

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council Nr 954
Vienna, 30 May 2013**

**EU statement in reply to the Head of the OSCE Centre in
Ashgabat, H.E. Ambassador Ivo Petrov**

The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. Ambassador Petrov to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his report on the activities of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat.

The EU appreciates the increased co-operation between the Turkmen authorities and OSCE institutions and the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat and encourages them to step up interaction on substantial issues. We welcome the early approval of the Centre's project proposals by the Turkmen authorities this year.

The EU welcomes the improved co-operation between the Centre and the Turkmen authorities concerning the Politico-Military Dimension. We continue to support the capacity building activities in the area of border security and combating drug trafficking and encourage the inclusion of Afghan customs officials in these projects. We would also welcome greater participation from Turkmenistan's side in the Border Management Staff College and more cooperation at regional level. We also welcome the training activities on small arms and light weapons conducted by the Centre. We welcome the positive developments on the issue of Turkmenistan's connection to the OSCE Communications Network and look forward to its successful completion.

In the Economic and Environmental Dimension, the EU commends the support of the Centre with regard to the establishment of the Aarhus Centre Turkmenistan. We look forward to clearing the obstacles related to the implementing partner that prevent its opening and hope it will contribute to the development of civil society capacity also in environmental projects. We also support the Centre's projects with regard to water management, combating corruption and energy security and look forward to the conference in this area to be organised later this year in Ashgabat. The EU enjoys good co-operation with Turkmenistan on energy

security matters and looks forward to the successful completion of the negotiations for the Trans-Caspian Pipeline System.

Regarding the Human Dimension, the EU notes the recent amendment of legislation, including the Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and the Code on Administrative Offences. In this context, we welcome the criminalisation of torture for the first time in the legislation of Turkmenistan. We also welcome the support of the Centre for the on-going legal reform and its detailed analysis of the Criminal Code. The EU encourages the Turkmen authorities to take advantage of the expertise of the OSCE institutions and the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat in the human dimension and cooperate with them with regard to the elaboration and implementation of legislation so as to ensure compliance with OSCE commitments.

We also support the Centre's activities with regard to promoting the rule of law, legal education and the administration of justice, as well as those aimed at assisting the authorities in improving the penitentiary system where conditions remain dire. In this regard, we underline the need for Turkmenistan to cooperate fully with the International Committee of the Red Cross and to give its representatives full access to all places of detention. We welcome the Centre's efforts to disseminate information on the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and hope that there will be enhanced participation from Turkmenistan in the Academy.

The EU remains concerned about the many shortcomings concerning respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Turkmenistan. These issues are discussed in the framework of the EU-Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue and we appreciate Turkmenistan's expressed commitment to comply with international human rights standards. However, we note that there is still a significant gap between the legislative framework and its practical implementation. We call on the Turkmen authorities to complete the legal reform process currently underway in order to ensure genuine improvements in the human rights record. This would enhance the prospects for a comprehensive framework of relations between the EU and Turkmenistan.

The EU is deeply concerned with the situation of civil society and of human rights defenders in Turkmenistan and urges the Turkmen authorities to comply fully with

international commitments regarding freedom of association, including in terms of regulations for NGOs and facilitating access by international NGOs. We encourage the Centre to step up activities to develop and strengthen civil society and we reiterate the high value we attach to the Centre's activities regarding individual complaints. The EU takes this opportunity to encourage Turkmenistan to participate in the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw and to engage with civil society also in this framework.

We welcome the organisation of the 14th Central Asia Media Conference for the first time in Turkmenistan in July 2012. We also welcome the adoption of a new Law on mass-media in Turkmenistan, notably the fact that it enshrines the freedom to seek, receive and impart information, freedom of the media and expression and the interdiction of censorship and state interference in the activities of the media outlets. However, we regret that the State Committee on Protection of State Secrets is still in operation and the lack of any independent media in Turkmenistan. In addition we remain concerned by the strict control of internet access, including the blocking of websites and social networking sites in Turkmenistan. In this regard we call on the authorities to continue cooperation with the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Centre in implementing the new law and their commitments with regard to freedom of the media and freedom of expression, safety of journalists and free internet access.

We commend the election-related activities of the Centre and encourage Turkmen authorities to engage with ODIHR in improving the election framework, including on the basis of comments to the Law on Political parties. We urge Turkmenistan to invite ODIHR to observe the parliamentary elections due to take place later this year, in line with existing commitments. We would also encourage Turkmenistan to take part in the works of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

In conclusion, the EU underlines its readiness to assist Turkmenistan in implementing its international commitments, including those undertaken within the OSCE framework and reiterates its support for the Centre.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland+ and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.