



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

**23rd Reform Monitoring Group Meeting
Press Statement
Ankara, 14 December 2010**

- The 23rd meeting of Reform Monitoring Group (RMG) which was established in 2003 was hosted in Ankara by Beşir Atalay, Minister of Interior, with the participation of Egemen Bağış, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, Sadullah Ergin, Minister of Justice, and Feridun Sinirlioğlu, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs on behalf of Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- 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 this meeting.
- The political reform process undertaken to protect human rights in all areas, strengthen democracy and the principle of the rule of law, is one of the most important components of the EU accession process.
- The aim of every arrangement carried out in the framework of the political reforms is the stability of our country and the welfare and happiness of our citizens by ensuring a more liberal democracy and an effectively functioning judicial system.
- Turkish citizens have demonstrated their support for our efforts in the referendum held on 12 September 2010.
- The approval of the Constitutional Reform Package has also been welcomed by the EU and identified as “a step in the right direction”. It has been observed that Turkey’s political and social reforms, active foreign policy and the successful performance of the economy have started to positively change the opinions of EU Member States on Turkey and has strengthened the hands of the supporters of Turkey. In this regard, we welcome the article jointly written by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of four EU Member States supporting Turkey’s accession process, prior to the meeting

of EU General Affairs Council, which will be held on 16-17 December 2010.

- In the RMG meeting, our Government's determination to pursue the political reforms has been emphasized once again.
- Within the framework of the Constitutional amendments, the "Action Plan on the amendments to be made in Turkish legislation in line with the Law No 5982 amending certain provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey" prepared under the coordination of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs was submitted to the Council of Ministers on 27 September 2010.
- With the participation of all relevant institutions, work has been initiated on the implementation of the Action Plan, by making also use of the "harmonization package" method. In addition to the harmonization packages, a list of laws on the implementation of the Constitutional amendments has been drawn up.
- Preparations are underway in respect of legislative work other than the harmonisation packages, including the "Draft Law on the Establishment of an Ombudsman Institution", "Draft Law on the Protection of Personal Data", "Draft Law Amending the Law on Civil Servants' Unions", "Draft Law on Turkish Human Rights Institution", "Draft Law on Fight against Discrimination" and "Draft Law on the Establishment of a Monitoring Committee for Law Enforcement Officers". It has been decided that necessary efforts will be made to adopt these laws as soon as possible.
- "Law on the High Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors" has been adopted by the Parliament recently. Furthermore, "Law on the Court of Auditors", which has been referred to in the Progress Reports, was adopted on 3 December 2010.
- Within the scope of the harmonisation packages, legal amendments on positive discrimination and the rights of children, freedom of travel, union rights, recourse to judicial remedies for disciplinary penalties; amendments related to military justice; and amendments related to judiciary are underway.
- The European Commission published the 2010 Progress Report on Turkey on 9 November 2010. In this report, Turkey's progress in meeting the political and economic criteria has been evaluated and

the progress on the adoption of the EU acquis have been assessed.

- The Reform Monitoring Group, taking into account the Progress Report, addressed the necessary steps to be taken in the forthcoming period particularly on the areas of freedom of expression and women's rights.
- It was also decided that, in line with the Constitutional amendments, the legal arrangements on the institutionalisation in the area of human rights be completed shortly, including the establishment of the institution of the Ombudsman.
- Legislative work towards strengthening the freedom of expression and the protection of personal data is ongoing.
- Besides, an international seminar will be held tomorrow under the coordination of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs addressing the issues of our Roma citizens, in light of the Roma Opening initiated by our Government, with the participation of representatives from civil society and Turkish and foreign experts. In the seminar, the problems of the Roma citizens in Turkey including those encountered in various areas such as education, health, housing and discrimination will be discussed. The issue will be covered through its social and economic implications.
- Work is underway on the draft of the National Action Plan for Fundamental Rights, which is being prepared under the coordination of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs. Arrangements in the areas of the freedom of expression, prevention of torture and ill-treatment, fight against discrimination, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, gender equality and women's rights will be included in the Action Plan.
- The legislative amendments and arrangements on implementation required to carry out the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) have also been addressed at this meeting.
- The property of the Büyükada Greek Orphanage was re-registered under the Patriarchate's name on 29 November 2010, in line with the ECtHR judgment of 15 June 2010 on the re-registration of the property in question.

