

Procedure file

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Turkey's 2007 progress report		
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Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	AFET Foreign Affairs		20/03/2007
		PPE-DE OOMEN-RUIJTEN Ria	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	FEMM Women's Rights and Gender Equality		28/02/2008
		PSE BOZKURT Emine	
Council of the European Union	Council configuration	Meeting	Date
	General Affairs	2850	18/02/2008
	General Affairs	2839	10/12/2007
European Commission	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations	REHN Olli	

Key events			
06/11/2007	Non-legislative basic document published	SEC(2007)1436	Summary
10/12/2007	Resolution/conclusions adopted by Council		Summary
13/12/2007	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
21/04/2008	Vote in committee		Summary
28/04/2008	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0168/2008	
21/05/2008	Results of vote in Parliament		
21/05/2008	Debate in Parliament		
21/05/2008	Decision by Parliament	T6-0224/2008	Summary

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Documentation gateway					
Non-legislative basic document		SEC(2007)1436	06/11/2007	EC	Summary
Committee draft report		PE402.879	06/03/2008	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE404.587	07/04/2008	EP	
Committee opinion	FEMM	PE404.500	15/04/2008	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0168/2008	28/04/2008	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0224/2008	21/05/2008	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2008)3593/2	12/06/2008	EC	
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2008)4116	17/07/2008	EC	

Turkey's 2007 progress report

CONTENT: this report reviews the progress made by Turkey in 2007 in preparation for accession. In particular, it details the efforts made by Turkey to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and supports the overall strategy document on the enlargement of the European Union (see [COM\(2007\)0663](#)) which indicates the way in which the renewed consensus, endorsed by EU representatives during the December 2006 Summit, will be implemented. The renewed consensus on enlargement is based on the principles of consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality and better communication with the public, combined with the EU's capacity to integrate new members. The current enlargement programme concerns the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Specifically in terms of Turkey, the report notes that following the legislative and presidential elections, it is imperative that Turkey continues to make reforms in order to consolidate fundamental rights and freedoms. Since the December 1999 European Council granted candidate status to Turkey, the country has achieved major changes. The European perspective proved one of the main incentives for reforms of the political and legal system, as well as the economy in Turkey. The death penalty was abolished, the functions and composition of the National Security Council were changed to increase civilian control over the military, and a series of constitutional amendments enhanced democratic freedoms. Progress was made in areas such as women's and children's rights, and the fight against torture, with a further overall decline of reported cases of torture and ill-treatment. At the same time, in 2007, Turkey overcame a political crisis by fully respecting the rules of democracy. It must now relaunch politic reforms, particularly those regarding fundamental freedoms, while respecting its international commitments.

The Commission expects progress to be made in the accession negotiations with Turkey throughout 2008.

Progress in the accession negotiations with Turkey: EU accession negotiations began with Turkey on 3 October 2005 and remain on track. Negotiations are continuing at a pace that reflects the pace of reforms in the country itself as well as Turkey's fulfilment of the relevant conditions. Four out of 33 negotiation chapters have been opened so far (statistics, enterprise and industrial policy, financial control) and one chapter has been provisionally closed (Science and Research). Opening benchmarks have been set as conditions for opening negotiations on 14 chapters (benchmarks are a new tool introduced as a result of lessons learnt from the fifth enlargement. Their purpose is to further improve the quality of the negotiations, by providing incentives for the candidate countries to undertake necessary reforms at an early stage. In general, opening benchmarks concern key preparatory steps for future alignment with the EU's legal order, such as strategies or action plans. In this case, benchmarks were adopted by the Council as conditions for opening negotiations with Turkey on the following chapters: Free movement of capital, Public procurement; Intellectual property rights, Competition policy; Agriculture, Taxation, Employment and Social policy, Customs union, Company law, Free movement of services, Food safety, Free movement of goods; Environment, Financial services). The Commission hopes that Turkey will be able to meet further benchmarks shortly, so that additional chapters can be opened.

