

THE CHINA AND EURASIA FORUM QUARTERLY

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Turkmenistan



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*



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Editor-in-Chief

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Institute for Security and Development Policy



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

Turkmenistan is generally regarded as the most obscure amongst the political systems of post-Soviet Central Asia. The cloud of mystery surrounding the Turkmen state thickened during the erratic and mercurial rule of its first President, Saparmurat Niyazov, whose eccentricities have regularly attracted the attention (and the sarcasm) of both Western and Russian media. Beyond past absurdities, the Turkmen state demands our attention, not only for its significant natural resources and its key geo-strategic position, but also for the tolerant disposition of the local population, who had to endure two decades of extreme isolation.

Throughout the post-Soviet era, Turkmenistan strictly pursued a policy of "perpetual neutrality," with a view of obtaining free hands in its dealings with Russia, diluting the different pressures exerted by the West within the context of the Iran question, and gaining a stronger bargaining position in its relations with the Taliban regime. The degree of international isolation surrounding the state appeared consistent with the deteriorating domestic political scene, which witnessed the emergence of extreme forms of authoritarian governance, the rehabilitation of pseudo-traditional political institutions allegedly inspired by the historical specificity of the Turkmen past and the introduction of a large number of draconian social measures, whose devastating effect was primarily felt in two key sectors, namely the education and the health system.

With the death of Niyazov and the accession to power of Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, two diverging trends came to characterize the domestic and external spheres of Turkmen politics. On the one hand, Turkmenistan is opening - tentatively although inexorably - to the outer world. The Berdymukhammedov era witnessed a rapprochement in relations with Azerbaijan, the strengthening - in spite of some temporary hiccups - of Ashgabat's partnership with Iran, the intensification of the always difficult ties with Russia, the emergence of strong bilateral links with China and a progressive thaw in the relations with the West in general and the European Union in particular. On the other hand, the domestic political situation remains complex, as the reforms announced in 2007 had only a modest transformative input: there is no trace of any significant relaxation of the regime's grip over the social and political realms, while growing inflation has dramatically reduced the beneficial effects of the reintroduction of the population's basic social rights. The political transition set in motion by the death of Saparmurat Niyazov has

proven a relatively smooth exercise, and Turkmen politics remain substantially unchanged: non-democratic governance continues to dominate the domestic political landscape. The Turkmen elite appears therefore to have achieved their key target: Turkmenistan has continued to be insulated from external influences while being less isolated from the rest of the international community.

This special issue is therefore designed to explore the issue of power in post-Niyazov Turkmenistan, and to investigate the endogenous and exogenous factors that allowed the regime established in December 2006 to maintain firm control over the domestic political scene. Thus questions will be in relation to the recent political developments in Turkmenistan: To what extent does the authoritarian regime headed by Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov differ from the preceding dictatorship? In order to consolidate its power, has the new regime implemented new policy strategies? How have Turkmen decision makers handled the tension between external pressure and domestic impermeability? The regime has, for instance, successfully engaged the European Union without any significant concession on thorny internal issues. Finally to what extent has Berdymukhammedov been able to introduce change into the regime's *modus operandi* or is the current system constraining his own power?

Regime survival represents the top priority for the Turkmen elite. Reformist initiatives are carefully designed in order to avoid any substantial impact on the intra-elite relationship and the wider social contract between the regime and the population, which is essentially based on the preservation of Soviet-style subsidies for natural gas, electricity, drinking water and some food products. The regime perceives that the stability of such a contract could be threatened by the state's economic failure or the relaxation of the political and cultural grip imposed over the wider population. Therefore the Turkmen social context remains complex: skyrocketing unemployment; declining confidence among the middle class; deterioration of economic conditions in rural areas, and declining human capital. It is thus crucial to investigate the nature of Turkmenistan's stability, especially since different types of social tensions have been experienced - in different ways and at different junctures - by neighboring Central Asian states. Can Turkmenistan consolidate its opening to the outer world - especially so far as the involvement of foreign investors is concerned - without undermining the consolidated dynamics of power maintenance? In the longer run, can economic prosperity be achieved by a corrupt and oppressive regime, which often ignores the role of basic social institutions?

Five contributions are included in this issue to analyze the evolution of post-Niyazov Turkmenistan. In discussing the wider political context of the 1990s, Steven Sabol questions the regime's elusive stability; Slavomir Horak places the spotlight on intra-elite relations to highlight the similarities and differences between Berdymukhammedov's personnel policies and those implemented by his predecessor; Sébastien Peyrouse analyzes the impact of domestic reforms by emphasizing the minor changes introduced in relation to civil liberties, social, cultural and religious rights. Jan Šir's contribution is mainly devoted to the analysis of the macro-economic initiatives of Turkmenistan's second President, and their impact on the financial sector and more broad-based Turkmen entrepreneurship. Finally, Luca Anceschi discusses how post-Niyazov foreign policy has achieved insulation without increasing the international isolation of the Turkmen state.

In the remainder of this issue, two commentaries focus on today's two main geopolitical issues in Eurasian space: the first, by Pan Guang, analyzes the conflict in Afghanistan, paying particular attention to China's policy in its regard; while the second, by Ishrak Ahmed Siddiky, examines the cross-border pipeline issue. In particular, he delves into the possibility of creating an International Pipeline Agency and thus a new institutional framework within which to discuss this sensitive issue. The analytical articles are devoted to present-day topics that bear on the journal's area of specialty, with Central Asian societies launched head-long into processes of nation-building, and public health in Asia both a major societal issue and a state concern, Sophie Hohmann's article sheds light on the renewal of traditional medicine in Uzbekistan. Igor Savin, for his part, examines the massive flow of Central Asian - mainly Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz - migrants into Russia. He studies their integration into the Orenburg region and the mutual social perceptions that have developed between migrant and host communities. Lastly, Fabio Indeo takes another look at the Northern Distribution Network and the geostrategic opportunity it represents for American insertion into Central Asia. This Network will provide Central Asian Republics with an opportunity to implement a "multi-vectorial" foreign policy strategy, as is already observable, for example, in the case of Uzbekistan.

The editors also would like to thank Nick Bishop for his help in preparing this issue.

Luca Anceschi and Sébastien Peyrouse

Turkmenistan: Permanent Transition or Elusive Stability?

Steven Sabol*

ABSTRACT

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Turkmenistan has been considered the most authoritarian state in Central Asia. The rule of Saparmurat Niyazov was an unfortunate failure, noted more for fostering a Stalin-like cult of personality than economic prosperity and social harmony. His successor, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, was elected President in February 2007 and has since moved cautiously toward a new domestic and international agenda for the country. After three years in office, changes are notable but at a glacial pace. In order to understand Turkmenistan's geopolitical position and its difficult transition, it is necessary to understand Niyazov's rule and international relations.

Keywords • Security Threats • Saparmurat Niyazov • Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov • Turkmenistan • Central Asia • Post-Soviet transition • Natural Gas

Introduction

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Turkmenistan has emerged as arguably the most authoritarian state in Central Asia. The rule of Saparmurat Niyazov, otherwise known as *Turkmenbashi* (Leader of the Turkmen), was an ambitious failure, noted more for fostering a Stalin-like cult of personality than economic prosperity and social harmony. All of the newly independent states of Central Asia have had to deal with the Soviet economic, social, and political legacy, which are more often than not so closely interconnected that unraveling the

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¹ Rainer Freitag-Wirringhaus, "Turkmenistan's Place in Central Asia and the World," in Touraj Atabaki and John O'Kane (eds.), *Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p. 162.

problems and establishing new norms during the transition has proven extraordinarily difficult. Niyazov's regime often characterized the era of transition as a return to the traditional Turkmen form of governance; however, economic decline, haphazard foreign relations, and political oppression beleaguered the population during his rule and remain its legacy. Niyazov's unexpected death in December 2006 created an opportunity that few observers anticipated, but many hoped for. His successor, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, was quickly named interim president by the Security Council and Cabinet of Ministers. In February 2007 he was elected president by popular vote and has since moved cautiously toward a new domestic and international agenda for the country. After three years in office, changes are notable but at a glacial pace. In order to understand Turkmenistan's geopolitical position and its difficult transition, it is necessary to understand Niyazov's rule and international relations.

Under Niyazov Turkmenistan moved vigorously to advance its independence and sought only bilateral agreements, consistently resisting multilateral arrangements that might infringe upon the republic's sovereignty. Turkmenistan's potential prosperity is dependent upon its ability to maintain peace and stability in a possibly volatile region. Thus, its international relations were focused within the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, Russia, and the Caucasus, yet also reach beyond to cultivate relations with Asian, European, and American states. Moreover, Turkmenistan's domestic agenda is closely connected to the foreign policy objectives that the Niyazov regime hoped would lead to prosperity. The best option for Turkmenistan was to restructure its economy and develop some sort of sustainable growth. The means to do so is its ability to market and sell its natural resources, in particular its natural gas, to the international market. Roughly 80 percent of Turkmenistan is desert, yet below ground lies almost 1.2 billion barrels of oil and more than 102 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves.

During the Soviet era Turkmenistan's economy served primarily as a supplier of raw materials, and little was done to develop its full potential. Thus, it is the absence of infrastructural preconditions that initially raised doubts about Turkmenistan's ability to implement these preconditions at the pace necessary for economic expansion and sustainability. During Niyazov's rule, foreign investors were hesitant to work in Turkmenistan, usually because the socio-economic environment deteriorated or the laws necessary to protect foreign investments were repeatedly violated by presidential decree.¹ What remains clear, however, is that Turkmenistan's prospects for a successful domestic transition oriented toward economic and democratic reforms is increasingly connected to its international relations.

Turkmenistan Under Niyazov

As with the other Central Asian states, Turkmenistan was caught unprepared for the collapse of the USSR. Indeed, Niyazov appeared reluctant to issue any sort of public statement regarding the August 1991 coup events in Moscow. A correspondent in Ashgabat reported, however, that except for some security steps, little appeared to change. According to the newspaper account:

“the coup in Moscow and the kidnapping of President Gorbachev seem to have gone unnoticed in Turkmenia. Outwardly, at least, nothing has changed in the republic’s measured life. Turkmenian radio broadcast its programs, and local TV did not go on the air at all. There was absolutely no discussion of what had taken place on the streets or in the lines at stores. The editors of the republic’s newspapers waited until late at night for a promised statement by S. Niyazov, President of Turkmenia. But it never came. They published only documents from Moscow. One has to assume that the leadership is following ancient Eastern wisdom: ‘Sit quietly, and the body of your enemy will be carried past you.’”²

Despite the “wait and see” attitude, the failed coup prompted several changes in the republic. Niyazov announced his resignation from the Communist Party and on October 27, 1991 Turkmenistan’s independence was proclaimed.³ In December, the party was renamed the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan and Niyazov was named its Chairman. In the months shortly after the failed coup, Turkmenistan cooperated with the other Central Asian states to coordinate some sort of economic partnership that would effectively replace the Soviet Union. According to a report in the newspaper *Izvestia*, President Niyazov desired close cooperation between the Central Asian republics. Following the declaration of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in December 1991, the leaders of the Central Asian republics gathered in Ashgabat. Afterwards in an interview, Niyazov described the reasons behind the meeting,

² Aleksandr Bushev, “Putsch in the USSR,” *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, August 22, 1991, 2, cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* XLIII, 33 (September 18, 1991).

³ Interestingly, in March 1991 a referendum on retaining union received 97 percent in favor and, yet, in merely six months 94 percent voted in favor of independence. See Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States: Discovering Independence* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p. 111.

“claiming that the idea of bringing together all the leaders of the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan has been dominating my thoughts for the past two days. After all, we ought to size up the situation together, not separately, adopt a decision and, most important, coordinate our positions for getting out of this political impasse. In principle, to be frank, there is little cause for any special joy in the fact that we have wound up outside the boundaries of the Union of Slavic republics. Confrontation must not be allowed. On Wednesday afternoon, I decided to sit down at the telephone and start to call the Presidents. ‘Are you in agreement?’ I asked Nazarbayev first. ‘There simply is no other way,’ he answered. ‘We are at such a point now that if we procrastinate, we could end up with unpredictable consequences.’ That’s what each of them said.”⁴

Initially, it appeared that the Commonwealth of Independent States would satisfy those needs; however, the subsequent inability of the CIS to deal with regional rivalries exposed its frail nature. Interestingly, Turkmenistan was the first state in Central Asia to promulgate a new constitution, which proclaimed Turkmenistan a presidential republic. It is the role of the president embodied by Niyazov that is regarded as the “chief guarantee of stability.”⁵

Niyazov was born in Ashgabat in 1940, but orphaned following the 1948 earthquake that devastated the city.⁶ Educated as an engineer, he spent most of his career working in the Communist Party apparatus in Leningrad. In 1985 he became chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Turkmen Communist Party during Mikhail Gorbachev’s anti-corruption campaign that removed his predecessor, Mukhammednazar Gafurov. During the next several years he concentrated his efforts upon accumulating power and, although closely connected with the party in Turkmenistan, Niyazov was able to distant himself from the “mistakes” of the past. From 1986 until 1991 he was first secretary of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan. He embraced the spirit of *glasnost*’ and *perestroika* and in May 1990 he accepted the idea of presidency. In October of that year he won election (being the only candidate) to a five-year term with more than 98 percent of the vote. He was reelected in an uncontested

⁴ V. Kuleshov, “The Central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan Intend to Support the Commonwealth of Independent States,” *Izvestia* (December 12, 1991), p. 1, cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* XLIII (January 15, 1992).

⁵ L. N. Kalinchenko and V. D. Semenova, “Turkmeniia: Razvitie ekonomiki v 90-e gody [Turkmenia: Economic Development in the 1990s],” in A. M. Vasil’eva, *Postsovetskaia tsentral’naia aziia: poteri i obreteniia* [Post-soviet Central Asia: Loss and Profit] (Moscow: Vost. Lit., 1998), p. 162.

⁶ Niyazov uses the death of his parents to his political advantage, claiming that it allows him to ignore tribal ties that were so detrimental to previous Turkmen politics.

vote in 1992. In 1995, however, Niyazov's rule was extended through a state-wide referendum (similar referendums quickly followed in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan). In late-1999, Niyazov was made president for life, thus abrogating any constitutional restraints on his rule. Despite objections by the president himself to this idea, Niyazov reconsidered it and reversed himself, responding to what he called "the people's will."⁷ Niyazov appeared reluctant to assume the honor, but in an emotional response he proclaimed himself "overwhelmed" and decided to offer his services for life. A new constitutional amendment was briskly adopted, making Niyazov, as Bruce Pannier wryly noted, the fifty-nine year old who "seems destined to remain leader of Turkmenistan until the day he dies."⁸ In 1997 Niyazov underwent heart surgery and three years later he announced plans to remain in office only 5 or 6 more years. "Nobody should remain behind the wheel of state permanently," he said, adding that "power will be transferred to a new generation of politicians who will find a more beneficial occupation than accusing their predecessors of all sins."⁹

Turkmenistan's past, however, is something that the president used not only to legitimize his governing style, but for the adoption of the constitution, reform programs, and political structure evident in the republic. In early 1992, as various programs and laws were being drafted, Niyazov cautioned legislators to resist "blind adherence to the systems of state establishment of other countries" and to remain focused upon the "history and traditions of the Turkmen people."¹⁰ Thus, the institutional choices were based on history and traditions that Niyazov deemed central to the identity and socio-political structure evident in Turkmen culture, not from external pressures or examples that he considered antithetical to Turkmen values.

The constitution of Turkmenistan adopted May 18, 1992 essentially gave the president extensive powers. In practice, Niyazov distorted his rule into a highly autocratic system that limited debate, making all other governing bodies rubber stamps for his political whims. Claims that his government is based upon the rule of law and recognized norms of international law were always dubious. While the constitution guaranteed citizens specific rights and freedoms, including property, speech, religion, political convictions, assembly, and association, international human rights organizations have consistently ranked

⁷ Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan: Niyazov Named President For Life," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Daily Reports*, December 29, 1999.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Moscow Interfax, "Niyazov Vows to Step Down in 5-6 years," in *FBIS-SOV 2000 Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, February 18, 2000.

¹⁰ K. P. Dudarev, "Postkommunisticheskii avtoritarnyi rezhim [A Post-communist Authoritarian Regime]" in *Postsovetskaiia tsentral'naia aziia: poteri i obreteniia* [Post-Soviet Central Asia: Lost and Found], *op. cit.*, p. 167.

Turkmenistan as an oppressive dictatorship that denied its population any such protection. Human Rights Watch, for example, claimed that one presidential decree “reaffirmed the inviolability of private property, despite a continuing spate of official confiscations of private homes.”¹¹

Under the Turkmen constitution, the president is not only the supreme leader and head of state, but consolidates various dispensations. The president heads the *Halk Maslahaty* (People’s Council), comprised of eminent individuals whose chief role is to advise the leader. In addition, the president is commander-in-chief of the armed forces and security services and appoints and dismisses the state Prosecutor-General and Chairman of the Supreme Court. Political power rests with the president’s right to dissolve the *Halk Mejlis* (People’s Assembly-parliament) if the deputies pass a vote of no confidence in the Cabinet of Ministers. Moreover, the country is divided into five *velaet* (province or region)¹² that are separated into *etraplar* (districts). Each *velaet* is headed by a *hakim*, or regional representatives appointed by the president. In an interview with the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaia gazeta* Niyazov suggested that “the supreme representative body of power in the country will be the *Halk Maslahaty*-the People’s Council-which will include the President, the deputies of the parliament, locally elected representatives, the Chairman of the Supreme Court, the Chairman of the Supreme Economic Court, the country’s Prosecutor General, the members of the Cabinet of Ministers, and the heads of administrative districts and municipal bodies.” Most officials, therefore, serve only at the behest of the President. Moreover, as Shahram Akhbarzadeh noted, these “pseudo-traditional” institutions are in reality a “smokescreen” and “indicative of the less than democratic nature of that state.”¹³

During the Soviet era, positions of authority were often filled by traditional groups of the titular nationality. In Kazakhstan, for example, many positions were assumed by Kazakhs from the Great Horde (*Uly zhuz*), whereas in Turkmenistan the positions were often held by members of the Tekke tribe.¹⁴ This practiced continued under Niyazov, a Tekke himself, and according to Rainer Freitag-Wirringhaus, the “overlapping of old tribal and clan structures, with Soviet-style political patterns of behavior has found its characteristic expression in the current political system of Turkmenbashi-carried to extremes.”¹⁵ This emphasize upon individual rule, however, has replaced the Soviet system, when the

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, “Turkmenistan,” *World Report 2000*, <<http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/europe/turkmenistan.html>> (May 15, 2010).

¹² Sometimes spelled *velaiat*.

¹³ Shahram Akbarzadeh, “National Identity and Political Legitimacy in Turkmenistan,” *Nationalities Papers* 27, 2, (1999), p. 276.

¹⁴ John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, (New York: Palgrave, 1999), p. 97.

¹⁵ Rainer Freitag-Wirringhaus, “Turkmenistan’s Place in Central Asia,” *op. cit.*, p. 159.

Party was the “guiding force” in society, with the leader who had the “monopoly on wisdom” that translates into, as Shirin Akiner noted, “a paternalistic discourse, with the president cast in the role of sage father figure to the young nation.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, the government was cautious concerning the appearance of tribalism. It claimed that Niyazov has even forbid Tekke government officials from reporting their tribal affiliation for fear of revealing a purported dominance by one tribe over another, thereby offending some element of Turkmen society. According to Michael Ochs, the pat answer given by Turkmen officials is that either no tribal rivalries exist or that the Turkmen leadership has “acted so successfully to minimize their significance that there is no problem to speak of.”¹⁷

Political opposition in Turkmenistan was successfully repressed, although opposition parties formed and public demonstrations occurred. In May 1988 and later in 1989 demonstrators marched in Ashgabat, protesting high unemployment and rising prices.¹⁸ Several years later, in July 1995, the most significant demonstration against the government occurred in the capital. The government appeared surprised by the demonstration, but reacted swiftly to quell it.¹⁹ The Russian newspaper *Izvestia* reported that the demonstration was peaceful and lasted no more than one hour. This form of social activism, while not altogether unusual in Turkmenistan,²⁰ remains relatively rare even under the new president. Opposition to the government was forced into exile.

In 1993 a group of émigrés coalesced around the Turkmenistan Fund for Cultural and Business Cooperation based in Moscow. The organization was started by two of Niyazov’s most ardent opponents, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdy Kuliev and Murad Esenov. They organized the Fund because according to Esenov, “the

¹⁶ Shirin Akiner, “Emerging Political Order in the New Caspian States: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan,” in: Gary K. Bertsch, Cassady Craft, Scott A. Jones and Michael Beck (eds.), *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), p. 96.

¹⁷ Michael Ochs, “Turkmenistan: the Quest for Stability and Control,” in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.), *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 318.

¹⁸ Yaacov Roi, “Central Asian Riots and Disturbances, 1989-1990: Causes and Context,” *Central Asian Survey* 10, 3 (1991), pp. 21-23. Unemployment in Turkmenistan during the Soviet era, many scholars believe, was consistently understated. In 1985 it was estimated at 15.7 percent and expected to increase. See I. Adirim, “A Note on the Current Level, Pattern and Trends of Unemployment in the USSR,” *Soviet Studies*, XLI, (1989), pp. 449-461.

¹⁹ *Inside Central Asia*, BBC Monitoring 81 (July 3 - August 6, 1995), p. 3.

²⁰ On the eve of the 1982 May Day celebrations, the Turkmen Central Committee building reportedly was set on fire. Speculation in the West led many to conclude that it was an act of arson motivated by “Moslem” opposition, although the evidence is scant at best and is purely conjecture. See Bohdan Nahaylo, Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion: The History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 213.

oppositionists do not recognize republic President Saparmurat Niyazov as legitimate, for his election was unconstitutional, and they intend to fight to remove him from power.”²¹ The group was unable, however, to withstand pressure from the republic’s authorities and in November 1994 Russian security forces arrested its leaders. International human rights’ groups vigorously protested and those arrested were eventually released. Turkmenistan’s single party system continues unabated, although some unofficial groups operate surreptitiously, such as the Islamic Renaissance Party, Party of Democratic Development, and the Movement for Political Reform, but their collective impact is minimal and no meaningful opposition in the republic exists despite the transition following Niyazov’s death.²²

The Niyazov government dismissed political plurality as antithetical to Turkmenistan’s historical evolution and the Turkmen’s nomadic heritage. Indeed, the government argued that multi-party systems lead to ethnic dissension and social disintegration. Tajikistan was often cited as the example of the sort of disunity the government sought to prevent. Therefore, this argument posited that Turkmenistan was not prepared for political pluralism; a position that is pursued under the new regime.²³

In October 1999 Niyazov, perhaps intending to quiet international condemnation, announced that the upcoming parliamentary elections would be free and democratic. In addition, it was declared that television and radio space would be made available. However, one month before the elections, it was announced that candidates must not be affiliated with parties because, as the president explained, Turkmenistan was not yet ready for a multiparty system. The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe immediately criticized this decision and refused to send observers to Turkmenistan to monitor the election.²⁴ The day before the election, Niyazov was declared president for life and claimed that the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan remains the sole party in the republic because no others exist.²⁵ The OSCE characteristically complained that Niyazov’s “virtual coronation as “president for life”

²¹ Leila Alibeili, “Turkmenian Opposition Bases itself in Moscow--Turkmenbashi Cannot Be Recognized as the Legitimate President,” *Sevodnia*, April 28 1994, p. 5, translated in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* XLVI, 17 (May 25, 1994).

²² Phool Badan, *Dynamics of Political Development in Central Asia* (New Delhi: Lancer Books, 2001), p. 125.

²³ Rainer Freitag-Wirninghaus, “Turkmenistan’s Place in Central Asia,” *op. cit.*, p. 161.

²⁴ “Human Rights and Democratization in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan,” A Report Prepared by the Staff of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, March 2000, p. 12.

²⁵ Nozar Alaolmolki, *Life After the Soviet Union: The Newly Independent Republics of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 101.

flagrantly flouts OSCE commitments, which call for regular and competitive elections.” It added that,

“Niyazov has never demonstrated the slightest inclination to loosen his absolute control of Turkmen society or to regard seriously the commitments he undertook when Turkmenistan joined the OSCE in 1992. There is no reason to expect any liberalization in Turkmenistan while he is in power.”²⁶

The institutional choices pursued by the regime have resulted in worsened conditions for the majority of the population.

During the Soviet era, Turkmenistan was considered one of the poorest republics, with roughly 45 percent of the population living below the official poverty line in 1989. According to official statistics, the population had a per capita income below the minimum wage. In Russia, by comparison, this figure was closer to 30 percent. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, uneven economic developments served to create a tiny stratum of the population in Turkmenistan that holds most of the wealth. For the average Turkmen citizen, the availability of food and consumer goods has declined while prices have risen. Most people continue to receive their income from state employment. Wages are based upon the old Soviet method, with people working in industry, transportation, and science faring better than individuals employed in health, education, and services. By 1995, real wages dropped nearly 48 percent since independence. Conditions in rural areas are often much worse than in urban, where unemployment is as high as 60 percent, although this is difficult to determine with any precision. It was estimated in 1997 that households in Turkmenistan spent 63 percent of income on food as prices continued to rise and real wages decline.²⁷

Turkmenistan’s relations with Russian-dominated CIS since 1991 have been complex. Niyazov has been strident in his efforts to limit Russian influence, but Turkmenistan was shackled with the economic links established during the Soviet era. Until the mid-1990s, much of Turkmenistan’s trade was oriented toward fellow CIS republics, accounting for almost 67 percent of foreign trade. By 1997 that figure had fallen to 64 percent. The initial pattern of trade established by the CIS closely resembled the former Soviet Gosplan system, using planned delivery, mostly of raw materials to manufacturers, in specified quantities, regardless of whether or not these were based upon

²⁶ “Human Rights and Democratization in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan,” *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁷ Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, David Tyson, “Turkmenistan,” in *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan: Country Studies* (Washington, D.C.: 1997), pp. 291-373.

economically rational needs. These procedures for trade, however, were influenced more by political expediency than by little or no consideration of transportation costs or consumer demand. Because CIS member states continued to use the ruble, many were reluctant to abandon Russian subsidies. Thus, the issue of trade credits between the republics' central banks turned into a competition to issue ruble credits. The more credits issued by one central bank, the greater share of the common GDP of that state increased, which naturally meant each state in effect was rivaling each other to destabilize the cumulative economic environment within the CIS. Thus, most states experienced dramatic hyperinflation. In Turkmenistan's case, in 1992 Russia's financial support amounted to 53 percent of Turkmenistan's GDP.²⁸ Gradually, Russia established credit limits, bringing the ruble zone to a forceful end. Turkmenistan, as with the other CIS countries, created its own currency, the *manat*.

In 1993 the government began an ambitious ten-year plan that was designed to achieve its economic potential as another, or second, "Kuwait." Indeed, the plan was expected to double per capita income, which was less than US\$3000 per year in purchasing power parity terms.²⁹ The government freed the population from certain fees, such as for heating and electricity, and initiated in December 1992 a program called "Ten Years of Prosperity."³⁰ Soon thereafter, however, the government changed the slogan to "Ten Years of Stability" when anticipated investments and profits failed to materialize. Nevertheless, the government took great strides to attract investment for the plan, as Turkmenistan upgraded its basic infrastructure. The government started a national airline and built a new airport, along with new roads, buildings, and hotels in Ashgabat. Emphasis later shifted to constructing new pipelines, or expanding capacity in old ones, to diversify its markets and avoid further dependency upon Russia.³¹

Russia dominates 50 percent of all intra-CIS exports, particularly among natural resources, and appears unlikely to relinquish control in the near future because it commands the transportation grid built during the Soviet era. Thus, for example, with oil and gas, the pipelines run through Russia and it can regulate how much and to where Central Asian exports traverse. Until late-1997, Russia was the only CIS state to export natural gas to the outside world; however, Turkmenistan's agreement with Iran took effect and it too became a minor exporter. A pricing feud over

²⁸ International Monetary Fund, *Economic Review: Financial Relations Among Countries of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C., 1994), p. 26.

²⁹ Richard M. Auty, "Sustainable Mineral-Driven Development in Turkmenistan," in Shirin Akiner, Sander Tideman, John Hay (eds.) *Sustainable Development in Central Asia* (Surry, Great Britain: Curzon Press, 1998), p. 170.

³⁰ L. N. Kalinchenko and V. D. Semenova, "Turkmeniia: Razvitie ekonomiki v 90-e gody [Turkmenia: Economic Development in the 1990s]," op. cit., p. 198.

³¹ Richard M. Auty, *Sustainable Mineral-Driven Development in Turkmenistan*, op. cit., p. 170.

supplies to Ukraine with the Russian firm Gazprom severely disrupted Turkmenistan's ability to export gas. Shipments were halted with the concomitant effect of handicapping all Turkmen trade, causing its exports to fall 61 percent in 1997 with GDP tumbling by 26 percent. Exporting gas through Iran has eased some of Turkmenistan's economic woes, and a resolution was reached with Gazprom, but the prices charged to transport the gas are so exorbitant that Turkmenistan realizes minimal profit.

The percentage of trade with CIS states in 1997 hovered around 50 percent for Turkmenistan. This is a slight decrease from previous years and represents Turkmenistan's somewhat successful efforts to reduce its dependency on Russia. Nevertheless, its export-import income has fallen significantly since independence. Export trade in 1992 was roughly US\$1.5 billion and was US\$751 million in 1997. This reflects Turkmenistan's continuing struggle to sell its natural gas. Imports, however, have risen even more dramatically from 1992, when it amounted to US\$446 million, jumping the next year to US\$2.1 billion, but decreasing steadily ever since. In 1997 imports totaled US\$1.2 billion. Because intra-CIS trade consists mostly of energy resources, rather than manufactured goods, Turkmenistan has maintained a positive trade balance, which has fluctuated widely since 1992. In 1996 every other state, other than Tajikistan, registered negative balances and Turkmenistan earned US\$753 million. Indeed, it is the only former Soviet republic to have a consistently positive balance during this time.

The Russian financial crisis in 1998 crippled the economies of other CIS countries as well. Turkmenistan, which had never opted for a market economy, reverted to a Soviet style system with multiple exchange rates, state orders, and regulated prices. As some scholars suggested, the CIS countries failed to face the crisis together and, instead, met the crisis "with a sense of desperation, and the desire to flee from one another."³² Trade among CIS countries continues to be critical for Turkmenistan, since more than 60 percent of imports come from former-Soviet states, especially food, transportation, chemical, crude oil, and medical products. Facing difficult choices of trade, Turkmenistan looked for opportunities to expand its trade network beyond the CIS, particularly exporting its chief hard currency source, natural gas.

Another source of tension between Central Asian states is water. Some scholars have argued that resolving the perennial water shortage requires serious negotiations and coordinated action, particularly concerning the Aral Sea and irrigation schemes. The Bolshevik victory signaled a fundamental transformation in water usage and irrigation in

³² See Martha Brill Olcott, Anders Aslund and Sherman W. Garnett, *Getting It Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), pp. 42-69.

Turkmenistan. The Soviets nationalized land in water in the region and Central Asia was selected as the cotton-growing region, in particular Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. In 1920, Lenin introduced a decree to rebuild the cotton industry and further provided the production goals that far exceeded current possibilities. Thus, the Soviets invested substantially in restructuring the irrigation system, earmarking some 50 million rubles to develop an additional 550,000 hectares of land.³³

The Soviets also practiced surface level irrigation, which meant water was provided along furrows rather than direct application, and, consequently, the time required to water sometimes took days instead of hours, often with around-the-clock irrigation. In addition, the Soviets abandoned nighttime irrigation in favor of daytime, subsequently increasing water usage substantially. Moreover, the water was free and carelessly transported. Almost no mechanism was in place to determine optimal application, or if there was adequate monitoring equipment it was in disrepair and rendered useless. The result was endemic over-watering and a casual disregard for resource management. The Soviets also failed to eradicate secondary salinization and sedimentary congestion.³⁴

An example of the difficult problems Turkmenistan faces is the Karakum Main Canal (KMC). Management and maintenance of the republic's irrigation network is expensive. Given Turkmenistan's current financial resources, cuts were made to such an extreme that the budget allocated for maintaining the existing KMC has fallen from US\$3.2 million to only US\$20,000.³⁵ In addition, the government has failed to reduce sediment in the canal, due to failing equipment and insufficient financial resources. Staffing has also become a critical problem for the KMC, having fallen from 1700 personnel in 1987 to 640 in 1999. A future issue, since staff is declining, is that the staff is also aging. Relatively few young people are employed in irrigation and water management, so Turkmenistan could be facing a severe crisis unless new skilled personnel are found to replace those leaving. As O'Hara and Hannan correctly note, the collapse of the Soviet Union left Turkmenistan with nearly

³³ Gregory Gleason, "The Struggle for Control over Water in Central Asia: Republican Sovereignty and Collective Action," *RFE/RL Report on the USSR*, June 21, 1991, pp. 11-19; B. T. Zakharchenko, *Voda v Turkmenskoi zhizni* [Water on Turkmen Life] (Ashgabad: Ylym, 1990).

³⁴ According to O'Hara and Hannan, a detailed study by the International Merv Project of palaeobotanical analysis of sediment indicates that there is "no evidence of salinisation in the archaeological record despite continuous irrigation." This seems to be a remarkable testament to pre-Soviet irrigation technique, as well as the utter failure of Soviet practices. See Sarah L. O'Hara and Tim Hannan, "Irrigation and Water Management in Turkmenistan: Past Systems, Present Problems and Future Scenarios," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, 1 (1999), pp. 21-41.

³⁵ Tim Hannan and Sarah O'Hara, "Managing Turkmenistan's Karakum Canal: Problems and Perspectives," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, 39 (1998), pp. 225-35.

insurmountable problems that might result in further deterioration and subsequent displacement of the entire irrigation system.³⁶

One of Niyazov's first projects was to make Turkmenistan self-sufficient in grain, as part of his "Ten Years of Prosperity" program. Despite increased investment in grain production, targets have not been met and, in fact, yields have fallen since independence. There has also been a sharp increase in the amount of land irrigated for this project, almost 420,000 additional hectares, which the system cannot support, and it further means that resources for maintaining the current system have not been available. The program projected an unfathomable additional 30 km³ of water as necessary, which is 25 percent more than the republic's allocation. Lofty goals based upon unrealistic expectations as demands clearly exceed supply.

In 1994 Niyazov introduced water pricing for the KMC; however, bills submitted to thirty collective farms totaling more than 29 million manat (roughly US\$400,000) realized only 458,000 manat, or 1.6 percent of the total. The problem is not entirely resistance to paying for a critical resource, but result from government dictates on pricing and procurement. Farmers are directed to grow certain crops and receive less than 10 percent of comparative world prices for their product. None of this suggests that future water management will improve and, indeed, suggests continued deterioration. Government practices provide more of a disincentive than prospects for ameliorating the current situation.³⁷

Turkmenistan's domestic agenda is deeply related to its foreign policy agenda, to which we now turn.

Turkmenistan's Foreign Relations

Turkmenistan throughout the Niyazov era consistently fashioned its foreign policy with an eye toward Russia and the influence it continued to have in the region. Turkmenistan did not hold a particularly strong position with the United States, although formal relations were established by early 1993. Washington was initially more interested in resolving the legacy of nuclear weapons in the region. Beset by domestic economic concerns, limited military capabilities, and fragile neighboring states, Turkmenistan decided to base its foreign policy on an unusual principle described as "positive neutrality."

Niyazov's mercurial personality emerged shortly after independence and the habit of dismissing subordinates who displeased him became a regular feature in Turkmenistan's internal dynamics. Turkmenistan quickly acquired membership in many international organizations, such

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See Philip Micklin, *Managing Water in Central Asia* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000).

as the Asian Development Bank, the Economic Cooperation Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and others, but this orientation toward multilateral relations was quickly undermined and Niyazov abandoned multilateral approaches with bilateral relations articulated through the concept of “Positive Neutrality.” The ascension of “Positive Neutrality” eclipsed multilateralism for the remainder of Niyazov’s rule; the consequence was the effective disengagement from international affairs and organizations that might have provided some benefit to Turkmenistan’s development. Indeed, except for this approach, no other distinguishing feature can be identified to define Turkmenistan’s foreign policy. In December 1995, the United Nations officially recognized Turkmenistan’s position.

Positive Neutrality always lacked clarity; the rhetorical ambiguity complicated rather than enhanced Turkmenistan’s international relations. It is more likely, however, that the policy was not designed to improve external relations as much as it was designed to consolidate and increase domestic political control. Within weeks, Turkmenistan’s *Halk Maslahaty* articulated the concept further, claiming that it provided the best means for mutual respect in its foreign relations, that it increased domestic and foreign security interests for the republic, and that it enhanced its internal growth.³⁸ The purpose, according to Turkmen officials, was to integrate the republic into the world’s economic system while liberating it from external pressures. The policy, as implemented, did not do either.

A third element to Positive Neutrality that is often overlooked was its theoretical human rights component. Although enshrined in the republic’s constitution, in practice Turkmenistan became one of the worst violators of basic human rights in the world. Positive Neutrality inherently demanded that international partners respect the internal affairs of the republic and Turkmenistan would not interfere in the affairs of others. To that end, Turkmenistan abolished the death penalty in 2000, but did little to eradicate its repressive policies that limited employment, travel, or freedom of speech, press, or religion. At its core though, this policy was designed to promote cordial relations with all states while avoiding multilateral agreements that might offend its partners.

Turkmenistan has enjoyed stable relations with both Iran and the United States, as well as with Russia, China, Pakistan, and Turkey. It is interesting to note, that while Turkmenistan is usually in the weaker negotiating position with these states, all of which covet its natural resources or access to them, its relations with most former-Soviet

³⁸ Boris O. Shikhmuradov, and Y. A. Kepbanov (eds.), *Foreign Policy of Neutral Turkmenistan: Speeches and Interviews by President Saparmurat Turkmenbashi* (Ashgabat: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997), pp. 105-109.

republics have been contentious and difficult. Moreover, Turkmenistan played an active role in attempting to mediate a settlement in troubled Afghanistan. Its relations with the ruling Afghan *Taliban* regime troubled some, but it was based upon pragmatic economic concerns - oil, gas, and pipelines. Pursuing the policy of Turkmenistan as a "Second Kuwait" could succeed only if transit routes were available and secure. Thus, since independence in 1991 Turkmenistan has entered into numerous agreements with its neighbors in order to increase exploration, exploitation, and sale of its natural gas. The expected gains and instant wealth envisioned by Ashgabat have not, however, materialized and have resulted in deeper economic decline and difficulties in collecting the debts accumulated by other former-Soviet republics.

Relations with Iran

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many observers suggested that the Central Asian republics were naturally oriented toward Turkey and Iran, both of which have attempted to develop and influence the policies pursued. In the months following the collapse of the USSR, there was an underlying assumption that the newly independent states were utterly vulnerable to Islamic extremism, or other insidious influences that might potentially destabilize the region and lead to conflict. This has, however, not occurred. Rather, each state has pursued generally pragmatic domestic and foreign policies, although often at odds with western wishes, resulting in a certain steadiness. Despite the human rights violations and the tendency toward autocratic rule, Central Asia has not become prone to conflict (Tajikistan is, of course, an exceptional case study) or embraced either militant or radical forms of Islam. Suspicion of Iran was initially serious, as some feared Tehran desired an ideological conquest in the region.

Western concerns about an Iranian monopoly in Turkmenistan appear to be little more than a bogeyman dressed in Islamic clothing. In reality, Iran is undergoing its own economic hardships and likely does not have the financial resources and sufficient organization or material to be a major economic player in the region. What it does have, however, is the geographic positioning to aid Turkmenistan and the other Central Asian states in exporting their natural resources which the rest of the world covets.³⁹ Overcoming ideological considerations is a Western problem, not Turkmenistan's, which is, despite the nature of the regime, naturally pursuing all its options. Therefore, it is little surprise that Turkmenistan signed the first truly major Central Asian contract with Iran. President Niyazov visited Tehran in the fall of 1994 and signed a

³⁹ Hanna Yousif Freij, "State Interests vs. The Umma: Iranian Policy in Central Asia," *Middle East Journal*, 50, 1 (1996), pp. 71-83.

contract to build a four-thousand-kilometer pipeline to carry gas to Turkey and Europe via Iran.⁴⁰ The Iranian factor not only concerned western powers and Russia, but Turkmenistan's neighbors as well. Uzbek President Islam Karimov expressed concerns about Iran's growing influence, but has since embraced further trade and contact.⁴¹ Indeed, during the last several years Iran has successfully used its relations with Turkmenistan to expand its economic ties with this country, but perhaps more importantly, to prove also to the other Central Asian states that it is interested primarily in mutually beneficial economic relations rather than ideological conquest.⁴² Indeed, Turkmenistan is scheduled to change the written script from Cyrillic to Latin, resembling modern Turkish in 2001.

