



**REPORT BY Mr Albert Jan MAAT, CHAIRMAN OF THE DELEGATION TO
THE FIRST INTERPARLIAMENTARY MEETING EU/TURKMENISTAN,
FOR THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE COMMITTEE
ON DEVELOPMENT**

ASHGABAT (TURKMENISTAN)

18-23 JUNE 2006

Introduction

The first Interparliamentary Meeting between a delegation of members from the European Parliament and the political authorities of Turkmenistan took place in Ashgabat from 19 to 22 June 2006. The visit had been scheduled as part of the 2006 programme for delegations and its inclusion was partly as a result of representations by the Turkmen authorities urging closer links with the European Union.

However the visit subsequently coincided with deliberations within the European Parliament on a proposed Interim Agreement on trade and trade-related matters between the European Community and Turkmenistan. The new Agreement would replace the Agreement on Trade and Commercial and Economic Cooperation between the EC and the USSR of 1989, which still covers relations between the EC and Turkmenistan.

The Interim Trade Agreement had been drawn up by the Commission to cover the period before a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) might come into force. It was initialled in 1998 and forwarded from the Commission to the Parliament under the consultation procedure. After a period of consideration in the Parliament, a final decision on the Agreement was suspended because of concerns over the poor human rights situation in Turkmenistan and political repression in the country.

This situation remained unchanged for several years. However, following further debate within the Parliament, the process started again and the International Trade Committee (rapporteur Daniel CASPARY, EPP-ED, Germany) was asked to prepare a draft legislative resolution on the proposal for an Agreement. The Foreign Affairs Committee (rapporteur Panagiotis BEGLITIS (PES, Greece) was asked to prepare an opinion on the proposal. Both Committees voted in favour of the Agreement in March 2006 and the draft legislative resolution was forwarded to plenary for a final vote.

The plenary vote has not yet taken place as a result of heightened controversy about the repressive nature of the Turkmen regime. The visit of the delegation therefore provided an opportunity for members to obtain first hand information about the situation in Turkmenistan and to meet with as wide a range of key players as possible.

Deliberations focused on what policy should be adopted towards the Turkmen government and the desirability of endorsing the Interim Trade Agreement. Those in favour of the Agreement argued in broad terms that a general policy of isolation towards Ashgabat had not yielded any positive results and that it was necessary to engage more with the Turkmen authorities. They pointed to Article One of the Agreement, which underlines the need for both parties to respect democracy and human rights. They noted too that there had been some positive signs emanating from Ashgabat, with such reforms as the abolition of the death penalty and the law against child labour. Those who opposed the agreement argued that the Turkmenistan government remained one of the most repressive in the world and that to offer a trade agreement at this time was sending out completely the wrong signal. They contrasted such a step with EU policy towards Belarus, which had been one of increased isolation and sanctions.

The substantial reserves of oil and gas of Turkmenistan were another factor that could not be ignored, although the Interim Agreement does not cover trade in these areas. Russia and China were also very keen to have close economic ties with Turkmenistan because of these energy resources. In addition to the current pipeline to Russia, a number of other lines from Turkmenistan are being proposed, including lines to China and to Pakistan via Afghanistan as well as a trans-Caspian venture.

The delegation was led by Mr Albert MAAT (EPP-ED, Netherlands), First Vice Chair of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Turkmenistan. A full list of members who participated is appended.

Preparation

An initial meeting took place with the ambassador of Turkmenistan, Mr Kakadjan MOMMADOV on 1 June 2006. Members were subsequently briefed by Mr Robin LIDDELL of the Commission on 14 June 2006 in Strasbourg. Briefing dossiers were also prepared. A Policy Note was prepared by the European Parliament services, which provides more in depth background on the current situation in Turkmenistan.

The Delegation sent an official letter to the Turkmen authorities requesting a series of meetings with the chief members of the government, including President NIYAZOV. The preparations for the visit were greatly facilitated by the representative of the EU Presidency, H.E. Hans MONDORF, Ambassador of Germany in Ashgabat and Mr Michael WILSON, Head of the TACIS Office in Turkmenistan. Thanks are due to them and their staff for liaising with the Turkmen authorities on the programme and logistics.

