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NEW
EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY
FOR TURKEY'S ACCESSION PROCESS

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European Union (EU) accession process has been considered as a modernization project of Turkey in line with the founding principles of the Republic. We have been consistently and systematically undertaking all efforts to this end. The accession process is important as through the reforms carried out Turkey is reaching highest standards in all fields and enhancing the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens. Accordingly, we are working intensively to carry forward the negotiation process and to increase the effectiveness of the implementation.

Turkey's accession negotiations were opened on 3 October 2005 with the adoption of the Negotiating Framework by the European Council. The first screening meeting was held on the "Science and Research" chapter on 20 October 2005, while the last one on "Justice and Fundamental Rights" chapter on 13 October 2006. Screening process has been completed in 33 chapters for which the negotiations would be held.

Twelve chapters, one of which was provisionally closed, have been opened so far in the accession negotiations ongoing since 2005. For chapters opened to negotiations, benchmarks need to be fulfilled to close the chapters. Furthermore, opening benchmarks should be fulfilled for those chapters to be opened in the near future.

With the aim of accelerating the accession negotiations and increasing the public awareness and support, the Secretariat General for EU Affairs has prepared a new European Union Strategy on Turkey's Accession Process. Introducing a comprehensive approach to the negotiation process on the basis of four pillars, the new Strategy has been submitted to the Council of Ministers on 4 January 2010.

The four pillars of the European Union Strategy are as follows:

First Pillar

The first pillar is the ongoing official negotiation process. Opening of chapters at the Intergovernmental Conference on Accession would confirm the consensus among the EU Member States that accession is the final objective in the negotiation process.

First pillar contains:

- a) Activities on the chapters that can be opened to negotiations, preparation of negotiation position documents, coordination of institutional activities to eliminate existing problems,
- b) Fulfilment of commitments on opened chapters and those in the strategy documents,
- c) Fulfilment of commitments regarding closing benchmarks on chapters that are opened.

The Internal Coordination and Harmonisation Committee, which is composed of Deputy Undersecretaries or high-level representatives responsible for EU affairs at the relevant ministries and public institutions, will serve as the key actors in this pillar. The Internal Coordination and Harmonisation Committee meetings will be held once every two months and will be chaired by Mr Egemen Bağış, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator. Furthermore, chapter-based committees with more limited participation are established under the Internal Coordination and Harmonisation Committee. Chapter-based committee meetings will be chaired by Ambassador Volkan Bozkır, Secretary General for EU Affairs, and will be held as frequently as necessary with the participation of high-level representatives of relevant ministries and public institutions.

Second Pillar

In the second pillar, regardless of whether the chapters have been opened, suspended or blocked, the objective is to revive the commitments laid down in the Programme for Alignment with the Acquis that was prepared earlier and based on Turkey's own priorities and timetables, and to keep on the agenda the priorities of Turkey's National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis, prepared in line with the Accession Partnership.

As a result;

- a) Turkey will pursue its work in the framework of all 35 chapters.
- b) Disengagement on the EU accession process that has emerged in public opinion can be eliminated.
- c) Civil society organisations, universities and other non-governmental groups can be effectively incorporated into the process.
- d) Turkey will be able to progress in the chapters that are important for itself (i.e. agriculture, fisheries, transportation, free movement of goods and services), disregarding if they are suspended or blocked by some EU Member States.
- e) Once the EU decides to open politically blocked chapters, Turkey's existing progress in the relevant field will facilitate the closing of the chapter in question.
- f) Turkey will have a say in the process by making its own decisions on timing and pace.
- g) Problematic issues for Turkey may be postponed; areas with priority would take precedence.

Therefore, Turkey will determine the pace of the reform process in accordance with its own preferences and priorities. To this end, "2010 Action Plan" will be put into effect without delay.

The Internal Coordination and Harmonisation Committee meetings and chapter-based committee meetings will be the key element of the work carried out under the second pillar.

Third Pillar

The third pillar is the area of political criteria, which is significant both for the democratisation of Turkey and for the accession process. EU Member States and Candidate Countries must comply with the political criteria.