On the whole, the 3 main criteria fixed at Copenhagen to allow a country to accede to the European Union have evolved in Turkey during 2007

as follows:

1. Political criteria: Turkey continues to sufficiently fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria. Turkey has smoothly overcome its political and institutional crisis. Early parliamentary elections were held in full respect of democratic standards and of the rule of law. The election of the President by Parliament in August 2007 took place in accordance with the Constitution and a new government was established swiftly. Democracy prevailed in a crisis in civil-military relations. There has been some progress in legislative reform of the public administration, and some progress has been made in improving the efficiency of the judiciary. Additional action has been taken to improve women's rights. The reported number of cases of torture and ill treatment continued to decrease. Turkey has made progress on the ratification of international human rights instruments and in implementing the European Court of Human Rights judgements. However, there was limited progress on political reforms in 2007. Significant further efforts are needed on freedom of expression and on the rights of non-Muslim religious communities. Further progress is also needed in the fight against corruption, the reform of the judicial system, as well as children's and women's rights, cultural rights, and civilian oversight of the security forces. It is now important that the new government takes immediate action in these priority areas. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are the most urgent issues, on which the government must take action without delay. There has been a further increase in terrorist attacks by the PKK, which is on the EU list of terrorist organisations. It is crucial that Turkey and Iraq continue to tackle this problem through cooperation between the relevant authorities and by respecting international law. There remains a need for Turkey to address the serious economic and social problems of the South East. Finally, the report expressed its regret that Turkey maintained its restrictions on direct transport links with Cyprus.
2. Economic criteria: Turkey can be considered as a functioning market economy. It should be able to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union in the medium term, provided that it implements its comprehensive reform programme in order to address structural weaknesses. Economic growth remained robust due to increased exports and business confidence was strong. The strength of the lira and fiscal discipline enabled a reduction in public debt. The central bank led a cautious and responsible monetary policy. Foreign direct investment grew significantly, notably in the form of purchases of Turkish companies by foreign entities, and has played a greater role in reducing risks related to macroeconomic imbalances. However, a tax relief and higher infrastructure spending led to a fiscal loosening in 2007. Inflationary pressures have increased. Structural rigidities in the labour market and fiscal pressure on labour hamper job creation in the formal sector of the economy, in particular for the employment of women.
3. EU legal order: Turkey has further improved its ability to take on the obligations of membership. Owing to Turkey's non-compliance with its obligations related to the additional protocol to the Ankara Agreement, in December 2006, the EU decided to freeze eight chapters of the negotiations, but to continue with the other chapters. Progress was made in most areas, in particular in the chapters on free movement of goods, financial services, trans-European Networks, and science and research. However, alignment needs to be pursued, especially in areas such as free movement of services, state aid, agriculture, fisheries, food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policies, and the environment. The fulfilment of short-term priorities under the Accession Partnership is lagging behind in many areas.

EU Financial Assistance under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA): Turkey should benefit from the following amounts during the 2007-2011 period, in accordance with the envelope planned by the IAP:

- 2007 : EUR 497.2 million
- 2008 : EUR 538.7 million
- 2009 : EUR 566.4 million
- 2010 : EUR 653.7 million
- 2011 : EUR 781.9 million

Total : EUR 3037.9 million

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The Council held an exchange of views on the enlargement strategy and adopted the following conclusions:

- In line with the enlargement strategy agreed by the December 2006 European Council and the Council conclusions of 11 December 2006, the Council welcomes the Commission's communication on the enlargement strategy and main challenges 2007-2008 of 6 November and takes good note of the analysis and recommendations contained therein. The renewed consensus on enlargement, which is based on consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality and better communication, together with the capacity to integrate new members, continues to form the basis of the EU's enlargement strategy. An improved quality of the enlargement process will ensure that enlargement continues to foster peace, democracy and stability throughout the continent and to bring concrete benefits in terms of increased trade, investment and economic growth. 2008 will be a particularly crucial year for supporting the transition process in the Western Balkans. The Council recalls that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union.

The Council reaffirms that the pace of the negotiations depends notably on the negotiating countries' progress in addressing opening and closing benchmarks as well as the requirements of the Negotiating Frameworks, including the implementation of the Accession Partnerships, currently in course of revision, with each country being judged on its own merits. The Council recalls that chapters for which technical preparations have been completed will be opened in accordance with established procedures, in line with the Negotiating Frameworks. In this context, the Council looks forward to the Intergovernmental Conferences with Turkey and Croatia later this month. It is also essential that the enlargement policy maintains fair and rigorous conditionality at all stages of the negotiations.

In this regard, the Council welcomes the Commission's intention to continue enhancing the quality of the enlargement process by tackling key priorities in areas of public administration and judicial reform and the fight against corruption at an early stage.

