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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S REPORT ON TÜRKİYE IN 2022 IS NOT SURPRISING ONCE AGAIN

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The European Parliaments (EP) annual Türkiye Report, which is an advisory document, was adopted by the Plenary of the Parliament on September 13, 2023.

Shortly before the 2022 Türkiye Report was adopted by the EP, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, in her State of the Union speech, stated that on enlargement if we want to be credible, we need to talk about a timetable[1]. Speaking about the importance of enlargement, von der Leyen also stated that it cannot be expected to change the treaties to facilitate enlargement. In her speech, von der Leyen emphasized that the seriousness of institutions in the world depends on the number of members and said: In a world where size and weight matter, EU enlargement is clearly in Europes strategic interest[2]. On this occasion, she used the term Western Balkans, which was carefully chosen to exclude Türkiye, and stated that five countries in this region are candidates for EU membership and that negotiations have been conducted with some of them for about ten years. The expression ten years here is important. Von der Leyen considered this period as long. Considering how long Türkiyes EU accession process has been on the agenda, her statement on the timeframe was far from convincing. In this context, the EU is expected to recommend Ukraine and Moldova to start accession negotiations in the fall.

Immediately after the speech of European Commission President von der Leyen, the 2022 Türkiye Report was adopted by the EP Plenary. The report emphasized that Türkiyes geography has become a challenging region after the Ukraine-Russia war. In such a complex region, Türkiyes key position allows it to play an instrumental and strategic role. It was also underlined that Türkiye was the only facilitator accepted by both Ukraine and Russia and played an active role in reaching agreement on the vital Black Sea Grain Initiative[3]. The grain crisis was saved from becoming a major problem for the world food industry by means of Türkiyes constructive stance. Our geography is not only complex in terms of Ukraine-Russia relations. The Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, and especially the fight against the recent unjust treatment of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) citizens by the United Nations (UN) are also topical issues. However, the statements in the EP report on this issue, as emphasized in the statement of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reflected the one-sided views of certain circles, which were detached from

historical and legal facts. In this context, it would be appropriate to point out that Türkiye also constitutes the way the allegations of genocide in the South Caucasus and Karabakh, and that the EUs Eurasian connection passes through Türkiye.

While Türkiye was commended in the report regarding the subject of grain, it was emphasized that Türkiye decided not to comply with the EU sanctions against Russia; Türkiyes foreign policy compliance with the EUs common foreign and security policy statements declined from 14% to 7% between 2021 and 2022, by far the lowest level among all enlargement countries. The almost doubling of trade between Türkiye and Russia since the EU imposed sanctions on Russia was also mentioned in the EP report. Each countrys foreign policy towards its neighbors varies. Türkiye has made a contribution to solving the grain crisis, which is a global crisis, not only regionally but also globally. Reducing the percentage of compliance to dramatic levels on the basis of relations between Türkiye and Russia is an asymmetric decision.

Almost every topic is covered in the EP Türkiye Report. The most striking parts are included in the general evaluation. In the twentieth article of the general assessments, a general summary of the EU and Türkiyes accession process draws attention[4]. According to this article, concludes that the Turkish Government has no interest in closing the persistent and growing gap between Türkiye and the EU on values and standards, as it has shown, for the past few years, a clear lack of political will to carry out the necessary reforms, in particular regarding the rule of law, fundamental rights and the protection and inclusion of all ethnic, religious and sexual minorities; concludes, further, that the Turkish Government has not shown any interest in respecting and upholding the Copenhagen criteria and in aligning itself with EU policies and objectives[5].

Regarding the visa exemption, six criteria that Türkiye has to fulfill were mentioned and it was expressed that we deeply regret that the Turkish authorities have not taken the necessary steps to comply with the six known criteria and that we deeply regret the continuous attempts to blame the EU for the lack of progress in this file. The European Parliaments reports and related resolutions summarize the situation, even if they are not binding on the EU[6].

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also issued a harsh statement on the issue. The Ministry criticized different pursuits being brought to the agenda instead of the EU accession negotiations process, and emphasized that unilateralism on the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus issues is incompatible with legal realities. It is clear that the Customs Union update and visa liberalization will require contributions from both sides to reach a quick solution. It was reminded that Türkiye has a significant potential in solving regional and global problems, and it was underlined that this can only be realized by having a visionary perspective[7].

While it is not expected that the EP Plenary 2022 Türkiye Report will have an extremely positive approach due to the internal structure of the EU, it also reveals that double standards are applied towards Türkiye. Although it is stated that it is credible that candidate countries should be given a date, Türkiye has not been given a date for decades. By establishing a relationship with Türkiye outside the Union, Türkiye is both

prevented from entering the Union and expected to fulfill all the wishes of the EU and the EU institutions even if it is not a part of the Union. What should be done, however, is to work together with the EU to remove the obstacles. Supporting Türkiyes contributions to the region and global politics can contribute to regional and global stability and increase the EUs global influence.

*Photograph: https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/5-soruda-avrupa-parlamentosu-secimleri-414473.html

[1] Leyenden genişleme mesajı: İnandırıcı olmak istiyorsak bir takvimden bahsetmeliyiz, *EuroNews*, 13 September 2023, https://tr.euronews.com/2023/09/13/leyenden-genisleme-mesaji-inandirici-olmak-istiyorsak-bir-takvimden-bahsetmeliyiz.

[2] EU must prepare to grow to more than 30 members: Von der Leyen, *Al Jazeera*, 13 September 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/13/eu-must-prepare-to-grow-to-more-than-30-members-von-der-leyen.

[3] Report on the 2022 Commission Report on Türkiye, *European Parliament*, europarl.europa.eu, 13 September 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0247_EN.html.

[4] Selim Yenel, Batı Cephesinde Yine Yeni Bir Şey Yok, *GİF*, 14 September 2023, https://www.gif.org.tr/files/gif-bilgi-notu-bati-cephesinde-yine-yeni-bir-sey-yok.pdf.

[5] Report on the 2022 Commission Report on Türkiye, *European Parliament*, europarl.europa.eu, 13 September 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0247_EN.html.

[6] Selim Yenel, https://www.gif.org.tr/files/gif-bilgi-notu-bati-cephesinde-yine-yeni-bir-sey-yok.pdf.

[7] No: 224, 13 September 2023, Press Release regarding the European Parliaments 2022 Report on Türkiye, *mfa.gov.tr*, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-224_-avrupa-parlamentosu-nun-2022-turkiye-raporu-hk.en.mfa.

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