



**Heidi HAUTALA**

Chairwoman of Subcommittee on Human Rights

Member of the European Parliament

9 April 2010

Dear Commissioner Oettinger,

In view of your upcoming visit to Turkmenistan, I would like to request you to include on your agenda a meeting with local human rights defenders and to raise the human rights situation in Turkmenistan with the authorities you shall meet with.

The repression in Turkmenistan, already an extremely repressive country, has again tightened last year. Restrictions on freedom of association, expression and media remain extensive while the functioning of the civil society has become practically impossible. Grave concern remains over the enforced disappearances and deaths in custody. Moreover, I urge you to call the authorities to release all political prisoners, including human rights activists Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khajiev and the dissident Gulgeldy Annaniazov.

I remain particularly concerned over the widespread oppression of human rights advocates. They are key to progress in any country.

In this context I respectfully recollect that the European Union has a legal obligation to support and protect human rights defenders under Article 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon and that the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders recall that support for human rights defenders is a long-established element of the European Union's human rights external action policy.

More specifically, the EU must voice its commitment to human rights and democracy before signing gas supply contracts with Turkmenistan if it does not want to lose the unique leverage it has to help improve the situation in this repressive country. In this context it would be essential for the EU also to stress the importance of the creation of standards to guarantee public access to information on the return of finances from the sale of energy resources.

As the situation worsens in Turkmenistan, the need for the EU to acknowledge and tackle the problems becomes ever more pressing. For this reason I respectfully call for you to give attention to these matters during your visit to Turkmenistan.

Yours sincerely,

Heidi HAUTALA