



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to Head of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat, Ambassador Ivo Petrov**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 28, 2015

The United States welcomes Ambassador Petrov back to the Permanent Council. Ambassador, thank you for your report.

The United States appreciates the work of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat across all three OSCE dimensions. The Center's projects on border security and management, carried out in cooperation with Turkmenistan's State Border Service, are outstanding examples of OSCE assistance to address a country's needs and the common challenges faced by all participating States.

The United States supports the Center's work on media and journalism in Turkmenistan. We hope that Turkmenistan's new law concerning the Internet will increase – not decrease – Internet access and freedom, and we urge Turkmenistan to take full advantage of OSCE assistance to ensure that this is the case. We note the concern raised by OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović that the law comes with restrictive regulations and could make users liable for the accuracy of all information they post. Restrictions and some vague definitions in the law could restrict the free flow of information and hamper freedom of expression on the Internet. We also are concerned about recent reports of widespread removal of private satellite dishes, which could have a negative impact on citizens' access to information.

We welcome the Center's activities to promote respect for freedom of religion or belief, including trainings and study trips. In 2014, the Secretary of State designated Turkmenistan as a Country of Particular Concern on religious freedom issues. We welcomed Turkmenistan's 2014 and 2015 releases of prisoners reportedly held on religious grounds, but we are concerned about reports of renewed arrests and mistreatment allegedly based on religious affiliation or worship. We encourage continued OSCE attention to this issue.

We urge Turkmen authorities to work with the OSCE to improve prison conditions and provide information on and access to all prisoners. It is vital that families have information on the whereabouts and well-being of their relatives. Too many have been in the dark for too long.

We encourage the OSCE Center and the government of Turkmenistan to strengthen cooperation on combating trafficking in persons, in particular to assist in victim identification and assistance, as well as the prosecution of perpetrators. The United States also supports continued work to address domestic violence and promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

The United States welcomes the increased involvement of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Turkmenistan, as well as the participation of Turkmen parliamentarians in the work of the OSCE PA. We hope that the OSCE will continue to support parliamentary development in Turkmenistan.

We encourage further efforts to support the development of civil society in Turkmenistan, including through increased participation in OSCE events. We urge the government of Turkmenistan to take advantage of OSCE assistance in evaluating the new laws on Public Associations and Assemblies to ensure the legislation is consistent with Turkmenistan's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

And of course we would look forward to welcoming Turkmenistan around the table at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.

Ambassador Petrov, we look forward to the continued good work of the Center as it assists Turkmenistan in meeting its OSCE commitments. Let me offer sincere thanks to you and your team at the OSCE Center in Ashgabat.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.