



Part 1: News Analysis Issue 44(2008) October 24-30, 2008

Turkmenistan celebrated the 17th anniversary of its independence on October 27 to great fanfare, military parades, children dancing and singing, and greetings from world leaders such as Turkish President Abdullah Gul, Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai, China's President Hu Jintao, Pope Benedict XVI, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, and England's Prince Andrew. While the official government website only briefly carried official greetings from Russia's leader, it featured a ceremony with the Russian ambassador to Ashgabat officiating over a presentation of Russian books to Turkmenistan, and Russia's MTS company installing Internet in 20 Turkmen schools.

Old friends of Turkmenistan such as the French Bouygues company, which has 132.5 million euro in new contracts to construct government buildings; Russia's KAMAZ, Itera, and Stroytransgas, which are helping to create the gas pipeline infrastructure; Germany's Siemens and Gotz & Partners, which hope to do more projects in Turkmenistan were all on hand to laud the achievements of "the great era of Revival" as the Turkmen leader has dubbed his rule. At the newly-constructed Turkmen Atlary State Association, the state's horse-breeding agency, the president launched a lavish book on Turkmenistan's famous Ahalteke horse which he had authored and published in Germany in three languages; he then headed to the newly-constructed State Hippodrome to ride around on Ahalteke horses and announce that \$300 million would be spent on new racetracks for each of Turkmenistan's regions, to be built by Turkish, Russian, and Lebanese companies.

In the last year, Turkmenistan's much-promoted neutrality and independence has moved from the stark isolation under former leader Sapurmurat Niyazov to a more cautious interaction with the many powers eager to help develop this energy-rich Central Asian nation. While attempting to hew its own "multi-vector" foreign policy under Russia's and Turkey's shadows, Turkmenistan is heavily dependent on these top trade partners as well as other investors to develop its backward economy and bring its gas to market. This week, the president was careful to meet with representatives of all the key players surrounding his independent nation. With Iran's minister of petroleum, he strove to keep cordial relations and stay upbeat about eventually arriving at a gas price to prevent another chilled winter for Iran, where people died from exposure and schools and hospitals were shut when the gas from Turkmenistan was turned off due to non-payment. President Berdymukhamedov also met with Tatarstan's Prime Minister and the heads of top Russian gas and oil companies. The Turkmen envoy to Tashkent continued to try to warm relations with Uzbekistan. EU Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs is slated to meet with the Turkmen leader next week on a regional trip to continue to promote the alternative Nabucco pipeline. Central Asian nations also met this week to work out their various differences, swapping abundant gas and oil for scarce water supplies.

Turkmenistan's creative intelligentsia, however, is feeling anything but independent these days as the ramifications of the state's new literary commission established last week make themselves felt. According to interviews with the BBC Russian Service, Turkmen artists and writers have already been complaining about censorship under President Berdymukhamedov, such as confiscation of singers' CDs or videos considered politically incorrect or too risqué, and that they already face too many clearances to get their works published. Now that the system has been formalized, they fear that the state will decide who gets to make a living from their creations. Cases of political prisoners also remain largely unsolved, with one civic activist, Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev, marking two years of essential house arrest and restriction on travel, for example, although Sapurmurat Saidov, the former chief of security imprisoned during the alleged November 2002 coup attempt

on President Niyazov, was said to be released this week, although the news could not be confirmed by the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights. Meanwhile, the president may be able to cheer some citizens with the 40% increase in the state budget for 2009, unanimously passed by the rubber-stamp parliament, which includes a 10% boost in salaries. The budget has little transparency as to which projects, sectors, and velayats are allocated funding and the public has no opportunity to decide if they would rather have schools and hospitals rather than vanity projects such as racetracks.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. Turkish President Congratulates Turkmenistan on Independence Holiday

Original title: Telephone Conversation Between Leaders of Turkmenistan and Turkey

Source: Official Turkmen government website/State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH)/10/29/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=1&id=081029b>

Synopsis: President Abdullah Gul of Turkey telephoned President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov to congratulate him and the Turkmen people on the 17th anniversary of the country's independence, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) reported.

