

25 Haziran 2013 Salı

The situation in the Middle East

Mr DİŞLİ (Turkey) – I would like to convey my sincere appreciation of the rapporteur's high quality work. The stalemate in negotiations between Israel and Palestine is still worsening the climate in Middle East. It is of the utmost importance, and our duty, to make every effort to keep open the channels of communication.

Turkey has always supported a two-State solution that would create a State of Palestine on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace and security side by side with the State of Israel. We support all efforts for the revival of the peace process and expect our international partners to encourage parties to come back to the negotiation table. We hope that the recent visits by President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry to the region will contribute to the revival of the peace process.

In an era of change and transformation in the Middle East caused by the Arab Spring, the Palestinian question has gained even more significance. Turkey remains a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause. Nevertheless, reconciliation within the Palestinian side is essential for the peace process and for the overall stability of the region. I am pleased to see growing co-ordination with all Palestinian factions recently.

On the other hand, Israel's settlement activities in the occupied areas are a serious obstacle to the resumption of the negotiations. The government should end all settlement activities once and for all and seriously commit itself to respect the established parameters, particularly on the 1967 borders. Above all, Israel must understand that stability and security can only be sustained through a just and comprehensive peace between the parties.

At a time when the world in general and the Middle East in particular are passing through an extremely critical period, Turkey attaches great importance to close dialogue and co-operation with all parties and the international community. We hope to see a positive reflection of our efforts, first and foremost on the Middle East peace process, and we set a great value upon achieving "two democratic and pluralist States".

Ms GÜNDEŞ BAKIR (Turkey) – In a time of change and transformation in the Middle East caused by the Arab Spring, sectarian violence in Iraq 10 years after the Iraq war began and a civil war in Syria that has gone beyond the point of no return, Israeli-Palestinian peace is today more important than ever. But peace is an empty word without justice, and justice delayed is justice denied. The absence of peace and the occupation that began in 1967 continue to deny the Palestinian people their dignity and freedom. This is unacceptable, and, ultimately, it too is unsustainable.

For both Israelis and Palestinians and, indeed, for all the people of the Middle East, it is crucial to end this conflict and bring a just and enduring peace to the Middle East based on two democratic and pluralist States for two peoples based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

I am fully convinced that a just peace can be achieved. However, it needs substantial political leadership from both sides. Unfortunately, Israeli and Palestinian leaders have fallen victim to their own rigid public rhetoric and policies, making it notably difficult to change direction

without losing their political base. A culture of death has emerged which has to be immediately transformed to a culture of life. In order to achieve that, mutual violence must stop. Palestinians should stop launching rockets to Israel from Gaza and Israel should stop all types of military operations against the Gaza strip that have killed a disproportionately high number of Palestinian civilians. Sustainable security against terrorist attacks cannot be achieved through military action, but rather through democracy, freedom, job creation and increasing the welfare of all classes of citizens regardless of their ethnic identity or religion. Israel should also discontinue building new separation walls or settlements in the occupied territories including East Jerusalem.

Israeli Governments' policies have turned Palestinians into people who have nothing to lose and have made its citizens, both Arab and Israeli, more vulnerable to extremist ideologies. And it is this atmosphere in the country which causes the security threats. Violent extremism stems from poverty, from hopelessness. The Palestinians are arbitrarily arrested, detained and transferred to Israeli prisons in violation of international humanitarian law. Their lands are confiscated in the occupied territories, they are denied control over their own natural resources including water, their homes are demolished, they are denied building permits, and their access to their land, their workplace, education, health and other services is hindered.

We have a proverb in Turkish which says "A true friend speaks bitterly." To play the win-lose game in the Middle East is fruitless. Israel needs friends and alliances in the region. The construction of ever more separation walls, which will soon besiege the whole country, is the physical indication of a paranoia. Israel is actually building a prison for itself, which makes it more isolated, politically and physically, from its neighbours and the international community.

Request for the opening of a monitoring procedure in respect of Hungary

Ms GÜNDEŞ BAKIR (Turkey) – I want to express my deep disappointment with the report that we are debating. Hungary has been a collaborative and co-operative member of the European Union and the Council of Europe. The country pursues its foreign policy within the framework of Euro-Atlantic integration and within the context of more progress and active collaboration in this direction.

