



**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
MINISTRY FOR EU AFFAIRS**

30th REFORM MONITORING GROUP MEETING

PRESS STATEMENT

Erzurum, 23 July 2014

The Reform Monitoring Group (RMG), established in 2003, held its 30th meeting hosted by Efkan Ala, Minister of Interior with the participation of Bekir Bozda , Minister of Justice, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, and Prof. Dr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Afif Demirkıran, Co-chairman of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee and İbrahim Kalın, Deputy Undersecretary of the Prime Ministry, also participated in the meeting.

The 30th meeting of the RMG was held in Erzurum only three months after the 29th meeting held on 9 May 2014 in Ankara.

It is particularly significant that the discussion at the 30th RMG meeting on the reforms for Turkey's EU accession process, our country's most important modernisation project since the proclamation of the Republic, coincided with the 95th anniversary of the Erzurum Congress of 23 July 1919.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had defined 2014 as the year in which reforms would be implemented to further promote the fundamental rights and freedoms in Turkey. With this understanding, we carefully monitor the steps taken at the Reform Monitoring Group meetings - having already been organised twice within this year - and we are determined to advance on the road to Turkey's European Union membership.

Developments in our neighbouring regions demonstrate once again the importance of the reforms carried out in Turkey. Whereas Turkey's neighbours struggle with instability and crises, the Turkish government maintains the pace of the reforms for European Union membership and takes steps that improve the living standards of Turkish citizens.

We are confident that our European friends will support this process. We hope that the European Parliament elected in May 2014 and the new European Commission will continue to prioritise enlargement on its agenda.

Turkey, as a founding member of the Council of Europe and a candidate state carrying out accession negotiations with the EU, has always and will continue to support the universal values of Europe. Turkey's historical and cultural values based on tolerance will not only ease the concerns of Europe but also reinforce its confidence.

We believe that Italian Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2014 will significantly accelerate Turkey's EU accession process. Italy has strongly expressed an intention to this end immediately after assuming the Presidency. We hope to see concrete results with the opening of new chapters to negotiations in this period.

Our government decisively continues to carry out significant reforms to address terrorism, which has been a long-standing source of suffering in our country.

In this context, the Law on Eradicating Terrorism and Strengthening Societal Integration was adopted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) on 10 July 2014 and published in the Official Journal on 16 July 2014. This law, consisting of six articles, introduces legal safeguards regarding steps taken to bring terrorism to an end and strengthen the societal integration.

The Turkish President will be elected directly by the people in the presidential elections to be held in August, which is a “first” in Turkey’s history of democracy.

The Visa Liberalisation Dialogue was officially launched on 16 December 2013 in Ankara, as a significant step towards the elimination of an important psychological obstacle between Turkey and EU, allowing Turkish citizens the right to visa-free travel to the EU within three to three and a half years at most. Since January, we have been working in collaboration with the European Commission to achieve this goal in due course.

Significant progress has been achieved in the visa liberalisation dialogue with the adoption of the “Law regarding the Approval of the Ratification of the Agreement between the Republic of Turkey and the European Union on the Readmission of Persons Residing without Authorisation” at the TGNA on 25 June 2014. The ratification procedure is underway at the Council of Ministers for this Agreement.

The Prime Ministerial Circular No. 2014/6 was published in the Official Gazette on 16 April 2014 regarding legal, financial, administrative or technical support and assistance to be provided by public institutions and administrations to the Directorate General of Migration Management, responsible for implementation of the Readmission Agreement, in the fight against irregular migration and the preparations for and implementation of the agreement.

Furthermore, we believe that the EU side will demonstrate due attention for projects prepared to obtain technical and financial assistance from the EU in accordance with the provisions of the agreement.

Regarding Turkey’s EU accession process, 17 chapters remain blocked due to the politically motivated and unilateral obstructions of the EU Council and certain member states.

Currently, the most important and urgent issue in Turkey-EU relations are these political obstacles which have no relevance for Turkey’s accession process.

In line with the progress achieved, we share the views regarding the opening of Chapter 23 on “Judiciary and Fundamental Rights” and Chapter 24 on “Justice, Freedom and Security” expressed in the Progress Report of the European Commission and the two most recent reports of the European Parliament. We reiterate our call on the EU to open these chapters.

On this occasion, we would like to share the decisions taken at the 30th RMG meeting with members of the media and the public.

As agreed upon at the 29th RMG meeting, we discussed the work prepared by the Ministry for EU Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice regarding conventions signed by Turkey but not ratified for the time being.

It is decided that the ratification process for the conventions addressed in this work will be initiated as soon as possible. In addition, we addressed the participation of Turkey in important international conventions relevant to the reform process.

The procedures have been initiated for the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (No. 108) and Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (No. 197). In addition, the enactment of the draft Law on the Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, currently on the TGNA agenda, has also been addressed as a priority in the 30th RMG meeting.

Our Government has once again demonstrated its commitment and determination for democratisation and the political reform process with the six Judicial Reform Packages and the Democratisation Package adopted in the past three years.

Law No. 6529 on the Amendment to Certain Laws to Enhance Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, introducing the necessary legal arrangements provided for in the Democratisation Package announced by the Prime Minister on 30 September 2014, entered into force on 13 March 2014.

