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Part 1: News Analysis

Regional controversies over Turkmen gas and electricity supplies, sparked in part by cold weather, have led to questions about Turkmenistan's ability to maintain exports without shorting its own population. Turkmen gas deliveries to Iran reportedly resumed after a brief suspension, although disputes over pricing and other details prompted an Iranian delegation to visit Ashgabat for talks. Meanwhile, a Tajik official announced that Turkmenistan had reduced the volume of electricity transfers to his country, and local reports revealed cracks in the facade of a long-time staple of Turkmen government propaganda: that gas and other utilities are provided for free to the public.

Both Turkmen and Iranian officials made announcements that Turkmen gas deliveries to Iran will resume soon, using part of the newly-constructed Caspian Sea pipeline. Explanations for the suspension continued to multiply: the official Turkmen line attributed the interruption to technical problems, but one anonymous source blamed Iran for failing to meet the terms of previous agreements while another added that Turkmenistan might be facing supply problems. Amid speculation that the real cause of the suspension was Turkmenistan's desire to renegotiate prices, Iranian Minister of Oil Gholam-Hossein Nozari said that Iran would not hold price talks until Turkmenistan resumes service under the current agreement.

Turkmenistan also cut electricity delivery to Tajikistan, following agreements last year to subsidize exports to its neighbor. As with the gas suspension, the electricity cut followed a surge in consumption due to the weather.

The drop in energy exports to immediate neighbors raises questions about Turkmenistan's ability to meet its commitments to customers in the wider region and at home. Since the days of Turkmenistan's long-time dictator, Saparmurat Niyazov, a centerpiece of government public relations spin has been the promise of free gas and heavily subsidized electricity and staples. The Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights reported this week that in fact rural residents in the Akhal, Mary, Lebap and Dashoguz provinces have been unable to access the free gas and have resorted to burning desert trees for cooking. Even the capital of Ashgabat has been facing intermittent electricity outages, since all Turkmen power generation facilities are gas-fired.

RFE/RL's Bruce Pannier reports that people in the rural areas – who make up two-thirds of the population of 5 million – complain that they cannot afford to pay for the gaslines required to bring the ostensibly free fuel to their homes. They also cite gas company employees who demand bribes to continue service. According to Pannier, Turkmenistan appears to be suffering domestic shortage as it increases its external exports, which include substantial commitments to Russia, China, and Iran.

Relations began to fray with Ukraine this week as well. President Berdymukhamedov made a dramatic, televised denunciation of a Ukrainian construction firm's work to build a bridge over the Amu-Darya River. The Turkmen leader said he had sent an official letter to Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko calling the job "an absolute disgrace," and laying down a 30-day ultimatum for completing the work. Ukraine's First Vice Premier Minister Aleksandr Turchinov immediately conceded that corruption could be at issue, and the Ukrainian Cabinet has launched an investigation into projects in Turkmenistan.

President Berdymukhamedov remained upbeat on cooperation with international organizations. Turkmenistan's Interagency Commission on International Human Rights convened to confirm guidelines for bringing Turkmenistan's laws into conformity with international norms. The commission members conceded the need to adopt new family, civil, housing, criminal and procedural codes.

The Turkmen leader met with Anthony Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, who visited Turkmenistan January 8-9. Maria Costa said that Turkmenistan, which had increased its cooperation with the UN as a vice president of the General Assembly and the host of the new UN Centre for the Prevention of Conflict in Central Asia, served as a "unique bridge between Europe and Asia due to its geographical position and balanced domestic and foreign policies," the government website quoted him as saying. With the UN's help in training of personnel, Turkmenistan plans to establish a new specialized agency for drug control and border policing.

Turkmenistan Part 2: News Digest

Summary: Turkmenistan's gas delivery to Iran is expected to resume soon as payment issues are resolved. An unusual regional cold snap has driven up energy consumption. The incident revealed gas supply problems within Turkmenistan as well, with local reports indicating consumers have disputed government propaganda about free gas. Electricity supply to Turkmenistan has also been reduced. President Berdymukhamedov met with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and to obtain assistance with a new drug control agency.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. Turkmenistan's Gas Deliveries to Iran to Resume

Original title: *Deliveries of Gas to Iran to be Resumed*

Source: [gundogar.org/Deutsche Welle/01/09/08](http://gundogar.org/Deutsche+Welle/01/09/08). Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.gundogar.org/?0130455860000000000011000000>

Synopsis: A source in Turkmenistan's presidential administration told Deutsche Welle January 8 that a recent disruption in gas delivery to Iran was due not only to price disputes, but difficulties with gas supply within Turkmenistan, gundogar reported. The Ministry of Gas Industry of Turkmenistan announced on the radio January 8 that export to Iran would resume, but only when an agreement was reached on pricing. Teheran sent a delegation to Ashgabat to settle the issue, which Turkmenistan claims is caused by Iran's failure to pay for delivery last year and Iran's desire to pay in euros rather than dollars. Iran said it was forced to reduce gas exports to Turkey by 75 percent to make up for the shortfall from Turkmenistan.

