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NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations

Subject: **Meeting of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)
Strasbourg, 9 December 2013**

- 1. Adoption of agenda**
- 2. Chair's announcements**
- 3. Debriefing by Vice-President Isabelle Durant on the EP delegation to the EU-Myanmar Task Force on 13 - 15 November**

Ms Durant briefed the committee on the outcome of the EP's delegation to Myanmar and announced a full report to come in writing. On democratic reform, she confirmed that things were moving in the right direction and towards democratization. Among the issues for concern, she mentioned land grabbing as one issue raised by local representatives. She mentioned that Aug San Suu Kyi, who wanted a change in the constitution of Myanmar in order to be able to present herself to the elections, but that she had not been very specific on other grounds arguing for a change in the constitution of her country. She noted that she seemed to be evolving from an icon defending human rights to a politician increasingly interested in satisfying her personal political ambitions. She recalled that Myanmar would be chairing ASEAN in 2014 and would thus be playing an increasingly important economic and political role on the international arena. She stated that the EP ought to follow up on those issues and envisage an election observation mission in view of the 2015 elections.

Ms. Jeggle (EPP, DE) supported Ms Durant and expressed disappointment at Ms Aung San Suu Kyi's attitude. She highlighted the issues of food security, agriculture as important. Mr Preda (EPP, RO) remarked that the Task Force on Myanmar was composed of 3 Commissioners, 6 MEPs and over hundred businessmen. He identified the issue of demilitarization of the political system as the most urgent political issue. He considered that Myanmar was still a military regime, noted that the two parliament's chambers were dominated by the military, and recalled that the EU's counterparts at the meeting table had been generals of the army. Ms Lochbihler (Greens, DE) considered that the High Representative's statement did not reflect the concerns expressed by civil society during the mission, in particular on land grabbing, and regretted that the meetings with civil society representatives, which had been very useful, including on human rights issues, had been kept separate from others.

Ms Durant took due note of the request by MEPs to include more fully civil society representatives in the meetings in future missions and to better balance civil society aspects with economic issues.

4. 2013 progress report on Turkey

The Rapporteur Ms. Oomen-Ruijten (EPP, NL) presented her draft report. She said that she could not envisage the EU's future without seeing Turkey at least partly shaping. She therefore considered that the EU ought to invest in its relationship with Turkey through a credible negotiation. She stated that Turkey was a strategic partner to the EU and the Parliament had its share of responsibility in providing an objective assessment of the process with this country. She said that some reforms currently under way in Turkey would have been inconceivable a few years ago, that the EU ought to remain the benchmark for reforms, but that the Parliament had to stress the need for further reform where appropriate. She mentioned the issues of the freedom of expression, freedom of the media and of the press as particularly worrying and referred to the prosecutions and imprisonment of numerous journalists. She further mentioned the polarization in politics as a source of concern and stated that there was a need for reform on the rule of law and for a radical change of mentality in the judiciary. She referred to the talks on visa liberalisation and towards a readmission agreement as particularly sensitive. She finally urged MEPs to refrain from submitting too many amendments that would affect the overall balance of the draft report.

Ms Flautre (Greens, FR) on behalf of the EU-Turkey delegation welcomed the broad political consensus reached on the draft resolution, which she considered a good text, expressed some worries on the political polarisation in view of local elections in Turkey in March, and regretted the lack of political will towards a new constitution. She expressed serious concern at the numerous violations of the freedom of the press, self-censorship practiced by journalists and at the numerous journalists being made redundant. She suggested further issues of EU interest to be better highlighted in the report, notably negotiations with the Kurdish community and Turkish relations with neighbouring countries such as Syria and Iran.

Mr Obiols (S&D, ES) welcomed the overall balance of the draft, which he saw as a good base for discussions, suggested to stress the areas of shared objectives, stressed the need to ensure maximum coherence both at EU and MS level, especially given the context in the region, argued for stronger language on the Kurdish, constitutional and human rights issues and a stronger reference to Syrian refugees.

Mr Duff (ALDE, UK) disagreed with the positive language on constitutional reform, arguing that there was not anything of substance in it. He advocated requiring the next Parliament to undertake a more radical approach and to ask about the plausibility and integrity of the continuing the integration process, and suggested instead to launch a debate on an alternative to accession with a view to a durable, convincing and lasting relationship.

Mr Van Orden (ECR, UK) considered that there had been missed opportunities to solve the Cypriot problem, that the Greek Presidency could provide a new opportunity; that the EU had not fulfilled its obligations towards the northern part of the island, and suggested including stronger language on energy.

Mr Salavrakos (EFD, EL) welcomed a good and balanced draft report, stressed that Turkey was one of the three countries still not to have ratified the law of the sea, expressed worries at Turkish declarations about transforming Agia Sophia, which was part of the world heritage, into a mosque, and at Erdogan's statements questioning the very existence of the republic of Cyprus.

In the lively debate which followed, MEPs partly echoed previous interventions on the need to reassess the relationship with Turkey to make it more effective (Schaake, S&D, NL). Most MEPs mentioned concerns related to Turkey's relations with neighbouring countries, be it Cyprus, Bulgaria, Syria or Middle East countries or its Kurdish and Alevite minorities. Others stressed at the same time its important strategic role in the neighbourhood and the need to strengthen the relationship with this important strategic partner. In particular,

- several MEPs (Theocharous, EPP, CY, Stasser, NI, NL, Koppa, S&D, EL, Sophocleous, S&D, CY, Giannakou, EPP, EL, Papadopoulou, S&D, CY) expressed serious concerns at the Turkish behaviour and statements with regard to Cyprus, with some of them recalling that Turkey was still occupying part of the island and threatening Greece on its EEZ;
- Ms. Lyubcheva (S&D, BG) stated that Turkey was not complying with its commitments towards Bulgaria;
- Mr Stier, EPP, HR referred to Mr Erdogan's recent statements in Vienna and suggested that Turkey should align its external policy with that of the EU;
- M. Belder, EFD, NL referred to Turkey's important role with the Middle East countries and Syria.

M. Kazak, ALDE, BG stressed Turkey's importance as a trade and economic power, advocated granting a status to Turkish Cypriots and argued in favour of opening negotiations on new chapters. So did M. Kacin, ALDE, SI, who stressed the growing strategic importance of Turkey as a consequence of recent events in Ukraine.

The Commission representative welcomed what is considered to be a balanced and forward-looking report, and advocated deepening the relationship with Turkey to promote political reform and democratization in this country. He welcomed the readmission agreement to be signed in December and the submission of the democratization package to the Turkish parliament as positive developments.

The rapporteur stressed that the report could not be too long and had therefore to limit itself to the most important elements.

- Deadline for tabling amendments: **8 January 2014, 12.00**

5. Debriefing by Roberto Gualtieri on the Election Observation Mission to Kosovo for the local elections on 3 November, 17 November and 1 December 2013

Mr Gualtieri reported on the outcome of the Election observation mission and expressed satisfaction at the positive outcome of the process, which had contributed to transform the political landscape.

6. Any other business

7. Next meeting(s)

- 12 December 2013, 8.30 – 10.30 (Strasbourg)