

### **Third Meeting of the Reform Action Group Press Statement**

The third meeting of the Reform Action Group (RAG) was held on 11 December 2015 in the Prime Ministry in Ankara, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Ahmet Davutođlu, with the participation of RAG members Volkan Bozkır, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, Bekir Bozdađ, Minister of Justice, Mevlüt Çavuşođlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Efan Ala, Minister of Interior. The meeting was also attended by Lutfi Elvan, Deputy Prime Minister, Kasım Gulpınar, Chairman of the Committee on EU Harmonization at the TGNA, Ahmet Berat Çonkar, Chairman of the Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee, Taha Özkan Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs at the TGNA, Kemal Madenođlu, Undersecretary of the Prime Ministry.

The Turkish Government will continue to improve the rights and freedoms of Turkish citizens with the new reforms in line with Turkey's 2023 objectives and on the basis of the comprehensive transformation to this day.

The objective of the European Union membership is one of the main driving elements of Turkey's reform process. Our preference and will for EU accession is the result of a strategic approach and has always been constant.

Turkey and EU acting together when facing current challenges will pave the way for achieving comprehensive and permanent solutions to the problems. During such a critical period of threats to universal values from all kinds of terrorism and intentions of violating the right to life, our main priority is to protect human dignity and develop human-oriented policies.

The Turkey-EU Summit held on 29 November 2015 in Brussels highlighted that we must embrace the construction of our future together.

This Summit has been unique in the sense that for the first time Turkey, 28 EU Member States and Presidents of three EU Institutions (European Council, European Commission and European Parliament) attended the meeting.

Within this framework, a new period started in Turkey-EU relations based on mutual trust. Turkey will decisively do its share by taking result-oriented steps in order to make good use of this period.

During the Summit, Turkey-EU relations were discussed in all its aspects, which included giving impetus to Turkey-EU relations, revitalising the negotiation process, opening chapters to negotiations, establishing high-level dialogue mechanisms and providing humanitarian aid for asylum seekers and preparations for the upgrading of Customs Union.

On 14 December 2015, the opening of Chapter 17 on Economic and Monetary Policy to negotiations at the Turkey-EU Intergovernmental Conference will be the first concrete indicator of the political will demonstrated during the Summit to revitalise the negotiation process.

The 64th Government Programme, the Action Plan, announced on 10 December 2015, and the National Action Plan for EU Accession to be updated within this framework are main indicators which demonstrate that 2016 will be a reform and EU oriented year.

Third meeting of the Reform Action Group has mainly addressed two agenda items. During the meeting, first, work necessary for visa-free travel for Turkish citizens to the Schengen Area as of October 2016 has been discussed. In this context, legal arrangements and operational steps required to be realized for the implementation of EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement and Visa Liberalisation Road Map have been deliberated. These priority arrangements are also addressed considerably in the Government Action Plan, which was publicized on 10 December 2015.

In order to enable our citizens' visa-free travel to the Schengen area, measures included in the Government Action Plan and other priority steps to be taken which are complementary to these measures are as follows:

- \* Law on the Protection of the Personal Data,
- \* Law on Political Ethics,
- \* Legislative arrangements on the fight against human trafficking and protection of victims,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Agreement on Tripartite Contact Centre of Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data and its Additional Protocol No. 181,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on Financing of Terrorism,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Protocol No.7 to the European Convention on Human Rights,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Additional Protocol of 1997 to the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons,
- \* By-law on implementation of the Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection,
- \* Legal amendments for the completion of transition to identity cards with biometric data,
- \* Decision of Council of Ministers allowing access to the labour market by Syrian citizens under temporary protection.
- \* Law on judicial cooperation in criminal matters,
- \* Law on the Establishment of the Law Enforcement Monitoring Commission,
- \* Legislative arrangements for the transposition of Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on Financing of Terrorism,

- \* Amendment to the Law on the National Human Rights Institution,
- \* Legal arrangements regarding the fight against cybercrime,
- \* Law on Anti-Discrimination and Equality,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Additional Protocol of 1975, 2010 and 2012 to the European Convention on the Extradition of Offenders,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Additional Protocol of 2001 to the European Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Hague Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children,
- \* Law on the Ratification of the Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance.

Along with the legal arrangements, the following operational measures will be implemented:

- \* Increasing the number and capacity of removal centres in order to enhance Turkey's readmission capacity of irregular migrants,
- \* Increasing the capacity of Coast Guard Command, considering the fact that an important amount of irregular migration takes place via sea,
- \* Drafting implementation protocols for readmission which are necessary for the implementation of the Turkey-EU Readmission Agreement and signing these readmission protocols with the relevant EU Member States,
- \* Maintaining cooperation with the EU Member States within the framework of the current bilateral readmission arrangements
- \* Ensuring the immediate conclusion of pending applications for international protection,
- \* Launching new efforts after an evaluation of the previous steps taken to find solutions to the problems of the Roma citizens and implementation of the relevant Strategy and Action Plan in a short period.

As the second agenda item of the RAG meeting, the political reform process was discussed with all its aspects. In this context, opening of Chapter 23 on "Judiciary and Fundamental Rights" and Chapter 24 on "Justice, Freedom and Security" as soon as possible is a common and priority target for both Turkey and the EU. For both of these chapters, Turkey has met all the opening benchmarks which were conveyed unofficially. With the new impetus regarding these two chapters, Turkey and the European Commission have started to work jointly on the current acquis. With this new turning point in Turkey-EU relations, our political reform process and the reform work to be carried out within the scope of the Chapters 23 and 24 will be accelerated and put into practice.

The political reforms, which will strengthen the foundations of democracy within the framework of Turkey's objective of achieving a pluralist, liberal and participatory democracy, will be crowned with a new Constitution that will completely remove the effects of the Military Coup of 12 September.

Within this scope, the work has been evaluated which will be carried out in order to broaden, maintain and strengthen the reforms in the area of freedom of expression, independence and impartiality of judiciary and the protection of human rights.

Regarding judiciary, steps will continue to be taken with reference to the Judicial Reform Strategy announced last April.

Regarding fundamental rights and freedoms, the implementation of the Action Plan on the Prevention of the Violation of the European Convention on Human Rights will be carefully monitored.

Chapter 24 was discussed with reference to the work being carried out for the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue. In this context, Readmission Agreement will begin to be implemented in June 2016 instead of October 2017 for third country nationals. Furthermore, the Action Plan against Organised Crime was discussed, along with the steps to be taken for border security.

Due to the unending crisis in Syria, both Turkey and the EU member States continue to be affected by the growing crisis of migration which started in 2011. For this reason, intensive consultations have been held with the EU authorities in the recent period.

Up to now, Turkey has exerted the best efforts for the Syrian issue, and in the next period it aims to address the field of education as a priority and also to take the necessary steps for the enhancement of health services, financing of the food card practice, improvement of the housing conditions, and the involvement of the Syrians into the economy.

Turkey and the EU have a deep and rich historical, cultural and economic relationship that cannot be limited only to the issue of migration. In appreciation of the value of such an asset, any solutions to be developed jointly by Turkey and the EU to address the regional and global issues will build a strong foundation for the establishment of permanent peace in our region and for the protection of human rights.

In the forthcoming period, a paradigm-shift on a new platform and new impetus in line with Turkey's objective of EU membership, will further strengthen and deepen Turkey-EU relations.