A source in the Turkmen Foreign Ministry told Deutsche Welle that while Iranian media had initially blamed Ashgabat alone for the gas cut-off, several high-ranking Iranian officials conceded that the issue required negotiation. A delegation of banking officials has now been dispatched to Turkmenistan to resolve the payment dispute and arrange for the resumption of gas delivery. The first source in the presidential administration indicated, however, that in addition to the payment issue, difficulties had arisen with gas reserves in Turkmenistan. Pressure in the Turkmen gas lines had fallen, according to the source, who added that while delivery to Iran will resume, it is unlikely that in 2008 Iran will receive the full amount agreed to in the contract.

b. Turkmenistan Resumes Pumping of Gas to Iran

Original title: *Turkmenistan To Pump Gas to Iran*

Source: *Teheran Times/Press TV/Turkmen State News Service/01/05/08*. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=160655

Synopsis: Turkmenistan has resumed pumping natural gas to Iran through the newly-constructed Caspian Sea gas pipeline, tehrantimes.com reported January 8, citing the Turkmen State News Agency (TDH). "The exported gas will be in accordance with international standards," TDH was quoted as saying. Facilities on the Caspian Sea and in Turkmenistan's Balkan region will take over the job of pumping gas to Iran, with an expected volume of 20 bcm per year.

Turkmenistan is increasing gas exports to Iran following a reduction of service last week, amid a cold spell that increased consumption in northern Iran, tehrantimes.com reported. Turkmenistan said the suspension was due to technical problems, but some Iranian officials suggested it was a ploy to negotiate higher prices. Iran sent extra gas to the affected regions and reduced export to Turkey as a result of the shortfall from Turkmenistan.

c. Turkmenistan Cuts Electricity to Tajikistan

Original title: *Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan Cut Electricity Supply to Tajikistan*

Source: *BBC Monitoring--Central Asia/01/07/08*. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Synopsis: With temperatures falling in Central Asia this winter, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have cut their supply to Tajikistan, BBC Monitoring Central Asia reported, citing Russia's Regnum news agency. Rashid Gulov, deputy chief engineer of Tajik Electricity, told Regnum January 7 that his country is getting electricity now for only two to three hours per day, reduced from four to five hours. Turkmenistan has an agreement to provide 1.2 billion kWh to Tajikistan during the winter.

d. Iranian Parliament Urges Oil Minister to Reconsider Gas Deal with Turkmenistan

Original title: *Majlis Urges Oil Ministry to Reconsider Gas Deal with Turkmenistan*

Source: *IRNA [Islamic Republic News Agency of Iran]/01/09/07*. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: <http://www2.ima.com/en/news/view/line-22/0801083306135430.htm>

Synopsis: Emad Hosseini, rapporteur of the Majlis [parliamentary -- TP] Energy Commission of Iran, called on his country's oil ministry to reconsider the current agreement with Turkmenistan about gas delivery, IRNA reported. Hosseini continued to speak of "a halt" in deliveries to Iran, which he believed was not justified by claims of repairs. "We believe the repair, if required, should have been made in an appropriate time," IRNA quoted him as saying.

e. Turkmen Opposition Concerned Over Killing of Turkmen National in Iran

Original title: *Opposition Concerned Over Killing of Turkmen National in Iran. Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *BBC Monitoring Central Asia/01/07/08/watan.ru/01/06/08*

Full version: http://www.watan.ru/eng/view.php?nomer=1688&razd=new_nov_en&pg=1

Synopsis: A 19-year-old Turkmen national, Hesammetdin Hydyver, has died as a result of a Caspian Sea boat crash involving Iranian coast guard services and Turkmen fishermen [presumably Iranian citizens -- TP] early in the morning of December 27, 2007, BBC Monitoring Central Asia reported, citing the Turkmen opposition website watan.ru. The website has reported similar deaths in the path, most recently that of Neman Nyazy, age 29, last year.

