



**EU-TURKEY JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**  
**Brussels, 8 September 2020**  
**Statement by the EU-side JCC members**

1. The EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) brings together representatives of organised civil society from the EU and Turkey. It complements other bodies set up within the framework of the Association Agreement between the EU and Turkey and enables civil society organisations from both sides to discuss all bilateral issues, including the monitoring of accession negotiations, and initiate debates on issues of common interest. Its members come from various economic and social interest groups.

2. The EU-Turkey JCC met in Brussels on 8 September 2020 in a hybrid and multi-location set-up due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the meeting, the JCC members discussed the state of EU-Turkey relations and the role of civil society.

3. The keynote addresses by **Margaritis Schinas**, European Commission Vice-President for Promoting the European Way of Life, on *The EU and its neighbours after the pandemic: recovery, resilience and cooperation*, and **Faruk Kaymakci**, Turkey's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs & Director for EU Affairs, on *Re-energising EU-Turkey relations during and post pandemic*, were followed by a general discussion.

4. While the COVID-19 response requires passengers' and workers' confidence to be restored by minimising the risk of infection in cross-border collective passenger transport, the EU-side JCC members express the hope that Turkey will shortly be included in the list of countries for which Member States are to gradually lift temporary travel restrictions on non-essential travel into the EU.

5. The EU-side JCC members express the hope that despite the short-term uncertainties, both the EU and Turkey may emerge stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic as the crisis could provide the required incentive to move towards a new stage of European integration.

6. The EU-side JCC members note with concern the tensions in EU-Turkey relations caused by Turkey's illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, in particular in the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and on Greece's continental shelf. In the mutual interest of both the EU and Turkey, further paths should be explored to decrease tensions, in accordance with international law.

7. The EU-side JCC members encourage all parties to actively restart negotiations on a fair, comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus issue within the framework of the United Nations resolutions and the parameters set out by the UN Secretary-General. They ask all parties to implement the Ankara Protocol for all European Member States and thereby facilitate the opening of additional chapters where negotiations were suspended. They also welcome the decision of the Council of the European Union regarding the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community.

8. The EU-side JCC members stress the importance of maintaining the dialogue between Turkish and EU civil society organisations. They reiterate their commitment to continuing long-term cooperation and underline that civil society organisations can only function in an atmosphere of respect for civil liberties.

9. As part of the dialogue between the EU and Turkey, the EU-side JCC members highlight the need to implement civic and human rights effectively on the basis of the rule of law, an independent judiciary and the full set of fundamental freedoms. They welcome the focus on democracy and the rule of law, including support to civil society and people-to-people contacts, in the funds allocated to Turkey through the EU's pre-accession instrument (IPA).

10. The EU-side JCC members commend the efforts made by Turkey to ensure a smooth reception and adequate living conditions for around four million Syrians and others under temporary protection in Turkey. Equally, they commend the support to refugees in Turkey through the EU Facility for Refugees through which EUR 6 billion was mobilised by the end of 2019. They stress the need for cooperation in order to tackle the migration challenge and its root causes effectively, notwithstanding the obligation of all parties to meet their commitments.

11. In 2019, Turkey remained the sixth largest trading partner of the EU-27, while the EU is by far Turkey's most important trading partner. In the light of this, the EU-side JCC members note with concern the continued protectionist tendency in the Turkish economy. Each party should refrain from introducing additional duties, in order not to deviate from proper enforcement of the EU-Turkey Customs Union Agreement of 1995 and subsequently jeopardise a level playing field between Turkey and the EU.

12. The EU-side JCC members call for the start of negotiations on the modernisation of the Customs Union Agreement, provided that no new barriers to trade are triggered and that the existing ones are revoked. The scope of the bilateral preferential trade relationship should be extended to cover additional economic sectors as well as a sustainability chapter on labour, social and environmental standards.

13. The EU-side JCC members support the visa liberalisation dialogue aimed at progressing towards the elimination of the visa obligation imposed on Turkish citizens travelling to the Schengen area for a short-term stay.

14. As always, the exchanges within the JCC were fruitful and informative to both sides. The Joint Consultative Committee functions as a forum for open exchanges at civil-society level and remains committed to its mandate and to pursuing its dialogue as representatives of organised civil society from both the EU and Turkey.

15. Despite continued efforts by the EU side, it was not possible to agree on a joint declaration. The EESC is the only institution that is still open to dialogue and acts as a bridge between the EU and Turkey. The EU-side members of the JCC are very disappointed that it was not possible to produce a joint declaration.

16. The 40th meeting of the JCC is to take place in Izmir, Turkey, in 2021, and include the presentation and discussion of reports on disaster management.

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