

'Is Turkey up to meeting European Parliament accession conditions?' from the Europe Daily Bulletin (6 January 2005)

Caption: On 6 January 2005, Ferdinando Riccardi, Editor-in-Chief of Agence Europe in Brussels, draws attention to the European Parliament's demands relating to Turkey's accession to the European Union resulting, in particular, from the Copenhagen political criteria.

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Is Turkey up to meeting European Parliament accession conditions?

I have to ask myself to what extent Turkey is fully aware of the implication of its possible EU accession (see this section yesterday). If the Union reaffirms and sticks to its goals by adopting the Constitution, the "sharing of sovereignty" which goes far beyond what the Turkish authorities and the main body of public opinion are prepared to accept. It is possible that certain quarters in Turkey will have analysed the effects of full Union participation: if this is the case, they are not, in my opinion, drawing all the right conclusions in the belief that it will be easier to reorientate within the EU while benefiting from accession. In order to assess the scope of the obligations resulting from "Member State" status, one only has to look at the resolution voted for on 15 December by the European Parliament (published in N0.2389 Europe/Documents).

The Long list of the European Parliament. The EP fully recognises the progress accomplished by Turkey, the reforms and efforts it has made and it pays homage to the country in this respect. But at the same time it draws up a long list of demands that Turkey should satisfy, to obtain when the time comes, the indispensable vote in favour from the EP for its accession. I'll refer to the essential elements in this connection.

1. Religious tolerance. Turkey has to "*swiftly guarantee equal treatment of all religious minorities and communities*" (the legal status of religious schools and religious training are explicitly mentioned, as well as the radio and television programmes for "*non Muslim minorities*": *Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Syriac Christians*). The EP is also calling for as a "*first clear sign*", the immediate reopening of the Greek Orthodox seminary in Haki and the public use of the title "*ecumenical patriarch*". In schools, religious teaching has to be optional and should not be limited to Sunni doctrine. 2. Armenia. It is "*necessary*" that borders between Turkey and Armenia are re-opened as soon as possible and the Union should. "*call on the Turkish authorities for formal recognition of the historical reality of the genocide of Armenians*". 3. Kurds. The EP calls on Turkey to reduce the 10% threshold in the electoral system so that "*as wide a representation of political forces is possible at the Grand Assembly, namely that for Kurdish parties*". The parliament is also "*encouraging*" the Turkish government to disarm "*village guards*" in the south east of the country and get rid of the system. The removal of restrictions on the use and teaching of minority languages (Kurdish, primarily but also Tcherkesse and Armenian, particularly in the broadcasting of programmes and in education. 4 Cyprus. "*Obviously the opening up of negotiations involves the recognition of Cyprus by Turkey*", explains the Parliament, of which the withdrawal of the forces of occupations "*is a necessary step*" and has to be done "*according to a specific timetable*".

Parliament's demands on women's rights, the total removal of torture (not only on paper but in practice), status for refugees, limits on the "*political role of the army*" resulting from the "Copenhagen criteria" and that Turkey, in principle, agrees to. But some EP demands in the cultural, environmental and economic areas go beyond commitments to respect the Community acquis overall and take a line in certain cases. This is indeed the case for the dams in the Munzur Vally and Ilisu and the mining for gold in Bergame "*where historical heritage and countryside of exceptional value are under threat*", as well as hydraulic resources: Turkey has to bring workgroups together from neighbouring countries (Iraq, Iran and Syria) "*in order to guarantee a fair and balanced distribution of water from rivers where the river flow is stronger in Turkey*".

The most sensitive area. For the time being, the question is not to discuss whether and to what extent Turkey will be able and will want to meet the demands of the European Parliament but rather of making clear that these demands are not presented as choices but for the main part are obligations resulting from the status of being a "Member State", often subject to the monitoring of the Community institutions (as for all Member States). The EP has skirted over the most sensitive and difficult area: foreign and defence policy. I am not going to say to my readers that the EU already has a policy in this area, this would be ridiculous and the contradictory positions of the Fifteen in respect of the war in Iraq have confirmed that a common foreign policy does not exist and will not exist in the immediate future. Turkey has widely displayed its loyalty to NATO and its effectiveness: it has nothing to prove in this regard. But it has a specific role to play in the massive Turkish speaking Muslim republics resulting from the break-up of the USSR, a role in which the EU will not directly be involved and an area in which Turkey needs to remain autonomous, without being bound by the EU's "common policy" as it currently sought.

(Ferdinando Riccardi)