All Caspian littoral states share the problem of illegal fishing in the sea, watan.ru commented, since for many villagers on the coast fishing has been the only means of survival. But there have been few or no cases of killing illegal fishermen in other Caspian states, says watan.ru. The Turkmen opposition group made a number of demands regarding the incident: that those responsible for the shooting be punished under the law; that those detained be released; and that the coast guard service be reorganized and retrained.

f. Colleagues Call For Release of Turkmen Journalists

Original title: *Support for a Journalist and a Human Rights Activist Imprisoned in Turkmenistan*

Source: *Rapporteurs sans frontieres/01/07/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Full version: http://www.rsfs.org/article.php?id_article=18343

Synopsis: Spanish and Belgian news organizations associated with the Paris-based Rapporteurs sans frontieres (RSF, Reporters Without Borders) have called on Turkmenistan's authorities to investigate the murder of Turkmen reporter Ogulsapar Muradova, who died in custody in 2006, and free two other Turkmen still in prison.

The European journalists called for the release of Annakurban Amanklychev, imprisoned for his reporting, and Sapardurdy Khajiyev, a human rights activist. They demanded an immediate end to any physical mistreatment of the prisoners and a restoration of the rights of the prisoners and their families. The groups are sending a petition on the subject to the Turkmen authorities.

g. Turkmen President Calls Ukrainian Bridge Construction "A Disgrace"

Original title: *Turkmen Leader Dissatisfied with Ukrainian Construction Firm. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Source: *BBC Monitoring Central Asia/Turkmen TV Altyn Asyr/01/04/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov criticized the construction of a railway bridge across the Amu Darya river by Ukraine's Ukraziyastro and related firms, BBC Monitoring reported, citing Turkmen TV Altyn Asyr.

"I would like once again to tell you that I am very dissatisfied with the pace of the bridge's construction," the Turkmen president told Viktor Shevchenko, president of the Ukrainian firm. The Turkmen leader said that the Ukrainians had missed a number of deadlines. He added that Turkmenistan had already paid the equivalent of US \$58.5 million in natural gas toward the total project cost of \$123 million and intended to pay the

remainder in cash. The president said he had called for accelerating the project a year ago when he assumed the acting presidency, but to no avail.

Berdymukhamedov said he had sent an official letter to Ukraine's President Viktor Yushchenko calling the job "an absolute disgrace" and saying that "no work is being done at all." Yushchenko responded promptly by sending ministers to resolve the issue and subsequently the Turkmen president ordered the bill to be paid. But the complications continued, according to the Turkmen president, including alleged embezzlement by a Ukrainian company sub-contracted to the project and price hikes for construction materials.

"Under such circumstances, I do not want to work with you any more. You have either to work as required or leave us immediately and go where you wish to go. On our part, we will appeal to the [international] court of arbitration and we will also look for other contractors," the president warned, indicating that if the work was not completed within 30 days, the firm would have to leave the country.

"When I asked you where do you get the necessary construction materials, you said that they come from Russia. If so, we ourselves can directly contact Russia and work with them," the Turkmen president said. "Why should we get a headache with you over this issue when there are a lot of European and US companies which are skilled in the field of constructing such kind of facilities. I cannot find any other word than disgrace, to express my feelings," he added.

h. Ukrainian Official Acknowledges Turkmen President's Criticism of Builders

Original title: *Ukrainian Acknowledges Fair Criticism of Ukrainian Builders. Translation and synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project*
Source: gundogar.org/UNIAN/01/09/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.
Full version: <http://www.gundogar.org/?02250000000000000011062008010000#5588>

Synopsis: Construction work in Turkmenistan on a bridge across the Amu-Darya River was poorly monitored, Aleksandr Turchinov, first vice premier minister of Ukraine admitted to UNIAN, the Ukrainian news agency, gundogar.org reported.

"Most likely in fact private, corporative interests, including I would say even corrupt interests dominated in these relations," Turchinov commented to UNIAN. Such performance was unacceptable, he added, "especially with such potentially important partners as countries with whom agreements can be resumed to deliver energy".

i. U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar Visits Turkmenistan

Original title: *American Senate Delegation Arrives in Turkmenistan. Translation and synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project*
Source: turkmenistan.ru/01/11/07
Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=ru&elem_id=11971&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: A U.S. delegation headed by Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, arrived in Ashgabat on January 11 for a two-day visit, turkmenistan.ru reported. Sen. Lugar is expected to meet with President Berdymukhamedov. The delegation will also meet with Turkmen officials at the Foreign Ministry and the Presidential State Agency to Manage Hydrocarbon Resources. The group is scheduled to visit the checkpoint at Gaudan Badzhigiran near the Iranian border.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. Turkmens Face Gas Shortage

Original title: *Turkmenistan Faces Shortage of Gas*
Source: *Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR)/01/08/08. Reprinted with permission from TIHR.*
Electronic version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?0257043657000000000001100000>

Virtually the entire world is aware of the unprecedented social service granted to the citizens of Turkmenistan – gas for domestic use, free of charge. Only a few know, however, that people residing in many parts of the country cannot actually use this national resource, especially in winter.