- The Council then returned to the situation in Turkey:

Firstly, the Council welcomes the resolution of the political and constitutional crisis in Turkey earlier this year. The outcome of the crisis strengthened democracy. The conduct of the recent parliamentary and presidential elections in full respect of democratic standards and the rule of law, the high voter turnout and the broader representation in the new Parliament demonstrate the wish of the Turkish people for democracy, stability and progress. The Council believes that this is a decisive moment to renew and intensify the reform process, and the Union will continue to assist Turkey in this regard.

The Council regrets the limited progress achieved in political reform in Turkey in 2007, but welcomes the Turkish government's declared intention and renewed commitment to continue the reform process and address the existing shortcomings. It looks forward to seeing these commitments soon translated into real and tangible actions.

The Council notes the process under way to revise the Constitution. This will constitute a key opportunity to fully enshrine the European standards in the Turkish constitutional law. Nevertheless, the Council stresses that this process should not delay long awaited reforms, in particular in the key areas of freedom of expression and freedom of religion, where Turkey needs to proceed without delay.

Significant further efforts are also needed in other areas such as:

- judicial reform;
- the fight against corruption;
- minority rights and the strengthening of cultural rights;
- women's and children's rights;
- trade union rights;
- the civilian control of the military.

As regards the East and Southeast, the Council recalls the need to promptly develop and implement a comprehensive strategy that will guarantee the economic, social and cultural development of this area.

The Council condemns all terrorist attacks and violence in Turkish territory and expresses its solidarity with the people of Turkey as well as its support for Turkey's efforts to protect its population and fight terrorism, while respecting human rights, fundamental freedoms and international law and preserving regional peace and stability.

In line with the Negotiating Framework and previous European Council and Council conclusions, Turkey needs to unequivocally commit to good neighbourly relations and to the peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, including, if necessary, jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. In this context, any threat or action which could negatively affect good neighbourly relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes should be avoided.

At the same time, the Council notes with regret that Turkey has not fulfilled its obligation of full non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement and has not made progress towards normalisation of relations with the Republic of Cyprus. The Council will continue to follow up and review progress made in this area. Swift progress on these issues is expected. The Council also expects Turkey to actively support efforts to reach a comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem, within the UN framework and in line with the principles on which the Union is founded.

Turkey's 2007 progress report

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own initiative report by Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN (EPP-ED, NL) on the 2007 report on Turkey's progress towards accession, welcoming the commitment of Prime Minister Erdogan that 2008 is going to be a year of reforms. MEPs now urge the Turkish government to fulfil its promises and to transform Turkey into a modern and prosperous democracy based on a secular state and a pluralistic society.

Reforms towards a democratic and prosperous society: MEPs underline their belief that only a society which is guided by respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and which is based on democracy and a socially oriented market economy, can develop into a peaceful, stable and prosperous society. They, therefore, welcome the fact that, in 2007, democracy prevailed over attempts by the military to interfere in the political process. Turkey must now make further efforts to ensure that the democratically elected political leadership bears full responsibility for formulation of policies and that the armed forces respect this responsibility by fully and unambiguously acknowledging civilian control. In particular, the Turkish government is called upon to respect the pluralism and diversity of Turkey and to engage itself in modernising the country. While they welcome the amendment to Article 301 of the Penal Code (article on denigrating Turkish identity or insulting the country's institutions which was introduced in 2005 to replace Article 159 of the former Penal Code and regularly invoked to prosecute human rights defenders, journalists etc), they believe that it is merely a first step towards freedom of expression by recalling that the number of persons prosecuted under legal provisions allowing for arbitrary restrictions on the expression of non-violent opinion continues to increase. In particular, MEPs call for further progress regarding human rights and religious freedom, even though significant reforms were made as regards the latter in 2007. MEPs particularly call for the immediate re-opening of the Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary and the public use of the ecclesiastical title of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