The Turkish leader noted his people's close fraternal ties and cultural and spiritual kinship with the Turkmen people, and called for "enhancing these ties in the new historical era that had provided immense opportunities for fruitful mutually advantageous collaboration," TDH reported.

b. Price for Turkmenistan's Gas to Be Declared Soon - Iran Official

Source: Teheran Times/ IRNA/10/30/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=181221

Synopsis: Seyyed Reza Kasa'izadeh, managing director of National Islamic Republic Iranian Gas Exports Company (NIRIGEC) said in an interview with the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) in Teheran that the base price for Turkmenistan's natural gas for export to Iran would be declared in early January, 2009. "Currently, the two countries have reached an agreement over the general formula for calculation of Turkmenistan's natural gas for export to Iran," Kasa'izadeh told IRNA.

Iran plans to increase its volume of natural gas imports from Turkmenistan from 26 million cubic meters per day to 30 mcm this winter, Kasa'izadeh said. The managing director of NIRIGEC met with President Berdymukhamedov during a short visit to take part at independence day celebrations in Turkmenistan.

c. President of Turkmenistan Receives Iranian Minister of Petroleum

Source: Official Turkmen government website/10/28/08/State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH)/10/28/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=1&id=081028b>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov received Minister of Petroleum of the Islamic Republic of Iran Gholam Hossein Nozari, who traveled to Ashgabat to take part in the celebrations of the 17th anniversary of Turkmenistan's independence. The minister conveyed greetings on behalf of President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the two sides discussed cooperation, particularly in the oil and gas industry. The Iranian minister noted Iran's "intense interest" in maintaining constructive cooperation with Turkmenistan, which it views as a reliable neighbor. President Berdymukhamedov reaffirmed Turkmenistan's willingness to enhance and expand bilateral energy cooperation.

d. Turkmen President Receives Russian CEOs

Original title: Turkmen President Receives Heads of Russia's Big Companies

Source: turkmenistan.ru/10/27/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=13837&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: On October 26, President Berdymukhamedov received the heads of leading Russian companies who traveled to Ashgabat to take part in Turkmenistan's Independence Day celebrations, turkmenistan.ru reported.

The Russian businessmen included Sergei Kogogin, director general of KAMAZ; Igor Makarov, head of Itera; and Vyacheslav Makhonin, chairman of the board of Stroytransgas, the company which is building the Malay-Gagtyarlyk gas main for the Turkmenistan-China transnational gas pipeline.

e. Piebalgs to Go On Nabucco Tour on November 5

Source: neurope.eu/10/30/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.neurope.eu/articles/90343.php>

Synopsis: EU Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs will travel to Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan next week as part of an effort to launch the Nabucco natural gas pipeline that would deliver Caspian gas to European markets, neurope.eu reported. A spokesman for the Energy Commissioner said he plans to publish a daily blog of his trip. Piebalgs says Europe needs to look at alternative energy supplies and is seeking a political commitment to the EU-financed Nabucco project, which would reduce European dependence on Russia's national energy monopoly, Gazprom. The Georgian conflict has highlighted the need to diversify EU gas supplies, as Europe relies on Russia for about 20% of its natural gas imports.

Austrian OMV, Hungarian MOL, Bulgarian Bulgargaz, Romanian Transgaz, Turkish Botas and German RWE have formed a consortium with equal shares to support the Nabucco project.

f. Central Asians Achieve Breakthrough Over Precious Resources

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty/10/22/08. Copyright (c) 2008. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036. Excerpt by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=081021a>

Excerpt: Eastern parts of Central Asia may be warmer this winter and western parts of the region more arable this spring if a recent deal translates from paper and words to concrete actions. The region's five post-Soviet republics appear to have resolved, for this year at least, their major disagreements over the distribution of energy and water. Officials from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and host Kazakhstan agreed on October 18 to a deal that looks to be to the satisfaction of all. Under the complex new arrangement, the region's energy-rich countries will provide more of their resources to their energy-poor neighbors in return for guaranteed water supplies. Central Asia's energy and reservoir networks are still mainly the product of Soviet times, when the five were "fraternal" Soviet republics. Then it did not matter whose water or gas, electricity or oil went where in Central Asia -- they were all part of the same country. But now those energy and water systems are linking independent countries that are not always on good terms with one another.

