



# 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.

## 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 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 a planned **opening of a fully-fledged EU Delegation in Turkmenistan** in 2019, signal a **mutual strategic interest to intensify relations**.

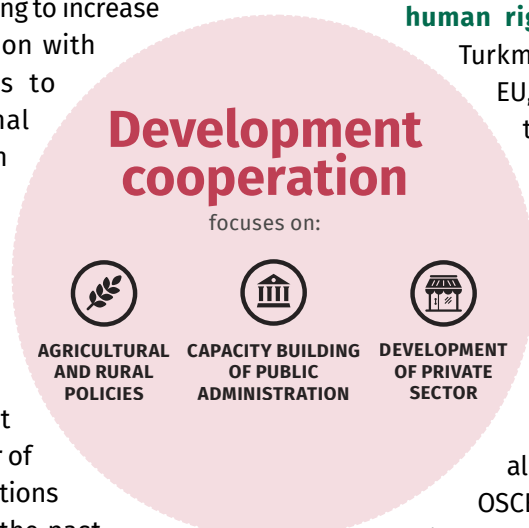
EU bilateral development cooperation focuses notably on consolidating the general and professional education systems, on capacity-building of the Turkmen **public administration**, further improving **public finance management**, supporting the development of the **private sector** and agricultural **and rural policies**.

## SUPPORTING EFFORTS IN IMPLEMENTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Human rights are an important aspect of our bilateral relations with Turkmenistan. The European Union has already held ten annual meetings of the Human Rights Dialogue (latest on 21 June 2018), allowing for open and constructive discussions on sensitive issues related to **human rights and democratisation**.

Turkmenistan organised a visit for EU, UN, OSCE and US diplomats to the Dashoguz women's penitentiary (in September 2015 and in January 2017), to the general regime colony for minors in Bayramali (in December 2016) and to Tejen general penitentiary in Ahal province (on November 2018). A Turkmen delegation also participated in the Warsaw OSCE Human Dimension meetings in 2015, 2016 and 2018.

In 2016, Turkmenistan adopted its first National Action Plan for **Human Rights** which outlined notably the need to implement reforms in the rule of law area. The EU supported the drafting of this Action Plan and the development of the National Institute of Human Rights and Democracy of Turkmenistan. Between 2015-2018, 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 person; and child rights. Furthermore, 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 remains 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 continues to expect Turkmenistan to effectively implement all accepted recommendations.

### **ENERGY COOPERATION**

The EU has also been engaging with Turkmenistan, along with Azerbaijan, on negotiations for developing the **Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCP)** and linking Turkmen gas to the Southern corridor. An extended **Southern Gas Corridor** should transport gas volumes far beyond 10bcm in future to have a significant impact on gas supply diversification in the EU as a whole. 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, the diversification of transit routes and the **promotion of renewables** and energy **efficiency**. A number of follow-up meetings and consultations on TCP took place in the past years, most recently in October 2018 in Brussels.

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

Turkmenistan continued to benefit from funding for development provided by the EU's Development Cooperation Instrument until 2017, despite its graduation to an upper middle income

country in 2014. While bilateral cooperation is slowly being phased out, there are still a number of projects ongoing in the areas of education, public administration capacity-building, and development of agricultural and rural policies. The EU and Turkmenistan also cooperate in the framework of the **regional approach** within the EU Strategy for Central Asia, which includes all five Central Asian countries. Regional cooperation projects focus on **education, rule of law, water and environment, border management and the fight against drug prevention**. Turkmenistan also benefits from projects under the EU **Investment Facility for Central Asia**.

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

Turkmenistan's status of permanent neutrality has contributed to its role in promoting regional stability and in tackling common threats such as **terrorism, violent extremism, illicit drug trafficking, and transnational organised crime**. The existence of ethnic Turkmens (between 200,000 and 1 million) living in the Northern provinces of Afghanistan is an important factor of relations with Afghanistan. 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 Aral Sea, which it currently chairs. The UN Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (**UNRCCA**) has been present in Ashgabat for ten years in order to **promote regional dialogue and conflict prevention**. This approach is supported by the EU through the High-Level and Political Security Dialogue, the Central Asia Border Security Initiative and several related projects (such as **BOMCA, CADAP, EU-ACT**) implemented at regional level.