19 June 2006

In the morning the delegation visited the National Museum of Turkmenistan.

Working lunch with EU ambassadors

Present at the meeting were the ambassadors of Germany, United Kingdom and Romania and the chargé d'affaires of the French embassy. Also present was the head of the TACIS Office.

It was noted that the EU dialogue with the Turkmen authorities was “uncoordinated but concentrated”. On 1 June the Joint Committee EC-Turkmenistan Trade and Cooperation Agreement – which included Ad Hoc Human Rights Meetings - had taken place. On 24-26 June there would be a series of OSCE meetings. By coincidence the European Parliament had sent a delegation in the same month.

The 2002 coup attempt by opposition forces in the country had pushed the Turkmen regime into a period of isolation from which it was gradually emerging. The most tangible sign of this had been the letter from President Niyazov to Mr Prodi in late 2003 stressing the Turkmen government’s desire for closer ties. There had been some rapprochement in the 1990s but this had not developed as Ashgabat had been hoping for more from the EU than it had been able to deliver. Much of the impetus for renewed ties had come from the increased importance of alternative energy supplies and the potential reserves of Turkmenistan. Gazprom had monopolised the energy reserves of the country to date. Ukraine was another significant customer; however it was obliged to transport all its imports via Russian territory.

The USA strongly favoured a Trans-Caspian pipeline in order that Turkmen energy exports need not go via Russia, although this was hampered because of the lack of an accord on territoriality issues. China was also a new player in the region and was keen to import as much Turkmen energy as possible. A trans-Afghanistan pipeline was not likely for a considerable period of time because of the lack of stability in the country. In the same week a high level delegation from Gazprom was also present in Turkmenistan to negotiate a new price for Turkmen gas.

Most diplomats broadly considered that the ratification and implementation of the Interim Trade Agreement would be a positive step. Some questions remained over whether Turkmenistan had gone far enough to warrant ratification of the Agreement and whether it would be appropriate to have stronger human rights conditionality clauses. One speaker underlined that there was a moral dimension to the EU and that it was important to keep raising the issue of human rights and democracy. A view was also expressed that the EU should have engaged more with the Turkmen in the past.

There had been positive steps in the field of human rights such as the abolition of exit visas. Concern centred over such areas as education where the tenth and eleventh years of schooling had been abolished and young people were now required to undertake two years of work experience. Reports indicated that this had led to enormous corruption over work certificates. Only 3% of the population went to university where their courses were limited to two years. (This was contrasted to Uzbekistan, which was investing \$1 billion in a five-year plan to raise education standards). It was noted that the Commission had raised these concerns over education standards during the recent Joint Committee.

There were significant worries over the restrictions on the media and it was noted that only three or four government-sponsored newspapers were authorised. However this was mitigated to some extent by the proliferation of satellite dishes, which allowed people to view up to 400 channels. Restrictions had recently been removed on the rights of certain sects to worship – in addition to Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox, which had already been authorised. A question mark remained however over whether it was possible to register religious establishments outside Ashgabat. A positive move was the softening of legislation on registration of NGOs, which was now theoretically possible.

Other issues addressed included the reports of the closure of libraries and hospitals in the provinces. The delegation was informed that a significant number of library books had indeed been destroyed but these were generally old books in poor condition, which dated from the Soviet regime. It was acknowledged that the situation of medical care in the provinces was also very bad and that many people had refused to have operations in provincial hospitals. Money had been spent on modern equipment but insufficient numbers of staff had been trained to operate it. Turkmenistan had lukewarm relations with other Central Asian countries and regional cooperation was very limited. Bilateral dialogue offered more opportunity for progress.

In this meeting - and subsequent meetings with ambassadors - there was discussion of the most appropriate way to deal with the Turkmen authorities during the current delegation visit and in particular how the subject of human rights should be broached in the course of meetings.

