
European Parliament Adopts Report On Turkey

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STRASBOURG - The European Parliament (EP) adopted on Wednesday a report on Turkey urging the government to accelerate reforms.

In a plenary session the EP debated and voted the report, prepared by Dutch parliamentarian Ria Oomen-Ruijten. The report is a non-binding and recommendatory one.

The parliament rejected amendments to the report regarding the incidents of 1915 submitted by a group of French MEPs trying to support Armenian allegations against Turkey.

However, the amendment on EP's concerns about news reports regarding Turkish riot police's disproportional use of force during May Day celebrations was accepted.

The amendment also said that the changes made in article 301 of Turkish Penal Code were not enough and urged Turkish parliament to revise the article and completely remove other restrictive stipulations.

The report, adopted last month by the European Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, expressed concern about the potential consequences of the recent dissolution case filed against Turkey's ruling Justice & Development (AK) Party.

Another amendment to the report said the EP expected Turkish Constitutional Court to act in accordance with the Venice Commission guidelines and European standards on the prohibition of political parties.

It also called on the Turkish government to respect pluralism, secularism and democracy while carrying out reforms and to reach a compromise with political parties and urged the political parties to distance themselves from violence and terrorist organizations.

-THE REPORT-

The report says the parliament takes note of the process underway to prepare a new, civilian constitution; regards it as a key opportunity to place the protection of human rights and freedoms at the core of the constitution and underlines the need for a broad involvement of civil society in this process.

The report also says the parliament "welcomes the commitment of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan that 2008 is going to be the year of reforms; urges the Turkish government to make use of its strong parliamentary majority to resolutely pursue reforms that are crucial for Turkey's transformation into a modern democratic and prosperous society."

It says "(the parliament) encourages the Turkish government to make further systematic efforts to ensure that the democratically elected political leadership bears full responsibility for formulation of domestic, foreign and security policy and that the armed forces respect this civilian responsibility; points out, in particular, the need to establish full parliamentary oversight of military and defence policy and all related expenditure."

-PRIORITY TO ARTICLE 301-

The report also urges the Turkish government and the parliament to abolish immediately article 301 of the Penal Code as a symbolic and substantive step towards full respect of freedom of expression in the country and underlines that, once the urgently needed abolition of article 301 has been carried out, further legislative and implementation steps will be required in order to ensure that Turkey fully guarantees freedom of expression and press freedom in line with ECHR and European democratic standards.

It says the parliament encourages the Turkish authorities to resolutely pursue investigations into the Ergenekon affair, "to fully uncover its networks reaching into the state structures and to bring those involved to justice."

The report welcomes the recent adoption by the Turkish Parliament of the Law on Foundations and says "the European Commission should analyse whether the Law addresses all shortcomings faced by non-Muslim religious communities with regard to property management and acquisition, including expropriated property sold to third parties."

The report also calls upon the Democratic Society Party (DTP), its members at the parliament and mayors "to engage constructively in the quest for a political solution to the Kurdish issue within the democratic Turkish state."

It strongly condemns the violence perpetrated by the terrorist organization PKK and reiterates European Parliament's solidarity with Turkey in its fight against terrorism. The report urges the Iraqi government and the regional Kurdish administration not to allow Iraqi territory to be used as a base for terrorist acts against Turkey.

The report stresses the need to arrive at a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus question within the UN framework, claiming that "the withdrawal of Turkish forces would facilitate the negotiation of a settlement."

Oomen-Ruijten's report also calls on the European Commission and the Turkish government to start negotiations on an agreement to ease granting of visas to Turkish nationals .
