



**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
MINISTRY FOR EU AFFAIRS**

**PRESS STATEMENT BY MINISTER FOR EU AFFAIRS AND CHIEF NEGOTIATOR
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TURKEY 2014 PROGRESS REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
(OCTOBER 8, 2014)**

Dear Members of the Press,

- First of all, I would like to extend my best wishes for the recent "Bayram" (Eid al-Adha).
- Today, the European Commission has published its Turkey 2014 Progress Report. This is the 17th progress report on Turkey since 1998 and I hope it will prove to be beneficial for our EU accession process.
- The European Commission has also published the Enlargement Strategy Paper today.
- The Progress Reports assess the candidate and potential candidate countries' progress for fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria during the past year. These are the final documents prepared by the current European Commission.

Dear Members of the Press,

- We are now talking about a new Turkey with the election of a President by popular vote for the first time in the nation's history, and also with a new Prime Minister taking over the office to chair a new Government. Similarly, the EU has also undergone significant changes with a new Commission and Parliament and also replacements in the positions of President of the European Council and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Hence, 2014 has been a year of new beginnings in Turkey-EU relations. This new period will gather more momentum in 2015 and definitely help accelerate Turkey's accession process.
- In fact, the regional and global challenges highlight the importance of Turkey's accession process both for Turkey and the EU.

- The international community is going through a particularly critical period. Therefore, the European project more than ever needs policies that focus on strong leadership, vision, positivity and human dignity.
- As a matter of fact, the EU Enlargement Strategy Paper clearly highlighted that enlargement would bring strategic benefits for the EU. These benefits include a) improved European security, b) improved life quality for European people and c) increased prosperity and welfare. It is therefore obvious that Turkey is to make significant contributions to these ends.

Dear Members of the Press,

- In the month since I took over the office of the Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, my colleagues and I have worked intensively to set forth Turkey's determination in the EU accession process. We have also worked to ensure the progress achieved by Turkey is impartially addressed.
- The Ministry of EU Affairs has regularly provided the Commission with the necessary documentation and information for the preparation of the Progress Report. This has been carried out in coordination with the relevant ministries and institutions of our public administration. Furthermore, the Delegations headed by our Ministry have held several visits with the European Commission regarding our contributions to the Report.
- I believe that contributions on paper must always be complemented by personal contacts. Therefore, I held intensive visits in Brussels and Strasbourg up until the publication of the report. These were held so as to clearly explain to the Commission the details of these contributions, and to ensure a balanced approach be taken *vis-à-vis* any potential criticisms and statements.

Dear Members of the Press,

- As I have pointed out many times, the progress reports neither are nor should be considered to be documents of the European Commission. The Progress Report should be read as a joint document by Turkey and the EU.
- During these visits, we expressed to the Commission and our counterparts that even though there would naturally be some criticism regarding Turkey in the report, a constructive and positive approach to the expression of this criticism was of key importance.
- We believe that our concerted efforts have paid off. As a matter of fact, we observe that many of our suggestions have been taken into account thanks to an effective working relationship with the Commission. In comparison with previous progress reports, we observe that this year's report has been written using a more technical language with

consideration to using a style that avoids value-laden statements and is mainly based on Commission's own findings.

- The report naturally contains some criticism. Yet this criticism has been conveyed in a constructive manner. Therefore, I would like to emphasise that it is essentially an objective and balanced document.
- We will carefully take note of justified and reasonable criticisms in the report, as we always have. We will make use of the progress report as a constructive element to advance Turkey's EU accession process and work on the reforms.
- We will inform the Commission of certain criticisms in the report with which we do not agree, together with areas including factual errors.

Dear Members of the Press,

- The EU accession process is one of the key driving forces behind Turkey's reform process. Our core objective is to achieve EU standards in all areas, and to enhance the fundamental rights and freedoms through the momentum created by the accession process.
- Our government's comprehensive work on reforms in various areas has been acknowledged in the Progress Report. The report praises many reforms, in particular the Settlement Process and the Democratisation Package.
- Military tutelage, torture and maltreatment, the Kurdish issue and the property rights of non-Muslim minorities were areas which previously received most criticism. Today these are areas of progress for which Turkey has received praise.
- The report indicates that Turkey's decisive policies in the Settlement Process are highly appreciated, in particular the "Law to End Terrorism and Strengthen Social Integration," which was adopted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) on June 11. It highlights the historical significance of this Settlement Process.
- The report specifically underlines the following arrangements implemented in the framework of the Democratisation Package:
 - the removal of restrictions on different languages and dialects in political campaigns,
 - the expansion of the scope of state aid for political parties,
 - the allowing of education in the mother tongue in private schools,
 - the lifting of penalties for using letters not in the alphabet, and
 - the introduction of a co-chairman system for political parties.