Meeting with H.E. Tracey JACOBSON, US Ambassador

Ms Jacobson noted that the USA had four major policy areas in Turkmenistan, viz: democracy and human rights; economic issues; security; and public health. Washington was working with the regime in places where it could help to bring about improvements. President Niyazov was sensitive to relations with the USA. The EU could raise its profile in Turkmenistan by ratifying and implementing the Agreement but it was also essential for it to set benchmarks to measure Ashgabat's progress towards respect for democracy, human rights and religious freedom.

Her government was working to promote democratic reforms and some success had been achieved in certain areas such as the lifting of the visa regime. A number of religious groups had also been granted registration. Nevertheless civil society remained under severe pressure. Ms Jacobson denied that there had been any softening of the US emphasis on human rights and noted that her government, for example, continued to raise the issue of Maria Yklymova, daughter of the exiled opposition leader.

The USA was seeking to promote small and medium sized enterprises in a country where 75% of the economy was in state hands. Oil and gas had only become a major policy issue after Russia had temporarily cut off its supplies to Ukraine. The US was seeking to diversify energy supplies. At present Turkmenistan was selling its gas to Russia at a price of \$65 per 1000 cubic metres and wished to raise this to \$100. Gazprom was charging Western Europe \$230 to \$280. The details of the pipeline to

China had not yet been worked out and there were security problems over a pipeline through Afghanistan. There had been a lack of any independent audit of the real extent of the country's energy reserves. The US government favoured multiple pipelines and it was important that they should be attractive to the private sector. Russia did not welcome alternative pipelines and was likely to raise environmental concerns.

Borders with Iran and Afghanistan posed security problems for Turkmenistan and there were serious problems of trafficking in person and narcotics. According to some reports 50% of the rural male population was addicted to heroin. There was no US military base in Turkmenistan, particularly as Ashgabat followed a clear policy of neutrality. Any reports of such bases were deliberate attempts at misinformation.

It was not permitted to report bad news in the press and it was very hard to target assistance when its discussion of the problem was not permitted. However in the field of public health the USA was particularly concerned about tuberculosis and HIV.

Meeting with H.E. Hakki AKIL, Turkish Ambassador

Mr Akil noted that democracy should be the goal of the EU, however it had to pursue a step-by-step approach and it was important to appreciate what was realistic in the current climate. His government was always raising individual cases of human rights and seeking to persuade the Turkmen authorities that they should not isolate the country. He noted that all major decisions depended on the President and that there were no regular ministers in the western sense. The President attached great importance to Ashgabat as a symbol of the new Turkmen nation.

The ambassador underlined the need to transport hydrocarbons from Turkmenistan and to find alternatives to Gazprom's routes. Regional cooperation was an essential element in this process. He also noted that Gazprom bought gas from Turkmenistan at a very low price and sold it to the EU at a much higher price.

Turkey was providing Turkmenistan with textile technology. A number of western companies such as Mercedes subcontracted their operations to Turkish concerns, which then carried out the activity on their behalf in Turkmenistan.

There was close cooperation on education between his country and Turkmenistan and around 10,000 Turkmen students were studying in Turkey. There were also a number of Turkish schools in Turkmenistan where students also learned English before they went to the USA as sponsored students.

Meeting with Mr Dieter MATTHEI, Political Officer OSCE

Mr Matthei and his colleagues outlined OSCE activity in its three areas of operation – political, economic/environment, and the human dimension. He noted that the Turkmen government wanted any cooperation to be at a government level and to restrict any contact with civil society and non-registered NGOs. The OSCE faced significant barriers in working with individuals who were suffering from intimidation.

There was no political opposition in the country and the media were completely controlled. Nepotism and corruption flourished and there was insufficient legal protection. There were many cases of people being sent to gaol on fabricated charges and some documented instances of torture. The authorities considered those imprisoned after the 2002 attempt to be “traitors to the motherland” and did not grant them any access to outside bodies. Some steps had been taken to tackle drug trafficking but there was a serious problem of drug addiction.

