



European Economic and Social Committee

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EU - Central Asia

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OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on

The EU's role and relationship with Central Asia and the contribution of civil society

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At its plenary session held on 15-16 September 2010 the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on:

The EU's role and relationship with Central Asia and the contribution of civil society.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 25 May 2011.

At its 472nd plenary session, held on 15 and 16 June (meeting of 16 June), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 112...votes to 5 with 12 abstentions.

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1. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 1.1 There is no real sense of regional affinity among the five Central Asian states, unlike Europe. The Committee urges the Commission and other EU Institutions to continue to work for a much deeper sense of regional identity and integration, encouraging each state to work more closely with its neighbours, to diminish ethnic and border problems as well as open the way for greater and more sustainable economic and social development.
 - 1.1.1 The Committee firmly believes there is an overwhelming need for a comprehensive, cohesive and co-ordinated EU strategy for developing and building effective contact between EU civil society and that in Central Asia. Currently there is very little such contact. A much greater level of EU diplomatic representation is necessary as a start.
 - 1.1.2 It is important to maximise the use of all expertise available across the EU institutions, not least in the spirit of Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty, and therefore we call upon the EEAS to involve this Committee wherever possible, not least in capacity building, based on our experience elsewhere (e.g. the Balkans, Latin America).
 - 1.1.3 We therefore recommend a formal mechanism be set up through the EEAS, involving the EESC, first to enable clearer identification of existing major civil society interlocutors in each state, including effective independent business and trade union partners, and secondly to help identify new, emerging civil society organisations and support these as they develop. To further these aims, a small EESC delegation should visit Central Asia.

- 1.1.4 The Committee strongly supports the well-structured EU Human Rights Dialogue Process, as an early, positive result of the EU's Central Asia Strategy, but expresses its deep disappointment at the failure so far to be included. This must be rectified as a top priority.
- 1.1.5 Such efforts to build far stronger people to people contact must include deeper youth and educational links, the majority of the population being under 25, and increase faster the use of the Erasmus Mundus Programme by both sides. This should include visa facilitation for educational purposes, fee-waivers for Central Asia's most gifted students, promotion of English language textbooks, Summer Schools, and partnerships at university as well as at secondary school level.
- 1.2 Closely connected with promoting greater civil society involvement is the wider issue of Human Rights. This is a key area where Europe can and is effectively offering assistance as the countries of Central Asia continue their independent course. However, the actual focuses of attention must be a matter of negotiation and cultural sensitivity. Despite the continuing problems, each of the five states have ratified the eight core ILO conventions (with two exceptions, outlined in 5.4.1). Identifying how and where Europe may assist Central Asia to fulfil these and other commitments offers a practical way to build mutual trust.
 - 1.2.1 The Committee also strongly supports moves towards eventual trade related agreements with each of the five States. In line with other recent EU trade agreements, we would in that context urge the introduction of Civil Society Forum in each case, to include Sustainable Development, again to enable the sharing of the Committee's expertise.
- 1.3 Of particular importance here are the linked but difficult issues of food security, water security and energy supply. We recommend that the EU play a greater role in encouraging the five states to work together to tackle these serious problems holistically. The Commission must clarify the extent to which these are interlinked. Both in water and food security, Europe has positive experience in helping other countries and this should be fully utilised here to build further confidence and trust.
- 1.4 The Committee recommends that, as previously urged¹ for future trade negotiations, the Commission uses the 27 conventions listed by its GSP Plus system as a basis for developing wider, non-energy related trade with Central Asia, together with Trade Related Technical Assistance (TRTA) measures as appropriate.
- 1.5 The Committee recommends that development of EU links with Central Asia must be closely and mutually informed with EU involvement with Russia, China and Turkey, but not Iran whilst sanctions remain in effect.

¹ CESE 773/2008.

- 1.6 The countries of Central Asia contain considerable potential energy reserves that offer Europe additional and complementary (as opposed to alternative) sources of energy, although complicated by issues of transit and transport. It is important that the viability of such links is based on practical and economic reasons.
- 1.7 Central Asia should not be a terminus for Europe's transport/ transit links but should better be seen as a through station to China and beyond. China's and the EU's proposed transport corridors need to be aligned. The old "Silk Road" should be developed as a commercial and energy highway.