- The Kurdish issue: MEPs urge the Turkish government to launch a political initiative favouring a lasting settlement of the Kurdish issue, based on tangible improvements in cultural, economic and social terms. The democratic Kurdish parties are called upon to distance themselves clearly from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and to engage constructively in the quest for a political solution to the Kurdish issue within the democratic Turkish state. They deplore, in particular, the many court cases brought against elected mayors and other politicians for using the Kurdish language, as well as the conviction of Leyla Zana (Kurdish activist). As for the Commission, it should link the regional component of assistance given under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to the drawing-up of a comprehensive strategy of the Turkish authorities as regards this region. Furthermore, MEPs condemn the violence perpetrated by the PKK (for example, the attack in Diyarbakir in January 2008) and reiterate their solidarity with Turkey in its fight against terrorism, once again calling on the PKK to declare and respect a ceasefire.
- Women and secularism: aware of the current development of a new secular Turkish constitution, MEPs believe that this is the time for the issue of women in civil society to be brought to the forefront. To make this reform a success, MEPs urge all political parties, ethnic and religious minorities and social partners to work together in the development of this text. They ask that the future constitution avoid the use of vague criteria such as "General Morality" and note the disappointment and concern of part of the population that the lifting of the ban on wearing headscarves in universities was not part of a broader package of reform based on a wide-ranging consultation of civil society. Overall, MEPs welcome the progress made by Turkey on protecting women against violence. However, further efforts must be made in this area through a sustained public campaign, and by providing more shelters for victims and stepping up training for law enforcement bodies. Turkey has also made good progress by giving a considerable number of women the opportunity to hold

important positions in economic, political and academic spheres. However, the overall rate of employment is still considerably low at just 23.8% and there has been scarcely any increase in the participation of women in politics. Therefore, further efforts are required in order to increase women's active involvement in politics.

- Minorities: MEPs are concerned about the welfare of certain minority groups. They urge the Turkish authorities to carry out a full investigation into the murders of Hrant Dink and of the three Christians in Malatya, as well as all other cases of politically, religiously or racially motivated violence. Turkey is also urged to pursue investigations into the Ergenekon criminal organisation.
- Torture: although there has been a continued downward trend in the number of cases of torture reported, MEPs fear that the anti-terror law and the law on police powers may weaken this positive record. Turkey must also step up its fight against torture perpetrated outside and inside its detention centres.

Towards a growing economy: MEPs welcome the positive development of the Turkish economy. However, considerable efforts are required to tackle the problem of the black economy and to place the social security system on a sustainable footing. In addition, efforts must be made in terms of social dialogue, the respect of International Labour Organisation conventions and access to education. MEPs express their concern about the level of corruption in Turkey and about the high extent of development disparities among Turkish regions (with sometimes very large differences between rural and urban areas). In terms of cohesion, MEPs call on Turkey to apply European standards to the construction of dams in the Munzur valley, the Alliano, the Ilisu and to gold-mining in Bergama.

Regional issues and external relations: MEPs recall Turkey's commitment to good neighbourly relations with Greece (e.g. the Aegean continental shelf) and Bulgaria (e.g. the property rights of Bulgarian Thracian refugees). In particular, they stress the need to arrive at a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus question based on the principles of the EU. In this respect, MEPs welcome the official visit to Turkey of the Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Kostas Karamanlis, which gives hope for further improvement of bilateral Greek-Turkish relations. They also call on the Turkish government to end the economic blockade with Armenia and to start a process of reconciliation with this country, allowing for a frank and open discussion of past events. At the same time, MEPs urge Turkey to sign the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

- Turkey ? Iraq: MEPs reiterate their appeals to the Turkish government not to engage in any disproportionate military operations violating Iraq's territory. They urge Turkey to respect Iraq's territorial integrity and urge the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq not to allow Iraqi territory to be used as base for terrorist acts against Turkey.
- Darfur and Afghanistan: MEPs regret Turkey's objections to the implementation of the EU-NATO strategic cooperation based on the Berlin Plus Agreement. They are concerned about their negative consequences for the protection of the EU personnel deployed, notably the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan and the EULEX Mission in Kosovo. Therefore, they call for those objections to be withdrawn by Turkey at the earliest possible date.

EU-Turkey relations: MEPs urge the Turkish government to implement fully and without delay the provisions stemming from the EC-Turkey Association Agreement and the Additional Protocol thereto, recalling that non-fulfilment of Turkey's commitments will continue to seriously affect the process of negotiations. MEPs recognise Turkey's ambition of becoming a Eurasian energy hub and encourage the country to join the European Energy Community as a full member. They call on Turkey to fully support the Nabucco pipeline project (a European priority project). They reiterate the importance of bilateral and trilateral cross-border cooperation programmes (Turkey-Greece-Bulgaria) and also those carried out under the ENPI/CBC Black Sea Programme. Lastly, MEPs call on the Commission and the Turkish government to start negotiations on an EU-Turkey visa facilitation agreement.