- Furthermore, this report makes reference to Turkey's socio-economic transformation, expanding democratic freedoms and further integration of the Turkish economy with global markets, over the last 12 years.
- During this period, our citizens have started to seek modern standards in all areas of social life with the increase in their welfare. The Report makes reference to this phenomenon. It is also emphasised that an active civil society is growing in Turkey.
- An environment of free discussion has emerged on the issues which were previously considered to be taboo in Turkey for decades. The European Commission explicitly states this in the progress report giving concrete examples.
- Adopting "The Action Plan on Prevention of ECHR Violations" has been indicated as a critical step in the progress report, which also refers to the importance of the institutionalisation of human rights. Furthermore, the progress report also states that the Ombudsman is functioning in line with fundamental democratic principles and in compliance with the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights.
- Acknowledging these developments, the European Commission has also underlined the significance of opening Chapter 23 - Judicial and Fundamental Rights and Chapter 24 - Justice, Freedom and Security to negotiations without delay.

Dear Members of the Press,

- Turkey's performance not only in the area of political criteria, but also in the areas of economics and foreign policy, has also been duly noted in the progress report.
- In the section on "Economic Criteria," the report confirms the existence of a functioning market economy in Turkey and praises the growth the Turkish economy has experienced since 2011.
- Furthermore, the report also indicates that the growth performance of the economy since 2011 affirms the strength and resilience of the economy against the global economic shocks.
- The rebound of economic growth in 2013 following the slow-down in 2012 is noted in the report, together with the positive role of net exports in this performance.
- Turkey's high level of trade and economic integration with the EU has also been highlighted.
- Moreover, the report indicates that Turkey continues to be actively involved in its wider region and is an important regional actor. The humanitarian assistance provided by

Turkey to refugees has been also praised in the report, in particular the assistance provided to 1,5 million Syrians fleeing violence across the border.

Dear Members of the Press,

- The section of the report covering “the ability to assume the obligations of membership,” which is an important dimension of the Turkey-EU accession process, confirms our government’s political commitment in the process of harmonisation with the EU.
- I would like to emphasize that many critical steps have been taken directly affecting the daily life of citizens and bringing Turkey closer to the EU standards. This is thanks more than two thousand pieces of legislation issued for alignment with the EU over the course of the last 12 years.
- Almost 170 pieces of legislation issued last year have led to improvements in the living standards of our people.
- With regard to alignment with the EU *acquis*, the progress report confirms that progress has been achieved at various levels in 30 of the 33 negotiation chapters. The progress report also indicates that Turkey has reached advanced level of alignment in 26 of these chapters.
- These report findings attest to our claim that while Turkey has officially opened only 14 chapters and closed one, actually 27-28 chapters should have been opened and 13-14 should have been closed.
- As is clearly indicated by this advanced level of alignment, Turkey is continuing with its work, despite political blockage.

Dear Members of the Press,

- Turkey's EU accession process, which started with the signing of the Ankara Agreement in 1963, has been given a systematic framework during successive governments in office, and has become an essential part of Turkey’s political vision.
- On the opening of parliament's new legislative session on October 1, 2014, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan once again emphasised that Turkey maintains its determination for full membership to the EU, and continues with reforms despite difficulties encountered in the negotiation process.
- With emphasis on this determination, the importance attached to the EU accession process in the Government Programme has been noted by the progress report. The

report also notes that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared 2014 as the “EU year,” underlining the EU accession process as a strategic objective for Turkey.

- The accession negotiations cannot proceed at the preferred pace due to the political stance of certain EU Member States. The report points to this, stating that the negotiation process has been stalled due to a lack of consensus between member states. However, Turkey remains committed to achieving EU standards. The government will forge ahead with Turkey’s reform process, whether the chapters are opened or not.
- As the Enlargement Strategy Paper emphasizes, accession negotiations provide the most suitable framework for exploiting the full potential of EU-Turkey relations. There is no alternative to the accession process, as underlined by the Commission.
- In this context, I hope that the Progress Report further advances Turkey-EU relations in the forthcoming period, and that concrete results are achieved through decisive steps in cooperation with all stakeholders.
- Reform, transformation and communication. These are the three key words that define our EU accession process, and we are determined to remain committed to these.
- As the outgoing Commission prepares to hand over its mandate to the new Commission in early November, we are fully confident that Turkey-EU relations will be strengthened and the accession process will be further advanced.
- For their contributions to Turkey-EU relations, I would like to take this opportunity to thank José Manuel Barroso’s team, and especially Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy.
- I would also like to wish every success to the new Commission, which will be guided by Jean-Claude Juncker as the President of the Commission; and especially to Federica Mogherini, as Vice-President and EU High Representative; and Johannes Hahn, as the new Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations.
- I hope that the new Commission will make the EU stronger, with the will to overcome present challenges. I also would like to emphasise that Turkey is determined to continue the accession process.
- I would like to thank you all for your participation.