



## EU – TURKMENISTAN RELATIONS

Bilateral relations between the European Union and Turkmenistan are governed by an Interim Agreement on trade and trade-related matters, which entered into force in August 2010, pending ratification of a **Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)** by the European Parliament.

The **EU Strategy on Central Asia** of June 2019 provides the EU's overall regional framework for engagement.

### STRENGTHENING TIES BETWEEN THE EU AND TURKMENISTAN

The European Union is looking to increase its dialogue and cooperation with Turkmenistan, and hopes to strengthen its institutional framework of cooperation with the ratification of the **Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)**. The entry into force of the PCA would allow for enhanced discussion and cooperation in all sectors, and would establish a formal **Cooperation Council**, held at Ministerial level. The number of official and business delegations visiting Turkmenistan over the past years, and **the opening of a fully-fledged EU Delegation in Turkmenistan** in July 2019, signal a mutual strategic interest to intensify relations.

### SUPPORTING EFFORTS IN IMPLEMENTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Human rights are an essential aspect of our bilateral relations with Turkmenistan. The European Union and Turkmenistan hold an annual **Human Rights Dialogue**, allowing for open and constructive discussions on sensitive issues related to human rights and democratisation. A Turkmen delegation also participated in the Warsaw **OSCE Human Dimension meetings**

in 2015, 2016 and 2018.

In May 2021, Turkmenistan presented its second **National Action Plan for Human Rights**, which attaches importance to the further development of the Ombudsperson's Office and the expansion of its cooperation with international organizations. The EU supported the drafting of this Action Plan and the development of the National Institute of Human Rights and Democracy of Turkmenistan. Between 2015 and 2018, the Turkmen authorities have also adopted several other National Action Plans dealing with political and social rights of its citizens: on **gender equality**; combating **trafficking in persons**; and **child rights**.

Already, in September 2016 Turkmenistan updated its Constitution and a number of other laws in line with international standards, notably in the judicial sectors, and adopted the **Law on the Commissioner for Human Rights** (Ombudsperson), followed by the election of a first Ombudsperson in March 2017. Effective implementation of these new laws and functioning of new institutions remain a priority in the EU-Turkmenistan cooperation.

The European Union is strongly committed to the **prevention of enforced disappearances**, and has consistently advocated in favour of Turkmenistan's ratification of the **Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture**, and the **International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances**. The European Union closely followed the Universal Periodic Review of Turkmenistan by the United Nations in May 2018, and expects Turkmenistan to effectively implement all accepted recommendations.

## **ENERGY COOPERATION**

The **Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of energy**, signed between the EU and Turkmenistan in 2008, provides a framework for an information exchange on energy policies, discussions on the diversification of transit routes and the promotion of renewables and energy efficiency. The EU will continue to discuss with Turkmenistan on all energy-related issues including methane gas emissions and renewables and has encouraged Turkmenistan to join the **Global Methane Pledge** initiative launched in September 2021 by President von der Leyen and President Biden.

## **DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND EU FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

In **2014-2020**, the EU has focused its **bilateral cooperation** on sustainable agriculture and rural development, education sector reform, public administration capacity building. The EBRD implements a bilateral support scheme for small and medium enterprises - the Enterprise Growth Programme. In the framework of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, Turkmenistan benefits from the EU **regional programmes** in the fields of governance, energy, environment, climate change, disaster risk management, trade, support to the private sector (mainly small and medium enterprises), border management and fight against drug trafficking.

Given its Upper Middle Income Country status, Turkmenistan will benefit, through the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) or Global Europe Instrument, **2021-2027**, from a **cooperation facility**, focusing on green aspects of the economy and improving the business climate, with an emphasis on agriculture/rural development and support to trade development, in particular support to youth- and women-led Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

## **TURKMENISTAN'S CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL STABILITY**

Turkmenistan's status of permanent neutrality has contributed to its role in promoting regional stability and to tackling common threats such as terrorism, violent extremism, drug trafficking and transnational organised crime. The existence of ethnic Turkmens living in the Northern provinces of Afghanistan is an important factor in relations with Afghanistan and justifies Turkmenistan's active interest in supporting peace talks.

Turkmenistan has also been active in facilitating better management of shared water resources in the region, notably in the framework of the **International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea**, which it chairs since 2017.

The **UN Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA)** has been present in Ashgabat since 2007 in order to promote regional dialogue and conflict prevention. The EU supports this approach through the **High-Level Political and Security Dialogue**, the **Central Asia Border Security Initiative** and several related projects (such as Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA), Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP), EU Action Against Drugs and Organised Crime (EU-ACT) and LEICA (Law Enforcement in Central Asia)) implemented at regional level.

## **RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

As part of the response to the crisis in Central Asia, the EU adopted in 2020 the **Central Asia COVID-19 Crisis Response (CACCR)** programme, which primarily aimed at assisting the region's middle- and upper-middle income countries (Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). This programme, implemented by the World Health Organisation, aims at containing and overcoming the pandemic and at strengthening the resilience of health systems in the participating countries. A successor programme under the NDICI will cover all five countries in the region with a focus on support to vaccination processes and immunisation systems with a view to future-proofing health systems.