Before giving this speech, I carefully read the Venice Commission report on Hungary. The report discusses topics such as legislation on the protection of marriage and family, how Hungary deals with its communist past, the recognition of Churches, media access for political parties, autonomy of institutions of higher education, financial support to students and homelessness. I can assure you that nothing that I found in the report constitutes strong evidence to support the opening of a monitoring procedure for Hungary.

Legislation on marriage and the family is within the margin of appreciation of the Hungarian authorities. Regarding Hungary's communist past, I firmly believe that every democratic country is free to require a minimum amount of loyalty from its citizens. Regarding the recognition of Churches, the exercise of freedom of religion is not constrained by law in Hungary and any organisation can call itself a Church. Regarding the freedom of the media, Internet, print media and cinema, political advertising is not constrained by law. Political propaganda on posters, fliers and billboards remains free. Commercial radio and television political talk shows, news programmes and analysis are by no means restricted.

On homelessness, the new implementing legislative framework creates a system that is substantially different from that annulled by the constitutional court. Paragraph 1 calls for the provision of decent housing for all, and paragraph 2 obliges central and local government to co-operate with a view to creating necessary conditions to provide shelter for all homeless persons. The governmental responsibility for the finances of state-run universities is merely a consequence of the fact that those institutions are financed from the State budget. The new rules have nothing to do with the autonomy of higher education.

The fourth amendment did address matters that had previously been judged by the constitutional court, but none of the new provisions can be considered as a reintroduction of legal rules that had been annulled. I emphasise the important distinction between overruling the constitutional court's decisions, and re-examining the subject matter of certain decisions. There is absolutely no evidence that the Hungarian Government systematically overruled previous decisions of the constitutional court. Hungary has no political prisoners, and there are no human rights violations in Hungary. Besides, Hungary is a democratic sovereign country and it has the right to make any changes that it wants to its laws or constitution. The intention to start a monitoring process against Hungary is deeply politically motivated and has no legal basis. In conclusion, I declare clearly that I am wholly against the opening of the monitoring procedure for Hungary.

26 Haziran 2013 Çarşamba

Equal access to health care

Mr KAYATÜRK (Turkey) – I express my sincere appreciation to the rapporteur. As he underlines in his report, access to health care is a key aspect of the right to health – there is no doubt about that. A lack of adequate and timely health care, a lack of available drugs and health professionals, unaffordable user fees and geographical and language barriers can have a negative impact on the disease outcomes of our citizens and migrants in our countries. It is very unfortunate to see that the number of people with an inadequate level of access to health care is growing in the member States.

The report rightly focuses on the issues that lie at the heart of the management of the challenges regarding access to health care. In this regard, the sharing of best practice among the member States carries the utmost importance. I draw your attention to Turkey's experience, with a view to supporting the rapporteur's elaboration of how to achieve equal access to health care. In Turkey, the so-called health transformation programme has been implemented for the past 11 years. The main purpose of the programme can be defined as the provision of quality and sustainable health services, accessible for everyone in an effective, quality and equitable manner. As a result of this effort, 98% of the population in Turkey are covered by public health insurance and emergency cover, while intensive care is provided to everyone free of charge.

I emphasise our awareness of the importance of this issue and the role that our parliaments could play in improving access to health care. I thank both rapporteurs and the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development.

27 Haziran 2013 Perşembe

Urgent debate: popular protest and challenges to freedom of assembly, media and speech

Mr KÜRKÇÜ (Turkey) – Let me start by expressing deep regret for the loss of four young people in the Gezi Park protests across Turkey and the highest respect for the millions who have continued their revolt for the dignity and freedom of our new generation.

On behalf of the UEL, I call on the Assembly to vote for this report. Although it refers to demonstrations that have taken place “in many European...countries”, most of the issues raised are directly related to the Turkish Government’s handling of the Gezi Park protests. By endorsing the report, the Assembly would send a strong warning to the Turkish Government: as a member country, you cannot order your police to shoot, gas or beat your citizens to death as you like. You cannot despise your citizens as *çapulcus* because they express discontent with your rule and take to the streets. You cannot order the smothering of whole neighbourhoods or districts with near-lethal gases for providing shelter to the protesters. For, as the report correctly underlines, “freedom of assembly and association, including unorganised and non-authorised protest, is an essential right in a democracy,” and, “in instances of popular protest, the role of law-enforcement bodies is to protect the rights of demonstrators, their freedom of association and expression”.

