

Press Release

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Turkish President outlines 'sweeping reforms' in Turkey, pledges better implementation

Strasbourg, 03.10.2007 – Turkish President Abdullah Gül, addressing the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly today, said his country was fulfilling its commitment to live up to "the highest standards" of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, outlining a series of reforms to improve gender equality, ban discrimination, ensure freedom of expression, upgrade cultural and religious rights and continue its "zero tolerance" policy on torture. Effective implementation "still poses a few challenges", he said, but pledged the government would give "top priority" to addressing them.

Addressing PACE in his first major speech outside Turkey, Mr Gül said the Council of Europe – of which Turkey was a founding member – played "an essential, if not much publicised, role" in Europe, and had contributed to Turkey's reform process. The European Court of Human Rights was a "unique institution" which had expanded individual liberties in Europe, said Mr Gül, and Turkey supported more effective working methods and additional resources for it. He also called on the EU to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights to eliminate "a large grey area".

Mr Gül also made an appeal for dialogue between cultures and civilisations, pointing to Turkey's "Alliance of Civilisations" initiative, along with Spain, at the UN. "It is time for moderates to be as daring and courageous as extremists," he said, pointing out that Turkey's own experience showed how secular democracy could flourish in a predominantly Muslim society.

On foreign policy, Mr Gül said Turkey remained committed to a political settlement in Cyprus, in line with long-established UN parameters, and said partition of Iraq would be "the worst scenario" for Iraq and its people.

Welcoming Mr Gül, PACE President René van der Linden recalled his many years as a member of the Assembly, declaring: "If the Parliamentary Assembly is a school of democracy, then you are one of our most distinguished alumni."

He congratulated Turkey on the "remarkable progress" it had made, enabling PACE to end its monitoring of the country in 2004, and pointed out that Turkey's democratic maturity had been well expressed during the election process that brought Mr Gül to the presidency. Europe's future depended on relations with Turkey "as a bridge and example to neighbouring countries and regions", he said, stressing the Assembly's full support for the Alliance of Civilisations initiative.

[Link to full speech](#)

[Link to Mr van der Linden's welcoming remarks](#)

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).