



**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
PRIME MINISTRY
SECRETARIAT GENERAL FOR EU AFFAIRS**

**21th Reform Monitoring Group Meeting
Press Statement
Ankara, 26 July 2010**

- The 21st meeting of the Reform Monitoring Group (RMG) was held in Ankara today under the auspices of the Minister of Interior Beşir Atalay, and with the participation of Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bağış, Minister of Justice Sadullah Engin, and Minister for Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu.
- High-level officials from the Prime Ministry, Secretariat General for EU Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Presidency for Human Rights have also participated in the meeting.
- The political reforms, undertaken to protect human rights in all areas, strengthen democracy and enhance the principle of the rule of law, is one of the most important components of the EU accession process, which has been a priority for Turkey.
- It is clear that the objective of these political reforms is to enable our citizens to exercise their rights in every area benefiting from all the features of a democratic state respecting the rule of law.
- In fact, each step taken for this purpose strengthens peace and harmony in our country, enhances the prosperity of our citizens and increases Turkey's international prestige.
- RMG, created in 2003, closely monitors the political reform process and formulate new reforms.
- RMG discussed the future reforms through a time scheme of one year. In this regard, three stages have been identified for the reforms process in the coming period:

1. The first period would cover the post-referendum period during which legislative work needs to be undertaken connected to the Constitutional package (in case the Constitutional package is approved in the referendum). Any progress achieved will have a positive effect on the 2010 Progress Report prepared by the European Commission.
 2. The second period would cover October, November and December 2010. Reforms undertaken during this period would have a positive effect just before the European Union Council meeting of December 2010.
 3. Finally, the December 2010-April 2011 period is a significant period to carry out political reforms prior to the election period.
- Legal arrangements carried out in many areas, dialogue processes developed with different segments of our society and constitutional amendment package adopted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly are the most concrete indicators of our Government's decisiveness regarding the political reform process.
 - The amendments foreseen in the constitutional package are of the nature that will ensure significant progress in the EU accession process. In fact, the constitutional amendments have been prepared in light of the Copenhagen political criteria. The extent to which the political criteria has been reflected to the constitutional amendment package was explained in a working- document distributed at the 20th meeting of the RMG in Konya.
 - While many amendments in the constitutional amendment package enable our citizens to benefit fully from fundamental rights in a more democratic system by lifting the restrictions of the September 12 military regime, these amendments also include arrangements, which in particular strengthen Turkey's position regarding the opening to negotiations of Chapter 23 on "Judiciary and Fundamental Rights". We will also distribute a working-document on this matter.
 - Turkey has taken important steps in terms of democratization in the past eight years. Those circles who wish to impede this process have once again increased their acts of violence. It is not a coincidence that the terrorist attacks have increased recently at a time when significant steps have been taken for the Democratic

Opening Initiative and especially prior to the referendum on constitutional amendments which will bring important improvements in respect of rights and freedoms.

- Our Government will continue its fight against the terrorist organisation. We will not make any concessions on the reforms that are causing concern for the terrorist organisation. We are determined to ensure national unity and brotherhood on the basis of equality of our citizens.
- We will continue our efforts with determination for the strengthening of democratization and brotherhood. The legislative amendments to Anti-Terror Law and Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstration Marches have been enacted last week.
- In order to prevent the exploitation of our children by the terrorist organisation, children who participate in meetings and demonstrations will not be convicted for being members of a terrorist organisation, when in fact they are not, and thus, will not be subject to severe sentences. In this framework, children who have committed crimes at meetings and demonstrations for the first time will not face prison sentences, provided that they do not use firearms. We will also distribute an explanatory note on the legislative amendments.
- In the 21st RMG Meeting, the legislative work on political criteria, Chapter 23 on “Judiciary and Fundamental Rights” and Chapter 24 on “Justice, Freedom, and Security” have been discussed in detail and the progress achieved in terms of the opening these chapters to negotiations have been assessed.
- The first of the Political Dialogue meetings, which have replaced the Troika meetings with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, has been held in Istanbul on 13 July 2010 with the participation of Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, and Stefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy. In this meeting, our progress in Chapter 23 and Chapter 24 have been explained in detail. We have informed our counterparts that we are close to fulfilling the requirements and thus we wish to open these chapters to negotiations in 2010.