Relations with Turkey

Relations with Turkey are based upon assumptions of a shared cultural, linguistic, and historic past. In January 1992 Turkey established the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA). Its purpose was to develop a "legal framework for liberalization . . . democratization . . . [and] management cadres . . . necessary to help the new republics adjust to the outside world not only politically and economically but also socially and culturally," and, of course, to consolidate Turkey's position in the Turkic states.⁴³ Most important was Turkey's position as a bridge to Europe and international markets for Turkmenistan's natural resources. Discouraged by the United States to build pipelines via Iran, Turkey has pursued the Caspian Sea route as the most viable for

⁴⁰ "Caspian Intrigue-Battle for Oil Could Have Regrettable Consequences for Russia," *Izvestia* (October 19, 1994), p. 13, translated in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLVI, 43, (November 23, 1994).

⁴¹ In an interview in 1994, Karimov lamented that "several strategic roads are being built there, and a highway between Iran and Turkmenistan. Not to mention the purely ideological presence. Mosques are being built and named after Rafsanjani and Khomeini. Not to mention the fact that the cotton grown there is being sold to Iran, not Russia - and being sold standing, incidentally. The next harvest isn't even ripe yet, but it's already been sold. . . . [President Niyazov] makes very frequent trips to Teheran, and there, in mutual embraces, they work out these problems. It would simply be unbecoming of me to speak ill of this or lodge any complaints, despite the fact that I fear for my territory (and I am very apprehensive about the consequences of this alliance). What am I to do?" Vitaly Portnikov, "I've already been sentenced many times," *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (June 21, 1994), 1-3, translated in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* XLVI, 25 (July 20, 1994).

⁴² Kemal H. Karpat, "The Role of Turkey and Iran in Incorporating the Former Soviet Republics into the World System," in Karen Dawisha, *The International Dimension of Post-Communist Transitions in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), p. 175.

⁴³ Umut Arik, "The New Independent States and Turkish Foreign Policy," in Kemal Karpat (ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 25-36.

Turkmenistan. Indeed, since 1991 numerous feasibility studies have been developed to secure the most efficient, cost-effect, and secure route. Turkey and the United States desire the line that runs across the Caspian to Azerbaijan through Turkey to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. Turkey has agreed to a 30 year deal to purchase natural gas, but the costs associated with the pipeline, as well as Russian opposition, have delayed its construction. Moreover, pricing agreements between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have stalled.⁴⁴

Another proposed pipeline was to connect Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan. The work was to be completed by 2001; however, the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan proved to be an obstacle that forced many consortium partners to withdraw from the project. In 2002 Turkmenistan has revived the plans for a trans-Afghan pipeline, but securing financial support for the project remains elusive. Turkmenistan's relations with Afghanistan have concerned most neighboring states, as well as Russia and the United States, but Pakistan has encouraged this route and Niyazov has tried to mediate international recognition for the regime in Kabul.⁴⁵ Since the collapse of the Taliban, Turkmenistan has denied American military forces use of its territory except for the transit of humanitarian aid into Afghanistan.

Turkmenistan After Niyazov

Shortly after Niyazov's death in December 2006, observers waited to see if the political process would collapse by virtue of a "Color Revolution" or withstand the uncertainty of political succession. Niyazov had so purged the political arena of potential rivals, it was doubtful anyone might be able to fill the void quickly. Nevertheless, Berdymukhammedov was rapidly selected to be acting president and this preserved at least the sense of stability and mitigated outside interference in the political succession. Article 61 of the republic's constitution stipulates that if for whatever reason the President is unable to fulfill his (or her) obligations, that authority shall be transferred to the Chairman of the Parliament. That did not happen in this case. Criminal charges were quickly brought against the speaker of the Mejlis, which led to speculation that

⁴⁴ For a detailed list of all the proposed pipelines projects, see Muhammad Azhar, "Alternative Routes for Oil and Gas pipelines from Central Asia and the Caspian Sea Basin," in Shams-Ud-Din, *Geopolitics and Energy Resources in Central Asia and Caspian Region*, (New Delhi: Lancer Press, 2000), pp. 203-18; John Roberts, *Caspian Pipelines* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996); Mehdi Parvizi Amineh, *Towards the Control of Oil Resources in the Caspian Region* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil & Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 143-182; "Inside Central Asia," *BBC Monitoring* 81 (July 3-August 6, 1995), p. 3.

Berdymukhammedov might follow Niyazov's pattern of authoritarian rule.

In late March 2007 he was elected Chairman of the *Halk Maslahaty*, paving the way for new elections for the republic's top post. Berdymukhammedov pledged loyalty to Niyazov's legacy, while simultaneously hinting that he would dismantle the cult of personality and its totalitarian grip. The *Halk Maslahaty* disappointed many who hoped it might resemble the CPSU's denunciation of Stalin; however, within weeks many staunch supporters were dismissed from their posts, moves that suggested the new leader was prepared to move the republic in a new direction.

Berdymukhammedov's reforms have been predictable and slow. His cautious approach has staved off political and social instability, but has done little to elevate the republic's dire economic conditions. The different Central Asian republics all perceived their political and economic transition differently and employed different methods. Despite the differences, significant similarities exist, most notably the emergence of authoritarian regimes that effectively stifled political opposition. Turkmenistan's evolution was clearly the most unusual in that it successfully resisted external pressures that resulted in a monopoly of power being concentrated in the role of a single individual. Dismantling that monopoly is ongoing and has been sporadic; however the transition occurred seemingly without any significant external influences.

By the late 1990s the Niyazov regime fully consolidated its grip on power, having removed the five regional governors and eliminated alternative patronage networks. Erratic governing dominated the period between the assassination attempt in November 2002 and Niyazov's death in December 2006. The political elite, such as it was, consistently faced purges and was reduced to merely being a rubber-stamp for Niyazov's policies. In order to provide at least a modicum of legitimacy to Niyazov's rule, the *Halk Maslahaty* was elevated into the highest legislative body, further eroding the Mejlis' influence. Niyazov used the *Halk Maslahaty* as the chief forum to present his domestic and foreign policies. He also used it as a platform to publically humiliate government officials.

The new president signaled early on that he would not deviate considerably from his predecessors' domestic or foreign policies. Indeed, concern grew among international observers that Berdymukhammedov's accession might result in deeper entrenchment of Niyazov's repressive tactics when Ovezgeldy Ataev, the Speaker of the Mejlis, was arrested on corruption and nepotism charges.⁴⁶ Within a week of Niyazov's death, Berdymukhammedov orchestrated a constitutional change, that the *Halk*

⁴⁶ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 22, 2006.

Maslahaty approved, that legitimized his authority as the republic's "interim" president.

In February 2007 presidential elections presented voters a multi-candidate ballot, although it clearly was a "Potemkin" election. The government prevented any legitimate opposition candidate from running and, instead, carefully selected generally unknown contenders. The government further restricted campaign media coverage, whereas the interim president's speeches and other public pronouncements were repeatedly presented on television and in print. International reaction was, as might be expected, critical but somewhat muted. The United Nations noted that the election was a "fateful step," but the European Union described it as a failed effort to reform Turkmenistan.⁴⁷

Despite the failure to follow constitutional procedures and the non-democratic process, Berdymukhammedov has generally pursued policies designed to dismantle the more repressive and totalitarian features of his predecessor's regime. During the presidential campaign, for example, Berdymukhammedov promised to raise teacher salaries and pledged to reform Turkmenistan's educational and health services. These reforms, however limited, are nonetheless positive and are regarded by international observers and fundamental to reversing many of Niyazov's more disastrous measures.⁴⁸

The single most important, yet similarly difficult, reform was the "de-Turkmenbashism" program many observers considered critical to overall reform in government, the economy, and political liberalization in Turkmenistan. In May 2007, Berdymukhammedov dismissed and subsequently arrested the powerful chief of Turkmenistan's Presidential Guard—a force that increased in power following the failed assassination attempt on Niyazov. Berdymukhammedov followed with similar purges in the armed forces and security services, removing many long-serving cadres and elites in order to increase his own authority within a fragile Turkmenistan.⁴⁹

Despite these numerous steps, Berdymukhammedov remains wedded to single-party rule, deviating little from his predecessor. Indeed, the new president was, according to one observer describing Niyazov's presidential style, committed to maintaining the "illusion of democratic institutions and a democratic constitution; repression of dissent; manipulation of the media; minor concession to an impoverished

⁴⁷ For the UN's reaction see *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, February 12, 2007; see also Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan: sorting out the presidential candidates," *RFE/RL Feature Article*, February 7, 2007, <www.rferl/featurearticle/2007/02/D52D02Co-BA3E-4FD4-B217-E00655400664.html> (April 1, 2007).

⁴⁸ Chemen Durdiyeva, "Berdimukhammedov Embarks on Significant Educational Reforms," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, June 27, 2007.

⁴⁹ "President Berdymukhammadov makes new Appointments," *Open Society Institute Turkmenistan Project Weekly Report* (October 12-18, 2007).

population” rather than embracing meaningful social, political, or economic reform.⁵⁰ Berdymukhammedov, nonetheless, dismantled slowly, cautiously, yet managed to consolidate the necessary mechanisms of power without completely undermining the republic’s sovereignty and security. It is difficult to determine the extent to which his emergence was supported by external forces, or the degree to which internal forces opposed his ascension, but he deftly handled the transition from the impulsive Niyazov.

Conclusion

Turkmenistan’s transition since the collapse of the Soviet Union has been an arduous one. During the Soviet era Turkmenistan was a source for raw materials for the USSR and as such is one of the most politically conservative and impoverished of the former Soviet republics. Child mortality rates continue to be the highest in the former Soviet Union and life expectancy the lowest. It has made little progress toward restructuring the economic foundation of its economy and has shown almost unabated decline in the last decade. Between 1991 and 1998, Turkmenistan’s economic activity plummeted 45 percent. In 1992, the government of President Niyazov introduced his program, “Ten Years of Prosperity,” which provided for Soviet-style subsidies for natural gas, electricity, and drinking water to all households in the republic. The program has since been modified to “Ten Years of Stability,” yet continues to subsidize for social needs, accounting for almost 60 percent of the state budgetary expenditures. In 1992 and 1993 the government passed laws on foreign investment, banking, property ownership, and intellectual property rights designed to attract foreign investment. The laws allow 100 percent ownership by foreign investors, but in practice the government restricts this right and prefers joint ventures rather than the full purchase of plants, factories, and other facilities by foreigners.

Turkmenistan has focused considerable attention to expanding its present pipeline capacity and building new lines. In April 1993 Niyazov announced that an agreement had been reached with Iran to construct a new line to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan through Iran to the Persian Gulf. These plans have been met with serious international opposition, particularly from the United States and Russia. The Russians profit from Turkmen dependence upon old Soviet transport routes; however, aging pipelines and insufficient capacity subject Turkmenistan to the whims of Moscow and the inability of former Soviet consumers to

⁵⁰ Although written in 1993 to describe Niyazov’s rule, Panico’s observation is relevant to Berdymukhammedov’s accession to power. See Christopher J. Panico, “Turkmenistan unaffected by winds of democratic change,” *RFE/RL Research Report* 2, 4 (January 22, 1993), p. 6.

make payment. The United States has encouraged Ashgabat to construct a line under the Caspian Sea to Turkey, or increase merchant fleet trade, in order to export its most valuable commodity. This proposal is costly and, thus far, absent more foreign investment, Turkmenistan has vacillated.

Geopolitically, since transportation and export problems have reverberated throughout Turkmenistan's entire economy, especially for the international trade of its energy resources, establishing new markets and routes is of crucial importance. Foreign investment in Turkmenistan has been substantial, although due to the political environment it has decreased almost 70 percent since 1995. In 1992 investment was US\$11 million, peaking in 1995 to US\$233 million, but falling to only US\$62 million by 1998. Foreign investment continued to fall during the next several years. Absent foreign investments, prospects for future economic growth and stability are bleak; however, current President Berdymukhammedov prioritized investment and has held several conferences designed to foster growth.

Soviet industrialization, despite rhetoric to the contrary which heralded great successes and magnificent achievements, has left a legacy of ecological devastation, uneven development, and an obsolete, rapidly deteriorating infrastructure. Furthermore, it often ignored local conditions that conflicted with a traditional society hesitant to embrace new technology. Thus, the Soviets proceeded to emphasize heavy industry that was more and more based upon imported labor from the European regions of the USSR. Local labor has not materialized to replace an imported workforce that began to depart long before the Soviet Union collapsed. Turkmenistan has a strong resource base, but inadequate financial resources to significantly expand its domestic industry in the near future, although the government is taking steps in that direction to lessen its dependency upon industrial trade.

Turkmenistan is regarded by most observers as the most restrictive state in the post-Soviet Central Asian region. Human rights organizations have consistently criticized the political and economic environment in Turkmenistan. President Niyazov promoted a political system, based upon the cult of Turkmenbashi that rigorously opposed any liberalization or reform programs. Many specialists believe that Turkmenistan has the natural resources necessary to make an effective economic recovery; however, the political environment is considered by most to be a major impediment to future prosperity. Even with the ascension of a new leader following Niyazov's death, there is little tangible evidence that the socio-political or economic environment will change. The investments made by major transnational petroleum companies have thus far ended up in the bank accounts of political elites.

Clearly, Turkmenistan has a difficult road ahead. Finding adequate solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems are the major focus of the government in the foreseeable future. The new regime's leaders must be cautious while de-Turkmenbashism occurs. Deconstructing the Niyazov cult of personality is more than simply replacing his official photo, renaming the months of the year, abandoning outrageous projects and schemes that were designed merely to sustain the Niyazov persona as the great father and patron of the Turkmen people. The new regime must take care not to disassemble the structures that provide the state's legitimacy. While attempting to deconstruct a powerful unifying force, the new regime will face opposition. Many benefited, politically and economically, by upholding Turkmenbashi and they will be reluctant to watch that power and prestige evaporate in the name of reform.

Changes in the Political Elite in Post-Soviet Turkmenistan

Slavomír Horák*

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the transformation of the Turkmen elite under the two last presidents, Saparmurat Niyazow and Gurbanguli Berdimuhamedow. Although the roots of the current elites are of the pre-Soviet origin, it is the Soviet legacy, strong leadership principle and the personal character of the leader, as well as the of Moscow control over Turkmen clans and politics, that have been determining the character of the Turkmen elite and, consequently, the political regime in Turkmenistan. While the first president Turkmenbashi was the main founder of Turkmenistan political cultural with its cronyism and corruption, the second president Berdimuhamedow has significantly fortified the clan loyalties, since his family ties and regional affiliation has been extremely firm.

Keywords • Post-Soviet Turkmenistan • Political Elite • Political Culture
• Saparmurat Niyazow • Gurbanguli Berdimukhammedov • Central Asia

Introduction

Research into political elites in Central Asia has recently begun to attract widespread attention in academic circles.¹ Authors have heretofore put

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¹ Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of "Blood". Kazakhstan and Beyond* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2004); Sally Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Power and Elite* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005); Kathleen Collins, *The Logic of Clan Politics in Central Asia: Its Impact on Regime Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

their primary focus on the more accessible countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Turkmenistan has so far remained outside the mainstream, the exception being the work of authors such as American historian Adrienne Edgar or Shohrat Kadyrov, the Turkmen sociologist and demographer, currently living in exile in Norway.² A solid empirical basis has been lacking upon which to anchor research into Turkmen political elites. The research that does exist is based largely upon incomplete biographies of key people, indirect observation, analogies, and unofficial sources and interviews. The closed character of the country and the nature of the regime also stand in the way of direct, on-location access to information, not to mention information which would be of a comprehensive character. Interviews with leaders of the Turkmen opposition living abroad are also problematic, since the information they provide is highly subjective.³

This paper will attempt to build upon previous research into the Turkmen political elites⁴ and to round out the information it provides by focusing on important occurrences within Turkmen elites in recent years,

² Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), Shohrat, Kadyrov, "Central Asia. The Ethnology of Political Management: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow," A special report for the conference *Turkmenistan: Not An Orange Revolution but Regional?*, Oslo, June 6, 2005; Shohrat Kadyrov, "Vneshnee upravleniie etnicheskim obshchestvom v sovetskom Turkmenistane i ego perspektivy [External Governing of Ethnical Society in Soviet Turkmenistan]," Turkmenistan Workshop, St Antony's College Oxford and The Oxford Society for Central Asia (TOSCA), June 18-19, 2004, www.sant.ox.ac.uk/areastudies/lecturesarchive/Turkmenistan/KadyrovPaper.doc (August 3, 2005); Shohrat Kadyrov, "Natsiia" plemen. *Etnicheskiie istoky, transformaciia, perspektivy gosudarstvennosti v Turkmenistane* [The "Nation" of the Tribes. Ethnical Resources, Transformation, Perspectives of Statehood in Turkmenistan] (Moscow: RAN, 2003); Shohrat Kadyrov, *Rossiisko-turkmenskii istoricheskii slovar'. chast' I*. [Russian-Turkmen Historical Dictionary. Volume I] (Bergen: Biblioteka al'manakha Turkmeny, 2001); Shohrat Kadyrov, "Turkmenistan. Institut prezidentstva v klanovom postkoloniial'nom obshchestve [Turkmenistan. Institute of the President in the Post-colonial Clannish Society]," *Vestnik Evrazii - Acta Eurasica*, No. 1 (2001), <<http://turkmeny.hi.ru/analyt/a4.html>> (September 8, 2005); Shohrat Kadyrov, *Elitnye klany. Shtrikhi k portretam* [Elite Clans: Details of the Image] (Moscow: MMIX, 2009).

³ The most obvious case of this concerns the former Deputy Prime Minister, Boris Shikhmuradov, who until 2001 was one of the most influential people around Saparmyrat Türkmenbaşhi. The gundogar.org website he founded attempts to trivialize the extent of the role he played in the Turkmen regime, something he has been criticized for right up to the present by some opposition leaders.

⁴ Slavomír Horák, *Hybrid tradice a modernity - neformální struktury ve středoaasijských zemích (případ Turkmenistánu)* [A Hybrid of Tradition and Modernity - Informal Structures in Central Asian Countries (The Case of Turkmenistan)] (Prague - Brno: Historický ústav AV ČR, Slovanské Historické Studie, 2006), pp. 199-225; see also the corresponding chapter in Slavomír Horák - Jan Šír, *Dismantling Totalitarianism? Turkmenistan under Berdimuhamedow*, Silk Road Papers (Washington - Stockholm: The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute - Silk Road Studies Program, March 2009), pp. 13-16, 26-32, see updating article Slavomír Horák, "Turkmen Elite Reshuffles," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* 12 (June 17, 2009), pp. 6-8.

particularly after the rise of Gurbanguli Berdimuhamedow. A key assumption of the paper is that the country's political culture is a continuation of both the Soviet and pre-Soviet eras. In addition, attention is given to the personality of the presidents. These factors combine traditional Turkmen tribal relationships, Soviet party models and a post-Soviet, markedly centralized system based upon a cult of personality in determining the nature of political elites.

The Historical Basis of Central Asian Post-Soviet Elites

Changes in the political regime came well in advance of changes in the behaviour of society. Change in individual social groups in the country (ethnicities, subethnic groups, family structures, political elites, etc.) has been motivated by the political climate. In spite of the fact that contemporary Turkmen society is based to a certain extent upon the traditional social division between tribes and family clans, the character of the elite and its transformation over the last 100 years, especially during the post-Soviet period, has been so marked that present-day elites have lost many of their more traditional characteristics.

The traditional Turkmen elite were based upon nomadic and settled elements of society. The nomadic or semi-nomadic societies of the Karakorum were dominant, while the settled population was concentrated around the Merv oasis and, to a lesser extent, in Choresm.⁵ At the head of the traditional hierarchical structure of the clans stood the chieftain (khan), whose powers were limited by the council of elders and whose function was called upon primarily during times of danger. Only the most authoritative individuals held the position of chief for a more extended period of time.⁶ The clan was further structured vertically within the clan itself (identification with one's own clan, knowledge of one's ancestors, etc.) and horizontally in the form of relations with other clans (normally, however, within a particular tribe). There was, at the same time, a relatively strict insistence on "purity", in particular social structure. Violation of the rules demotes the member within the hierarchy of the kinship unit. Aside from familial and patron-client relationships, territorial identification also played a certain role but only as a supplementary element based on the movement of a particular clan within a particular territory which might potentially change over time.

⁵ For Turkmenistan, e.g., Paul Geiss, "Turkmen Tribalism," *Central Asian Survey*, 18 (1999), pp. 347-357; Mehmet Saray, *The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism. A Study of the Turkmen People and Their Incorporation into the Russian Empire* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 1989).

⁶ An example would be the 19th century Nurberdy Khan at Ahalteke, or Koushut Khan in Merv. M. N. Tikhomirov, *Prisoedineniie Merva k Rusii Or Rossii?* [Annexation of Merv to Russia] (Moscow: Izd. Vostochnoi literatury, 1960), p. 32.

In Tsarist Russia, the role played by the Ahalteke tribe was gradually enlarged when the center of the so-called trans-Caspian region - Ashkhabad - was located in its territory. The Ahalteke were thus logically preferred as local administrators and subject to much greater Russification than other city elites partially living under Bukhara or Khiva administration.⁷

The Ahalteke continued to hold this position even after the 1917 revolution, which brought rapid change to the nomadic tribes.⁸ With the disappearance of their "traditional" world came the sedentarization of the formerly nomadic tribes. Significant changes were also made to the power structure of the region. For the first time in their history, the Turkmen tribes, which had always been fragmented and diverse, were to live as a single nationally-determined unit in Soviet Turkmenistan beginning in 1924. The pre-revolutionary elites were mostly liquidated, either as the result of fleeing abroad or by repression (the dekulakization of villages and disappearance of traditional farming elites). Resistance by the old elites continued to into the 1930s, in a movement led by the so-called Basmachis and in Turkmenistan, were primarily under the chieftain Junaid Khan.⁹ If, however, we look at the tribal/regional affiliation of the opposition Basmachis, most of them were from the former Bukhara and Khiva areas.

The establishment of new institutions of power (state institutions such as the government or parliament, party system, as well as economic units like kolkhozes) took place against a background of attempts by the Soviet central leadership to maintain the maximum possible parity between individual tribes.¹⁰ The new institutions either eliminated the traditional structures (tribal leaders, the gathering of tribal elders, etc.) or incorporated them, often as informal units in cadre politics. Keeping in mind the inertia present in societal development, it is logical that even after radical changes to the formal institutions of power, tribal rivalries continued to manifest themselves, albeit somewhat dampened by the external center in Moscow.¹¹ The battle between elites took place quite literally "under the banner of the October Revolution".

⁷ Kadyrov, *Natsiia Plemen* [The Nation of the Tribes], pp. 145-146.

⁸ Sergei Demidov, *Postsovetskii Turkmenistan* [Post-Soviet Turkmenistan] (Moscow: Natalis 2002), p. 45.

⁹ Jan Wanner, "Politicko-vojenská nestabilita sovětské moci v muslimských oblastech I-II. [The political-military instability of Soviet power in Muslim regions I-II]," in *Armáda jako nástroj státní integrace SSSR (1923-1941)* [The army as tool of state integration in the USSR (1923-1941)] (Prague: Historický ústav AV ČR, 1997), pp. 101-184.

¹⁰ Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, p. 268.

¹¹ Shohrat Kadyrov, "Vneshnee upravleniie etnicheskim obshchestvom v sovetskom Turkmenistane i ego perspektivy [External Administration of the Ethnic Society in Soviet Turkmenistan and its Perspectives]," 2005.

The Soviet period created a kind of hybrid system uniting elements of the “traditional” social structure and the “modern” power hierarchy and institutions. A local/regional identity began to develop in societies whose way of life had always been nomadic. This resulted from sedentarization process in Central Asia, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s. Agricultural and water management reform in 1925-26 and the Great Terror of the 1930s played a lesser role in eliminating large landholders in Turkmenistan than within the settled population of Central Asia but did bring about a mixing of traditional clan and tribal structures. At the same time, the first generation of Soviet Turkmen leaders (including First Secretaries of the Communist Party Gaigysyz Atabaiev and Nedirbai Artikov) were subject to repression. When this period drew to a close at the end of the 1930s, new power structures began to arise which were removed from the traditional concepts of tribes and clans. Although some of the elites were able to retain their traditional identities, many more promoted new cadres based upon nationality and language knowledge (Turkmen, Russified Turkmen) or party affiliation. In this new hybrid system, traditional elements of society such as tribal identity and respect for the tribal hierarchy represented only one precondition for elite promotion, even if in some cases it was of fundamental importance. Restrictions imposed by Moscow also concerned the “Slavonic” Second Secretaries of the Communist Party in these republics who performed the de facto function of First Secretary during the 1920s and 1930s, in reality stood at the head of the republic.

Starting in the 1940s, the power of the Second Secretaries began to wane as the First Secretaries built firmer, more powerful ties within the republics. Particularly since the mid 1960s during the time of Brezhnev, when the First Secretary remained in office for a long period, the role of the Second Secretary became much more formal.¹² When conflict arose between the two leading figures of the republic, the central powers tended to recall “their” Second Secretary. In addition, strong personalities able to limit the rise of informal networks between the local elites were not normally sent to the Central Asian republics after the Second World War. The processes noted above were accompanied by a practical

¹² The long ruling First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Uzbekistan SSR, Sharaf Rashidov, who created his own governing clan both inside Uzbekistan and in Moscow may serve as an example of this type of politics. The clan he created did not reflect the important regional relationships of the past. This is a fundamental mistake repeated by many authors who view the current and former regimes in Uzbekistan as engaging in struggles between individual regional groups. It is worth noting, however, that many members of the Fergana clan (theoretically hostile to Rashidov) were actually his close allies. The practices of this clan policy were outlined (unfortunately, not always in a systematic fashion) in the memoirs of one of the chief investigators, Telman Gdljan, and Nikolai V. Ivanov, *Kremlevskoe Delo* [The Kremlin Affair] (Rostov na Donu, 1994), p. 114 et seq.

weakening of the role played by formal institutions at the expense of informal ties existing within the patron-client system.

Ties between local cadres and Moscow, however, led to the establishment of a second source of loyalty for the local elites. Under these circumstances, local players came to the foreground who were, strongly Russified and whose ties to the traditional structures (auls, tribes, clans) were weak, although their relationship to their original region was mutually dependent.¹³ The influence of the center in Moscow on the appointment of these First Secretaries led the new elites to seek support for their appointment within the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on at least the same level as in the local environment. Moscow had already begun trying to balance tribal/clan relations in the diverse new national republics during the period of their formation by appointing so-called compromise figures or figures from non-dominant groups. For internal support, the candidate had to create his own informal structures made up of members of his own social group. Towards the end of the Soviet period, hybrid systems of political elites were created on the one hand by the Soviet party structure and, on the other, on the basis of membership in traditional structures whose influence was important to the position of the First Secretary. The Secretary's function therefore demanded good relations both with Moscow and members of his own family.

A major focus in Turkmenistan in the 1940s and 1950s was the battle between Ahalteke hegemony and regional groupings. From 1951-1985, non-Ahalteke groups had a formal majority represented by the First Secretary.¹⁴ The last of these in particular, because of his character and relatively long period in power, significantly molded the political environment in the spirit of the Brezhnev era of stagnation. Here the important role was played by the personality of Gapurov, whom many today (especially from Ahalteke) consider to have been illiterate (in both the political and cultural sense).¹⁵ His name is associated with the entrance of many incapable cadres to the party leadership apparatus, the

¹³ The original region was the source of new cadres in the capital as well as the means of their material and mental support. Kadyrov, *Shtrikhi k portretam* [Elite Clans: Details of the Image], p. 35-36.

¹⁴ Suvhan Babaiev (1951-1957), Balysh Ovezov (Yomut, 1958-1969), Muhamednazar Gapurov (1969-1985, Lebap, from eastern Turkmenistan). For more details see Kadyrov, *Natsiia plemen* [The Nation of the Tribes], pp. 126-137.

¹⁵ Muhammednazar Gapurov (1922-1999) went to teacher's college in Khardzhiev. In 1941, however, he was sent to the front and after being wounded and demobilized in 1943, worked as a functionary first in the area of education and later in the party in the Khardzhiev region. In 1962, he assumed the position in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan. A year later, he was named Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Turkmen SSR. From 1969-1985, he served as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan and in December 1985, was removed from all functions and given an honorary retirement.

security apparatus and the intellectual environment of Soviet Turkmenistan.¹⁶ The political environment and the corruption associated with this period was hardly different from that of neighbouring Central Asian republics.¹⁷ It is understandable that the post-Soviet elite, including Niyazow, educated during the Gapurov era, would preserve and allow the continued unobstructed growth of the political culture founded upon cronyism, corruption and (to a lesser extent under Niyazow) clan loyalties.

The Ahalteke at that time was made up of several influential families which, during the Soviet period, had been in the middle levels of the power apparatus. The Ahalteke, however, had no access to the highest levels because these had been reserved for representatives of other regions depending upon the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan. Important families included, those related to Khanamov-Nurklychev (during the Soviet period, they were involved in the cotton sector, public procurement, trade and consumer goods),¹⁸ the Sikhmuradovs (diplomacy, ideology, origin in Baharden)¹⁹ and many others. All of those named come primarily from Aşgabat, with the second and third generations also often having origins in the Ahal region. These people made up an intelligentsia that was often urban in nature and heavily Russified.

Gorbachev's perestroika substantially impacted the evolution of the Turkmen elite and determined the character of the government during the post-Soviet era. It was under just such a circumstance that the policy appeared of appointing a member of the "opposition group" to a high function within the existing government. In the case of Turkmenistan, this involved the long-awaited return of the Ahalteke to power. At the same time, however, this person was not to be an unknown who would be subject to control by Moscow. The then-First Secretary of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan Saparmyrat Niyazow was the ideal

¹⁶ An interesting publication regarding changes in cadres in the Soviet apparatus is I. K. Kadyrov, and A. K. Saparov, *Osushchestvlenie Kompartiiei Turkmenistana kadrovoi politiki* [Implementation of Cadre Policy by the Communist Party of Turkmenistan] (Ashkhabad, 1982).

¹⁷ An example would be the well known "pripisky" culture of data falsification in agriculture - see, e.g., Nikolai Kharin, *Vegetation Degradation in Central Asia under the Impact of Human Activities* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), pp. 73-76. Saparmyrat Niyazov's appearance before the 6th Plenary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan is interesting in this regard. Saparmyrat Niyazov, "Partiinui i gosudarstvennui distsiplinu na uroven' sovremennykh trebovani [Party and State Discipline on the Level of Contemporary Requirements]," *Turkmenskaia iskra*, October 21, 1986.

¹⁸ Vitaliy Ponomarev, "Besedy s Abdy Kulievym, chast' 2 [Conversations with Abdy Kulievym. Part 2]," *Tsentr Memorial*, 2001, <<http://www.memo.ru/hr/politpr/asia/turkmenistan/kuliev2.htm>> (August 23, 2005).

¹⁹ Kadyrov, *Natsiia Plemen* [The Nation of the Tribes], pp. 356-357.

candidate from this standpoint. Although he had formally been part of the Ahalteke, he did not possess a significant client network in Turkmenistan itself. Furthermore, his wife was Russian and before being appointed he had undergone ideological training at the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

An emphasis on informal relationships within the elites as opposed to formal institutions became a marked feature after the fall of the USSR. The Moscow element was now missing and the old/new cadres in Central Asia, appointed during the Soviet era, no longer felt any pressure in giving preference to the people approved by Soviet center. As a result, newly created institutions of power (government, parliament) took root much more slowly in Central Asia. In contrast, because of the absence of external controls, patron-client, clan, family and other informal ties became more firmly entrenched (a process sometimes labelled re-traditionalization). At the same time, the loss of support from the center in Moscow, one of the two pillars of power, meant that the First Secretary had to maintain his own power, normally by liquidating his opponents, whether they be in the ranks of the liberal (often Russian-speaking) intelligentsia, members of the clan or of other informal groupings. These factors contributed greatly to the formation of authoritarian regimes in the region.

Elites Under Türkmenbashi

The purge of the countries which took place with the rise of Saparmyrat Niyazow, to First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan in 1986, led to renewed dominance by the Ahalteke. The main factors determining the political culture and the distribution of power in the country came to depend, however, on the personality and origin of President Niyazow (renamed as Türkmenbashi in 1993). His weak position within the traditional Turkmen (and Ahalteke in particular) elite and family structure - the president was an orphan who had no moral obligation to elevate his own relatives and cronies - made possible a pronounced centralization of power around his person, thereby strengthening authoritarian tendencies in the country. During the early years of independence, Türkmenbashi kept an eye on Moscow, perhaps out of fear that the once-powerful Soviet empire would arise again.²⁰ The president also announced a "return to the traditional institutions of power", but nevertheless accorded them only a formal role in the new political process with little real power.²¹

²⁰ Interview by author with Avdy Kuliev, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan (1990-1992), October 16, 1999.

²¹ These were pseudo-traditional institutions such as the Council of Elders (or the Halk Maslahaty, the supreme constitutional assembly overseeing the executive, legislative and

People of non-Turkmen origin were entrusted with much more power and influence by the new president than local elites. Despite external emphasis on Turkmenness, they external actors became his base of power. This portion of the elite consisted of people formerly connected to the presidential apparatus as advisors. They included Viktor Khramov, the former Director for Ideology of the Central Committee of The Communist Party of the Turkmen SSR.²² Everything written about the president in Turkmenistan and his policies were edited by Khramov. He was also active as a businessman - he had a share in Turkmenistan's energy trade and was the owner of several prosperous florists, clothiers and other businesses.²³ The president's financial affairs were administered directly in A gabat by Alexandr Zhadan and Vladimír Umnov. The circle of influential non-Turkmen included important foreign business people capable of establishing good relations with the president who, after a certain period of time, proved able to markedly influence his decision-making (normally for their own profit). These people included, among others, Yoseph Maiman, who was an energy advisor, Ahmed Chalyk, the longtime Vice-Minister of the Textile Industry and owner of the construction company Chalyk Holdings, responsible for construction of many new buildings in A gabat.²⁴ Other companies included the Turkish Polimeks (owned by Erol Tabanca), Erku (Ilhan Ipekchi) and the French Bouygues.²⁵ Turks also occupied places in the Turkmenistan state administration (Ugur Halil, for example, was ambassador to the United States in the 1990s).

In contradiction to other Central Asian presidents, whose families were directly tied to particular regional and clan groupings, the family of Türkmenbashi was scattered around the world and to some extent, at least, worked to maintain Türkmenbashi's financial empire. While his

judicial powers). For more on the issue, see Jan Šír, "Halk Maslahaty in the Context of the Constitutional Evolution of Post-Soviet Turkmenistan," *Perspectives on European Politics & Society* 6, 2 (2005), pp. 321-330; Jan Šír, *Návrat k Tradicím? Hledání moderních institucí v postsovětském Turkmenistánu* [Back to Tradition? Searching for Modern Institutional Design in Post-Soviet Turkmenistan] (Prague - Brno: Historický ústav AV ČR, Slovanské Historické Studie, 2006), pp. 225-238.

²² For more on the regime's ideology, see Slavomír Horák, "The Ideology of Turkmenbashi Regime," *Perspectives on European Politics & Society* 6, 2 (2005), pp. 305-320.

²³ Aydin Begench, "Who is Ruling Turkmenistan?" *Turkmenskaia iskra*, May 21, 2008, <<http://www.tm-iskra.org/20/08/Hramov-V-2-eng.html>> (May 23, 2008). See also: "Turkmen residents instructed to be healthy," *Chronicle of Turkmenistan*, November 26, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1223>> (November 30, 2009).

²⁴ A. Esenov, "Turetskii biznesmen Akhmet Chalyk: 'Seryi Kardinal' Turkmenskoi Politiki [Turkish Businessman Akhmet Chalyk: 'The Shadow Cardinal of Turkmen Politics?]," *Centrasia.ru*, September 28, 2003, <<http://www.centrasia.ru/news2.php4?st=1064699520>> (March 8, 2010); Chalyk's holdings include GAP Güneydoğu Tekstil, Çalık Enerji, GAP İnşaat, Çalıkbank и GAP Pazarlama.

²⁵ For their practices, see the documentary film *The Shadow of the Holy Book*, released in 2007.

son Murad, who was clearly involved in business with Turkmenistan in a wide variety of areas, his daughter Irina, who lived with her husband in Paris and Moscow, as was true for his wife, who lived in Moscow for an extended time, had any ambitions inside Turkmenistan.²⁶

Due to the concentration of power in the hands of the president and his advisors, no significant renewal of the traditional, or rather pseudo-traditional, elites took place in Turkmenistan as it had in other Central Asian countries. Although groups formed on the basis of tribal/regional relationships, these groups were not strong enough to threaten the basis of the personality-cult of President Türkmenbashi. The old Soviet families took a substantial part in consolidating the Ahalteke in Aşgabat back in the first half of the 1990s and held a de facto monopoly on power in the capital, while other regions tended to have insignificant representation.²⁷ In spite of this, people without Ahalteke ties occupied relatively important functions, institutions included the KGB up until 2002 (later the Ministry of National Safety) under Muhammet Nazarow.²⁸ The president's chief apparatchik was Rejep Saparow (originally from Dashoguz), who was only eliminated during the struggle between elites in 2005.²⁹ The head of the presidential guard, Akmurat Rejepow, a member of the Ersary tribe from Charjew in the Lebap region, must also be considered one of the most powerful men in the country. He was backed by the former First Secretary, Muhammatnazar Gapurov, who was from the same area and thus theoretically a member of the

²⁶ "From a forum featuring the leader of the United Turkmen Opposition, Avdy Kuliiev, and the former Vice-Premier and Chairman of the Central Bank of Turkmenistan, Khudaiberdy Artykovich Orazov". United Turkmen Opposition, <http://www.erkyn.net> February 29, 2002, accessed from Informatsiionyi biulleten Instituta stran SNG, <<http://www.zatulin.ru/institute/sbornik/047/03.shtml>> (October 7, 2010).

²⁷ Until approximately 1997, a series of purges took place among hakims (governors) of individual velayats, eliminating potentially influential elites in the regions. Influential state officials from other regions were also removed from their posts, being sent to their own region to work in a secondary position (an example is Pajzygel'dy Meredov from Mary, Minister of Agriculture until 1994).

²⁸ Nazarow came from the Lebap region, from the town of Kharjou (today Turkmenabat), from the same region as Muhammetnazar Gapurov, Niyazov's predecessor in the post of First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan.

²⁹ According to some sources, then-Vice-Premier Jolly Gurbanmuradov (who was sentenced that same year) and Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov stood behind an attempt to forcibly remove one of the administrators of the president's wealth. This theory was also put forward by Vitalii Khliupin in the essay "Chelovek bez litsa. Berdimuhamedow v Turkmenii nadolgo [Man without Face. Berdimuhamedow is going to be in Turkmenistan for a long time]," *Nomad*, December 27, 2006, <<http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-200612270614>> (January 10, 2007). Saparow died in prison in 2007.

clique in power during the Brezhnev era, and with which Türkmenbashi fought for almost the entire time he was in a position of leadership.³⁰

The increased presence of Ahalteke in state administration led to a battle within the regional elite. The result of which was a long series of reports to the president about other members of Ahalteke, which usually led to purges in the state apparatus.³¹ Those affected in the very beginning were normally sent into exile (to ambassadorial posts, honorary retirement etc.) but in later years usually lost their freedom for a long period of time. During the course of the roughly 15-year Türkmenbashi period in independent Turkmenistan, these old cadres, as well as the majority of Russian speakers, were forced to leave politics. The “Ahalization” of the Turkmen political elite and the battle between its members, however, meant the elimination or emigration of a substantial portion of the Ahalteke elite, thereby substantially narrowing their power base.

Toward the end of the Türkmenbashi regime, the highest Turkmen elite was comprised of a small circle of close individuals who, for one reason or another, had not been purged. If we look at the composition of this circle, it becomes obvious that the dominance of Ahalteke played no role under these circumstances. It included the presidential guard, which under General Akmyrat Rejepow, became the strongest power structure in the country. Rejepow’s people controlled the work of other security agencies. Other invulnerable ministers were Agageldi Mämmetgeldiyew (Defence Minister, Ahal, but from the Tejen district in south Turkmenistan), Geldimuhammet Aşyrmuhammedow (Ministry of National Security, Balkan region), and Akmämmet Rahmanow (Minister of the Interior, Ahalteke), as well as the Prosecutor General, Muhammetguly Ogşukow (Baharly region of Ahal welaýat). The future leader of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguli Berdimuhamedow from Ahalteke, held the position of Health Minister and was said to have provided personal medical assistance to President Türkmenbashi. As is obvious, regional origin was only one criterion for holding onto power at this level. Others included members in key state security units, irreplaceable to the president and the ability to plot against others without being included in the cadre purges.

³⁰ Rejepow himself, however, was not considered to be of pure Ersara blood, which was also true of Niyazov vis-à-vis the Ahalteke and allowed him to endure. “Vladyka pustyni [The Leader of the Desert],” *Planeta*, February 2007, <<http://www.planeta.by/article/174>> (October 7, 2010).

