

Tensions between European Parliament and Turkey heat up

Fri, 2020-07-10 22:23

ANKARA: The European Parliament has become increasingly critical about democratic backsliding in Turkey, with calls on Thursday for a complete end to accession negotiations with the country.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) said that Turkey should no longer receive pre-accession funding from the European Union budget as part of its candidacy process and for economic sanctions to be used as a stick against Ankara, which they called an "authoritarian regime."

Although all EU governments would have to vote by a qualified majority to end Turkey's 15-year-long stalled EU accession bid and cut funding programs, the escalating trend of criticism should be seen as a warning.

Last March the European Parliament also called for the suspension of EU accession talks with Turkey, over concerns about the violation of human rights and the rule of law. Ankara rejected the symbolic nonbinding resolution in favor of formally suspending EU accession talks with Turkey as "meaningless."

Its Turkey rapporteur, Nacho Sanchez Amor, criticized the country for showing "constant distancing, underpinned by a lack of trust."

FASTFACT

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"Namely in the accession process, with a huge backsliding in human rights; in the current customs union, while we are quarreling at the World Trade Organization; in the visa liberalization, on which Turkey still has to comply with benchmarks, or in migration where the EU is complying with commitments, but Turkey uses it for putting more pressure," he said.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

While Sanchez Amor emphasized the need for keeping the accession process alive to use as leverage for supporting Turkish society, the head of the

European People's Party Manfred Weber said accession negotiations with Turkey were a historical mistake and talks should be stopped.

Germany's Left Party also called on Brussels to halt its arms exports to Turkey.

Laura Batalla Adam, secretary general of the European Union Turkey Forum, said relations between the two sides had been at their lowest point for several years now.

"The political situation in the country and its estrangement from EU values have been the main cause of concern for Brussels," she told Arab News. "Turkey's increasingly assertive foreign policy today is creating new frictions in the relationship."

Batalla thought that the visit of Josep Borrell, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, to Turkey this week signalled the bloc's willingness to hear Ankara's views on the pressing issues in its region.

"In times like these, dialogue is more important than ever. We need more cooperation rather than confrontation with Turkey," she said. "However, this cooperation needs to be based on values and not only on interests. There is a will from both sides to make this happen but their success will depend on a true commitment," Batalla added.

On Friday, the European Parliament gave the green light to earmark 485 million euros to Turkey for ensuring urgent humanitarian aid to refugees.

The EU had committed 6 billion euros in aid for the refugees being hosted in Turkey under a bilateral deal in March 2016.

However the full amount of aid is expected to be paid by 2025 – another point of friction between Ankara and Brussels. Turkey has accused Brussels of not fulfilling its promises for burden-sharing and for not taking any steps for achieving the pledged visa-free deal for Turkish citizens.

"The EP's 2019 report on Turkey had also called for an end to accession negotiations," Cigdem Nas, secretary general of the Istanbul-based Economic Development Foundation, told Arab News.

"The situation between Turkey and the EU has become even worse since then. In addition to problems related to democracy, rights and the rule of law in Turkey, geopolitical clashes in the Eastern Med, over Syria and Libya have further complicated Turkey-EU relations. The conflictual positions of some member states ... over Turkey's actions in the Eastern Med and Libya have led to a strong urge to counter and limit Turkey's activism in the region."

According to Nas, the recent events and debates in Turkey regarding further constraints on social media, interference in bar associations, and the status of the Hagia Sophia had also created additional concerns about the country's political regime.

“It is no surprise that a majority of MEPs support a suspension or total ending of the accession process. In this regard the general affairs meeting which will be held on July 13 is also quite critical.”

But she believed that Turkey’s hosting of 3.5 million Syrian refugees and holding one of the major transit routes toward the EU would make it hard for the member states to antagonize Ankara by stopping the accession process.

“As for further sanctions, several sanctions have already been decided upon in 2019. The accession process is practically frozen, customs union modernization talks have not started, visa liberalization is at an impasse. The EU does not really have any tools to use in order to put pressure on Turkey.”

Nas said that the use of EU funds might become conditional upon the fulfilment of political criteria.

