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**FIRST MEETING OF THE REFORM ACTION GROUP
PRESS STATEMENT
ANKARA, 8 NOVEMBER 2014**

The first meeting of the Reform Action Group (RAG) was held in Ankara on 8 November 2014, with the participation of Bekir Bozdağ, Minister of Justice; Volkan Bozkır, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator; Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Efkan Ala Minister of Interior. Afif Demirkıran, co-Chairman of Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee; Mehmet Tekelioğlu, Chairman of the EU Harmonization Committee of the TGNA; Ahmet Berat Çonkar, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the TGNA and Kemal Madenoğlu, Undersecretary of the Prime Ministry have also participated in the meeting which was hosted by the Ministry of Justice and coordinated by the Ministry for EU Affairs.

The Reform Monitoring Group (RMG), which convened for the last time on 23 July 2014 in Erzurum, has been replaced by the Reform Action Group with the approval of the Council of Ministers. The reorganisation of the RAG marks a new period in the political reform process. The already established strong coordination between the participating Ministries in RAG will be supporting the future new and comprehensive reform initiatives as a strong platform. The RAG, established on this platform, will no longer just monitor the political reforms, but it will also take on an active role in the whole cycle of the reform agenda contributing to the preparation, adoption and implementation phases.

As indicated by President Erdoğan in his speech at the inauguration ceremony of the new legislative year, as well as in the 62nd Government programme, Turkey's EU membership is a strategic objective.

Accordingly, Turkey's new EU Strategy was approved by the Council of Ministers and made public on 18 September 2014. The EU Strategy is based on the following three pillars; political reform process, socio-



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economic transformation and effective communication. The EU Communication Strategy was announced on 16 October 2014.

The National Action Plan for the EU Accession (Phase-I), prepared within the framework of the new EU Strategy, was announced to the public on 30 October 2014. It provides for a number of significant legislative measures to be undertaken until June 2015 regarding political reforms and the negotiation chapters.

The implementation of the political reforms clearly requires commitment as well as a transformation in mentality. The RAG maintains that it is essential to ensure active participation and contribution of all segments of society in the reform process from preparation to implementation phases.

The perception regarding Turkey by the international and EU public opinion is at times inaccurate or distorted. In dispelling this misperception the RAG will play a key role by implementing a constructive and active communication strategy which takes into account relevant criticism regarding the reform process. It was decided that, the Ministers and Undersecretaries from the Ministries participating in the RAG intensify their contacts at the international level in order to better inform their counterparts in the EU about the existing and future reforms.

The RAG addressed the reform packages on internal security and the judiciary which have recently become part of the public debate. Turkey will continue to implement important political reforms bearing in mind that security is a must to protect freedoms. The reforms on the gendarmerie and coast guard are significant for the civilian oversight of internal security, as well as the enhancement of democratic standards in Turkey.

It is decided to establish a working group with the participation of RAG ministries under the coordination of Ministry of Justice in order to evaluate the legal provisions that need to be reviewed with reference to



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the freedom of expression, in line with the ECtHR rulings and international documents. Work in this area will be submitted to the second RAG meeting to be held in the beginning of 2015 in Istanbul.

We will continue to hold seminars and similar activities on political criteria in the context of the determined stance of our Government for political reforms. Seminars on the Political Criteria will be held in cooperation with the European Commission and with the participation of NGOs and academicians. Conclusions and recommendations of the European Commission peer reviews will be addressed according to Turkey's priorities and evaluation of the peer reviews.

The RAG will facilitate the preparation and implementation of all reforms regarding fundamental rights and freedoms. This will be done taking into account universal values that are commensurate with Turkey's self-confident global stature.

An inter-ministerial working group has been established in order to review all legislation which have the imprints of 1980 military coup. Thus, the work on the new constitution will help remove the impact of military tutelage on our legal system.

Reforms for achieving the standards of advanced democracy will continue with determination in all areas of the Political Criteria, as well as Chapters 23 and 24. The European Convention on Human Rights, the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and the EU acquis will continue to be the references for our reform agenda.

Turkey will speed up the ratification process for the international conventions that have been signed. It is envisaged to submit the Judicial Reform Strategy to the Council of Ministers in December.

The implementation of the Action Plan on the Prevention of the Violations of the European Convention on Human Rights is being



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carefully monitored. The RAG has emphasized the importance of effective cooperation between institutions for the implementation of the Action Plan, which has been referred to in the 62nd Government Programme and in Turkey's new EU Strategy, according to the time table envisaged.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the effective functioning of individual application procedure to the Constitutional Court as adopted by the 12 September 2010 referendum, the Ministry of Justice continues the already initiated work for establishing legal remedies to accelerate the trials and eliminate the grievances that arise from lengthy trial periods within the framework of jurisdiction procedures.

Work for the development and effectiveness of human rights institutions will be carried out and necessary new mechanisms will be established. Accordingly, the RAG has addressed the draft Law on the Establishment of the Law Enforcement Monitoring Commission, prepared by the Ministry of Interior to enable independent investigations of maltreatment allegations by law enforcement officers. The work on amendment of the Law on Turkish National Human Rights Institution has also been addressed.

It is envisaged that the Law on the Protection of Personal Data, referred to in Turkey's National Action Plan for the EU Accession and discussed at the Council of Ministers' meeting of 3 November 2014, will soon be submitted to the TGNA.

Work to enhance the rights of the socially vulnerable groups, in particular the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities will continue. In consideration of related rulings of the ECtHR, work will be carried out to enhance the right to the freedom of association and peaceful assembly.



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Social integration and the solution process and facing the long-standing problems of various segments of society will pave the way for internalisation of the achievements that political reforms brought about, encompassing all segments of society. In this framework, the draft Law on Anti-discrimination and Equality, referred to in the National Action Plan for the EU Accession, will be submitted to the Parliament without delay.

In addition, draft laws on the protection of the victims of crime, prevention of human trafficking and protection of the victims, and border security were addressed in the meeting.

The implementation of the Readmission Agreement concluded between Turkey and the EU within the framework of the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue was addressed in the meeting. The European Commission's report on the visa liberalisation dialogue issued on 20 October 2014 was also discussed. The report, prepared in the light of on-site expert missions of the European Commission, adopts a results-oriented approach and confirms the related progress by Turkey.

The RAG also discussed the measures for further progress in the forthcoming reporting period with reference to obligations set out in the Turkey-EU Visa Liberalisation Roadmap.

Due to the substantial overlap between the obligations set out in the Roadmap and the harmonization efforts in Chapters 23 and 24, Turkey will have fulfilled its obligations arising from the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue with the implementation of the Action Plans prepared as a part of Turkey's new EU Strategy.

The active role taken by the RAG in the political reform process will allow all Turkish citizens to feel confident in having a say in the process of building New Turkey. Thus, as the real owners of the process, Turkish citizens will better internalise and monitor the reforms.



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Turkey continuously envisages higher standards in the area of political reforms and decisively pursues an approach based on democracy, the rule of law and protection of human rights in building the future.

The first meeting of RAG conveys a powerful message in this sense.

The next meeting of RAG will be hosted by Volkan Bozkır, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator in Istanbul in January 2015.