

SPEECH/05/556

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"Accession negotiations with Turkey: the journey is as important as the final destination"

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Introduction

Let me first extend a warm welcome to the new observer Members of Parliament from Bulgaria and Romania. I am very happy to see that you are participating in the work of this House, and I am looking forward to cooperating with you in the future.

This debate about Turkey is timely. We are on the eve of the date fixed by the European Council for starting accession negotiations with Turkey. This opens a new phase in the EU-Turkey relations.

The reasons which led the EU to decide to open accession negotiations with Turkey are unchanged: the EU needs a stable, democratic and prosperous Turkey, in peace with its neighbours, which takes over the EU values, policies and standards.

The start of the negotiations will give a strong push for those in Turkey, who want to reform the country to meet the European values of rule of law and human rights; they are also a way for the EU to have leverage on the direction of these reforms.

The conditions set in the December European Council conclusions are met: First, the six pieces of legislation, including the penal code, identified by the Commission in last year's Recommendation entered into force on 1 June. Second, Turkey signed Additional Protocol to Ankara Agreement on 29 July.

Additional Protocol

In this context, I would like to thank the chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs and the rapporteur, Mr Elmar Brok, for putting forward the recommendation to give assent to the conclusion of the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement.

Let me make some comments in light of the developments in recent weeks.

We regret the fact that Turkey had to issue a declaration upon signature of the Additional Protocol. This obliged the EU Member States to react and to lay down the obligations which we expect Turkey to meet, in a statement adopted on 21 September. It stresses that:

- the declaration by Turkey is unilateral, it does not form part of the Protocol and that has no legal effect on Turkey's obligations under the Protocol;
- the EU expects full, non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol, and the removal of all obstacles to the free movement of goods, including restrictions on means of transport;

- the opening of negotiations on the relevant chapters depends on Turkey's implementation of its contractual obligations to all Member States; failure to implement its obligations in full will affect the overall progress in the negotiations;
- recognition of all Member States is a necessary component of the accession process; accordingly, the EU underlines the importance it attaches to the normalisation of relations between Turkey and all EU Member States, as soon as possible;
- and finally, in the context of this declaration, the European Community and its Member States agree on the importance of supporting the efforts of the UN Secretary General to bring about a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem in line with relevant UNSCRs and the principles on which the EU is founded, and that a just and lasting settlement will contribute to peace, stability and harmonious relations in the region.

Negotiating framework

Right before the start of accession negotiations, the Council should adopt the negotiation framework proposed by the Commission. This framework forms a solid basis for rigorous and fair negotiations with Turkey.

Political reform

I have carefully read your joint motion for a resolution and I share many of your concerns. I also agree with you that there is an important link between the pace of negotiations and the pace of political reforms.

I will spare no effort to repeat time and again that starting accession negotiations marks only the beginning of a very demanding and complex process: Turkey will need to continue and accelerate its process of internal transformation and its transition towards a fully fledged liberal democracy respectful of human rights and minorities.

Turkey's reform process is ongoing. Important legislative reforms adopted earlier have now entered into force, leading to structural changes in the judiciary. The human rights situation has improved, but significant further efforts are required.

There have been recently some encouraging signals. The acknowledgment by Prime Minister Erdogan of the existence of a "Kurdish issue" is a landmark. His trip to Diyarbakir suggests the importance the Government attaches to the economic and social development of the South East of Turkey.

The academic conference on the Armenian issue could finally take place in Istanbul last week-end, with the support of the government and despite last-minute attempts by an administrative court to cancel it. These attempts were strongly condemned by PM Erdogan and Vice-PM Abdullah Gül. This is a step forward.

However, in order to be fully credible, Turkey's commitment to further political reforms should be translated into more concrete achievements for the benefit of all Turkish citizens.

Despite the efforts of the authorities, implementation on the ground remains uneven. On the one hand, there are signs that the judiciary is enforcing the reforms. Several positive court judgements have been made in relation to cases on freedom of expression, freedom of religion and the fight against torture and ill-treatment.

