



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1270 Vienna, 4 June 2020

EU Statement in response to the report of the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, Ambassador Natalya Drozd

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

We commend the continued work of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat over the past 20 years. We appreciate Turkmenistan's interest to engage actively with OSCE across all three dimensions. In this regard, we welcome the Secretary General's "virtual visit" to Turkmenistan on 6 May and we look forward to the planned visits to Turkmenistan in 2020 by the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities, once the circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic permit.

We attach great importance to the continuing work of the Centre, which remains key in promoting and facilitating the implementation by Turkmenistan of all its OSCE-related commitments. We welcome the close and enhanced relationship between the Centre and the host country, and we support exploring new programmatic work in areas of OSCE recognized expertise. We welcome the cooperation with other OSCE and international actors, including the EU Delegation in Turkmenistan as well as the several UN agencies, in particular UNODC, 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 cooperation development and on the Caspian Sea ports cooperation. We welcome that gender equality and mainstreaming remains high on the agenda. We appreciate the adjustments made in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the first dimension, we support the focus on border security and management. We particularly welcome the emphasis on strengthening border service capacities, also engaging representatives of Afghanistan. We appreciate the cooperation with the OSCE Border Management Staff College. We are supportive of continued work in addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism, also at regional level with the other Central Asian countries, and enhancing cyber security, while promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. We welcome the initiative of Turkmenistan to organise a side-event at the OSCE dedicated to the adoption of the National Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism for 2020-2024 and the Centre's expressed support to its implementation. We appreciate the seminar on rule of law compliant criminal justice responses to terrorism.

In the second dimension, we encourage the Centre to continue to focus on improving good governance, including good environmental governance, which together with strengthening the rule of law should enhance sustainable development and economic growth. We support continued work on preventing and combating existing corruption, implementation of the Aarhus Convention, improving energy security, and assisting the host country in addressing the key regional issues related to water and transport management. We highly appreciate involving representatives of Afghanistan when discussing regional trans-border cooperation, which is key to peace, security and stability for the region.

The improving of rule of law and respect for human rights are essential elements of the EU-Turkmenistan relationship. Despite some limited progress observed in the past years, the EU remains concerned about the serious shortcomings in human rights and fundamental freedoms protection in Turkmenistan and for the lack of transparency and accountability in such relevant areas, including detention conditions and right to a fair and public process. We continue to urge enhanced work in the third dimension, in promoting and supporting the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as in support of genuine civil society. In this context, we appreciate the Centre's intensified collaboration with national stakeholders.

We welcome and support the continued focus on assisting the Office of the Ombudsperson, with a view to its engagement on all human rights issues, and appreciate related programmatic work. We support providing assistance in the reform, preparation and implementation of national legislation, such as in the drafting of the

new National Action Plan on Human Rights, in cooperation with ODIHR, RFoM and HCNM, as appropriate. Further development of the electoral legal framework and practices should remain an important focus.

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 remain concerned by the continued enforced disappearance of many people in Turkmenistan's prisons and we reiterate our call on authorities to immediately and effectively acknowledge this problem, and take action to eradicate this heinous violation of human rights.

We welcome that the Centre stepped up its activities with regard to media and we encourage a close coordination with the RFoM. We support continued work on combating trafficking in human beings and domestic violence.

Turkmenistan is an important partner in the EU's relations with Central Asia, including in the implementation of the new EU Strategy for Central Asia, which provides a valuable opportunity to forge a strong and durable partnership with the region. We hope that the opening of an EU Delegation in Turkmenistan will increase even more our good cooperation, covering all aspects of the relationship.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Ambassador Drozd for her active leadership as Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat and we wish her and her team success in their work.

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

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