

Article – New beginnings: reassessing EU-Turkey relations



On 13 November, MEPs will debate Turkish drilling activities in EU waters in the Eastern Mediterranean. Although this is far from the only time that the Parliament raises concerns, the EU and Turkey do enjoy close links in many areas.

From trade to Nato, the EU and Turkey have enjoyed a productive relationship in many domains for decades. However, recently relations have turned frosty as concerns mount over Turkey's military intervention in Syria as well as the rule of law and the state of democracy in the country with media outlets being closed and journalists being jailed.

These developments are all the more reason for MEPs to take another look at how the EU and Turkey are working together. Read on for an overview of the state of play on various aspects of EU-Turkey relations.

EU membership: suspension of accession talks?

Turkey has been an associate member of the European Economic Community since 1963 and applied to join in 1987. It was recognised as a candidate for EU membership in 1999, but negotiations didn't start until 2005. Even after that not much progress was made. Only 16 out of 35 chapters have been opened and only one closed. After The Turkish government's crackdown following the failed coup d'état on 15 July 2016 negotiations effectively ended and no new chapters have been opened since then.

In November 2016 MEPs adopted a [resolution](#) asking for the negotiations to be suspended while repression continues in Turkey. They repeated their call for suspension in a [resolution](#) adopted in July 2017 due to continuing concerns about the human rights situation. Although these resolutions are not binding, they send out an important signal.

MEPs regularly debate the situation in the country. For example, In February 2018 they discussed the human rights in Turkey as well as the country's military operation in Afrin, Syria. That same month they also adopted a [resolution calling on Turkey to lift the state of emergency](#).

[Press release – MEPs condemn criminalisation of sex education in Poland](#)



In the text adopted by 471 votes in favour, 128 against and 57 abstentions, MEPs criticise a draft law that seeks to make the provision of sex education to minors a crime in Poland. This initiative to amend a Polish law against paedophilia threatens teachers with up to three years in prison and increasing this penalty to five years has been proposed.

The European Parliament condemns the shift in Poland towards misinforming young people, and stigmatising and banning sexuality in education. It calls on the Polish Parliament to refrain from adopting the bill, which follows recent attempts to limit sexual and reproductive rights in Poland, including the right to abortion.

Protect young people from abuse through better education

The resolution encourages all EU countries to provide comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education in schools. MEPs stress that lack of information and education about sex and sexuality puts the safety and wellbeing of young people at risk and makes them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, abuse and violence, including online harassment.

Teaching young people about gender equality, consent and mutual respect can help to prevent and combat gender stereotypes, homophobia, transphobia and gender-based violence, say MEPs.

Recognising the important role of civil society in providing sex education, MEPs call for these organisations to be adequately funded at EU level, be it through the 2021 – 2027 Rights and Values programme or other EU pilot projects. They also call on the Council to address the Polish draft law in the [Article 7 \(1\)](#) related hearings.

[Press release – Parliament backs €1.6 million to help former workers of Carrefour Belgium](#)



The measure, co-financed by the [European Globalisation Adjustment Fund](#) (EGF) would help the 400 workers find new jobs by providing them with career guidance, job training, entrepreneurship advice and contributions towards business start-up.

In addition, the measure will also provide support for up to 330 unemployed young people who are under the age of 25 and are not currently enrolled in education or training.

The total estimated funding amounts to €2.7 million, of which the EGF would provide 60% (€1.6 million).

The [draft report](#) by [José Manuel Fernandes](#) (EPP, PT), recommending that Parliament approve the aid, was passed by 558 votes to 63, and 43 abstentions.

Next steps

To take effect, the aid has yet to be approved by the Council, which is still discussing it, as not all member states have agreed on the measure up to now.

Background

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) contributes to packages of tailor-made services to help redundant workers find new jobs. Its annual ceiling is €150 million.

According to the Belgian Federation for Commerce and Services, 67% of Belgian consumers shopped online in 2018 – up from 46% in 2012. Overall, 39% of consumers say they will shop more online in 2019 than in the previous year. [More information in the Commission proposal.](#)

[Press release – Wolfgang Schäuble: “Without European unification, there would be no German unity”](#)



The President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli, paid tribute to courageous European citizens “who peacefully, without any violence, but through the strength of their own will alone, were able to overcome the yoke to which they had been subjected for decades.”

He warned, however, that “unfortunately, European democracy, and the values and principles on which it is based, is not irreversible. It requires the commitment and determination of all of us to defend them.” (...) “As a witness of those extraordinary days in Berlin, I cannot help but look with great concern, at the return, in Europe, of ghosts we thought were dead and buried under the weight of history”, he added, deploring the resurgence of anti-Semitism and on the anniversary of the Paris attacks, remembering the lives lost four years ago. ([Read the full speech](#))

The President of the German Parliament, Wolfgang Schäuble, said: “Without European unification, without the desire of Europeans to grow together in East and West, there would be no German unity.” Germans will “never forget” the trust they received that made reunification possible, “despite the wounds that the Second World War, unleashed by Germany, had left on the continent”, Schäuble said.

He also warned that European values and freedom do not spread unopposed and added: “The rules-based international order is under pressure – truth no longer counts and national egoism prevails. However, the most pressing questions – feeding the world, migration, climate change and security – can only be answered globally. (...) We must overcome small-mindedness, selfishness and fear.”

A round of political group speakers and representatives from Commission and Council then wrapped up the formal sitting.

Click on the following links to watch the speeches:

Opening remarks by [David SASSOLI](#), EP President

Address by [Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE](#), President of the German Bundestag

One round of [political group speakers](#)

Statements by [Frans TIMMERMANS](#), First Vice-President of the EC and by [Tytti TUPPURAINEN](#), Finnish Minister of the European Affairs, on behalf of the [Council](#)

[Press release – Opening of November I plenary session: debates on Chile, EU steel industry added](#)



Changes to the agenda

Wednesday

The debate on Children's Rights is moved up, as the first item.

The debate on the "Situation in Bolivia" will be wound up with a resolution, to be voted on in November II.

A debate on the "Situation in Chile" has been added, as the fourth item after the debate on the situation in Bolivia.

A Commission statement on the "EU steel sector: how to protect domestic workers and productive chain?" has been added, as the second item after the debate on children's rights.

Thursday

The Objection regarding genetically modified oilseed rape T45 is taken out of the votes.

The Legal Affairs Committee has adopted an immunity report on José Manuel Fernandes (EPP, PT) by Ibán García del Blanco (S&D, ES) which will be added to the votes.

Requests by committees to start negotiations with Council and Commission

Decisions by several committees to enter into inter-institutional negotiations (Rule 69c) are published [on the plenary website](#).

If no request for a vote in Parliament on the decision to enter into negotiations is made by midnight on Thursday, the committees may start negotiations.