

EU delivers withering report on Turkey

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Opinion

Fundamental European values related to human rights and the rule of law are being ignored, warns Renate Sommer.



Earlier this week, the European Commission presented its annual report on Turkey. For the first time the lack of progress on human rights and the rule of law were specifically highlighted.

For years the Turkey's EU progress reports have been de facto "Regress Reports". Given the desolate situation in Turkey the Commission finally calls it an annual report on the country's accession capability. Positive developments are hardly visible - on the contrary: For the first time the report openly criticises serious human rights failures and backsliding on the rule of law. Fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression, have been severely restricted.

The wave of criminal proceedings against journalists, writers and social media users as well as changes to the internet law, which are not in line with European standards, have further strengthened the power of the government, which can now block content at its own discretion and without a court order. This means that fundamental European values are being ignored.

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The Commission's report is a shocking testimonial for Turkey. Reform has come to a halt and for several years now, Ankara has been shifting away from trying to achieve the EU's membership eligibility rules, the so-called 'Copenhagen Criteria'. The report also sharply criticises the passing of new laws such as the new security law which massively extends the rights of the police to arrest people, obtain search warrants and use weapons, in direct contradiction with European standards.

Furthermore, the Commission does not only criticise the lack of free speech, but also the adoption of laws restricting freedom of assembly and the judicial system. The Turkish government's attack against 'alleged' parallel structures' within state institutions led to illegal infringements in the legal system. Judges and lawyers have been arrested and prosecutors have been deprived of their mandate in several cases.

The fight against corruption has not only stopped, but policy makers even try to exert influence on ongoing investigations. Despite these serious shortcomings the Commission's recommendation to open new negotiation chapters is incomprehensible.

President Erdoğan will no-doubt 'sell' this as a successful vindication of his policies. Already as the refugee crisis unfolds, he is acting as a saviour, using the situation to exert pressure on the European Union.

However, there should be no reduction on EU accession rules. Our fundamental European values should not be negotiable.

About the author

Renate Sommer (DE) is Parliament's EPP group standing rapporteur on Turkey

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