The police officer who killed protester Ethem Sarısülük in Ankara confessed in court that he had fired at the victim because of fear, and he was released. Had this officer been trained as a servant of the people, he would have protected Sarısülük from shooters, not shot him. The report sends the Turkish authorities this message: you cannot sow fear of the people in the hearts of the police and then grant them impunity as they kill your citizens. The report also sends the signal to Turkey’s Prime Minister – who boasts of having ordered all the police operations – that a statesperson cannot boast of “having written a legend” after four people have died and thousands of citizens have been injured as a result of these orders. *L’État, c’est moi* is indeed a legend. Not even Louis XIV was able to practise it in reality.

If you claim to remain a pluralist democracy, you cannot turn the mainstream media into an instrument of disinformation that airs a programme about the life of penguins at a time of popular unrest. Assembly members might also express their disagreement with the attempts by the Turkish Government to control social media by sending tweets saying, “*Ya basta!*” to the Twitter account @RT_Erdogan.

Dear colleagues, your vote for the report will send a signal to all Turkish citizens that they have a guarantee in the Council of Europe for the rule of law, human rights and democracy, which all governments should abide by, including the Turkish Government. No government can kill, gas or injure its citizens under controversial orders at a time of popular unrest. The unrest will continue unless the demands of the millions are met by their governments across Europe, Turkey and the globe.

Ms BİLGEHAN (Turkey)* – I have four minutes, so I will go straight to the heart of the subject. The Socialist Group has decided that it is time to call a spade a spade. The main subject of this discussion is of course Turkey. Just as the whole generation of the 1990s read the famous book, *Time for Outrage: Indignez-Vous!*, the same thing has happened in Turkey for this generation of 20-year-olds. It is all about the park of Gezi, a small park next to Taksim Square in the very centre of Istanbul. It is very much like the park here, the Orangerie, and has been there since Ottoman times. The Prime Minister himself decided that it was time to build a shopping mall there.

The police have used disproportionate force against the demonstrators, burning their tents and using tear gas and cannons. International organisations monitoring this, including the Council of Europe, are expressing their concern and claiming that unnecessary violence has been used with impunity against the demonstrators. Gezi is the last straw that is breaking the camel's back; it is the issue that has triggered this demonstration against the overbearing manner of the head of our government. Everything is monitored and controlled in Turkey, even the sale of the morning-after pill. Schools are becoming semi-religious, people's alcohol consumption is being monitored and many journalists are in prison. Every time the Prime Minister speaks, we see this happening. Mr Erdoğan was elected legally but that is not a reason to oppress half the population.

Some 56% of the demonstrators have further or higher education, and at least half of them are women. The excessive violence used by the police is out of order. It is also the case that 17% of the demonstrators did not vote in the previous election because they had not reached their majority. Listen to the testimony of Naz, who is 18. She says: "We are not alcoholics or terrorists. We are normal people. We are representatives of the Turkish people. We are upright citizens. Some of us work, some are retired and some are looking for a job. We represent all political parties. We are representing all different religions and no religion too. We are the people who clean the streets after the demonstrations."

According to doctors, four people have died and 8 000 have been injured out of the thousands who have demonstrated. Approximately 5 000 have been taken in for questioning. It is time that our country respected Council of Europe values before things become really bad there. To quote François Mitterrand: "They may not be right, but if we don't listen to them then we know we are definitely in the wrong."

Mr Dişli (Turkey) – I thank the rapporteur. I take this opportunity to thank the international community and media institutions for their in-depth consideration and critiques of the situation in Turkey. Of course, my thankfulness would have been much greater if that consideration and those critiques had been objective, impartial and constructive, but they were mostly not, particularly those that came from the international media.

We believe that political participation and opposition are not threats, but encouraging progressive instruments of democracy. However, we have to strike a balance between that principle and the need to maintain public order. The protests in Turkey began as a peaceful environmental movement. Afterwards, unfortunately, the purpose of the protests was deflected by violent extremist groups that wanted to take down the government. Their intention was to undermine public order, using all kinds of violence.

