



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

A - STRATEGY AND TURKEY
A.5 – TURKEY
Head of Unit

Brussels,

Dear Petitioner,

Thank you for your letter to President von der Leyen in which you share your concerns regarding the relationship between the European Union and Turkey. President von der Leyen has asked me to reply.

The Commission shares many of your concerns and is well aware of Turkey's backsliding on relations with the EU and some neighbouring countries and respect for human and fundamental rights.

On 19 November 2020, following the latest provocations by Turkey in Cyprus, High Representative/Vice President Borrell stated that we are approaching a watershed moment in our relationship with Turkey as its behaviour is widening the separation from the EU¹.

Furthermore, in its conclusions of 1 October 2020², the European Council reaffirmed that in case of renewed unilateral actions or provocations, the EU will use all the instruments and the options at its disposal, in accordance with Article 29 of the Treaty on European Union and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to defend its interests and those of its Member States.

On 11 December 2020³, the European Council expressed regret for the unilateral actions and provocations of Turkey against the EU, its Member States, and European leaders. The European Council, with the aim of defending Member States' interests and uphold regional stability, has called for the adoption of additional listings under the Eastern Mediterranean sanctions regime. The framework for sanctions was adopted on 11 November 2019 and has been extended in November 2020 for an additional year. Currently, two individuals are subject to sanctions.

Particularly in response to Turkey's military operations in Syria, in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of 14 October 2019 Member States committed to strong national

¹ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88998/video-conference-foreign-affairs-ministers-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press_en.

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45910/021020-euco-final-conclusions.pdf>

³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2020/12/10-11/>

positions regarding their arms export policy to Turkey on the basis of the provision of the Common Position 2008/944/CFSP on arms export control⁴.

With regard to the accession process, on 26 June 2018⁵ the Council concluded that, as Turkey has been moving further away from the EU, no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing and that accession negotiations have therefore effectively come to a standstill.

Turkey remains a candidate country and a key partner in many areas. Within this framework, the Commission continues to support political and economic reforms in Turkey with financial and technical assistance through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). Nevertheless, considering the serious backsliding on reforms required to join the Union, financial assistance through IPA has been substantially cut for the period 2014-2020. Furthermore, the Commission has reoriented EU funds in order to prioritise key sectors such as democracy and governance, civil society, and rule of law and fundamental rights specifically to support Turkish citizens and non-governmental organisations that are defending universal and European values.

A decision on any suspension of EU funding under IPA cannot be taken in isolation and should be part of a comprehensive EU approach on EU-Turkey relations. Stopping IPA assistance completely would deprive the EU of the instrument needed to support the independent civil society of Turkey and the people-to-people contacts that ensure that the Turkish people remain aware of developments, standards, practices and norms of the European Union. Furthermore, a suspension of funding would send a wrong signal to EU-oriented segments of the Turkish society, and even more so to those civil society organisations and human rights defenders relying on IPA support.

Especially with regard to the EU-Turkey Customs Union, trade has been considered primarily as a bright spot with significant potential for positive developments and mutual gains for European and Turkish businesses. Unfortunately, EU-Turkey trade relations have recently deteriorated and the relative share of the EU in Turkey's foreign trade has declined amid a growing list of deviations from Turkey's obligations under the EU-Turkey Customs Union. The European Council on 11 December further expressed its interest in developing a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey, provided that Turkey signals readiness to resolve differences through dialogue and in accordance with international law.

The Commission will keep monitoring Turkey's foreign and domestic policy developments and will raise its concerns at every level in its bilateral contacts with Turkish officials.

Yours sincerely,

(e-signed)
Bernard Brunet

⁴ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2019/10/14/>

⁵ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35863/st10555-en18.pdf>