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**June 22, 2016 – High profile Meeting on Turkey-EU Visa Liberalization.**



Expert Panel organized by ENC in the European Parliament on June 22, 2016.

*“Visa Liberalization Expert Panel – Socio Economic Effects on Turkey and the EU”* was held in Brussels on the 22<sup>th</sup> of June and chaired by MEP Ismail Ertug in the European Parliament at a relevant time when Turkey’s visa liberalization is being scrutinized by the European Commission and is expected to face a vote in the European Parliament towards the end of 2016.

The expert panel - consisting of academics, policy makers and business representatives – served primarily as an information exchange and expert advise for Members of Parliament and advisors, who are expected to take a final decision on Turkish visa liberalization later this year.

Among the distinguished speakers were, H.E. Selim Yenel, Ambassador of the Permanent Delegation of Turkey to the EU, Dr Cigdem Nas, Secretary General for

Turkey's Economic Development Foundation, Ms. Alexandra Stiglmayer, senior analyst at the European Stability Initiative (ESI), Mr. Zeki Guvercin, Board member at MUSIAD, and Ms. Dilek Aydin, EU Representative of TURKONFED and UEAPME. The event was moderated by Melih Ozsos, Communication Director at Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK).

During the panel Amb. Yenel noted that visa free regime is a psychological barrier for Turkish citizens that needs to be lifted, whereas Dr Nas indicated the transformative power of the EU following the signing of visa free travel.

We can expect the European Commission and Turkey to negotiate further on the five remaining articles (benchmarks) out of 72 before October in order to get the final visa free travel by November, he said. The Ambassador equally noted that Turkey had fulfilled the outright majority, many concerning migrants, of the articles in an unprecedented short period of time.



MEP Ismail Ertug speaking during ENC interview at the Visa Liberalization Event in the European Parliament on June 22, 2016.

### **Blocking Turkish visa liberalization: 'big mistake'.**

Ms. Stiglmayer – who has worked on visa liberalization for Turkey and Azerbaijan for a sustained period of time - underlined that by not granting visa liberalization to Turkey, the EU is risking to lose the refugee deal and to further undermine and deteriorate the civil society within Turkey.

Based on the logic that Turkey will only improve through EU engagement, she noted that human rights should be a top priority, but that the European Parliament's potential decision to block visa liberalization would be entirely counter productive. According to her, such a move would only alienate Turkish civil society and directly punish Turkish business, travelers, tourist and promoters of democracy inside the country.

Dr. Nas and Ms. Stigmayer, both veteran analysts on EU-Turkey affairs and the visa issue, came to the conclusion that the current issues in Turkey will only improve or be overcome through deeper EU interaction, not marginalization or short-term punishment policy.

Ms. Stigmayer underlined that the EU must come up with a better rule system and strategy, while pointing towards the potential option of cutting the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA Funds) which account for millions of euro's annually, out of which 50% go to Turkey as the leading accession country.

Most panelists agreed on the fact that blocking visa travel was counter productive and not credible in terms of solving underlying problems.

The Business community was represented in the second panel by Mr. Zeki Guvercin, Board member at MUSIAD, and Ms. Dilek Aydin, EU Representative of TURKONFED and UEAPME.

Both stressed the need for a more business-oriented approach, meaning visa free regimes and freedom for businesses and more opportunities for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in Turkey as well as Turkish investments in the EU.

All business associations present presented detailed outlooks and analysis of the socio economic impacts of visa liberalization.



Panel Speakers at the Visa Liberalization Event in the European Parliament on June 22, 2016.

### **Win-Win or Leave?**

Innovative agriculture and innovative technologies will be a 'win-win' deal for both the EU and Turkey, referring to an increase in business research and development between the two major consumer markets.



Visa free will be more efficient if its linked to deeper integration of Turkey with the EU, according to Ms. Aydin from TURKONFED.

The MUSIAD board member also warned that his organization and Turkey promoted freedom of business and would like to continue doing so, but felt that Europe was increasingly making it more difficult to do so.

“We are investing in Africa, Asia and elsewhere, because we sometimes feel like the Europeans are less interested” he said.



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