

Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union**Permanent Council No. 604  
6 April 2006****EU Statement on Turkmenistan**

1. The European Union welcomes the recent visits to Turkmenistan by the Chairman in Office and of the High Commissioner for National Minorities (HCNM). The European Union appreciates the opportunity provided for the Chairman in Office and the HCNM to have a constructive dialogue with the Turkmen authorities.
2. However, the European Union shares the concerns expressed by the Chairman in Office, and regrets that Turkmenistan is still lagging behind in the implementation of numerous OSCE commitments.
3. In this context, the EU regrets in particular the continuing difficult situation concerning the freedom of the media, the lack of plurality, the absence of access to international print media, and to the Internet, as well as state censorship of all media and the difficulty for local journalists to engage with foreigners. In this regard, we urge Turkmenistan to take advantage of the expertise of the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media.
4. The EU also remains deeply concerned over the discrimination by the government of persons belonging to national minorities, particularly in the field of education and employment, and over travelling restrictions and reported forced displacements. The EU expresses its hope that the Turkmen authorities will follow up on the recent visit on 6 March of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities with substantive improvements in this area.
5. The EU welcomes the fact that additional minority religious groups have been allowed their right to worship, and strongly encourages Turkmenistan to remove remaining restrictions on the exercise of the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief of certain religious communities, such as the restriction on registered religious communities to rent publicly owned premises or meet in private houses.

6. The European Union would like to reiterate its position that for Turkmenistan to ensure peace, stability and sustainable prosperity, serious reform efforts remain necessary, notably in the field of human rights, fundamental freedoms including the freedom of expression and assembly, the rule of law and democratisation. We call on the Turkmen authorities to respect the international norms enshrined in the OSCE and UN instruments. The EU would also encourage Turkmenistan to allow genuine plurality of choice, starting with the local council elections to be held on 23 July 2006. Furthermore, the EU expresses its hope that current negative trends in education and health care, such as the reduction of the number of the years of schooling, the reduced university intake, or the use of unqualified military conscripts in hospitals, are reversed for the better of all of the Turkmen people.
7. The EU is pleased that Turkmenistan will participate in the Regional Dialogue meeting between the EU and the Central Asian countries to be held on 7 April in Almaty. Moreover, the EU is looking forward to discussing human rights issues within the context of the EU-Turkmenistan ad hoc human rights dialogue which began following the proposal by the President of Turkmenistan in 2003. The EU notes that at the last ad hoc human rights dialogue in April 2005, the EU requested information on certain prisoners at that time including, the former chief mufti Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, Rahim Esenov, Amandur Hajiyev and Mukhhametkuli Aymuradov. In the spirit of a constructive dialogue, the EU would appreciate this information before the next such meeting.
8. The EU believes it is important that ongoing dialogue on human rights issues is accompanied by substantive reforms. The Union stands ready to further assist Turkmenistan in its reform efforts, including within the OSCE framework.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia\* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, the EFTA country Iceland, a member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

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\*Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process