³¹ Between 1992 and 2006, there were several waves of purges, including the removal of the clan chief Khan Ahmed, the then-Premier. M. Shamayev, “Gde byl zhildom - tam zhdet stoit. Turkmenbashy metodichno unichtozhaet vsekh, kogo schitaet umnee sebia [Turkmenbashy methodically destroys everyone considered to be more capable than him],” *Gundogar*, September 24, 2002.

Elites under Berdimuhamedow

It was precisely the close, homogeneous nature of the elite which, after the death of Türkmenbashi, provided protection against internal disputes with unforeseeable consequences. It was this group of people which was able to arrive at a fairly rapid consensus concerning the new leader, with the requirement for an Ahalteke origin being probably beyond discussion.³² The transition from one personality-based regime to another was also clearly motivated by this internal elite, with foreigners in the state apparatus playing a much lesser role. Foreigners were focused on preserving their own positions rather than taking part in the internal affairs of the Turkmen elite.

These people chose from their midst the long-serving Minister of Health, Gurbanguli Berdimuhamedow, who because of his function as the president's personal dentist, was presumably one of the first to learn of his death. The other "December 21 Men" did not, for the most part, have this advantage.³³ His youthful visage and the fact that he had led a non-military department would also make him popular with the public, although public opinion did not have any significant role during the transfer of power.³⁴ Berdimuhamedow likely also maintained good relationships with some members of the innermost circle of the elite, most likely with Rejepow and Mämmetgeldiyew. He was also apparently able to construct coalitions and compromise within the main power circle in the country immediately after coming to power in December 2006.

At the beginning it seemed that he would be a compromise candidate and therefore weak and easily manipulated by the "siloviks" headed by Akmyrat Rejepow. Early signs seemed to indicate that Turkmenistan would follow a course which was more oligarchic than personality-based. However, President Berdimuhamedow began to consolidate his personal power almost immediately after his selection. He had to get his hands on highly compromising materials which he could then use later against other members of the elite. His extensive legal powers enabled this compromise and "weak" candidate to establish his own power base and create a personal regime in the spirit of the local political culture founded upon the absolute dominance of a single leader.

³² This ruled out the "eminence grise," Akmyrat Rejepow, who had no power base either in the center or in his own region.

³³ An exception was the Minister of the Interior, Rahmanow, who was from the Ahal velayat. It was necessary to find a compromise candidate from the highest ranks of the Turkmen elite, but not someone who would acquire substantial dominance over other members of the inner core of the elite. I am not including Muhammetgul Ogshukow, the Prosecutor General in 2006-2009, who is also from Western Ahal, but not from within the president's closest circle.

³⁴ The fact that Berdimuhamedow had apparently been responsible for pushing Uzbeks from border areas into the desert, the "reform" of health care, etc., were not brought up. See *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, November 19, 2002, and January 4, 2003.

As for the cadres, the first step was to liquidate the potential competition, in particular his “patrons” in order to survive. From this viewpoint Berdimuhamedow acted pragmatically in starting with General Akmämmet Rahmanow, the Minister of the Interior.³⁵ Rahmanow enjoyed extensive support within Aşgabat and was also a professional within the police apparatus and the security structures with detailed knowledge of compromising materials concerning Berdimuhamedow and other members of the elite.³⁶ After that came Akmurat Rejepow, Berdimuhamedow’s patron and the most powerful figure in the coup at the end of 2006. There is reason to think that until several months after the death of Türkmenbashi, he functioned as a shadow president. Other figures from the former inner circle were gradually eliminated between 2007 and 2009.³⁷ Although some of them were of Ahalteke origin, they were not close relatives and did not come from the same district.³⁸

Berdimuhamedow’s growing power was reflected in his ever more significant position ideologically in Turkmenistan. Already by 2007, all references to the first president of Turkmenistan had been eliminated from the Turkmen ideology, leading to the building of a cult around the personality of President Berdimuhamedow in 2009. In addition to several changes to official posters of the president, other features of the personality cult began to be constructed, as well. The media presented Berdimuhamedow using epithets such as “The Creator of the Great Renaissance in Turkmenistan”, “author of a number of initiatives with global impact”, “Defender of a Healthy Way of Life”, etc. Following the example of his predecessor, Berdimuhamedow’s ancestors were also revered;³⁹ the president also has his own museum and a mosque in Mary was named after him.

³⁵ *Neitral’nyi Turkmenistan*, April 10, 2007.

³⁶ His biography is available at <http://www.centrasia.ru>. One might also speculate that he was the biggest opponent of Rejepow still in power. “Kapkan dlia generála Redzhepova [A Trap for General Rejepow?],” *Planeta*, May 2007, <<http://www.planeta.by/article/211>> (March 8, 2010).

³⁷ This concerned first of all the minister of national security, Geldimuhamet Aşyrmuhammedow, who was dismissed from office in October 2007 together with several top officials at the Ministry of National Security (*Neitral’nyi Turkmenistan*, October 9, 2007). Muhammetguly Ogşukow, Prosecutor General from spring 2006, was removed from office in March 2008 (*Neitral’nyi Turkmenistan*, March 4, 2008). Baýram Alolow, chief commander of the Border Guard, and Agageldi Mämmetgeldiýew, Minister of Defence and Secretary of the State Security Council were finally sacked as part of the cadre changes in January 2009.

³⁸ This was the case with Mämmetgeldiýew, who had been a medical colleague of Berdymukhammedov and was “only” retired. Kadyrov, *Elitnye klany*, p. 35.

³⁹ Most revered was his grandfather, a village teacher, after whom the school in the village of Yzgant (Geok Depe district) was renamed (*Neitral’nyi Turkmenistan*, September 4, 2009). His biography was published at the same time. *Pedagog, voïn, grazhdanin. Zhizn’-podvig Berdymukhamedova Annaeva* [The Pedagogue, the Soldier, the Citizen. Life-heroism of

The circumstances noted above also led to changes in the process of forming the power base in the country, with a greater emphasis laid on the regional origin of important ministers. President Berdimuhamedow, in contrast to his predecessor, was much more involved in the traditional family and tribal structures. He behaved in accordance with the law of group morality, and was beholden to “his own people”, who had “their own man” at the head of state. Responsibility to his own social group in this case meant an “obligation” to provide the group protection and means of subsistence⁴⁰ and so it was logical that the share of people hailing from the Western Ahal region west of Aşgabat would rise.

Today, the people in charge of security ministries (the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior) are almost exclusively tied to the president; through origin, career or family. Family ties provide for a more stable position than just territorial ties. Ata Serdarow, a cousin of the president, has managed to hold onto the position of Minister of Health. Gurbanmyrat Hangulyýew, a brother-in-law, has been the Minister of Transport since 2008. Ýaýlym Berdyýew, another relative of the president, was appointed to the position of Minister of Defence and head of the State Security Council in January 2009. Changes in the cadres also, however, impacted the immediate clan of Berdimuhamedow. One such change in 2007 saw the Minister of the Interior and brother-in-law of the president, Hojamyrat Annagurbanow removed from office. The powerful secretary of the president’s apparatus and former fellow student of the president, Yusup Işangullyýew, lost his position in March 2009.⁴¹

The next most represented region is the Mary velayat, where the president also has relatives. Included in his family line from this area is the Vice-Premier for Culture and Media, Maysa Ýazmuhammedowa, a cousin of the president. She and Myratgeldi Akmammedow, another denizen of Mary, and Vice-Premier for Agriculture are “regulated” by executives from the Ahal region (Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Water Management).

Energy, as a key sector in the Turkmen economy used to be in the hands of the elites from the Balkan velayat even under Türkmenbashi, i.e., under the control of the Yomud tribe. The control of incomes in these sectors lay in Aşgabat but technical matters were in the hands of people from western Turkmenistan. Most significantly, these included

Berdymukhamed Annaev] (Ashgabat: Glavnoe arkhivnoe upravlenie při Kabinete Ministrov Turkenistana, 2009).

⁴⁰ According to the definition of Kadyrov, *Natsiia plemen*, p. 166.

⁴¹ Kadyrov, *Elitnye klany*, p. 138-141. Işangullyew became the director of the local hospital in v Berzengi. Nothing is known about the fate of Hojamyrat Annagurbanow, who was paradoxically removed from his function for engaging in cronyism and favouring his relatives (*Neitral’nyi Turkmenistan*, October 9, 2007).

Taçberdi Tagyýew (Vice-Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers in charge of mineral resources until August 2009) and Garýagdi Taşlyýew (head of the national oil company Turkmennebit until January 2009). There was a shift of functions in favour of dominance by the Ahalteke (Minister of Oil and Gas, Vice-Premier for Energy). But the Balkan Yomuds continued to maintain their influence over particular companies (Turkmennebit, Turkmengaz and, until October 2009, the Ministry of Oil and Gas, as well). The watershed moment arrived in 2009 in terms of energy sector positions - cadres were rotated in January, May and October of that year.⁴²

These changes were also partly reflected in developments on the international scene. This was particularly true for the May purge, which was likely in reaction to the shutoff of gas from Gazprom one month earlier as a consequence of an alleged explosion in the pipeline, and for the October reshuffle of cadres connected to questionable data concerning Turkmen gas supplies.⁴³ Similar purges in the sector and relocation of cadres continued to take place in January of 2010, when Bayramgeldy Nedirow was appointed Minister for Oil and Gas Supplies, a position he had already held. At the symbolic level, the change in control over the energy sector was confirmed by moving the headquarters of Turkmennebit (Turkmenneft'), the national oil company, from Balkanabatu (the former Nebit Dag) in western Turkmenistan to Aşgabat in January 2009. This is testimony to the fact that energy policy is being decided by people in positions outside the appropriate bureaucracies, whose role is technical rather than political. In reality, the energy sector in Turkmenistan is under the overall dominance of the Ahalteke and, particularly, of Berdimuhamedow and his family.⁴⁴

Other people with no or little clan, territorial or career affiliation to the president are constantly sacked or reshuffled in order to prevent their attaining political power. A regular series of purges took place in pursuit of this goal, which President Berdimuhamedow carried out in the same fashion as had his predecessor. Ministers and other important persons in the state apparatus are appointed for trial periods which might conclude with further changes. High-level functionaries who served

⁴² *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 13, 2009.

⁴³ The results of the foreign audit of gas reserves were met with skepticism by the foreign mass-media. Arkadii Dubnov, "Truboprokol [The Pipe Fiasco]," *Vremia.ru*, October 13, 2009, <<http://www.vremya.ru/2009/188/5/239444.html>> (March 8, 2010).

⁴⁴ Berdymukhammedov's son-in-law Dowlet Atabaýew became responsible for the oil and gas sector instead of Tagyýew, who was finally replaced in 2009. Atabaýew worked as a commercial attaché at the embassy of Turkmenistan in Paris. In January 2008 he was appointed chief representative of the State Agency for Management and Exploitation of Hydrocarbon Resources by the President of Turkmenistan in London. Maksat Alikperov, "Turkmen Gas as a family business," *Khronika Turkmenistana*, February 3, 2010, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1276>> (March 10, 2010).

Türkmenbashi at various ministries were also replaced. Among the other changes they brought, these purges affected regional bodies, courts, etc. Further purges were carried out on remaining non-Turkmen cadres. The purges, however, normally were not carried out on the monstrous scale of those that had taken place under Türkmenbashi. The power system is centralized and controlled by the unilateral decisions of the president. Therefore, regular rotation of the cadres did not initiate any real instability in the functioning of the state apparatus.

In addition to the Turkmen elites, Berdimuhamedow was forced to protect the positions of non-Turkmen in his inner circle. Similar to what had happened under Türkmenbashi, three Russian advisors - Alexandr Zhadan, Vladimir Umnov and Viktor Khramov - remained in the apparatus of the president, in spite of the fact that there was speculation about their disappearance in 2007. Viktor Khramov remains responsible for creating the ideological framework for the Berdimuhamedow era and issuing publications concerning the new president.⁴⁵

The commercial elites which had surrounded President Türkmenbashi have also, for the most part, maintained their influence under the new president. These are primarily representatives of construction companies - especially the Turkish Polimex and French Bouygues. The most interesting development concerned the holding company of Ahmed Chalyk, who is responsible not only for a series of buildings in the country but is also the owner of a number of textile concerns and other businesses. After a brief decline in influence after Türkmenbashi's death, Chalyk, using his connections within the Turkish government and the economic might of Turkmenistan itself, was able to restore his prior authority. In 2009, he was even an integral part of Berdimuhamedow's delegations abroad and his holding company had access to the majority of joint projects between Turkmenistan and other countries.⁴⁶ These companies are chiefly focused on construction in Turkmenistan. Apart from Aşgabat, the focus is on key projects of President Berdimuhamedow, like the tourist destination of Awaza under

⁴⁵ Viktor Khramov and Maiia Mollaýewa (eds.), *Prezident Turkmenistana Berdimukhammedov Gurbanguly Mialikgulyevich. Kratkaia biografiia* [Berdimukhammedov Gurbanguly Mialikgulyevich. the President of Turkmenistan. Short Biography] (Ashgabat: Turkmenskaia gosudarstvennaia izdatel'skaia sluzhba, 2007). Also published in the daily *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan* from July 26 to August 4, 2007, and from August 7 to August 9, 2008.

⁴⁶ Alan Peskov, "A New friend of Turkmens," *Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, May 27, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/print.php?id=1042>> (March 8, 2010). See also Maksat Alikperov, "Berdimukhammedov could not resist the financial charm of Chalyk," *Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, January 6, 2010, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1252>> (March 8, 2010).

construction on the coast of the Caspian Sea, not far from the port of Türkmenbashi (the former Krasnovodsk).⁴⁷

There are many reasons for protecting the positions of these people. These people have obvious ties with other influential persons in economic and political life. With regard to the Russian language cadres in the presidential apparatus, their knowledge of everyday administration, is something which might not be available to the local cadres selected by Berdimuhamedow. As for the commercial elites, it is very likely that there is a transfer of income going on to the accounts of the president and his family.⁴⁸

Conclusion

In the years since 1991, the Turkmen elite has taken on its own specific characteristics based, on the Soviet heritage, as well as pre-Soviet social governing structures which had often paradoxically been retained under the Soviet regime, and post-Soviet developments, especially the background of the Turkmen presidents. These specifics may be categorized into the following areas which are certain to have a continuing impact on Turkmen politics for decades to come. At the same time it must be noted that none of these factors is dominant; rather, all are mutually interconnected.

Emphasizing Traditional Regional and Tribal Affiliations

As has already been noted several times, the rise of Türkmenbashi markedly increased the power of the Ahalteke. This has led to the permanent elimination of non-Ahalteke from key positions throughout the era of Türkmenbashi and Berdimuhamedow. At the same time, frequent purges radically narrowed the power base of the opposition, leading to the quiet usurpation of power after the death of Türkmenbashi. The Ahalteke powerbase narrowed further after the rise Berdimuhamedow, when he began to favour people from the Western Ahal velayat (Geokdepe, Ahal, Baharly, Büzmeýin, etc.), which is also

⁴⁷ The project includes construction of dozens of hotels and is designed to compete with destinations like Dubai. From the project presentation at the website <<http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/awaza>> (last accessed September 5, 2010). Hotels remain incomplete but are put into partial service during formal openings with presidential participation. People from throughout Turkmenistan are then forced to spend their vacations in local hotels to create the impression that development of the tourist zone has been successful. "Forced Vacation," *Chronicle of Turkmenistan*, December 7, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1230>> (March 8, 2010); "The Turks are building whilst Turkmen are completing construction works," *Chronicle of Turkmenistan*, December 13, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1233>> (March 8, 2010).

⁴⁸ Maksim Pender, "G. Berdymukhamedova pobuzhdaiut prodolzhat' bashistskuiu politiku [G. Berdimuhamedow is encouraged to continue the Bashi politics]," *Turkmenskaia iskra*, June 16, 2008, <<http://www.tm-iskra.org/20/08/sliv-guly.html>> (June 19, 2008).

where his family originates. In this regard, the government of Berdimuhamedow resembles those of other countries in Central Asia.⁴⁹ The dominance of the Ahalteke is not, however, absolute and is not a unique necessity for the rise of a cadre. The utility of members is also due to personal loyalty, as well as the decisions of the president. The Turkmenization of cadres in the state apparatus is also continuing, leading the “visible ethnic purity” of cadres. It was for this reason that the great majority of non-Turkmen were removed from power. The only exceptions are those possessing extensive and possibly compromising knowledge about both post-Soviet presidents which makes them difficult to remove. A certain number of specialists remain at mid- and lower levels of power, which are necessary for the functioning of the bureaucracy.

Strengthening of the Leadership Principle

The president as the central figure in Turkmen politics means he becomes Turkmen No. 1, or in a narrower sense, Ahalteke No. 1. The complete lack of controls on his power leads to its further accumulation and the liquidation of any potential competitor which, over time, may once again increase the ideological magnetism of the president and lead to his canonization. A consequence of this is the frequent purges and movement of cadres from one location to another, normally without any justification. Any new president who wishes to hold on to his position under such circumstances must prevent the rise of competitors who might attempt to overthrow the leader. Turkmenistan political culture is founded upon the ability to permanently head off any move toward a more liberal system. This is, of course, not only characteristic of Turkmen political culture; the attempt to preserve one's political position is characteristic of many politicians and leaders everywhere.

Soviet Political Culture

Next, Soviet political culture in its regional variant with an emphasis on ties to the center, forms another characteristic feature of post-Soviet Turkmenistan (and all post-Soviet republics in general). The “party apparatus”, strongly hierarchical structure of the Soviets, correlates with the vertical hierarchy of traditional society, the role of the leader, the clan or corruption factor and cadre issues. The stagnation under Brezhnev helped establish the position of the First Secretary and, later, the

⁴⁹ An analogy in Central Asia is Tajikistan (favour shown to the Dangara, the native city of the Tajik president, Emomali Rahmon), Kyrgyzstan, especially under the first president, Akayev (the town of Kemin and the birthplace of the president's wife, Talas) and Kazakhstan (the role of the village Chemolgan, birthplace of President Nazarbaev). The Uzbek elite is much more heterogeneous in these terms because of the less personality-oriented regime and many more pretenders to elite positions.

president. The elimination of Soviet higher power as a determining factor in the republic's cadre politics also contributed (in combination with the factors noted above) to an uncontrolled cadre policy of both Turkmen presidents.⁵⁰ At the same time, support for corruption and toadyism permits a powerful position to be obtained (at least for a limited period of time). Niyazow as well as Berdimuhamedow are glowing examples of prior obeisance toward higher powers, something which became the focus of criticism and derision afterwards. In the beginning, Niyazow was loyal to his predecessor Gapurov, but as soon as he assumed his position, he removed Gapurov from all his positions.⁵¹ Niyazow remained loyal to the Soviet power center, but around 1993 began to understand that he no longer needed to fear a return of the Soviet Union. This was evidenced in his unpredictable foreign policy toward Russia, the criticism of Russian and Soviet colonialism in his historiography and his actions toward the Russian minority in Turkmenistan itself. Berdimuhamedow was forced to maintain loyalty toward Niyazow, who could have removed him from his position at any time with much worse consequences than during the Soviet period. After his rise to power, however, Türkmenbashi's name essentially disappeared from the Turkmen media.

The Soviet era and the implementation of Marxist politics in its local Turkmen incarnation also led (often in combination with the character of the leader) to the conservation of pre-existing ideological elements which were merely transformed into other frameworks, placing a greater emphasis on post-Soviet development in Turkmenistan. The ideology of the "Golden Age of Turkmenistan" and the "Era of the Turkmen Renaissance" actually represents a continuation of the Soviet ideological concept of the "Golden Tomorrow". This combination of Soviet and post-Soviet ideology is all the more understandable in light of the fact that those who created these ideologies have been active since the Soviet era. Changing the positions occupied by the chief ideologues, however, may transform the "Soviet heritage" of Turkmen ideology into new forms.

⁵⁰ This syndrome is typical not only for post-Soviet Turkmenistan, it is a frequent characteristic of political culture in postcolonial societies in which power is assumed by a single party with a substantial majority of adherents in a country of limited numbers. Similar instances in which the casting off of political controls from above have taken place in some European countries - for example, in the role played by Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia up to 1998.

⁵¹ Gapurov's funeral was characteristic of this approach, in that it could not take place in the spirit of the Muslim and Turkmen traditions. It's possible that Gapurov was murdered at the behest of Türkmenbashi the moment he became a threat to the presidency. Avdy Kuliev, "O Gapurove, Muhamednazare [About Muhamednazar Gapurov]," *Erkin Turkmenistan - Svobodnyi Turkmenistan. Informatsionno-analiticheskii biulleten* 7 (April 2001), pp. 36-38.

Turkmen political culture thus forced Berdimuhamedow to reinforce the authoritarian system in the interests of maintaining his own position, even if at the beginning it looked as if there might be a shift in the political culture. Berdimuhamedow well understood, however, that any weakening of power would bring a rapid end to his career in Turkmenistan. In addition, it is open to debate whether the changes promised during the pre-election campaign at the beginning of 2007 were ever intended seriously.

For the future, the issue remains whether the rise of a weaker personality at the helm of Turkmenistan might lead to changes in the political culture, or whether the political culture in its current incarnation might give rise to a new leader. Turkmenistan was lucky at the end of 2006 to have a narrow elite base, so the preconditions for internal conflicts within the elite were low. Nevertheless, it is uncertain whether this narrow base will continue into the future. Any expansion could lead to political instability accompanied by armed conflict between individual power groups. At present, however, it appears that the personality-oriented regime of President Berdimuhamedow is stable, both because of his age and the position he holds in the local power structure.

Berdymukhammedov's Turkmenistan: A Modest Shift in Domestic and Social Politics

Sébastien Peyrouse^{*}

ABSTRACT

While Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov seeks to reintegrate Turkmenistan on the international and regional levels and attempts to establish new partnerships with foreign companies to accelerate investments, domestic policy seems a poor reflection of the regime's evolution. The authorities' attention is focused on social issues totally neglected by the regime of Saparmurat Niyazov. New schools were built, provincial hospitals have reopened, roads and railways are improving, land reforms, however small, are welcomed, and a modest decentralization has emerged. However, the general social situation remains tense: a total absence of public liberty, violations of religious rights, mostly unacknowledged massive unemployment, a loss of confidence of the middle classes, whose educational and professional opportunities have been reduced, increasing corruption of state organs, and rural poverty influenced by the social problems of recent years. Yet, the main long-term problem probably remains the country's lack of human capital, which was destroyed in recent decades and needs time to be restored.

Keywords • Turkmenistan • Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov • Domestic Politics • Education • Health • Media • Food Security

Introduction

In December 2006, the death of Saparmurat Niyazov raised many questions about the future evolution of Turkmenistan. The eccentricities

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¹ Richard Pomfret, "Turkmenistan's foreign policy," *The China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6, 4 (2008), pp. 22-26.

and the dictatorial management style of the deceased president, his systematic repression of all opposition, and the increasingly difficult social situation, exacerbated by the financial misappropriations of the president and his entourage, lent the country an extremely negative image. The arrival to power of a new president raised hopes of a “thaw” along the lines of Nikita Khrushchev after the death of Stalin. The declarations and first measures decreed by the new Turkmen leader did in fact go in this direction, as Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov reoriented certain aspects of Turkmen policy. On the international level, he encouraged an exit from the country’s isolationist policies and the revival of foreign cooperation, in particular in the economic realm.¹ Concerning domestic affairs, he announced large reforms in key sectors such as health, education, and agriculture. Among other improvements, he brought far greater attention to the trafficking and consumption of drugs.² These problems have been recognized publicly and the country now participates in various regional and international projects aimed at limiting their growth. However, the much-awaited shift in domestic policies has been more cautious than what has taken place in foreign policy.

One of the most visible steps, the new Code of Social Security instituted in Spring 2007 has helped restore full pensions, or significantly increase them, for nearly 200,000 citizens who had been arbitrarily deprived under Niyazov. Water and electricity are still free, payments for rent and heating are symbolic, and many staples such as flour and salt are sold at low prices and sometimes for a loss, as during Soviet times. Meanwhile other benefits enjoyed by the Turkmen people have been put into question: rising gasoline prices, limiting free access to city gas to 600 m³ per year, the override to be charged through meters installed in 2010. The official exchange rate was 5,200 Manat to the dollar when Berdymukhammedov came to power, and has now reached 14,200 Manat, leading to very high inflation. Furthermore, since unemployment is officially non-existent, pauperized people cannot claim social or financial assistance. Finally, despite the promises to decentralize made in 2007 and the increased attention by the new president to rural areas, the autonomy of municipalities and local councils is more symbolic than real.

Public Space, Still Controlled

Cult of Personality: Has One President Followed the Other?

Upon taking office, Berdymukhammedov put forth all the signs of deference necessary to establish his legitimacy as the successor of the first

² Bernd Rechel, Inga Sikorskaya, Martin McKee, *Health in Turkmenistan after Niyazov* (London: London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, 2009), p. 25.

president of independent Turkmenistan and to pay homage to Niyazov. The “men of the December 21,” who put him in power, belonged mainly to the *siloviki* (representatives of the power ministries) and expected ideological stability. However, later in 2007, Berdymukhammedov diminished references to the “holy book” or the *Ruhnama*, Niyazov’s ideological “Red Book”, ordered the removal of Niyazov’s portraits from primary and secondary schools immediately after the educational reform, and seemed to hesitate as to where to take the ideological framework. From 2008 to 2009, the portraits of Niyazov in public spaces were gradually removed, new bank notes were issued without the face of the first president, and the official cult of the *Ruhnama* was quietly shelved. The most apparent excesses, like the changes to the calendar, were abolished and popular holidays such as Victory Day and International Women’s Day were reinstated.³ Relocating the Neutrality Arch, one of the primary symbols of the Niyazov regime, was openly discussed. “Deniyazovization” accelerated when in 2009 the birthday of the former president was ignored, even though the occasion was marked with great festivities during his lifetime. The *Ruhnama* continues to be taught, but it is now recommended that teachers not to dwell on the chapters that mention Niyazov and his family. A special commission to confiscate Niyazov-era books, including the *Ruhnama*, was set up and searches were conducted of government and business offices.⁴

However, this progressive erasure of the cult of Niyazov gave way to a new cult of the second president and his family. Although Berdymukhammedov did not proclaim himself a prophet or confer upon his works prophylactic virtues as Niyazov decreed for the *Ruhnama*, the cult of personality continues. The portraits and writings of Berdymukhammedov have gradually replaced those of Niyazov.⁵ The media continue to describe him with designations similar to those of his predecessor, including “leader of the fair state”, “dear son of the Turkmen people”, and the “backbone of the nation.”⁶ The theme of the “Great Renaissance”, for which Berdymukhammedov would be the same incarnation, has replaced that of the “golden age” of the nation.⁷ A museum dedicated to his grandfather, who was killed during the great earthquake of 1948, opened in 2009 and the cult of his parents is

³ However number of holidays deemed not compliant with Turkmen traditions, such as Valentine’s Day, have been banned.

⁴ Kumush Ovezova, “Author of Rukhnama not to be mentioned,” *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, March 24, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1029>> (May 2, 2010).

⁵ Personal observations, Ashgabat, April 2008.

⁶ “Happy new cult!” *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, September 9, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1151>> (May 2, 2010).

⁷ Slavomír Horák, “Velikoe Vozrozhdenie: prodolzhenie ideologicheskoi traditsii Turkmenistan [The Great Renaissance. The Continuity of Ideological Tradition of Turkmenistan],” *Politeks* 3 (2009), pp. 100-115.

spreading.⁸ Some measures related to the cult of personality should not be understood as mere gestures of ideological upbringing, but arise because of financial reasons. The requirement for each university or school to buy presidential works constitutes a significant source of revenue for the presidential administration. The decree on the obligation to play sports in the name of the good physical health of the nation requires citizens to pay a fee to join sports clubs, and is similar to the mandate to lay wreaths on monuments related to Turkmenbashi (Niyazov's ceremonial name) and his family, since the floral industry is run by relatives of the president.

Through multiple staged media appearances, Berdymukhammedov has sought to preserve a paternalistic attitude. He continues the tradition set by Niyazov of televised sessions in which persons accused of crimes are publicly reprimanded, making note of his openness and willingness to fight against crime, corruption, and abuse. A particularly tangible sign of the maintenance of a highly authoritarian regime, the situation of human rights has not improved at all since the death of Niyazov. Aside from very restricted possibilities for expression and movement, individual freedoms are limited. An unofficial curfew has been upheld, forcing citizens to return to their home before eleven in the evening, while a process of forced retraditionalization obliges women to dress in a traditional manner at formal meetings.

A Long-Awaited Cultural and Media Opening Delayed

Despite the promising signs associated with the reestablishing of the theatre and circus, which were forbidden under Niyazov, the long-awaited cultural liberation has not taken place. In December 2009, the Turkmen national theater was ultimately banned from staging *Metranpazh*, a play by the Russian playwright Alexander Vampilov, as the Ministry of Culture decreed that it was more judicious to put on Turkmen plays.⁹ While all forms of art had been particularly mistreated under Niyazov, the hard sciences received the same treatment and were removed from the public space. Although Berdymukhammedov has not really restored any breathing room for the arts, he has sought to revitalize scientific endeavors, as he is aware of their direct and immediate impact on the state of economic development. By June 2007, he had ordered the reopening of the Academy of Sciences, which was abolished in 1997-1998,

⁸ "Grandfather's museum," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, November 27, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1226>> (May 2, 2010); "The statue of the President's father installed in the Ashgabat higher educational establishment," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, February 15, 2010, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1289>> (May 2, 2010).

⁹ "V Turkmenistane zapreshchena postanovka p'esy russkogo dramaturga [Turkmenistan forbids the staging of Russian dramatic pieces]," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, December 2, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/?id=2304>> (May 2, 2010).

established a Fund for science and technology, and has again allowed thesis defenses in the exact sciences and humanities.¹⁰

A mark of the cultural closure of the regime, the publishing field remains paltry, limited to presidential works and a few other books that the authorities strictly control. All publications are still endorsed by the president's ideology advisor, Viktor Khramov, the former director for ideology of the Central Committee of the Turkmen Communist Party. Publishing is carried out by students from the Academy of Arts of Turkmenistan, whose cost is markedly less than that of professionals. Apart from school textbooks, the majority of publications are devoted to the president. In more than eighteen years of independence, not one literary work by a contemporary Turkmen writer has been published. Each year Turkmenistan holds a book fair, which is meant to showcase the cultural revival of the country. Whereas a number of Russian writers travelled to it in 2008, hoping to initiate some cooperation, the country is now so closed off that none of those Russian authors returned in 2009. It is still practically impossible to import books published in Russia, unless one is in possession of a special permit, which is extremely difficult to obtain. Some Russian editors were allowed to make gifts of books, later deposited at Turkmenistan's national library, to the fair in 2009.¹¹ Latinization also poses an obstacle, since the few classics from the Soviet era that have been republished are in Latin writing, which remains difficult to access for many of the country's citizens. In April 2010, Berdymukhammedov finally reopened the municipal libraries that his predecessor had closed down.¹² No additional Cyrillic typography machine was available in the country, with Gazprom reintroducing the first in 2007.

The hoped-for reforms in the area of freedom of the press have remained a dead letter. Today all media organizations are controlled totally by the state and are subject to permanent censorship. Only one information agency exists, the Turkmen State Information Agency (*Turkmen Döwlet Habarlary*) and all the information provided to journalists comes from the presidential press. At present, none of the twenty-five newspapers, fifteen magazines, four television channels, or four radio stations has the least bit of independence. As under Niyazov, the broadcasting of bad news, for example shortages or factory failures, is

¹⁰ Rafiz Abazov, "Science In Turkmenistan: How Far Will Reforms Go?" *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, June 15, 2009, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5150>> (April 14, 2010).

¹¹ Kumush Ovezova, "Ne vsiakaia kniga – put' k progressu [Not every book is a way to progress]," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, October 9, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/?heading=12>> (April 15, 2010).

¹² "V Turkmenii vnov' otkrylis' biblioteki, zakrytye pri Turkmenbashi [The libraries closed in Turkmenistan by Niyazov have reopened]," *Gundogar*, April 1, 2010, <http://www.gundogar.org/?topic_id=25&year=2010&month=4> (April 15, 2010).

prohibited. A sociological study conducted clandestinely reveals that the Turkmen population gives priority to watching Russian television, followed by Uzbek and then Turkish television, via satellite;¹³ however, this remains the privilege of a minority. In 2008, Berdymukhammedov ordered the disassembly of satellite dishes, arguing that they blighted towns. Even if no written order followed, the dishes have begun to be taken down by the administration so they can be replaced by a cable system enabling the state to control the channels to which Turkmen citizens can gain access. According to the Turkmen Initiative report, the dismantling of these dishes is to be continued.¹⁴

In such conditions the vast majority of the population has no interest in the daily newspapers and magazines, which are considered of poor quality and pro-government. In order for periodical publications to survive, the government compels state employees to subscribe to several newspapers at once, and those who do not comply are threatened with dismissal. They must generally subscribe to the newspapers linked with their profession, but also to magazines without any connection to their jobs. Company leaders receive a quota from the ministry indicating the number of copies of each newspaper that must be distributed within the organization. In some provinces, a minimal subscription fee of about US\$18 has been set, a significant amount for those with very low salaries, such as teachers. The number of subscriptions is deducted from salaries and, in many cases, it seems that the interested person is not even asked to which newspaper he or she would like to subscribe. This results in some households receiving two or three copies of the same newspaper when the members of the same family work in different places.¹⁵

All internet subscriptions stipulate that users are not allowed to visit sites containing information likely to harm social morale, relations between the national minorities, and the prestige of the country. Since 2000, the state corporation Turkmentelekom has controlled the entire network. The opening of 15 Internet cafes in 2007 can certainly be counted as progress, but using the web requires the presentation of a passport, and the manager must obligatorily note the name and the address of the user. In 2008, the authorities installed new filters to

¹³ "Pessimizm turkmenskikh telezritelei [The pessimism of Turkmen television audiences]," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, July 23, 2010, <<http://iwpr.net/fr/node/47336>> (August 17, 2010).

¹⁴ On Internet and medias in Turkmenistan, see *O sostoianii svobody sredstv massovoi informatsii, prava na svobodu slova i prava na dostup k informatsii v Turkmenistane* [On the state of the freedom of the press, and the right to free speech and to accessing information in Turkmenistan] (Vienna: Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights, 2008).

¹⁵ Nazar Saparov, "Subscription to periodicals is underway in Turkmenistan," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, May 7, 2008, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1090>> (April 15, 2010).

prevent access to dissident sites.¹⁶ Exchanges of emails via the most popular sites such as Gmail, Yahoo, or Hotmail are monitored. Other sites were blocked in 2009, such as YouTube and Live Journal. Those who can gain access to the internet mainly work in companies and businesses, with access for ordinary citizens remaining extremely limited.¹⁷

Minority Rights and Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The rights of national minorities are widely flouted. Under Niyazov, minorities were deprived of public expression and could not receive education in their national languages. It is still difficult to obtain information on national minority schools, most of which were closed or converted into Turkmen-language institutions. According to the Turkmen Education Initiative, there are only six schools in Mary with some instruction in Russian, five in Turkmenabat, four in Dashoguz, and five in Turkmenbashi.¹⁸ The Uzbek-language schools have all closed. Despite negotiations in 2007 between Nursultan Nazarbayev and Berdymukhammedov to build a Kazakh-language school in Turkmenbashi, it seems that the project has stalled. There is practically no media for the national minorities. Today only one Russian-language newspaper exists, *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, as well as one dual language Russian-Turkmen publicity newspaper, *Habarlary*. The main television channel broadcasts one program in Russian for two hours each day. About 10 percent of radio information time is in Russian. None of the other national minority languages is used in the media.

Far more than his predecessor, Berdymukhammedov emphasizes the internal dangers that ethnic separatism and religious extremism pose, which the 2009 military doctrine discussed at particular length. The methods of control and repression against religion have barely changed. The second president since independence has extended all regulations imposed under the Soviet regime and then maintained or enhanced by Niyazov, in particular the obligation of every religious movement to register with the Ministry of Justice or else face a criminal penalty. The number of authorized movements remains extremely small. Although the separation of state and religion is specified in the Constitution, it does not exist in practice. The main body of religious control, the Committee

¹⁶ Personal observations, Ashgabat, April 2008.

¹⁷ "Prezident Turkmenistana ne vypolniaet obeshchaniia o dostupe v Internet [The president of Turkmenistan fails to respect his promises concerning access to the Internet]," IWPR, November 12, 2009, <<http://iwpr.net/fr/node/29353>> (August 17, 2010); "Turkmen Internet. Our survey," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, June 16, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?heading=4&page=17>> (August 17, 2010).

¹⁸ *Turkmenistan. The Reform of the Education System* (Vienna: Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights, 2009), p. 20.

for Religious Affairs (*Gengeshi*) continues to appoint Muslim representatives and Orthodox clergy, who then refuse to register “competitor” movements. The situation of religious education is equally difficult, as Berdymukhammedov has not allowed any madrasas to open. Muslims are forbidden from receiving religious training abroad and imams educated outside of Turkmenistan cannot earn tenure; only future Orthodox priests have the “privilege” of going to Russia to study. The number of people authorized to make the *hajj* has remained as low as before, 188 people out of the 5,000 authorized by the Saudi authorities in 2008.¹⁹ Like Uzbekistan, control over Islam is extreme. A somewhat dissident person, even if he or she belongs to a Sufi movement, may be imprisoned for “Wahhabism.” The mosques are empty, as believers prefer to avoid being controlled by the police and assimilated to the Islamists.²⁰

Many minority faiths are also banned, a punishment that is part of a broader policy of discrimination against national minorities. Shiism, practiced by the country’s Azeri minority of at least 30,000 people, is a major target. No Shiite mosque can be officially registered and a handful of clandestine establishments and prayer rooms open to Shiites are tolerated in Sunni mosques. These illegal buildings numbered around five in 2008. A Shiite mosque in the village of Bagyr, near Ashgabat, was demolished in 2005. The last Shiite imam of Turkmenbashi, a city that is home to much of the Azeri community, was forced to leave the country the same year.²¹ The Iranian Embassy in Ashgabat maintains its own mosque, which is protected by diplomatic status, but remains inaccessible to citizens of Turkmenistan. This is also the case for Armenians, who were unable to obtain official recognition and are forced to worship in Russian Orthodox churches. Finally, as in most of the other Central Asian republics, a citizen belonging to the titular nationality who has converted to a Christian movement is subject to strong pressures. The Protestant movements are in the sights of the authorities, faithful Protestants lose their jobs and their children are threatened with expulsion from school. Police raids in places of worship or in the homes of believers remain commonplace.²²

Repression continues to be meted out regularly and some Soviet practices have been maintained, such as internment in psychiatric hospitals, which in 2008 happened to a correspondent of Freedom Radio,

¹⁹ “Turkmenistan: Exit bans, haj ban, visa denials part of state religious isolation policy,” *Forum 18*, February 2, 2010, <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1403> (March 8, 2010).

²⁰ Personal observations and interviews with anonymous Turkmen citizens, Ashgabat, April 2008.

²¹ Sébastien Peyrouse, Sadykzhan Ibraimov, “Iran’s Central Asia Temptations,” *Currents Trends in Islamist Ideology* 10 (2010).

²² On the religious situation, see Felix Corley’s reports at www.forum18.org.

Sazak Durdymuradov. This practice seems to have returned in force because it can result in detention without going through the courts. Prisons are overcrowded; the penal facility in the city of Bairamali was built to house 800 people, but now holds between 3,500 and 4,000. Many prisoners prefer to sleep outside, around the barracks when the weather permits. Visitation buildings are far too small, forcing families to pay bribes of around US\$30 to speak to a detained relative.²³ As in other prisons in Central Asia, the more affluent prisoners are able to achieve a higher standard of living, and can even bring in prostitutes and alcohol. Under Niyazov, regular amnesties guaranteed the government substantial income, since they were the result of deals with families. Under Berdymukhammedov, it seems that the number of people pardoned has fallen significantly.

Renewed Social Protections? Education, Health, and Housing

An Educational System Difficult to Rebuild

It is perhaps in education where the hopes have been the highest. Some positive measures were taken and rapidly adopted in February 2007. Mandatory schooling, reduced to nine years by Niyazov, has gone back to ten years.²⁴ However, it still remains one year less than that of Russia, meaning that pupils are unable to obtain the necessary equivalents to pursue their studies in Russian universities. Niyazov eliminated several subjects such as physics, chemistry, universal history, and literature, while Berdymukhammedov has reestablished the human and natural sciences to the curriculum. From first to seventh grade, courses of physical education have also been reintroduced. Despite these positive measures, the announced reforms remain suspended.

The reduction in the number of teaching hours of the *Ruhnama* has also failed to create a freer atmosphere. All textbooks published after 2001 contain citations, texts, and extracts from it. On the other hand, any new textbooks published since 2007 contains multiple references to the new president. Some disciplines aimed at spreading the personality cult of the new president have been included in the curriculum. Students must, for example, study the "Policy of the Renaissance era," in which they are taught about the new summits the country has attained and the justness of presidential decisions. Another subject called "Basics of a healthy life

²³ "Koloniiia v Bairamali [Penitentiary colony in Bairamali]," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, November 11, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/?id=2263>> (May 15, 2010).