Relations with the United Nations had priority for the Turkmen government as the organisation was seen as being the main guarantee of the country’s independence and security. Mutual economic need underpinned the relationship between Russia and Turkmenistan, however Ashgabat was not integrated into CIS structures and had been only an associate member since 2005. The situation with Uzbekistan had normalised and Turkmenistan was on cordial terms with Iran. Economic relations with China were good and there had been progress in developing links with Japan.

Meeting with Mr Alexander LETOSHOV, First Secretary, Russian Embassy

Mr Letoshov noted that Russia was cooperating with Turkmenistan at a number of levels. He stressed that it was important to involve Ashgabat in a constructive dialogue and to recognise the specificities of the country. Messrs Putin and Niyazov spoke on a regular basis.

His government raised particular concerns about the position of the Russian-speaking minority, which had reduced opportunities for education in their own language. He noted that in the Soviet era secondary and tertiary education had been in Russian – the situation was now almost the opposite. As a consequence around 60% of those registered as having left the country since 1991 were Russian speaking. The current Russian speaking population in Turkmenistan was probably around 150,000 to 200,000.

Mr Letoshov had no information about the ongoing discussions between Gazprom and the Turkmen authorities. His government recognised that each sovereign state had the right to develop pipelines where it wished, however it considered that these should be economically viable and not based on political expediency.

20 June 2006

Meeting with Mr Rashid MEREDOV, Foreign Minister

Mr Meredov outlined the desire of Turkmenistan for closer links with the EU and referred to the letter sent by President Niyazov to Mr Prodi to this effect. He pointed to the growing trade links with EU member states and the active cooperation that was taking place through the TACIS programme. The EC-Turkmenistan Trade and Cooperation Agreement Joint Committee earlier in the month had also been constructive. He signalled a readiness on the part of his government to participate in an open dialogue on humanitarian issues.

The EP delegation stressed the importance of dialogue and cooperation in areas such as trade. Members stressed that they were seeking to learn more about the situation in Turkmenistan and that such links were at a very early stage.

Mr Meredov noted that Turkmen delegations had recently gone to France and Sweden where they had met with parliamentarians of those countries. Turkmenistan was already trading with 85 countries and, since independence, the volume of trade had totalled \$56 billion, which was made up of \$32 billion in exports and \$24 billion in imports. 22% of Turkmenistan's trade was with the EU. He stressed that his country had changed its social and economic infrastructure in order to be more fully integrated into the world economy. It was increasing oil and gas production and also developing its textile industry and the agriculture sector. The transport sector was also being developed, in particular through more modern aeroplanes and airports and new roads and railways.

The EP delegation agreed that trade and economic links were very important but stressed that it was also important to have a wide-ranging discussion and cooperation on issues such as human rights. Members also underlined the common interests between the two sides, such as security and energy.

Mr Meredov emphasised the importance of cooperation in the field of energy and noted that the current six-month contract with Gazprom for Turkmen gas was nearly completed and that negotiations were still underway to fix a new price. No agreement had been reached to date.

The EP delegation underlined again the need for dialogue to prevent misinformation and the importance of having well educated people and security in the judicial system. The EU-Turkmen relationship should also be founded on respect for human rights.

Mr Meredov requested a short break and after this reiterated that his government was ready to develop cooperation in all areas. He stressed that security was a key issue for the region and that Turkmenistan was actively involved in all processes to promote peace. He underlined that his country's neutrality did not mean isolation and noted that Ashgabat had joined the international anti-terror coalition in 2001. His government was actively involved in the fight against illicit drug trafficking. The border guards had received training and were taking all possible steps in this field. This had led to increased arrests of smugglers and the public destruction of 1,756 kilos of drugs three weeks previously. Ashgabat was cooperating closely with the OSCE, UN and EU in this field.

The EP delegation stressed its welcome for the Turkmen government position on terrorism and underlined again the need for ongoing engagement in all areas, including human rights. They reiterated their desire to meet with President Niyazov and to continue this discussion.

Following this meeting MEPs Jonas SJOSTEDT and Glyn FORD had a separate discussion with Mr Meredov on humanitarian issues, notably the case of Maria YKLYMOVA (see above).