Every democratically elected government has to protect public and private property and ensure safety for all, so our security forces had to take the necessary measures. Of course, they had to act in accordance with the law and meet European and international standards. We should recall that in similar incidents in other member countries such as France and Sweden, the use of tear gas and detention was quite extensive, resulting in many injuries. There were some mistakes regarding the use of force against protesters, especially on the first day of the protest, and the Turkish President and Government have expressed their regret for that. It cannot be expected that all mistakes could have been prevented. The criticisms would be fair only if the incidents were not being investigated, and those who are responsible were not being held accountable.

Once again, I stress that objectivity, impartiality and a constructive approach are essential. The violent acts of protesters are always ignored by the international community, and especially by the media. They are even portrayed as innocent, peaceful, pro-democracy groups. That prompts the question: how did it come about, then, that public and private property was so badly damaged? About 300 businesses, 400 private and public vehicles and various buildings were greatly damaged. The cost of the violence so far is \$70 million, but the overall cost to the Turkish economy is over \$1 billion.

I understand our sensitivity towards freedom of assembly and association – that is an essential right – but as the rapporteur rightly said, democratically elected governments do not change their justified policies in the face of protests.

Ms GÜNDEŞ BAKIR (Turkey) – Freedom is the essence of life. All human beings deserve to be respected and to live with dignity. They should have equal opportunities to realise their potential to their utmost capacity. All human beings want to be valued and need to be understood. Every society must give different people room to breathe and a space in which to lead their lives in dignity. Every human thought, belief or feeling deserves to be expressed, as long as it does not involve violence. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly as enshrined in Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Peaceful protest is a human right.

Turkey will always stand up for those aspirations. That was our founding purpose. We, the MPs of the ruling party, wholeheartedly believe that participation in decision-making mechanisms is an important freedom that must be granted to all of our citizens regardless of their gender, belief or ethnic identity. Participation brings pluralism, and pluralism guarantees a healthy democracy. Our party got more than 50% of the votes in elections in Turkey, but we have the assurance in our hearts and minds that other citizens who did not vote for us are as much citizens of our country as those who did, and they deserve a respectful hearing. We believe our job is to act in accordance with Turkey's national interests and to serve all of our citizens, not only our supporters.

The scale of the peaceful protests shows the energy and dynamism of our democracy and the modernity of our people. We listen to the voices and demands of the streets. In Turkey, there will be no impunity for members of the security forces and police who used disproportionate force or violence towards peaceful protesters. However, I equally condemn the extensive vandalism by some protesters towards the police, public buildings and public property. There is no excuse for protesters who burned buses, ambulances, police cars and private cars. There are no words that excuse protesters for throwing Molotov cocktails or for shooting at police. One policeman lost his life when escaping from the protesters. A 12-year-old child was thrown from a bridge by the protesters. Roads have been blocked by burning barricades. There is also no excuse for protesters who attacked women who were wearing headscarves on the streets. In a country under the rule of law, such violent protest is not acceptable.

No matter how dark the day may seem, victory will always belong to those who choose to side with justice. I pledge that Turkey will always stand for those who stand up for their dignity and their rights, for our citizens who demand to be heard, for the oppressed who long to be free, and for our people who want to determine their own destiny, but who do all those things in a peaceful way. I want to draw your attention to the bias of the international media, which broadcast the protests in Turkey live for nine hours a day, but which has totally ignored for two years the human tragedy and killing in Syria.

Dear colleagues, we are all in the same boat. A strong Turkey is to the benefit of the European Union. Turkey belongs to the West. We share Western values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We are a candidate country for membership of the European Union, and we are committed to that goal. Turkey needs more European engagement, more encouragement and more progress towards its way to the European Union at this time, not less.

Ms ERKAL KARA (Turkey)* – The rights to freedom of speech and assembly, and the right to demonstrate, are the rights of every citizen in a democracy. Turkey has acted decisively, leaving no shadow of a doubt, to protect and develop those rights. That also applies to our citizens who have assembled to express their demands for democracy. What has happened in Turkey since the end of May is no different from events that have taken place in many European cities, particularly over the past few years. In fact, the demonstrations have provided an opportunity to see how much has been achieved in the evolution of democratic awareness and the culture of democracy in Turkey.

