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Press Release

SNP MEPs on Turkey EU Membership Talks

SNP MEPs have given a cautious welcome to the European Parliament's decision to back opening EU membership talks with Turkey. Concerns continue about the human rights situation in Turkey and the regime's treatment of the country's Kurdish population.

Euro-MPs Ian Hudgton and Alyn Smith backed the move but warned that the opening of negotiations does not automatically mean that Turkey would eventually become an EU member. They called for the talks to be a vehicle for the ongoing improvement of the human and minority rights situation in Turkey.

Speaking from Strasbourg, Ian Hudgton MEP said:

"We've said all along that we have no objection in principle to Turkey becoming a member of the European Union. Turkish EU membership could be good for Europe and good for Turkey. Throughout this process our concerns have focussed on the level of the Turkish government's willingness to embrace the necessary reforms in human and minority rights. With this vote in parliament today, and with Europe's leaders poised to give the green light to opening talks when they meet in Brussels later this week, the whole debate is entering a new phase.

The EU must seize this opportunity to use the accession negotiations as a vehicle for human and minority rights reform in Turkey. Work to eradicate torture and ill treatment must make rapid progress. So must recognition of the political, cultural and religious rights of the Kurdish people, many of whom see opening EU talks as a positive step forward."

Alyn Smith MEP added:

"Eventual Turkish membership of the EU could be very positive indeed for all concerned, but there's an awful lot of work to do before that could happen as right now Turkey falls short on a number of points. We commend the Turkish government on the small degree of progress they've made up to now, but it would be wrong to interpret an opening of talks as a green light to EU membership.

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ALYN SMITH MEP

FIGHTING FOR AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND IN EUROPE

If he's still in power by then, our own Mr Blair could have an important role to play in this when the UK takes over the EU Presidency next year. He must make sure that the whole negotiation process has the strongest possible focus on the human rights reform agenda. "

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