“Funds could be made available mostly to civil society, refugee and human rights organizations, but not state organs or ministries.”



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Russia and China veto extension of cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria
Turkey-Russia cease-fire negotiations for Libya: Any hope for durability?

Lebanese PM sues American University of Beirut over exit package

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2020-07-10 09:19

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab is suing the American University of Beirut (AUB), where he worked for 35 years as an academic, a spokesman for Diab said, in a dispute over his exit package from the financially struggling institution.

AUB, which has been hit hard by Lebanon's economic meltdown, declined to comment on the case.

Lebanon is grappling with a crisis caused by decades of state corruption and bad governance. A hard currency liquidity crunch has led to an 80% weakening of the local currency since October.

Diab presented his-long planned resignation in January – the month he became prime minister.

"... He asked for an exit package in line with common practices and precedents at AUB. This request was denied ...," the spokesman said.

Diab had "never made any special request for any payments to be made either in foreign currency or into foreign bank accounts. All AUB professors have their pensions paid in U.S. dollars, from a AUB foreign account", the spokesman said.

"What the PM expressed was only what was already stated in the AUB retirement plan regulations and policies."

The private AUB, founded in the 1860s, is alma mater of some of the Arab world's leading figures in politics, medicine, law, science and art. Its president told Reuters in May Lebanon's catastrophic collapse represented one of the biggest challenges in the history of a university which has weathered many crises, including Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war.

The state, which defaulted on its foreign currency debt in March, owes AUB's medical centre – which attracts patients from across the Middle East and Central Asia – more than \$150 million in arrears, AUB President Fadlo Khuri said.



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AUB's saga of survival in the limelight as Lebanon battles financial, coronavirus crises
AUB president says liberal Arab thought at risk amid Lebanon's coronavirus, financial crises

[Turkey-Russia cease-fire negotiations for Libya: Any hope for durability?](#)

Thu, 2020-07-09 20:46

ANKARA: As Kremlin announced the ongoing consultations between Turkey and Russia for an immediate cease-fire deal for the longstanding Libyan conflict, the feasibility of such an agreement is being questioned more and more as the two countries support opposing sides.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the Libyan National Army (LNA), backed by Russia and led by eastern Libyan Commander Khalifa Haftar, is willing to sign a cease-fire document. Russia expects Ankara to convince the Government of National Accord (GNA) to proceed in the same way.

The ministerial-level talks have been ongoing for a while, with some

postponements last month over the technical disagreements.

Samuel Ramani, a Middle East analyst at the University of Oxford, is skeptical about a cease-fire working on the ground.

“The Libyan war is much more complicated than a mere Russia-Turkey proxy war, even though it is often oversimplified to this binary in Western media outlets. The UAE and Egypt will be much more hesitant than Russia about signing a peace deal with Turkey and might not view such as a ceasefire as credible,” he told Arab News.

According to Ramani, Haftar’s military actions in Libya could continue.

“Alternatively, Turkey has powerful interests against a cease-fire at this time and has also escalated tensions with France. Moreover, when Russia says the LNA is on board, there is a question as to whether he means Libyan House of Representatives Chief Aguila Saleh, who might be, or Haftar,” Ramani said.

Experts insist that the spheres of influence in Libya should be clearly outlined to prevent another failed cease-fire.

Regarding the red lines for a cease-fire, Ramani thinks that freezing the conflict areas in and around LNA-held Sirte and Jufra is an immediate priority.

Sirte bears strategic importance as it lies close to key energy export terminals on the Mediterranean shores, while Jufra hosts a strategic military base where Russian aircraft and Wagner mercenaries are reportedly located.

“An escalation from either side in these areas would be a red line. Also, there is a need for assurances from both sides that they won’t restart a broader war if they perceive their rivals as being weak,” Ramani said.

Aydin Sezer, an expert on Turkey-Russia relations, thinks that Russia is concerned about the increasing military support that Turkey gives to the GNA, which further escalates tension in the civil war.