This law has introduced provisions to relevant laws to further enhance standards of democracy and freedom, such as legislative arrangements on hate crimes, guarantees on respect for lifestyles, allowing for education in different languages and dialects in private schools, allowing political campaigns to be carried out in languages and dialects other than Turkish and expanding the scope of state aid for political parties.

Furthermore, we are decisively continuing to work on the draft Law on the Protection of Personal Data and the draft Law on Anti-Discrimination and Equality Board which are included in the Democratisation Package. The work for submitting the draft Law on the Protection of Personal Data to the TGNA continues with the participation of the relevant ministries under the coordination of the Prime Ministry.

The draft Law on Anti-Discrimination and Equality Board is at the stage of submission to the Prime Ministry. In the meantime, a project will be implemented as of September 2014 with the objective of informing the public on discrimination issues, raising awareness of the local administrative authorities and drafting the inspection guides and control lists to be used during inspection of complaints by the civil inspectors.

The Judicial Reform Strategy, prepared in 2009 by the Ministry of Justice, has been implemented to a great extent and is currently under revision, with special consideration to ensuring transparency and participation. A workshop, with broad participation, was organized between 14-15 July under the coordination of the Ministry of Justice to update the Judicial Reform Strategy. Finalisation of the Strategy is currently on-going in collaboration with the relevant parties.

Certain amendments introduced by the Law No. 6524 to the Law No. 6087 on High Council of Judges and Prosecutors have been annulled by the Constitutional Court.

The draft Law Amending Turkish Penal Code and Certain Laws (6th Reform Package), which also includes provisions regarding the arrangements annulled pursuant to the reasoned judgement of the Constitutional Court, was approved by the TGNA on 18 June 2014. The

TGNA speedily adopted the new articles of the Law on High Council of Judges and Prosecutors in line with the ruling of the Constitutional Court, once again demonstrating the effective functioning of the rule of law with all its institutions, procedures and processes in Turkey.

We will continue the judicial reforms which aim to enhance impartiality and independence of the judiciary.

The Action Plan on the Prevention of Violation of the European Convention on Human Rights prepared by the Ministry of Justice to identify measures to eliminate problems in areas which have been subject to rulings of violations by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), along with the activities and arrangements, as well as the institutions responsible for these tasks, was published in the Official Gazette of 1 March 2014.

With the adoption of this action plan, all of the unofficial opening criteria for Chapter on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights (Chapter 23) have been fulfilled. Close monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan in the forthcoming period is essential to achieving its established objectives. Ministry of Justice will be submitting an annual report to the Prime Ministry on the implementation of the Action Plan which will also be monitored by the RMG.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the effective functioning of individual application procedure to the Constitutional Court as adopted by the 12 September 2010 referendum, the Ministry of Justice continues the already initiated work for establishing legal remedies to accelerate the trials and eliminate the grievances that arise from lengthy trial periods within the framework of jurisdiction procedures.

With regard to the draft Law Amending the Law on the National Human Rights Institution, the National Human Rights Institution is preparing the draft law to be submitted to the Council of Ministers, considering the opinions of the relevant institutions.

The work will be carried out for the enactment of the draft Law Regarding the Establishment of the Law Enforcement Monitoring Commission and Amendment of Certain Laws, which is on the agenda of the TGNA.

In order to further strengthen the right to peaceful assembly, several projects are being implemented under Turkey-EU Financial Cooperation.

Work undertaken by the Ministry of Interior to increase the capacity of law enforcement units regarding crowd control has also been evaluated.

At the meeting, practical problems hindering further progress in the freedom of expression were discussed, along with the related work for possible amendments to the relevant laws.

The Commission, established under the Ministry of Justice, responsible for preparing the draft "Law on Provision of Aid to the Victims of Crime", has started its activities. With the aim of the protection of rights of victims of crime and in line with the EU Directive establishing Minimum Standards on Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime, the draft law will provide for the principles and procedures regarding the provision of aid to the victims of crime or to their dependants in case of their death, in accordance with the principle of social state as enshrined in the Constitution. Work on the draft law is currently underway.

Turkey signed the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime on 10 November 2010. The Law on the Approval of the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime has been adopted by the TGNA on 22 April 2014. In this framework, a working group will be set up at the Ministry of Justice with the participation of the Ministry of Interior and work on necessary legislative arrangements is planned to be completed by December 2014.

The work on draft “Law on the Fight against Human Trafficking and Protection of Victims” is being carried out under the coordination of the Directorate General of Migration Management.

The draft “Law on Border Management” regarding the reorganisation in scope of the Integrated Border Management was prepared by the Ministry of Interior. At the meeting, relevant units provided information on this draft law.

The 30th RMG decisions clearly demonstrate that our government continues to take steps for further democratisation at the same pace. The ministries that are members of the RMG have decided to develop a strategy to better communicate the adopted reforms to the domestic and international public opinion.

In order to ensure the continuity of the political reform process - a fundamental element of our determination to advance Turkey beyond the level of contemporary civilizations - and to ensure and monitor the effective implementation of these reforms, the 31th Meeting of the Reform Monitoring Group, has been decided to be held in Yozgat on 23 October 2014.