



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1320 Vienna, 17 June 2021

#### **EU Statement in response to the report of the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, Ambassador John MacGregor**

The European Union warmly welcomes the new Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, Ambassador John MacGregor, to the PC and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The work of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat remains key in promoting and facilitating the implementation of all of Turkmenistan's OSCE - related commitments. We appreciate Turkmenistan's interest in engaging actively with the OSCE across all three dimensions. We applaud the flexibility shown by the Centre in adapting to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We welcome the support provided by the Centre for the host country's reform process. We support continued coordination and cooperation with other OSCE and international actors, including the EU Delegation in Turkmenistan. We appreciate the Centre's regional outlook, manifested across all three dimensions and in regular cooperation with OSCE field operations in Central Asia.

In the first dimension, we support the continuing focus on border security and appreciate the cooperation with the OSCE Border Management Staff College. We commend Afghanistan's engagement in border management projects and the development of trans-border cooperation. We welcome the Centre's support in strengthening border service professional and technical capabilities, including its canine unit's capacity, and improving customs procedures. We appreciate the

promotion of the implementation of the UNSCR 1540 and the work on addressing VERLT.

In the second dimension, we support the focus on good governance, including good environmental governance and implementation of the Aarhus Convention, combating corruption, as well as energy security, transport and water management. We appreciate the assistance in aligning the AML/CFT national legal framework with the Financial Action Task Force standards and in the preparation of the Law on Foreign Investments, which could significantly help Turkmenistan in attracting more investors. We support the Centre's work in the anticorruption area, such as assistance in developing the legal framework as well as trainings.

The improvement of rule of law and respect for human rights are essential elements of the third dimension of OSCE and of the EU-Turkmenistan relationship. Despite some limited progress, the EU remains concerned about the serious shortcomings in protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Turkmenistan. We continue to urge enhanced work in promoting and supporting the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments in this area, and including enabling space for genuine civil society and free and independent media, both online and offline. In this context, we appreciate the Centre's assistance to the Office of the Ombudsperson and commend the organization of the regional forum on The Role of Women in Fostering Peace, Trust and Security. The training courses organized by the Centre address issues of utmost importance, such as human rights standards during criminal proceedings and investigations, age- and gender-sensitive criminal justice responses to terrorism, and the promotion of security and social cohesion through advancing freedom of religion or belief. We encourage the Centre to continue its cooperation with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on regional initiatives fostering the rights and role of persons belonging to national minorities.

Sharing best practice in the fields of independence of the judiciary, rule of law, penitentiary reform, and freedom of religion or belief should remain a priority. We are concerned by the continued enforced disappearance of people in Turkmenistan's prisons, often held incommunicado for years, and we reiterate our call to the authorities to immediately acknowledge this problem and take action to eradicate this heinous violation of human rights, in line with the Tirana Ministerial Council decision. The EU

stresses that ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances would be an important step towards eradication of these practices. The expert seminar on penitentiary legal standards organized by the Centre is a valuable contribution in disseminating knowledge on the international legal framework and international standards for the protection of prisoners. We encourage the Centre to continue to be involved in visits of the detention facilities.

We particularly value activities which enhance media freedom, pluralism, editorial independence and online journalism, and we encourage the Centre to co-ordinate closely with the RFoM. We support continued work on combating domestic violence, in co-operation with a local NGO. Bringing the legislative framework in line with international standards, including international human rights law, and its effective implementation remains necessary to achieve a concrete improvement of human rights situation in the country.

Turkmenistan is an important partner of the EU, including in the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, which provides a valuable opportunity to forge a strong and durable partnership with the region. In conclusion, we would like to thank Ambassador John MacGregor and the whole team of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat for their dedication and hard work – and we wish them success in the future.

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.