

OSCE Centre in Ashgabat: UK statement

We welcome and thank Ambassador Natalya Drozd and her colleagues for her report to the Permanent Council and the work they have undertaken at the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat over the last year.

2020 marks the 25th anniversary of Turkmenistan's permanent neutral status. We welcome Turkmenistan's efforts to strengthen security and reduce conflict regionally and internationally, and encourage Turkmenistan's on-going engagement with the international community and the rules based international system to promote increased respect for basic rights and freedoms for the Turkmen people.

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

First, on the work in the third dimension. I was encouraged to read about the support provided by the Centre to the host authorities in helping them continue to adhere to international human rights standards, and assisting them with the implementation of the 2016-2020 National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP). We too have supported the implementation of this Action Plan, and it is good to see this work prioritised.

I was also pleased to read about the assistance given by the Centre to the Ombudsperson's Office. The UK has supported the work of the Human Rights Ombudsperson since her appointment in 2017, through staff training, raising awareness of human rights, and providing human rights education to those in government and civil society. I am glad to see the importance of this role recognised.

I commend Ambassador Drozd for the work the Centre has done on the 2015-2020 National Action Plan on Gender Equality. The UK has supported human rights and civic education for youth, particularly for girls, and recently worked with the UN Population Fund to organise the first national survey on family life in Turkmenistan, which will provide base line statistics on domestic abuse. I am glad that the Centre's mainstreaming of gender equality has included organising and conducting lectures on the role of women in security, as well as women in leadership.

Second, on security. I would like to give special mention to the work the Centre has done to strengthen the capacities of the State Border Guard Service, by using innovative patrolling, surveillance, and other methods; and conducting cross-border workshops and conferences. As chair of the Security Committee, we place great value on comprehensive border management as a means to reduce cross border crime.

And finally, on trade. I am pleased to see the focus on promoting economic connectivity through regional trade. In recent years, British experts have worked with Turkmen counterparts on exploring export opportunities, promoting diversity in routes and potential markets for exports, and developing

international marketing strategies for natural gas products. Covid-19 restrictions aside, Turkmenistan's role in regional cooperation means people and goods have moved more freely across the region, and improved cooperation adds to the region's security and stability

As this is the last Permanent Council meeting for Ambassador Drozd in her role as Head of Centre in Ashgabat I would like to greatly thank her for her hard work and efforts in Turkmenistan. I wish the Centre continued success and wish Ambassador Drozd all the very best for the future.