On the other hand, there have been contradictory decisions, particularly in the area of freedom of expression where, for example, journalists continue to be prosecuted and, on occasion, convicted, for expressing certain non-violent opinions.

The case of Orhan Pamuk is emblematic of the difficulties the Turkish authorities face to ensure effective and uniform implementation of the reforms and of the struggle between the reformers and the conservatives in Turkey.

The respected novelist is prosecuted by a district judge of Istanbul under art 301 of the new Penal Code for “denigrating Turkish identity”. Yet, an earlier investigation by another prosecutor was dropped following a different interpretation of the same Penal Code, which states in the same article, 301 that expression of opinion with the purpose of criticism does not require penalties!

The Commission made already very clear that its assessment of the new Penal Code, in particular on the doubtful provisions related to freedom of expression, would depend on how actually these provisions are implemented.

The prosecution of Mr Pamuk raises serious concerns in this respect. If this is indeed the direction taken by the judiciary in Turkey, then the Turkish Penal Code will have to be amended in such a way that freedom of expression is not subject to the very particular beliefs of some district judge anymore, but simply follows European standards as we all know them.

Another problem: fundamental problems encountered by non Muslim religious minorities persist. There is an urgent need to address these in a comprehensive manner via the adoption of legislation in line with the relevant European standards. A draft Law on Foundations is currently pending in Parliament but we have made it clear to the Turkish authorities that the current draft still falls short of EU standards.

On these issues, the Commission will continue to monitor closely the progress in meeting the Copenhagen political criteria fully. We shall make a detailed analysis in our Regular Report, to be published on 9 November.

I want to add that we shall propose a revised Accession Partnership which will list the priorities that Turkey needs to meet, including in the political area. This will serve as a roadmap for future political reforms and as a yardstick against which to measure future progress.

Conclusion

L'Union Européenne se trouve à un moment crucial, dont nous ne devons pas sous-estimer l'importance. En ouvrant des négociations d'adhésion avec la Turquie, nous

prenons une option forte sur la poursuite de la métamorphose politique, économique et sociale de ce pays. Ce faisant, nous respectons nos engagements à son égard.

J'adresse à la Turquie le message que nous devons construire des relations basées sur une confiance réciproque. Je fais confiance aux autorités turques pour qu'elles s'embarquent dans ce voyage avec une attitude ouverte et que le Trois Octobre fournisse l'occasion d'un nouveau départ. La démonstration d'un engagement sans ambiguïté ni arrière-pensées envers la transformation démocratique et les valeurs européennes sera certainement le meilleur atout de la Turquie pour gagner le soutien de l'opinion publique en Europe.

Au cours de la période à venir, la Turquie aura l'opportunité de démontrer qu'elle est sérieusement engagée à intégrer les valeurs européennes. Les pays qui souhaitent adhérer à l'Union doivent en effet partager notre vision de l'Europe et notre conception de relations internationales basées sur la démocratie, l'état de droit, les droits de l'homme et la solidarité. Ils doivent également partager nos normes, que ce soit entre autres dans le domaine social, environnemental ou industriel. Si l'Union Européenne prend un pari sur leur adhésion future, c'est parce que nous croyons aussi que c'est dans notre meilleur intérêt et que c'est pour le bénéfice de nos concitoyens. Je m'engage personnellement devant cette Assemblée à mettre en œuvre rigoureusement nos critères et conditions.

Comme je l'ai dit à de nombreuses reprises, le voyage est aussi important que la destination finale. Bien que l'objectif commun des négociations soit l'adhésion, de telles négociations sont de par leur nature même ouvertes quant au résultat. Mais c'est dans notre intérêt réciproque que ce processus soit encadré dans des principes clairs et rigoureux tels que ceux prévus dans le cadre de négociation. Ceci est la meilleure garantie d'un succès.