



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, Ambassador Sergei Belyaev

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 22, 2011

The United States extends a warm welcome back to the Permanent Council to Ambassador Sergei Belyaev, here for the first time in his capacity as Head of Mission at the OSCE Center in Ashgabat. Ambassador, we thank you for your thorough and detailed report this morning. Please also extend our thanks to your very capable staff for the excellent work they do every day.

Ambassador Belyaev, your report documents laudable achievements in Ashgabat. The work of the Center to implement Ministerial Council Decision 4 of 2007 on enhancing engagement with Afghanistan has been encouraging. The Center's work in the fields of border management and security assists efforts to combat the narcotics trade through cross-border cooperation, and these activities in turn contribute to the security and stability of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and the entire region.

Likewise, we applaud the Center's efforts to work with the government in the safe and secure storage or destruction of small arms, light weapons, and conventional ammunition. The terrible explosion and resulting loss of life in Abadan on July 7 underscores the vital importance of this work and the need for it to continue. We also applaud your efforts to work with other organizations and partners, particularly UNODC, which can act as a force multiplier of your work.

Turkmenistan has made great progress in developing its energy sector. Your report reflects on the tremendous growth experienced in Turkmenistan and on the government's efforts to encourage foreign direct investment. The Center's work to combat corruption in Turkmenistan is of crucial significance. Likewise, measures taken by the Center to assist the government in addressing environmental challenges and promoting environmental security have been valuable, particularly with respect to strengthening regional cooperation around the Aral and Caspian Seas. We look forward to the results of the upcoming High-Level Energy Conference on integrating global energy markets in November in Ashgabat, and we know the Center will be doing a great deal to see that it is a success.

Ambassador, the United States sees the work the Center does in the field of the Human Dimension as among the chief contributions the OSCE can make to the government and the people of Turkmenistan. Regrettably, this remains the area where the government of Turkmenistan remains least compliant in its OSCE commitments — commitments which it has freely and voluntarily undertaken.

While we welcome news of the recent visit of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, freedom of expression, including for members of the media, remains almost completely absent in Turkmenistan. State censorship of the internet, to include many social networking and blogging sites, severely restricts the population's access to information that is widely available in the rest of the world. We welcome the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media's intention to return to Turkmenistan in November as evidence to the OSCE's intention to engage more actively on this important issue.

We support the Center's efforts to work with the government to improve the legal framework and to upgrade the system of justice administration, and we applaud the efforts to address conditions for prisoners in Turkmenistan. We encourage the government to take the steps and institute real reforms, including additional governmental support for the development of civil society, which are necessary for Turkmenistan to uphold its OSCE commitments. The government's lack of support for and even hostility toward civil society resulted in the closure of the local Medicins Sans Frontiers office in December 2009, and is responsible for the slow development of civil society, which has seen the opening of only one NGO since 2005.

We call on the Center to continue to help the government find new and creative ways to engage with civil society. The training course your staff presented in cooperation with ODIHR on protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in countering terrorism is an excellent example, as is the support the Center provides to the NGO Keik Okara, which is doing exceptional work under difficult circumstances to assist victims of domestic violence.

Finally, Ambassador, we encourage the Center to engage with the Government of Turkmenistan and encourage it to provide timely feedback on the Center's project proposals. Additionally, we encourage the Center to urge the Government of Turkmenistan to come up-to-date on its financial obligations to the OSCE. The failure to pay its fair share in this organization and delay in approving a list of projects sends an unwelcome message about Turkmenistan's readiness to comply with all of its OSCE commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

.