



Key findings of the 2020 Report on Turkey

Brussels, 6 October 2020

Political criteria

Despite the lifting of the state of emergency in July 2018, the adverse impacts of the two-year long emergency ruling continued to significantly impact on **democracy** and fundamental rights. Certain legal provisions granting extraordinary powers to the government authorities and retaining several restrictive elements of the emergency rule have been integrated into law. Key recommendations of the Council of Europe and its bodies are yet to be addressed. Allegations of wrongdoing need to be addressed through transparent procedures and on an individual basis. Individual criminal liability can only be established with full respect for the separation of powers, the full independence of the judiciary and the right of every individual to a fair trial and due process.

The constitutional architecture continued centralising powers at the level of the Presidency without ensuring a sound and effective separation of powers between the executive, legislative and the judiciary. In the absence of an effective checks and balances mechanism, the democratic accountability of the executive branch remains limited to elections. Under these conditions, the serious backsliding of the respect for democratic standards, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms continued. Political polarisation continued to prevent constructive parliamentary dialogue. Parliamentary oversight of the executive remained weak. Under the presidential system, many regulatory authorities and the Central Bank were directly linked to the Presidency, undermining their independence.

The opposition candidate won the re-run of the metropolitan mayoral elections in Istanbul on 23 June 2019. While the elections were professionally organised, they were characterised by limited plurality for democratic media and conditions that were objectively not fair to all political parties and candidates in all respects. Turkey needs to take steps to improve the broader environment for elections, ensuring a level playing field for all candidates and protecting the integrity of the election process. The implementation of Venice Commission recommendations is crucial in this regard.

The **situation in the south-east** continued to be very worrying, despite an improved security environment. The replacement of 47 democratically elected HDP municipal mayors by centrally-appointed trustees in the south-east put the results of the democratic process of the 31 March 2019 local elections into question. Arrests and dismissals of elected mayors and party representatives continued and seriously damaged local democracy. The Government continued security operations against a background of the recurrent violent acts by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which remains on the EU list of persons, groups and entities involved in acts of terrorism. While the government has a legitimate right to fight terrorism, it is also responsible for ensuring this is done in accordance with the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. Anti-terror measures need to be proportionate. Despite some reconstruction, only few internally displaced persons have received compensation. There were no visible developments on the resumption of a credible political process to achieve a peaceful and sustainable solution.

Civil society came under continuous pressure and their space to operate freely has continued to diminish. The Gezi trial and the continued pre-trial detention of Osman Kavala, despite the existence of a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights calling on his release, had a deterrent effect. Administrative difficulties for national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) continued to hamper civil society activities. Civil society organisations remained excluded from genuine legislative consultation processes.

The legal and institutional framework governing the security and intelligence sector remained unchanged with strengthened **civilian oversight of the security forces** under the presidential system.

Turkey has some level of preparation/is moderately prepared in **public administration reform**. There was backsliding during the reporting period. The major restructuring of public administration and civil service after the shift to the presidential system in 2018 continued to have a negative impact on policy development, accountability of the administration as well as human resources

management, although policy coordination among central government institutions remained strong. Changes to the civil service system have increased the politicisation of the administration. No steps were taken to develop a comprehensive public administration reform strategy and an overarching public financial management reform programme. An effective remedy still needs to be provided for the large-scale dismissals that took place during the state of emergency. There remained questions over the extent to which the Inquiry Commission is an effective judicial remedy.

Turkey's **judicial system** is at an early stage of preparation and serious backsliding continued during the reporting period. Concerns remained, in particular over the systemic lack of independence of the judiciary. The President announced the Judicial Reform Strategy for 2019-2023 in May 2019. However, it falls short of addressing key shortcomings regarding the independence of the judiciary. No measures were announced to remedy the concerns identified by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission and in the European Commission's annual country reports. There are concerns that dismissals in the absence of respect for due procedures caused self-censorship and intimidation within the judiciary. No measures were taken to change the structure of, and process for, the selection of members of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors to strengthen its independence. Concerns regarding the lack of objective, merit-based, uniform and pre-established criteria for recruiting and promoting judges and prosecutors persisted. No changes were made to the institution of criminal judges of peace so that concerns regarding their jurisdiction and practice remained.

