

## Parliamentary questions

3 November 2010

P-9177/2010

Question for written answer  
to the Commission  
Rule 117  
Emine Bozkurt (S&D)

### **Subject: Child labour in Turkey**

With 75 % of the world's hazelnut production coming from Turkey, hazelnut production makes up 25 % of Turkey's agricultural exports, worth two billion dollars a year. This industry provides eight million people with jobs. However child labour, prohibited by Turkish law, is a common feature in this industry, as it is in cotton and pistachio production.

Hazelnuts are grown in the Black Sea region. People travel from five different regions in Turkey for hundreds of kilometres to the Black Sea region. From the Sanliurfa region alone, the number of children involved in the hazelnut picking process is estimated to exceed 70 000.

The children earn EUR 1 an hour, working 11 hours a day. Many Turks leave their homes for a few months to live in tent camps with terrible sanitary conditions. Not only are these children performing child labour, they are also denied access to education for several months a year and live in unhealthy living conditions with no access to clean water.

Is the Commission aware of the huge number of children involved in hazelnut production in Turkey and of the horrible circumstances they live in?

What representations is the Commission making to the Turkish Government in order to eradicate child labour from Turkish society?

Many of the hazelnut production companies are partly in European hands. Furthermore their market consists mostly of European clients. What representations is the Commission making to European companies that make use of Turkish hazelnuts produced by child labour?

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#### **Answer given by Mr Füle on behalf of the Commission (3.12.2010)**

The Commission is closely following the efforts made by Turkey to combat child labour. As indicated in the 2010 Progress Report on Turkey<sup>(1)</sup>, the administrative capacity to tackle this issue has been strengthened, through the establishment of a Department for disadvantaged Groups in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. This should now translate in the implementation of more effective policies to prevent child labour.

Turkey has ratified International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions No 138 on Minimum Age and No 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. The ILO reports that the Turkish government has committed to end child labour by 2014 and that, in this respect, it continues technical support to the Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

(1) <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement>

The past 15 years have witnessed an overall positive trend as regards reduction of the prevalence of child labour in Turkey. This has led the ILO to select Turkey as one of the three countries that achieved success in the fight against child labour in 2006. According to survey results of the Turkish Statistics Institute, the numbers of children engaged in economic activities in the age group 6-17 decreased from 2 269 000 (15.2 %) in 1994 to 958000 (5.9 %) in 2006.

The Commission actively supports Turkey's efforts in this area as part of the pre-accession financial assistance to Turkey under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). The implementation of a EUR 5.3 million project on eradicating the worst forms of child labour in Turkey was completed in 2007. The project enhanced the national and regional capacity for actively removing children from the worst forms of child labour and preventing children 'at risk' from beginning such work. The project was managed by the Child Labour Unit of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security with technical assistance provided by ILO. Within the framework of the project, pilot offices were established in seven provinces (Çankırı, Kastamonu, Sinop, Ordu, Erzurum, Elazığ, Van) offering education, withdrawal from work, prevention, monitoring and counselling services to working children and their families.

The Commission will pursue its dialogue with the Turkish authorities on the prevalence of child labour, including in hazelnut plantations, during the sub-committee meetings planned for 2011 under the EU-Turkey Association Agreement, and as part of its regular dialogue with the Turkish authorities on the Copenhagen political criteria.

According to the preliminary findings of the Delegation of the EU in Turkey, there are reportedly 300 000 people (50-60 thousand families) involved in seasonal migration in Turkey every year, mostly to work in hazelnut plantations in the Black Sea region or in cotton plantations in Adana.

The period of seasonal migration hampers children's enrolment in school. EĞİTİM-SEN (a labour union active in education sector) published a report on this subject in 2007 reviewing the impact of seasonal agricultural work on 115 primary schools in six South-eastern provinces. According to this study approximately 10 % of the primary school students (i.e. 23 683 students) started school later in the year and left earlier, due to seasonal agricultural work.

A Circular was issued by the Turkish Prime Ministry in March 2010 with the aim of improving conditions for seasonal migrant agricultural workers and their families, including better access for children to education and health services. The Circular establishes a 'Monitoring Board for Seasonal Migrant Farm Workers (SMFWs)' at national and local level. In addition, several measures designed to address the needs of migrant workers were announced, mainly in the areas of housing, education, health and labour issues.

The Commission is convinced that proper implementation of the measures announced in this Circular will make a substantial contribution to improving the conditions for migrant seasonal workers in Turkey. The Commission will therefore continue closely monitoring the follow-up in close consultation with all relevant stakeholders.