2. **Introduction**

- 2.1 Although Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country by area, the five countries in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan) have between them only a population of some 61m people – the same size as the UK, France or Italy alone.
- 2.2 It is essential to realise that effectively these are new states still largely in formation. Though independent and fully recognised, they are a result of the disintegration of the USSR. There was no significant "national liberation movement" in any of them. In each the previous soviet political elite took over as the new independent elite. However, this shared background remains a positive factor in encouraging regional cohesion, which is poor and far from the extent found across Europe, a concept that the EU is starting to foster here.
- 2.3 Further, they are operating within boundaries not of their own choosing nor based on natural borders. They were defined by outsiders, formed into constituent republics of the USSR, in turn bringing ethnic tensions, most recently seen in Kyrgyzstan where the minority Uzbek community came under pressure. This offers a major opportunity for the EU to bring to bear its experience in helping resolve national tensions.
- 2.4 These states also inherited command economies: models convenient for the present ruling elites to maintain. This underlying sclerosis has been complicated by the revival of old international strategic rivalries (not least due to proximity to Afghanistan and Iran), but which crucially are now also economic due to the discovery of as yet unquantified natural energy resources, notably in oil and gas, especially gas in Turkmenistan.
 - 2.4.1 Already we have seen the emergence of questions involving power passing from one generation of a family to another in the area (viz Kazakhstan). The old Soviet Nomenklatura administrative infrastructure may be better described now as a clan/family nomenklatura. Here too supporting the fostering of a more neutral civil service is another potential area for the EU to assist in its civil society and governance programmes.
- 2.5 Before coming under Russian domination in the nineteenth century, Central Asia comprised a collection of fiercely independent Muslim Khanates and Emirates, with exotic names,

including Bokhara and Khiva, but they were also remote due to the vast areas of desert that surrounded them. Tamurlane built his huge empire based on Samarkand, whilst the population is also descended in part from the armies of Gengkhiz Khan, and the "Golden Horde". Also noteworthy is the strong scientific tradition in this area, notably in astronomy, dating from the Observatory founded by Ulugh Beg, grandson of Tamurlane, in the 1420s. Kazakhstan today remains heavily involved with the space programme.

3. **A new Great Game?**

- 3.1 Despite its inhospitable location, Central Asia as stated has become of major strategic importance. Echoing the nineteenth century "Great Game" (when it was the scene of rivalries between British and Russian ambitions), once again this is, apart from East Asia, probably the main area in the world where so many major interests threaten to collide.
- 3.2 Having been under Russian domination for over a century there remains very strong **Russian** influence in the area. Russian is the common language, economic ties remain strong and Russia believes that this area naturally falls within its sphere of influence. Kazakhstan entered a Customs Union with Russia (and Belarus) in 2010 and others showed some interest. For Kyrgyzstan, as the only WTO Member this would be a problem. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan however are notably more wary of rebuilding ties with Russia than the others.
- 3.3 **China** is also heavily involved developmentally, finding formal expression through its membership of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (which also involves Russia and Iran). China has strategic energy interests – in 2010 they brought on stream in record time a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, to be fully linked into their internal energy network. China is also deeply interested in building strategic rail and road corridors to the West through Central Asia, but as yet these are not aligned with European transport corridors to the East. This needs to be rectified. The old "Silk Road", already a tourist itinerary, could also be profitably developed as a commercial and energy highway.
- 3.4 Iran and Afghanistan are intimately involved, as close neighbours, Farsi-related language speaking like Tajikistan, and with recent histories of Islamic fundamentalism. Religious fervour is currently kept firmly in check by each Central Asian State, but it is growing. Islamic insurgency was a factor in the 1990s Tajik civil war, which many fear could reoccur. For Iran, with sanctions over the nuclear issue, links with Turkmenistan are particularly significant, also building a new strategic gas pipeline. Drugs traffic out of Afghanistan is a growing issue, but that is more a problem about end-use in the West: curtailing and curbing the illegal market in Europe (and the US) must also be part of the solution in addition to exhorting poor and corruptible local officials to clamp down on the drugs traffic.
- 3.5 **Turkey** also enjoys strong influence in the area, not least as all but the Tajiks are Turkic people with interconnected languages. Turkey was heavily involved soon after the break-up

of the Soviet Union but, after initial set-backs, is again increasing its voice. Turkey will also be a key staging post for energy pipelines to the West.