Regarding the **fight against corruption**, Turkey remained at an early stage and made no progress in the reporting period. The country continued to lack preventive anti-corruption bodies. The flaws of the legal framework and institutional architecture allowed undue political influence in the investigation and prosecution phases of corruption cases. Accountability and transparency of public institutions need to be improved. The absence of an anti-corruption strategy and action plan indicated the lack of political will to fight decisively against corruption. Overall, corruption is widespread and remains an issue of concern.

Turkey has some level of preparation in the **fight against organised crime** and there was limited progress. The 2019-2021 national action plan, for the implementation of the 2016-2021 national strategy on the fight against organised crime, was adopted in May 2019. Cooperation between Europol and Turkey is based on a Strategic Agreement on Cooperation, which entered into force in July 2004. Negotiations concerning an operational cooperation agreement on the exchange of personal data between Europol and Turkey were ongoing, requiring Turkey to align its data protection law in line with European standards. Turkey should improve its track record on dismantling criminal networks and confiscating criminal assets. The legal framework regulating the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing needs to be improved. Efforts are needed to improve the legislation on cybercrime, asset confiscation and witness protection. A cooperation agreement with CEPOL has been in force since 2010.

The deterioration of **human and fundamental rights** continued. Many of the measures introduced during the state of emergency remained in force and continued to have a profound and devastating impact. The legal framework includes general guarantees of respect for human and fundamental rights but the legislation and practice still need to be brought into line with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and with the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case-law. The lack of institutional independence, lengthy review procedures, the absence of sufficiently individualised criteria, and the absence of a proper means of defence cast serious doubt over the Inquiry Commission on the State of Emergency Measures' ability to provide an effective remedy against dismissals. Legislation introduced immediately after the lifting of the state of emergency removed crucial safeguards protecting detainees from abuse, thereby increasing the risk of impunity. The enforcement of rights is hindered by the fragmentation and limited independence of public institutions responsible for protecting human rights and freedoms, and is aggravated by the lack of an independent judiciary. Restrictions imposed on, and surveillance of, the activities of journalists, writers, lawyers, academics, human rights defenders and critical voices on a broad scale have a negative effect on the exercise of these freedoms, and lead to self-censorship. Credible allegations of torture and ill-treatment continued to be reported. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, a controversial legislative package provided for the conditional release of up to 90,000 prisoners. As of July, 65,000 prisoners had been released. However, it excluded those held in pre-trial detention for alleged terrorism-related offences, including lawyers, journalists, politicians and human rights defenders.

Serious backsliding continued on freedom of expression. The disproportionate implementation of the restrictive measures continued to negatively affect the freedom of expression and dissemination of opposition voices. Criminal cases and convictions of journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, writers and social media continued. The ban on Wikipedia was lifted in December 2019, however, the blocking and erasing of online content without a court order on an inappropriately wide range of grounds continued. There was further backsliding in the area of freedom of assembly and association

in light of recurrent bans, disproportionate interventions in peaceful demonstrations, investigations, administrative fines and prosecutions against demonstrators on charges of 'terrorism-related activities'.

The rights of the most disadvantaged groups and of persons belonging to minorities need better protection. Roma continue to live in very poor housing, often lacking basic public services and relying on social benefits. The urban renewal projects continue to affect primarily their settlements, forcing the displacement of entire families. Gender-based violence, discrimination, hate speech against minorities, hate crime and violations of human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons are still a matter of serious concern.

