

## Turkey: 2019 and 2020 country reports

Turkey's relations with the European Communities/Union date back to 1959, with milestones including the Ankara Association Agreement (1963) and Customs Union (1995). Turkey is a key strategic partner of the EU on issues such as migration, security, counter-terrorism and trade. However, following democratic backsliding, in June 2018 the Council of the EU decided to freeze accession negotiations. During its May 2021 plenary session, the European Parliament is due to debate a resolution on the Commission's latest country reports on Turkey.

### Background

Despite being a candidate for EU membership, Turkey has increasingly chosen to distance itself from European values and standards. The concentration of political power in the hands of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and backsliding in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights since the attempted coup in 2016, have strained relations with the EU and its Member States. Ankara's aggressive moves in the [eastern Mediterranean](#) are a further source of tensions, with unauthorised drilling in Cypriot waters, threatening naval exercises and hostile rhetoric towards Greece and Cyprus. Furthermore, there has been no progress on normalising bilateral relations with Cyprus. Tensions in the eastern Mediterranean subsided in 2021 after cessation of these activities, allowing the EU to re-engage with Ankara – subject to strong conditionality – on important areas of cooperation including [modernisation of the Customs Union](#), the relaunch of high-level dialogues and people-to-people contacts, and cooperation on migration management, in line with the 2016 [EU-Turkey Statement](#). Accession talks began in 2005. So far 16 negotiation chapters out of 35 have been opened, and only one has been provisionally closed. Nevertheless, the EU has adhered to the decision of the [Council of the EU](#) of 26 June 2018 that ruled out the opening of any new chapter. Accession talks have therefore come to a standstill. The European Commission did not mention Turkey in its February 2020 [communication](#) on the accession process.

### European Commission reports (2019 and 2020)

Despite the problems highlighted in its [2019](#) and [2020](#) reports, the Commission expressed in its March 2021 [joint communication](#) (with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) on EU-Turkey relations the wish for a 'more positive agenda', following recent de-escalation in the eastern Mediterranean. The March 2021 [European Council meeting](#) called on the Council to evaluate progress in EU-Turkey relations in June 2021. Regarding bilateral financial assistance, the EU strongly reduced funding from its Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), with €168.2 million allocated to Turkey in 2020, compared to €3.5 billion under IPA II in 2014-2020. Assistance now mainly covers actions related to fundamental rights, education and support to civil society. Turkey has also received EU aid of approximately €6 billion under the [EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#) launched in 2016 and [extended](#) until 2022.

### European Parliament position

On 13 April 2021, Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) adopted its [motion for a resolution](#) on the Commission's reports. It calls on Turkey to credibly demonstrate the sincerity of its commitment to closer relations with the EU. It stresses that modernisation of the Customs Union could be beneficial for both parties, and would keep Turkey economically and normatively anchored to the EU. Rule of law, democratic values and women's rights remain main concerns. It criticises Turkey's [withdrawal](#) from the Council of Europe 'Istanbul Convention' (on preventing violence against women) announced in March 2021. More positively, Turkey is hosting some 4 million [refugees](#). In 2021, Parliament initiated political evaluation of the refugee support programmes within the EU Trust Funds (EUTFs).

Own-initiative report: [2019/2176\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Nacho Sánchez Amor (S&D, Spain).

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