

Jose Manuel Barroso
President of European Commission

Gunther Oettinger
European Commissioner for Energy

12 January 2011,

Dear President of the Commission,
Dear Commissioner,

We write in advance of your visit to Turkmenistan to urge you to place human rights and rule of law on the agenda of your discussions with President Berdymukhamedov.

As you are aware, Turkmenistan remains one of the worst offenders on human rights worldwide¹. In 2010 several reports by international NGOs testify to the lack of improvement in guaranteeing a range of human rights and fundamental freedoms.² Amongst the litany of rights concerns on which the European Union should promote reforms in line with international standards, we highlight the following:

- freedom of movement remains restricted through the existence of unofficial exit blacklists;
- the country is still closed to independent human rights monitors and the government continues to bar international organisations access to the country's detention facilities; and
- civil society actors continue to be the target of government persecution and are unable to work freely.

Many prisoners continue to be held in Turkmen prisons on trumped-up charges. In particular, we would urge you to use your visit to raise the cases of *Sapardurdy Khadzhiyev* and *Annakurban Amanklychev*, who worked with the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation and were imprisoned in 2006 on trumped-up charges, after they assisted a French TV crew in making a documentary about the country. Amnesty International has named them prisoners of conscience and the UN has recently called for their release. We urge you to do likewise. A decision by Berdymukhamedov to free these Niyazov-era political prisoners would send a positive signal about Turkmenistan's readiness to respond to EU Concerns about its human rights record. Likewise, we would urge you to press for the release of dissident *Gulgeldy Annaniyazov*, imprisoned in 2008 and *Ilmurad Nurliev*, a Protestant pastor who recently received a four year prison sentence on what appear to be politically motivated charges.

¹ Transparency international placed this closed country at 172nd in the world in its 2010 corruption perceptions index; Freedom House Freedom in the world report in 2010 classified the country as 'not free'.

² *Freedom of Movement in Turkmenistan*, Turkmen Independent Lawyers' Association; *Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkmenistan*, Open Society Foundations; *All that Gas? The EU and Turkmenistan*, Global Witness;

These are but a few emblematic cases among hundreds of unnamed prisoners languishing in Turkmen prisons on wrongful charges.

The EU is also well placed to press for the upholding of rule of law and for greater transparency: An audit of the Foreign Exchange Reserve Fund/ Stabilisation Fund and an agreement by the Turkmen government to publish a proper budget should be a pre-requisite for European engagement in this sector. We hope you will use your visit to demand information about the Stabilisation Fund and call for disclosure of budgets as a necessary part of the transparency expected in good governance. It would also provide some assurance as to the use of EU investors' and taxpayers' money.

It is in the EU's interests to place human rights and the rule of law squarely on its agenda with the Turkmen government. Not doing so would risk being seen as the EU condoning one of the worst human rights records in the world. It would undermine the EU's negotiating position by reinforcing a misconception that the EU somehow cannot pursue strategic interests and promote human rights at the same time.

Yours sincerely,

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Director, International Partnership for Human Rights, Belgium

Bjoern Engesland
Secretary General, Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Eldar Zeynalov
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