

Turkey and the EU: time for a new dynamic

It is EU accession that we are talking about when it comes to EU-Turkey relations, and nothing short of it.

Yesterday we published a new Progress Report on Turkey, commending progress where praise was due and signalling the way ahead for further reforms.

Thanks to Turkey's commitment to its EU accession strategic goal, reforms got a clear European footprint. Democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law are being steadily strengthened. Legislation is aligned more and more with EU standards. The economy, already highly integrated with the EU through the Customs Union, is thriving. More and more Turkish citizens come to know and work together with their EU fellows, be it in educational exchange programmes, civil society initiatives or business joint ventures. Our knowledge of each other goes well beyond diplomatic and official contacts.

Turkey's transformation is still work in progress. While the Constitutional reform validated through the 12 September referendum was a step in the right direction, more needs to be done to meet Turkish citizens' desire for more fundamental freedoms. Journalists should be able to work without fear of judicial or political pressure. By the same token, a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish issue is more necessary than ever. This is why I call for the continuation of the democratic opening, which should translate quickly into further concrete reforms. At the same time, we unequivocally condemn all acts of terrorism and violence on Turkish territory in the strongest possible terms. This is where we stand united with the people of Turkey.

As EU-Turkey relations deepen, we will come across issues that require hard work to resolve. This will not only require that we both remain committed, but also that we are ready to meet the obligations we have accepted at the outset of this process. Above all, if EU accession is our common strategic goal, then it is time to focus on what unites us, not on what could keep us apart.

The experience of the European project itself bears testimony that entrenched positions never bring solutions. And right now, we need solutions, not more problems. The EU is looking for solutions to a changing world in which it needs to be able to continue projecting its model of peace building and reconciliation with the past to its immediate neighbours, most of whom nurture a wish to join the Union one day. Turkey should be searching solutions to its own predicaments, both internal and in relations with its neighbours.

Time has come for Turkey to normalise relations with all EU Member States it negotiates accession with. It is now urgent that Turkey fully implements its obligations under the Customs Union. By doing so, Turkey would take the moral high ground of a country that delivers on its commitments, and which expects others to do so too. This would be the biggest impetus that Turkey could give right now to its accession process.

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