



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat, Ambassador Natalya Drozd

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 14, 2018

The United States welcomes Ambassador Drozd to the Permanent Council today, and we thank you for your report.

The United States appreciates the work of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat across all three dimensions. We welcome the Center's continued work on border management training, strengthening good governance and anti-corruption, promoting respect for international human rights, including the freedom of religion or belief, and combating trafficking in persons. We support your work on countering violent extremism and radicalization that can lead to terrorism (VERLT), cybersecurity, good governance, and your plans to increase project activity in these areas. The United States values the Center's continued assistance in promoting gender equality in Turkmenistan, as well as in addressing domestic violence.

Mr. Chair, The United States commends OSCE efforts in developing Turkmenistan's Ombudsperson's Office. Independent national human rights institutions can play an important role in promoting respect for human rights and OSCE human dimension commitments. We therefore urge the government to ensure that Turkmenistan's Ombudsperson has the support and independence needed to perform in this manner. While we appreciate that the Ombudsperson participated in the Human Dimension Committee last month to discuss women's rights in Turkmenistan, we encourage the Ombudsperson to broaden her contacts further by meeting with civil society leaders and embassy representatives in Ashgabat, including those from the United States.

The United States also backs the Center's efforts related to penitentiary reform. Turkmenistan authorities should provide information on, and access to, all prisoners, and ensure that families have information on the whereabouts and well-being of their relatives, particularly those in prison who have not been able to communicate with the outside world for many years. We note in particular that our former permanent representative colleague here in Vienna, Batyr Berdiev, is among those about whom there has been no reliable information for years.

The United States encourages the Center to work actively to support the development of civil society and independent media in Turkmenistan, including through increased participation in OSCE events. This work remains important, as we continue to have serious concerns about the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Turkmenistan. We appreciate the commentary by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on the new law "on

Television and Radio Broadcasting” and its recommendations concerning the need to ensure the independence of Turkmenistan’s licensing agency and public service broadcaster. We urge Turkmenistan authorities to make full use of the Representative on the Freedom of the Media’s assistance in this regard. The United States also notes that Turkmen journalist and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty contributor Saparmamed Nepeskuliev was released from prison at the end of his sentence. We had previously raised concerns about his case, including his treatment in detention and his conviction on questionable charges of narcotics possession.

Mr. Chair, we also support ODIHR’s final report on the conduct of the March 25 parliamentary elections in Turkmenistan, which concluded that the vote lacked important prerequisites of a genuinely democratic electoral process. The political environment is only nominally pluralist, with elections that fail to offer voters political alternatives that would allow the free expression of the voters’ will. Exercise of fundamental freedoms is severely curtailed. We further agree with the conclusion that additional efforts must be undertaken to develop democratic institutions enabling citizen participation in the conduct of government and public affairs consistent with Turkmenistan’s international obligations and in line with its OSCE commitments. We thus urge the government of Turkmenistan to take full advantage of the OSCE’s assistance and expertise to address these issues.

Ambassador Drozd, once again we thank you and your dedicated team at the OSCE Center in Ashgabat for your work across all three dimensions of security in Turkmenistan. We look forward to continued collaboration.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.