

Dimitrij Rupel  
President of the Council of the European Union

Brussels, 31 March 2008  
Our ref: B763

Dear Mr Rupel,

**Subject: EU-Central Asia Troika, 9-10 April 2008**

Amnesty International understands that implementation of the Central Asia Strategy will be discussed in detail at the EU-Central Asia Troika in Ashgabat, on 9-10 April 2008, with a view to the first year review due in June 2008.

We are concerned that the human rights dimension of the Strategy and its implementation has not been vigorously pursued by the EU and its Member States, and would therefore like to take this opportunity to make a number of comments and recommendations.

**1) Human rights dialogues**

Amnesty International welcomed the commitment made in the Strategy to establish specific results-oriented human rights dialogues with each Central Asian country - on the understanding that human rights would also always be an issue of priority in every political meeting at all levels, as stated in the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues.

However, it is clear that no real progress has been made in initiating dialogues with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In this context, the discussions so far have taken place between Member States to determine the modalities of potential dialogues, rather than with the Central Asian countries concerned. In addition, the dialogues that have taken place with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have not fully complied with the EU Guidelines.

The result has been that the importance of the dialogues has not been made clear to Central Asian countries from the outset. It is obvious that not every Central Asian country is willing to make a firm commitment to address shortcomings and improve the human rights situation. The EU and Member States need to reaffirm that the establishment of dialogues remains an *integral* part of the Strategy that was agreed last June. Indeed, the dialogues are the only human rights-specific tool contained in the Strategy. The dialogues need to be results-oriented, take place on a regular basis, preferably in a consistent Troika format, and should be established within the framework of the existing Guidelines.

**2) Concrete benchmarks for each Central Asian country**

Amnesty International would like to reiterate the need to develop detailed country-related strategies and programmes which take the specificity of the human rights situation in each country into account. We understand that country strategies are being developed for the review in June, and will be discussed at the Troika meeting.

These strategies need to include specific benchmarks for each of the five countries, depending on the individual situation, on the basis of the existing EU Guidelines on Human Rights and on implementation of international obligations and commitments. It is essential that benchmarks be part of the strategies adopted in June, rather than linked solely to the establishment of human rights dialogues.

Above all the EU should call for the ratification and implementation of all core international human rights conventions and optional protocols, as well as the implementation of those conventions that have already been ratified by the Central Asian states. These are for instance, the 1951 Refugee Convention, which has not been signed and ratified by Uzbekistan, or the First Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), which only Kazakhstan has signed.

Please find attached a briefing on the current human rights situation in all five Central Asian countries, for your use in preparing these benchmarks and in raising issues during the Troika meeting.

### **3) EU Special Representative's role**

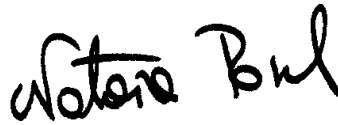
Amnesty International expects the mandate of the EU Special Representative for Central Asia to be further strengthened, in order to monitor actively the human rights situation in the Central Asian states and the implementation of the Strategy, and report back to the EU institutions. The Special Representative should also be mandated to engage systematically with both international and local human rights organisations in order to ensure the mainstreaming of human rights at all levels.

We look forward to hearing from you as regards the outcome of the Troika.

Yours sincerely,



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*Amnesty International EU Office*



Nataša Posel  
*Director*  
*Amnesty International Slovenia*

*Attached: Central Asia - a briefing on current human rights concerns (March 2007 - March 2008)*