

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S RESOLUTION REGARDING THE 2014 PROGRESS REPORT ON TURKEY

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The Resolution of the European Parliament (EP) regarding the European Commission's 2014 Turkey Progress Report was adopted in the EP Plenary Session in Strasbourg on 10 June 2015.[1] This resolution drew strong reaction of Turkey due to its reference to the EPs resolution of 15 April 2015 on the events of 1915.

First of all, a progress report is a document prepared by the European Commission which addresses the progress achieved by the EU candidate country during its accession progress and conversely the deficiencies it observes. Each year, the European Parliament announces its views on the European Commissions progress report with a resolution. Thus, EP Resolution of 10 June 2015 is a document in which the European Parliament indicates its views on the European Commissions Progress Report on Turkey which was published on 8 October 2014. Just like other EP resolutions, this resolution on the Progress Report on Turkey is a political statement and not a legally binding document.

Prepared by Kati Piri, the Dutch Member of the European Parliament from the Social Democrat group and Rapporteur for Turkey, the first draft of the resolution took its final form through a great number of proposals for amendments given initially in EP Committee on Foreign Affairs and then in the EP Plenary Session.

Turkey previously announced its objections to three issues long contested by Turkey that was included in the proposals for amendments, informing the EP that should the resolution include those issues, Turkey would consider the resolution unacceptable and return it to the EP. These three issue were:[2]

1. a reference to the EPs resolution of 15 April 2015 on the events of 1915,

2. a call for removal of the PKK from the EUs terrorist organisations list,

3. any statement that would block opening of negotiation chapters which would thus

block accession negotiations and a call for the suspension of EU financial support.

Although the resolution adopted by the EP did not include two of these issues, the reference to the EPs resolution of 15 April 2015 on the events of 1915 was added. In response, Turkey rejected and returned the resolution.

In a press conference following the adoption of the resolution,[3] Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Volkan Bozkır stated that just as the resolution of 15 April on the events of 1915, the EPs resolution regarding the 2014 Progress Report on Turkey unacceptable on the grounds that it contradicts with historical and legal facts and will be returned to the EP. He indicated that this Resolution, which could have cast light to the future of the relations with the EU and the European Parliament, became unacceptable due to the reference to the 1915 events despite Turkeys opinions.

In a press release,[4] the Turkish Foreign Ministry stated that they did not accept this resolution and will return it to the EP as it contains unfounded allegations against Turkey in many fields. The ministry indicated that EP resolution, which contained a balanced and constructive critical tone in its first draft, was changed into a one-sided text far from being objective in the process of adoption by the EP Foreign Affairs Committee and the plenary of the EP. It was pointed out that the EP, which took office after the elections held in May 2014, adopted many resolutions against Turkey which contained prejudiced statements and criticisms, this last resolution aggravating concerns that the EP is unwilling to include Turkey in the EU project.

It is possible to say that this resolution by the EP is consistent with regard to EPs previous resolutions. In the past, the resolution of the EP of 18 June 1987 titled a political solution to the Armenian question recognized the events of 1915 as genocide and called for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey. EPs resolution of 15 April 2015 on the centenary of the Armenian Genocide, which was also referred in the EPs resolution of 10 June 2015, also called for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey.

It should be emphasized that EP resolutions are not legally binding and are purely political statements. After Turkey was given the status of candidate state for the European Union membership in 1999, an Armenian Diaspora organization (Euro-Arménie ASBL) and two French Armenians (Grégoire Krikorian ve Suzanne Krikorian) applied to the Court of First Instance of the European Communities in 2003 and indicated that Turkeys status of candidacy to the EU was against EPS resolution of 18 June 1987. They claimed that the resolution of 18 June 1987 clearly recognized the Armenian Genocide and its denial posed an obstacle for Turkeys full membership. Furthermore, they stated that they were offended by the recognition of Turkey's status candidate for EU membership and asked for a moral and symbolic compensation and demand the courts cost to be paid by the defendants. However, the Court dropped the case and judged that the court costs should be paid by the applicants.[5] Yet, what is important is the Courts declaration that EP resolutions are not legally binding with the following statement (para.19):

> It suffices to point out that the 1987 resolution is a document containing declarations of a purely political nature, which may be amended by the Parliament

at any time. It cannot therefore have binding legal consequences for its author nor, a fortiori, for the other defendant institutions.

In line with its goal to improve its democracy, human rights, economy and living standards, Turkey entered the process of full membership to the EU which is its strategic objective. With its important position in its region and the world, Turkeys membership to the EU will be benefit both Turkey and the EU. In this context, the objective of EP resolutions must be to improve the cooperation, relations and dialogue between Turkey and the EU. Moreover, EP resolutions on Turkey must be fair and objective, and criticisms and expectations must be expressed in a constructive and balanced manner.

Unfortunately, the resolutions of 10 June 2015 and 15 April 2015, which distorts history and defamates Turkey, serves no purpose other than damaging Turkey-EU relations and creating hostility. Especially in this period where Turkey and EU need to cooperate in the fields of economy, politics, etc., such biased and one-sided resolutions ostracizing Turkey is to the benefit of neither Turkey nor the EU.

Furthermore, it is observed that AP resolutions against Turkey have increased further in recent times. We witness that the rising Islamophobia and Turcophobia in Europe and in connection with this, the far-right parties which entered the EP on May 2014 and recently formed a group in the parliament are influential in the adoption of such resolutions.

Ultimately, this stance of the EP damages Turkey-EU relations and creates the impression that the goal is to prevent Turkey from being a full member of the EU. The fact that Turkey, a strategic partner of the EU on many fields such as economy, energy security and foreign policy, is being pushed away from the EU conjures unpleasant comments for the EU about the reasons for EUs opposition to Turkeys full membership. The fact that European Parliament EPP member, a German MEP Renate Sommer[6] could make a comment labeling 2015 is the jubilee year of Turkey with regard to the EU is a development which will be remembered for the record. Turkey expects from the EU to abandon this biased and one-sided attitude, to stop distorting history regarding the events of 2015 and to contribute in a positive manner to Turkey-EU relations in the process of full membership.

[1] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0228+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

[2] http://www.ab.gov.tr/index.php?p=49987&l=1

[3] http://www.abgs.gov.tr/index.php?p=49991&l=2

[4] http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-173_-10-june-2015_-press-release-regarding-the-european-parliament_s-resolution-regarding-the-european-commission_s-2014-progress-report-on-turkey.en.mfa

[5] http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=48869&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&

[6] http://www.abhaber.com/renate-sommer-2015-yili-ab-turkiye-arasinda-jubile-yili-olacak-english/

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