Meeting with Majilis (Parliament) Chairman, Vice Premier Owesgeldi ATAYEV

Mr Atayev noted that Turkmenistan was a young state that had encountered difficult times after achieving its independence from Moscow, to which it had been linked since 1881. Nevertheless it had achieved an impressive economic growth rate and was creating a market economy based on a proper legal framework. The visit of the delegation was a good opportunity for the two sides to get to know each other.

The Vice Premier stressed that all draft legislation was sent to the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights, which established whether the proposals were in line with international standards. In response to a question about multi-party politics, Mr Atayev argued that there was no single common understanding of what was meant by democracy and human rights. He stressed that democracy ought not to mean that a person could do whatever he or she liked and human rights should not lead to the existing legislative framework being ignored. Laws that had been adopted should be respected. The draft budget was submitted to the Majilis and around 60 to 65% of the total was allocated to social expenditure. Attempts were being made to reduce administrative costs. Only four taxes or “administrative charges” were still in place and there was a 2% tax for entrepreneurs.

Institute of Democracy and Human Rights, Foreign Minister MEREDOV

The delegation resumed its discussions with Mr Meredov and other representatives of the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights.

They were informed that the Institute examined the complaints of citizens and provided an advisory/consulting service. It monitored foreign legislation and ensured that domestic legislation complied with it. Educational activities took place through the Centre for Humanitarian Law and the Centre for Human Rights, both of which carried out seminars and workshops. Recent legislation in which it was involved included the Law on Abolishing Capital Punishment and the ban on the searching of private houses.

There was close cooperation with the OSCE, UNDP and UNICEF. In particular it was noted that the UN Deputy High Commissioner on Minority Rights had visited the country. Mr Meredov stated that there were no problems with the Russian or other minorities and that non-discrimination was enshrined in the constitution.

UNHCR experts had assisted in drafting the new laws on religious freedom. This had led to the initial registration of four “non-traditional” religious sects (Baptists, Seven Day Adventists, Hare Krishna and Bah’ai) and subsequently five others. Non-registered religious activity had also been decriminalised.

Other recent legislation that was noted included conventions against racial discrimination and protecting the rights of women and children. Article 18 of the constitution enshrined the rights of women although there were no gender quotas. There was no “black list” on citizens leaving the country and citizens did not require an exit visa. However certain circumstances existed under which people would not be allowed to leave the country for a temporary period, such as debt recovery, military service obligations, or being under criminal investigation.

The Institute was involved in the preparation of legislation for the local elections taking place on 23 July 2006 and the district elections in December 2006. “Hakims”, or Heads of the District legislative bodies, would be elected in multi-candidate elections – in the past people had been appointed to this position by the President. The Institute would observe the elections.

The Foreign Minister stated that reports of the arrest of four underground human rights activists on the previous Friday (16 June) were inaccurate. Those detained were involved in illegal anti-government activity and the case had nothing to do with human rights.

Mr Meredov stressed that it was important to see the situation in the country rather than to rely on inaccurate reports. The Turkmen Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Foreign Affairs in Ashgabat could deal directly with concerns on human rights.

The EP delegation underlined four points:

1. Free elections with international observers
2. Freedom of religion
3. An ongoing debate and relation on human rights issues between the European Parliament and the Turkmen government
4. Reform of the education system

Meeting with Mr Gurbanmyrat ATAYEV, Minister of Oil, Gas and Natural Resources

Mr Ataev outlined the huge reserves of on-shore and off-shore oil and gas possessed by Turkmenistan, stressing that there was proper audit of these volumes by international companies. He pointed to his government’s plans to expand its existing network of pipelines. According to the agreement with China, Turkmenistan would supply 30 billion cubic metres of gas over the period from 2009 to 2039. A similar amount of gas would be transported to Pakistan, via Afghanistan. The trans-Caspian pipeline was in the research and development stage.