In the area of **migration and asylum policy**, Turkey made some progress. Throughout 2019, Turkey was committed to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 and played a key role in ensuring effective management of migratory flows along the Eastern Mediterranean route. Turkey sustained its outstanding efforts to provide unprecedented humanitarian aid and support to more than 3.6 million registered refugees from Syria and around 370,000 registered refugees from other countries, thus hosting the largest refugee community in the world. However, in March 2020, Turkey actively encouraged migrants and refugees to take the land route to Europe through Greece. This led to the set-up of an informal camp at one of the Greek-Turkish border crossing points in Pazarkule, hosting close to 60,000 migrants and refugees in dire conditions. Later in March, the Turkish authorities organised transport for the migrants and refugees away from the border area and closed the borders with Greece and Bulgaria except for commercial traffic because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the Turkish Minister of Interior indicated that this move did not mean a change in Turkey's policy to allow irregular migrants' exits over its borders and the government had no intention to prevent anyone who wishes to leave Turkey. While the EU acknowledged the increased migratory burden and risks Turkey had been facing on its territory and the substantial efforts it was making in hosting refugees, it strongly rejected Turkey's use of migratory pressure for political purposes. Overall, the number of illegal border crossings between Turkey and Greece still remained significantly lower than prior to the adoption of the EU-Turkey Statement.

The prolonged presence of refugees in the country requires efficient integration measures to avoid social tensions. The authorities should increase access to public health for migrants and refugees in the country. A comprehensive amendment to the Law on Foreigners and International Protection was adopted in 2019. Turkey still did not implement the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement towards all Member States nor the provisions relating to third-country nationals. Despite an announced acceleration of work on visa liberalisation, no outstanding visa liberalisation benchmarks were fulfilled and amendments to the anti-terror law and data protection law are still outstanding. Turkey still needs to further align its legislation with the EU *acquis* on visa policy.

Turkey's **foreign policy** increasingly collided with the EU priorities under the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean region further increased in the reporting period as a result of Turkey's illegal actions and provocative statements challenging the right of the Republic of Cyprus to exploit hydrocarbon resources in the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey deployed two drilling and two seismic vessels in the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Cyprus, including in the areas that have been licensed by the Government of Cyprus to European oil and gas companies, as well as in Cypriot territorial sea. The Turkish Armed Forces accompanied the drilling and seismic ships during their operations, posing a grave threat to the security of the region. Turkey also challenged the status of the fenced-off city of Varosha.

The EU has repeatedly stressed the need to respect the sovereign rights of EU Member States, which include entering into bilateral agreements and exploring and exploiting their natural resources in accordance with the EU *acquis* and international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Turkey needs to commit itself unequivocally to good neighbourly relations, international agreements and the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter, having recourse, if necessary, to the International Court of Justice. In light of the unauthorised drilling activities of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, in July 2019 the Council decided a number of measures, including not to hold for the time being the EU-Turkey Association Council as well as further meetings of the EU-Turkey high-level dialogues. The EU further adopted a framework for targeted measures against Turkey in November 2019 and decided in February 2020 to add two individuals to the list of designations under this sanctions framework.

On 1 October 2020, the European Council stated that, provided constructive efforts to stop illegal activities vis-à-vis Greece and Cyprus are sustained, the European Council agreed to launch a positive political EU-Turkey agenda with a specific emphasis on the modernisation of the Customs Union and trade facilitation, people to people contacts, High level dialogues, continued cooperation on migration issues, in line with the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement. The European Council also stressed

that in case of renewed unilateral actions or provocations in breach of international law, the EU will use all the instruments and the options at its disposal, including in accordance with Article 29 TEU and Article 215 TFEU, in order to defend its interests and those of its Member States.

Turkey has still not fulfilled its obligation to ensure full and non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the EU-Turkey Association Agreement and has not removed all the obstacles to the free movement of goods, including restrictions on direct transport links with Cyprus. There was no progress on normalising bilateral relations with the Republic of Cyprus.

