



# 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 together with the related Council conclusions of June 2019 provide 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. 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.

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 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 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 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**; **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 remain a priority in the EU-Turkmenistan cooperation.

### Development cooperation

focuses on



AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL POLICIES



STRENGTHENING THE FIELD OF EDUCATION



PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CAPACITY-BUILDING



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 whilst staying true to the **European Green Deal**.

### **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 bilateral projects ongoing until 2020/2021 in the areas of **education**, **public administration capacity-building**, and development of **sustainable 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, the rule of law, water and environment, border management and the

fight against drug trafficking. 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 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 implemented at regional level.

### **RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

The EU and its Member States have mobilised **€134 million for Central Asia** as part of the **Team Europe** solidarity package. In July 2020, the EU launched a €3 million Central Asia COVID-19 Crisis Response Solidarity Programme, with a primary focus on Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The programme, implemented by the World Health Organisation, will provide support over a period of two years to mitigate the current outbreak of the pandemic and contribute towards longer-term resilience of the national health systems.