The Delegation noted that the existence of oil and gas had been a handicap to many countries because of crime and corruption. Members stressed the need for complete transparency and full accounts of prices and production. Mr Atayev replied that the Institute of Statistics provided full information on these matters.

The Minister outlined the situation regarding negotiations with Gazprom and stated that in the second half of 2006 the Turkmen government proposed to raise the price of gas from \$60 to \$100 for a thousand cubic metres. He recognised that Gazprom was selling on the same gas to Western Europe for \$230 or more and emphasised the wish for direct gas links to the EU.

In the evening the delegation attended a dinner hosted by the TACIS office.

21 June 2006

In the morning the delegation visited the Kiptschak Mosque where President Niyazov's family are buried. They then visited the ancient Parthian capital of Old Nissa and drove through the hills of Archabil near the border with Iran.

In the early afternoon members attended a concert "on the occasion of the 14 years from election of President Saparmurat Turkmenbashi the Great".

Meeting with Ms Shemshat ANNAGYLYJOVA, Minister of Education and officials of the Turkmenistan University

Members were informed about the work of the university and the support that it had received from the TACIS programme, which included computerisation of the library services. It was noted that there were 16 higher education institutions with 16,000 students. All of these institutions had a connection to the Internet and there was a UNDP programme to connect schools. Many students went abroad to countries such as Russia, Romania, China and Ukraine. Specialists in oil and gas production also studied abroad.

The Minister considered it was a positive move to end compulsory education after nine years and she pointed to the success of Turkmen students in the International Olympiads. After nine years students now pursued work experience in their chosen field before entering higher education. In the past they had tended to follow their parents' choice of subject in higher education, however after two years of work experience they were more equipped to make decisions for themselves.

Other subjects covered in the meeting included discussion of the cooperation between Turkmenistan and foreign academics in such areas as science and archaeology. There was recognition of foreign diplomas from reputable institutions, provided students met certain linguistic standards and took a government qualification.

Ms Annagylyjova argued that study of the Rukhnama taught children about the past present and future and that to omit it from the education system was inconceivable. However Turkmenistan was not a religious state and the Rukhnama should not be confused with religion.

Meeting with Dr Orazmamed VASOV, Supreme Council for Science and Technology

Dr Vasov informed members that the Supreme Council was a public body that had been founded in 1993. It promoted science and technology and undertook work in such areas as combating desertification and deforestation. It was the coordinator for the TACIS TEMPUS programme and the Virtual Silk Road Internet project.

In the evening a dinner was hosted by H.E. Hakki AKIL, Turkish Ambassador.

22 June 2006

In the morning the delegation visited the Tolkutschka Bazaar and the National Carpets Museum

Meeting with UN Organisations (UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF) and International Aid Organisations (USAID, EU-TACIS, GTZ)

The UN Coordinator Mr. Richard YOUNG outlined the activity of the UN Development Assistance Programme (UNDAP) for Turkmenistan from 2005 to 2009. It covered the development of economic and social policies and plans; basic social services; and the environment. The UNDAP is the centrepiece of United Nations System assistance at the country level, providing the basis for individual UN organisations' Country Programmes. Documented information on UNDAP activity was provided to the delegation.

Members were subsequently briefed on activity under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The delegation also heard from the representative of US Aid, who informed them that Washington funded programmes to support democracy (\$2.3 million), economic prosperity (\$2.6 million), security (\$8.4 million) and cross-sectoral initiatives (\$0.3 million). German Technical Assistance (GTZ) focused on combating land degradation, legal reform, and advanced training of specialists in the agrarian sector.

EU Assistance to Turkmenistan through TACIS was funded under the Regional Strategy and Budget with support going – inter alia - to economic reform, sustainable development, the education sector and helping the authorities to develop reliable statistical systems. Attention was also drawn to regional programmes such as TRACECA, the environment and the Central Asia Drug Programme.