²⁴ "O vnesenii izmeneniia v Zakon Turkmenistana 'Ob obrazovanii v Turkmenistane' [The introduction of changes to the Turkmenistan law 'On Education in Turkmenistan']," *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, February 16, 2007.

style” has been made compulsory and is taught on the basis of presidential works for one hour per week across all grades.²⁵ Most of the persons responsible for it have no special training in teaching, but are rather recruited on the basis of their availability.

Officially, the number of teaching hours per instructor has been reduced, going from thirty to twenty-four hours per week, as has the number of children per class, which is now limited to twenty-five. But the lack of teachers in rural areas often makes presidential decisions difficult to enforce. Although the authorities announced a forty-percent salary increase for teachers, the raise has not been realized in practice, since this amount is deducted from salaries for various social needs. Most of the country’s schools have not been refurbished since independence, with the exception of a few cosmetic renovations undertaken during summer vacations using funds collected from teachers and the parents of pupils. Schools lack qualified staff, for example, for teaching physics and chemistry. Berdymukhammedov decided instead to multiply the construction of new schools. The symbol of the new generation of schools, the Pushkin school, is the only one that maintains a Russian curriculum. Inaugurated in December 2009 in the presence of the Russian and Turkmen presidents, it is financed by Russian energy firms.²⁶ This school has today become one of the striking examples of the corruption of teaching. Even if entry is officially free, bribes of between US\$5,000 and US\$10,000 are allegedly required to enroll one’s child, on top of which additional bribes are payable throughout the year, in particular in the form of gifts to teachers.²⁷ The Pushkin school enables access to Russian universities, where the education is better and the fees are markedly lower than in Turkmen universities.

Turkmen schools still have a general lack of textbooks. Most date from the Soviet era, although some were published during the 2000s, including textbooks for physics in 2003, English in 2006, and fourth grade mathematics in 2007. Possibilities for learning foreign languages remain very limited in terms of hours and are restricted to Russian which, given its disappearance as the language of learning, is increasingly taught as a foreign language, sometimes English, rarely German. The majority of Russian teachers left the country after they were dismissed from their positions, following Niyazov’s decision to eliminate most of the classes taught in Russian and to forbid state administration to minorities. Until 2001, the country had about 1,900 middle schools, including 49 that

²⁵ *Turkmenistan. The Reform of the Education System, op. cit.* p. 10.

²⁶ Marina Volkova, “Gazprom Opens School in Ashgabat,” *The Voice of Russia*, December 22, 2009, <<http://english.ruvr.ru/2009/12/22/3187073.html>> (May 15, 2010).

²⁷ “Pochem besplatnoe obrazovanie v russkoj shkole? [How much is the free education at the Russian school?]” *Ferghana.ru*, December 30, 2009, <<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6420>> (February 10, 2010).

Despite Berdymukhammedov promoting the end of the international isolation of the country, education and research exchanges with other countries remain difficult. In April 2009, the Turkmen president and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev decided to institute reciprocal recognition for degrees; however, the measure has not yet been ratified by the countries' respective parliaments. The renowned Gubkin Institute of Oil and Gas, based in Moscow, has opened an office in Ashgabat to train young Turkmen to be oil professionals, as the country faces an acute shortage of technicians. But the operation and recruitment of the institute has fared poorly due to the steady deterioration of relations between Russia and Turkmenistan. In the context of deepening relations with the European Union, which is attempting to stand as a key partner of the new president, the Tempus and Erasmus Mundus programs for student exchange were established, although their adaptation to the Turkmen

²⁹ "Somnitel'nyi progress turkmenskogo obrazovaniia [The doubtful progress of the Turkmen education system]," September 18, 2009, <<http://gundog.newhost.ru/?0110484250000000000000130000000>> (June 3, 2010).

system has been particularly unsuccessful.³⁰ In 2009, the Turkmen authorities cut down drastically on cooperation with foreign universities, in particular those in Europe and the United States. Almost one hundred Turkmen students with the proper visas and enrollment documents were forbidden from pursuing their studies abroad. The authorities were concerned with the ideas, deemed too liberal, being disseminated in certain new universities in Central Asia, such as the American University of Bishkek or the KIMEP in Almaty. A study conducted by the Ministry of Education reportedly showed that 80 percent of students at the end of their schooling would prefer to leave the country to study or work abroad.³¹

Progress and Setbacks in Public Health

The second area where reforms have been most anticipated is health. The new president has committed himself to putting the health system back on its feet, since it suffered severely from Niyazov's policies during his final years. In spite of the improvements, the Turkmen health system remains in bad shape. The number of trained personnel is far too few, and the system is suffering from the effects of the reduction of the duration of medical training to two years, which Niyazov imposed. Berdymukhammedov, a dentist by trade, increased the length of training to five years, but it will be necessary to wait a while until proper standards are again reached. Basic medical care remains very limited, in particular in rural areas, where access to care is clearly inefficient. Health financing is by no means transparent. As the Rechel report notes, it is still difficult to obtain official information about the country's health system, yet this is indispensable in the effort to outline strategies for improvement.³²

The regime maintains secrecy over numerous medical domains and their financing, and it continues to hinder the diagnosis of infectious diseases. It refuses, for example, to recognize that people are infected with HIV/AIDS and allegedly has reported only one new case between 1989 and 2006.³³ According to the Rechel report, this very low level is not credible. In 2009, for fear of provoking a movement of panic among the

³⁰ Peter Jones, "The EU-Central Asia Education Initiative," *EUCAM working Paper*, no. 9, February 2010,

<http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Working_Papers/WP9-EN.pdf> (April 17, 2010).

³¹ "Turkmenistan: Students Slapped with Five-Year Travel Ban," *Eurasianet.org*, November 12, 2009,

<<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/civilsociety/articles/eav111309b.shtml>> (April 23, 2010). The ban was partly lifted at the beginning of 2010.

³² Bernd Rechel, Inga Sikorskaya, Martin McKee, *Health in Turkmenistan after Niyazov*, *op. cit.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

population, Berdymukhammedov restricted information on preventative measures designed to limit the spread of bird flu, and representatives from the Ministry of Health prohibited schoolchildren and state employees from wearing masks. The Ministry seems to have focused much more on the fight against the rumors than against the spread of the H1N1 virus. In November 2009, it requested the withdrawal of brochures providing information about the flu and its prevention that had been distributed in state organs. Posters designed in collaboration with UNICEF and put up in public places were also taken down.

Several international institutions, including the European Union, the World Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank, have expressed readiness to assist the country in the health sector; however, the hoped-for cooperation with the international community in this area has also been called into question. Public health NGOs have not been able to develop, despite the policies of opening promised by Berdymukhammedov. The last NGO established in Turkmenistan, Doctors without Borders (MSF), left the country after claiming it was confronted with permanent hindrances from the political authorities.³⁴ Indeed, the government henceforth claimed to be capable of fighting tuberculosis on its own, but this is highly unlikely given the progression of infectious diseases. While MSF did not contest the authorities' plans for improvement in health—which include the opening of a center for the treatment and prevention of tuberculosis in 2007, within the State Medicine Institute, and a new strategy for the prevention and the fight against tuberculosis for 2008 to 2015—these plans will not bear any results until 2013-2014 at the earliest. Moreover, one person in five affected by tuberculosis in the country has developed a drug-resistant form, which is very difficult to treat and calls for international knowledge.³⁵

The Construction Boom and Continued Expropriation

The famous construction boom under the Niyazov regime did not end with the leadership change. Berdymukhammedov seems as symbolically invested in new building projects as his predecessor. The corruption related to real estate is indeed a source of huge gains, whether in the context of big construction projects or smaller buildings. In 2008, for example, Berdymukhammedov ordered the renovation of two cinemas in Ashgabat, allocating US\$20 million for the project while independent estimates showed that the actual cost of the renovation amounted to only US\$1 million. New buildings remain unaffordable for a majority of the

³⁴ "Vrachi bez granits. Pri prezidente-medike nam v Turkmenii mesta ne nashlos [Doctors Without Border did not find its place under the President-physician]," *Deutsche Welle*, December 22, 2009, <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5046276,00.html>> (March 9, 2010).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

population. Under Niyazov, the price of a three-room apartment in a new building was nearly US\$300,000 at the official rate (or approximately US\$62,000 at the black market rate). A credit scheme meant to facilitate the acquisition of new apartments has been adopted. However, the political and administrative authorities of several *vellayat* (regions) that lack the financial resources demand that buyers repay the loans too quickly. In Ashgabat, several persons who bought their apartments with cash or repaid their credit on time have been suspected of corruption and money laundering and summoned by the Prosecutor or Ministry of National Security (MNB).³⁶

The majority of newly constructed buildings are empty, whatever their original function. Cultural buildings are largely under-utilized; luxury homes cannot find tenants, and hotels lack guests. This is especially true in the famous tourist area of Avaza, near Turkmenbashi, the main Turkmen Caspian port formerly known as Krasnovodsk. The seaside resort is supposed to have sixty hotels, restaurants and shopping centers, recreational activities, a seven kilometer-long artificial river, six artificial lakes with beaches and islands, four acres of wooded parks, sports complexes, a Disneyland, a planetarium, an aquarium, and even an ice rink, as well as a free trade area to promote market entry for foreign companies. In 2009, six hotels were in operation to accommodate roughly the first 2,000 Turkmen tourists, often the workers of companies involved in the construction of Avaza who were forced to take their holidays there.³⁷

The policy of property seizure by the government without compensation has also continued. Despite official pronouncements guaranteeing compensation for any expropriated property, the government uses many arguments to deny the planned compensatory measures, which rarely correspond to the actual value of the destroyed houses.³⁸ The value of the underlying land, for example, is not taken into account in the compensation process. Many of those expelled are given small apartments in remote areas in return for their houses with land near the city center. The political and administrative pressures are such that most of the victims of expropriations prefer silence. However, several reports confirm that the situation has improved compared to Niyazov, who in many cases offered no compensation at all.

³⁶ "Housing issue," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, August 25, 2009 <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1139>> (April 17, 2010).

³⁷ "Otdykhat' zastaviat [Rest is mandatory]," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, December 7, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/?id=2305>> (February 15, 2010).

³⁸ Dovelet Ovezov, Inga Sikorskaya, "Nedovol'stvo kampaniei turkmenskikh vlastei po snosu zhilykh domov [Property seizure organized by the Turkmen authorities creates discontent]," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, March 1, 2010, <<http://www.iwpr.net/ru/node/29959>> (May 2, 2010).

Social and Economic Development Issues

Agriculture and Food Security

Agricultural questions, and the linked subject of food security, are important issues for the Turkmen authorities as they worry about destabilization in rural areas. Despite the reforms announced in 2007, meant to develop the private sector and allow farmers greater initiative, this sector is kept under tight state control. Numerous legislative changes have barely altered the situation. The state leases land, choosing crops and setting production quotas for so-called independent farmers, and then buys their output at unilaterally set prices. Farmers are still obligated to grow cotton or wheat, despite the desire of many to cultivate produce or livestock. The announced reforms have not led to a liberalization of agriculture, although some government actions, such as increasing the purchase price of grain in January 2009 (with a further increase expected to come in 2010), have helped to encourage grain production.³⁹ Berdymukhammedov also expressed support for livestock development, since half the meat and poultry consumed in the country is imported from the United States, Iran, Russia, and Kazakhstan. But with the exception of a few new factory farms for poultry financed by Turkish companies, the sector remains moribund.

To ensure autonomy in food production, an obsession of the regime, Turkmenistan would need to produce 2.5 million tons of grain each year. Officially, the country produces 1.8 million tons, but independent estimates describe an output that does not exceed one million tons,⁴⁰ thus necessitating imports of more than half the country's grain stocks. In addition, production is often of poor quality due to harsh climatic conditions and limited productivity. Some of the grain can only be used for livestock feed. Moreover, as under the previous regime, overly ambitious economic goals sometimes lead to serious consequences for the lives of farmers and the rest of the population. In the regions of Lebap and Dashoguz in 2008, the authorities were too late in giving farmers permission to prepare fields for new cottonseed, in the mistaken expectation of maximum yield. The fields were then already frozen and tens of thousands of hectares could not be worked.⁴¹ At the end of 2008, flour shortages provoked serious social tensions in these regions. Queues

³⁹ "Turkmen Farmers to Get Higher Prices," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, January 21, 2009, <<http://www.iwpr.net/fr/node/3961>> (March 17, 2010).

⁴⁰ Turkmenistan. State hails food self-sufficiency, but many say claim is overblown," *Asia News*, July 26, 2010, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/State-hails-food-self-sufficiency,-but-many-say-claim-is-overblown-19037.html> (July 26, 2010).

⁴¹ Sayara Djumabaeva, "Agricultural sector will recover on command," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, January 8, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?heading=16>> (March 3, 2010).

for bread multiplied and stocks sold within hours. Fear of renewed shortages of flour and rising wheat prices have led some people to buy more bread than necessary. Turkmen flour is still rationed, but the better off can obtain more costly Russian or Kazakh flour, which is sold without restrictions. Problems with the procurement of bread were still reported in some provincial cities in 2009.

The Deterioration of Irrigation Systems

The agricultural situation is particularly sensitive as the country faces severe environmental problems, particularly the dilapidated state of its irrigation systems combined with the high water requirements of some crops, such as wheat and rice.⁴² The authorities seem to want to maximize the repair of existing structures and claim to have modernized hundreds of kilometers of irrigation networks throughout the country. Many of them remain dry or damaged and the country lacks the water pumps needed to irrigate its fields. The question becomes even more acute in the regions of Lebap and Dashoguz, fed by the Amu Darya, a river that had particularly low water levels in 2008. In both areas, a majority of wheat fields have not received any water at all and the crops can survive only through the water from snowfall. As throughout the rest of Central Asia, the winter of 2007-2008 was terribly cold, and in the region of Dashoguz, the livestock died.⁴³

The start of construction on the “Lake of the Golden Age,” presented by Niyazov’s propaganda as the solution to the irrigation problems of a part of the country, is considered by many experts as a future environmental tragedy and a source of potential tensions with neighboring Uzbekistan. Berdymukhammedov has not questioned its construction, as he sees it as one of the engines of future irrigation of the Karakum desert. The filling of the lake, at a length of 103 kilometers and a width of 18.6 kilometers, could take fifteen years and cost about US\$4.5 billion. It is likely to have serious consequences, among them the drying up of already-abused irrigation networks, the massive evaporation of the lake during the summer, the desertification of the area around the lake and, therefore, displacement by wind of sand and chemicals.⁴⁴

Turkmenistan is already affected by the ecological crisis of the Aral Sea, the poor water quality of which facilitates the spread of hepatitis, intestinal problems, and other infectious diseases. Despite some

⁴² Oraz Akhmet, “Will bread be sufficient?” *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, September 15, 2008, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1013>> (June 11, 2009).

⁴³ “Considerable loss of livestock,” *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, June 3, 2008, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=553>> (April 17, 2010).

⁴⁴ Richard Stone, “A New Great Lake or Dead Sea?” *Science* 320 (May 23, 2008), pp. 1002-1005; “Turkmenistan to create desert sea,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2009, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8154467.stm>> (May 11, 2010).

desalination and water purification plants that Turkish firms like Sekhil installed in the border region of Dashoguz, many Turkmen citizens continue each day to drink and use water unfit for consumption. The difficulty of accessing drinking water thus adds to environmental issues for a part of the population, especially in rural areas. In the summer of 2009, the authorities of Turkmenbashi and Dashoguz had to make cuts in water; in the latter city, water was available for only two to three hours per day. Steps have been taken to try to facilitate access to water, for example by allowing private companies to distill it, but demand still far exceeds supply and the cost of privatized water is too large for rural areas.⁴⁵

Costly Transportation

Since coming to power, Berdymukhammedov had expressed his willingness to develop transport networks to open up the country and accelerate the transit of foreign goods on national territory. However, the improved transportation of goods is not intended to apply to individuals. The movement of people remains very difficult, for both economic and political reasons. During the Soviet era, Turkmens grew accustomed to travel, whether by land or air, at very low, subsidized prices. Despite several increases, this privilege had been kept under Niyazov for travel within the country, but the cost of transportation has dramatically increased since 2008. The lack of air links also leads to a demand that greatly exceeds supply and promotes the black market, where tickets are sometimes sold at ten times their face value. The movement across borders is always difficult; the fares for the most desirable routes—especially to Turkey, the main destination for small business (*chelnoki*)—have risen sharply. The cost of road transport has also increased significantly, further reducing the mobility of Turkmen citizens. From 2007 to 2008, the cost of petrol increased by a factor of eight.⁴⁶ The political authorities decided to distribute free gasoline coupons beginning in the first half of 2010, to a maximum of 120 liters per month per vehicle. A car owner receives coupons for 720 liters every six months. The procedure for obtaining these vouchers has grown administratively complex after hundreds of thousands of tons of fuel was attributed to persons not entitled to it.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Nazar Saparov, "Lack of water in Turkmenistan," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, May 28, 2008, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1091>> (May 1, 2009).

⁴⁶ Alan Peskov, "Mnimoe blagosostoianie [An Illusory Well-Being]," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, August 27, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/?id=2102>> (December 3, 2009).

⁴⁷ Meret Babaev, "Coupons for free Gasoline," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, December 24, 2009, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1239>> (February 10, 2010).

Migratory Flows and a Growing Demographic Crisis

Despite the numerous administrative barriers, it seems that more and more people leave Turkmenistan to work abroad in Turkey, Iran, and increasingly Russia. These would-be migrants obtain tourist visas through travel agencies or manage to receive official documents to leave the country due to deep administrative corruption. Although much lower than migration from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, larger migration flows from Turkmenistan appear poised to take shape, mainly in the north and east. In 2005, 1,800 Turkmen “tourists” from the Dzhoguz region visited Russia; in 2006, this figure increased to nearly 2,400 and reached 4,000 in 2008.⁴⁸ While ethnic Turkmen tend to move to Turkey and Iran for work, ethnic Russians whose occupations have been particularly affected by Turkmen policies, such as teachers and professionals, dominate the flows toward Russia. Berdymukhammedov stopped Moscow’s repatriation program of the Russians from abroad launched in 2006, closing the provincial offices of the Russian emigration services in 2008.⁴⁹

For the authorities, this emigration discredits the social reforms of the second president and further shrinks a population already in decline since independence. Unlike his predecessor, who said that the country had about 7 million inhabitants, Berdymukhammedov has quietly acknowledged the demographic crisis facing the regime, especially in urban areas. While no reliable figures are available, families with four to five children, common in the last years of the Soviet Union, have become rarer in large cities because of the social crisis affecting the country. Aid to mothers is extremely limited, around US\$12 per month.⁵⁰ Several measures have been taken to motivate births. In March 2008, a law known as *Ene Mahri* stated that women who give birth to at least eight children could receive social benefits. However, this financial incentive is limited and the status of *Ene Mahri* is granted only after the eighth child reaches eight years of age and all the other children are still alive, an indirect revelation of the high infant mortality rates in the country.⁵¹

Increasingly Omnipresent Corruption

As in other countries in the region, the prestige of a profession includes not only potential salary earned, but also the potential for bribes that can be extracted in the exercise of one’s profession. Corruption is especially

⁴⁸ Marlène Laruelle (ed.), *Dynamiques migratoires et changements sociétaux en Asie centrale* [Migration dynamics and societal changes in Central Asia] (Paris: Petra, 2010).

⁴⁹ Essen Aman, “Turkmens move to Russia,” *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, April 28, 2008, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1058>> (March 10, 2010).

⁵⁰ Essen Aman, “Large families are uncommon in today’s Turkmenistan,” *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, March 25, 2008, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1054>> (May 10, 2010).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

accentuated in Turkmenistan, where high turnover in the upper echelons of the administration lead state officials to attempt to enrich themselves as quickly as possible. This turnover ensured the stability of the system under Niyazov, as it does under Berdymukhammedov, since ministers protesting against their dismissal become the target of inspections in which they are accused of corruption and embezzlement. In a country where unemployment is high, all functions related to the allocation of posts are particularly profitable. Berdymukhammedov therefore has not at all changed the political-administrative structure, and Niyazov-era policies continue in all the profitable sectors of the national economy. This is especially true for gas revenues, a portion of which is sent to accounts in Europe (Deutsche Bank is regularly suspected to receive Turkmen presidential accounts). The only difference between Berdymukhammedov and his predecessor is the clear implication for members of his family and his clan, the Ahal-Teke.⁵² The new president has therefore attempted to substitute his own financial networks to those controlled by the former president and his family. On a more modest social scale, small entrepreneurs face continuing pressures from the bureaucracy. Health and tax inspections are the most common because the payoff is usually more profitable than the fine that would otherwise be levied. Tax inspectors seem to calculate their payoff at about five to six percent of total sales. Thus to obtain a license to sell alcohol, one will generally pay a bribe of US\$7,000.⁵³

Conclusion

While Berdymukhammedov seeks to reintegrate the country on the international and regional levels and attempts to establish new partnerships with foreign companies to accelerate investments have been made, domestic policy seems a poor reflection of the regime's evolution. It is indirectly affected by the slight opening in certain international areas; Turkish, European, Japanese, and South Korean investments may change the situation in the region by opening a new facility or rehabilitating local production, which has sometimes been the case in recent years. The authorities' attention is focused on social issues totally neglected by the regime of Saparmurat Niyazov. New schools were built, provincial hospitals have reopened, roads and railways are improving, land reforms, however small, are welcomed, and a modest decentralization of power has emerged. However, the general social

⁵² Maksat Alikperov, "Turkmen Gas as a family business," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, February 3, 2010, <<http://www.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=1276>> (March 10, 2010). See also Slavomir Horák's paper in this issue.

⁵³ Maksat Alikperov, "Large-scale corruption of small businesses," *The Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, February 13, 2010, <www.chrono-tm.org/en/?heading=34> (May 16, 2010).

situation remains tense: a total absence of public liberty, violations of religious rights, mostly unacknowledged mass unemployment, a loss of confidence by the middle classes whose educational and professional opportunities have been reduced, increasing corruption of state organs, and rural poverty influenced by the social problems of recent years (rising gasoline prices, decreased numbers of subsidized products, difficulties in ensuring food security, and increased malnutrition). Rather than these issues, the main long-term problem probably remains the country's lack of human capital, which was destroyed in recent decades and needs time to be restored.

The case of Turkmenistan reveals how difficult it is to relax a dictatorial regime and to liberalize domestic policies so long as the same elites are in place. The change of a president does not necessarily entail real evolutions of political practices. The domestic policies remain the most difficult to liberalize, while foreign policy, in particular when energy issues are concerned, evolve more rapidly. This raises questions about the leeway given to authoritarian countries like Turkmenistan, which is often classified by international human rights organizations in the same category as North Korea and Myanmar/Burma. One may indeed wonder whether the tendency of Western observers to paint the regime in terms of its leader is relevant. Can Berdymukhammedov change the situation consistently or is he a hostage to the system? What degree of flexibility will be possible in a few years for the regime in an unstable geopolitical environment like that of Central Asia? The advocates of inaction can manipulate these questions, however legitimate. Throughout the twentieth century, some politicians with iron wills have drastically influenced their system and liberalized some of the most closed regimes. Given the complexity of the challenge, one may wonder to what extent Turkmen elites can attempt to change their country and meet growing social demands without creating a situation in which the political system would be completely reconsidered and former elites delegitimized.

Turkmenistan: A Promised Land for Doing Business? Macroeconomic Reforms under Berdymukhammedov

Jan Šír*

ABSTRACT

The death of Turkmenistan's first president-for-life, Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, in late 2006 marked an important milestone in the post-Soviet history of this Central Asian nation. Kurbankuli Berdymukhammedov succeeded the deceased president as Turkmenistan's new head of state amidst hopes for liberalization of public life. This paper gives an overview of Turkmenistan's macroeconomic reforms after the latest regime change of 2006. In particular, Turkmenistan's policies in banking and finance, major capital investment infrastructure projects, promoting private entrepreneurship, regional development, and human capital building are discussed. Based on an account of the institutional changes that took place in these areas over the last three years, the author provides a critical assessment of Turkmenistan's recent market transition process.

Keywords • Turkmenistan • Transition • Finance • Capital Investments • SMEs • Regional Development • Human Capital

Introduction

With the unexpected death of Turkmenistan's first president, Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, in late 2006, a wind of change has swept through what is undoubtedly the most isolated post-Soviet nation which

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had been facing ever-more autocratic rule ever since independence. Kurbankuli Berdymukhammedov, long Turkmenbashi's crony, soon emerged as Turkmenistan's new head of state, claiming an overwhelming victory in the subsequent extraordinary presidential ballot. In his inauguration speech given after his spectacular election victory in mid-February 2007, the new president pledged a wide reform program to be introduced in Turkmenistan that would allow this energy rich Central Asian republic to establish itself among developed nations. Economic reforms, aimed, as became clearer later on, at a gradual market transition, creating a diversified economic structure, and integration of Turkmenistan into the international system, would be at the core of these modernization efforts. More than three years have passed since the abrupt regime change in Turkmenistan and so it seems appropriate to conduct a preliminary review of what remains from the ambitious reform plans announced by Turkmenistan's leadership.

This article gives a brief overview of the recent economic developments in Turkmenistan, focusing mainly on the structural reforms this post-Soviet nation went through after the regime change in late 2006. From this background, it first analyzes the developments in Turkmenistan's banking and finance sectors, with an emphasis on the currency reform of 2008/2009. Next, it goes on to outline major capital investment infrastructure projects carried out in Turkmenistan under President Berdymukhammedov, including those in oil and gas, transportation and communications, and construction. The promotion of small businesses and private entrepreneurship as well as the government's regional development schemes are also discussed. Finally, the social policies of President Berdymukhammedov are explored, in particular in education and science, as well as the 2007 pension reform.

Before we move on, it should be noted that following and interpreting Turkmenistan's economic performance is sometimes a tricky endeavor in terms of methodology as virtually no credible quantitative data is available, owing to the very nature of the Ashkhabad ruling regime. Turkmenistan, sadly, has a poor record of reporting statistical data to international agencies, which have then to rely mostly on own projections and estimates. Moreover, manipulating official statistics for political purposes is still a rule rather than an exception in Turkmenistan, and revealing information not consistent with the ruling regime and its' ideology may turn out to be a criminal offense. Hence, the validity of all statements regarding Turkmenistan's output developments is very much conditioned by the very validity of the data sets used, which is a problem. Yet, with this in mind, this essay attempts to assess Turkmenistan's recent economic reform progress. Based on an account of what has been done in this area over the last three years, it argues that whereas it still has a tremendously long way to go, there nonetheless do appear to be

signs that institutional foundations of a more liberalized national economy are being laid in Turkmenistan.

Finance

Structural problems of Turkmenistan's national economy derive, to a large extent, from the malfunctioning financial system. This encompasses all kinds of financial relations, ranging from an inefficient budget structure, with most export revenues allocated in extrabudgetary funds under little, if any, public control, except for the president himself, over distorting monetary, currency, fiscal, and pricing policies, to last but not least an archaic banking system dominated by a handful of state-controlled banks issuing preferential loans to state enterprises on government orders. As a result, the level of monetization in Turkmenistan's economy is still comparably low even in the post-Soviet context, and the circulation of the national currency remains far from optimal. Furthermore, financial transactions are severely crippled by government regulations requiring official approval for trading operations conducted through Turkmenistan State Commodity Exchange as well as maintaining an artificial foreign exchange rate that was long far above the parallel exchange rate for which foreign currency was, though illegally, tradeable on the black market. Turkmenistan's finances, like virtually all other areas of public life as well, are notorious for general systemic deficiencies, such as bad governance, mismanagement, and misallocation of funds, and are subject to government restrictions and interference. Pervasive corruption is a problem.¹

Initial steps towards rearranging inter-budgetary relations occurred already in the aftermath of the appointment of Turkmenistan's new government in early 2007. However, possible economic reform measures on the part of the government were largely contingent upon addressing a broader set of political issues pertaining, first of all, to solidifying President Berdymukhammedov's power, which from time to time delayed the overall reform progress. Thus, it was not before mid-May 2007 that Berdymukhammedov, still busy with top level purges, called for

¹ For best earlier overviews of economic developments in Turkmenistan, see the relevant working papers published by IMF during the 1990s. Annual Reports on Transition published by EBRD, while often using Turkmenistan's official data, provide yet another good overview of Turkmenistan's macroeconomic reform progress in comparison with other transition economies. For an original insight on the specific features of Turkmenistan's national economy model under Turkmenbashi, see also Richard Pomfret, "Turkmenistan: From Communism to Nationalism by Gradual Economic Reform," *MOCT-MOST: Economic Policy in Transitional Economies* 11, 2 (June 2001), pp. 165-176. For a discussion of the link between operation of the financial system and economic performance, see Ross Levine, "Finance and Growth: Theory and Evidence," in *Handbook of Economic Growth*, Vol. 1, Part 1, ed. Philippe Aghion and Steven Durlauf (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), pp. 865-934.

a new strategy of development for Turkmenistan's financial sector to be worked out in line with existing national development schemes. This was intended primarily as to provide necessary funds for achieving target production plans in individual sectors of the national economy as part of the government's expansionary investments, particularly in the oil and gas industry.² By mid-2007, the International Saparmurat Turkmenbashi Fund was dissolved in an effort to secure the majority of extra-budgetary assets belonging to the late president, with a special commission for the liquidation of the fund set up to decide about further allocation of the funds.³ Moreover, Turkmenistan Supreme Audit Office was established soon thereafter by a presidential decree, reporting directly to Berdymukhammedov, as Turkmenistan's first institution of this kind ever endowed with powers of conducting state financial control and auditing,⁴ explicitly to include in future other sectoral funds with export revenues as well.⁵

By the end of summer 2007, the next measures to be taken had already crystallized so that in early September, President Berdymukhammedov could address the government with what was to become his plan of action for bringing Turkmenistan closer to developed economies. In his speech of September 6, 2007, Berdymukhammedov stressed, in particular, the need to employ a complex approach towards macroeconomic policy management. Emphasis would be placed on financial programming, which would enable new methods of design for financial policies as well as identifying priority areas for development of individual sectors based on economic modeling in planning and forecasting.⁶ The Institute for Strategic Planning and Economic Development was established by a presidential decree during the following month, bringing together some of the foremost national economists to engage in economic planning and forecasting. Within the competences of the new institute were performing complex analysis of economic processes and elaboration of

² *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, May 18, 2007.

³ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, June 23, 2007. For purges within Turkmenistan's highest security apparatus that were presumably related to the struggle for control over multi-billion heritage left after the deceased "Head of the Turkmens," see Arkadii Dubnov, "Konets niiazovskogo biznesa [The End of Niyazov's Business]," *Vremia novostei*, July 31, 2007.

⁴ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, July 14, 2007. For more on the status and competencies of Turkmenistan Supreme Audit Office, see also *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, August 24, 2007.

⁵ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, August 10, 2007.

⁶ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 7, 2007. For edited transcript of this programmatic speech, see *Vystuplenie Prezidenta Turkmenistana Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedova na zasedanii Kabineta Ministrov Turkmenistana, posviashchennom itogam raboty za vosem' mesiatsev 2007 goda (6 Rukhnama 2007 goda)* [Speech by President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov at the Review Session of Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan for the Period of January to August 2007 (September 6, 2007)], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 10, 2007.

macroeconomic policy recommendations for the government.⁷ Furthermore, with macroeconomic policy management relying increasingly on strategic planning, the strengthened role of statistics in providing operative and credible data for the elaboration of national and sectoral development schemes was announced as well. Thus, the infamous Türkmenmillihasabat was transformed into a slightly more trustworthy Turkmenistan State Committee for Statistics in charge of national policy in the fields of accounting and statistics, of working out methodical guidelines for statistics conforming to best international practices as well as of gathering, processing, and analysis of statistical information about Turkmenistan's economic developments.⁸ In addition, Berdymukhammedov instructed that International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) be adopted in national accounting as a sign of commitment on the part of the Ashkhabad government to strive for greater transparency in Turkmenistan's banking sector.⁹

In autumn 2007, timid changes followed with a loosening of the draconian foreign trade and exchange regimes still in place. A package of presidential legislation was passed in October 2007, which provided for the facilitation of foreign trade exchange for domestic industry enterprises. The regulation included simplifying registration procedures for trade contracts with Turkmenistan State Commodity Exchange. This applied particularly to state enterprises in the textile industry, who were the first to be permitted to convert foreign currency freely according to an exchange rate to be announced by Turkmenistan Central Bank.¹⁰ In November 2007, a special government session with the executives of Turkmenistan's commercial banks took place where further work on a new banking strategy was discussed, including expanding credit operations to boost domestic businesses, along with the official presentation of new specimen banknotes as part of a major currency reform.¹¹ Next, presidential legislation on improving payment operations in foreign currency was adopted by the end of 2007. These rulings mandated introducing, apart from the official foreign exchange rate of the Manat, also a so-called commercial exchange rate to be used in Turkmenistan freely for most business operations involving foreign

⁷ Ukaz Prezidenta Turkmenistana "O reorganizatsii Natsional'nogo instituta gosudarstvennoi statistiki i informatsii Turkmenistana" [Decree of President of Turkmenistan "On the Reorganization of National Institute for State Statistics and Information of Turkmenistan"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 12, 2007. For more about the new structure, see also the interview with the first head of Institute for Strategic Planning and Economic Development, Dr. Ashirkuli Kurbankuliev, as published in the Ashkhabad daily *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, January 9, 2008.

⁸ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 12, 2007.

⁹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 7, 2007.

¹⁰ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 26, 2007.

¹¹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, November 29, 2007.

currency, effective January 1, 2008.¹² For this purpose, foreign exchange windows at commercial banks reopened in Turkmenistan again after almost a decade of forced closure, with the commercial (tradeable) exchange rate being fixed by Turkmenistan Central Bank at a fairly defensible level of Manat 20,000 for US\$1, apparently fitting well Turkmenistan's external trading position.

At the beginning of February 2008, Berdymukhammedov decreed that Ministry of Finance be established according to the framework of the past joint department of economy and finance in a move signaling the determination of Turkmenistan's government to deal with national treasury more seriously than before.¹³ And already during the next extended government session of February 8, 2008, the freeing of gasoline prices was announced.¹⁴ The government had an effort to compensate for the latest price hike by introducing a rationing system for petrol to be distributed to Turkmenistan's nationals for free with generous quotas of 120 liters monthly per car, upon registration.¹⁵ Still, the eight to ten times increase in prices for what was to many a real welfare achievement of the previous regime caused much panic among the public, with besieged petrol stations even being reportedly set on fire by despaired protesters across Turkmenistan.¹⁶ More than that, it also accelerated an increase in bazaar retail prices, thereby adding to inflationary pressures, to which the government responded with amendments to the running state budget in a bid to save the treasury from growing budget deficit.¹⁷ In May 2008, the government went on in cutting subsidies even further when it consented to an increase of tariffs in public transport, with air and rail tickets going up some ten to twenty times on selected domestic lines, though obviously still well below the level of real production costs for these services.¹⁸ With that price rise, however, all experiments with loosening of prices for public goods basically stopped, presumably also due to social security concerns as the government did not look capable of coping with the

¹² *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 28, 2007.

¹³ Ukaz Prezidenta Turkmenistana "O sozdanii Ministerstva finansov Turkmenistana" [Decree of President of Turkmenistan "On the Establishment of Ministry of Finance of Turkmenistan"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, February 4, 2008.

¹⁴ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, February 9, 2008.

¹⁵ For the new regulation of petroleum sales, see *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, February 9, 2008.

¹⁶ Arslan Mamedov, "V ochered', sukiny deti! [Stay in Line, You Motherf...ers!]," *Türkmenistan Gündogar*, February 12, 2008. See also Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Gas Rationing Stirs Rare Public Outrage," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, February 19, 2008.

¹⁷ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, June 26, 2008.

¹⁸ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, May 31, 2008. See also Ésen Aman, "Podorozhali biletly na vnutrennie aviareisy [Prices for Domestic Air Tickets Going Up]," *Khronika Turkmenistana*, June 3, 2008; and Turkmenskaia Initsiativa po Pravam Cheloveka, "V Turkmenistane podorozhali biletly na poezda [Rail Fares Getting Up in Turkmenistan]," *Khronika Turkmenistana*, July 18, 2008.

negative effects on the living standards of large segments of population these unpopular reforms would necessarily entail.

Finally, in the spring of 2008 the currency reform entered its hot phase with the unification of the foreign exchange regimes, a move critical for facilitating and enhancing transparency in performing financial operations in and with Turkmenistan and its accounting. On April 14, 2008, an extended government session took place where the core legislation was approved for restructuring national finances. In line with a presidential ruling, effective May 1, 2008, foreign currency was to be sold in Turkmenistan freely under a single foreign exchange rate to be set by Turkmenistan Central Bank.¹⁹ The new foreign exchange rate was subsequently established at Manat 14,250 per US\$, amidst much speculation prior to the strong appreciation of the Manat.²⁰ At the same time, Turkmenistan Interbank Foreign Exchange, which used to conduct auctions no more frequently than once a month under late Turkmenbashi, was to be fundamentally restructured in order to comply with its new role in national finance.²¹ Still, only very little information is available about its real function,²² and, as of today, the foreign exchange rate remains for the second consecutive year effectively fixed at the same level of 2.85 TMT (New Manat Turkmenistan)/US\$ after the unification of 2008.²³ As a follow up to the unification of the foreign exchange rate, Berdymukhammedov further ordered a redenomination of the Manat to be launched in Turkmenistan effective January 1, 2009, which was to run according to a soft redenomination scenario envisaging parallel circulation of the old and new bills within a manageable period of twelve months,²⁴ a measure that, apart from simplifying the currency

¹⁹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, April 15, 2008.

²⁰ *Turkmenskaia Initsiativa po Pravam Cheloveka*, "Zachem vlastiam Turkmenistana ponadobilsia grabitel'skii kurs dollara [Why Was the Exorbitant Exchange Rate So Needed to Turkmenistan Government]," *Khronika Turkmenistana*, May 20, 2008. In this context, it is interesting to point also to the simultaneous reshuffles in the top management of Turkmenistan Central Bank, which indicated possible disagreements within the government about adjusting the foreign exchange rate of the unified Manat. See also Pishik chopany, "Valiutnyi kurs: 1 Abilov raven 1 Goklenovu. A mozhet byt' i net [The Foreign Exchange Rate: One Abilov Equal to One Goklenov. Or Possibly Not]," *Khronika Turkmenistana*, April 19, 2008.

²¹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, May 31, 2008.

²² For supposed functioning of the new structure, see Ogulmaral Redzhepova, "Mezhhbankovskaia valiutnaia birzha - vazhnyi urchag finansovoi politiki [Interbank Foreign Exchange: An Important Tool for Designing Financial Policies]," *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, June 4, 2008.

²³ The State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan publishes daily official exchange rates of the Manat on its website at <http://www.tfeb.gov.tm/index.html>.

²⁴ *Ukaz Prezidenta Turkmenistana* "O provedenii denominatsii (izmeneniia stoimosti) natsional'noi denezhnoi edinitsy Turkmenistana [Decree of President of Turkmenistan "On the Redenomination (Reduction in the Face Value) of the National Currency of Turkmenistan]," *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, April 15, 2008. The redenomination ratio was

floating by decreasing the amount of bills in circulation, had also a huge psychological importance as it was supposed to mark the end of uncertainty as regards trust and confidence in the national currency.

Further institutional measures were taken by Turkmenistan's government during 2008/2009 to maintain macroeconomic stability, against the backdrop of the global financial crisis. Most importantly, the Turkmenistan Stabilization Fund was established by a presidential ruling of October 21, 2008.²⁵ Budget surpluses from the previous years as well as other government assets, to be specified, were reported to be accumulated in the Stabilization Fund in order to minimize external pressures and to decrease the dependence of Turkmenistan's economy on oil and gas revenues. The fund's resources are supposed to be used for funding social and economic advancement through implementing of various budgetary programs and for the preferential introduction of high technologies and equipment intended for the modernization of infrastructure, according to the official Turkmen press.²⁶ Apart from macroeconomic stabilization, the fund is also to perform strategic savings functions, with "funds for the future generations" reportedly being invested with minimal risks in highly profitable long-term equities and enterprises abroad.²⁷ Details about managing this strategic financial reserve are still to be made public as no legal act whatsoever governing the functioning of the Stabilization Fund appears to have been officially published. Nevertheless, senior government members have been since repeatedly quoted as reporting about financial means being transferred from the state budget to the Stabilization Fund on a regular basis starting from 2009.²⁸ The published Law "On Turkmenistan State Budget" for both 2009 and 2010 does not seem to support this claim though.²⁹

originally set at 1,000 old Manat equivalent to one of the new. However, in the course of further preparations it was eventually adjusted to final 5,000 to 1. See *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 6, 2008.

²⁵ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 23, 2008.

²⁶ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 22, 2008.

²⁷ *Ibid.* See also *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 25, 2008.

²⁸ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, February 7, 2009, August 8, 2009, and November 7, 2009.