Turkey's 2007 progress report

The European Parliament adopted by 467 votes to 62, with 61 abstentions, a resolution on Turkey's 2007 progress report concerning accession.

The own-initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN (EPP-ED, NL) on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

First of all, the Parliament welcomes the commitment of Prime Minister Erdogan that 2008 is going to be the year of reforms. It urges the Turkish government to fulfil its promises and to transform Turkey into a modern and prosperous democracy based on a secular state and a pluralistic society. Furthermore, it underlines the importance for Turkey of combating all forms of discrimination in line with Article 13 of the EC Treaty, which requires equality for all regardless of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Towards a democratic and prosperous society: the Parliament believes that only a society which is guided by respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and which is based on democracy and a socially oriented market economy can develop into a peaceful, stable and prosperous society. Therefore, it welcomes the fact that in 2007 democracy prevailed over attempts by the military to interfere in the political process. Turkey must now make further systematic efforts to ensure that the democratically elected political leadership bears full responsibility for policies, and that the armed forces respect this responsibility by fully and unambiguously acknowledging civilian control. In particular, the Turkish government is called to respect pluralism and diversity in Turkey, and to strive to modernise the country. However, the plenary is concerned about the implications of the AK Party closure case. Consequently, the Parliament expects the Turkish Constitutional Court to respect principles of the rule of law, European standards and the Guidelines on prohibition and dissolution of political parties and analogous measures. It also asks the Turkish parliament to bring the Constitution into line with these standards on the prohibition of political parties.

The Parliament considers the changes to Article 301 of the Penal Code (article on denigrating Turkish identity or insulting the country's institutions which was introduced in 2005 to replace Article 159 of the former Penal Code and regularly invoked to prosecute human rights defenders, journalists etc), adopted by the Turkish parliament on 30 April 2008, to be a first step towards a fundamental reform of the Turkish Penal Code. However, it looks forward to further initiatives and stresses that progress has to be achieved regarding freedom of expression, both in theory and in practice. In particular, the plenary deplores the fact that the number of persons prosecuted under legal provisions allowing for arbitrary restrictions on the expression of non-violent opinion has further increased in 2007. The Parliament is of the opinion that the repeal of Article 301 of the Penal Code and other legal provisions representing an illegitimate restriction on freedom of expression would be the best solution in order to ensure that Turkey fully guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The Parliament also calls for further progress regarding religious freedom, even though significant reforms were made as regards the latter in 2007. In particular, the

Parliament calls for the immediate re-opening of the Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary and the public use of the ecclesiastical title of the Ecumenical Patriarch as well as further progress regarding the Law on the Ombudsman. The Parliament also recommends that Turkey should cooperate with the European Ombudsman and with national ombudsmen in EU Member States.

- The Kurdish issue: the Parliament urges the Turkish government to launch a political initiative favouring a lasting settlement of the Kurdish issue, based on tangible improvements in cultural, economic and social terms available to citizens of Kurdish origin, including real possibilities to learn Kurdish within the public and private schooling system and to use it in broadcasting, in daily life and in access to public services. It regards a possible banning of the Democratic Society Party (DTP) as counterproductive to a political solution. At the same time, the Parliament calls on the democratic Kurdish parties and mayors to distance themselves clearly from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and to engage constructively in the quest for a political solution to the Kurdish issue within the democratic Turkish state. It deplores, in particular, the many court cases brought against elected mayors and other politicians for using the Kurdish language, as well as the conviction of Leyla Zana (Kurdish activist). More generally, the Parliament asks Turkey to come up with an overall national strategy to address the issue of internally displaced persons, which would remove the current legal and practical deficiencies and provide the financial support needed in order to properly tackle the return and compensation of those concerned. As for the Commission, it should link the regional component of assistance given under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to the drawing-up of a comprehensive strategy of the Turkish authorities as regards this region. Furthermore, the Parliament condemns the violence perpetrated by the PKK (for example, the attack in Diyarbakir in January 2008) as well as all forms of terrorism, reiterating its call for the PKK to declare and respect a ceasefire.
- Women and secularism: aware of the current development of a new secular Turkish constitution, the Parliament believes that this is the time for the issue of women in civil society to be brought to the forefront. To make this reform a success, it urges all political parties, ethnic and religious minorities and social partners to work together in the development of this text. It asks that the future constitution avoid the use of vague criteria such as "General Morality" and notes the disappointment and concern of part of the population that the lifting of the ban on wearing headscarves in Turkish schools and universities was not part of a broader package of reform based on a wide-ranging consultation of civil society. Overall, the Parliament welcomes the progress made by Turkey on protecting women against violence. However, further efforts must be made in this area, by providing more shelters for victims and stepping up training for law enforcement bodies. In addition, the Parliament is disappointed in the overall low rate of employment of women in Turkey (23.8%). Therefore, further efforts are required in order to increase the active involvement of women in politics and public life, in particular. The plenary also encourages the Turkish parliament to create a specialised parliamentary committee with legislative powers as an essential instrument for the improvement of women's rights in Turkey.
- Torture and ill treatments: although there has been a continued downward trend in the number of cases of torture reported, the Parliament fears that the anti-terror law and the law on police powers may weaken this positive record. Turkey must also step up its fight against torture perpetrated outside and inside its detention centres. Overall, the plenary believes that the Turkish police resort to using excessive force against demonstrators (e.g. at the 2008 May Day rally in Istanbul). It reaffirms that freedom of association and the peaceful operations of trade unions represent a fundamental right under the European Convention for the protection of Human Rights (ECHR).