- Our request to open negotiations on these two chapters by carrying out the necessary steps indicates our Government's decisiveness in the reform process despite the existence of political obstacles brought before Turkey in negotiations.
- During the meeting, the progress regarding institutionalization in the area of human rights has also been discussed in detail. We have discussed the "Draft Law on Anti-discrimination and Equality" which has been prepared under the coordination of the Ministry of Interior. The draft law has been submitted to the Prime Ministry. The Anti-Discrimination and Equality Board to be established by this law will undertake the fight against all kinds of discrimination and carry out activities necessary for the prevention of discrimination.
- Furthermore, the activities of the Task Force on Anti-Discrimination, created to closely monitor the steps taken for fight against discrimination has been evaluated.
- In addition, the significance of the draft law on the "Turkish National Human Rights Institution" has been underlined.
- The results of the visit to the religious and community leaders of five different faiths by a large delegation presided by Ambassador Volkan Bozkır, Secretary General for EU Affairs, on 13-14th May, 2010 in Istanbul have been addressed at this meeting.
- Prime Ministry Circular, published in the Official Gazette of 13th May, 2010, regarding issues of our citizens of different faiths reiterates the will of our Government to ensure that every citizen benefits fully from equal rights. We will continue our work in line with this Circular.
- As a matter brought by different communities in these meetings, Ministry of Education will be continuing its work to review and eliminate all kinds of discrimination in schoolbooks. Ministry of Education is also exploring the means to enable children of foreign nationals to attend minority schools.

- An international seminar will be held in September under the coordination of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs on the issues of our Roman citizens, in light of the Roman Opening initiated by our Government, with participation of representatives from civil society and experts from other countries.
- The first draft of the National Action Plan for Fundamental Rights is being prepared under the coordination of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs and will be presented at the next meeting of the RMG.
- The necessary amendments to the legislation and implementation to execute the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights have also been addressed in detail.
- In the area of freedom of expression, Ministry of Justice is carrying out a comprehensive work, which has reached its final stage, with the participation of academicians and civil society representatives. Depending on the conclusions of this study, a legislative package on freedom of expression might be prepared.
- Work is ongoing on Chapter 24 on “Justice, Freedom, and Security”, which comprises the areas of asylum, migration and visa policy.
- Taking into consideration the legal commitments between Turkey as a negotiating candidate country and EU, arising from the Ankara Agreement, the Additional Protocol and the Customs Union Decision, in order to initiate the process for visa exemption by the EU for Turkish citizens, the technical work that need to be carried out by Turkey following the mandate to be given to the European Commission by Member States has been addressed in detail.
- It has been underlined that the process for completing the readmission agreement, which has reached its final stage, will be carried out in parallel with the mandate to be given to the European Commission by Member States to carry out the work related to the visa regime for Turkish citizens.

- It has been noted that electronic passports with biometric data, which constitutes an important step within the scope of Chapter 24, particularly in the area of security, have been made available to Turkish citizens as of 1 June 2010 as decided at the 20th meeting of the RMG.
- Work is ongoing on integrated border management which will enable more effective protection, control and management of land and sea borders.
- In light of the decisions of the 19th and the 20th RMG meetings, the significance of the Prime Ministry Circular, dated 26 May 2010, has been underlined. By the Circular, a “Coordination Board” under the chairmanship of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior and comprising representatives from all relevant public institutions and organisations has been established in order to ensure high level coordination and cooperation in the area of integrated border management,.
- Work is ongoing on “Law on Asylum”, “Law on Foreigners”, “Framework Law on the Fight Against Human Trafficking” and “Law on the Establishment of the Administration of Asylum and Migration”, which will redefine basic policies and significantly develop the system in the areas of asylum and migration. These laws will also introduce new arrangements on matters referred to in the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights in the areas of migration and asylum. The draft laws will be made available to the public in order to obtain the views of relevant international organisations, civil society organisations and academicians.
- In the area of fight against illegal migration, Article 79 of the Turkish Criminal Code has been amended so that attempted migrant smuggling is also qualified as a crime. This amendment has been adopted by the Parliament on 22 July 2010, as a part of the Law Amending the Anti-Terror Law and other Laws.
- The implementation of the National Strategy Paper for Fight Against Organized Crime (2010-2015) and its Action Plan (2010-2012), which are among the criteria for the opening of Chapter 24 to negotiations, have been initiated upon the approval by the Prime Ministry. The Strategy Paper, which aims to develop inter-institutional cooperation and increase the capacity of relevant

institutions, and the Action Plan, which identifies the relevant activities, aim to minimize organized crime.

- Turkey will progress with determination to achieve its objective to be a member of the EU. The priority of our Government through the accession process has always been and will be to ensure the highest level of standards for our citizens.
- The 22nd RMG meeting will be held in Istanbul on 17 September 2010 under the auspices of the Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bağış.