

Highlights of Deputy FM Kourkoulas interventions, in his capacity as representative of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, at the European Parliament Plenary (11 March 2014)

Wednesday, 12 March 2014

Below are excerpts from Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Kourkoulas' interventions yesterday at the European Parliament Plenary in Strasbourg.

Regarding the "Personal Data Protection" legislation package and the debate on the report on "US NSA surveillance programme, surveillance bodies in various Member States and impact on EU citizens' fundamental rights":

- "Over the two past years, no other legislative initiative has been the subject of such important and multiple debates in the Council. The Hellenic Presidency has already dedicated 10 meetings to this issue during the first 10 weeks of our Presidency."
- "The Hellenic Presidency is determined that progress be made on this particular dossier, which, as you know, is key to the rights of individuals and to the development of the EU."
- "We welcome today's debate and the process that has begun with your initiative, through the relevant report. We are also closely monitoring the debate being carried out across the Atlantic."

Regarding the "2013 progress report on Turkey":

- "The Council reaffirms the importance attached to the EU's relations with Turkey. For the EU, Turkey is both a candidate country and an important partner with a dynamic economy."
- "At this point in time, it is very important to underline that the EU should remain the anchor for reforms in Turkey, especially in the areas of rule of law, and fundamental rights and freedoms."
- "The Council continues to encourage Turkey to work on reforms which should provide for adequate checks and balances fully guaranteeing freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities."
- "As such, further sustained efforts will be required, particularly as regards improving the observance of fundamental rights and freedoms in law and in practice in Turkey, including in the areas of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and property rights. Excessive use of force against protestors by law enforcement bodies needs to be addressed and investigated effectively. The restrictions in practice on the freedom of the media, including the large number of legal cases launched against writers, journalists, academics and human rights defenders, frequent and disproportionate website bans, as well as broad application of the legislation on terrorism and organised crime, have also raised serious concerns."
- "The EU welcomes the signing last year of the readmission agreement and looks forward to its swift ratification and full and effective implementation vis-à-vis all Member States. Progress in the dialogue on visa liberalisation will be founded on a performance-based

approach and conditioned on effective and consistent implementation by Turkey of the requirements in the visa roadmap, as agreed on by the Council, vis-à-vis the EU and its Member States.”

- “We note with deep regret that Turkey, despite repeated calls, continues to refuse to fulfil its obligation of full, non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement towards all Member States. This could provide a significant boost to the negotiation process.”

Regarding the “Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund – Internal Security Fund”:

“Tomorrow’s vote on the new generation of financial tools for EU Home Affairs, which are provided for by the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework, enables us to complete the reform of the funding of the policies in question on a European level.”

“The number of existing programmes will be reduced and their new structure will consist of two Funds. The first will concern Asylum, Migration and Integration, and the second will concern Internal Security and will have two components: borders and visas, on the one hand, and police cooperation, on the other.”

“In total, the two Funds will provide €6.9 billion for the period 2014-2020. The international and regional challenges that the EU is facing in the field of Justice and Home Affairs will continue to increase. It is thus of the highest priority that the EU have at its disposal financial tools that are more effective, flexible and comprehensive.”

“The negotiations were not always easy. However, the Council is of the opinion that the overall result fully achieves the goals of the reform of the funding tools at the disposal of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Policies.”