

Address given by Romano Prodi on Turkey's application for accession (Brussels, 6 October 2004)

Caption: On 6 December 2004, Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, delivers an address to the European Parliament in which he outlines the reasons why the Commission recommends the opening of negotiations with Turkey on accession to the European Union.

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The Commission's Report and Recommendation on Turkey's application (Brussels, 6 October 2004)

Presentation to the European Parliament

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me, together with Günter Verheugen, to present before you the Recommendation and Report on Turkey's application, which the Copenhagen European Council of December 2002 asked the Commission to draw up in readiness for examination by the European Council in December 2004. As Parliament wished, these documents are accompanied by a preliminary appraisal of the main issues arising in connection with the prospect of Turkey's accession, with particular regard to EU policies and the Community budget.

The Commission has just adopted these documents after several exploratory debates on the subject and following a long preparatory period which concludes with today's debate. It is a natural part of our democratic process for us to present these results to you at the same time as we inform the Council.

As you know, the first task allotted to us by the Copenhagen European Council was to draw up a report on the extent to which Turkey meets the Copenhagen political criteria and to put forward a recommendation. However, I should like to stress that it is, of course, the European Council itself - as it made abundantly clear in its December 2002 decision - to decide whether the criteria are being met and whether to open negotiations with Turkey.

The Commission's task was thus to analyse, as objectively and precisely as possible, Turkey's state of progress with regard to these criteria, and to draw up a recommendation to the Council on the basis of this analysis and any other relevant factors, including the impact study requested by Parliament.

The Commission's response today is YES. That is to say, its response as regards compliance with the criteria is **positive**, and it **recommends opening negotiations**.

However, it is a **QUALIFIED YES** that is accompanied by a large number of recommendations on following up and monitoring the situation in Turkey, and some specific recommendations on the conduct of negotiations.

I want to draw your attention to these two aspects, which are inseparably linked as far as we are concerned. In all sincerity, I appeal to the European public, Parliament, the Council, and to our Turkish partners – the people of Turkey and the Turkish Government – not to separate these two aspects: **on the one hand our response, which is positive overall, and on the other the provisos** that form the essential key to the success of the whole process of integrating Turkey into the European Union.

How has the Commission come up with this response?

Firstly, as regards **Turkey's compliance with the Copenhagen criteria**, the Commission has, as I have already noted, tried to present as objective and precise a picture as possible. Nothing has been concealed, covered up or distorted, neither the positive nor the negative aspects. On the positive side, the whole of Turkish society has been committed to a very far-reaching reform process, particularly over the last few years. In short, as regards the essential documents on the organisation of democracy in Turkey – the Constitution itself, all the internal laws and Turkey's accession to the various international conventions, whose primacy over its domestic laws it now recognises – Turkey has reached the level required by European standards in such matters – or will do so once the new Criminal Code recently adopted by its Parliament enters into force.

All these instruments are already having a strong impact on public life and behaviour in Turkey. Two examples are the abolition of the death penalty and the recent review of Leila Zana's trial and her release.

However, much remains to be done to implement these texts in full and to bring actual reality in Turkey closer to practices in the countries of the European Union. The report draws attention to the situation as regards torture, women's rights, trade union rights, religious freedom and relations between civil and military authorities. A great deal has been achieved in these areas and progress is clearly visible – especially over the last few years. Nonetheless, much remains to be done.

This accounts for our position, which is positive, but at the same time cautious. Looking at today's snapshot, we have to admit there are still some blurred areas. If we consider the long-term picture, however, we see an increasingly active Turkish civil society and institutions that clearly project their desire to move towards our democratic values and standards and which are, indeed, making rapid progress in this direction. This is what prompts us to say YES. But at the same time, we have to ensure that these developments really are irreversible and that they will be pursued to completion. We must take the time needed to make sure that all the important reforms adopted become day-to-day reality for Turkish citizens, both men and women. And we must also tell our Turkish partners clearly and calmly that any breakdown in this progress towards democracy, human rights, fundamental rights and the rule of law as practised in the European Union will automatically bring negotiations to a halt.

To take an entirely different angle, our **impact study** indicates that the overall balance is positive. Taking all the relevant factors into account, we believe that Turkey's accession to the EU may make a positive contribution to the Union. However, the country's size, geographical position and traditions as a regional power, its defence capacity, population and demographic growth, its current level of development, the disparities between its regions, its infrastructure and the size of its rural and farming population call for profound reflection and clear precautions in conducting accession negotiations, so as to prevent Turkey's integration from weakening the structure we have been building for over 50 years.

The impact study we are presenting today is modest in its claims. It does not seek to be exhaustive or to predict the future while essential parameters such as economic growth in Turkey and the Union remain uncertain. Nonetheless, it does already draw attention to various sectors that will require lengthy periods of preparation and adjustment in Turkey's policies, notably rural and farming policy. Long transition periods will be needed, and sometimes, as with the free movement of persons, permanent safeguard clauses could prove necessary.

An estimate has been made of the impact of Turkey's accession on the budget. Bearing in mind all the methodological precautions that are needed when it comes to interpreting such figures, which depend on parameters that are, as I said, uncertain, the main political lesson to be drawn from this estimate is that Turkish integration cannot be included in the 2007-2013 budgetary perspective on which negotiations have started on the basis of proposals put forward by the Commission some months ago. This means that negotiations on the chapters of the Turkish accession treaty that have financial implications can only be started on the basis of the financial perspective for the following period. This is consistent with the prudent pace of negotiations to which I referred earlier.

Finally, as with all negotiation processes, particularly those that are as complex as our study indicates, we must stress that the outcome is not a foregone conclusion. There are risks that we must take on board, and that we also ask Turkey to take on board. However, we cannot imagine a future for Europe in which Turkey is not firmly anchored.

Honourable Members, this is the main burden of the message I wanted to convey to you today on behalf of the Commission, to which Günter Verheugen will add further details. We are ready to reply to all your questions, but firstly I would like to conclude by addressing myself to Turkey and then, through you, to the European public.

I want to send a message of confidence to Turkey, its people and its government. In responding positively today, the Commission is acknowledging your historic aspiration, in which Atatürk stands as a landmark, to share fully in the destiny and values of Europe. Likewise, it acknowledges the extent of the efforts made over the last few years to translate this aspiration into the organisation and operation of your democracy.

Nonetheless, much ground remains to be covered before this objective can be fully attained, and I appeal to you to show the same determination in pursuing further reforms and wisely conducting an accession process which, like all the others, will display both periods of progress and moments of tension and unavoidable difficulties.

I want to call on the European public to demonstrate equal perseverance. A Europe with self-confidence and a Constitution, strong institutions and well-established policies, which is in the process of recovering economic growth and is underpinned by its model of peace, prosperity and solidarity, has nothing to fear from Turkey's accession. The integration of Turkey is only one of the many challenges facing us. The biggest of these challenges are internal ones. We must also consider the opportunities that Turkey's integration will bring us in terms of growth and prosperity. We must, above all, bear in mind the message of the founding fathers of our Europe and the project of disseminating the values of peace, security, democracy and cooperation throughout our continent and among our peoples and nations.