²⁹ *Zakon Turkmenistana "O Gosudarstvennom biudzhete Turkmenistana na 2009 god (v denominirovannoi valiute)"* [Law of Turkmenistan "On the State Budget of Turkmenistan for the Fiscal Year 2009 (Redenominated)"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 25, 2008; *Zakon Turkmenistana "O Gosudarstvennom biudzhete Turkmenistana na 2010 god"* [Law of Turkmenistan "On the State Budget of Turkmenistan for the Fiscal Year 2010"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, November 23, 2009.

Infrastructure

Modern and up-to-date infrastructure is an important factor of overall economic growth.³⁰ This notwithstanding, investments in basic capital did not appear to be high on the priority list of Turkmenistan's government under the previous regime. In spite of the fact that the government clearly was capable of generating multi-billion revenues from energy exports, Turkmenistan's capital infrastructure remained largely underfunded and underdeveloped. An exception to this was the capital city of Ashkhabad, which had been experiencing a truly massive construction boom since independence. But even here, investments were concentrated mostly on a few prestigious projects, such as government palaces or allegorical monuments celebrating late Turkmenbashi and/or his parents, with little impact on stimulating economic activity nor on improving living standards for large segments of population.³¹ Under Berdymukhammedov, attention seems to have shifted towards readdressing the needs of developing basic infrastructure, with capital investments in 2008 reported to have more than tripled in relation to the previous year, according to official Turkmen sources.³² Yet, as the following section indicates, these government expenditures alone are unlikely in the short term to create a basis for a more diversified economy.

Energy infrastructure remains a government priority for capital investments in Turkmenistan, mirroring the heavy dependence of its national economy on the oil and gas industries, which generate most of Turkmenistan's export revenues that are vital for the implementation of the government's ambitious modernization schemes. Under Berdymukhammedov, positive dynamics prevailed in Turkmenistan's external trade in between 2007 and 2009 recording annually a growth of 26.8 percent, 33.7 percent and 3.8 percent, respectively, according to official Turkmen sources,³³ with a widening of the republic's trade

³⁰ For an authoritative discussion of the impact of infrastructure development on economic growth, see César Calderón and Luis Servén, "The Effects of Infrastructure Development on Growth and Income Distribution," World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series WPS3400 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2004). See also *World Development Report 1994: Infrastructure for Development* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1994).

³¹ The author dealt with these construction activities by late Turkmenbashi in more detail in his earlier study entitled "Cult of Personality in Monumental Art and Architecture: The Case of Post-Soviet Turkmenistan," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 25 (2008), pp. 203-220.

³² "Sotsial'no-èkonomicheskoe polozhenie Turkmenistana za 2008 god [The Social and Economic State of Turkmenistan in 2008]." Statistical fact sheet available from the website of Türkmenistanyň Statistika baradaky Döwlet komiteti at www.stat.gov.tm.

³³ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 18, 2007, and January 16, 2009. Final figure for 2009 was taken from the statistical fact sheet "Sotsial'no-èkonomicheskoe polozhenie Turkmenistana za 2009 god [The Social and Economic State of Turkmenistan in 2009]," provided by Türkmenistanyň Statistika baradaky Döwlet komiteti at www.stat.gov.tm.

balance steadily to mid-2009, mainly thanks to the skillful negotiations on an increase of prices on Turkmenistan's natural gas exported to Russia, its major customer. Thus, over the past few years, Turkmenistan was able to make the most of improving its international bargaining position, with gas export prices rising from US\$65 per 1,000 cubic meter in late 2006, over US\$100 in 2007 and US\$130 and 150 in the first and second half of 2008 respectively, to the European netback pricing formula minus transit costs and an unclear profit margin kept for "Gazprom," Russia's gas monopoly.³⁴ In the spring of 2009, an unidentified "technological incident" was reported to have occurred in Turkmenistan's main gas export transportation pipeline system "Central Asia-Center" after a rapid price drop in energy markets in Europe, leading to a total cutoff in Turkmenistan's gas supplies to Russia for the rest of 2009.³⁵ However, investments in Turkmenistan's oil and gas sector were further boosted, particularly as regards upstream development of new energy fuel deposits in order to upgrade domestic output capacities. In late 2008, the result of an independent international audit conducted by UK "Gaffney, Cline and Associates" of Turkmenistan's gas reserves was announced with a great fanfare related to the new discovery of the "super giant" natural gas field Osman/South Yolotan in southeastern Turkmenistan, with the best estimates of the gas reserves put somewhere between 4 and 14 tcm, making the field potentially the world's fourth largest gas deposit and the largest gas discovery in several decades.³⁶ It, of course, would be an exaggeration to say that it came as a complete surprise when rumors spread among the international oil and gas business community that the audit was flawed, with estimated gas reserves being purportedly inflated by a minimum two to three times by Ashkhabad in order to attract foreign investments.³⁷ Nevertheless, on the background of relations with Russia steadily worsening, Turkmenistan proved quick to secure US\$4 billion Chinese credits for further drilling on this promising field.³⁸ By the end of 2009, service contracts of reportedly US\$9.7 billion in total for the development of the Osman/South Yolotan gas deposit were concluded between

³⁴ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 30, 2005, October 28, 2006, and December 25, 2009; and *RIA Novosti*, November 28, 2007. See also Arkadii Dubnov and Aleksei Grivach, "Sredneaziatskii front [The Central Asian Battle Front]," *Vremia novostei*, March 12, 2008.

³⁵ For first assessment of what really happened in the gas export transportation system, including conflicting stories of the supposed gas pipe explosion as propagandized by the both parties involved, see Arkadii Dubnov, "Ispytanie na vzryv [Testing The Blast]," *Vremia novostei*, April 10, 2009.

³⁶ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 14, 2008.

³⁷ For purges that followed in Turkmenistan's oil and gas sector top management after the latest embarrassing leakage scandal, see Arkadii Dubnov, "Truboprokol. Turkmeniia sfal'sifitsirovala dannye o zapasakh gaza [The Rig Is Up: Turkmenistan Falsified Figures About Natural Gas Reserves]," *Vremia novostei*, October 13, 2009.

³⁸ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, June 6, 2009, and June 25, 2009.

Turkmenistan's national gas concern "Turkmengaz" and a number of UAE, Chinese and Korean drilling companies.³⁹

Closely related to the development of oil and gas reserves is the expansion of necessary transportation capacities in order for Turkmenistan to obtain stable and secure access to world energy markets, a process which also has gained momentum in the last three years. In May 2007, a trilateral summit took place in the Caspian port town of Turkmenbashi, attended by the heads of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. There, the three presidents signed a joint statement initiating the project of a Caspian Coastal Pipeline which would enable Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to boost their gas exports northward through a newly built route to Russia.⁴⁰ At the same time, more importantly, Turkmenistan continued its strategic push for diversifying gas export routes in multiple complementary, or competing, directions, finding itself in the center of an increasingly stiff geopolitical struggle over energy resources in Central Eurasia. Beijing, in the first place, appears to have risen stronger from this latest phase of pipeline geopolitics when the construction of a transcontinental Turkmenistan-China pipeline commenced in the summer of 2007. This new gas export route, upon reaching full capacity, would enable Turkmenistan to supply China with up to 40 bcm of natural gas annually for a period of thirty years.⁴¹ The official opening ceremony of the pipeline took place in Bagtyýarlyk, eastern Turkmenistan, at the end of 2009, attended by the presidents of both Turkmenistan and China as well as of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, which serve as transit countries.⁴² In the meantime a serious crisis erupted between Turkmenistan and Russia associated with the aforesaid blockade by Moscow of Turkmenistan's gas supplies to and via Russia, exposing once again Ashkhabad's vulnerability *vis-à-vis* its predominant external trading partner. Against this backdrop, Turkmenistan's diversification efforts further intensified during 2009 with the strengthening of the Iranian vector of its pipeline diplomacy by reaching a deal on constructing a new small diameter gas pipe to northern Iran, eventually built in just a several few months and officially commenced by early 2010.⁴³ Besides these developments, another event of tremendous importance happened in 2009 when Turkmenistan, irrespective of previous arrangements with Russia, called for an open international

³⁹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 30, 2009.

⁴⁰ Sovmestnaia deklaratsiia Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan, Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Prezidenta Turkmenistana o stroitel'stve Prikaspiiskogo gazoprovoda [Joint Statement by the President of Republic of Kazakhstan, the President of Russian Federation and the President of Turkmenistan On the Construction of the Caspian Coastal Pipeline], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, May 14, 2007.

⁴¹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, August 30, 2007, and June 25, 2009.

⁴² *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 15, 2009.

⁴³ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, July 13, 2009, and January 7, 2010.

tender on the construction of a domestic 1,000 kilometer “East-West” gas pipeline connecting energy rich eastern Turkmenistan with the west of the country,⁴⁴ a step viewed widely as allowing Turkmenistan to broaden further its playing field for maneuvering *vis-à-vis* major energy players in Eurasia, including the possibility of supplying gas to Europe via the proposed pipeline “Nabucco.”⁴⁵

Much attention is also being devoted to the development of the transportation and communications infrastructure. In this respect, Turkmenistan hopes to capitalize on its pivotal geostrategic location in Central Eurasia, which, moreover, can provide it with an effective tool for regional integration with its neighbors.⁴⁶ In particular, construction of a new railway Novyi Uzen-Gyzylgaýa-Bereket-Etrek-Gorgan officially commenced in late 2007 following a trilateral intergovernmental agreement between Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Iran as part of the “North-South” trans-regional transportation and communications corridor.⁴⁷ Upon completion, this new rail artery is supposed to significantly shorten and ease shipping cargo from Europe via Russia and Central Asia to the Gulf, provided a solution can be found to the excessive bureaucratic procedures in place with crossing international borders in the region.⁴⁸ Furthermore, a key railway bridge near the town of Kerkichi in eastern Turkmenistan was finally made operational in 2009 after years of protracted disputes with foreign contractors, thus locking the remote lands on the right bank of the Amu-Darya river into the domestic railway system.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, modern and up-to-date motorways like the Turkmenbashi-Ashkhabad-Farab and Dashoguz-Garagumy-Ashkhabad routes continue to be built as well along existing rail and road corridors bisecting Turkmenistan from west to east and north to south;⁵⁰ however, the building process still lags well behind

⁴⁴ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 28, 2009, March 31, 2009, and April 3, 2009.

⁴⁵ Aleksei Grivach, “Vybor Berdymukhamedova [Berdymukhammedov’s Choice],” *Vremia novostei*, June 8, 2009. Turkmenistan officially committed itself to “Nabucco” beginning July 2009. See also Arkadii Dubnov, “Turkmenskii èksprompt [Turkmen Impromptu],” *Vremia novostei*, July 13, 2009.

⁴⁶ On Turkmenistan’s role within the context of transregional transport and trade, see Firat Yildiz, “Turkmenistan,” in S. Frederick Starr, (ed.), *The New Silk Roads: Transport and Trade in Greater Central Asia*, (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2007), pp. 141-166.

⁴⁷ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 3, 2007. Islamic Development Bank was instrumental in providing funding for this project. See *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 22, 2009.

⁴⁸ On existing constraints in transcontinental trade in the region, see also Michael Emerson and Evgeny Vinokurov, *Optimisation of Central Asian and Eurasian Trans-Continental Land Transport Corridors* (Brussels: EUCAM, 2009). EUCAM Working Paper No. 7.

⁴⁹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 17, 2009.

⁵⁰ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 25, 2009. For the government’s road construction plans in Turkmenistan, see Vladimir Zarembo, “Kuda vedet doroga? Za proshedshie

schedule, largely due to a lack of organizational capacity.⁵¹ About to open, at the time of the writing of this paper, was moreover a brand new international airport in the town of Turkmenbashi aspiring to become a major international air transportation hub for transcontinental flights.⁵² Completion of these transportation and communications projects in Turkmenistan is expected to have manifold spillover effects as many of these routes run through little inhabited dessert areas and will open up new lands for cultivation and settlement.

Finally, between 2007 and 2009, Turkmenistan also sought to introduce cautious legislative amendments aimed at improving the overall business climate, which would in theory provide for the protection of foreign investments, the right of free repatriation of profit, and a number of tax incentives for potential newcomers.⁵³ However, apart from the most lucrative energy projects where foreign companies seem keen to participate, it is still primarily the state itself that bears the main burden of capital investments, be it, as it may, with ad hoc multi-billion dollar projects of its own. In this regard, perhaps the most controversial of the ongoing government spending endeavors, painfully resembling the worst megalomaniacal excesses of the late Turkmenbashi, is the construction of the National Tourist Zone “Awaza,” kicked off by Kurbankuli Berdymukhammedov in summer 2007. The resort was granted a special legal, tax, and visa regime under the national directives.⁵⁴ Located near the oil industry center of Turkmenbashi on the Caspian Sea, the would-be visitor bonanza, with tens of top class hotels, casinos, and a wide range of other unconventional sightseeings, the most

piatnadsat' let bylo postroeno bolee tysiachi kilometrov dorog [Where Does the Road Lead? The Past Fifteen Years Have Seen over Thousand Kilometers of Roads Constructed],” *Mezhdunarodnyi zhurnal Turkmenistan* 1-2 (February 2007), pp. 54-63.

⁵¹ “Mestnykh resursov nedostatochno dlia sooruzheniia sovremennykh avtobanov [Local Resources Clearly Insufficient for Constructing Modern Autobahns],” *NBCA*, March 27, 2010.

⁵² Author’s personal communication with a top Turkmenistan diplomat. April 2010.

⁵³ *Zakon Turkmenistana “O vnesenii izmenenii i dopolnenii v nekotorye zakonodatel'nye akty Turkmenistana”* [Law of Turkmenistan “On Introduction of Changes and Amendments to Selected Legislation Acts of Turkmenistan”], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 12, 2007; *Zakon Turkmenistana “Ob inostrannykh investitsiakh (novaia redaktsiia)”* [Law of Turkmenistan “On Foreign Investments (New Version)”], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 18, 2008; *Zakon Turkmenistana “O vnesenii izmenenii i dopolnenii v Nalogovyi kodeks Turkmenistana”* [Law of Turkmenistan “On Introduction of Changes and Amendments to Tax Code of Turkmenistan”], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 18, 2008. For a slightly optimistic, yet informative overview of the national legislation in this regard, see also Atamurat Tailiev, “Mezhdunarodnomu sotrudnichestvu - pravovuiu osnovu” [International Cooperation To Be Put On a Legal Footing], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, July 10, 2009.

⁵⁴ *Postanovlenie Prezidenta Turkmenistana “O natsional'noi turistichekoi zone ‘Avaza’* [Resolution of President of Turkmenistan “On the National Tourist Zone ‘Awaza’],” *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, July 23, 2007.

spectacular of which as of today is a brand new navigable artificial river worth of €180 million, is supposed to become the core of Turkmenistan's national leisure business, travel, and entertainment industry.⁵⁵ The first entertainments in this "Turkmen Las Vegas" were opened by Berdymukhammedov himself in mid-June 2009, with concerts featuring pop music stars from both Ukraine/Russia and abroad.⁵⁶ Despite a massive advertising campaign in international media, however, for the time being the project still fails to have gained much attention on the part of foreign investors. It is significant that all the major projects in Awaza are totally void of foreign investments but rather are unilaterally government contracts assigned to Ashkhabad's traditional, though often of dubious reputation, trading partners in the construction business from Turkey, Russia and France who have close personal links to the president.

Promoting Private Entrepreneurship

Small enterprises are typically the driving force behind economic advancement. In developed countries, they constitute the most flexible segment of the national economy. As a rule, they are highly competitive, are capable of adapting to fluctuations in demand in the domestic market, and, moreover, they create majority of jobs.⁵⁷ Thus, all transitional economies have, to a various degree, implemented large privatization programs as a means of introducing elements of a market economy. In Turkmenistan, in contrast, private entrepreneurship remains limited, and consists mostly of petty business, with most privatization of small and medium size enterprises, where initiated, being halted by the mid-1990s. So even today, official Turkmen sources estimate the private sector in Turkmenistan to make up only 40 percent of the national GDP, a figure believed by international financial institutions to be substantially inflated, with EBRD, for instance, putting this indicator as low as 25 percent of Turkmenistan's GDP, far the lowest percentage amongst transitional economies.⁵⁸ As of January 1, 2007, there were no more than

⁵⁵ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 4, 2007.

⁵⁶ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, June 16, 2009. For a photo report from the ceremonial opening of the new sea resort, see also Mikhail Perepeslin, "Zolotye kliuchi: Kurort na beregu Kaspiia prinial pervyi massovyi zaezd gostei [Golden Keys. The Resort on the Shore of the Caspian Receives a Great Number of First Guests]," *Mezhdunarodnyi zhurnal Turkmenistan* 6 (2009), pp. 14-25.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the link between the size of the SME sector and the economic growth, see Thorsten Beck, Asli Demirgüç-Kunt, and Ross Levine, "SMEs, Growth, and Poverty: Cross-Country Evidence," *Journal of Economic Growth* 10, 3 (September 2005), pp. 199-229.

⁵⁸ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Transition Report 2009* (London: EBRD, 2009), p. 238. The higher figure was taken from President Berdymukhammedov's

11,800 small businesses and some 57,800 individual entrepreneurs in Turkmenistan, mainly in and around the capital Ashkhabad, according to official Turkmen sources,⁵⁹ a figure far from impressive for a nation of almost five million.⁶⁰ Moreover, many individual entrepreneurs are probably not registered at all, and, instead, are part of the gray economy. Hence there is exceptional potential for growth in this very underdeveloped segment of Turkmenistan's economy.

Promoting private entrepreneurship has, in the recent years, become a focus of Turkmenistan's macroeconomic policy, and, as such, it has slowly begun to be reflected in the government's agenda. In this regard, the government session of March 17, 2008, was of particular significance. During that occasion, President Berdymukhammedov called for the preparation of a special government program for development of private entrepreneurship based on existing national development schemes. In particular, among the ambitious target output indicators he set, the share of private sector in Turkmenistan's GDP was to reach 70 percent by 2020.⁶¹ However, the strategic sectors, such as the oil and gas industries, which make up most of Turkmenistan's production output, were excluded from these target objectives, making the president's plan somewhat less ambitious, if calculating carefully.⁶² Sketching the new

speech on state support for private entrepreneurship to be discussed in more detail below in the text as summarized in the Ashkhabad daily *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 18, 2008.

⁵⁹ For a detailed composition of small businesses in Turkmenistan see the analytical paper by O. Soiunova, "Perspektivy razvitiia malogo biznesa" [Development Prospects for the Small Entrepreneurship], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 13, 2007.

⁶⁰ Turkmenistan's real population figure is another variable which may fairly substantially distort the very macroeconomic indicators as data available on this account fluctuates greatly, from some 4.5 million to almost 7 million or so, with the highest numbers, as a rule, stemming from Turkmenistan's authorities. Here, the author leans on the latest UN estimates for 2007 as published in 2007 *Demographic Yearbook* (New York: United Nations, 2009), 643. However, considering the fact that in 1989 there were some 3.5 million people in Turkmenistan only according to the last Soviet population census as well as the high levels of emigration of people of non-Turkmen origin after 1991 due to Turkmenbashi's increasingly chauvinist policy, Turkmenistan's real population figure might in fact prove to be even lower than indicated by the most conservative foreign estimates. On forging the very most basic demographic statistics under Turkmenbashi, including facsimiles of the late president's personal directives in this regard, see Shokhrat Kadyrov, *Rossiisko-turkmenskii istoricheskii slovar'* [Russia-Turkmenistan Historical Dictionary], Vol. 1 (Bergen: Biblioteka al'manakha Turkmeny, 2001), pp. 67-74 and 450-453. The general census to be conducted in Turkmenistan in 2012 as mandated recently by President Berdymukhammedov could hopefully shed some light on this puzzle, if done properly.

⁶¹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 18, 2008.

⁶² Industry made up for 53.1 percent of Turkmenistan's GDP as of 2008, according to the official Turkmen statistics. At the same time, 61.4 percent of all industrial output fell, according to the same sources, on mining and quarrying, including oil and gas. See "Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Turkmenistana za 2008 god [The Social and Economic State of Turkmenistan in 2008]". Statistical fact sheet available from the website of Türkmenistanyň Statistika baradaky Döwlet komiteti at www.stat.gov.tm.

government program, the president further underlined the need to carry out a thorough legislation review with respect to eliminating unnecessary administrative barriers in the field of business licensing, registration procedures, and concessions, along with improving the tax legislation with regard to elaboration of a system of flexible tax incentives.⁶³ Nevertheless, minimal taxation, such as a flat 2 percent income tax already in place, proved thus far insufficient for stimulating private initiative under Turkmenistan's current conditions.

Expansion of credit to small and medium size enterprises is the key instrument of the government's policy on promoting private business under national legislation following the government session of March 17, 2008. In line with a presidential ruling, three sectoral commercial banks in Turkmenistan were mandated to open credit lines on preferential terms of as little as 5 percent per annum for an up to ten year period for creditworthy business projects within respective areas of interest. In particular, the Dayhanbank was to be in charge of issuing loans for development of agriculture. The Senagat Bank and the Garagum Bank, in turn, were authorized to finance business projects in industry, transportation, communications, IT, and innovations, with preference to be given to export-oriented and import-substituting production.⁶⁴ Still, the destiny of this presidential legislation looks murky as virtually no specific credits in support of private entrepreneurship seem to have been reported thus far.⁶⁵ In the spring of 2008, Turkmenistan Union of Industrials and Entrepreneurs was established under a local tycoon believed to have close ties to President Berdymukhammedov in an effort to provide for an institutional platform for corporate representation of domestic business *vis-à-vis* the government.⁶⁶ However, all these government measures target the promotion of new businesses at best, rather than restructuring the virtually ubiquitous sector of largely ineffective state enterprises that continue to depend on government subventions, and for the time being it is still unclear whether there is actually a privatization program to be in place in Turkmenistan at all.

Finally, in mid-2009, a new Labor Code took effect, bringing, while maintaining a broad range of social benefits for the workers, a comprehensive update of the regulation of wage relations in Turkmenistan which were still governed mainly by old Soviet labor

⁶³ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 18, 2008. For relevant legislation amendments that followed, see *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, May 12, 2008, and June 26, 2008.

⁶⁴ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 18, 2008. On the main areas of Turkmenistan's credit policy, see also *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, November 6, 2008.

⁶⁵ Frequent personal changes in the top management of all the three commercial banks concerned, the most recent of April 2010, are indicative of the troubled implementation of the government's expansionary crediting schemes as envisaged by the president's program on support for private entrepreneurship. See *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, April 10, 2010.

⁶⁶ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 28, 2008.

legislation from the early 1970s.⁶⁷ However, it is evident that legislative progress alone, while positive, is unlikely to ensure significant improvements in Turkmenistan's business climate if not accompanied by a fundamental strengthening of the rule of law; rather, preferential regimes as mandated by extensive legislation to promote private initiatives might only serve to fuel corruption and thus further cripple the overall deficient economic environment.

In 2008, the tenets of Berdymukhammedov's transition strategy were further enshrined in the new constitution where it was explicitly stipulated that Turkmenistan's economic model should "rely on market principles," with the government "promoting and supporting private entrepreneurship and conducting to the development of small and medium size businesses."⁶⁸ In elaboration of this, a special Law "On State Support for Small and Medium Size Enterprises" was adopted on August 21, 2009, that was to outline the aforesaid constitutional provisions on state support for private entrepreneurship.⁶⁹ The law delineates power between competent bodies in charge of regulating the functioning of small and medium size enterprises. In this regard, the central role falls on State Commission for Promoting Small and Medium Size Enterprises as well as on local executive commissions to be set up within government bodies.⁷⁰ In general, the law is supposed to mandate creation of favorable conditions for the development of private entrepreneurship. The main areas of the state support for private entrepreneurship include provision of financial and material resources, ensuring access to relevant legal and economic information, know-how and technologies, a wide range of investment incentives as well as government assistance with professional training and retraining and human resources development to the workforce, among others.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Trudovoi kodeks Turkmenistana [Labor Code of Turkmenistan], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, May 1, 2009. For official commentary on the new code, see *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, July 1, 2009. For the new labor legislation, see also the relevant brochure by prominent parliament deputy Maral Paltaeva "Trudovoi kodeks Turkmenistana: Voprosy regulirovaniia trudovykh i svyazannykh s nimi otnoshenii" [Labor Code of Turkmenistan: The Problems of Regulation of Wage and Wage Related Relations] as reprinted in the daily *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, July 2, 2009.

⁶⁸ Konstitutsiia Turkmenistana [Constitution of Turkmenistan], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 27, 2008, Art. 10.

⁶⁹ Zakon Turkmenistana "O gosudarstvennoi podderzhke malogo i srednego predprinimatel'stva" [Law of Turkmenistan "On State Support for Small and Medium Size Enterprises"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, August 22, 2009.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.* See also the commentary on the aforesaid law by Maral Paltaeva as published in the daily *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 18, 2009.

Regional Development

Regional development has become an issue within the overall modernization efforts in Turkmenistan entering the Berdymukhammedov era of “Great Renaissance.” This emphasis on regional development is understandable in light of the following socio-economic and demographic indicators, which all point to huge cleavages between the rural and urban population. Some 51 to 55 percent of population in Turkmenistan lives in rural areas, a figure typical of developing countries.⁷² Agriculture, particularly cotton production, remains the predominant sector within the economy as it continues to employ up to 50 percent of the overall labor force, despite its share of the agricultural output in the national GDP continually diminishing since independence to 12.1 percent as of 2008, according to government sources.⁷³ Moreover, some 30 to 50 percent of the population of Turkmenistan is estimated to fall below the poverty line, a figure roughly in correlation with the no less horrifying unemployment rate, according to foreign estimates.⁷⁴ This alone should make regional development a key part of the government’s cohesion policy in order to counteract divergent tendencies in development among individual regions.

Transforming the desperately hopeless socio-economic relations in Turkmenistan’s countryside for the better would be impossible to imagine without a fundamental reform in agriculture, an issue that was of particular concern to the ruling elite following the successful transition to the new regime because of fears that bread riots could erupt in rural areas as a consequence of shortages in basic foodstuffs, despite the previous year’s reportedly record-breaking harvests. For this reason, a special government commission was established immediately during the government session following Turkmenbashi’s funeral late December 2006, reporting to the interim head of state, to be in charge of elaborating a strategy of development for this most sensitive sector of Turkmenistan’s economy while it was still early enough to prepare for

⁷² Higher figures as of 1995 are taken from the statistical fact sheet “Perepis' naseleniia 1995 goda” [1995 Population Census] provided by Türkmenistanyň Statistika baradaky Döwlet komiteti at www.stat.gov.tm. Lower estimates as of 2008 are derived from the WB World Development Indicators database available at www.worldbank.org.

⁷³ “Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Turkmenistana za 2008 god [The Social and Economic State of Turkmenistan in 2008].” Statistical fact sheet available from the website of Türkmenistanyň Statistika baradaky Döwlet komiteti at www.stat.gov.tm. Regrettably, official statistics published for 2009 contain no data on sectoral distribution of Turkmenistan’s GDP. According to the 2009 CIA World Factbook, 48.2 percent of Turkmenistan’s labor were estimated to be engaged in agriculture as of 2008.

⁷⁴ 2009 CIA World Factbook; 2009 World Bank World Development Indicators; EBRD estimates. For a survey of unemployment across Turkmenistan, see also Turkmenskaia Initsiativa po Pravam Cheloveka, “Turkmenistan. Bezrobotitsa v tsifrakh [Turkmenistan. Unemployment in Figures],” *Khronika Turkmenistana*, April 6, 2009.

sowing.⁷⁵ On March 30, 2007, a session of the People's Council, then Turkmenistan's supreme representative body under the previous constitution, convened in the city of Mary to deal with the issue of advancing the domestic agricultural complex. During that session, a package of national legislation was approved that was supposed to form the core of the ongoing agriculture reform. Among the latest legislation changes were new laws "On Heads of Village Administrations," "On Collective Farming," and "On Farmer Cooperatives." The significance of these acts lie in devolving to the farmer cooperatives the right to decide for themselves about leasing land for agricultural production to individual cooperatives members as well as to market freely their production surplus, upon meeting government orders.⁷⁶ At the same time, an amendment to the Land Code was approved by the People's Council whereby farmers would be free to apply, theoretically, for private ownership of land for housing and crofts farming.⁷⁷ Moreover, the redemption prices for harvests to be sold under government orders were increased repeatedly during the months to come, with harvest profits to be eventually paid out to the farmers in cash exclusively, half in USD, in an effort to provide domestic agricultural producers with additional economic incentives.⁷⁸ However, all these novelties, while no doubt progressive in Turkmenistan's context, fell short of giving a true impetus to boosting the collapsing agriculture industry in the very most critical production areas where inefficient administrative command methods prevail, leaving little room for institutions of a genuine free market variety to develop.⁷⁹ This is especially true in the case of wheat breeding, which after 1991 was overtly favored by Turkmenbashi as a means to

⁷⁵ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 29, 2006. See also Vitalii Volkov, Oraz Saryev, and Durdy Nazarov, "Izoliatsiia i khlebyni defitsit [Isolation and Bread Deficit]," *Deutsche Welle*, January 14, 2007.

⁷⁶ *Zakon Turkmenistana "Ob archynakh"* [Law of Turkmenistan "On the Heads of Village Administrations"]; *Zakon Turkmenistana "O daikhanskoi khoziaistve (novaia redaktsiia)"* [Law of Turkmenistan "On Collective Farming (New Version)"]; *Zakon Turkmenistana "O daikhanskikh ob"edineniakh (novaia redaktsiia)"* [Law of Turkmenistan "On Farmer Cooperatives (New Version)"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 31, 2007.

⁷⁷ *Zakon Turkmenistana "O vnesenii izmenenii i dopolnenii v Kodeks Turkmenistana 'O zemle'"* [Law of Turkmenistan "On Introduction of Changes and Amendments to Land Code of Turkmenistan"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 31, 2007.

⁷⁸ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, April 12, 2007, August 10, 2007, November 13, 2007, August 21, 2008, and January 16, 2009.

⁷⁹ For a recent overview of Turkmenistan's agriculture in comparison with other republics of post-Soviet Central Asia, see Sébastien Peyrouse, *The Multiple Paradoxes of the Agriculture Issue in Central Asia* (Brussels: EUCAM, 2009). EUCAM Working Paper No. 6.

achieve self-sufficiency in foodstuffs.⁸⁰ As of 2009, problems with procurement of bread were still reported from rural areas outside of Ashkhabad, with domestic flour continually being provided by the government to households under a rationing system.⁸¹

Reshaping life in Turkmenistan's countryside, however, turned out to be an even more complex issue than just a mere agriculture reform and became a task that would require a more strategic approach. For this reason, beginning in April 2007 a government commission was set up under President Berdymukhammedov that was to draft a strategy for further regional development.⁸² And, consequently, a comprehensive paper, "National Program of President of Turkmenistan for the Transformation of Social and Living Conditions in Villages, Settlements, District Towns and District Centers over the Period to 2020," was approved in late 2007.⁸³ The program identified key social infrastructure objects that, as a matter of government priority, were to be built in Turkmenistan's rural areas within the aforesaid period of time, such as housings, public schools and hospitals, roads and telecommunications lines as well as electricity, gas, water, and sewerage networks. Over 72,501 billion (pre-2009) Manat was assigned in total for the government spendings in line with this development scheme, extended in three phases, to 2010, 2015, and 2020.⁸⁴ In addition, the program provided an umbrella for the expansion of lower level programs of regional development by local government bodies for years to come.⁸⁵ Based on this program, a government paper on the development of the western, Balkan, administrative region was endorsed in 2008 as the first of the lower level governmental papers defining detailed target parameters for the development of individual regions in Turkmenistan.⁸⁶ Yet, with the Soviet-style *pripiski* still forming much of the essence of Turkmenistan's strategic planning and budgeting, the program for the moment is more wishful thinking than a viable blueprint for sustainable advancement.

⁸⁰ For transformation of Turkmenistan's agriculture under Turkmenbashi, see Zvi Lerman and Ivan Stanchin, "Institutional Changes in Turkmenistan's Agriculture: Impacts on Productivity and Rural Incomes," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 45, 1 (2004), pp. 60-72.

⁸¹ "Narod malo verit v zernovuiu samodostatochnost' [Turkmens Having Little Faith in Wheat Self-Sufficiency]," NBCA, August 5, 2009.

⁸² *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, April 3, 2007.

⁸³ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 18, 2007.

⁸⁴ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, December 28, 2007.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* For the text of the blueprint, see *Natsional'naia programma Prezidenta Turkmenistana po preobrazovaniuu sotsial'no-bytovykh uslovii naseleniia sel, poselkov, gorodov étrapov i étrapsskikh tsentrov na period do 2020 goda* [National Program of President of Turkmenistan for the Transformation of Social and Living Conditions in Villages, Settlements, District Towns and District Centers over the Period to 2020] (Ashkhabad: TDH, 2007).

⁸⁶ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, April 15, 2008.

Parts of the president's latest regional development program nevertheless move forward at a swift pace. Most visibly, the government-sponsored land reclamation schemes seem to have further intensified in Turkmenistan under Berdymukhammedov. These are predominantly being used to expand the area of irrigation lands available for cultivation and settlement. In particular, three new agricultural districts, Ruhybelent, Döwletli, and Altyn Sahra, located in the Dashoguz, Lebap, and Mary administrative regions, respectively, were detached under this ambitious program during 2007 and 2008.⁸⁷ As of 2008, some 41,000 hectares of virgin lands were readied under this scheme according to government sources. More than 800 kilometers of irrigation channels and rainwater collection basins were reportedly laid on these virgin lands and an additional 720 kilometers of water systems were reconstructed during this period.⁸⁸ In addition, a reshuffle in the territorial divisions of Turkmenistan was endorsed by the president in early 2008 following a special government session on regional development, providing for the enhancement of the administrative status of a number of towns and settlements to reflect the recent social and economic advancement of these units.⁸⁹ In the summer of 2008, further public infrastructure objects opened in the newly founded district Esenguly situated out of the way on the Caspian Sea coast in the Balkan administrative region.⁹⁰

On July 15, 2009, President Berdymukhammedov ceremonially launched the filling of the Grand Turkmen Lake "Altyn Asyr" in a move constituting as of today the undoubtedly most questionable part of the extensive land reclamation scheme initiated by Turkmenbashi a decade ago, with potentially far reaching consequences for the fragile regional water balance in Central Asia. This unique water reservoir, as it is referred to in the official Turkmen press, extends into the Karashor

⁸⁷ Postanovlenie Khalk Maslakhaty Turkmenistana "Ob obrazovanii v Dashoguzskom velaiate ètrapa Rukhubelent, a takzhe sel, gengeshlikov i daikhanskikh ob"edinenii v ètom ètrape" [Resolution of the People's Council of Turkmenistan "On the Creation of Ruhybelent District in Dashoguz Administrative Region as well as of Villages, Village Administrations and Farmer Cooperatives in the Aforesaid District"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 31, 2007; Postanovlenie Khalk Maslakhaty Turkmenistana "O sozdanii v Lebapskom velaiate ètrapa Döwletli, sel, gengeshlikov i daikhanskikh ob"edinenii" [Resolution of the People's Council of Turkmenistan "On the Creation of Döwletli District, Villages, Village Administrations and Farmer Cooperatives in Lebap Administrative Region"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, August 30, 2007; Postanovlenie Khalk Maslakhaty Turkmenistana "Ob obrazovanii ètrapa Altyn sakhra v Maryiskom velaiate, a takzhe sel, gengeshlikov i daikhanskikh ob"edinenii v ètom ètrape" [Resolution of the People's Council of Turkmenistan "On the Creation of Altyn Sahra District in Mary Administrative Region as well as of Villages, Village Administrations and Farmer Cooperatives in the Aforesaid District"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, April 19, 2008.

⁸⁸ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, October 14, 2008.

⁸⁹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, February 4, 2008.

⁹⁰ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 15, 2008.

natural depression, a remote dessert in the northern part of the country. Stretching to over 100 kilometers in length over the territory of three administrative regions, this giant artificial lake is to be fed by diverting over 10 billion cubic meters of mineralized rain water each consecutive year within the next one and a half decade until full. The overall length of the water collection channels that bring water to the lake is a reported 2,654 kilometers.⁹¹ In this way, a strategic water reserve would emerge, which could be used for irrigation of new land.⁹²

Human Capital

The social dimension of post-Soviet transition is the last distinctive feature of Turkmenistan's economy to be discussed here pertaining to the specific model of development embarked upon since independence.⁹³ Even today, after almost two decades that have elapsed since the fall of communism, it is still the government that sets the pricing mechanisms in the national economy through effective control over the public sector. Turkmenistan's households thus receive, free of charge, gas, water and electricity within generous rationing quotas, a measure that is to remain in force until at least 2030 under current legislation, while bills for rents, public telecommunications, heat and other utilities are largely symbolic. Moreover, a large assortment of other goods, such as bread, wheat, salt, cement or bricks are distributed to households for subsidized prices.⁹⁴ In this way, the government provides the people with subsistence level material support. The flip side, however, is a vast underinvestment and, consequently, a degradation of all public sphere, against the background of which some of the most extravagant decisions by late Turkmenbashi were taken.

Educational reform is a priority among social policies in Turkmenistan after the regime change under Berdymukhammedov. This privileged position of the education within the overall modernization plans, however, does not seem as much a part of the government best efforts to develop and utilize fully Turkmenistan's human resources

⁹¹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, July 16, 2009.

⁹² *Ibid.* For technical parameters of the two main collecting channels, see B. K. Balakaev, N. Tailyev, and K. B. Gulmanov, "Stroitel'stvo magistral'nykh kollektorov v Turkmenistane [Construction of the Arterial Collectors in Turkmenistan]," *Problemy osvoeniia pustyn' 1* (2008), pp. 11-15. For a more critical assessment of the whole US\$6 billion Golden Age Lake project, see the report by Richard Stone, "A New Great Lake-Or Dead Sea?" *Science* 320 (May 23, 2008), pp. 1002-1005.

⁹³ For a discussion of the role of human capital in economic growth, see Paul M. Romer, "Human Capital and Growth: Theory and Evidence," NBER Working Paper Series 3173 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1989).

⁹⁴ For a concise overview of the government's foremost welfare achievements in this respect, see Liudmila Amanniazova, "Glavnaia tsel' - blagosostoianie cheloveka [Striving For Human Well Being]," *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, November 13, 2009.

potential as it is a reflection of the absolute debilitation of the national education, which under Turkmenbashi degraded to mere indoctrination of the youth with the president's ideology masterpiece, the "holy book" of Rukhnama.⁹⁵ Upon proclaiming as Turkmenistan's new president, on February 15, 2007, Berdymukhammedov thus signed in law a bill whereby mandatory ten year schooling was restored in Turkmenistan as an overture to deep organizational reshuffles in the national education.⁹⁶ Within that, starting from the academic year of 2007/2008, school subjects like physical training that had been previously outlawed were reintroduced and specialized schools as well as schools with partly instruction in Russian, but no other minority language, were reopened.⁹⁷ At the same time, the system of tertiary education in Turkmenistan ascended the path of transformation whereas regular five and six year schooling was successfully restored as a response to the devastating consequences of Turkmenbashi's earlier experiments with shortening the years of university studies. Thanks to this restoration, specializations and disciplines deemed long harmful to the Turkmens under the previous regime, such as journalism, have witnessed a renaissance in university curriculums. As well new universities and other tertiary institutions, among them the Turkmenistan National Institute of Economy and Management or the Institute of International Relations, were established during 2008 in an effort to keep Turkmenistan in step with the recent educational trends in the developed world.⁹⁸ The same holds true for the presidential Academy of Civil Service which opened for the first time its door later on that year to provide for training and retraining for government officials.⁹⁹ Finally, in summer 2009 a comprehensive Law "On Education" was adopted that was to underscore all the promising results that were by then achieved during reforming the national schooling system.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, considering the complexity of the challenges that must be overcome, a full recovery to pre-1991 levels is hardly a realistic option even in the medium term, provided all modernization programs as envisaged by the educational reform in place

⁹⁵ For a concise overview of Turkmenistan's educational system under late Turkmenbashi, see the report by Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights *Obrazovanie v Turkmenistane* [The Education in Turkmenistan] (Vienna: TIHR, November 2006).

⁹⁶ *Zakon Turkmenistana "O vnesenii izmeneniia v Zakon Turkmenistana 'Ob obrazovanii v Turkmenistane'"* [Law of Turkmenistan "On Introduction of Changes to Law of Turkmenistan 'On Education in Turkmenistan'"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, February 16, 2007.

⁹⁷ For a brief overview of the recent changes in Turkmenistan's high school curricula, see Aisha Berdyeva, "Chemu seichas uchat v turkmenskikh shkolakh [What is Being Taught At Turkmen Schools]," *Deutsche Welle*, December 11, 2009.

⁹⁸ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 21, 2008, and April 15, 2008.