The authorities are taking all necessary measures to ensure that the demonstrations are peaceful and safe for all citizens. In that respect, there has been a series of talks with representatives of the groups of demonstrators, with positive and concrete results. During any such public demonstration, the police must respond proportionately, and I stress that inquiries are under way into the allegations of disproportionate use of force by the police.

However, we must remember that there are limits on the freedom to demonstrate defined in the European Convention on Human Rights, and that the authorities have a responsibility to guarantee public security and protect the rights and liberties of others. During the three weeks of protests, 660 police have been injured and one police commissioner lost his life. In addition, 290 private buildings, 20 public buildings, 116 police vehicles and 270 private vehicles have been damaged as a result of violence by some demonstrators. A democratic country has a responsibility to prevent violence by bringing the perpetrators to justice before an independent court. In that respect, the international community must adopt an objective view of the events in Turkey, which prioritises our shared goal of protecting democratic values and the rights of every individual, to stop this mounting wave of violence and extremism.

Ms MEMECAN (Turkey) – I thank the mover of the motion, Tiny Kox, for his initiative in focusing members on this important issue and the rapporteur, Mr Díaz Tejera, for his efforts in putting together the report. In recent years, the number of protests against governments and international organisations has been increasing. The response of the security forces to maintain the safety of the public at large and to contain the protesters while respecting the protesters' right to assemble and freedom of expression have raised new issues about the role of the security forces and the use of force. Many member States as well as Turkey are reviewing the procedures and methods of their security forces to prioritise peace during protests. For the information of colleagues, 76 people were detained in Turkey during the recent protest and not hundreds, as was said earlier.

The incentives that motivate people to organise and to participate in protests are myriad: unemployment and migration policies in Sweden, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community's demands in France, environmental issues in Turkey and Germany, and frustration with authoritarian regimes in Egypt and Libya. The list goes on. It is important to make the effort to understand the rationale behind such protests and address the cries of the people before the problems become chronic.

It is important to respect international norms when protesting and when trying to maintain public order. Often, peaceful protests are hijacked by marginal extremist or anarchist groups that resort to violence, looting and vandalism to create chaos. That was also the case in the recent protests in Turkey, which started out as a peaceful protest by environmentalists but were unfortunately taken over by extremist groups that caused a lot of damage to public and private property. The investigation is continuing into the violence of the extremists and the use of police force.

I would like to touch on the role of the media during times of protests. As the editor of *The New York Times* recently said, “The cameras focus wherever the smoke comes from.” The media can influence perceptions through the length, frequency and priorities of the broadcast news. Although the media should be completely free to operate, the position of editors requires more caution and responsibility to avoid unnecessarily feeding the aggravation.

Social media grant people the opportunity to share their ideas and information at enormous speed and across a wide area. The new technology also brings many problems with it: sometimes it is the messages, sometimes it is the unedited messages, sometimes it is the manipulated messages that negatively affect a situation. At such times of crisis, the international community should not confine its efforts to simply producing reports and statements based on media reporting. It is crucial that it invests time and energy in objectively assessing the situation and learning from various experiences in different societies.

I therefore thank the Secretary General, Mr Jagland, for taking the time to visit Turkey in order to continue its constructive dialogue and good relationship with the Council of Europe, which has contributed a lot to recent democratic progress in Turkey. I hope that his exemplary efforts will set a new trend in other concerned international institutions.

Mr KAYATÜRK (Turkey) – I thank the rapporteur for producing such a good report in such a short time.

Every freedom has limits, and freedom of assembly is no exception. In some circles, it has been argued that the Turkish Government and security forces did not respect the freedom of assembly during the recent protest demonstrations in Turkey. On the contrary, for the last three to four weeks, widespread demonstrations were organised in Turkey. This would not have been possible if Turkey was not a fully fledged democracy that respects the freedom of assembly. Security forces did not intervene unless the demonstrations posed a threat to public order and the safety of our citizens.

If the demonstrations were completely peaceful, as some circles argue, how were 292 business offices, 116 police vehicles and 271 private vehicles damaged? Likewise, how can one explain the death of a police officer in Adana? It is evident that some of these demonstrations were violent and necessitated the intervention of the security forces. In this context, the use of tear gas by Turkish police forces is in compliance with the relevant national and international standards. The use of tear gas in Turkey is regulated by the law on the prohibition, stockpiling, production and development of chemical weapons which is based on the Convention on Chemical Weapons.

