

# Head of the OSCE centre in Ashgabat: UK response



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First, let me congratulate you, Ambassador MacGregor, on your new appointment and thank you and your colleagues for the report to the Permanent Council and for the work undertaken at the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat over the previous year. I would also like to thank your predecessor Ambassador Drozd for her work over the last five years.

We welcome the productive relationship that has been established between the field mission and the host government, as evidenced by the President providing new office premises to the Centre free of charge for ten years. We welcome this demonstration of the host government's commitment to the OSCE mission, which helps the sustainability of the Centre. I wish you and your staff a smooth office move.

We welcome the efforts you and your colleagues have made to promote the Centre's work, and the extensive media engagement you have undertaken. We look forward to hearing in future reports your account of the positive effect this has had. We also celebrate the work you have done to join up with other OSCE field missions in Central Asia, helping maximise the effect of the OSCE in the region.

Madam Chair, I would like to pay particular attention to three areas of Ambassador MacGregor's report.

First, on trans-national threats. We welcome the work of the Centre to increase regional and cross-regional cooperation, including with Afghanistan. We note that the Centre supported officers from various border agencies to establish an Advanced Passenger Information system, and supported the training and certification of local experts. I would be interested to learn more about the effect this training has had and the benefits it has brought.

The UK was also pleased to be able to support the “Strengthening Border Service Capacities in Turkmenistan” project, which has improved the skills of over one hundred and fifty Turkmen border guards and law enforcement officers.

In the second dimension, we would like to highlight the work being done to assist Turkmenistan in developing strategic planning, networking and scientific collaboration in the area of renewable energy. And we commend the Centre for its efforts to raise awareness of environmental issues, in particular prevention of pollution in the oil and gas sector.

We look forward to working with the OSCE and other partners to assist the government of Turkmenistan to address the challenges of climate change.

Third, we were pleased to read of the work done by the Centre on media freedom, specifically supporting the development of a module on freedom of expression for journalism. We look forward to hearing more about the impact of its launch later this year.

More broadly, we were pleased to be able to provide experts from the United Kingdom to give an overview of models of national human rights institutions and shared experiences of co-operation between such institutions and governments.

The human rights situation in Turkmenistan is such that it remains a UK Human Rights Priority Country. We believe that the host government would continue to benefit from OSCE assistance as it strives to meet international standards and commitments made at the 2018 UN Universal Periodic Review. This includes the recommendation it accepted to investigate allegations of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment of prisoners – including holding individuals incommunicado.

Throughout all this, we are grateful that the Centre has continued to promote and mainstream gender equality. I am glad that the Centre’s activities were able to involve so many beneficiaries.

To finish, I would like to once again congratulate the

Ambassador on his new role and am confident he will bring the energy and drive – as he did in his previous posting – to Turkmenistan in the years to come.

Thank you.

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