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Turkey's risk, Europe's role

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Two of the four political parties in the Turkish parliament are now facing cases in the constitutional court, led [1] by the chief prosecutor of the court of appeals, to declare them illegal. If these cases are found to have merit, then half of the Turkish electorate (as in the general election of July 2007) has voted for political parties which are a grave threat to the democratic order. If the cases are not merited, then there is a problem [2] with the highest prosecutor of the land seeking such grave measures, and the judiciary may be in need of an overhaul.

Three months ago, we declared that as a group of European citizens who are committed to a political Europe and a democratic Turkey, we would follow European Union-Turkey relations closely (see "Turkey and a new vision for Europe [2]" (12 December 2007)). In this respect, recent events have given us grave concern.

Either way, these developments put at risk Turkey's compliance with the "Copenhagen criteria [3]" which expect European Union candidate states to achieve stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law. Furthermore, the debates of February-March 2008 have triggered additional doubts whether Turkey has achieved a minimally sustainable *modus vivendi* among different lifestyles.

We call on the leaders of the government and the opposition to reverse these troubling trends. The governing *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* (Justice & Development Party / AKP) is said to be considering [4] a "surgical" constitutional amendment to make the disbandment of a political party difficult. That would be a mistake, as the AKP promised a liberal European constitution before the July 2007 elections, but has repeatedly failed to take action. Despite repeated promises, Article 301 of the penal code has also not been reformed [5]. A comprehensive constitutional reform, not surgical and selective amendments, is overdue.

We are also deeply disappointed that the main opposition party, the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party / CHP), has failed to articulate a coherent EU perspective for Turkey, and has not challenged the government to be more energetic on EU reforms. We fail to understand this inaction and lack of commitment on the part of the opposition. In the past, several countries have overcome deep societal schisms through a grand consensus on their European vocation. If the government and opposition do not do the same in Turkey, history will not look on them kindly.

There is a vital role for the European Union in all this. The EU now needs to redouble its efforts [6] to state unequivocally that Turkey, if and when it completes its reforms, will be welcomed into the union. In December

This statement follows the founding document of a group of European citizens published in **openDemocracy**:

"Turkey and a new vision for Europe [0]" (12 December 2007):

"We are a group of European citizens who are disturbed both by the strength of prejudice in the European Union debate on Turkey's accession, and by setbacks to the reform process in Turkey. We are committed to the success of the European Union as a political project. We also see the urgency of dismantling the remnants of authoritarianism in Turkey. We believe that these two goals are interconnected and that the credible prospect of Turkish membership of the European Union is the best way to achieve them. This, however, requires a different public debate..."

2007, we argued that the credible prospect of EU membership was the best way to achieve a democratic and reformed Turkey which was in European interest. We now feel more strongly than ever that this is the case.

(signed)

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[1]

<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/5CCBAE17-700B-4066-BB3D-5213CAA008FE.htm>

[2] <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-slams-turkish-court-decision-hear-akp-ban/article-171240>

[3] http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm

[4] <http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5jYK6mGNhXuWpP8gBCKuni-W6AG4QD8VOJ9S00>

[5] <http://www.englishpen.org/writersinprison/bulletins/turkeyarticle301/>

[6] <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-turkey-relations/article-129678>



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