The signing of a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas between Turkey and the National Accord Government of Libya in November 2019 increased tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, as it ignored the sovereign rights of Greece's islands in the area concerned. There was a sharp increase in provocative actions by Turkey towards Greece, in particular Turkish overflights of Greek inhabited areas. In this respect, the European Council, in December 2019, unequivocally reaffirmed its solidarity with Greece and Cyprus regarding actions by Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea. It stressed that the Memorandum infringes upon the sovereign rights of third States, does not comply with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and cannot produce any legal consequences for third States. In May 2020, EU Foreign Ministers reaffirmed the EU's position on Turkey's continued illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as on Turkey's provocative and aggressive behaviour in relation to Cyprus and Greece, underlining that abstaining from unilateral actions is a basic element to allow dialogue between the EU and Turkey to advance and that Turkey's illegal actions have serious negative impact across the range of EU-Turkey relations. In October 2020, the European Council called on Turkey to accept the invitation by Cyprus to engage in dialogue with the objective of settling all maritime-related disputes between Turkey and Cyprus.

The EU condemned Turkey's unilateral military action in north-east Syria and urged Turkey to end its military action, withdraw its forces and respect international humanitarian law. The vast majority of Member States decided to halt arms export licensing to Turkey. Following airstrikes against Turkish troops in the Idlib governorate at the end of February 2020, Turkey launched the military operation 'Spring Shield' in the area. Turkey and Russia agreed on a ceasefire in March 2020 that stabilised frontlines in north-west Syria, established a new corridor along the M4 highway, and created a framework for joint Russian-Turkish military patrols. Turkey maintained its military observation posts on the ground, including those situated in territories now controlled by the Syrian regime, and brought in further reinforcements to the region. Turkey further significantly increased its military involvement in the conflict in Libya, contributing to a reversal of the situation on the ground.

Regarding the **economic criteria**, the Turkish economy is well advanced, but made no progress over the reporting period and serious concerns persist over its functioning. The economy rebounded from the summer 2018 sharp currency depreciation and the resulting recession faster than expected, helped by expansionary policies and a strong contribution of net exports. However, the recovery remained fragile given the weak labour market and the need to repair corporate balance sheets. As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded, the authorities took a number of measures to cushion the economic impact of the pandemic, including a significant monetary expansion. These measures were constrained, however, by a limited policy space, in particular on the fiscal side, and institutional weaknesses. The current account balance, which had improved markedly since 2017, started deteriorating again by the end of 2019, triggering a sizeable increase of import duties and non tariff barriers. Due to high external financing needs, Turkey remained exposed to rapid changes in investor sentiment, aggravated by the pandemic and rising geopolitical risks. Inflation fell from a very high level but remained elevated and well above target. Monetary policy credibility weakened further because of the dismissal of the governor of the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) and recurrent political pressures. Price competitiveness continued to benefit from the weakening of the lira and the real effective exchange rate depreciated in 2019, a trend that accelerated further in 2020.

The government continued to further improve the regulatory environment for businesses. However, the informal sector remains large. State interventions in price setting mechanisms continued, and there is a continued lack of state aid implementation rules, enforcement, transparency and institutional set up. The financial sector remained stable. However, vulnerabilities increased, in particular due to rapid credit growth in state owned banks, and various regulatory measures aimed at boosting lending activity. The high level of unemployment, in particular among young people and women, paired with declining employment, low labour mobility and a high share of undeclared work remain major concerns.

Turkey has made limited progress and has a good level of preparation in achieving the capacity to cope with the competitive pressure and market forces within the EU. Expenditure on research and development increased, although remaining well below the Government's target. Investment

excesses and misallocations declined. Progress was made in the diversification of energy supplies but reforms are needed to open up the natural gas market and increase competition on it. Significant problems remain in education as regards quality and access. Women face difficulties in accessing quality education and the labour market. Although Turkey remains well integrated with the EU market in terms of both trade and investment links, the relative share of the EU in Turkey's foreign trade declined further amid a growing list of deviations from Turkey's obligations under the EU-Turkey Customs Union.

