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## Swedish Presidency of the European Union

**OSCE Permanent Council No. 772  
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### **EU statement in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, Ambassador Arsim Zekolli**

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The EU would like to warmly welcome Ambassador Zekolli to the Permanent Council and thank him for this comprehensive report.

The EU notes signs of positive development in Turkmenistan, such as the adoption of a new constitution, the ongoing process of legal reform, and the progress made in the fields of social security, education and science. The EU particularly commends the efforts of Turkmenistan to develop its relations with other countries and to increase its involvement in, and cooperation with, international organizations, including the OSCE. We appreciate increased high level dialogue between the Turkmen authorities and various OSCE institutions, and more constructive and deeper cooperation with the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat. The EU notes the increased range and depth of the Centre's activities across all three dimensions.

Although there has been visible improvement in Turkmenistan's legislation on human rights, the EU remains concerned about the lack of overall progress and many shortcomings reported regarding

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the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EU is deeply concerned about reports on torture, poor prison conditions, and the fact that the penitentiary system in Turkmenistan remains closed to international observers, even to the ICRC. The EU also finds it disturbing that recently students, including some from the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, have been unable to leave Turkmenistan to study abroad without special permission.

Many of these worrying shortcomings were discussed in a constructive manner in the framework of the Second Round of EU – Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue in June 2009. The EU appreciates that Turkmenistan repeatedly expressed its commitment to comply with international human rights standards and its willingness to continue reviewing its national legislation with a view to improving it further. The EU stands ready to cooperate with Turkmenistan in this process and urges its authorities to take advantage of the assistance and expertise offered by the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, and by the OSCE institutions, notably the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). In this regard, we welcome the positive signals that the government is ready to engage further with the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat on the implementation of human dimension initiatives. The EU fully supports the Centre's existing programmes and activities in this field, and supports its intention to define new areas of cooperation, notably the reform of the judiciary, the rule of law, combating trafficking in human beings, raising legal awareness of citizens and the penitentiary system. At the same time the EU would like to encourage the Centre to increase its level of cooperation with the host government in the field of development of independent journalism and establishment of independent private media. We would like to underline that improvement of human rights legislation is not sufficient – legislation has to be implemented. The OSCE

Centre in Ashgabat can provide the necessary tools to help Turkmenistan reduce the current implementation gap.

On election-related issues, the EU encourages further cooperation between the relevant Turkmen authorities, the OSCE centre and the ODIHR in order for Turkmenistan to comply with its OSCE commitments in this field, particularly those enshrined in the 1990 Copenhagen Document and which relate to political pluralism, election campaigning, and voting and counting procedures. The EU would also like to raise the issue of amnesties. The EU notes that more than 5000 prisoners have been released since the last report, but regrets that no human rights activists have benefited from these amnesties.

In the Economic and Environmental Dimension the EU notes with satisfaction the development of partnerships with various Turkmen institutions, in particular on water management and food security. In the recent period the dialogue between the EU and Central Asian countries has intensified on the issues of security, trade, energy, water, and environment. The EU Strategy for Central Asia and recently adopted Interim Agreement with Turkmenistan represent a good framework for advancing EU- Turkmenistan relations in these fields.

In the field of strengthening border security and management, the EU would like to commend the successful launch by the Centre in Ashgabat of two projects for training customs and border officials from Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, complementary to the EU BOMCA and CADAP programmes in which Turkmenistan also takes active part. In the areas falling broadly under the first dimension,

solid progress and good cooperation between the Centre and Turkmenistan have been evident.

In conclusion, as we witness the involvement of Turkmenistan with the UN Universal Periodic Review process and the increased active participation of Turkmen representatives in OSCE events and training programmes, the EU encourages Turkmenistan to participate in the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw and to engage with civil society there.

Ambassador Zekolli, the EU remains committed to supporting the Centre in its endeavours and wishes you and your team all success in the future.

The candidate countries CROATIA\* and FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND and NORWAY align themselves with this statement.

\*Croatia and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.