- 3.6 The **USA** is also heavily involved in the region, not least due to the war in Afghanistan.
- 3.7 So all this questions how far the **EU** needs to be involved, noting too that there is no EU Member State colonial legacy here. Europe's needs should be looked at long-term, and with wider EU relationships fully factored in.
- 3.7.1 The EU is already conducting major negotiations with both Russia and China, with whom the EU enjoys a Strategic Partnership. Accession talks are under way with Turkey, even if progress is extremely slow. The impression nevertheless remains that EU links with the Central Asian states are dealt with totally independently to these other countries. This does not make sense. Development of EU links with Central Asia need to be closely and mutually informed with EU involvement with Russia, China and Turkey; equally our relations with Central Asia should not be developed in a way that would jeopardise our strategic relations with any of these key partners. Whilst sanctions are being used against Iran it would be premature to involve it, but the Iran/Central Asia equation needs to be kept under review.

4. **EU involvement in Central Asia**

- 4.1 The EU launched its own Central Asia Strategy in July 2007, inspired by the German Presidency. This reads rather paternalistically, and yet the very low levels of trade have yet to pick up. Apart from Kazakhstan, which in 2009 (as in 2007) accounted for 0.9% of the EU's imports, and 0.5% of exports, none of the others exceeded 0.1% of EU trade. Despite these figures, the EU remains a major trading partner for each state, especially for Kazakhstan, for whom in terms of trade volume the EU is a bigger trade partner than either Russia or China.
- 4.2 It makes considerable sense for the EU to show close interest in Central Asia, especially in the light of its Eastern Partnership Programme and the Black Sea Strategy. These effectively involve (together with Turkey) all the other countries of the former USSR, except Russia with which the EU is negotiating a separate, new Strategic Relationship. Some EU Member States, notably Lithuania and increasingly Germany, already have strong ties with Central Asia. In addition, Azerbaijan is seen by many to be more closely connected with Central Asia than the Caucasus, not least for reasons of energy and religion.
- 4.2.1 A key issue is energy. The countries of Central Asia contain considerable potential energy reserves that offer Europe additional and complementary sources of energy although this is complicated by issues of transit and transport. It is essential that the EU remains realistic about the potential of energy supply from the region and that the viability of such links is based on practical and economic reasons. Important too for the host states, these sources of natural energy are better seen as *complementary* to and diversifying existing supplies and not

as a possible *alternative* supply, nor as a pawn to be used in influencing relationships with other countries in the region.

- 4.3 Despite the upbeat tone of the Progress Report last June, EU links with the five states of Central Asia are remarkably weak. There is only a full EU Mission in Kazakhstan whilst EU delegations opened recently in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. For Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the EU is only represented through "Europa Houses" mainly staffed by contracted consultants. According to CEPS², 18 Member States have embassies in Kazakhstan, ten in Uzbekistan and only a few elsewhere. Germany and France alone have embassies in all five states, the UK in four. Nine Member States have no representation at all. The EU Central Asia Strategy will depend on a far greater level of EU representation if it is to succeed, which will provide an early searching test for the new European External Action Service, despite its severe budgetary limitations. Joint action through the EEAS on key issues such as Visas (at least for Schengen states) will be one such test.
- 4.4 The EU has negotiated Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with all five states. Those with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan came into effect in 1999, although the PCA with Uzbekistan was later partially suspended from 2005 to 2008 following the Andijan massacre. That with Tajikistan (delayed due to the civil war) was only ratified in 2009, whilst that with Turkmenistan has yet to be ratified at all, due to Human Rights issues.
- 4.5 Kazakhstan in particular is emerging as a key player in the region, where the EU's relations are progressing strongly, bolstered by growing interest in the relationship from both sides. Kazakhstan is clearly the most approachable state for the EU and by its active and successful canvassing for the Chairmanship of the OSCE³ gave an unambiguous signal of its desire to play a key role. Further evidence of Kazakhstan's wish for increasing involvement in wider affairs is its joining the Customs Union with Russia and Belarus, and its evident interest in achieving WTO Membership, possibly alongside Russia. Another sign is the growth of a notable young entrepreneurial class, which is both willing and encouraged to be educated abroad, together with a growing civil society ethos and involvement.
- 4.6 A similar wish for increased international visibility is not yet found in Uzbekistan, which retains a more closed and authoritarian approach, as does Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan originally looked most likely to build closer links with Europe, but that faded, notably following Andijan, as Kazakhstan opened up.
- 4.7 Kyrgyzstan, with major concerns following the ethnic unrest in 2010, is nevertheless a more open society with greater civil society involvement. This is also the case with Tajikistan,