On the other hand, there were incidents in which security forces may have exceeded their authority and acted in a way incompatible with the relevant legislation. These cases are being thoroughly investigated by the authorities.

The demonstrations in Turkey and the response of the security forces are no different from those seen in the riots that swept Europe in the last decade. In Spain, plastic bullets were used to stop the demonstrations in May 2011. In Italy, tear gas was used in November 2012 to disperse demonstrators. Many other examples could be cited.

If an objective and unbiased perspective is adopted, it is easily understood that the recent events in Turkey are a clear example of freedom of assembly being respected. However, if a country is governed by the rule of law, security forces cannot sit idle while violent demonstrations pose a concrete threat to public order and safety of other citizens.

Tackling discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity

Ms BILGEHAN (Turkey)* – Like colleagues before me, I thank Mr Haugli for this report, which talks about human rights. Gender identity is one of the most fundamental aspects of someone's life. Somebody's gender is determined at birth and then becomes a legal and social fact. The plight of LGBT people in terms of human rights was neglected for a long time, even though they face serious problems, such as discrimination, intolerance and violence. Often, their fundamental rights are violated, including the right to life, to physical integrity and to health care.

In principle, international human rights instruments afford protection to all people without distinction. In March 2010, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on measures to be taken to eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity and, to date, this is the most comprehensive recommendation we have. Member States have subscribed to this recommendation and, in so doing, have undertaken to try and improve the situation of LGBT people in Europe.

Since 2010, our Assembly has also looked into discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and has adopted various recommendations. Protection is also afforded by the Istanbul Convention. In passing, I can say I am very proud to come from the country in which the convention was signed and which was first to ratify it. We are awaiting further ratification so that it can come into force. For now, the convention is not in force in Turkey or anywhere else. But in certain member States of the Council of Europe, some positive strides have been made, notably with the implementation of laws, plans of action and specific strategies.

Having said that, a number of countries are failing to comply with their legal obligations. In Turkey, in principle, the constitutional system is based on equality for all before the law, regardless of language, race, skin colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical beliefs, religion or sect, but those are just words – in real life and in practice, the picture is not that rosy. We are in the process of drawing up a new constitution, in which we want gender equality enshrined. We must also heed the various rulings on sexual discrimination.

Homosexuality is not a criminal offence in Turkey, which is a good thing. I can assure you that there has been a shift in mind-set in our country recently. For example, there was a gay pride march just last weekend in Istanbul with a big turnout. A lot of LGBT people have been working in favour of various civil society organisations. I commend everything non-governmental organisations in Turkey have done. Bravely, they continue to battle for their rights. At all events, I thank Mr Haugli and assure him that I fully support the report.

Post-monitoring dialogue with “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

Mr Dişli (Turkey) – I thank the rapporteur for his high-quality work. Macedonia is a pivotal country for peace and stability in the Balkans. We attach great importance to the security, stability and prosperity of the Republic of Macedonia, and to the preservation of its territorial integrity. Macedonia can be seen as a unique model for peaceful co-existence in the region, given its multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multicultural social fabric. The 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement should be fully implemented. Within that framework, the full integration European and Euro-Atlantic institutions would provide additional support for the Macedonian reform process.

Elections constitute a litmus test by which to evaluate a country's democratic credentials. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights monitored municipal elections in the Republic of Macedonia in April 2013, and it described the two rounds of voting for the elections – held on 24 March and 7 April 2013 – as well administered and highly competitive. That is an important step towards the consolidation of democracy in Macedonia. However, the observers also highlighted some procedural irregularities. I am sure that Macedonia will take the necessary measures to overcome those problems in co-operation with the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Macedonia is host to numerous historical monuments. Turkey attaches importance to protecting and preserving them according to their original functions. They once belonged to the Ottoman "waqfs", which can be translated as "foundations", and the restitution of the waqf properties expropriated during the communist era has remained an open issue. Despite the denationalisation process after the regime change in 1991, the Muslim religious community of the Republic of Macedonia has not been able to regain ownership of several waqf properties. The community is entitled to inherit these properties under the Restitution Act of 1998, but the process is running very slowly. I call on the Macedonian authorities to take the necessary measures for facilitating the restitution of the waqf properties.

