



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENLARGEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

A - Strategy and Turkey
A.5 - Turkey

Brussels,

Dear madame and sirs,

Thank you for your email of 31 July 2020 addressed to the EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in which you expressed your concerns over Turkey's international and domestic political developments, and its relations with the EU and Member States. I have been asked to reply.

EU-Turkey relations remain under strain following worrying developments affecting the EU's interests, in particular in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The EU has repeatedly underlined that delimitation of exclusive economic zones and the continental shelf should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation in good faith. Regrettably, escalating unilateral actions by Turkey, in particular in the Eastern Mediterranean, go in the opposite direction, run counter to EU interests, to the sovereign rights of EU Member States and to international law, and must come to an end. Turkey should instead respect the Law of the Sea, and in particular the sovereignty of all EU Member States over their territorial sea and their sovereign rights in their maritime zones, including those generated by islands.

As all EU restrictive measures regimes, sanctions are part of a comprehensive approach that also includes diplomatic outreach. Any decision on listings is primarily for the Member States, as listings require unanimity. A number of restrictive measures were adopted in July 2019 and a sanctions regime was adopted in November 2019.¹ Furthermore, legal acts to list two Turkish individuals under the sanctions regime were adopted on 27 February 2020.² Among other measures, the financial cooperation with Turkey under the Instrument of Pre-Accession assistance (IPA II) has been substantially reduced by the EU.³

Escalating tensions in the Mediterranean were again addressed at the Foreign Affairs Council of 13 July 2020, during which the HR/VP was asked to explore further paths that could contribute to lowering tensions and reach understandings on issues that are increasingly stressing EU-Turkey relations. He was furthermore tasked with preparing options on further appropriate measures that could be taken in response to the challenges the EU is

¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/11/11/turkey-s-illegal-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-adopts-framework-for-sanctions/>

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/02/27/turkey-s-illegal-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-eu-puts-two-persons-on-sanctions-list/>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/turkey_en

facing as a result of Turkish actions, including in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴ Options for the evolution of relations will be discussed in the upcoming months.

Regarding Hagia Sophia, the HR/VP underlined in his statement of 10 July 2020⁵ that Hagia Sophia has a strong symbolic, historical and universal value and the Turkish President's decision to place the monument under the management of the Religious Affairs Presidency, is regrettable. This position was further echoed by the Foreign Affairs Council on 13 July 2020. The Commission has followed closely the use of Hagia Sophia over the past years and reported on the issue in its annual reports on Turkey.⁶ The Commission has also stressed on many occasions that Turkey must respect international law and good neighbourly relations and must normalise relations with all EU Member States. The Commission remains in close contact with UNESCO on this matter and will keep monitoring the situation and will raise the issue in bilateral contacts with the Turkish authorities.

Regarding your point on refugees in Turkey, as underlined at the meeting of the EU Ministers of Home Affairs, and the meeting of EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs in March 2020, the EU strongly rejects Turkey's use of migration for political purposes.⁷ At his meeting with the Foreign Affairs Minister Çavuşoğlu in Ankara on 6 July 2020, the HR/VP restated the need to focus on the full implementation of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement.⁸ The EU-Turkey Statement⁹ has brought tangible results in terms of managing migratory flows and reduced numbers of lives lost at sea, and has delivered EUR 6 billion support to refugees and host communities in Turkey via the Facility for Refugees in Turkey. It was agreed at a difficult moment and its implementation should continue. As underlined by President Von der Leyen following her meeting with President Erdogan in March 2020, and again by the HR/VP at his meeting with the Turkish Foreign Minister in July 2020, the lines of communication with Turkey remain open and active.¹⁰

If, at any time, you have questions about the European Union, its activities or institutions, we will be happy to assist you.

Yours sincerely,

(e-signed)
Bernard BRUNET
Head of Unit

⁴ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82792/foreign-affairs-council-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-press_en

⁵ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82728/turkey-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-decision-regarding-hagia_en

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-turkey-report.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/03/04/statement-on-the-situation-at-the-eus-external-borders/> and <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/03/06/statement-of-the-foreign-affairs-council-on-syria-and-turkey/>

⁸ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82146/turkey-remarks-hrvp-josep-borrell-press-conference-following-his-meeting-minister-foreign_en

⁹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/pdf>

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_429

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