Towards a growing economy: the Parliament welcomes the positive development of the Turkish economy. However, considerable efforts are required to tackle the problem of the black economy and to place the social security system on a sustainable footing. In addition, efforts must be made in terms of social dialogue, the respect of International Labour Organisation conventions and access to education. The Parliament expresses its concern about the level of corruption in Turkey and about the high extent of development disparities among Turkish regions (with sometimes very large differences between rural and urban areas). In terms of cohesion, the Parliament calls on Turkey to apply European standards to the construction of dams in the Munzur valley, the Alliano, the Ilisu and to gold mining in Bergama. It also calls for better access to education as central to success.

Regional issues and external relations: the Parliament recalls Turkey's commitment to good neighbourly relations with Greece (e.g. the Aegean continental shelf) and Bulgaria (e.g. the property rights of Bulgarian Thracian refugees). In particular, it stresses the need to arrive at a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus question based on the principles of the EU. In this respect, the Parliament welcomes the improved relations achieved between Greece and Turkey over the last decade and the continuation of the good political climate, as witnessed during the recent official visit to Turkey of the Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Kostas Karamanlis, which gives hope for further improvement of bilateral Greek-Turkish relations. It also calls on the Turkish government to end the economic blockade with Armenia, to restore full economic and political relations with this country, and to start a process of reconciliation, allowing for a frank and open discussion of past events. The plenary acknowledges Turkey's role as an important partner of the EU with a view to the realisation of EU foreign policy goals in the Black Sea region, Central Asia and the broader Middle East. It calls on the Commission and the Council to better exploit the potential of close EU-Turkey relations in these regions.

At the same time, the Parliament urges Turkey to sign the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

- Turkey? Iraq: the Parliament reiterates its appeal to the Turkish government not to engage in any disproportionate military operations violating Iraq's territory. It urges Turkey to respect Iraq's territorial integrity, and urges the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq not to allow Iraqi territory to be used as a base for terrorist acts against Turkey.
- Darfur and Afghanistan: the Parliament regrets Turkey's objections to the implementation of the EU-NATO strategic cooperation based on the Berlin Plus Agreement. It is concerned about the negative consequences for the protection of the EU personnel deployed, notably the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan and the EULEX Mission in Kosovo. Therefore, it calls for those objections to be withdrawn by Turkey at the earliest possible date.

EU-Turkey relations: the Parliament urges the Turkish government to implement fully, and without delay, the provisions stemming from the EC-Turkey Association Agreement and the Additional Protocol thereto, recalling that non-fulfilment of Turkey's commitments will continue to seriously affect the process of negotiations. The Parliament recognises Turkey's ambition of becoming a Eurasian energy hub and calls on Turkey to fully support the Nabucco pipeline project (a European priority project). It reiterates the importance of bilateral and trilateral cross-border cooperation programmes (Turkey-Greece-Bulgaria) and also those carried out under the ENPI/CBC Black Sea Programme. Lastly, the Parliament calls on the Commission to start negotiations on an EU-Turkey visa facilitation agreement.