



**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Directorate for EU Affairs**

**THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE REFORM ACTION GROUP
PRESS STATEMENT
ANKARA, 9 MAY 2019**

The sixth meeting of the Reform Action Group (RAG) was held under the chairmanship of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 9 May Europe Day in Ankara, under the coordination of the Directorate for European Union Affairs, and with the participation of Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gül, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chief Negotiator Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Treasury and Finance Dr. Berat Albayrak and Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu.

This is the first meeting of the Reform Action Group chaired by the President and held on 9 May Europe Day.

Chairman of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT) Committee on Justice Hakkı Köylü, Chairman of GNAT Committee on Internal Affairs Celalettin Güvenç, Chairman of GNAT Committee on Foreign Affairs Ambassador Volkan Bozkır, Chairman of GNAT Committee on EU Harmonisation Mehmet Kasım Gülpınar, Chairman of Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee İsmail Emrah Karayel, Chairperson of the Turkish Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Akif Çağatay Kılıç, Chief Ombudsman Şeref Malkoç, Head of Human Rights and Equality Institution Süleyman Arslan, and President of the Personal Data Protection Authority Prof. Dr. Faruk Bilir have participated in the meeting.

Turkey remains committed to its objective of EU membership and continues its efforts in this respect. It is not a coincidence that the sixth RAG meeting is held on 9 May Europe Day. This is the day when the foundations of the European integration were laid. The RAG meetings serve as the most important mechanism leading to the reforms accomplished by Turkey in the EU accession process. Thus, holding the RAG meeting on 9 May Europe Day sets forth our commitment to the EU accession process.

Turkey and the EU will not benefit from the standstill in the accession negotiations due to political blockages despite all efforts made by Turkey until today. Our expectation from the EU is to treat Turkey on equal footing with other candidate countries and to remove political barriers on the way of negotiations which is supposed to be a technical process.

The composition of the European Parliament (EP) and the European Commission will be restructured through the EP elections to be held at the end of May. We hope that the increasing ideological extremism does not dominate the new EP and the new composition in the EU institutions adopts a more balanced and objective approach towards Turkey.



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Turkey is fully committed to the objective of EU membership. Although our accession negotiations are politically blocked, Turkey decisively continues its efforts for alignment with the EU standards. In the meeting today, we have set out the current developments in Turkey and agreed on the steps to be taken in the forthcoming period.

The finalisation of the Visa Liberalization Dialogue process which will allow our citizens to travel to the Schengen area without a visa, is our first priority. In this framework, it has been agreed to accelerate the process of fulfilling remaining benchmarks in this meeting. We have clarified the steps to be taken in the forthcoming period to finalise the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue, which will benefit our citizens in many areas, including economy.

Within the scope of the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue, the second meeting of the negotiations for the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the Exchange of Personal Data between Europol and the Turkish Competent Authorities for Fighting Serious Crime and Terrorism was held on 9 April 2019 in Ankara.

We have decisively carried out our obligations within the context of the 18 March EU-Turkey Statement. We continue to keep irregular migration under control and more importantly, prevent the loss of lives. The number of irregular migrants crossing into the European Union is at its lowest level in the last five years as an outcome of Turkey's efforts. Europe, as well as its welfare and security, begin at the eastern borders of Turkey.

We also expect the EU to fulfil its commitments within the framework of the 18 March EU-Turkey Statement.

We will soon announce the Judicial Reform Strategy, which has been finalised by the Ministry of Justice, in line with the decisions taken at the fourth and the fifth RAG meetings. The contributions of all stakeholders, including those of the Council of Europe and the European Commission, have been benefited in the updating process, which was carried out with a participatory approach. We will implement many reforms in line with the Judicial Reform Strategy, which will be our road map in the area of the judiciary. Regarding fundamental rights and freedoms, we will announce the Action Plan on Human Rights, which is being prepared in an inclusive manner.

As the first step of the Judicial Reform Strategy, the Turkish Justice Academy was established on 2 May as a result of efforts towards restructuring of the Academy. Under its new structure, the Turkish Justice Academy will also enhance the quality of human resources in the area of the judiciary through trainings.



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Following the V. RAG meeting, the Code of Judicial Ethics for judges and prosecutors was announced on 14 March. A significant step has been taken towards ensuring the independence and impartiality of the judiciary with these guiding ethic principles designated for Turkish judges and prosecutors. With this step, we have realised another one of the Council of Europe GRECO Recommendations.

Steps will be taken to strengthen the institutional structure of the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey.

The RAG also addressed the current works of the Ombudsman Institution that serve for embedding the principles of good governance, a culture of claiming rights and a transparent, accountable and human-oriented administration.

Within the scope of the Memorandum of Understanding concluded with Frontex, the cooperation plan for 2019-2021 is ready to be signed.

The relevant By-law in the area of border management has been amended in order to align with the Presidential system of government. The Migration Board and the Border Management Implementation Board, which have significant roles in migration and border management actively continue their work. The drafting process for the Migration Strategy Document, which addresses regular and irregular migration, international protection and fight against human trafficking, has been prepared. The Document will be agreed on through the decision taken at the first meeting of the Migration Board and its implementation phase will start right after.

All of the 52 activities in the 2016-2018 Action Plan corresponding to the first half of 2016-2021 National Strategy Paper on the Fight against Organised Crime, have been completed. The 2019-2021 National Action Plan on the Fight against Organised Crime has been finalised with the consensus of relevant institutions and has been shared with the public today.

We have strengthened the mechanisms for financial cooperation and coordination to ensure the most efficient use of the Pre-accession Financial Assistance (IPA) funds in Turkey.

This year is the 20th anniversary of the official endorsement of Turkey's candidacy in Helsinki. We anticipate support from the EU to revitalise the spirit of Helsinki. We mainly expect that the accession negotiations are revitalised, the updating of the Customs Union is initiated, common fight against all terrorist organisations is carried out and Turkey-EU High Level Dialogue, as well as Turkey-EU Summits, are maintained.



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9 May Europe Day is based on the Schuman Declaration of 1950 which emphasizes that world peace cannot be maintained without common effort. Although 69 years have passed since the Declaration, its significance becomes more apparent each passing day. Challenges such as increasing terrorist threats, rising racism and Islamophobia significantly threaten the world peace and undermine the values defended by the EU to this day. Turkey makes its utmost effort to resolve conflicts taking place adjacent to its borders and threatening peace and stability not only in the region but also throughout the world. One of the most important steps to enhance the political power of the EU will be Turkey's membership to the EU. It is time for the EU Member States to uphold the 69-years old founding philosophy of the EU by setting aside domestic politics and populism and to realise that Turkey's EU membership will be one of the most significant and beneficial accessions to the EU.

We agreed on holding the next meeting of the Reform Action Group under the auspices of Ministry of Treasury and Finance in the second half of 2019.