- The Government continues to work with a view to improving the freedom of religion in Turkey. The dialogue with Turkish citizens of different faiths has been in progress. The “Religious Freedom Award” presented to Egemen Bağış, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, in Brussels in November 2010, clearly indicates the recognition of the efforts of the Turkish Government at international platforms.
- It has also been decided to discuss in the next RMG meeting, the steps to be taken in order to solve the problems of our former citizens who wish to re-acquire Turkish citizenship.
- Work is ongoing on Chapter 24 on “Justice, Freedom, and Security”, which includes the areas of asylum, migration and visa policy.
- It has been once more 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 negotiate a road map on the visa-free regime for Turkish citizens.
- Taking into account the visa exemptions provided to third countries by the EU, we call upon the EU to start the process on the visa-free regime for Turkish citizens as soon as possible.
- Work is ongoing on integrated border management, which will enable more effective protection of Turkey’s land and sea borders.
- It was decided to complete shortly the work on the “Draft Law on the Organisation and Duties of the Directorate General for Border Security” that will provide the establishment of a border security organisation.
- “Draft Law on the Border Security Organisation” will be conveyed to the relevant public institutions for consultation. In this area, 33 projects have been prepared to improve the security of our borders, and strengthen the institutional capacity of border crossing points and furnish them with high technology equipment.
- Work is underway on the “Draft Law on Foreigners and International Protection” and “Draft Law on the Fight against Human Trafficking and Protection of Victims”, which will redefine main policies and significantly enhance the current system in the

areas of asylum and migration. These legislation will also resolve the matters referred to in the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights in these areas.

- While Turkey is not a country of origin for illegal migration, Turkey also suffers the negative effects of illegal migration as a transit country similar to some EU Member States. Turkey is fighting with determination against migration flow through the progress made on integrated border management and management of migration.
- Necessary work is ongoing to improve the living conditions of illegal immigrants, and to enable them to benefit from health, educational and social benefits until their repatriation.
- Within this framework, removal centres, each with a capacity of 650 persons, are being built in Aydın, Edirne and Van by the Ministry of Interior. A removal centre in Tatvan with a capacity of 750 persons has become operational.
- As Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, has stated in his most recent visit to Turkey last month, Turkey should not be treated as a “buffer” or a “dump-area” of illegal immigrants concerning irregular migrant and refugee flows that the EU has been facing. The difficulties encountered regarding migration within the EU should be regarded as a matter that the EU needs to address within itself.
- It was also decided to accelerate the efforts to ratify the agreement between Turkey and European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction that will increase the efficiency of Turkey in the area of fight against drugs.
- NGOs, which are one of the principal actors of the European Union Communication Strategy, contribute actively to Turkey’s accession process with the EU through the enhancement of our democracy and deepening of the culture of democracy with their leading role in the initiation and implementation of political reforms.
- With this consideration, fourth meeting on dialogue with civil society namely “Civil Society, Local Governments and Youth on the Path to EU Membership” was held under the coordination of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs in İstanbul on 11 December 2010, with the participation of 350 different NGOs.

- The administrative capacities of the municipalities will be enhanced significantly through the protocol signed between the Secretariat General for EU Affairs and Turkish Union of Municipalities in the context of the “Municipalities are getting prepared for the EU” project. This will reinforce the role of the local governments in Turkey’s EU accession process in addition to the designation of deputy governors as EU permanent contact points in 81 provinces.
- The priority of our Government through the accession process is to ensure the highest level of standards for our citizens. Turkey will continue to work with determination to attain its objective of full membership to the EU.
- The 24th RMG meeting will be hosted by Sadullah Ergin, Minister of Justice in Kahramanmaraş in February 2011.