Key points to emerge during the discussion included the positive sign that all prima facie refugees from Tajikistan had been registered during a joint UNHCR/State Service registration process. In a Presidential edict of August 2005 Turkmen citizenship had been granted to 10,158 Tajik refugees and residence permits to a further 2,341.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids (UNAIDS) was working on prevention of the disease, as the government only recognises one actual case of HIV/Aids in the country. However the extent of the problem was not known and this was a cause of great concern. Many contracted HIV/Aids via intravenous drug use. The two “gap years” for students before they entered higher education were also a problem as the young people were open to many temptations.

There was a significant level of poverty in the country, although the official government position was that it did not exist. It was difficult to measure the extent of this poverty because of inadequate statistics, however the situation was mitigated to some extent because of the family and clan support networks. Consequently there was no actual starvation in the country but times were particularly difficult for those from ethnic minorities and those who had no pensions. There were also concerns that the water infrastructure was breaking down. In view of the high GDP of Turkmenistan,

there should clearly be no poverty at all in the country, which was classified as “low middle income” according to the World Bank.

Speakers underlined that it was important to train up local people and the aid agencies should be helping to enhance their skills and capacities.

Feedback meeting

Present at the meeting were the ambassadors of Germany, United Kingdom and Romania and Turkey and the chargé d'affaires of the French embassy. Also present was the head of the TACIS Office.

The following points were made:

Interim Trade Agreement

Members generally concluded that the Agreement appeared not to be as important to the Turkmen authorities as they might have thought before travelling to the country. A number of MEPs commented that it appeared to be a case of double standards on the part of the EU to isolate Belarus while building links with Turkmenistan. Several parliamentarians also stressed the need for the Agreement to have a strong human rights clause. It was also emphasised that the Agreement would send out a political message, which was more important than any economic results that might ensue.

EU-Turkmenistan cooperation

There was general support for cooperation with the people of Turkmenistan in areas such as education and a desire for TACIS and its successors to be maintained – with or without the Agreement. There was general recognition of the economic benefits of gaining greater access to Turkmen energy reserves.

General situation in Turkmenistan

Broadly speaking the picture of the country presented by the NGOs appeared to be accurate, although there were some mistakes that could be ascribed to the difficulty in obtaining information. The cult of personality of President Niyazov was heavily criticised.

Members also expressed their disappointment that no meeting with the President had been forthcoming. It was not certain that the Turkmen authorities appreciated the role played by the European Parliament in voting on legislation.

In the evening the European Parliament hosted a reception for all those with whom they had held meetings.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Delegations to the Parliamentary Cooperation Committees UE-Kazakhstan, UE-Kyrgyzstan and UE-Uzbekistan and Delegation for Relations with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Mongolia

1st IPM EU/Turkmenistan

19-23 June 2006

List of Participants

Members (9)

	Group	Country
Mr Albert Jan MAAT, Chairman	EPP-ED	Netherlands
Mr John ATTARD-MONTALTO	PES	Malta
Mr Martin CALLANAN	EPP-ED	United Kingdom
Mr Daniel CASPARY*	EPP-ED	Germany
Mr Valdis DOMBROVSKIS	EPP-ED	Latvia
Mr Glyn FORD	PES	United Kingdom
Mrs Marie Anne ISLER BEGUIN	Verts/ALE	France
Mr Peter OLAJOS	EPP-ED	Hungary
Mr Jonas SJÖSTEDT	GUE/NGL	Sweden

* rapporteur for the Committee on International Trade

EP Delegation Staff (2)

Mr Timothy BODEN	Administrator
Ms Nekane AZPIRI LEJARDI	Assistance

Political Group Advisors (4)

Mr Adriaan BASTIAANSEN	EPP-ED
Mr Ambroise PERRIN	PES
Mr Niccolo RINALDI	ALDE
Mr Paolo BERGAMASCHI	Verts/ALE

Interpreters (English and Russian) (2)

Mr Nikolai ZAITSEV	
M. Vadim NIKITIN	

EPP-ED Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats

PES Group of the Party of European Socialists

ALDE Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

UEN Union for Europe of the Nations Group

Verts/ALE Group of the Greens /European Free Alliance

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Delegations to the Parliamentary Cooperation Committees UE-Kazakhstan, UE-Kyrgyzstan and UE-Uzbekistan and Delegation for Relations with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Mongolia