Most rural residents face severe difficulties in the winter months without gas. Now, when air temperature drops to minus 30C at night, rural residents of the Akhal, Mary, Lebap and Dashoguz velayats [provinces – TP] have to use an ancient heating method – burning saxaul, which grows in the Karakum sands. It should be noted that this plant is red-listed [as an endangered species--TP]. But when there is no heating source for living and cooking, rural residents care little about protecting nature.

Residents of the Mary velayat are at a particular disadvantage without gas, as it is in this region that the lion's share of Turkmen gas is extracted.

"I cannot say that it does not reach us at all," says a resident of the Vekilbazar etrap. "When I strike a match, the gas fire burns, but the fire is so weak that it takes an hour or more to actually boil the water."

The recent fuel cuts for neighboring Iran have failed to improve the gas deficit situation in Turkmenistan.

Moreover, since January 7, the country's capital Ashgabat has been facing problems with gas and electricity supplies (all electricity stations in the country run on gas).

b. Turkmenistan's 'Gas-Rich' Residents Shiver in the Cold

Original title: Turkmenistan: 'Gas-Rich' Residents Shiver In The Cold

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty/01/03/08. Excerpted by OSI Turkmenistan Project. Copyright (c) 2008. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036.

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/01/a2e230b8-4619-4245-ac1d-3bfd86683bbf.html>

Excerpt: Turkmen authorities have long boasted about the country's vast gas reserves, exports of which are expected to at least double in coming years as new pipelines are completed to improve links to China and Russia. Natural gas is a cornerstone of Turkmen foreign policy -- a fact highlighted this week when Ashgabat cut its gas flows to Iran: officially because of technical problems, although a price dispute appeared as likely a culprit.

[Passage omitted: on policy of free utilities instituted under first president, Saparmurat Niyazov].

But people in rural areas, where two-thirds of the country's 5 million people live, paint a different, and colder, picture -- one that suggests Turkmenistan's growing export obligations are affecting domestic consumption. A correspondent for RFE/RL's Turkmen Service in eastern Turkmenistan says that as the Central Asian winter has set in, rural inhabitants have begun experiencing huge problems with gas supplies. The correspondent says that while the urban population appears to have enough gas, pressure is falling in the homes of rural residents.

A homemaker in the Lebap village of Arab says she and her family have never had gas since moving there in 1993. "Our neighbors and I are not able to pay for the pipeline to be built to our neighborhood," says the woman, in her 30s. "Some families used small pipes to connect their homes to the pipeline, but now [authorities] don't care about providing access to gas. We don't know what to do."

Residents in rural areas outside Ashgabat tell RFE/RL correspondent Soltan Achylova that employees from the state gas company appear to have their own interpretation of the free-gas policy. Locals say that representatives of the gas supplier tell them that households frequently consume more than their allotment and that the utility company is thus forced to lower pressure in the pipelines or even cut off supplies completely "from time to time" to help them stick to yearly limits. They claim that such explanations are often accompanied by solicitations for bribes to keep the gas flowing.

Achylova reports having had representatives of the gas company visit her home to pressure her for money. She refused, instead going to the company offices to complain; the company responded by telling her that gas is no longer entirely free and that she will be charged for anything more than one stove burner or one radiator for heating.

[Passage omitted: on Achylova's refusal to pay off gas officials and speculation that authorities are exploiting public ignorance.]

[Passage omitted: on increasing struggle for heat and cooking fuel.]

[Passage omitted: on gas cuts to Iran last week possibly motivated by price concerns.]

Turkmenistan currently has two gas-export pipelines -- one from the Soviet-era connecting it with Russia, and another built some 10 years ago that links it with Iran. Iran currently imports some 8 billion cubic meters of Turkmen gas annually at a rate of \$75 per 1,000 cubic meters. That's half of what Russia's powerful Gazprom is slated to pay. Under a new 30-year contract beginning later this year, Turkmenistan will sell up to 50 billion cubic meters of gas annually to Gazprom for \$150 million per 1,000 cubic meters.

"Without a doubt, what has happened recently is a demonstration of Ashgabat's desire to increase the price it gets [from Iran] for gas," says Moscow-based political analyst Artem Ulunyan.