The core of the problem is simple: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have oil and natural gas but little water; Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, on the other hand, are lacking substantial energy resources but the mountains that supply Central Asia's great rivers are located on their territories.

[Passages omitted: Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan hope to utilize hydropower as their domestic source of energy and seek to import natural gas from Uzbekistan but are chronic debtors; Kyrgyzstan has experienced a drought and suffers a historic low at the Toktogul Reservoir; if Kyrgyzstan uses the current volume, less than half than usual, little will be left for Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. This has led to regional conflicts.]

Turkmenistan traditionally has stayed away from negotiations about water and energy in Central Asia. But under President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, who took office after the death of his longtime predecessor in late 2006, Ashgabat is politically active in the region again. As a result, Turkmenistan is playing a part in the new arrangement.

"Turkmenistan took upon itself the responsibility to sell additional amounts of electrical energy to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan has the responsibility of guaranteeing the transit of that electrical energy," [Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister Umirzak Shukeev] Shukeev said at an October 18 meeting of the countries.

[Passages omitted: on mutual agreements for gas supply among the countries and introduction of strict controls over hydroelectric facilities.]

"All the sides agree that the Turkmen electricity will be transferred through Uzbekistan and the Tajik side will maintain the needed flow of water from Qairoqum Reservoir to Uzbekistan," Nuraliev said in Dushanbe on October 22. "At the same time, the neighbors will help Tajikistan to improve the technical state of the Qairoqum Reservoir," Kamol Nuraliev, Tajikistan's deputy water resources minister said.

[Passages omitted: on the resolution of the dispute over Dostyk Canal after Uzbekistan nearly halted the flow of water to the canal when drought struck, with an agreement to keep a minimum of water available.]

Central Asia saw extreme cold last winter and was parched this summer, suggesting that all five sides have added incentives to work together. But it is too early to regard the successful completion of the recent talks as a sign of durable progress. A milder winter that provides generous amounts of precipitation for reservoirs could easily see all parties return to their original positions on energy and water distribution, ensuring deadlocks in the future that could hobble vulnerable economies and boost discontent among some of the former Soviet Union's most beleaguered populations.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. President of Turkmenistan Takes Part in Independence Day Ceremony

Original title: *President of Turkmenistan Lays Flowers to Monument to Independence*

Source: *Official government website/State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH)/10/28/08.*

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=1&id=081028e>

On October 27, the people of Turkmenistan celebrated the main national holiday – Independence Day. By tradition, to mark this notable date, there is a ceremony of laying flowers at the memorial marker at the Monument of Independence – a magnificent memorial complex embodying the long-awaited freedom and independence sacred for every citizen of Turkmenistan.

In the early morning, thousands of people in Ashgabat gathered in the National Park of Independence in the south end of Ashgabat at the foothills of the Kopetdag Mountains. Participants of the ceremony including high-ranking officials of the Mejlis, cabinet ministers, representatives of public organizations, elders, heads of diplomatic missions accredited to Turkmenistan and numerous foreign guests who had arrived in the Turkmen capital to participate in and attend the large-scale celebrations, and to share the joy of the nationwide festivities with the Turkmen people.

The participants and guests of the ceremony cordially greeted President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, upon whom the Turkmen people have pinned all their bright hopes for the welfare and further prosperity of the native country. Girls dressed in national costumes presented wonderful bouquets of flowers to the Turkmen leader.

In solemn silence President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov laid a wreath of flowers at the Monument. Then the participants of the ceremony laid flowers as well. The square in front of the memorial was buried in gorgeous autumn flowers. The stream of people to the main monument of the country was endless. They came there to commemorate all those who had brought closer the freedom and independence of the Motherland.

b. Turkmen Parliament Unanimously Passes 40% Higher State Budget

Original title: *Turkmenistan: Next Year's Budget to be 40% Higher than 2008*

Source: *News Central Asia(nCa)/10/22/08; turkmenistan.ru/10/24/08 . Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Full version: <http://www.newscentralasia.net/Regional-News/381.html>

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=13837&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: The draft budget for Turkmenistan for 2009 sent to parliament is 39.5% higher than the budget for 2008, News Central Asia (nCa) reported. The budget is 294.5 trillion manats in the present currency, or 58.9 billion manats (5000 to 1) in the redenominated currency to be issued early next year, according to nCa. The current exchange rate is 14250 manats to US \$1.00.