FIRST EUROPEAN UNION / TURKMENISTAN INTERPARLIMENTARY MEETING

ASHGABAT (TURKMENISTAN)

18 - 23 June 2006

DRAFT PROGRAMME

Sunday/, 18 June 2006

08:50 Departure from Brussels

09:55 Arrival Frankfurt

10:30-12:30 Meeting with delegation Members, handing out passports, debriefing with acting Chairman, Mr MAAT

23:55 Arrival in Ashgabat and transport to

*Hotel "PRESIDENT HOTEL"
54, Novoarchabilscoe Highway
ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan
Tel +99312 400000
Fax +99312 400222/400041*

Monday, 19 June 2006

09:30-11:00 Technical meeting
Location: German Embassy (Secretariat only)

11:00-12:00 National Museum (near to President Hotel)

12:30-14:30 Working lunch with EU Ambassadors in Ashgabat:

French Chargé d'Affairs, Henri TOMASINI
British Ambassador, Peter BUTCHER
German Ambassador, Hans MONDORF
Romanian Ambassador, Tasin GEMIL
TACIS Adviser, Michael WILSON

Hosted by the European Parliament
Location: President Hotel

14:30 Meeting with USA Ambassador, Tracey JACOBSON
 15:30 Meeting with Turkey Ambassador, Hakki AKIL
 16:30 Meeting with OSCE Political Officer, Dr. Dieter MATTHEI
 (accompanied by three advisors)
 17:30 Meeting with Russian Embassy First Secretary, Alexander
 LETOSHNEV
 Location – *President Hotel*

19:30 Working dinner offered by the Chair of the Delegation

Tuesday, 20 June 2006

09:30 Departure from President Hotel to:

10:00-12:00 Meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rashid **MEREDOV**
Location: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

12:00-13:15 Meeting with Parliament (Majlis)
 Chairman Vice Premier Owesgeldi **ATAYEV**
Location: Majlis Building

13:15-14:30 Lunch at the Majlis hosted by Mr **ATAYEV**

15:00-16:00 Meeting with Institute for Human Rights and Democracy
Location: Institute of Human Rights and Democracy

16:15-17:30 Meeting with Minister of Oil & Gas, Gurbanmyrat **ATAYEV**
Location: Ministry for Oil and Gas

20:00 Reception hosted by TACIS representative, Mr Michael WILSON

Wednesday, 21 June 2006

09:00 Departure from hotel

09:30-10:45 Kiptschak Mosque

11:00-11:30 Old Nissa (Ancient Parthian Capital)

12:00-13:00 Archabil (Mountains)

13:00-13:30 Lunch (own arrangements)

14:00-15:30 Concert in honour of 14th anniversary of election of President
 NIYAZOV

16:00-17:10 Meeting with Minister of Education, Ms Shemshat
 ANNAGYLYGJOVA
*Location: Turkmenistan University - Turkmenbashi Scharjoli Street
 No 31*

- 17:10-18:30 Meeting with Dr Orazmamed VASOV, Supreme Council for
Science and Technology (EU TACIS Project)
Location: Atabajeva No 40
- 20:00 Reception hosted by H.E. the Ambassador of Turkey to Turkmenistan,
Mr Hakki AKIL
Location: Turkish Embassy

Thursday, 22 June 2006

- 08:00 Departure from hotel
- 08:30 Tolkutschka Bazaar
- 10:30-11:30 Carpets Museum
- 11:30-12:20 Russian Bazaar
- 13:15-14:30 Lunch (own arrangements)
- 14:30-16:30 Meeting with UN Organisations
(UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF)
International Aid Organisations
(USAID, EU-TACIS, GTZ)
hosted by UN Coordinator Mr. Richard YOUNG
Location: UN Building
- 17:00-18:30 De-Briefing session with EU Ambassadors
Location: UN Building
- 19:30 Reception hosted by the European Parliament
Location: President Hotel

Friday, 23 June 2006

- 01:55 Flight departures for Europe