[Passage omitted: on new pipeline deals with Kazakhstan and Russia with 20 bcm annual capacity and with China with 30 bcm annual capacity and a price of \$80 per 1,000 cm.]

But Ulunyan says Berdymukhamedov, seeing world gas prices, might realize the deal with Iran is simply outdated. "It is no secret that those contracts made during the time of Niyazov cannot be considered advantageous for Turkmenistan," Ulunyan says. "So that means that probably now the talk is about reviewing the price for Turkmen gas."

Whether Ashgabat will demand more money from Iran remains to be seen. Tehran does have a bargaining chip, since it was mainly Iranian money and labor that built the pipeline connecting it with Turkmenistan. Many Turkmen citizens, however, are more concerned about having enough gas for cooking and heating than for exporting to Iran -- or anywhere else.

"It's difficult for housewives," says the homemaker in the village of Arab. "Since September, we have used an open fire for cooking. There's no way to use an alternative cooker with electricity. The power is too low."

c. Arctic Cold Snap for the First Time in 40 Years in Turkmenistan

Original title: Arctic Cold Comes to Turkmenistan for First Time in 40 years

Source: RIA Novosti/01/10/07. Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: <http://www.gundogar.org/?02250000000000000011062008010000#5589>

Synopsis: For the first time in 40 years Turkmenistan is experiencing an arctic cold wave, with temperatures reaching as low as minus 31 degrees Celsius, RIA Novosti reported, citing Turkmenistan's National Committee for Meteorology. Ashgabat, where winters are usually mild, is suffering heavy frosts and snow.

d. Turkmen Interagency Commission on International Human Rights Convenes

Original title: In the Interests of People, Society, State

Source: Official Turkmen Government Website/State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH)/01/06/08. Excerpted by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/_en/?idr=1&id=080106a

Excerpt: A regular meeting of the interagency commission on monitoring the implementation of Turkmenistan's international human rights commitments was held in the Turkmen capital.

The meeting was held at the Turkmen Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan to review the outcome of the work and to specify further steps to fulfill the commission's tasks. Rashit Meredov, Chairman of the Commission, Vice Premier, and Minister of Foreign Affairs noted that during the reporting period, the commission had focused on monitoring national legislation and had established guidelines to bring legislation into compliance with international human rights norms, in particular, the international conventions to which Turkmenistan is party.

[Passage omitted: on president's comments at first meeting of the commission.]

The members of the interagency commission, including officials of the national ministries, the Turkmen Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan, members of the Mejlis, and public organizations made recommendations and proposals to improve the current legislation and to draft laws and statutes ensuing from the international commitments of Turkmenistan which are to guide the policy of the Turkmen state in various fields. The participants confirmed the need to adopt new family, civil, procedural, criminal, and housing codes and to draft laws regulating and promoting economic activity as well.

The participants emphasized the need to expand collaboration with international experts and leading international organizations, in particular, the United Nations. Turkmenistan has acceded to over 90 fundamental conventions and other international documents and now adheres to the provisions of those international legal acts.

The commission members passed a decision to introduce amendments and additions to the previously-approved plan on the preparation of national reports on the implementation of international human rights commitments by Turkmenistan and the commission's long-term action plan. In particular, the participants unanimously approved the list of events on the occasion of the coming celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by-laws for the expert working group under the interagency commission.

e. Another Conscientious Objector Arrested in Turkmenistan

Original title: Turkmenistan: Another Conscientious Objector Arrested, Another Police Raid

Source: Forum 18 News Service/01/10/08. Reprinted with permission from Forum 18 News Service,

Full version: http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1069

Ashirgeldy Taganov is the sixth conscientious objector to be sentenced in Turkmenistan in recent months for refusing compulsory military service on grounds of religious conscience, Forum 18 News Service reported. His fellow Jehovah's Witnesses complain that the court procedure was "hasty" and "careless" and that Taganov could not present his case in full. He was sentenced to an 18-month suspended sentence, which imposes harsh restrictions. Offenders cannot leave Ashgabat and must be back home each evening by 8 pm. They must also find work. "This is very difficult as there is no work available," another religious conscientious objector told Forum 18. Meanwhile, a Baptist congregation has been raided by police, who confiscated hymn books, a Bible concordance, books of poetry and 47 CD recordings of sermons and hymns. The Deputy Chair of the government's Gengeshi (Committee) for Religious Affairs conceded to Forum 18 that any such raid would be "unpleasant", but said he had heard nothing about it. He then put the phone down.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations have been prepared by OSI's Turkmenistan Project.

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