² Centre for European Policy Studies.

³ Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the only international political and institutional link that couples Europe with all of the former USSR.

where current EU links are notably weak. Tajikistan is more fragile, it suffered a major civil war in the 1990s which could reoccur and it faces a food crisis.

5. **The role of Civil Society, and Human Rights**

5.1 The role of civil society is both intermittent and varies widely between the five states. Kyrgyzstan enjoys the greatest level of civil society involvement, whilst Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have a developing civil society ethos.

5.1.1 However, civil society has played a clear role in the well-structured EU Human Rights Dialogue Process, one of the first results of the EU's Central Asia Strategy, in these three countries. This has seen the development of annual meetings at official level, with separate civil society seminars involving human rights lawyers and local NGOs, with EU officials present, and a standardised agenda, but as yet no effective benchmarking to measure results.

5.1.2 The Committee strongly supports this Process but is deeply disappointed that the EEAS has not yet seen fit to include the EESC within this. We urge the EEAS to rectify this as soon as possible, not least as we are a proven dialogue partner and conduit to wider civil society, with deep, practical knowledge and a widely recognised expertise.

5.2 This level of civil society input is not echoed in either Uzbekistan (where government organised NGOs were put forward) or Turkmenistan, where there is effectively no independent civil society.

5.2.1 It is important to recall that before independence there was no tradition or understanding of civil society as an intermediary between the state and the citizen, nor any concept of NGOs. Trade unions, community, youth and professional associations were all part of the state structure, with little contact with outside influences to shape new, post-independence institutions. However, many have since developed along more independent lines along with privatised state enterprises, independent trade unions and professional associations, notably in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and to a lesser extent Tajikistan.

5.2.2 Local rural community-based initiatives and self-help groups emerged in the 1990s, based on traditional local community and kinship self-help *hashar/ashar* groups, not least to respond to the break-up of soviet social welfare systems, but these are very different to NGOs as internationally recognised. Such NGOs also emerged, but were largely confined to the major urban areas and often dependent on significant external financial support (including US). Each country developed differently with varying problems but after the "colour" revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, NGOs (seen by many as alien, and overpaid when compared locally) were severely restricted in Uzbekistan, and effectively disappeared in Turkmenistan. Recently there has been a growing increase in the urban-rural divide, as well as in Islamic based influence and activity.