⁹⁹ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 13, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ *Zakon Turkmenistana "Ob obrazovanii"* [Law of Turkmenistan "On Education"], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, August 20, 2009.

are coherently implemented.¹⁰¹ In between 2007 and 2009, international cooperation of Turkmenistan in education and research slowly revived after years of isolation, with agreements being reached on participation in EU mobility programs “Tempus” and “Erasmus Mundus” as well as the opening of a distant branch of Moscow Gubkin State University of Oil and Gas in Ashkhabad. To complement this, the government stipend programs for high school graduates sent abroad to continue their university studies have been increased.¹⁰² However, even this greater openness towards international cooperation on the part of the Ashkhabad government has clear political limits, as became apparent when last year more than sixty students enrolled in US-sponsored educational programs were barred by the authorities from exiting Turkmenistan for study.¹⁰³

Encouraging, after years of systematic destruction, look the latest developments in science, where institutional structures are being created for a regular functioning of this important segment of human capital building. On June 12, 2007, President Berdymukhammedov signed an act whereby Turkmenistan Academy of Sciences was reestablished again after being dissolved as superfluous by Turkmenbashi in the 1990s. The Turkmenistan Supreme Attestation Commission, responsible for overseeing dissertation proceedings, as well as Fund for Science and Technology were founded under the provisional Supreme Council for Science and Technology to form the organizational pillars of a renewed national science initiative. Due to this initiative, after a decade or so, first scientific degrees were awarded to supposedly prominent figures in academia, among them Berdymukhammedov himself.¹⁰⁴ As a follow up, postgraduate placements, doctoral fellowships and clinical traineeships were approved for commencement in 2008 and subsequently opened at 22 accredited research institutes and university departments within across Turkmenistan, giving start to the restoration of the national human resource capital in nearly sixty of the most sought-after specializations and disciplines.¹⁰⁵ By mid-2009, six research institutes were finally set up within Turkmenistan Academy of Sciences, which after additional

¹⁰¹ For an informative overview of the ongoing educational reform in Turkmenistan, see the report by Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights *Turkmenistan. Reforma sistemy obrazovaniia* [Turkmenistan. Reforming the National Education System] (Vienna: TIHR, January 2009). For a preliminary discussion of the educational reform and its future prospects, see also the relevant chapter originally drafted by Slavomír Horák for our joint Silk Road Paper entitled *Dismantling Totalitarianism? Turkmenistan under Berdimuhamedov* (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2009), pp. 68-80.

¹⁰² *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, November 6, 2007, July 3, 2008, September 1, 2008, December 10, 2008, and September 1, 2009.

¹⁰³ *Reuters*, September 1, 2009. For an overview of this case, see also Arkadii Dubnov, “Turkmenskaia myshelovka [Turkmen Mousetrap],” *Vremia novostei*, October 7, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, June, 13, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, January 10, 2008, January 16, 2008, April 1, 2008, and June 9, 2008.

organizational reshuffling officially began operation as a government-run body.¹⁰⁶

Significant progress is also being registered in the field of social security, which was no less badly affected by the incoherent government interventions of the previous regime. On March 17, 2007, a comprehensive Code of Social Security was adopted by Turkmenistan Mejlis, the national parliament, replacing the old statutes on elderly pensions, social benefits and social protection of the disabled as well as other legislation acts.¹⁰⁷ With this new code, the long-awaited reform began in Turkmenistan of the vastly out-of-date pension system. Perhaps most importantly, the payouts of elderly pensions were restored under the reform, effective July 1, 2007, pertaining to whole categories of Turkmenistan's elderly who were deliberately deprived of their pensions by Turkmenbashi in previous years. Some 65,000 pensioners from amongst former agricultural workers were reported to have benefited from the reinstatement of pensions in accord with the new legislation, while 110,000 others have seen their pensions favorably recounted based on actual track record, according to information published by Turkmenistan Ministry of Social Security.¹⁰⁸ The mandatory public pension system in Turkmenistan continues to rely as such predominantly on a redistributive pay-as-you-go model, with notional defined contributions envisaged for introduction in 2012.¹⁰⁹ All in all, however, the new code still lacks many institutions and instruments typical of modern social security systems as known from developed Western countries. For instance, as there is no unemployment officially recorded in Turkmenistan, accordingly there are no unemployment benefits whatsoever paid under the new code to this large group of jobless people, who thus stay outside the social safety net.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

Thus, a rather grim picture arises of a young nation in Central Asia coping with very systemic deficiencies carried over from the inherited Soviet model of a command economy, which after fifteen years of independence were only exacerbated as a result of poor management. Much has been done in Turkmenistan after 2006 on the level of

¹⁰⁶ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, June 13, 2009, and July 25, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ *Zakon Turkmenistana* "Ob utverzhdenii i vvedenii v deistvie Kodeksa Turkmenistana 'O sotsial'nom obespechenii' [Law of Turkmenistan "On the Approval and Enactment of Code of Turkmenistan 'On Social Security'"]," *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 19, 2007.

¹⁰⁸ *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, September 6, 2007.

¹⁰⁹ *Kodeks Turkmenistana* "O sotsial'nom obespechenii [Code of Turkmenistan "On Social Security"]," *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, March 19, 2007.

¹¹⁰ "Mnogie turkmeny lisheny pensii [Many Turkmens Still Deprived of Their Pensions]," *CA-NEWS*, March 22, 2010.

macroeconomic policy. Much more, however, is still ahead. Much in this respect will depend on how the country is going to treat the surplus revenues it enjoys from energy exports which could provide the windfall for further structural reforms whereby institutional foundations of a viable market economy would be laid, giving Turkmenistan a chance at long-term sustainable development. Here, the utmost responsibility lies with the ruling elites, who are free to decide about the use, or misuse, of national resources. There seems to be little doubt that over the last three years Turkmenistan has made a huge effort to increase oil and gas revenues, stabilizing cash inflows and further investing in upstream development and diversified energy export transportation infrastructure in a bid to maximize its international bargaining position. Still, the temptation may turn out to be too strong to resist at any moment and under existing conditions there are few real institutional constraints which could prevent the elites in power from dissipating the accumulated wealth for their own personal use.

Another risk, with which Turkmenistan is likely to be confronted in this regard, stems from possible political implications of eventual market reforms, should they continue. While even a harsh non-democratic political system and a developing market are, at least in the short and medium term, not necessarily mutually exclusive, it is evident that economic prosperity is unsustainable when there also exists arbitrary use of government authority, high level corruption, and a general disregard for social institutions and norms such as law. Should Turkmenistan go on striving towards a more liberalized economy, these factors will prove to be a challenge that reaches to the very foundations of the Berdymukhammedov's regime.

External Conditionality, Domestic Insulation and Energy Security: The International Politics of Post-Niyazov Turkmenistan

Luca Anceschi*

ABSTRACT

The leadership transition of 2006-2007 failed to bring discontinuity in Turkmenistan's foreign policy strategy. Authoritarian stability remains at the core of Berdymukhammedov's foreign policy, as it does Ashgabat's special relationship with the Russian Federation. The changing energy security priorities formulated by the United States and the European Union opened nevertheless new international perspectives for the Turkmenistani regime, which, since Niyazov's death, has engaged with increasing regularity with the international community. This paper aims at discussing these dynamics, by looking at how three key factors - external conditionality, internal perceptions of external pressures for political liberalisation and the regime's energy security priorities - influenced Turkmenistani foreign policy making in the Berdymukhammedov era.

Keywords • Turkmenistan • Foreign Policy • Energy • European Union

Introduction

Since the achievement of independence, authoritarian governance has deeply influenced Turkmenistani political developments. The regime headed by Saparmurat A. Niyazov made systemic use of repressive methods to obliterate internal opponents, silence dissent, and establish a monopoly within the domestic political landscape. As a large number of international actors vehemently criticised its abysmal human rights

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¹ Luca Anceschi, *Turkmenistan's foreign policy – Positive Neutrality and the consolidation of the Turkmen regime* (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 1.

record and regularly denounced its oppressive power maintenance strategies, the Niyazov regime - in late 2006 - was widely considered as "the most repressive in Central Asia and one of the most authoritarian in the world".¹ Turkmenistan's internal political processes, throughout the Niyazov years, were therefore defined virtually *in toto* by their authoritarian essence.

At the same time, the non-democratic nature of Turkmenistani internal politics came to directly influence the state's international dealings. Domestic determinants - and regime survival more specifically - became the centrepiece of Turkmenistani foreign policy-making, and played crucial roles *vis-à-vis* the orientation of the state's international posture. In this context, Niyazov's foreign policy was essentially concerned with the achievement of two main targets. First, it had to insulate the country from external pressures for political liberalisation, which, in the views of the leadership, could set into motion political mechanisms detrimental to regime stability.² Second, it had to guarantee a regular flow of gas revenues, essential to run the Turkmenistani economy and lubricate the regime's patronage system.³

Nevertheless, the external priorities of the Niyazov regime contained an inherent contradiction, which emerges more evidently when Turkmenistani foreign policy is observed through the lens of regime survival. A number of key foreign policy targets - the maximisation of prospects for gas exports and the attraction of foreign direct investments necessary to develop the Turkmenistani energy industry - could be achieved only through enhanced cooperation with the West. The regime nevertheless perceived that unrestrained openings to the West could expose Turkmenistan to destabilising influences and have a negative impact on the bilateral relationship with the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan's key international partner. Niyazov's response to this foreign policy dilemma, as many observers have remarked,⁴ was

² Interestingly, Niyazov's attempts at insulating Turkmenistan came to the fore vividly as early as the latter part of the 1990s. By regulating the influences of exogenous factors over Turkmenistani domestic politics, the Niyazov regime pre-emptively addressed one of the key dynamics that would play crucial roles in the political transitions completed in the contexts of the 'Colour Revolutions' erupted in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005).

³ Richard Pomfret, "Turkmenistan's foreign policy," *China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6, 4 (2008), pp. 22-26.

⁴ "While regularly affirming Turkmenistan's official policy of neutrality, however, President Niyazov continues to lead his country down a path more akin to isolationism" (Annette Bohr, "Independent Turkmenistan: from post-communism to sultanism," in Sally N. Cummings (ed.), *Oil, transition and security in Central Asia* (London-New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 16; Sally N. Cummings and Michael Ochs, "Turkmenistan - Saparmurat Niyazov's inglorious isolation," in Sally N. Cummings (ed.), *Power and change in Central Asia* (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 123.

straightforward: the political survival of his regime was to be given priority over any other policy consideration. A calculated opening to the Western world and the establishment of a client-patron relationship with Russia thus became typical features of Turkmenistani foreign policy under Niyazov. The implementation of such policy precluded the achievement of key objectives, including the geographical expansions of gas export routes and the technological advancement of the Turkmenistani energy industry.

It is in this context that the regime's assessment of international perceptions of domestic authoritarian practices became a key element of Turkmenistani foreign policy-making. To preserve the impermeability of the domestic political landscape, Niyazov limited Turkmenistan's partnership network to state-actors that, by sharing his understanding of authoritarian governance, tended not to pursue a normative foreign policy; namely, Russia, the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Relations with Western actors, that conversely were more inclined to attach different degrees of conditionality to cooperation initiatives extended to Ashgabat, were therefore assigned a limited role in Turkmenistan's external policies.

The tension between external conditionality and domestic impermeability is therefore crucial if we are to understand the international posture of Turkmenistan under Niyazov. At the same time, exploring how the ensuing regime handled this tension does offer a new framework of analysis for post-Niyazov foreign policy. In general terms, the foreign policy of Gurbanguly M. Berdymukhammedov might be said to have been primarily influenced by two main forces: the preservation of external circumstances conducive to the maintenance of domestic political control on the one hand; and the reduction of international isolation on the other. To put it simply, post-Niyazov foreign policy had to achieve insulation without increasing Turkmenistan's isolation. It is precisely to the discussion of this dynamics that this article devotes its focus.

A few introductory remarks are necessary before introducing our analysis. Establishing the degree of change experienced since 2007 by the Turkmenistani decision-making milieu and the regional geopolitical landscape is critical to identifying the major evolutionary developments that occurred within Turkmenistani foreign policy-making in the Berdymukhammedov era. To begin with, post-Niyazov domestic politics - as argued by Steven Sabol and Sébastien Peyrouse in their contributions to this Special Issue - remained strongly authoritarian. In spite of numerous proclamations made during the 2007 electoral campaign⁵ and in

⁵ See: Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan: Presidential campaign opens with surprising promises of reform," *RFE/RL Feature Article*, January 4, 2007.

a number of speeches delivered to domestic⁶ and international audiences,⁷ President Berdymukhammedov has failed to liberalise the Turkmenistani domestic political landscape in any significant way. Further weight to the latter proposition is offered by recent criticisms of the human rights record of the Berdymukhammedov regime.⁸ Secondly, Turkmenistani foreign policy has remained, since the end of the Niyazov era, essentially domestically-oriented. Here, the picture appears more complex, as substantial change in the foreign policy strategies implemented by the new regime has not been complemented by a radical revision of the core aim of foreign policy.⁹ The new leadership has, in other words, negotiated in a peculiar way the tension between insulation and isolation: Berdymukhammedov's foreign policy has continued to pursue essentially domestic targets through a relatively new strategy, built upon the establishment of "more constructive relations with other members of the international community".¹⁰

Third, the regional and international contexts in which Berdymukhammedov's external policies are operating appear different from those which witnessed the operationalisation of Niyazov's foreign policy. A major factor in the emergence of this new scenario has been represented by the evolution of the energy security priorities of the European Union and of the United States. Central Asia in general, and Turkmenistan in particular, have been assigned key functions in the new energy security paradigms conceptualised by Brussels¹¹ and Washington.¹² In turn, Turkmenistan's increasing relevance *vis-à-vis* the

⁶ See: "Vystuplenie Prezidenta Turkmenistana Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedova na rasshirennom zasedanii Kabineta Ministrov (9 apreliya 2010 goda)" ["Speech of the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov at the opening session of the Cabinet of Ministers (April 9, 2010)"], <<http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=2&id=100422a>> (April 12, 2010).

⁷ On this note, confront the 2008 speech delivered by Turkmenistani Minister Rashit Meredov to the Plenary Session of the UN General Assembly (A/63/PV.15, particularly p. 5), with Berdymukhammedov's 2009 address to the same institution (A/64/PV.3).

⁸ See the entries on Turkmenistan in: *Human Rights Watch World Report 2009*, *Nations in Transit 2009*, and in the *Press Freedom Index 2009*.

⁹ Anceschi, *Turkmenistan's foreign policy*, p. 140.

¹⁰ Slavomír Horák and Jan Šír, *Dismantling totalitarianism? Turkmenistan under Berdimuhamedov* (Washington, D.C.: The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Monograph, March 2009), p. 67, <www.isdp.eu/files/publications/srp/09/js09turkmenistanunder.pdf> (April 10, 2010).

¹¹ The general guidelines for the EU energy strategy in Central Asia are outlined in: Council of the European Union, *The European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a new partnership* (Brussels: European Communities, 2007).

¹² According to the U.S. Department of State, the Obama Administration sees Turkmenistan as a "leader in terms of energy security and energy supply." "Remarks of Assistant Secretary Robert O. Blake, Turkmenistan's bilateral meeting," September 21, 2009, <<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2009/129450.htm>> (April 11, 2010).

energy security of the West has had a major impact on the latter's perception of Turkmenistani authoritarianism. To put it simply, Berdymukhammedov's foreign policy has been implemented in rather new international surroundings, in which Western partners have ceased to systematically employ conditionality while dealing with the Turkmenistani regime.

Bearing in mind these preliminary remarks, the analysis presented in this article - which is chronologically limited to the post-Niyazov era - is mostly concerned with the observation of the ways in which Turkmenistan's international posture has been influenced by the following factors:

1. Internal perceptions of regime stability;
2. The energy security priorities of the Turkmenistani regime and of the international actors dealing with Turkmenistan;
3. The ways in which external actors have perceived Turkmenistani authoritarianism and how such perceptions influenced more pragmatic facets of the bilateral relationships they established with the Berdymukhammedov regime.

The influences exerted on decision-making by these factors, which are interestingly located internally and externally to the Turkmenistani foreign policy-making milieu, will be assessed in relation to the links established by Turkmenistan with the following sets of actors:

1. Regional Powers (Russia and China);
2. The West (the European Union and the United States).

This article does not ignore that, in the Berdymukhammedov era, an increasingly important portion of foreign policy has been formulated in relation to Turkmenistan's immediate neighbours, especially Iran and, to a lesser degree, Azerbaijan. In spite of the development of similar agendas - both Turkmenistani-Iranian and Turkmenistani-Azerbaijani relations have predominantly focused on energy matters - the two interactive relations have continued to develop in a diverging perspective. Successive Turkmenistani regimes established and developed fruitful energy partnerships with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Positive cooperative trends that emerged under Niyazov have continued to characterise the relationship between Ashgabat and Tehran in the Berdymukhammedov era also, as confirmed by the inauguration (January 2010) of the Dovletabad-Sarakhs-Hangeran pipeline,¹³ which, in spite of

¹³ "Turkmenistan: New pipeline to Iran set to open," *Eurasianet News Brief*, January 5, 2010.

its reduced length (30 km), will double the volume of gas traded between Iran and Turkmenistan. Conversely, Turkmenistani-Azerbaijani relations have been traditionally conflicting, and the recent¹⁴ emergence of new rifts in the dispute over contended off-shore gas sites in the Caspian Sea seems to indicate that a rapprochement between Ashgabat and Baku still constitutes a challenging undertaking. In spite of their relevance, this article will not devote much attention to the analysis of recent developments in Turkmenistani-Iranian and Turkmenistani-Azerbaijani relations. These interactive frameworks do not feature a characteristic trait which is instead essential to the overall argument presented here. Domestic consolidation was not a foreign policy result sought through relations with Iran and Azerbaijan. Conversely, the regime has attempted to shape the relationships between Turkmenistan and the Great Powers with domestic objectives in mind. It is the intersection between the domestic and the external that represents the main concern for this paper, which will therefore exclusively focus on post-Niyazov evolutions in Turkmenistan's relations with the Russia, China, the EU and the US.

Turkmenistan's Relations with Regional Powers

Russo-Turkmenistani bilateralism remained, in the post-Niyazov era, the keystone of the Turkmenistani system of international relations. Since 2007, the two leaderships have continued to hold regular bilateral summits, as President Berdymukhammedov has met rather frequently with both Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev. Further, the volume of trade exchanged between Turkmenistan and Russia has remained significant,¹⁵ and, perhaps most importantly, the Kremlin has continued to extend vital international support to the Turkmenistani regime. In other words, the relationship between Moscow and Ashgabat has preserved its "special" essence even after the death of Niyazov. Nevertheless, Berdymukhammedov's accession to power did not fail to bring change into the relationship's equation, as indicated by a specific trend, which emerged as early as 2007 to acquire then increasing relevance in the context of Russo-Turkmenistani bilateralism. In mid-2010, Russia is no longer Turkmenistan's sole international partner.

¹⁴ Bruce Pannier, "Flare-Up in Turkmenistani-Azerbaijani dispute latest Nabucco challenge," *RFE/RL Feature Article*, July 27, 2009.

¹⁵ The Russian Federal Customs Service reported that, in November 2009, the total trade exchanged between Russia and Turkmenistan amounted to US\$980.6 million. The annual growth rate of trade between the parties was 11.97 percent. See: *Federal'naia tamozhennaia sluzhba, Vneshniaia trgovlia Rossiiskoi Federatsii po osnovnym stranam za ianvar'-noiabr' 2009 g.* [Federal Customs Service, *Russian Federation: External trade with selected countries (January-November 2009)*], <<http://www.customs.ru/ru/stats/arhiv-stats-new/popup.php?id286=622>> (April 10, 2010).

Berdymukhammedov successfully boosted the multi-vector component of Turkmenistani foreign policy, with a view of breaking the international isolation inherited from the prior regime. Given the importance that relations with Moscow have held *vis-à-vis* Turkmenistani foreign policy, evolutionary developments in the relationship with Russia have to be regarded as the direct consequence of wider structural changes that have emerged within Turkmenistani foreign policy-making.

At the apex of Niyazov's isolationism (2003-2006), Russia represented the central element of foreign policy formulation and implementation, as other bilateral relations and multilateral diplomacy more generally did not hold much relevance in the external strategies designed by the regime. Less than four years after the death of its first President, Turkmenistan is a state-actor much more integrated in the world community. Most importantly, a significant segment of Turkmenistani foreign policy is no longer exclusively oriented towards Moscow. There is nevertheless insufficient evidence to maintain that Berdymukhammedov's multi-vector foreign policy is ultimately a tool to move out of Moscow's orbit. Cooperative initiatives extended to partners other than Russia have been pursued exclusively in the economic field, with particular reference to the energy sector. Berdymukhammedov's policy does not therefore share much similarity with the comprehensive strategy of political, economic, and military disengagement from Russia that Niyazov unsuccessfully pursued in the early post-Soviet era (1992-1995).¹⁶

The regime has recently multiplied its efforts to diversify gas export options through a two-pronged strategy, which involved (1) a series of agreements with China and Iran, and (2) regular negotiations with state and non-state energy actors located in the West. To these ends, Berdymukhammedov has managed to place Turkmenistan at the epicentre of international gas politics.¹⁷ Interestingly, this process took place without an ensuing deterioration in the relationship with Moscow, as the regime had carefully attempted to expand the Turkmenistani network of energy partnerships without cutting back gas trade with Russia. That is not to say that the post-Niyazov energy cooperation

¹⁶ See Anceschi, *Turkmenistan's foreign policy*, p. 112-115.

¹⁷ Further weight to this proposition is offered by the significant number of international gas actors who have been visiting Ashgabat since 2007. For instance, in only three days during 2008 (August 29-September 1), Berdymukhammedov met with top officials from China (President Hu Jintao), Russia (Viktor Zubkov, First Deputy Minister and Co-Chairman of the Russia-Turkmenistan Economic Cooperation Commission) and the United States (George A. Krol, Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs) who visited the Turkmenistani capital with a view of discussing future avenues of cooperation in the energy field.

between Russia and Turkmenistan has developed smoothly, as confirmed by the gas crisis that unfolded in 2009-2010.

On April 9, 2009, the immediate interruption of gas delivery between Russia and Turkmenistan was provoked by the explosion of a branch of the Central Asia-Centre Pipeline located in the proximity of the Turkmenistani-Uzbek border.¹⁸ While the Turkmenistani government promptly accused *Gazprom* of sabotage, Russian officials responded by underlining the “purely technical”¹⁹ nature of the explosion. A few days later, gas traffic between Turkmenistan and Russia was reduced by 90 per cent.²⁰ The dispute between the two parties continued for nine months, in which Turkmenistan experienced a record GDP loss of 25 per cent. The underlying issue behind the dispute was Turkmenistan’s pressure for a renegotiation of the export price *Gazprom* agreed to pay according to the gas deal of January 2009.²¹ Speculation in this regard was granted further weight by the terms of the gas deal finalised on December 22 2009, in which Russia agreed to buy 30 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas from Turkmenistan at the price, considered more in line with European standards, of about US\$250 per thousand cubic meter (tcm).²² Normal gas traffic between Turkmenistan and Russia resumed on January 10 2010.

After the conclusion of the 2009-2010 gas dispute, Russo-Turkmenistani relations underwent a rapid process of normalisation. In the aftermath of a summit with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (March 15-16, 2010), Berdymukhammedov reportedly stated that “Turkmenistan will always have enough gas for Russia”.²³ This declaration, when observed in conjunction with the dynamics that led to the resolution of the gas crisis, allows us to draw an important conclusion

¹⁸ Bruce Pannier, “Pipeline explosion raises tensions between Turkmenistan, Russia,” *RFE/RL Feature Article*, April 13, 2009.

¹⁹ “Turkmen gas pipeline explosion ‘purely technical’: Russian Foreign Minister,” *OSI Turkmenistan Project Weekly Report* 14 (April 11-16, 2009).

²⁰ See: “Turkmen President orders investigation into pipeline blast,” *RFE/RL News*, April 13, 2009.

²¹ “Russia’s *Gazprom* reach terms on price of Turkmen gas, pipeline construction,” *OSI Turkmenistan Project Weekly Report* 1 (January 1-9, 2009).

²² “Ob itogakh vizita delegatsii OAO ‘Gazprom’ v Turkmenistan [On the outcomes of the visit of *Gazprom* delegation to Turkmenistan],” *Gazprom website*, <<http://www.gazprom.ru/press/news/2009/december/article73466/>> (April 20, 2010).

²³ “Stenogramma Zaiavleniia dlia SCI ministra Inostrannykh Del Rossii S.V. Lavrova po itogam peregovorov s zamestitel'em predsdatelia Kabineta ministrov Turkmenistana, ministrom Inostrannykh Del R.O. Merdeovym, Ashgabat, 16 marta 2010 goda [Transcript of the declaration of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov on the outcome of the meeting with the vice-president of the Cabinet of Minister of Turkmenistan, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan R.O Meredov, Ashgabat, March 16, 2010],” Russian ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/o/EC4DC9EE5F7E161FC32576E8005C2A77> (April 8, 2010).

on the current state of the relationship between Moscow and Ashgabat. In spite of Berdymukhammedov's manifest plans for a significant expansion of Turkmenistan's energy partnership network, the intricately interdependent nature of Turkmenistan's relations with Russia does not allow for a drastic reduction of Moscow's share in Turkmenistani gas trade. As Russia's political support for any Turkmenistani regime is traditionally dependent on the intensity of the bilateral gas trade, Berdymukhammedov will carefully avoid energy policies that could significantly damage Russian energy interests. In other words, Moscow's political support is inseparable from Turkmenistan's participation in the Russian monopoly over the Eurasian gas trade.

It is in this context that the emerging Sino-Turkmenistani partnership is acquiring key relevance for both Turkmenistani domestic politics and regional energy dynamics. In the post-Niyazov era, energy cooperation between China and Turkmenistan has been regulated by a landmark gas deal signed in 2007,²⁴ which determined the role of the China National Petroleum Company in the development of a number of gas fields in the Lebap *velayat* (eastern Turkmenistan) and in the construction works of a major pipeline.²⁵ The provisions included in this agreement came to fruition with the inauguration of the Central Asia-China pipeline on December 14 2009.

In the Niyazov era, the completion of virtually all pipeline projects involving Turkmenistan "proved difficult and in a number of cases, extremely unlikely".²⁶ In contrast, the Central Asia-China pipeline reached completion in a rather short timeframe. The pipeline was inaugurated in a historic ceremony held in Saman-Depe (eastern Turkmenistan) and attended by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - the project's major stakeholders.²⁷ This new pipeline - not expected to operate at full capacity until 2012, when it will carry 30-40 bcm of gas - marks "the first time in more than a decade that a pipeline has been constructed to pump gas out of the region, and the biggest-ever effort to export Central Asian gas without using Russian

²⁴ The 2007 contract followed from a major Sino-Turkmenistani energy deal signed by Niyazov in April 2006. For details, see: Daniel Kimmage, "Central Asia: Turkmenistan-China Pipeline Project has Far-Reaching Implications," *RFE/RL Feature Article*, April 10, 2006.

²⁵ Luca Anceschi, "Analyzing Turkmen foreign policy in the Berdymukhammedov era," *China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6, 4 (2008), p. 45.

²⁶ Anceschi, *Turkmenistan's foreign policy*, p. 93.

²⁷ The Central Asia-China pipeline - whose total length is of approximately 1,833 kilometres - starts at Saman-Depe, in the proximity of the Turkmenistani-Uzbek border, and then runs through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to end at Horgos (north-western Xinjiang).

routes”.²⁸ Beside its obvious implications for the geopolitics of Central Asian gas, the entry online of the Central Asia-China pipeline represents a watershed in the Sino-Turkmenistani relationship. Prior to 2009, economic cooperation between the two parties was rather insignificant: as the total value of Chinese direct investments in Turkmenistan for 2002 was only US\$300,000,²⁹ in 2005 total imports from China accounted for less than 1 per cent of Turkmenistani total imports.³⁰ These meagre figures are now part of the past, as massive amounts of Chinese investments are flowing into Turkmenistan: while a loan of US\$4 billion represented Beijing’s contribution to the China-Central Asia pipeline project, another loan of US\$3 billion was granted to the Turkmenistani government to develop the giant gas field of South Yolotan in June 2009.³¹

While Sino-Turkmenistani military cooperation developed quite substantially under Niyazov,³² the Berdymukhammedov era witnessed the emergence of an embryonic political cooperation between China and Turkmenistan. In this field, the key document has been represented by the “Joint Declaration between the People’s Republic of China and Turkmenistan”, signed during Berdymukhammedov’s official visit to China in September 2008. In the 13-point declaration, China expressed its appreciation for “the remarkable progress made by Turkmenistan in nation-building and social and economic development”, while the Turkmenistani government “applauded the outstanding achievements China has made after 30 years of reform and opening-up”.³³ Such rhetorical statements point out the emergence of a Sino-Turkmenistani political entente, which - as it did in the Niyazov years - continues to be essentially based on the similar understanding of authoritarian practices

²⁸ Bruce Pannier, “New Turkmen-China Pipeline Breaks Russia’s Hold over Central Asian Gas,” *RFE/RL News*, December 14, 2009. For other accounts of the pipeline’s inauguration, see also “China president opens Turkmenistan gas pipeline,” *BBC News*, December 14 2009; “Cross-border pipeline pulls region closer,” *The China Daily*, December 15, 2009.

²⁹ Hsiu-Ling Wu and Chien-Hsun Chen, “The prospects for regional economic integration between China and the Central Asia countries,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, 7 (2004), p. 1075.

³⁰ Anceschi, *Turkmenistan’s foreign policy*, p. 80.

³¹ “China loans \$3 billion for gas field development,” *OSI Turkmenistan Project Weekly Report* 23 (June 5-11, 2009).

³² For background information on past developments and future prospects in the Sino-Turkmenistani military cooperation, see: Sébastien Peyrouse, “Military Cooperation between China and Central Asia: Breakthrough, Limits, and Prospects,” *China Brief* 10, 5 (2010), pp. 10-14.

³³ For the full text, see: “Joint Declaration between the People’s Republic of China and Turkmenistan,” <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/2649/t511329.htm>> (April 14, 2010).

that is shared by the leaderships in Ashgabat and Beijing.³⁴ This represents a new evolution in the relationship's framework. While in the Niyazov era cooperation between China and Turkmenistan was essentially limited to minor energy projects, the Berdymukhammedov era witnessed an increase in the significance of energy cooperation between the two parties, as well as the emergence of a more political tone in the relationship. In other words, China is acquiring more and more centrality in the Turkmenistani foreign policy system.

Turkmenistan and the West

The formulation of the EU Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia and, to a lesser degree, the inauguration of Barack Obama as President of the United States offered new opportunities in the development of the relationships between Turkmenistan and the West. An analogous determinant - energy security - led Brussels and Washington to re-engage the Central Asian region with renewed intensity. Interestingly, both the European Union and the United States have considered the strengthening of their energy cooperation with Central Asia (and Turkmenistan in particular) as an adequate response to a specific challenge, namely the diversification of their import options and the ensuing dilution of energy dependency on Russia or the Persian Gulf. When it came to approaching the Central Asian states to develop bilateral energy cooperation, decision-makers in Brussels and Washington were nevertheless faced with a similar prioritisation dilemma: the European Union and the United States had to negotiate their pragmatic interests in Central Asia with the promotion of good governance in the region. This conundrum acquired particular relevance in the context of the relationships established with Turkmenistan, on the basis of (1) the significant potential of Turkmenistan's energy reserves; (2) the authoritarian essence of the Turkmenistani regime, and (3) the traditional reluctance with which the Turkmenistani elite has responded to external pressures for political liberalisation. Conditionality, insulation, energy security and regime stability became therefore the main forces behind recent developments in Turkmenistan's relations with the West.

In the Berdymukhammedov era, the European Union has represented the Western actor that engaged Turkmenistan with more regularity and through a more diversified range of initiatives. Turkmenistan - which Michael Denison rightly considered as "the indispensable state in any

³⁴ On this note, see also: Slavomír Horák, Jan Šír, "China as the emerging superpower in Central Asia: The view from Ashkhabad," *China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6, 2 (2008), pp. 75-88.

commercial gas trading between the EU and Central Asia”³⁵ - occupies a pivotal place in EU energy strategy in the region: it is only through the establishment of a successful energy partnership with Ashgabat that the European Union will make substantial progress towards the achievement of the objectives outlined in the 2007 Strategy for a New Partnership and in the Second Strategic Energy Review (2009).³⁶

The conditionalities imposed so far from different EU organs have complicated the normalisation of the EU-Turkmenistani relationship, particularly as regards the ratification of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the European Union and Turkmenistan. Although the European Parliament is yet to ratify the PCA, on the basis of its concerns for the abysmal human rights record of the Turkmenistani regime,³⁷ the approval (April 22, 2009) of an Interim Trade Agreement (ITA) between the parties appears a positive development in the establishment of fully-fledged relations between Brussels and Ashgabat. To further expose the tensions between pragmatism and good governance that characterises EU policy *vis-à-vis* Turkmenistan, it must be remarked that the approval of the ITA represented the outcome of long negotiations between different EU institutions, namely the Commission and the Parliament. Significant conditionality was, in fact, attached to the Parliament’s green light to the agreement. According to the approved draft, suspension measures are to be activated at any time if the Turkmenistani government does fail to promote a comprehensive programme of political-economic reforms: in this sense, the EU Parliament underlined that the ITA ought not to be considered as a “blank cheque [for the Turkmenistani regime], [but] as a potential lever to strengthen the reform process in Turkmenistan”.³⁸

Similar measures are also included in the new strategy for Turkmenistan approved in April 2010 by the Board of Directors of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The EBRD Strategy - whose core focus is connected to the strengthening of Turkmenistan’s private sector - will be implemented exclusively against a background of political and economic reforms introduced by the Turkmenistani government, with particular emphasis on the overall

³⁵ Michael Denison, “The EU and Central Asia: Commercialising the energy relationship,” *EUCAM Working Paper* 2, June 2009, p. 9.

³⁶ See also the interviews to Pierre Morel, the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, January 30, 2009, p. 6 and February 2, 2009, pp. 6-10.

³⁷ See: *European Parliament resolution on Turkmenistan, including Central Asia*, P5_TA(2003)0467, October 23, 2003.

³⁸ *European Parliament resolution of 22 April 2009 on the Interim Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan*, P6_TA(2009)0252, April 22, 2009.

transparency of the Turkmenistani budget.³⁹ The prospects for the success of the conditionality attached to the latter context are nevertheless difficult to assess. External demands for qualitative improvement in the budgetary information provided by Turkmenistani authorities - particularly as regards the redistribution of gas revenues in the overall state budget - have been traditionally met with scarce enthusiasm in Ashgabat.⁴⁰

In principle, more direct pressure on Ashgabat could be exerted by the European Union through the EU-Turkmenistani Human Rights Dialogue, whose institutionalisation has represented a major feature of the Strategy for a New Partnership. To date, two rounds of consultations have been organised in this context. The first dialogue (Ashgabat, June 24 2008) represented a very controversial exercise. While the human rights talks were held, the Turkmenistani regime proceeded with the arrest, harassment, and torture of Sazak Durdymuradov, a Turkmenistani journalist and regular contributor to *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*.⁴¹ After mounting international pressure, Durdymuradov was finally released on July 4 2008. Interestingly, official EU and Turkmenistani accounts of the meeting failed to report (or simply comment on) the incident: whereas the European Union highlighted the “constructive atmosphere”⁴² of the dialogue, the Turkmenistani official press predictably remarked on the support that the European Union had extended to Berdymukhammedov’s reformist programme.⁴³ While the third dialogue is scheduled for mid-2010, the second round of talks - held in Brussels in June 2009 - witnessed the broadening of the range of invited participants, as EU officials met with Turkmenistani human rights organisations in the lead-up to the government-to-government meeting.⁴⁴

³⁹ EBRD, *Strategy for Turkmenistan as approved by the Board of Directors at its meeting on 23 March 2010*, <<http://www.ebrd.com/about/strategy/country/turk/strategy.pdf>> (April 9, 2010).

⁴⁰ See: “Turkmenistan ‘shocked’ by new terms from Europe,” *OSI Turkmenistan Project Weekly Report* 25 (June 19-25, 2009).

⁴¹ Gulnoza Saidazimova, “Activists, journalists harassed ahead of EU-Turkmen meeting,” *RFE/RL News*, June 24, 2008.

⁴² “Presidency Press Statement: EU and Turkmenistan hold first round of human rights talks,” <http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/June/o626MZZ_Turkmenistan.html> (April 7, 2010). See also RFE/RL’s interview with Riina Kionka, the Personal Representative on Human Rights for the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (“EU official optimistic about Turkmen rights situation, despite setbacks,” *RFE/RL News*, June 27, 2008).

⁴³ *Neitral’nyi Turkmenistan*, June 26, 2008, p. 1.

⁴⁴ *EU-Turkmenistan human rights dialogue*, Council of the European Union Press Release 11618/09, June 30, 2009.

Official assessments of the success encountered by the EU-Turkmenistani Human Rights Dialogue do not seem to match the Turkmenistani political reality. To begin, Turkmenistani official sources have observed how the establishment of the dialogue supported the government's efforts in "strengthening the supremacy of law"⁴⁵ within the domestic political landscape. There is, nevertheless, insufficient evidence to maintain that substantial improvements in the regime's respect for the civil and political liberties of the wider population have been stimulated by the dialogues. At the same time, Pierre Morel, the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, emphasised that, in the context of the EU-Turkmenistani human rights talks, the Berdymukhammedov regime has showed "readiness to discuss even the difficult issues".⁴⁶ In spite of Morel's positive assessment, two key constraints have been set by the Turkmenistani regime in the negotiations for the dialogues' agendas and the range of invited participants. On the one hand, the voice of independent non-governmental actors has so far remained absent in the human rights talks with the European Union. Secondly, discussions held within the Human Rights Dialogue could only be regarded as "evasive",⁴⁷ as the Berdymukhammedov regime appears heavily involved in setting the agenda of the meetings. Paradoxically, it is the choice of placing structured dialogues with the national regime at the centrepiece of the EU human dimension action in Turkmenistan that appears problematic in relation to future developments *vis-à-vis* good governance.

The institutionalisation of the EU-Turkmenistani Human Rights Dialogue seems to be primarily addressing more pragmatic priorities. For Turkmenistan, it plays a key role in the international image-making mechanism devised by the regime. For Brussels, it is emerging as a crucial tool in the legitimisation of the EU policy in Central Asia: human rights talks with Turkmenistan (and those established with the other Central Asian states more generally) remained indispensable to pay lip service to the promotion of good governance in the domestic political context while representing the "fig leaf behind which [...] to privilege economic cooperation".⁴⁸

The institutionalisation of human rights talks and the attachment of conditionality to cooperation offers extended to Turkmenistan could nevertheless only mitigate the embarrassment resulting from

⁴⁵ State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH), "Ashgabat hosted the 9th meeting of the Turkmenistan-European Union Joint Committee," June 27, 2008.

⁴⁶ "Exclusive interview: Ambassador Pierre Morel, EU Special Representative for Central Asia," <<http://www.newscentralasia.net/moreNews.php?nID=60>> (April 12, 2010).

⁴⁷ *Into Eurasia - Monitoring the European Union's Central Asia Strategy* (Brussels-Madrid: CEPS-FRIDE, 2010), p. 68.

⁴⁸ *EU-Turkmenistan: The authorities must move from words to action*, IOR 61/008/2008, June 23, 2008.

improvements in the relations between the European Union and the Berdymukhammedov regime. The latter proposition is acquiring increasing relevance in the interactive frameworks established by individual EU members with Turkmenistan. *Reporters sans Frontières* highlighted the secrecy that surrounded Berdymukhammedov's visits to Italy (November 2009)⁴⁹ and France (February 2010),⁵⁰ reporting the embarrassment of the two governments, which repeatedly denied that the visits were going to take place while ensuring that details of Berdymukhammedov's schedules were not transmitted to Italian and French news outlets.

Criticisms expressed by member states or European non-governmental actors are in evident contradiction with a number of EU official declarations on Turkmenistan, which have instead offered positive evaluations of Berdymukhammedov's reformist input. In asking the EU Parliament to give its assent to the ITA with Turkmenistan, Benita Ferrero-Waldner - then EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy - argued that "[A]fter the election of President Berdymukhammedov, Turkmenistan entered a new development stage, as a significant number of positive political signs emerged"⁵¹ within the domestic political landscape. In the EU institutional context, other positive assessments of Turkmenistan under Berdymukhammedov have been produced in the aftermath of the first EU Foreign Ministers Troika Meeting with the Central Asian countries⁵² and, in September 2009, by the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council.⁵³ The tones and contents of these statements suggest that the EU perception of Turkmenistani authoritarianism is rapidly shifting, as is also indicated by declining EU criticism of Turkmenistani authoritarianism. Similar traits have also come to the fore in the context of U.S. official assessment of Turkmenistani domestic politics. In following up policy practices that emerged in the late Bush era,⁵⁴ the

⁴⁹ "Mr. Berlusconi, è o non è frequentabile il regime turkmeno?" *RSF Press Release*, November 25, 2009, <http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/CP_Turkmenistan_25-11_Ita.pdf> (April 11, 2010).

⁵⁰ James Delly, "Turkmenistan: Berdymukhamedov seeks prestige in Paris," *Eurasia Insight*, February 3, 2010.

