



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1232 Vienna, 13 June 2019

#### **EU Statement in response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, Amb. Natalya Drozd**

The European Union welcomes Ambassador Natalya Drozd to the Permanent Council and thanks her for the comprehensive report.

Turkmenistan is an important partner in the EU's overall relations with Central Asia. The EU is looking to increase its dialogue and cooperation with Turkmenistan, including in the context of the new EU Strategy for Central Asia. The planned opening of a fully-fledged EU Delegation in Turkmenistan in 2019 signals a mutual strategic interest to intensify relations.

2019 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat. We commend the work of the Centre over the past 20 years. We welcome that the anniversary event on 17 April in Ashgabat highlighted that there is great potential for continuing and strengthening the OSCE-Turkmenistan cooperation. We appreciate Turkmenistan's continuous interest in intensifying cooperation with the OSCE. In this regard, we welcome the visits to Turkmenistan of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, the OSCE Secretary General and the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

We attach great importance to the continuing work of the Centre, which remains key in facilitating the implementation by Turkmenistan of all its OSCE-related commitments. We welcome that the Centre was able to expand programmatic work in areas of OSCE recognized expertise such as media or rights of persons belonging to national minorities. We welcome the

cooperation with other OSCE and international actors in planning and implementing programmatic activities. We appreciate the Centre's regional outlook, with a special emphasis on Afghanistan's engagement in border management and trans-border co-operation development. We welcome that gender mainstreaming remains high on the Centre's agenda.

In the first dimension, we support the focus on border security and management, including the development of an Advance Passenger Information system and travel document security. We particularly welcome the emphasis on strengthening border guards' capacities, also engaging representatives of Afghanistan. Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism, while promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as cyber security, remain important areas of work. We appreciate the cooperation between the Centre and the OSCE Border Management Staff College. We also welcome the delivery of the interactive course with the Secretariat and the OSCE Mobile Training Team on the identification of potential Foreign Terrorist Fighters.

In the second dimension, we support the focus on good governance, preventing and combating corruption, which together with strengthening the rule of law, enhances sustainable development and economic growth. We support continued work on energy security, implementation of Aarhus Convention, water and transport management, sustaining the host country's needs.

The rule of law and respect for human rights are essential elements of the EU-Turkmenistan relationship. The EU remains concerned about the serious shortcomings in human rights and fundamental freedoms in Turkmenistan. Effective implementation of the laws remains necessary to achieve concrete improvement of the human rights situation. We continue to urge for an enhanced work in the third dimension as well as in support of civil society, promoting and supporting the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We support the focus on assisting the Office of the Ombudsperson, with a view to her engagement on all human rights issues. We support providing

assistance in the preparation and implementation of national legislation on human rights, including the implementation of the National Action Plan on Human Rights 2016 – 2020. Further development of the electoral legal framework and practices should remain in focus. We would like to enquire how the Centre would continue to support the host country in these areas. We welcome and further encourage the Centre's cooperation with ODIHR, in particular.

We continue to consider work in the area of penitentiary reform, including with the view of ensuring international standards related to prisoners' rights, to be a priority. We welcome support to the improvement of the penitentiary and encourage the Centre to continue to be involved in visiting detention facilities. The EU stresses the importance of ratification by Turkmenistan of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances, as an important step towards eradication of these practices. We reiterate our strong call on Turkmenistan to take action on enforced disappearances and look forward to continue our dialogue on this matter. We follow very closely the situation of the disappeared persons whose prison terms have ended or are scheduled to end in 2019-2020.

We support the Centre's activities with regard to media, in particular towards media freedom, media pluralism, editorial independence and online journalism, in close coordination with the RFoM. Promoting the rule of law, gender equality and mainstreaming, combating trafficking in human beings, and combating domestic violence remain important areas of further work.

In conclusion, we wish success to Ambassador Drozd and her team in their work and recall our support to the activity of the Centre.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.