Regarding its **ability to assume the obligations of membership**, Turkey has continued to align with the EU *acquis*, albeit at a very limited pace and in a fragmented manner. There continued to be instances of backsliding regarding a number of key aspects in the areas of competition on account of an increase in State aid and its lack of transparency, information society and media, economic and monetary policy, customs union, external relations and foreign, security and defence policy. Turkey is well advanced in the areas of company law, trans-European networks and science and research, and it has also achieved a good level of preparation in a number of areas, including free movement of goods, intellectual property law, financial services, and enterprise and industrial policy. Turkey is moderately prepared on public procurement as important gaps remain in its alignment. Turkey is also moderately prepared in areas such as free movement of capital, transport policy, energy, taxation, economic and monetary union, statistics, where further significant efforts are needed across the board. Overall, in most areas more ambitious and better coordinated policies still need to be established and implemented. In all areas, more attention needs to be given to enforce legislation whilst many areas require further significant progress to achieve legislative alignment with the EU *acquis*, strengthen the independence of regulatory authorities and build the administrative capacities.

Key dates

September 1959: Turkey applies for associate membership of the European Economic Community (EEC).

September 1963: Signature of the Association Agreement, aiming at enhancing economic cooperation and achieving a Customs Union between Turkey and the EEC.

April 1987: Turkey presents its formal application for membership of the European Economic Community.

January 1995: EU-Turkey Agreement creating a customs union.

December 1999: The European Council recognises Turkey as a candidate country.

December 2004: The European Council agrees to start accession negotiations with Turkey.

October 2005: Start of accession negotiations.

December 2006: The Council decides that eight negotiating chapters cannot be opened and no chapter can be closed until Turkey meets its obligation of full, non-discriminatory implementation of the additional protocol to the Association Agreement.

May 2012: European Commission and Turkey start the implementation of the Positive agenda for Turkey.

December 2013: The EU-Turkey readmission agreement is signed in parallel with the launching of the visa liberalisation dialogue.

October 2014: The EU-Turkey readmission agreement enters into force.

March 2015: The European Commission and Turkey launch a high-level energy dialogue.

May 2015: The European Commission and Turkey agree to modernise the 20-year-old Customs Union Agreement and to enhance EU-Turkey bilateral trade relations.

November 2015: On the occasion of the EU-Turkey Leaders' Meeting, both sides agree on the activation of a Joint Action Plan aiming at ending the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU, in full compliance with EU and international standards.

December 2015: Chapter 17 on economic and monetary policy is opened.

January 2016: The EU-Turkey high-level political dialogue and high-level energy dialogue take place.

March 2016: The EU and Turkey agree on a joint Statement on the basis of the Joint Action Plan of

November 2015.

April 2016: The first EU-Turkey high-level economic dialogue takes place; the first Report on the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 is published.

May 2016: The third Report on progress by Turkey in fulfilling the requirements of its visa liberalisation roadmap is published.

June 2016: Chapter 33 on financial and budgetary provisions is opened.

December 2016: The European Commission adopts a recommendation for opening of negotiations with Turkey on the modernisation of the Customs Union.

May 2017: EU-Turkey Leaders' meeting takes place in Brussels.

November 2017: The first high-level EU-Turkey dialogue on transport takes place.

December 2017: The EU-Turkey high-level economic dialogue takes place.

March 2018: EU-Turkey Leaders' meeting takes place in Varna, Bulgaria.

November 2018: The EU-Turkey high-level political dialogue takes place in Ankara.

December 2018: The 78th EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee takes place in Ankara.

January 2019: The EU-Turkey high-level dialogue on transport takes place in Brussels.

February 2019: The EU-Turkey high-level economic dialogue takes place in Istanbul.

March 2019: The 54th EU-Turkey Association Council takes place in Brussels.

November 2019: The EU adopts a framework for targeted measures against Turkey for its illegal drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean.

December 2019: The 13th steering committee of the Facility for Refugees takes place in Brussels.

February 2020: Revised methodology, presented by the Commission, to drive forward the enlargement process with a stronger political steer and in a more credible, predictable, dynamic way.

March 2020: EU-Turkey Leaders' meeting takes place in Brussels.

July 2020: The EU adopts additional €485 million to continue the EU's two flagship humanitarian programmes supporting refugees in Turkey, on top of the €6 billion of the Facility for Refugees.

For More Information

[Turkey Report 2020](#)

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