May, the Commission acknowledged that Ankara had yet to comply with five requirements, out of 72, regarding data protection and antiterrorist laws, among other issues. Also on 4 May, it presented a proposal to lift the visa requirements “under the understanding that the Turkish authorities will fulfil, as a matter of urgency and as they committed to do so on 18 March 2016, the outstanding benchmarks”.

Following the Commission's announcement, the European Parliament Conference of Presidents (EP President and political group leaders) [made clear](#) that the proposal will be dealt with only after all the benchmarks have been fulfilled. Until this is fully the case, and until the Commission provides the Parliament with a written guarantee that it is the case, thorough work should continue but no referral to committee can take place.

Press release

Further information

- Video recording of debate (09.05.2016): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/en/committees/video?event=20160509-1900-COMMITTEE-LIBE>
- Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/libe/home.html>
- Third report on progress by Turkey in fulfilling the requirements of its visa liberalisation roadmap: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160504/third_progress_report_on_turkey_visa_liberalisation_roadmap_en.pdf
- Proposal to transfer Turkey's citizens to the visa-free list for short stays in most EU Member States: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160504/turkey_proposal_en.pdf
- Visa liberalisation: Turkey must meet all benchmarks before EP can vote (European Parliament press release, 4.05.2016): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20160504IPR25841/Visa-liberalisation-Turkey-must-meet-all-benchmarks-before-EP-can-vote>
- EU-Turkey statement , 18 March 2016: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18-eu-turkey-statement/>

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