

Kati Piri: EU must freeze accession talks with Turkey

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Opinion

The EU must send a strong signal to the Turkish government, says Kati Piri.



Kati Piri | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

Parliament's rapporteur on Turkey has called for EU accession talks with Ankara to be frozen, following growing concerns about the rule of law and democracy in the country.

In calling for a temporary freeze on talks, which should include refusing to open any new negotiating chapters, Kati Piri outlines what she calls a "witch hunt" by the ruling Turkish regime.

This, she says, includes the detention of 10 Turkish opposition MPs, the jailing 142 of journalists critical to the ruling government and the imprisonment of 28 mayors in south east Turkey.

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"Turkey has crossed the line of what is acceptable for an EU candidate country," she tells this website. "It is not just about one event but a series of events stretching back for the last three years."

The Dutch Socialist member, who is drafting a parliamentary report on Turkey, was supposed to visit the country last week as part of a two-member delegation, with foreign affairs committee Chair Elmar Brok, but the visit was called off by the assembly's President Martin Schulz after the Turkish government specifically objected to her attendance.

"The Turkish government said I was not welcome in Turkey. This is probably because of my past statements about the dire human rights situation. It is disappointing, not least because this was a genuine effort to keep the dialogue open."

The cancellation came soon after publication of the European Commission's annual Turkey report, which Piri says, "reflects the dire situation and the serious backlash" of the rule of law in the country.

Her comments come amid a deepening rift between Turkey and the European Parliament and ahead of an expected debate on Turkey during next week's Strasbourg plenary.

"For the last three years," she says, "Turkey has been drifting away more and more from European values such as the respect for human rights and media freedom. While the heinous coup attempt on 15 July needs to be strongly condemned and its perpetrators brought to justice, we see that the state of emergency is being used to further suppress any critical voices left."

Piri, whose Turkey report will be finalised in January, adds, "Almost all critical media outlets have been closed and Turkey is again the world's top jailer of journalists; more than 100,000 people have been dismissed and 35,000 arrested without due process - among them a third of all judges and prosecutors.

"Elected mayors are being replaced by appointed trustees and 10 MPs have been jailed for using their freedom of expression. While I remain committed to keeping Turkey anchored to the EU, I also believe that we should draw political consequences from the current situation.

"The government in Ankara is shutting the door to the European Union with its actions. In reaction, the EU has to temporarily freeze the accession talks until the Turkish government returns to the path of respect for the rule of law and human rights."

She says, "I am afraid we have come to the point where the EU needs to send a strong signal to the Turkish government. We have to say that what is going on there is not acceptable. This is also necessary for the EU to retain a credible foreign policy."

Piri insists that she is not advocating to formally stop the talks - something some other groups in the Parliament called for last week - saying that "it is important" to keep up a dialogue with the Erdogan regime, even if talks about accession are at this moment not credible.

She also makes a distinction between the migration deal struck between the EU and Turkey and accession talks, adding, "It is Europe that has much work to do - more than Turkey - on this and it is stupid to connect the two issues or put them in the same basket.

"So far Turkey has, in fact, provided a reliable partner in handling the migration crisis so it is perfectly ok to continue dealing with them on this issue."

She adds, "I hope that the EU leaders in December will tell Turkey that there will be political consequences if such events continue. Reintroduction of the death penalty is an absolute red line. If these things were happening in another candidate country, no one would find it acceptable and this is no different."

Looking to the near future, she is doubtful about Turkey's EU credentials, saying, "Let's put it like this. I do not think Turkey will become an EU member while I remain an MEP. But is in both the EU's and Turkey's interest to keep the country anchored to the EU. That does, however require also strong commitment by the Turkish government."

About the author

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