“The only priority right now for Russia is to achieve a lasting peace through a sustainable ceasefire agreement. The same goes for France. Both these countries are also set to bring this issue to the UN Security Council. These latest ceasefire negotiations mean Russia wants to keep the diplomacy doors open for both sides,” he told Arab News.

Saturday’s attack targeting the strategic Al-Watiya air base in Libya damaged Turkish air defense systems where Turkey was reportedly planning to establish a permanent presence. The attack also came a couple of hours after Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar visited Libya.

“After that attack, Ankara felt obligated to be much more cautious regarding the fragile dynamics in Libya. The situation on the ground is complicated and time is not on the Turkish side. Therefore, the cease-fire is necessary for Ankara more than ever,” Sezer said.

For Wolfram Lacher, however, senior associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Russia and Turkey may well try to broker a ceasefire and thereby become the two key players in Libya, but it is doubtful whether such a cease-fire could succeed.

“Haftar has more room to maneuver with regard to Russia than Turkey has with regard to the GNA because he can still rely on Egyptian and UAE support. So, he may reject the terms of a Russian-Turkish ceasefire,” Lacher told Arab News.

According to Lacher, other powers – including the US, France, Egypt and the UAE – want to prevent a Russian-Turkish arrangement in Libya and instead want ceasefire talks to take place under the UN auspices.

“This competition over the forum for ceasefire talks will also make any cease-fire initiative more difficult,” he said.

On the other hand, Bill Park, senior lecturer in the Department of Defense Studies at King’s College London, thinks Moscow is uncomfortable with the implications of Turkey’s escalation in Libya.

“Russia wants to demonstrate that there might be limits to what it will tolerate,” he told Arab News. “At this stage, Ankara should be willing to take risks while Russia should meet the challenges for a negotiated agreement and manage the hostility between France and Turkey.”



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Russia working on immediate Libya cease-fire with Turkey Battle looms for key Libyan city Sirte

[Britain calls on Houthis to allow UN access to Yemen's time bomb oil tanker](#)

Thu, 2020-07-09 20:55

LONDON: The UK urged the Houthi militia to allow UN inspectors access to a derelict tanker and remove the oil it contains on Thursday.

FSO Safer has been moored 7 km off the coast of Yemen since 1988 and fell into the hands of the Houthis in March 2015.

The UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office said the 1.14 million barrels of oil onboard could leak into the Red Sea "if nothing is done" and that the tanker is an "environmental disaster waiting to happen."

The FSO Safer is an environmental disaster waiting to happen. If nothing is done, 1.14 million barrels of oil could leak into the Red Sea. Houthi Authorities must allow UN inspectors to access the ship and remove the oil. pic.twitter.com/1TKBRk8V7t

– Foreign Office (@foreignoffice) [July 9, 2020](#)

The Houthis have actively prevented international engineers from boarding FSO Safer to carry out essential repairs.

There are fears that the oil it contains will start to seep out as the vessel's condition deteriorates.



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Yemen PM slams Houthis for preventing UN assessment of decaying oil tanker in Red Sea
Seawater seeping into decaying oil tanker off Yemen coast

[Oxfam: Yemen most at risk of virus-related hunger](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-07-09 20:41

LONDON: Yemen and Syria are among the countries most at risk of hunger crises in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new Oxfam report titled "The Hunger Virus: How COVID-19 is Fuelling Hunger in a Hungry World."

Yemen was ranked as the country most at risk of a hunger crisis, with Oxfam saying 15.9 million people, or 53 percent of the population, could face starvation.

The report cited how conflict had damaged the country's infrastructure and its ability to both produce and import food.

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The economic shock to the Gulf caused by COVID-19 and unprecedented slumps in the oil industry also had an impact on Yemen, with financial support through remittances and donations down over 80 percent from neighboring countries in the first four months of 2020, said the report.

It added that food imports to Yemen, which was already importing 90 percent of its food before the pandemic, were down 43 percent in March and 39 percent in April.

In June, the report said, Yemen had discovered more than 900 COVID-19 cases and recorded over 250 deaths, but those figures were likely to be underestimates due to the state of the country's health-care services.



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UN warns Yemen on brink of famine againYemen receives COVID-19 aid as medical sector struggles with virus