⁵¹ Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Déclaration de la Commission: Turkménistan - Accord Commercial Intérimaire*, SPEECH/09/145, Strasbourg, March 25, 2009.

⁵² *Council Conclusions on Central Asia*, 2976th External Relations Council meeting, Luxembourg, April 27, 2007, Press Release, <www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/CentralAsia%2023.04.pdf> (April 11, 2010).

⁵³ *EU statement in the OSCE in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat*, Ambassador Arsim Zekolli, September 3, 2009.

⁵⁴ In commenting on Berdymukhammedov's reformist input, Richard Boucher - the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs - remarked that "[In Turkmenistan] [T]here is some change underway; we've seen some positive steps already.

Obama Administration is regularly toning down its criticism of the human rights record of the Berdymukhammedov regime. In the 2009 meeting between Hillary Clinton - the U.S. Secretary of State - and President Berdymukhammedov, the issue of human rights was not raised by the U.S. Administration. The absence of the human dimension from the US-Turkmenistani bilateral agenda was motivated by time constraints and, rather strikingly, its allegedly scarce relevance for the Turkmenistani political landscape.⁵⁵ Reference to the respect of human rights is also missing from the 2010 *Nawruz* address delivered by Secretary Clinton on behalf of President Obama.⁵⁶

The Turkmenistani elite has undoubtedly interpreted in a positive way declining Western criticism for its human rights record. For Berdymukhammedov and his associates, this development became equivalent to regime consolidation. More importantly, it allowed Turkmenistani foreign policy to achieve an unprecedented end: the domestic political landscape was to be insulated through enhanced integration in international affairs and not through calculated withdrawal into strict isolationism.

It seems unrealistic to argue that shifts in the EU and U.S. official perceptions of Turkmenistani authoritarianism have followed substantial improvements in the regime's human rights record, given the scarce reformist input of the Berdymukhammedov regime. To be fully appreciated, the more conciliatory attitudes that Washington and Brussels have assumed in relation to post-Niyazov Turkmenistan have to be discussed in the context of the engagement strategies that the European Union and the United States had devised with a view to pursuing their respective energy priorities in Central Asia. A substantial increase in energy cooperation with Turkmenistan is viewed by the Obama Administration as an essential tool to strengthen Washington's influence over decision-making circles in Ashgabat, to ultimately achieve

And what we're looking to do is to support that process of change broadly and substantively to make sure that it benefits the citizens of Turkmenistan". See: "Turkmenistan: Change and the Future," <<http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/2008/105714.htm>> (April 21, 2010).

⁵⁵ Richard O. Blake - U.S. Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs - explained failure in raising the human rights issue as follow: "It's just in these bilats, we've got kind of - we've only got a certain amount of time, and so we touch on the most important things. And human rights is not as big an issue in Turkmenistan as it is in some of the other Central Asian countries". See: "Turkmenistan Bilateral Meeting," <<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/remarks/129450.htm>> (April 19, 2010).

⁵⁶ Statement by Secretary Clinton: Bahar Bayramy Greeting to the People of Turkmenistan, <<http://turkmenistan.usembassy.gov/statement20100319.html>> (April 21, 2010).

an objective that successive U.S. Administrations have failed to attain.⁵⁷ As for the European Union, it is in relation to the energy dimension that EU interests *vis-à-vis* Turkmenistan have been traditionally formulated: the energy sector accounts for approximately 90 per cent of EU imports from Turkmenistan.⁵⁸

In general terms, common objectives seem to underpin future prospects for EU-Turkmenistani and US-Turkmenistani energy cooperation. EU and Turkmenistani decision-makers have framed convergent energy security concepts.⁵⁹ While Turkmenistan's energy security has been associated traditionally with the ability to ensure a regular flow of revenues from the exploration, processing and, ultimately, export of gas resources, the European Union has more recently identified the establishment of a "Southern Gas Corridor for supply from Caspian and Middle Eastern sources"⁶⁰ as an essential step to increase its energy security. Turkmenistan's focus on diversification of energy exports seems also to be consistent with current U.S. policies, which are focused on "encouraging multiple pipelines out of the Central Asian region".⁶¹ Against this background, the deepening of energy cooperation with Turkmenistan might represent a key factor in meeting a large number of EU and U.S. energy demands, at least those that Brussels and Washington had formulated in the Central Asian context.

As per other aspects of the bilateral partnership, the European Union had assumed a leadership position in the promotion of energy cooperation between the West and post-Niyazov Turkmenistan. A number of decisive steps to consolidate the EU-Turkmenistani energy partnership were made in 2008. Following gas talks with EU officials (April 10 2008), President Berdymukhammedov announced that an

⁵⁷ Throughout the post-Soviet era, Turkmenistan remained marginal in the U.S. strategy in Central Asia, as confirmed by an in-depth observation of Washington's financial commitment in Turkmenistan, which, in the period 1992-2007, failed to substantially take-off. See: Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, "Foreign Operations Appropriated Assistance: Turkmenistan Fact Sheet, January 20, 2009," <<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/103639.htm>> (April 20, 2010).

⁵⁸ Sébastien Peyrouse, "Business and trade relationships between the EU and Central Asia," *EUCAM Working Paper* 1, June 2009, p. 5.

⁵⁹ "Our societies and therefore our continuing economic development depend on the secure and reliable flow of energy" (Günther H. Oettinger, *Remarks by Commissioner Oettinger at the Turkmenistan Gas Conference*, SPEECH/10, Ashgabat, April 14, 2010).

⁶⁰ European Commission, Directorate General for Energy and Trade, *Memo - EU Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan: 2nd Strategic Energy Review*, <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/strategies/2008/doc/2008_II_ser2/strategic_energy_review_memo.pdf> (April 17, 2010).

⁶¹ See the remarks of U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State George Krol at the International Gas Conference held in Ashgabat on April 23-24, 2009 as summarised in: Jim Nichol. *Turkmenistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, CRS Report for Congress 7-5700, September 10, 2009, p. 9.

annual gas delivery of 10 bcm per year would reach the European Union from 2009 onwards.⁶² This unprecedented move - which is nevertheless yet to translate into practical action - was soon followed (May 26 2008) by the finalisation of a more comprehensive “Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation in the field of Energy”,⁶³ which essentially provided a reference framework for the development of the bilateral energy relationship. In spite of these positive trends, the commercialisation of the EU-Turkmenistani energy partnership might still represent a challenging enterprise. To date, the leaderships have successfully fleshed out, in bilateral declarations or more comprehensive energy deals, the matching nature of their energy interests. Nevertheless, the EU-Turkmenistani energy cooperation is yet to reach a crucial stage, namely the development of an all-inclusive agenda to convert declarations of intent into policy outcomes. Convergent perspectives, in other words, are yet to be translated into detailed initiatives or clear-cut operational strategies.

A large degree of uncertainty surrounds the identification of viable routes to move Turkmenistani gas across the Caspian Sea and then into Central and Western Europe. As we have seen, EU decision-makers have placed energy cooperation with Turkmenistan in a wider context: the development of the Southern Gas Corridor. Three pipelines projects will form the key arteries for the corridor: White Stream; Nabucco - connecting Erzurum (Turkey) with Baumgarten an der March (Austria) via Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary - and the ITGI (Turkey-Greece-Italy Interconnector Pipeline). The total capacity of the latter two pipelines is expected to reach approximately 40 bcm per year in 2020,⁶⁴ whereas White Stream’s planned capacity is to exceed 30 bcm per year.

The European Union is particularly keen to involve Turkmenistan in the Nabucco project - a 3,300 km long pipeline, whose construction costs will exceed US\$11 billion. Turkmenistan’s participation is regarded as highly critical to the overall success of Nabucco, as the European Union is eager to finalise a comprehensive supply deal with the Turkmenistani government. Interestingly, the United States has also expressed a strong commitment to the Nabucco project, insofar as it contributes to the strengthening of the energy security of the European Union, which Richard L. Morningstar, Special Envoy of the U.S. Secretary of State for Eurasian Energy, identified as one of the key outcomes for U.S. energy

⁶² Ahto Lobjakas, “Turkmenistan: Gas-export offer seen as ‘breakthrough’ by EU,” *RFE/RL News*, April 15, 2008.

⁶³ For the full draft, see: *Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation in the field of Energy between the European Union and Turkmenistan*, <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/international/international_cooperation/doc/mou_turkmenistan.pdf> (April 17, 2010).

⁶⁴ Denison, “The EU and Central Asia: Commercialising the energy relationship,” p. 6.

policy in Eurasia.⁶⁵ A multilevel strategy, which saw the involvement of different stakeholders (the European Union, its member states, and the European firms involved in the Nabucco consortium⁶⁶), has been devised in order to seal Ashgabat's commitment to the project - construction is due to commence in 2011. In the first three weeks of April 2010, in addition to the official visit of Günther H. Oettinger (the EU Commissioner for Energy), no less than six delegations from EU member states - Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom - visited Ashgabat to discuss bilateral energy cooperation.⁶⁷ In most cases,⁶⁸ discussions focused on the Turkmenistani involvement in the Nabucco project. Massive government presence has been complemented by the action of private members of the consortium: in April 2010, the German energy concern RWE had reportedly engaged in "intensive negotiations"⁶⁹ with the Turkmenistani government to secure Ashgabat's participation in the Nabucco project.

Ambivalent prospects surround the future of the Nabucco project. It is perhaps the scope of the project itself that restricts its overall feasibility. The completion of the ratification processes for the Nabucco Intergovernmental Agreement involving Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Austria has contributed to dissipating doubts about the overall commitment of transit states,⁷⁰ after Turkey had adopted a rather inflexible attitude towards the determination of transit prices.⁷¹ It is, nevertheless, in relation to the identification of the pipeline's major suppliers that the future of Nabucco will be most likely determined. In this context, a crucial position is occupied by the degree of commitment

⁶⁵ Richard L. Morningstar, "Remarks at the Center for American Progress: 2010 Outlook for Eurasian Energy, January 28, 2010," http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2010/01/av/morningstar_remarks.pdf (April 25, 2010).

⁶⁶ These include: RWE AG (Germany), Botas AS (Turkey), Bulgarian Energy Holding EAD (Bulgaria), Transgaz S.A. (Romania), MOL Plc (Hungary), and OMV Gas & Power (Austria).

⁶⁷ "Turkmenistan: Six European delegations to visit Ashgabat in April," *Eurasianet News Briefs*, April 5, 2010.

⁶⁸ The exception to this norm was constituted by the visit of the CEO of ENI, the Italian energy concern, Paolo Scaroni. ENI is in fact a major partner in South Stream, a Russian sponsored pipeline project that is generally considered a major competitor to Nabucco.

⁶⁹ "Nabucco talks 'Jogging in place' - Opposition Website," *OSI Turkmenistan Project Weekly Report* 12 (March 19-25, 2010).

⁷⁰ "Nabucco consortium welcomes ratification of Intergovernmental Agreement by the Turkish Parliament," Nabucco Project Press Release, http://www.nabucco-pipeline.com/cms/dbfs.php?file=dbfs:/resources/IGARatification_24022010_engldoc.pdf (April 20, 2010).

⁷¹ Bruce Pannier, "Hopes raised anew about future of Nabucco gas pipeline project," *RFE/RL Feature Article*, March 16, 2010.

that the Turkmenistani government will extend to the Nabucco consortium.

To date, repeated messages of ambiguity have been conveyed by the Turkmenistani elite in relation to Turkmenistan's role in Nabucco. On the one hand, Berdymukhammedov had never categorically excluded Turkmenistani involvement in the project, and, to this end, has continued to receive Western governmental and non-governmental delegations to discuss supply deals. On the other hand, the Turkmenistani regime has never openly committed to participate in Nabucco, mostly on the basis of the perceived negative impact that the finalisation of the project (and more generally of the Southern gas corridor) could have upon relations with Moscow. Ashgabat's open support to Nabucco - more than Turkmenistan's participation in the Central Asia-China pipeline - would effectively break two major Russian monopolies, namely those that *Gazprom* is currently exerting over Turkmenistani energy resources and the wider Eurasian gas market. Incidentally, this context offers a useful interpretative key for the repeated efforts made by the Obama Administration to tone down the perceived 'anti-*Gazprom*' essence of Nabucco.⁷²

Berdymukhammedov's oscillations in the Nabucco context are reminiscent of the ambivalence that characterised Niyazov's attitude during the unfruitful negotiations for the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline.⁷³ Recurrent short-term strategies - in this case those through which successive Turkmenistani regimes have targeted the West - are indicative of the influence that domestic imperatives continue to exert over Turkmenistani foreign policy. Regime consolidation occupies a central place in Turkmenistani decision-making *vis-à-vis* Nabucco. Obscuring the regime's real intentions in relation to Turkmenistan's involvement in the project is necessary to attract the interest of the West without alarming Russia - which remains a virtually irreplaceable source of support for Berdymukhammedov and his associates. In order to attract Turkmenistani participation in the project, European stakeholders had deliberately avoided any move that might be interpreted negatively in Ashgabat, including those connected with the promotion of good governance in the Turkmenistani political landscape. As the Turkmenistani regime achieved domestic insulation through heightened international engagement, the net effect of the strategies implemented by Turkmenistani and European actors in the Nabucco negotiations has been represented by a substantial strengthening in the international position of the Berdymukhammedov regime.

⁷² See: Morningstar, *op. cit.*, and: Joshua Kucera, "Caspian energy: Washington trying new tack on Nabucco project," *Eurasianet Business & Economics*, February 1, 2010.

⁷³ On this note, see: Anceschi, *Turkmenistan's foreign policy*, pp. 90-91.

Concluding Observations

Three main forces - external conditionality, domestic impermeability, and energy security - endeavoured to influence more directly Turkmenistani foreign policy in the post-Niyazov era. Berdymukhammedov balanced the impacts of these influencing forces to ultimately deliver both continuity and change in relation to foreign policy-making. In a striking continuity with praxis consolidated in the Niyazov years, Turkmenistan's external policies remained closely concerned with regime stability. In a significant shift from policy positions consolidated in the Niyazov years, isolation came to be perceived as a condition detrimental for regime stability. Foreign policy had therefore to achieve two apparently conflicting ends: the expansion of the Turkmenistani partnership network; and the containment of the influences exerted by external political factors on the domestic landscape.

New structural conditions, emerged in response to changed international perceptions of the reliability of Turkmenistani gas reserves and as a result of new energy security priorities identified by Western actors, facilitated Berdymukhammedov's calculated opening to the external world, which led to the establishment of new energy partnerships with China and the European Union. Interestingly, the strengthening of these partnerships came without a price tag, as China - on the basis of its authoritarian essence - and the European Union - which opted to prioritise interests over values in its dealings with Turkmenistan - failed to attach any significant conditionality to cooperation offers extended to Ashgabat. As a result, Turkmenistan continued to be insulated from external pressures without remaining isolated from the rest of the international community.

New partnerships were not developed independently from regime survival, which remained a core objective for Berdymukhammedov's foreign policy. The regime's assessment of Russia's reactions to Turkmenistani foreign policy initiatives remained, in this sense, a central foreign policy concern. It is in this context that it is possible to address the "eternal question"⁷⁴ advanced by Marlène Laruelle: is Russia losing its influence in Turkmenistan? *Prima facie*, it could be said that Berdymukhammedov's foreign policy had significantly eroded the Kremlin's influence over the Turkmenistani political-economic landscape. *Gazprom's* monopoly over Turkmenistani gas has been unquestionably broken, as the expansion of Turkmenistan's gas network has been carried out through partnerships with a number of non-Russian partners, including the China National Petroleum Company. On closer inspection, it can be argued that, in the Berdymukhammedov era,

⁷⁴ Marlène Laruelle, "Russia in Central Asia: Old history, new challenges?" *EUCAM Working Paper* 3, September 2008, p. 8.

external policies sought regime consolidation through further engagement with the external world, as long as such engagement is not considered to be detrimental to the relationship with Russia. The case of the Turkmenistani attitude in the Nabucco negotiations is illustrative of the last proposition. As long as Nabucco appears to be representing interests that are in competition to those expressed by the Kremlin via *Gazprom*, Berdymukhammedov will continue to procrastinate regarding Turkmenistan's involvement in the project. Russia's evaluation of its role in Central Asia is nevertheless changing, as confirmed by Moscow's inability to respond to China's economic advancement in the region. This might explain the Kremlin's attitude in respect to the finalisation of the Central Asia-China pipeline.

In conclusion, Russia retains its special role in Turkmenistani foreign policy-making, as the Kremlin continues to occupy a unique function in the power maintenance strategy framed in Ashgabat. Nevertheless, significant portions of Turkmenistan's foreign policy are no longer exclusively formulated in relation to the Kremlin. Whether this trend will evolve into the institutionalisation of disengagement from Russia as a key foreign policy objective - as was the case in the early 1990s - will depend almost exclusively on the emergence of evolutionary developments in the regime survival mechanism devised by Berdymukhammedov and his associates.

China's Policy on the Conflict in Afghanistan

Pan Guang^{*}

Afghan-Pakistani Chaos Threatening China's Security

China has traditionally maintained friendly relations with Afghanistan, while Pakistan is a long-term ally of China. No matter who comes to power in Pakistan, whether the leader is a civil official or military officer, Pakistan is sure to follow a policy of friendliness towards China. The most worrisome scenario for China would be the lack of a strong leader or strong central government in Pakistan, where the situation could easily spiral out of control to the point where extremist or terrorist forces seize power, like what happened in Afghanistan in 1996 with the Taliban.

Such a scenario would not only be a disaster for countries in the region including China, but would also present a serious challenge to global peace and development. This judgment is based on the fact that the Taliban and al-Qaeda are very active in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, and almost all the key figures of these terrorist groups have developed out of the conflict in Afghanistan; this area remains the main base and spiritual pillar of global terrorism including the Eastern Turkistan terrorist groups that undermine China's stability. Cross-border crimes like drug-trafficking and weapons smuggling also stem from this hotbed. Moreover, Pakistan is in possession of nuclear weapons. The Afghan-Pakistani chaos poses serious threats to China mainly in three aspects:

First, the stability and development of Western China, and Xinjiang in particular, would be directly threatened. The instability of the Afghan-Pakistani region raises the probability that certain tribal areas, near China's borders, could fall under Taliban control, while groups like the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement could resurrect themselves in the

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¹ Xinhua News Agency, Hague, March 31, 2009.

area, and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (the Islamic Party of Liberation), another extremist organization, could further its expansion. If these developments occur, ethnic and religious extremist sentiments and conflicts in Xinjiang would increase.

Second, China's energy security would be compromised. Some economically viable options are being considered for transporting oil and gas resources from the Middle East and the Caspian Sea to China, India and other countries via pipelines running through Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the Afghan-Pakistani situation will certainly nullify all those efforts that substantially shorten the transportation routes between the Eurasian energy source and its Pacific end-users. Furthermore, any serious turmoil in Afghanistan and Pakistan would disrupt China's energy imports from Central Asia, which is actually the only land-based energy transportation route for the country.

Third, the security of Chinese citizens and companies in the area would be under threat. China and Pakistan are well known to have close political, economic and military cooperation. Meanwhile, China has now become the largest investor in Afghanistan, with thousands of Chinese workers and engineers engaged in various infrastructure projects there. Clearly, the possibility of chaos in Afghanistan and Pakistan would put Chinese individual lives and investments at serious risk.

China Shares Common Interests with the International Community in Central and South Asia

The international community shares common interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan in fighting terrorism and extremism, especially in the success of the anti-terror war in Afghanistan; preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including the proliferation of nuclear weapons and nuclear materials; promoting the economic, social and cultural development, and facilitating reconstruction in Afghanistan; jointly coping with non-conventional security threats like drug-trafficking, weapons smuggling, illegal immigration, cross-border crimes, environmental pollution, water resource shortage, and emergent public health issues.

At the same time, it is fairly normal to see competition in the region. For example, regarding the routing of oil and gas pipelines from the hinterland of Eurasia, Russia naturally wishes to see its traditional influence maintained, with pipelines passing through Russian territory; the U.S. and some European countries may expect that pipelines bypass Russia and lead to the west or the south through the Caucasus and Turkey or Afghanistan and Pakistan. Meanwhile, China is interested in seeing more pipelines going eastward. Even in the eastward flow, competition between China and Japan is evident; and even the Central

Asian states and Russia have different considerations regarding the destination and routing of their energy flow. However, whether as energy consuming nations or exporting nations, all agree that there should be dialogue and coordination alongside competition. It is critical that all participating parties work together to find mutually beneficial arrangements, in order to avoid the scenario of vicious competition leading to possible conflict.

Three points are thus important. First, all participating parties have recognized that regional security is a precondition for economic and cultural development, and have a common interest in safeguarding the security, stability and prosperity of Central and South Asia. Second, as there are cross investments and cross holdings of shares in each other's business operations, there is an increasing overlap of interests among companies and states engaged in economic development in the region. As stakeholders in the Central and South Asian market, all participants will have to follow the common rules of the game and act in a mutually responsible manner if they are to reap benefits from the business there. This means that any short-sighted act that hurts others' interests is likely to boomerang, and only reciprocity will ensure sustainable development and prosperity for all involved. Finally, the multi-directional pulling forces produced by competition will actually facilitate the interconnection and outward expansion of the Central and South Asian market networks, thus resulting in an ever more important role played by the region in the global economy. For example, although pipelines of different directions lead to different destinations and seem apparently competitive, they are after all connected in the hinterland of Eurasia, forming a network of energy supply that shortens considerably the transportation distance among East Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Russia, South Asia, and within the Eurasian continent itself. Viewed in this broad perspective, the new "Silk Road of energy transportation" will make Central and South Asia a second global energy hub next to the Middle East. This fact will become a critical factor in shaping the promising scenario of economic development in Central and South Asia.

What Role Can China Play on the Afghan Issue?

As elaborated by Wu Dawei, China's former deputy foreign minister, at the international conference on Afghanistan held in Den Hague in March 2009, China applies the following principles regarding its role on the Afghan issue: First, China is committed to working together with the international community for political stability, social progress, economic development, and the improvement of people's livelihood in Afghanistan. Second, China supports the efforts to combat all forms of terrorism, with a special emphasis on addressing those root causes that

give rise to terrorism in the first place. It is in this spirit that China endorses the implementation of the National Development Strategy put forth by the Afghan government, with the hope that this will lead towards sustainable peace and development and will finally remove the seed of growth for terrorism. Third, China would like to engage in various ways in the reconstruction process in Afghanistan. While providing assistance within its means, China encourages Chinese companies to participate in the Afghan reconstruction. Fourth, China supports the United Nations to play a chief role in coordinating the efforts of the international community for helping Afghanistan, and China supports the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to actively join in the resolution of the Afghan problem. Fifth, as a friendly neighbor, China is committed to developing with Afghanistan a relationship of neighborhood friendship and reciprocal cooperation on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.¹

The role that China is playing in Afghanistan is mainly economic for the moment. The Chinese government has provided Afghanistan a large amount of free economic aid, and will continue to do so over the next five years. Many daily necessities used by the Afghan people come from China, in particular, millions of bicycles. In the ongoing construction of Afghan infrastructure, China is the number one participant. Chinese workers have completed, and will continue to construct, highways, bridges, power facilities, hospitals, schools, etc. Furthermore with its investment of US\$4 billion, China ranks first among international investors in Afghan copper mining. The Afghan government has stated that it has chosen Chinese partners to develop its Ainak copper mine, which has the second largest estimated copper reserves in the world. This project, with the first phase of investment amounting to US\$2.9 billion, will generate over 6000 jobs for the local people and tax revenues of over US\$400 million each year.² Ahmad Baheen, the Afghan ambassador to China, believes that there is great potential in bilateral cooperation, with Afghanistan rich in natural and human resources and China possessing technology and funding. Enhancing economic cooperation between the two sides, according to the ambassador, will do tremendous good for both countries.³ During the state visit to China by Hamid Karzai in March 2010, China and Afghanistan reached a broad consensus regarding the promotion of bilateral economic and security cooperation, and a host of other new agreements for further cooperation were signed.⁴

In the meantime, China also plays an important role in coping with non-conventional security threats in the region. China has taken an active part in the efforts sponsored by the United Nations and assisted by

² *The Telegraph*, November 23, 2009.

³ *Oriental Morning Post*, August 20, 2009.

⁴ *People's Daily*, March 26, 2010.

the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in establishing an “anti-drug belt” around Afghanistan.⁵ China has also been actively involved in the international campaigns against terrorism and other cross-border crimes in Central and South Asia, including weapons smuggling, illegal immigration, etc.

Many people are speculating on the military role that China might play. In November 2008, then-British Prime Minister Gordon Brown formally invited China to send its troops to join the allied forces in Afghanistan. The spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in response to the invitation, remarked that, “aside from joining the peace-keeping operations authorized by the United Nations, China refrains from deploying troops overseas.”⁶ This could mean that if there is a UN-authorized peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan, China may consider the possibility of sending its troops there. During the recent military exercise of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization involving mainly Russia and the Chinese, General Chen Binde, China’s Military Chief of Staff, said that, when invited by the related foreign governments, China could send troops to Central Asian states for striking at terrorist and separatist forces.⁷ General Chen’s words have expressed another possibility that China could participate in anti-terror warfare within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. However, up till now, it is still not clear what role the Shanghai Cooperation Organization can play on the Afghan issue. Most observers around the world believe that it is almost impossible for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to form an allied military force for combating terrorism in Afghanistan. Particularly negative impacts could result from this scenario as the engagement of Russian soldiers in Afghanistan is deemed a highly sensitive issue.

It should be stressed that, even though China has not sent its troops to Afghanistan, the Chinese support for the allied forces in the country is highly visible. According to a 2009 report in *The Wall Street Journal*, American troops took risks to protect Chinese workers in an Afghan valley where the Taliban forces were very active, while the Chinese workers were taking risks to construct a highway urgently demanded by the American troops.⁸ While giving testimony at a Congressional hearing in May 2009, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense, Michael

⁵ Apparently, without the external support, the Afghan government can hardly live up to its commitment to curbing drug production and transaction. For the moment, two things are especially pressing, firstly, assisting the Afghan government in containing drug production and transaction; and secondly cutting off the channels whereby terrorist groups reap profits from drug transactions. The SCO states, as neighbors of Afghanistan, play important role in the international anti-drug belt built around Afghanistan within the UN framework.

⁶ Website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, November 18, 2008.

⁷ Phoenix TV (Hong Kong) Report, July 24, 2009.

⁸ *Wall Street Journal*, June 22, 2009.

Heaver said that the roads built and the optical fibers laid by the Chinese were conducive to the U.S.-promoted stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.⁹ China has also recently hosted minesweeping-training programs for Afghans, winning high praise from the international community.¹⁰

At present, the United States and NATO are considering three options for involving China in the logistic replenishment of Afghan missions. First, China is required to open the Wakhan Corridor on the Sino-Afghan border as a channel for providing logistic support for NATO troops. But the corridor, over 5,000 meters in altitude, has very challenging topography and climate, posing serious technical difficulties to any passage. Second, highways and railways in China are used for transporting goods into Kashmir, for eventual transport into Afghanistan. Third, goods are to be shipped to Gwadar, the Pakistani port constructed by the Chinese and managed by the Singaporeans, before they are transported into Afghanistan on land. For the moment, the second option is being focused upon by the two parties in negotiation.

Since the Obama administration took office, it has shown a ready inclination towards dialogue and multilateralism. Furthermore China, the U.S. and Europe are coordinating and cooperating more effectively in Central Asia on addressing a series of common challenges, as shown by the China-U.S. Joint Statement of December 17, 2009¹¹ and the China-EU Joint Statement of November 30, 2009.¹²

Conclusion

The anti-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan should not be waged by military means alone. Military means, while indispensable in quite a few cases, can never be a cure-all. The international community should also focus on the political, economic and social roots that have given rise to terrorism and extremism in the first place, and this broadened perspective reveals that, besides military means, economic, political and social measures must be taken as well for any long-term solution to be effective. China, as a neighbor of Afghanistan and Pakistan, would certainly like to work together with the international community in promoting this constructive process.

⁹ *Oriental Morning Post*, August 20, 2009.

¹⁰ *Xinhua News Agency*, November 9, 2009.

¹¹ *China – US Joint Statement*, Beijing, December 17, 2009.

¹² *China – EU Joint Statement*, Nanjing, November 30, 2009.

Towards a New Framework for Cross-Border Pipelines: The International Pipeline Agency

*Ishrak Ahmed Siddiky**

Introduction

The role of cross-border pipelines has greatly increased over the years as have the disputes surrounding them. Most of these disputes are either resolved by the pipeline members themselves or with the help of outside mediation. However all these disputes incur losses for investors thus this commentary proposes a pipeline agency, which would act in a regulatory capacity in resolving some of the disputes in cross-border pipelines. The role of the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) is first discussed to show the need for a new regulatory agency, as the ECT in its current form is inadequate. The commentary then focuses on the incentives for countries to align themselves with the new agency and the role it would play.

The Energy Charter Treaty

The ECT's main role since its inception was to secure Western investment in the Eastern European and the post-Soviet newly independent states in the Caspian region¹. The treaty provided Western governments/companies with the required legal framework to protect their investment as these former communist countries were rich in hydro-carbon energy resources and the Western European countries needed a secured supply.

However, the political and economic situation has evolved since independence, as these new countries now have a more stable legal and regulatory framework and thus require a more precise framework than

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¹ At the ministerial meeting in Hague in 1991, 49 countries signed the European Energy Charter, which led to the signing of the ECT in 1994.

the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) for the export of their natural resources. The ECT, apart from a new transit protocol has not evolved along with these states and a point of major contention is whether GATT Article V on freedom of transit applies to network infrastructure like pipelines or is it more appropriate to follow Article 7 of the ECT in terms of freedom of transit.² This has caused problems among the many actors involved in the energy trade, as there is a lack of clarity on the term freedom of transit. As a result, some experts feel that it needs a legal definition³. According to some experts, the terms, needs to take into account “the realities of energy transport infrastructure and the interests of shippers, owners of transport facilities, investors and the producer, importer and transit states”.⁴

Another cause of the ineffectiveness of the treaty is its focus on security of supply concerns and investment issues for the European states. It does not appeal to countries outside the EU or the Caspian region, which is a major cause of concern because, due to this, it lacks the global dimension, which is required in the energy field for its credibility. Some of the exporting countries are also skeptical about the ECT because they see the treaty as being primarily geared towards consuming states rather than exporting states. In fact according to them, the treaty does not reflect the interests of both the exporting and importing countries in a balanced way. A more balanced relationship between the exporting and importing countries would enhance cooperation between the two sides, and help serve the interests of all parties, which would make the treaty more credible.⁵

Furthermore, the ratification of transit protocols by a majority of signatory states also does not look possible because of the controversial nature of the “right of first refusal.”⁶ According to this term, if the supply contract runs for 10 years but the transit contract for only 5 years, it is then normal for the party using it to renew the contract or the transit country to offer the exporting or importing country the right to renew the term as before⁷. However, this term is not accepted by the European Union because it contradicts competition law, which further causes problems for countries that have been depending upon this clause. Due to

² See the Energy Charter Treaty at www.energychartertreaty.org

³ See “Gas transit tariffs in Selected ECT Countries,” Energy Charter Secretariat, January 2006.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ There could be an argument that getting more countries in the ECT might solve the problem but many countries will not be willing to join it based on the current framework of the ECT, as it might not benefit them. This is especially in the case of exporters.

⁶ See the Energy Charter Treaty at <www.energychartertreaty.org>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

this, some of the countries involved are not willing to ratify the protocol, which further weakens the transit aspects of the ECT⁸.

The ECT secretariat has also failed to play a proactive role since its inception. It has not been successful in selling the ECT treaty to countries outside the EU and has also not been able to solve disputes when they arise. The 2008-2009 gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine, which resulted in the suspension of gas supplies to Europe in the winter of 2008, is a prime example of that.⁹ The secretariat has also failed to play a balanced and efficient role among the exporting and importing countries, which is another reason why the ECT has not been able to play a major role on the international energy scene. There is a lack of trust and belief in the entire ECT system by countries exporting to the EU. The ECT and its secretariat lack the impartial and independent institution status where countries could come and express their concerns and have disputes resolved, which is also one of its main drawbacks.¹⁰

The ECT does not address the problem of government intervention due to geo-political, legal and economic reasons within the pipeline regime. The ECT supports or gives credibility to governments' intervention as it is designed for them to intervene in case of any of these problems. As a result instead of giving support to the other private parties in the pipeline regime it indirectly supports government intervention, which fails to protect the other members in the regime.¹¹

For example in the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) pipeline, Ukraine being a signatory country of the ECT could have asked the body to mediate between them and Russia during the pipeline dispute. However the fact that none of the parties decided to do so is further proof that they are not optimistic about having their disputes resolved through the ECT. This attitude does not solve the main problems of the pipeline, which result from parties not abiding by their original positions¹². The ECT cannot deal with this aspect because the nature of the treaty is to provide safety to investors and help provide better transit facilities; rather than providing a safety net to vulnerable parties in a pipeline regime or

⁸ Russia for example has not ratified the Energy Charter Treaty.

⁹ For a detailed analysis also read: Andrey Konoplyanik, "Russian Gas to Europe: From Long term contracts, on cross-border trade, Destination Clause and Major role of transit to...?" *JERL* 23 (2005), pp. 282-307.

¹⁰ See Andrey Konoplyanik, "A Common Russia-EU Energy space: the new EU Russia Partnership Agreement, Acquis Communautaire and the Energy Charter," *JERL* 26 (2009), pp. 258-291.

¹¹ The reason for implying this is the whole reason ECT was signed was to protect the investment of the companies and governments investing in Eastern Europe. As a result the government can use the argument they are interfering to protect their interest as advocated and intended by the treaty.

¹² Original position here means the original contract signed and agreed between the parties before the signing of the project.

help ensure that the actors within the regime are abiding by their various obligations.

Creating an International Pipeline Agency (IPA)

It is normal for states to join organizations or international bodies to serve their own interest. Some states join for economic benefits while others join to forge political alliances or due to geopolitical and security reasons. As a result self-interest plays a large role in the decision to join. States joining these autonomous bodies benefit because it allows them to enhance their economic potential and by cooperating with other states allows them to strengthen their strategic position internationally. Energy exporting, importing and transit countries through which pipelines pass through are able to share information to enhance operational capacity on the pipeline and prevent service disruptions and thus increasing the security of supply for both exporters and importers.

Although many countries use the pipeline chain, an argument can be put forward that the stronger countries, which use the pipelines or act as transit countries might not join the autonomous body because they are able to fulfill their interests irrespective of whether they are part of any body or mechanism. However the IPA would be beneficial for all parties, as it would allow them to cooperate in the area of cross-border pipelines. The reason being that it takes a lot of investment, various legal agreements, common interests, political will, years of planning and implementation of the project and the cooperation of all the actors involved to make the pipeline operational.¹³ As a result any disruption in the pipeline can hurt all the parties no matter how strong and influential they are.

Moreover, even if one of the parties is strong, it would still like the cooperation and support of the others to make its claims credible as no matter how big and strong a country is, it always wants some sort of cooperation and support from others. This fact makes the joining of all the parties irrespective of their size, strength and influence beneficial so that they can take the advantage of being a member. The body can work through consensus and ensure that all the members benefit from joining the body and this autonomous body would promote common interest at the expense of self-interest. The reputation of states that are part of the unifying mechanisms or the agency would also be enhanced as investors would feel more comfortable in investing their money in pipelines in those countries. In times of disputes, the country could also use the regime as a platform to support their position.¹⁴

¹⁴ By joining the agency or the mechanism, some government who have a track record for intervention in the pipelines due to geo-political, legal and economic reasons, could

There is always uncertainty regarding whether a state would attain its own expectations by joining this autonomous body or mechanism. However, the fact remains that no one can predict the level of benefits before joining the IPA. As a result, once a state becomes a member, it will win on certain aspects and might suffer on others. However the fact that it is comfortable with the credibility and impartiality of the IPA and its various actions would keep it interested in being a part of this regime. Moreover, among states joining the IPA, there would be greater transparency between all the pipeline countries, which would lower the level of disputes between the various actors involved in the pipeline regime and enhance cooperation. Furthermore the states would also have greater accountability about the actions they take in regard to the pipeline regimes they are part of. This in turn would also address some of the problems that may arise between the shareholders in the pipeline regime and would enable the IPA to intercede where necessary.

The IPA would be active in the following areas: (1) it would increase the level of compatibility of interest in the issue of cross-border pipelines, which would help members to protect their various interests and could act as a stepping stone for constraining government intervention, (2) it would enhance a state's willingness to compromise as it encourages countries to give into certain matters while reaping the benefits in other issue areas; finally (3) it would help in the sharing of information which could help protect interests and also collectively improve the benefits of all the members who are a part of the pipeline agency. The IPA in this kind of scenario could step in to stop government intervention by reminding them of their obligation and ensuring that the interest of all the parties in the pipeline is protected. The reason being in pipeline disputes it is the governments with power who intervenes more as they hold the leverage. The IPA would attempt to balance this power. The IAEA is a good example although it is relevant for nuclear issues.

Some Important Aspects of the IPA

If private parties are part of the pipeline project then what can the agency do to regulate those companies or enforce the decision of the agency? It would be difficult to enforce the decision of the agency on a private foreign company that does not have any affiliation with the state. In this case all the IPA decisions can be enforced through the concept of "direct effect"¹⁵ and this would ensure that even private parties abide by the

improve their image and standing among the investors and other countries, who might be sceptical of its credibility and past record of intervention.

¹⁵ The concept of direct effect was first established in the case of *Van Gend & Loos*. The case was about whether article 12 of the EC was directly effective or not. The Court was of the opinion that, "the wording of Article 12 contains a clear and unconditional prohibition which is not a positive but a negative obligation. This obligation, moreover, is not

decision of the agency. The state from where the company originates would be encouraged to take action against the company involved in the pipeline and if the state is a member of the agency then they are obligated to take action even if the country is not directly involved in the pipeline.

However, there can also be instances when some of the private companies involved in the pipeline project might not be registered in any particular country and may be situated in places, which can be outside the jurisdiction of the IPA. In that case the company's assets in countries where it is involved in the pipeline project can be taken over in order to enforce the decision of the IPA. For example if the company is registered in Cayman Islands and has business ventures in Kazakhstan, USA or Russia and its alleged violation took place in Azerbaijan, then either the Kazakhstan or Russian governments can be asked to take action against the company in order to force them to accept the decision of the IPA. These countries if they are part of the agency will be obliged to carry out the enforcement on behalf of the agency.

Another argument that can also be put forward in support of the creation of the IPA is the potential capability of the IPA in dealing with different pipeline regimes, which have different sets of problems. In this case, the agency will be equipped to deal with different regimes because once there is a conflict, the agency would nominate inspectors who are experts in their fields. Moreover, the panel of experts who will give their final verdict regarding the matter if the state wishes, would decide any dispute. The purpose of the agency is to be multi-dimensional and flexible just like the problems in cross-border pipelines and would be more active in preventing supply disruptions.

The three main goals of the agency would therefore be: (1) the detection of non-compliance with the agreements signed by the parties, (2) reporting any disruption and conflict in cross-border pipelines, and (3) enforcement of the various clauses of the agreement. All these aspects would help the agency to constrain government intervention. The verification and compliance regime of the agency will be robust in ensuring that key stakeholders and members of the agency abide by their obligations. However non-members would also come under supervision if they have pipelines going through their country or are part of any pipeline projects.

qualified by any reservation on the part of states, which would make its implementation conditional upon a positive legislation measure enacted under national law. They are very nature of this prohibition makes it ideally adapted to produce direct effects in the legal relationship between Member States and their subjects”.

Conclusion

The idea of the IPA in cross-border pipelines has certain similarities with the functioning of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) although the role of the two bodies is totally different. However like the IAEA, the IPA also needs to be a proactive regulatory body strongly ensuring that the various actors in cross-border pipelines abide by their various obligations. However one of the drawbacks of the IPA is the debate regarding whether it should be regional or international, as most pipeline problems tend to be regional by nature. Despite that, a regulatory body in the form of the IPA could help to lower the problems associated with cross-border pipelines, as there is an urgent requirement to deal with these issues, which are a cause of concern for exporters, importers and transit countries.

National Identity and Invented Tradition: The Rehabilitation of Traditional Medicine in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

Sophie Hohmann*

ABSTRACT

This paper will show how Uzbekistan's Soviet heritage and new political, social and economic conditions following its independence are giving birth to "alternative" forms of medical practice. The emergence of a new category of formally trained physicians who are also traditional healers deserves special attention, and will be approached in a holistic way as a result of local traditions, beliefs, and cultural as well as social representations. In addition, since 1999, the Uzbek government has been attempting to institutionalize traditional medicine, primarily through the re-appropriation of ancient principles inherited from Avicenna (Ibn Sina), in a comprehensive strategy to reconstruct national identity. Only registered public health physicians with a family heritage or training in traditional medicine (*tabib*) are authorized to practice traditional medicine in allopathic institutions and are officially recognized as "physician-*tabib*".

