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## **PES Presidency declaration Concerns over undemocratic developments in Turkey**

Turkey is an EU accession country and an important ally of Europe. We share several common challenges and both hope that cooperation with the EU (in the form of the EU-Turkey action plan) will start to bear fruit and lead to the faster European integration of Turkey. Turkey is at the heart of the refugee crisis. The way it has hosted more than 2 million refugees in the last couple of years is remarkable.

As the biggest democracy in the region, Turkey can serve both as a partner for the EU and an example for its neighbouring countries. Turkey could in many ways be a role model. However, we should not close our eyes to the continued injustices perpetrated by the Turkish government.

We cannot ignore the increased authoritarianism displayed by President Erdogan, who is taking control over the media and justice system. The constant intimidation of journalists and newspapers, combined with the interference of the Turkish government in the justice system will set the country back in time. Next to journalists, academics have also fallen prey to the ever growing limits to freedom of speech. A number of academics who signed a petition asking the government to end the violence in the Southeast of Turkey have been subject to intimidation and detention on charges of insulting the state and engaging in terrorist propaganda.

On the occasion of the CHP Congress last week Party of European Socialists (PES) President Sergei Stanishev met some of the academics that signed the petition in Ankara to show the PES' solidarity. The next day, in front of the Silivri Prison near Istanbul, he expressed our support to esteemed journalists Can Dundar and Erdem Gul of the newspaper Cumhuriyet who are being held on charges of 'espionage' and 'terrorist propaganda'. Both were detained in November after they released footage revealing that the Turkish secret service was selling weapons to Islamist forces in Syria. They are only two of the 33 journalists detained in Turkey's prisons.

As the PES, we stand firm in defending human rights and democratic values. Turkey should serve as an example for the region. Unfortunately, now it is displaying the same authoritarianism that led to the multiple uprisings in the Arab world five years ago. If we remain silent we allow Turkey to go down a dangerous path.

Our sister party CHP, and especially HDP, are experiencing increased difficulties in conducting their opposition work. Mr Erdogan's repressive behaviour is making it very difficult for other political forces to perform their duties as part of a democratic system.

The PES is therefore calling on the Turkish government to ensure that crucial democratic standards such as freedom of speech and rule of law are being upheld. Separation of powers and adherence to human rights are essential to build a well-functioning democracy, and further integration of Turkey towards the EU should be conditional on progress made in those fields. Compliance with the Copenhagen criteria is essential to facilitate further EU integration. We also urge President Erdogan

to re-start the peace process involving all parties from parliament and civil society, and make a substantial effort to end the violence in the Southeast of Turkey. Too many civilians have lost their lives during violent attacks in the Southeast and the crimes committed against political figures need to stop. We condemn all acts of terrorism, including those perpetrated by the PKK. However it is imperative that all parties involved in this conflict make a genuine effort to establish a framework of peace. Further we want to express our solidarity with those journalists and academics that are under threat or being detained, and we urge the government to release the detained journalists and academics, thus showing its commitment to basic democratic values.