Spending in the social sector will increase by 13% compared to last year, to 18.1 trillion manats. Wages and pensions will be raised by 10%. Another 19 trillion manats have been allocated for economic development.

c. Turkmen Activist Under House Arrest for Two Years

Source: *Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe/10/23/08. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036*

Full version: http://www.rferl.org/Content/Turkmen_Activist_Under_House_Arrest_For_Two_Years/1332332.html%5C

Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev, a civic activist from the western Turkmen city of Balkanabat (formerly Nebitdag) and a frequent guest on Radio Azatlyk, says he has been under house arrest since July 2006.

According to Durdykuliev, he was detained by the regional secret police as he was planning to leave for the capital at the invitation of the U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat to celebrate U.S. Independence Day. They also confiscated his passport and pension card.

Durdykuliev has written to many government agencies, but nothing has changed. Even the prosecutor's office has not made any attempt to investigate. Since he does not have his passport, he is unable to receive pension or disability payments from the government. The Balkanabat municipal officials have given Durdykuliev a temporary identity document to replace his passport, saying that he will be issued a new one if he can confirm that he lost the old one.

Durdykuliev was confined to a psychiatric hospital in February 2004 after he sent a letter to then-President Saparmurat Niyazov and the governor of the Balkan region, urging them to authorize a peaceful demonstration critical of government policies. He was released after two years following a letter to Niyazov from international organizations and Western governments, as well as 54 members of the U.S. Congress, urging him to release Durdykuliev.

d. Former Security Chief Reportedly Released from Prison

Original title: Seidov Reportedly Released from Prison

Source: Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights/(TIHR)/10/28/08. Reprinted with permission from TIHR.

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?0257044483000000000000011000000>

On October 27, TIHR was informed that Saparmurat Seidov was released from prison on October 26. Seidov was sentenced to six years imprisonment in January 2003 and sent to a maximum-security colony for his [alleged] involvement in the assassination attempt on former President Saparmurat Niyazov.

During the 1990s, Seidov held the post of the Chairman of Turkmenistan's National Security Committee. Later, for a short period of time, he was the deputy head of the state border guard service. At the time of arrest in November 2002, Seidov, age 66, retired from duty.

These reports have not yet been confirmed.

e. Turkmen President Authors Book on Horses; Rides Famous Turkmen Breed

Original title: President Berdymukhamedov Takes Part in Celebrations in Ashgabat; Hymn to Turkmen Horses

Source: Official Turkmen government website/State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH)/10/30/08. Translation and synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=081029c>

<http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=4&id=081029b>

Synopsis: In celebration of Turkmenistan's Independence Day, the book "Ahalteke Horse – Our Pride and Glory" authored by President Berdymukhamedov was presented in a ceremony at the newly-constructed Turkmen Atlay State Association, the state's horse-breeding agency, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) reported. According to TDH, the book "published in one of the best publishing houses in Germany" with color illustrations was produced in Turkmen, Russian, and English language to tell the story of Turkmenistan's Ahalteke horse, "a phenomenon of both national and world cultures." The Ahalteke is bred for "strength, speech, beauty and intellect" by a people with "friendship, affection and faithful service to each other," TDH commented.

The Turkmen leader said he had sought in the book to try to explain "the ineradicable love of the Turkmen people for their miraculous fast horses." He added that the horse "is a real symbol of our independent neutral Fatherland, a living embodiment of its aspirations for peace and friendship with all peoples."

According to TDH, the book covers the history of the horse breed going back to ancient Turkmen tribes who lived in the third and second centuries B.C. and follows the horse to its position today as "a Symbol of Great Rival" and a healthy lifestyle and social system. The horse has been used over the years for military campaigns, hunting, and racings and is world-renowned. The Iranian ambassador to Turkmenistan proposed holding an international conference on horse-breeding in Turkmenistan.

