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MINISTRY FOR EU AFFAIRS**

**SECOND MEETING OF THE REFORM ACTION GROUP
PRESS STATEMENT
ANKARA, 20 FEBRUARY 2015**

The second meeting of the Reform Action Group (RAG) was held on 20 February 2015 in Ankara, with the participation of Bekir Bozdağ, Minister of Justice, Efan Ala, Minister of Interior, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Volkan Bozkır, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator. In the framework of the meeting agenda, Assoc. Prof. Ayşenur İslam, Minister for Family and Social Policy also attended the RAG Meeting. Afif Demirkıran, Co-Chair of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, Ahmet Berat Çonkar, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) and Kemal Madenoğlu, Undersecretary of the Prime Ministry were present at the meeting.

In the last two months period, the Turkish Government continues to base its policies on its commitment to the political reform process and sustain its efforts to take concrete steps at the same speed. The RAG, which was restructured to initiate a new period in the political reform process, will maintain its work in the upcoming election process.

Following the first meeting of the on 8 November 2014, we have continued to work consistently on the Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Chapter 24 on Justice, Freedom and Security, within the framework of the EU accession process.

Recent contacts by the Turkish Prime Minister Prof. Dr. Ahmet Davutoğlu with our EU counterparts have once again underlined Turkey's commitment to the political reform process and to the EU accession process. Regional and global challenges have highlighted the critical importance of protecting fundamental rights and freedoms. Developments of serious concern in Europe which bring to the forefront the protection of the right to life of its citizens, have made it essential that mechanisms focusing on political reform, in particular the RAG, function effectively. Under such circumstances, reform processes that reinforce both social solidarity based on values and a common vision for the future of Europe have become even more important.

The recent tragic and vile attack in France once again demonstrated the importance of the fight against terrorism. Turkey, as an integral member



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of the European family and a country which is familiar with the suffering and destruction caused by terrorism, shares the grief of the French people.

We believe cooperation based on mutual confidence at the international level is the best response to terrorism that crosses all boundaries and become a global threat. Therefore, we believe that deepening of the existing cooperation between Turkey and the EU in the area of the fight against terrorism vis-a-vis new challenges, will be extremely important for eliminating threat of terrorism.

The increasing radicalization in Europe is another cause of concern in addition to the threat of terrorism. It is a matter of concern that the values upon which the EU is established are under threat, at a time when racism, xenophobia, intolerance of diversity and anti-EU political movements are on the rise.

Turkey, as a founding member of the Council of Europe and a candidate country carrying out accession negotiations, will continue to promote the universal values upon which the EU was established. Turkey's values based on a historical culture of tolerance, in fact, coincide with the values of the EU, the founding philosophy of which encompasses the common values and ideals of humanity.

The free expression of thoughts and practice of beliefs freely by people belonging to different faiths and cultures and having different life styles fearlessly without facing discrimination or hate is a requirement for a pluralist democracy. Reforms introduced by the AK Party governments over twelve years in the areas of democracy, human rights, rule of law and freedom of expression and belief are clear indications of our understanding.

We believe, rather than making different values compete and restricting them, we have to respect diversities and maximize freedoms, at a time when discrimination and hate crimes are on the rise. In this context, regardless of the views or beliefs, insults to sacred values should not be considered within the framework of freedom of expression. Embodying the best examples of co-existence of societies with different faiths, ancient Anatolian cultures can make significant contributions to the world in terms of experience of co-existence. Turkey's EU accession process is



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of great importance in terms of universalization of the European Project which is built upon these values.

Our goal is to improve democratic standards through the political reforms, considering the fact that security is required to protect the freedoms.

RAG, which aims to play an active role in the preparation of political reform proposals, and their adoption and implementation phases have begun to create an impetus in the reform process. Finally, the Additional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Disabled has been ratified by the decision of the Council of Ministers published on the Official Gazette on 10 February 2015. The ratification process of the international conventions that Turkey has signed shall be accelerated.

We agreed on the issue that the RAG, which has been re-structured, is not only a body serving Turkey's EU accession process but also involved in all political reforms planned to be or have already been carried out, as well as the work on fundamental rights and freedoms.

In this meeting, the most recent work of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review Mechanism (UPR), which reviews the state of the UN member countries in the field of human rights every four and half years by its Human Rights Committee, was also addressed. Recommendations to Turkey during the second cycle of the UPR, which was realised on 27-29 January 2015, are directly related to the work that was carried out within the scope of the RAG. In this framework, from now on, the implementation of the UPR recommendations will be monitored by the RAG.

The judiciary reform strategy which constitutes the basis of the progress made in the field of the judiciary, in particular the judicial reform packages prepared since 2009, has been updated and will be submitted to the Council of Ministers without delay.

Action Plan on Prevention of Violation of European Convention on Human Rights, first year of which will be completed in March, includes necessary measures, activities and arrangements for remedying shortcomings with respect to the rulings of violation by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The implementation of this Action Plan is being carefully monitored and the annual report to be prepared by the



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Ministry of Justice will be submitted to the Prime Ministry. Furthermore, the work is on-going to establish an informal working group on the issues referred to in the Action Plan by the participation of the representatives of the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights and Turkish Ministry of Justice.

In the meeting, the Ministry of Justice made a presentation regarding the effects of the recent reforms, in particular of the judicial reform packages, on the ECtHR statistics, and work to be carried out in the forthcoming period. In 2012, the number of pending applications about Turkey at the ECtHR was 16,876 while as of 31 January 2015, this number has decreased by 45 % to 9,550 applications. Five judges from Turkey have been seconded at the ECtHR for the rapid conclusion of pending files at the ECtHR regarding Turkey.