Political reforms in the fields of human rights, democracy and rule of law constitute the backbone of the accession process. Work accelerated since 2002 to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria has continued persistently following the opening of the accession negotiations on 3 October 2005.

The progress achieved in the political reforms field will pave the way for other reforms. In fact, political reforms should not be evaluated only in respect of Turkey's accession process. The uninterrupted implementation of these reforms in any circumstances is of utmost importance and, in Turkey's interests, to ensure that its citizens are guaranteed the highest standards of democracy and freedoms, human rights and the rule of law. With these reforms, the Turkey of today is, and will continue to be, more liberal, democratic, stable, prosperous, transparent and prestigious.

With this understanding, the Reform Monitoring Group (RMG) established in 2003, meets once every two months with the participation of the Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, Minister of Interior, Minister of Justice and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Meetings are held in various cities in order to observe the effects of the reforms in different parts of the country, as well as to raise public awareness on the accession process. Accordingly, the 16th RMG meeting was held in Hatay in July 2009; the 17th in Trabzon in September 2009 and the 18th in Ankara on 19 December 2009.

Taking into account the lengthy period required for the enactment of each law separately due to the busy agenda of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), necessary amendments to the relevant legislation will be submitted to it in the form of "reform packages" based on articles of various laws related to the reform process. In case a consensus is reached among the political parties, even "constitutional packages" may be submitted to the TGNA.

In order to increase and systematize the current support of the TGNA, it was decided at the most recent RMG meeting to propose a special legislation procedure concerning EU reforms at the TGNA. Accordingly, meeting of the TGNA for one week once every month in order to discuss laws relevant to the EU negotiation process was proposed to the Council of Ministers on 4 January 2010.

The Political Affairs Subcommittee, which played an important role in the reforms introduced in the early 2000s, has been re-established under the auspices of the RMG in order to speed up the work and effectively monitor the implementation in the area of political reforms. The Political Affairs Subcommittee is composed of high-level bureaucrats of relevant bodies meeting under the coordination of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs. This Subcommittee will determine issues to be brought to the agenda of the RMG, present these issues for the approval of the relevant Ministers, monitor decisions taken at the RMG and present new legislation proposals related to implementation.

The Political Affairs Subcommittee will convene under the coordination of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs and with the participation of high-level representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prime Ministry and with the participation of the President of the Prime Ministry Human Rights Presidency and a representative of Mr Cemil Çiçek, State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Other relevant public institutions may also be invited to attend the meetings, depending on the agenda. Subcommittee meetings will be held once or more frequently if necessary, between every two RMG meetings.

The Subcommittee will not only undertake the work on the RMG agenda, but will also carry out the work for the preparation of reform packages. To this end, frequent meetings will be held by the chapter based working groups to be formed. At its first meeting on 25 December 2009, the Political Affairs Subcommittee decided to set up two working groups under Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security). These working groups will convene under the chairmanship of relevant Deputy Secretary Generals of the Secretariat General for EU Affairs and will submit their work to the Political Affairs Subcommittee.

Fourth Pillar

The fourth pillar is the communication strategy which will support the other three pillars. The neglected communication dimension constitutes an important reason for the decline in public support. To this end, a comprehensive and flexible EU Communication Strategy has been prepared to enhance communication between Turkey and the EU. The internal dimension of the Communication Strategy aims to increase public support by revitalizing enthusiasm for the EU accession process and ensuring the participation of all groups in society.

To this end, one Deputy Governor will be assigned in 81 provinces as EU Contact Points, District Governors will be intensively trained on EU projects and meetings will be organized with the participation of universities, bar associations, chambers of commerce, associations and civil society organisations in various provinces of Turkey to discuss the various aspects of the accession process.

The Communication Strategy will be an important means to counteract the negative effects on European public opinion of certain discourses brought up by some EU Member States on Turkey's membership. The argument that the Turkey-EU relationship is a "win-win" relationship will be emphasized. The external dimension of the Communication Strategy will target those segments of European countries that hold reservations against Turkish membership.

The Communication Strategy will be carried out in cooperation with both public institutions and NGOs, think-tanks, academicians, the media and private sector. It will be updated continuously with the contributions of all relevant groups.



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