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Press Release



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In the context of the General Affairs and External Relations Council on Tuesday, 26 April 2005, Jean Asselborn, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and current President of the Council of the European Union, chaired the EU-Turkey Association Council. Mr Asselborn issued the following statement on this occasion:

"Today's EU-Turkey Association Council is the last before a new stage in relations between the European Union and Turkey starts on 3 October 2005 when, as planned by the European Council on 17 December 2004, accession negotiations will begin.

In this perspective the presidency welcomes the fact that the protocol on the adaptation of the Ankara Agreement has been initialled by Turkey and we now await its signature and implementation. The signature of the protocol on the adaptation of the Ankara Agreement, which takes account of the accession of the ten new Member States, represents an important step towards normalising bilateral relations between Turkey and all the Member States in the European Union.

We also await with interest the entry into force of the last legislative texts mentioned in the Commission's recommendation of October 2004.

Moving to more general matters, we reiterated our attachment to the political criteria to be met in this regard. There are still some issues which cause us concern, including religious freedom, protection of minorities and the exercise of cultural rights, social rights and the removal of discrimination, as well as relations between civil society and the army. We acknowledge the reform package adopted by Turkey over the past two years.

The Commission will issue, undoubtedly in June, a draft negotiation mandate. The Luxembourg Presidency will be keen to move work on this document forward as quickly as possible so that negotiations can open under the best possible circumstances.

However, how fast accession negotiations progress will clearly depend on the rate at which reform takes place. Resolute, effective and comprehensive implementation of the reforms will be a determining factor in the success of the overall accession process.

With regard to Cyprus, the Presidency reiterated its willingness to support new initiatives seeking settlement of the matter through the United Nations."

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