



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat, Ambassador Natalya Drozd

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Gregory Macris
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 13, 2019

The United States welcomes you, Ambassador Drozd, to the Permanent Council today, and we thank you for your report, for your kind words on U.S. assistance to your Mission, and, personally, for the time that you took yesterday to engage with me and my team. That was very helpful for us.

The United States appreciates the work of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat across all three dimensions of security, namely: the political-military, the economic and environmental, and the human.

We welcome the Center's contributions to building Turkmenistan's capacity to manage its borders in cooperation with its neighbors, including Afghanistan. We support your work on countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT), in keeping with international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments.

Strengthening good governance and anti-corruption is a priority, and we support the Center's work to increase Turkmenistan's capacity to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

Exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms is severely curtailed in Turkmenistan. We therefore urge the government of Turkmenistan to take full advantage of the OSCE's assistance and expertise to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of religion or belief.

Mr. Chair, the United States commends OSCE efforts in developing Turkmenistan's Ombudsperson's Office. It is important that the government ensure the Ombudsperson has both the political support and the independence needed to perform effectively.

Penitentiary reform is another area in which Turkmenistan can benefit from OSCE assistance. The United States repeatedly has raised concerns about prisoners who have not been allowed to communicate with the outside world for years. Authorities should provide information on, and unhindered access to, all prisoners, and ensure that families have information on the whereabouts and well-being of their relatives.

We note in particular that our former permanent representative colleague here in Vienna, Batyr Berdiev, is among those detainees about whom there has been no reliable information for years. The United States welcomes that activist Gulgeldy Annaniyazov's family reportedly has been able to visit him in his current detention situation in Garabogaz, although we note that he received an extremely harsh sentence for crossing the border into his own country. We hope that the government of Turkmenistan will show clemency by unconditionally releasing him from detention.

The United States encourages the Center to step up its activities to support the development of civil society and independent media in Turkmenistan, including through the increased participation in OSCE events of civil society representatives and independent journalists. Both sectors are underdeveloped and overly restricted in Turkmenistan, and we support activities that include and support them.

The United States also values the Center's assistance in promoting gender equality in Turkmenistan, as well as in addressing domestic violence.

Ambassador Drozd, once again we thank you and your dedicated team at the OSCE Center in Ashgabat for your work across all three dimensions of security in Turkmenistan.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.