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# EU Presses Turkey for Quick Progress on Reform

By Javno.hr,  
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Reuters The European Union pressed Turkey on Saturday for immediate progress to improve freedom of expression and religion following the re-election of the pro-European AK party.

But new Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan made clear there were no early plans to amend or abolish a penal code clause used to prosecute intellectuals and journalists, saying it would be addressed in a planned new constitution.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said the EU candidate had overcome remarkably smoothly a political and institutional crisis unleashed in April when its powerful military warned it could intervene to defend Turkey's secular order.

The armed forces' statement was seen as an attempt to block the election of former Islamist AK candidate Abdullah Gul as president. But the outcome was a sweeping victory for the AK party in early general elections in July, and Gul's election as president by the new parliament last week.

"I don't only hope but I expect the government will immediately relaunch the reform process, especially as regards freedom of expression and religious freedom so that they can ... prove that they are making serious progress," Rehn told a news conference.

He welcomed the fact that the new administration had put EU accession and the necessary reforms at the top of its agenda.

Babacan refused to be pinned down on amending article 301 of the penal code, which punishes "insulting Turkishness" and has been used to prosecute writers who urged Turkey to face up to the mass killing of Armenians by Ottoman Turks in 1915.

"I don't want to talk about a specific article of a specific law right now, but we are now working on a new constitutional framework which is going to be in line with the Copenhagen criteria," he said, referring to the EU's membership conditions on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

EU officials have said that unless Turkey shows quick progress, it is bound to receive a negative annual progress report from the European Commission in November, since election campaigning took precedence over reform for most of the year.

Babacan, who had a private meeting with Rehn on the sidelines of an EU foreign ministers' meeting in Portugal, shrugged off that prospect, calling the report "an outsider's view" and saying what mattered were the reforms Turkey carried out for its own sake.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy has opposed Turkey, a populous, poor, secular but overwhelmingly Muslim country on the edge of Europe and the Middle East, becoming an EU member.

But he agreed last week to allow negotiations on most policy areas to proceed provided the EU appoints a panel of wise people in December to consider the future shape and borders of Europe.

Rehn said the EU had just had a lengthy debate on its enlargement agenda and reached consensus at a summit last year, but a group of wise people could reflect on the EU's regional relationships with the Mediterranean area and northern Europe.

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