The work undertaken by the Human Rights Compensation Commission, receiving applications as of 20 February 2013, significantly contributed to the decrease in the number of applications filed to ECtHR against Turkey. ECtHR has upheld that applications to the Commission for lengthy trials are an effective, domestic legal remedy. The number of applications made to the Human Rights Compensation Commission has reached 6,938. Almost 5,955 of these applications have been finalised. 2,508 of the applications were accepted, where 1,686 of them were rejected. Objection is raised against 1,520 of the 5,955 files. 1,133 of the objections have been rejected while 42 have been accepted.

The National Human Rights Institution is one of the fundamental columns in terms of institutionalisation of human rights in Turkey and it has also undertaken the role of national prevention mechanism envisaged in Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). In the meeting, the Draft Law Amending Law on National Human Rights Institution - the relevant law on this institution - has been addressed.

The "Internal Security Reform Package" which was submitted to the TGNA on 24 November 2014 and referred to TGNA General Assembly on 23 January 2015 includes certain arrangements that make the life easier for citizens, guaranteeing the security and the right to life and right to property and eliminating red tape in daily administrative practices. These arrangements have been prepared in line with the EU acquis and international standards.



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Turkey will continue introducing significant political reforms with the approach that security is required for the protection of freedoms. The enactment of the Draft Law on Establishing the Law Enforcement Monitoring Commission and Amending Certain Laws that is currently on the agenda of the TGNA General Assembly aiming to independently examine and investigate the allegations of maltreatment by law enforcement officers, is of great importance. Thus, current mechanisms which provide examination, monitoring and concluding of complaints about law enforcement officers will ensure that the complaint system be more effective and rapid.

We, as the RAG, consider the realization of political reforms, as well as the monitoring of implementation process to be highly significant. With diligent implementation of current and new arrangements and with the identification of shortcomings in implementation, we continue to steer the reform process.

The draft Law on the Protection of the Personal Data, which is related to the five negotiation chapters in Turkey's EU accession process and is required to ensure strong cooperation with the EU institutions, particularly European Police Office (EUROPOL) and European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit (EUROJUST), is one of the issues addressed in the RAG. Enactment of the Draft Law on the Protection of the Personal Data, which was submitted to the TGNA on 26 December 2014 and is currently under discussion in the relevant Committees, is crucial.

Moreover, draft laws regarding the protection of the victims of crime, anti-discrimination and equality, referred to in the National Action Plan for the EU Accession, have been addressed at this meeting.

Work regarding dialogue with citizens belonging to different faith groups, which is a priority item of the RAG agenda, is being determinedly carried out. As a result of the work carried out within this context, properties were returned to a great extent, churches were restored, religious ceremonies were held in churches and restriction on our citizens of different faiths to opening schools were lifted. Relevant representatives of our Government, all public institutions and organisations and in particular, Prime Minister Prof. Dr. Ahmet Davutoğlu have regularly met with citizens of different faiths.



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Developments regarding the Chapter 24 on Justice, Freedom and Security, which were discussed at the Sub-Committee Meeting No 8, held on 11 February 2015 in Ankara, were also addressed in this meeting.

Work undertaken within the scope of the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue has been discussed and steps to be taken during the forthcoming reporting period in the framework of the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue have been determined. In addition, the requirements for the implementation of the Readmission Agreement concluded between Turkey and the EU have been addressed. Two important steps were taken recently on visa policy which is also closely related to the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue. First, the visa stamp requirement for 47 countries was abolished on 1 January 2015 and "e-Visa" system is introduced for the citizens of these countries. Second, high security visa stickers were prepared and put into use. These two steps play an important role for fulfilling our obligations with regard to the visa liberalisation dialogue and a more effective fight against irregular migration. Work continues with determination in order to meet the requirements completely and without delay as indicated in the Visa Liberalisation Roadmap completely and without delay.

We welcomed the balanced approach in the first draft of the European Parliament's Report on Turkey which was released on 15 January 2015. It is important that this approach and the call for opening of the Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and the Chapter 24 on Justice, Freedom and Security to negotiations, made in the draft version of the Report, are maintained in the final version. We expect a rapid response to the call made by the European Commission and the European Parliament to open these Chapters to negotiations.

In the meeting, we addressed the effective fight against the violence against women, particularly in view of the recent tragic events in Turkey. We, as the Ministers participating in the RAG, strongly condemn the brutal murder of Özgecan Aslan, which has deeply grieved us. We wish God's mercy upon Özgecan Aslan and express our condolences to her family. We hope for this heinous murder to have a unifying effect on all segments of the society to create greater solidarity in fighting violence against women.

In this framework, we have also dealt with the further steps required to be taken for fighting violence against women, with the participation of



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Assoc.Prof. Ayşenur İslam, Minister of Family and Social Policies. Turkey is the first country that signed and ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Combating and Preventing Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention. By taking into account the provisions in the Convention, "Law No. 6284 on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women" entered into force on 20 March 2012. It has been underlined that, in addition to measures to be taken in order to prevent violence against women, it is necessary to increase the awareness of the community on this issue, extend current preventive mechanisms, and thus, ensure that these mechanisms are more effectively used by all citizens. Furthermore, work is on-going for the "National Action Plan on Fighting Violence against Women", which aims to fight in this field as a whole with full consideration of the "zero-tolerance principle", assigns new responsibilities to the relevant Ministries and envisages an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism. The Action Plan will be implemented between 2016-2019. Within the framework of this Action Plan, it has been underlined that preventive and protective mechanisms will be used more effectively by all citizens.