After the book presentation, President Berdymukhamedov visited the State Hippodrome which has recently been reconstructed, TDH reported. A crowd greeted him and held a dance performance and exhibition of national artists. Two of the best horses and a hand-woven carpet were presented to the president, who proceeded to ride a lap on each of them.

f. Turkmen Artists Concerned About Censorship

Original title: *Intelligentsia of Turkmenistan Concerned About Censorship*

Source: gundogar.org/BBC-Russian-Service/10/24/08. Translation and synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.gundogar.org/?012046818000000000000011000000>

Synopsis: Intellectuals in Ashgabat were concerned to hear the announcement October 21 on state television that the government has created a commission to evaluate movie scripts, plays, novels, short stories, and major poems, BBC Russian Service reported. *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, the state newspaper, reported that the move was designed to ensure "a high artistic level and depth of content" for creative works which are supposed to "reflect the large-scale reforms of the era of new Revival," and also "social and individual cooperation, national traditions and customs."

For some artists, the commission seemed to signal the end of a period of liberalization. "Many people, almost everyone, considered the start of Berdymukhamedov's rule as the kind of thaw that occurred in the USSR in the 1960s. But gradually these hopes died out, the illusions were dispelled, and this latest decree enabled everyone to realize that instead of a thaw, there is a freeze," a set designer at a state theater commented to BBC Russian Service. He believed that many people would seek to leave the country rather than face such ideological control. Article 39 of the newly-revised constitution says, "Citizens of Turkmenistan have the right to freedom of artistic, scientific, and technical creation," yet the newly-established commission legalizes the institution of censorship, says BBC Russian Service. The commission will essentially decide which artists can make a living from their work.

A writer commented to BBC Russian Service that the people who joined the commission were co-opted by the government to ensure that no materials would be allowed that diverged from the official view of history, culture and tradition. "Political opportunism and the coercion of state ideology will finally bury Turkmen culture," he said. If before, artists might be able to get away with some works, with a whole commission watching, that was unlikely. While painting and sculpture were not mentioned in the decree, it was believed the commission would cover them.

A lyricist said that some popular singers and authors had been persecuted by the government; one singer was said to have his CD removed from stores for having a song in both Turkmen and Russian; another was reportedly jailed for a music video with a woman's bared shoulder, and copies were removed from stores.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. French Bouygues to Build Government Buildings in Turkmenistan

Original title: *French Bouygues to Build New Buildings for Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education in Ashgabat*

Source: turkmenistan.ru/10/29/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=13865&type=event&sort=date_desc
turkmenistan.ru/10/29/08

Synopsis: The French Bouygues company will build new office buildings for the ministries of foreign affairs and education as well as the Galkynsh state-sponsored civic movement at a cost of 132.5 million euros, turkmenistan.ru reported. President Berdymukhamedov received Bouygues chief Martin Bouygues on October 28 to review the plans for the ministries as well as for the mayor's office, the international airport, a fashionable hotel, and a cable car system for Gokdere.

b. Turkmenistan to Spend \$300 M on Racetracks

Original title: *Golden Age...of Horses. Turkmenistan Allocates \$300 M to Build Five Racetracks in Country's Regions*

Source: [centralasia.ru/Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan/10/29/08](http://centralasia.ru/Neitral'nyi_Turkmenistan/10/29/08). Translation and synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1225275420>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov has decreed the allocation of more than US \$300 million to build five modern racetracks in the country's five regions, centralasia.ru reported, citing the state newspaper *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*. The Turkmen Atlary state company will build world-class tracks with the help of four foreign firms. Etkin Yap Sanayi ve Ticaret A.S. of Turkey will build a \$100.1 million track in Akhal velayat; Itera-Inwest-Stroy of Russia will build tracks totalling \$49 million in Balkan and Lebap velyats; Goodness International Resources Ltd. of Lebanon will build the \$49 million track in Dashoguz; and Sevincler insaat Tahh Tic. Ltd. Sti of Turkey will construct the track in Mary velayat for \$49 million.

According to the presidential decree, the facilities are to be built "for the purpose of greater development in independent, neutral Turkmenistan in the era of great Revival, refining the Turkmen national art of horse breeding perfected over a thousand years." *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan* reported.

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

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