- 5.3 Between EU civil society and that in Central Asia there would appear to be little formal input or in depth contact, hardly surprising given the very poor state of people to people contacts between Europe and Central Asia. Before we can expect civil society in Central Asia to share or even identify with our values, these have to be made known first, and then be widely understood, but not imposed. Kazakhstan can offer a bridge here, not least with its better inter-business and union contacts.
- 5.3.1 The Committee believes there is an overwhelming need for a comprehensive, cohesive and co-ordinated EU strategy in developing civil society contact with Central Asia. The Committee itself is well placed to take this forward, the key question being how best to contribute to encouraging far greater dialogue and people to people contacts, identify topics of mutual interest and emerging civil society groups, and promoting best practice, so as to lead to the establishment of a more formal mechanism for nurturing effective civil society contact.
- 5.3.2 The current work of the External Action Service (EEAS) in the region is to be welcomed. However, it is essential to maximise the use of all expertise available across the EU institutions and therefore, as with the Human Rights Dialogue Process, we call upon the EEAS to involve this Committee wherever possible, not least to support capacity building based on our key experience elsewhere.
- 5.3.3 There would appear to be three avenues for this. First the Committee itself, with the aid of the EEAS, needs to identify clearly who its current main interlocutors should be. Effective independent business and independent trade union partners must be identified and links fully established in all five states, together with other relevant civil society partners. The International Organisation of Employers (OIE) has no members listed for Central Asia, although it has contacts in Kazakhstan. To this end it is recommended that a small EESC delegation visit Central Asia (as well as to promote this opinion).
- 5.3.4 Next it is essential that other, developing civil society organisations should be identified, encouraged and given support on the ground as they develop. Here again we look to the EEAS to involve the Committee whenever and wherever this is appropriate.
- 5.3.5 The Committee also strongly supports moves towards eventual trade related agreements with each of the five States. In line with other recent EU trade agreements, we would in that context recommend the introduction of Civil Society Forum with each state, to bring greater formalisation to links with civil society in the region, which would also enable the Committee's expertise on Sustainable Development to be shared with the relevant civil society representatives.
- 5.3.6 Thirdly, greater encouragement must be given to wider youth contact and exchanges and to even greater utilisation of the Erasmus Mundus Programme to encourage deeper educational links and mobility by both sides. This should include, visa facilitation for educational

purposes, fee-waivers for Central Asia's most gifted students, promotion of English language textbooks, Summer Schools, and partnerships at university as well as at secondary school level. We welcome the doubling of the budget here to €10m pa, but as the Progress Report points out, the majority of the population in Central Asia is under 25 (so will not recall soviet times).

- 5.3.7 Civil society has a key role to play in encouraging greater regional cohesion and integration - important in building up an economic and social environment where markets can operate effectively, promoting the creation of decent jobs, developing SMEs, strengthening local infrastructure and helping poverty reduction, backed by robust institutions with clear terms of reference. The experience of civil society in the Baltic States among others will be particularly useful here.
- 5.3.8 That in turn needs to be underpinned by political commitment, peace and security, rule of law, greater democracy, good governance and macroeconomic stability.
- 5.4 However, closely connected with promoting greater civil society involvement, especially in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, is Human Rights, where progress is painstakingly slow. With a long history of autocratic rule and lack of any tradition of human rights, these must play an increasing role if the EU - and EU civil society - is to develop an effective working relationship with Central Asia. Human Rights help define Europe and its history: a key area where Europe rightly feels it can offer assistance.
 - 5.4.1 However, the actual focuses of attention must be a matter of negotiation and cultural sensitivity. Each of these states have voluntarily subscribed to Universal Human Rights by the adherence to the United Nations and associated institutions (e.g. ILO). Unlike many other EU trading partners, each Central Asian state has already ratified the 8 core ILO conventions, with the exceptions of Freedom of Association (no 87) by Uzbekistan, and Minimum Age (no 138) by Turkmenistan. The latter only signed that on Child Labour (no 182) in November 2010, and Uzbekistan that on Minimum Age in 2009. Enforcement is another matter. We therefore urge the Commission, in conjunction with the ILO, to put greater emphasis on identifying how and where Europe may best assist Central Asia to fulfil these commitments.
 - 5.4.2 This offers a practical way forward to build mutual trust. Whilst it is arguable that no human rights are more fundamental than others, real issues remain with those involving basic human freedoms, the rule of law and the freedoms of assembly, association and expression. The EU has already established a good record through positively handling issues such as disability.
 - 5.4.3 Nevertheless major concerns and problems remain, and recent events in North Africa are a reminder both of the importance of building active civil society participation and of the urgency in dealing with these underlying issues in a positive way. The Committee wishes to develop strong and effective contact and good working relationships with civil society in Central Asia. Boycotts or imposing very strict conditions based on progress are not a realistic

option. The situations here have been compared with that in Belarus, where in January 2011, following disturbances after the Presidential election, 158 leading office holders were banned from travelling to the EU and their EU bank accounts frozen, an example that all five states need to keep clearly in mind.

5.4.4 In its Opinion on "Global Europe"⁴, the Committee urged that as a foundation for future EU trade agreements, the Commission uses the 27 conventions (including the eight core ILO conventions) listed by its GSP Plus system. This goal needs to be repeated here as a basis for developing wider, non-energy related trade with Central Asia, together with Trade Related Technical Assistance (TRTA) measures as appropriate, whilst encouraging WTO membership at the same time. Only Kyrgyzstan is a WTO Member but its entry in 1998 is now widely seen as premature.

5.5 Appendix A includes a brief summary of current Human Rights issues in each of the five states.

6. **Environmental issues**

6.1 GSP Plus includes key environmental Conventions. Of particular relevance to Central Asia are the linked issues of food security, water security and energy supply, where a key role for the EU will be in encouraging the five to work together to tackle these holistically. It is not clear from the EU Strategy just how far these are interlinked, water being covered separately both as part of energy and under environmental sustainability, and food security as a major problem in its own right.

6.2 Tajikistan was listed by FAO in 2008 as one of 17 countries "in food crisis" – the only one in Asia. Water security is also a fundamentally important issue for the region as a whole, as witnessed by the severe shrinkage of the Aral Sea, the growing problems of disappearing rivers, and the fact that cotton is a particularly water intensive crop. The EU's experience in helping others here should also help to build further confidence and trust within Central Asia.

6.2.1 Tajikistan, along with Kyrgyzstan, has a supply of water at most times of the year (although poor management and damaged distribution systems have led to notably high levels of wastage and consequent shortages), whereas its neighbours suffer from water scarcities, in particular Uzbekistan (which relies heavily on water from elsewhere for its water-thirsty crops of rice and cotton, and for drinking). Tajikistan in turn suffers from very limited resources of other forms of energy, but above all from food insecurity. It is largely dependent on its neighbours for both energy and food supplies.

6.2.2 In 2008 over two million people (over a third of the population) there were considered to be food insecure and 0.75 million as "severely food insecure". 64% of the population is below the poverty line; only 7% of its land is suitable for agriculture.

⁴ COM(2006) 763 final.

- 6.2.3 Unfortunately Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have not been good neighbours, which led to a vicious circle of deprivation and counter-deprivation as in turn export bans on energy and water were imposed, the latter not least to generate domestic supplies of electricity, which was still only available in Dushanbe for two hours a day at a time of severe cold.
- 6.3 That crisis demonstrated just how important a holistic strategy, covering environmentally sound usage of natural resources, poverty alleviation and above all food security, is to promote the sustainable economic growth of Central Asia as a whole. Nevertheless the Committee welcomes the fact that the EU is already very heavily involved in helping Tajikistan and its neighbours to meet such crises.

Brussels, 16 June 2011

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Staffan Nilsson

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N.B.: Appendix overleaf

Appendix A on Human Rights:

In Kazakhstan problems include limitations on freedom of assembly, torture and other ill-treatment by members of the security forces, and problems for asylum-seekers and religious minorities. Many of these are mirrored in Kyrgyzstan where there are also restrictive laws on TV and radio as well as a draft law forbidding NGOs from "political" activity. In Tajikistan women's rights have deteriorated, penalties exist for "irresponsible" journalism, school and university students have been used as "forced labour" in cotton harvests, and there are concerns for religious minorities.

Both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were included on the UK's "Country of Concern" list in 2009. In the former it has been reported that civil society activists were imprisoned after unfair trials and held incommunicado, that journalists and their families were intimidated together with pervasive impunity for police, security services and other government authorities. Discrimination against ethnic minorities was also reported. In the latter, despite conditional releases from prison of some human rights defenders, increased dialogue, and legislative and judicial reforms, this did not lead to genuine and wide-reaching systemic reforms, nor real improvement in freedom of expression and assembly. Human rights defenders, activists and independent journalists continued to be targeted for their work. Widespread torture or other ill-treatment of detainees and prisoners, including human rights defenders and government critics, continued to be reported, which the authorities failed to investigate effectively. Several thousand people convicted of involvement with banned Islamist organisations continued to serve long prison terms in conditions that amounted to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, whilst others were threatened with extradition.