Keywords • Uzbekistan • Traditional Medicine • Physicians-*tabib* • Biomedicine • Identity • Invented Tradition

Introduction

More than fifteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan is an interesting research laboratory for

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studying the evolution of “traditions”. Having been condemned or ignored for years during the Soviet era, some traditions have now emerged in new or different forms. Currently, people’s collective memories are being used to legitimize governments though the recognition of a body of local traditions that draw their substance from long-forgotten beliefs. These may be the object of a religious revival with an ideological vocation, as is the case with Tengrism¹ in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tatarstan, or with Zoroastrianism in Tajikistan to name but a few striking examples. These ideological movements appear to be important instruments in the post-Soviet renewal of identity, where they are also conceptualized as so-called “ethnic” religions at the service of a national construction based on a prestigious past. In Uzbekistan, this desire to re-appropriate a past that the authorities perceive as prestigious has taken on a different form, such as the institutionalized cult of Tamerlane,² or the famous physician/philosopher Avicenna, who both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan claim as their own. In this context, traditional medicine has become a social issue and part of the construction process of Uzbek identity.

This paper attempts to shed light on the phenomenon by taking traditional medicine in Uzbekistan as an observation point, and especially a category of institutionalized healers, the physicians-*tabib*,³ as viewed through the career of a certain Umid,⁴ a physician-*tabib* in Tashkent. These traditional practitioners provide food for thought on the subject of tradition, the creation of neo-traditions, and how such a body of tradition is perceived by the communities. Traditional medicine forms a good basis as a condition for social adhesion to the process of inventing or re-inventing tradition. However, it should be stressed that the ideological currents behind the rehabilitation of the heroic figure of Tamerlane (which incidentally provides an indirect claim to ties with Genghis Khan), and of traditional medicine, do not have the same resonance for the population because they do not have the same

¹ See Marlène Laruelle, “Religious revival, nationalism and the ‘invention of tradition’: political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, 2 (2007), p. 204.

² Timur i-Leng or Tamerlane established his Timurid empire in the 14th century, but it fell apart rapidly after his death in 1405. His son Shah Rukh succeeded him but dissent in the various branches of the family continued. Nevertheless, the Timurids succeeded in promoting an important cultural renaissance movement. The end of the empire was marked by the arrival of the Shaybanid Uzbeks in the 16th century.

³ The physician-*tabib* is a medical university graduate with the additional knowledge of a *tabib*, whether acquired, inherited or revealed. These physicians can decide if they want to ratify their *tabib* knowledge in the oriental medicine department of the University.

⁴ Some names have been changed to preserve respondents’ anonymity.

significance in the community's cultural memory.⁵ This leads us to reflect on the meaning of belief and the multiple ways of believing, which, ultimately, leads us to consider the importance of imagination⁶ in discussing tradition. In certain cases, the current process of reformulating tradition is carried out in a changing context in which events intervene to guide the implementation of beliefs, a form of symbolic obedience.

Moreover, the emergence of traditional practitioners in Uzbekistan has occurred in a specific political context in which the Uzbek government is attempting to institutionalize traditional medicine by mobilizing an entire corpus of traditions and representations with strong identity significance at a time when the public health system is struggling to keep up with its Soviet past. An analysis of the relationship between these medical actors, the government and the people will enable us to identify continuities with the past, which are not easily discernable where the social role of traditional medicine is concerned, and the way it functioned despite Uzbekistan's integration into the Soviet sphere of influence.

Hobsbawm's "Invented Traditions"

The main purpose of this work is to find out whether rehabilitated traditional medicine, forms part of Eric Hobsbawm's⁷ concept of "invented traditions", or if on the contrary, it is truly an ancient body of traditions that has been revisited and adapted to political and historic circumstances. As Hobsbawm says in his introduction to "The Invention of Tradition"⁸:

"[...] the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the 'invention of tradition'. Where the old ways are alive, tradition need be neither revived nor invented."

Uzbekistan, like other former Soviet countries, is interesting in that it allows us to use the concept of invented tradition to consider an alternative possibility that would not consider the traditional medicine currently promoted in Uzbekistan as recently invented. Indeed this form of medicine has always existed, unlike other traditions that have been entirely reinvented. However, it is quite possible that these authentic,

⁵ For the impact of a community on the maintenance of tradition, see Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Albin Michel, (First edition 1950, PUF), 1997).

⁶ On imagination in motion and the capacity for resistance to reality by the "action of imagining," see Gaston Bachelard, *L'air et les songes. Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement* (Paris : Le livre de Poche, (First edition 1943), 2007), pp. 5-26.

⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger (eds.), *L'invention de la tradition* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2006), p. 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

rather than invented, traditions, to use Hobsbawm's concept, have been subjected to a thorough reworking. Indeed, from our observations and interviews, it appears that the revival and adaptation of these traditions is the consequence of the changes that occurred after the collapse of the USSR,⁹ which gave rise to various attempts at re-appropriation or invention processes, depending on the circumstances of the countries concerned. The common denominator is doubtless the Soviet experience, which continues to guide the rhetoric of the "new" leaders of the now-free states. We may reflect on the impact of the totalitarian experience on the exploitation and nature of a "new" tradition, the meaning conferred on it by the people or the ideologues who experienced totalitarianism compared with other countries and regimes which have not had the same experiences.

This paper aims to provide information about the ways these traditions become "hybridized" and the types of government that accompany them. The concept of invented tradition is interesting in that it obliges one to think about tradition itself and its limitations in relation to numerous parameters that appear to converge on a new desire for authenticity, which, in turn, leads to the creation of a new body of traditions. However, the Central Asian countries, first colonized by Russia and then after integration into the Soviet Union in the 1920s, were subjected to rapid transformations that attempted to destroy traditional models but failed to eradicate all local traditions, especially if they formed a system of belief that was sufficiently important for populations to keep them alive in their cultural or religious memories. Of course, with respect to certain traditions, such as Tengrism and Zoroastrianism that really had long disappeared from the region, the "renewal" was based entirely on new concepts that were far removed from "authentic" tradition. Like the societies studied by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Central Asian societies certainly need new models, and consequently, produce new traditions. Nevertheless, where traditional medicine is concerned, it appears that they used ancient traditions as a base on which to paste other schemes produced by the authorities, the intellectual elite and the ideologists. Nevertheless, these schemas are used, outwardly at least, by traditional healers. The instrumentalization of this political fabrication as well as the narrative forms¹⁰ used in

⁹ On disincorporation and disintrication see Lefort's discussion of the monarchic state and the formation of the modern state in: Claude Lefort, "Droits de l'homme et politique," in *L'invention démocratique: Les limites de la domination totalitaire* (Paris : Fayard, 1994), pp. 63-67; and Claude Lefort, "Désincorporation et réincorporation du pouvoir," in *La Complication* (Paris : Fayard, 1999), pp.183-193.

¹⁰ On the fabrication of facts, news and the role of the collective conscience and processes that influence public opinion (by using emotive and intellectual representations that allow the construction of legends) see Marc Bloch, *Réflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre* (Paris: Allia (First edition 1921), 2007).

government discourse enables traditional healers to maintain a certain social order.

Finally, this paper opens a window for approaching the nature of political power and of the Soviet regime that followed the Russian colonial empire. Medicine appears as an interesting tool to monitor the policies started by the tsarist authorities, and then followed by the Soviets. However, I doubt that this is a proper tool for questioning the colonial nature of these political regimes. Indeed, biomedicine is used by the authorities and shaped according to the local context and the local situations in which it evolves.¹¹ This use of medicine for political purposes is also found in numerous colonial countries, and is well documented. One must remember that the colonization process occurred at the same time as the development of the Pasteurian germ theory of diseases, which followed the advances made by sanitarians in Europe and in North America. The social, economic and environmental aspects of diseases are largely shadowed by their biological explanation, which offers a justification for the intervention methods of colonial authorities. Any political regime may pretend to use medicine as a political tool. However, its success depends on the ability of the authorities to convey meaning and to show its importance in the process of legitimizing the political system.

In this respect, the Soviet period appears as a special case, for which the colonial nature of the domination can be discussed endlessly. Several researchers have tried to discuss this issue, with strong disagreements. Some, like Paula Michaels, identify the Soviet Union as a “modern colonial empire”; others like Francine Hirsch and Douglas Northrop, as an “empire of nations”, others as an “affirmative action empire” (Terry Martin). These debates reveal the ambiguities and the contradictions, which underline this field of research. The approach that I followed here, focuses on a “new” interpretation of traditional medicine, and is an attempt to contribute to this complex debate. My position is based on theoretical work initiated by Claude Lefort on the nature of power in the Soviet Union. The main question he proposed was to determine whether a fully incorporated political power (characterized as “full space” by Claude Lefort), such as the Soviet Union, may still qualify as a colonial power.

¹¹ Sophie Hohmann, “La médecine moderne au Turkestan russe : un outil au service de la politique coloniale,” in Svetlana Gorshenina & Sergej Abashin, (eds.), *Le Turkestan russe : Une colonie pas comme les autres ?* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1999), pp. 315-348. Paula A. Michaels, “Medical Propaganda and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1928-1941,” *Russian Review* 59, 2 (2000), pp. 159-178. Paula A. Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003).

“Tabibism” vs. Public Health

This research is based on a series of interviews with traditional healers and physicians-*tabib* carried out in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, between April and July 2004. Our survey was limited to the so-called “rational” medical practices, namely those which have a naturalistic explanation of disease as opposed to a personalistic etiological system. The medical systems of the so-called “Great Tradition” integrate alternative medicines (as opposed to biomedicine), which are essentially based on the naturalistic etiological system, without reference to the personalistic system. Of course numerous cognitive differences distinguish biomedicine from traditional medicine, whether Chinese or Aryurvedic medicine and their derivatives (as, for instance, the principles of vital energy, the individual’s position in relation to the cosmos, forms of treatment etc.). Nevertheless, in terms of analytical models, a relationship exists and is not incompatible, whereas a relationship with practices such as shamanism and other divinatory techniques requires a very different approach. Nevertheless, the sacred and its relationship to health may be raised in our results since the sacred aspect of the “event”, and the “evil” of disease, are omnipresent in local perception. However, we will endeavour to remain on the fringe of this relationship and detach our research from the supernatural, which is an object of study in itself.

The meaning of the word “*tabib*” is very heterogeneous and shows that various therapeutic systems or ways of managing illness may be interwoven, and that religious and therapeutic functions can be compatible. Physicians-*tabib* are an extension of this duality for they are specific actors in the health system as both qualified physicians from the Institute of medicine, possessing a scientific and theoretical approach, which the *tabib* does not have. They combine knowledge of general medicine with alternative knowledge, and explain the latter simply as a divine gift, a prophecy, or a dream. The methods of the physician-*tabib* we met consisted in measuring the organic balance of fluids and determining whether or not the patient’s balance was disturbed by means of an ultrasound apparatus, by taking the pulse, and by iridological¹² and tongue diagnosis,¹³ in order to prescribe appropriate treatment for purifying the organism, balancing the vital forces and strengthening immunity.

We will examine this phenomenon in greater detail through the career of Umid, one of the physician-*tabibs* I interviewed on repeated occasions in Tashkent. He provides a relevant example of the special physician-*tabib* universe in which the medical practices of two different systems cohabit.

¹² Diagnosis carried out by examination of the patient’s irises.

¹³ Diagnosis carried out by examination of the patient’s tongue.

Umid was born in Tashkent in 1952. He studied at the Central Asian Institute of Paediatrics in Tashkent and then from 1980 spent nearly ten years in the surgery department of the Sechenov Moscow Medical Academy where he became *kandidat nauk* and defended his PhD thesis in 1993. He became interested in traditional medicine in 1988, while he was working in the department of surgery at the N. I. Pirogov First Institute of Medicine in Moscow, because as a surgeon he observed that patients often had allergic reactions to medication. He therefore developed a drug-free method of treatment that was largely based on reflexotherapy, and used an electrical pulse machine¹⁴ called “Asian doctor”, which closely resembles a machine developed in the 1940s by a German physician called Reinold Voll, as well as acupuncture,¹⁵ electrotherapy (galvanic currents)¹⁶, manual therapy and phytotherapy. The medicinal plants used in Umid’s treatment were made up by certain *tabib*¹⁷ from his own network and/or sold by a pharmaceutical company called Dori-Darmon, which has the monopoly of pharmaceutical products in Uzbekistan.

Like most of the *tabib* I met, Umid believes that pathological phenomena in living organisms are really quantitative variations of corresponding physiological phenomena. This theory of the relationship between normality and pathology as explained by Henry Sigerist in his *Introduction to Medicine* in 1932, does not qualitatively oppose illness to health and the belief that it is scientifically possible to re-establish normality is such that it cancels out the pathology. The *tabib* illustrates Georges Canguilhem’s observation that semantically, pathology could be said to be “departing from the normal not so much by a or dys as by hyper or hypo.”¹⁸

Umid showed us several notes dated 1990 from Moscow’s Hospital No. 15 and the N. I. Pirogov Institute’s department of surgery, in which

¹⁴ This 9-volt portable machine is 20 cm x 1.5 cm wide. A low electrical discharge acts on the blood plasma. A consultation without treatment costs 700 soums. In the spring of 2004, US\$1 was worth approximately 1,000 soums at the official rate and more (1,200 soums) on the black market. The average monthly wage ranges between US\$15 and US\$40.

¹⁵ Chinese medicine was officially accepted by the Soviet Union in the 1970s and was taught in the Oriental medicine departments of the Soviet Republics.

¹⁶ Traditional and experimental medicine often uses electrical machines for therapeutic ends. Low-voltage electrical impulses stimulate connective tissue to activate blood nutrition or soothe pain. Electrotherapy consists of either galvano-therapy, diathermy, therapy with alternative electrical currents with selective stimulation, and high frequency therapy. The best-known method is Dr Voll’s electro-acupuncture (EAV-, resulting from the study of energy thesis and traditional Chinese acupuncture). Here the action of the needles is replaced by magnetic waves pulsating via a transmitter which is connected to a monitor designed by Dr Voll.

¹⁷ *Tabib* we met at the Biochemical and Botanical Institutes in Tashkent.

¹⁸ Georges Canguilhem, *Le normal et le pathologique* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2003), p. 14.

they agreed in principle to the introduction of his “non-traditional”¹⁹ medicine. Umid’s methods were recognized by the medical authorities of those establishments as being beneficial and therefore could be added to the treatments available in the Moscow health system and that of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) as a whole. The introduction of these so-called “non-traditional” practices and their acceptance in the public health system, were confirmed by the department of theoretical issues of the Russian Academy of Science on 16 November 1994 which officially accepted Umid’s working methods “based on concepts inherited from Avicenna”. The department of neurology of the advanced medical training faculty established a chair of “non-traditional” medicine and neurology at the Russian State Medical University that integrated Umid’s therapeutic method into official medical practices.

Umid’s practices and reputation spread throughout the Soviet Union, and Russia in particular, but he returned to Tashkent in 1994 following problems with drug traffickers. He had worked with drug addicts to help them quit by means of his reflexology-based methods but this led to threats from drug dealers, which obliged him to stop. Back in Uzbekistan, he continued to work with his colleagues from the Moscow Medical Academy. He was also in demand with local industrialists who used his services to improve the health of workers during the construction of the hydroelectric power plant in Kodinsk in Siberia, where the worker’s 18-hour working day required an excellent status of health. According to several Russian and Uzbek newspaper cuttings that Umid showed me, his practices were beneficial to the workers’ health and he was in regular demand on worksites and in certain *kolkhoz*, including one in Tchirtchik near Tashkent. Umid appears to have acquired a serious reputation in drug-free treatments and reflexology-based therapies.²⁰

Physicians-tabib: A New Category of Health Professionals?

Umid describes himself as physician-surgeon and a *tabib*. He explains his dual role by affiliation since his mother was a *bakhshi*²¹ and his maternal

¹⁹ The term “non-traditional” (*netraditsionnaia meditsina*) is used to describe what we could call traditional medicine, and is often used by public health professionals in opposition to conventional, ie. traditional or classical medicine. Thus the term traditional is confusing since Western bio-medical publications often describe their own practices as “traditional” and call others “alternative”.

²⁰ Information gathered during repeated interviews with Umid in June and July 2004.

²¹ The *bakhshi* is often described as an Islamicized shaman. He is a syncretism of the northern nomads and the southern sedentary population, and blends the shamanism of Turkic-Mongolian Asia with the Islam of the Arab-Persian world. However, there are different kinds of *bakhshi* depending on the ethno-geographic distribution, and some may

grandfather was a doctor (*lekar'*). As a child, he watched his mother heal, but in addition to the knowledge acquired from his mother and grandfather, he claims to have the gift of premonition (*ekstrasens*)²² which enables him to cure his patients more effectively and which confers a certain legitimacy to his title of *tselitel'* (seer-healer). Here is a true blend of different kinds of knowledge, which, to judge by Umid, are quite un-segmented. Umid believes that empirical and theoretical knowledge are complementary; knowledge is transmitted and raises the issue of a "reassessment of the evolution of modern medicine" which traps individuals in treatments without any room for alternative ones, for instance those transmitted by Avicenna in his canon of medical texts.

However, Umid does have trouble defining himself as a healthcare professional. On the one hand, he condemns *tabib* and healers generally who have no medical qualifications and perform medical acts with no anatomical training. On the other hand, he does not entirely reject the category to which, as physician-*tabib*, he belongs. He supports the practices of the *tabib* who, in his eyes, are not physicians but deal with illness by means of a gift or instinct that he fully recognizes. The result is an interesting overlap of different methods and a difficulty in drawing a line between the functions of the various practitioners and their characteristics. Self-presentation may also result in bias because of government pressure concerning all activities that it considers "obscurantist" or "deviant". I will later look at the recent movement to officialize certain traditional medical practices as well as the underlying issues in terms of implementing a strong national policy.

Knowledge may also be acquired by apprenticeship. Physicians-*tabib* have the unusual role of transmitting the body of knowledge they received by revelation or which they inherited from their families, to other healers, which in this case means to physicians. We cannot express an opinion on the precise motivations of the students and physicians wishing to practice traditional medicine. As a physician-*tabib*, Umid, as Director of the Manual Therapy Centre in Tashkent, had acquired a genuine legitimacy in numerous regions of the RSFSR and Central Asia prior to the fall of the Soviet Union because of his dual qualifications; his academic medical knowledge from Moscow University and his inherited knowledge of traditional medicine. However knowledge is obtained, it requires a period of apprenticeship. After Uzbekistan's independence, a

be related to divine healers (central Asian shamans), or to bards, minstrels or both. See Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont, "Un chaman musulman," in *Et si on parlait d'Afghanistan ?* (Paris: MSH, 1988) pp. 149-151. In this study we will describe the *bakhshi* as a seer and a traditional healer, which are more appropriate signifiers in Uzbekistan and less controversial.

²² *Ekstrasens* are healers with a special bio-energy and extraordinary powers. They may be found throughout the former Soviet Union.

system was put in place integrating Umid's methods, and physicians of all ages with solid theoretical and practical medical qualifications, could receive a few months training in Umid's techniques, procedures and secrets at the Manual Therapy Centre. The authorities considered Umid's practices to be complementary to public health practices and not in conflict with them, unlike certain "divinatory therapies". A course for 5-6 people lasts for one month and cost 43,000 soums per month (approximately US\$40). Physicians must then practice for five years in a government establishment before obtaining the traditional medical licence (Umid's method) and practice independently or open their own surgery.

Umid also trains *tabib* with no prior training in anatomy or physiology, in the hope of inculcating the necessary foundations in anatomy required for manual therapy. Officially, however, such *tabib* are not allowed to practice, and Umid explained that this training gave them greater credibility in their own *mahalla*²³ networks since it improved both their diagnoses of patients and their treatments. Umid also trained the non-physician *tabib* who were to take part in the major project of the Tashkent Academy of Traditional Medicine.²⁴ According to the Academy's President Mr. Khamraev, *tabib* with traditional healing gifts require training in anatomy and physiology in order to work in the Academy. The vast building is being renovated and a range of consulting and manual therapy rooms are being set up for the *tabib*, as well as bathrooms for Avicenna's capillary therapy and a cafeteria which will offer concoctions of medicinal plants.²⁵

Are Traditional Therapies a Lasting Feature?

The erosion of the health system, which began in the 1970s, continued into Uzbekistan's independence and has grown increasingly complex. The institutional void as well as the economic and social disturbances resulting from the collapse of an entire system of government required - but did not receive - efficient state management. Against that background the population grew wary of the public health system and its response to illness, its lack of means (physicians, treatments and vaccines) and poor distribution of health care professionals in the face of regional

²³ A word of Arabic origin meaning "the place where one puts one's things". The social and administrative community recognized by the government. An organized neighbourhood family or clientelistic network of socialization and group solidarity. An official *mahalla* which consists of between 2,000 and 4,000 persons, may well consist of several non-official *mahallas* that are too small to be recognized.

²⁴ We will go into the Academy of Traditional Medicine in greater detail when we discuss the current process of legitimizing traditional medicine in Uzbekistan.

²⁵ A visit to the Academy of Traditional Medicine and interview with the President of this Academy on July 8, 2004.

epidemiological issues. Thus *tabib* and other healers filled the void created by the political and socioeconomic context. However, *tabib* had always been consulted, whether separately or in addition to physicians, and it would be interesting to research the possible correlations between the erosion of the public health system and the frequency with which the *tabib* were consulted. Our sample, which was not representative of the population, does not allow for a judgement, but did provide us with access to “exemplary” phenomena at the micro-level, which open up avenues for more detailed research. It appears from interviews with both healers and patients, that the generational factor of the patient is an important variable in whether or not he/she resorts to the services of a *tabib*. But another variable is also very influential: the community and the influence it has on individuals requiring medical treatment. The way a community “assigns” the representations of an individual’s illness has to be taken into account, for each society has its own rules for transforming these signs into symptoms.

Interviews carried out with *tabib*, physicians and the local population, enabled us to find continuities with previous periods, which we confirmed with the observations of *tabib* and physicians, as well as patients. The resistance to the body of traditions proved to be both very strong and real, not so much because these medical beliefs and practices persist, but because of society’s global perceptions about the array of traditional practices which have been perpetuated through the collective Uzbek memory while being modified by temporal changes. Nevertheless, the government deems these practices to be “obscurantist” and dangerous and they are increasingly subject to strict controls, whereas the same government is appropriating certain other traditional healing practices in order to reinforce its identity and legitimacy. We shall look at the basis of the recent legalization process of some forms of traditional medicine.

Towards Recognition of Traditional Medicine? The Political Exploitation of Tradition

The Soviet secularization process and its attempt to merge its peoples into a single *homo sovieticus*, failed to eradicate religion in Central Asia. Islam survived Soviet pressure by other means (such as “parallel” Islam), and currently the body of practices related to Islamic belief or beliefs prior to the arrival of Islam in the region have again been mobilized by collective memory as well as by the Uzbek policy on national identity. However, in this case only those elements that fit in to the government’s

identity strategy are chosen, namely those that can be used as a basis for the construction of the nation-state.²⁶

In 1999, a presidential decree (*ukaz*) followed by a decision (*prikaz*)²⁷ emanating from the Uzbek Ministry of Health legalized the use of traditional medical by endorsing the Ibn Sina (Avicenna) Foundation.²⁸ The decree authorized the establishment of institutions specialized in diagnoses and treatments based on Avicenna's medical principles. Avicenna's heritage is regularly promoted in Uzbekistan and all decisions relating to this sphere of medicine have to claim some direct relationship with the famous physician-philosopher's medical practices. At the same time a scientific traditional medicine course on "alternative treatments" was established together with the Ibn Sina foundation, largely based on Avicenna's scientific teachings. This alternative medicine course is offered to specialists with a medical degree. Interestingly, in the official text the adjective "popular" (as in "popular" medicine) is placed in brackets. Popular medical practices are discussed, but remain the preserve of specialized physicians.

Tabib are not mentioned in the 2002 text emanating from the Tashkent Institute of Advanced Medical Education. Only qualified physicians are entitled to practice in these institutions. Qualified physicians can also be *tabib* and work through these structures, though their ties with traditional medicine are looser because of their academic

²⁶ Catherine Poujol, *Ouzbékistan : à la croisée des chemins* (Paris: Belin and La Documentation française, 2005). Catherine Poujol, "Islam et mondialisation en Asie centrale. Une trajectoire entre islam local et islam global," *La Pensée* 338 (2004), pp. 5-21.

²⁷ "Prikaz MinZdrava Respubliki Uzbekistan No. 261 'O voprosakh organizatsii i deiatel'nosti mezhdunarodnogo fonda Ibn Sino'" [On matters of organization and the activities of the International Ibn Sina Foundation], April 23, 1999, which followed the *ukaz* presidential decree dated 6 January 1999 No. 2171 "O podderzhke mezhdunarodnogo fonda Ibn Sino" [On support for the International Ibn Sina Foundation]. This laid down plans for the following: the establishment of regional subsidiaries [*oblast'*] and an entire network that included a pharmacy, a geriatric centre, and a general hospital in each region, the development of scientific programs and research on Oriental medicine that would highlight Avicenna's heritage, the organization of conferences and congresses on Avicenna's scientific and spiritual heritage. In 2001, a manual therapy centre [*Manual'naia terapiia*] was also established within this framework at the Tashkent Institute for Advanced Medical Education.

²⁸ The Ibn Sina foundation was established in 1999 with local NGO status and its stated aims are to promote Avicenna's scientific heritage in Uzbekistan and abroad, with representatives in Egypt, Canada, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, and France. Ashirbek, the foundation's chairman and a cardiologist by training, endeavoured to find funds for subsidiaries in the various regions of the Republic. The foundation has a library, a computer centre and a centre for drug addicts. It has a committee of advisors consisting of 12 NGOs working on these issues and has developed a program for combating drug addiction and AIDS. It also works with schools and associations, *mahalla*, *Soglom avlod Uchun*, and *Kamolot* for setting up a range of preventative measures for societal problems and emerging diseases. Interview with Ashirbek in Tashkent on July 15, 2004. See the following website <www.avicenna.uz> (May 13, 2010).

medical training. The physician-*tabibs* I interviewed defined themselves as physicians with a *tabib* gift or physicians who decided to become *tabib* (by training at the Oriental medicine department of the University). *Tabib* without a medical degree cannot practice but are welcomed at these institutions to share their knowledge and receive training, especially in anatomy. Physicians wishing to become *tabib* can also be trained there and are free to practice after five years' practice in public institutions. A 1989 decision by the Soviet Union's Ministry of Health,²⁹ which dealt with the institutionalization of traditional medicine, was taken up by the Uzbekistan Council of Ministers in a law dated March 9, 1989.

According to available documents, these laws did not permit traditional healers to practice without medical degrees. There is an interesting comparison with Kazakhstan where Korean healers are very active in manual therapy, electro therapy and acupuncture. In 1994, they established a Soo-Jok³⁰ Academy of Korean Medicine there, and private clinics in 2000 under an agreement with both the Kazakh and the South-Korean governments. As is the case in Uzbekistan, only qualified physicians with degrees from the Almaty State Institute of Advanced Medical Education are authorized to practice this type of medicine.³¹ In Dushanbe, Tajikistan, there has been an Institute of Traditional Medicine since 1997. It depends on the Tajikistan Ministry of Health and has a medical staff of a dozen qualified physicians. This institute has close ties with the departments of medicine and traditional medicine at the Dushanbe Academy of Science, as well as with other centres and institutes of traditional medicine. These include centres in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, as well as close relations with China, India, Iran and France concerning new methods. Since the law of December 9, 2004 governing traditional medicine, the Dushanbe institute³² has offered 5-year diplomas in traditional medicine to physicians and to certain healers such as *tabib* without medical qualifications. In this case, the healers obtain their diploma after being examined on a 6-month anatomy course.³³

²⁹ Decree No. 18-11 by the Soviet Ministry of Health dated 2 August 1989, "Ob ispol'zovanii metodov traditsionnoi v lechenii i reabilitacii" [On the use of traditional practices in treatment, cures and recovery].

³⁰ A Korean hand and foot acupuncture technique.

³¹ Danuta Penkala-Gawecka, "Korean medicine in Kazakhstan: ideas, practices and patients," *Anthropology & Medicine* 9, 3 (2002), pp. 315-336.

³² This institute is run by a Pamiri Tajik woman who is a trained phytotherapist, and, among other things, has an exceptional gift for identifying medicinal plants. She claims to have acquired this gift from her grandmother who trained in the Pamir mountains where she was born. Interviews carried out with Z. Bahramova, Director of the Traditional Medicine Institute, in Dushanbe, June 2007 and with Professeur Nuraliev, Director of the Department of Science and Traditional Medicine in Dushanbe.

³³ A total of 12 persons have obtained medical licenses since 2004.

In Uzbekistan two qualified physicians-*tabib* are setting up centres for traditional medicine: H. Dadaev's Manual Therapy Centre, and K. Khamraev's Academy of Traditional Medicine. Dadaev explained to us that he had to draw up a list of non-physician *tabib* and register them with the authorities.³⁴ Where religion is concerned, a similar situation has existed since 1999, the date of the first wave of terrorist attacks on Tashkent. Muslim spiritual organizations have to provide lists of followers and whether they practice official Islam or not (Sufism, for instance) and give these lists to the authorities. This proves the government's firm intention to control so-called "obscurantist" activities, and closely resembles former Soviet policy. Just as in medicine only Avicenna-type medical practices are authorized, so there is an interesting parallel with the attitude of the authorities towards Islam, and its distinction between the standard, official form, and traditional Islam, whose practices are considered to be infused with obscure beliefs, such as shamanism or Zoroastrianism, that escape government control.

What we see, therefore, is a national desire to re-appropriate a piece of history and put aside, if not eradicate, elements that recall the Soviet era. Yet at the same time there is a transfer of referents, which remains anchored in Soviet-style operating methods. There are shifts in representation but the operating methods endure; there are changes in form but the ideological content remains the same in that it reveals almost unchanged Soviet operating structures and reasoning. Independence favoured a search for a national memory, a religious identity (through "re-Islamicization") and a cultural identity (through the re-appropriation of historical figures). In the former Soviet Union, the reconstruction of symbolic sites is "the obvious sign of a desire to erase the traces of an undesirable past and create a new artificial memory, able to offer substitute values to an identity."³⁵ The process of recreating an identity generated by the country's independence was expressed by the search for, and exploitation of, identity markers such as religion, tradition, and pre-revolutionary history. The *tabib* we met used the history of their country rather than its traditions to justify the return to their practice. Despite the erosion of religion and traditional practice during the Soviet era, both survived by sliding into private space, as was the case for instance with Sufism, which allowed Islam to endure. The *tabib* use Avicenna's principles³⁶ in a quasi-dogmatic way, quote only him

³⁴ Interview with Umid in Tashkent on July 6, 2004.

³⁵ See Maria Ferretti, "La mémoire refoulée. La Russie devant le passé stalinien," in Marc Ferro (ed.), *Nazisme et communisme. Deux régimes dans le siècle* (Paris: Hachette/Pluriel, 1999), p. 270.

³⁶ Avicenna frequently appeared in Soviet medical journals well before the 1980s, for instance in *Meditinskii zhurnal Uzbekistana*, *Sovetskoe zdavookhranenie*, *Sovetskoe zdavookhranenie Uzbekistana*. This requires further analysis, since the emblematic, heroic,

and query major medical advances such as antibiotics, which they claim damage the balance of fluids. They are convinced that all diseases can be cured without resorting to drugs and that all treatment should now be based on medicinal plants. They also refer to the rich Central Asian pharmacopoeia and the unique nature of medicinal plants in the regions of Pamir, Tian-Shan and the Altai.

The Uzbek authorities official approval of the creation of the Academy of Traditional Medicine illustrates this process. The academy's official vocation (like that of the Ibn Sina foundation) is to promote Avicenna's scientific principles and develop programmes for teaching traditional medicine. This academy was officially due to open in 2004.³⁷ Its founder and president K. Khamraev, a chemist by profession, began his career in 1996 as a practicing physician-*tabib* and in 2000 bought a building in the district of Yunus-Abad to set up his academy. Khamraev developed a range of plant-based medicines ("Osio" treatments, meaning Asian in Uzbek) which he claims cure numerous diseases including hepatitis A, B, and C, goitres, anaemia, chronic bronchitis, etc. The academy publishes a review called *Shark Tabobati* (Oriental medicine) which, according to Khamraev, has close contacts with countries in which traditional medicine is officially practiced, such as China, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, India, Nepal and Russia. The academy aims to promote traditional medicine within the public health system, develop therapies based on the ancient manuscripts of Eastern *tabib* and Avicenna's canon, set up a training institute to train specialists in this type of medicine and compile an encyclopaedia of traditional Uzbek medicine.³⁸

This querying of legitimacy reflects in part modern medicine's inability to cover all aspects of disease, including psychological and social afflictions, and in part the current dominance of rational science and state authority. The government's ambiguous attitude by which the law is expected to legitimize tradition, leads people to side with the many nurses and physicians caught in the contradictions of their ancestral heritage combined with scientific training. It is understandable that physicians use medicinal plants to treat certain illnesses or that they

figure of Avicenna (and, to a lesser degree, Al-Biruni), who was allegedly rediscovered only after independence, is in fact, a far more timeless marker.

³⁷ According to my sources, this academy had still not opened in 2007. The first congress of traditional Uzbek medicine was held in October 2002. Officials from the Uzbek Ministry of Health now deny the existence of this academy which, they claim, "does not have a vocation to develop traditional medicine but uses this as a selling point for its cures." (interview in Tashkent on July 13, 2004).

³⁸ See the article by D. O. Oyebola, "Professional Associations, Ethics and Discipline among Yoruba traditional healers of Nigeria," *Social Science and Medicine*, 15B, (1981), pp. 87-92 and the discussion that follows.

experiment with local pharmacopoeias,³⁹ and that ministers and government officials support research on traditional medicine, as was the case during the Soviet era. This new interpretation of a long-standing social issue appears to be more related to an ability to adapt to change rather than to filling the void left by the contradictions of the Soviet health system.

On theoretical grounds, one could assume that traditional medicine might recover some visibility every time a state fails and therefore opens a breach, or when a power ceases to be a “full place” and paves the way to a logic of democratization, leaving an “empty space” as described by Claude Lefort.⁴⁰ However, in Central Asia it does not seem to be the case that political power disengaged; on the contrary, it remained very incorporated, the image given by the official rehabilitation of some forms of traditional medicine as well as of other national traditions, is in no way an argument in favour of a democratisation process. The power remains a “full place”, and this instrumentalization by the political authorities of traditions which have a common meaning for the population is rather a sign of power consolidation in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. However, this does not mean that the current regimes could get rid of these medical traditions. The concepts developed by Lefort seem to be pertinent arguments to raise more generally the question of the nature of power and of “atypical” (unknown before) system⁴¹ and domination in the Soviet Union. Let us remember that the Soviet regime was characterized by the overwhelming presence and domination of the party, which hampered any separation between political power, law, and knowledge. Power lay within the party’s body, which incarnates an historical function of a new type in the bureaucratic society. It is the agent of a complete penetration of the state in civil society. It is the milieu in which the state is changed into the society, and the society into the state.⁴²

³⁹ Examples of plant-based medicines distributed or sold by several *tabib* and physician-*tabib* we met at the Biochemical Institute. These medicines are packed in small plastic jars, produced and endorsed by the Institute’s biochemists. Observations and interviews carried out in Tashkent in June and July.

⁴⁰ See the article by Claude Lefort, “Le stalinisme sans Staline,” in *Éléments d’une critique de la bureaucratie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 155-235. Bernard Flynn, *The Philosophy of Claude Lefort: Interpreting The Political* (Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), p. 148.

⁴¹ François Furet, *Le passé d’une illusion, Essai sur l’idée communiste au XX^{ème} siècle* (Paris: Robert Laffont/Calmann-Lévy, 1995), pp. 179-180.

⁴² Lefort, “Le stalinisme sans Staline,” p. 191.

Therapies, Recomposed Identities and Staging Tradition

Independent Uzbekistan no longer has the means to provide its population with all the social benefits that were the corollary of the Soviet system. The fragmentation of the health services and the complexity of the administrative procedures are major obstacles to accessing the health system for an ill-informed population, which often lives far from any health centre. Distance is often dissuasive and combined with the loss of confidence in a worn-out paternalistic system that has ceased to be efficient or secure, exacerbate the dangers of the lack of medical assistance and delays in getting patients into care. The limits that were reached even in the Soviet era have had repercussions on the social situation: expensive medication resulting from the opening of borders and markets, inflation, unemployment, very low salaries and all the social and economic consequences these have on the individual and the community. Where medical treatment is concerned, family and community opinions are based on their own convictions and representations of their misfortunes and illnesses, and they tend to trust the vast and nebulous system of traditional beliefs and therapies. These systems are often interconnected and provide answers that fit in with people's expectations, cosmogony and representations. The importance of this blend of beliefs lies in a complex movement for a search for identity, understanding of self and one's origins. The institution of the *mahalla*, in its superficial re-appropriation of its role as social regulator and cultural player, lies at the heart of the "archaeological" process that is remodelling the historical and cultural roots of Uzbek society, the better to legitimize them.

The post-USSR phenomena often appear specifically to the foreign observer as a "re-Islamicization" process, or a "renewal" of tradition. Yet by analysing these phenomena in the broader context of continuity between the colonial era, the Soviet and the post-Soviet era, we can see how the socio-historic links between the various regimes and periods are somewhat perpetuated and reproduced, revealing a maieutic in long-term evolutions. In the chaotic context that resulted from the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the traditional medical system, divinatory or otherwise, formed an institutional response to society's need to ensure its reproduction. The coexistence of several medical traditions in Uzbekistan doubtless means that each school of medical tradition will claim exclusivity of meaning in the face of modern medicine's tendency to monopolize knowledge and identify with the Soviet system.

According to Eric Hobsbawm,⁴³ invented traditions induce a new historicity and in that respect they respond to a break with the past by creating continuity. Hobsbawm summarizes the following conditions required for traditions to be described as invented: brutal social change,

⁴³ Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger (eds.), *L'invention de la tradition*, op. cit.

the emergence of a new elite and a new power that seeks to impose its own legitimacy and order. In Central Asia, as in most of the former Soviet countries, the elite has remained the same and is generated by the same party apparatus. Despite the changes resulting from the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union, the political order remains unchanged. The elite in power certainly seeks to impose its legitimacy, but does so by a massive transfer of Soviet representations to so-called national representations which, in fact, borrow everything they require to function from the Soviet system. The form has changed but not the content. Of course, as with invented tradition, the renaissance of traditions in Uzbekistan and their re-fabrication are accepted by the people if they correspond to a social demand for the recognition of a present situation and match a future project.

These government-arranged traditions allow the local population to identify with symbolic systems that have a shared meaning for them and their reference communities. However, people take into account those elements that correspond to their individual choices and can be inserted into a communitarian logic (a broader reference with which they identify). Individuals manufacture their own truths, which condition their constituent imagination. As Paul Veyne has remarked,

“It is better to recognize that all knowledge is interested, and that truths and interests are two different ways of saying the same thing, for practice is as practice does. We only wanted to distinguish between truth and interest in an attempt to explain the limitations of truth. We thought it was limited by the influence of interests. That was forgetting that the interests themselves are limited [...] that the restrictions are the same as those of the corresponding truths. They appear on the horizons that the fortunes of history assign to different programmes.”⁴⁴

Thus the willingness to believe ceases when collective memory no longer identifies with the belief, when there is a conflict between the individuals and the group. Similarly, the reconstitution of events that form a tradition must be carried out on the basis of concepts that are common to the group. Here we see the introduction of a new historicity: tradition is used in political discourse in an attempt to create continuity with the past and ensure the legitimacy of political power.

This process is part of the need to maintain a constant in the evolution of societies and, to use the words of Maurice Halbwachs, “Society has to live; when even the social institutions are profoundly transformed and especially when they are, the best way to let them take

⁴⁴ Paul Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leur mythe?* (Paris: Seuil/Points, 1992), p. 95.

root is to spread them with every tradition one can get hold of.”⁴⁵ To say, as Georges Balandier⁴⁶ did, that tradition is partly linked to the vision of society as continuity and conformity, does not mean that the societies in which traditions thrive are immobile, or insensitive to change. What tradition produces is a universe of collective significance in which the daily experiences that plunge individuals and groups into chaos, are related to an immutable, necessary order that existed before the individuals themselves or the group. This universe that composes traditionalism is characterized by Max Weber, as having the “propensity to accept customary daily life and believe that it constitutes the norm for action”.⁴⁷ But it is also the structural uncertainty of a changing society that “imposes” and reinforces the individual and collective need to believe in order to produce, under modern circumstances, the elements on which society will lean on and refer to. The question of meaning is central in societies where the assertion of personal autonomy requires an individual, subjective response to illness, suffering, and death. To achieve the effect of meaning it is necessary to have a collective sharing of meaning. The individually-constructed significance must be vouched for by others. There must be social confirmation.

Conclusion

Traditional medicine is not just a simple repetitive phenomenon. It reflects the dynamic readjustment of customs and values. The values to which society is most attached adapt to reality in a continuous process. Traditional medicine is also the result of a collective sharing of meaning and requires a collective validation of its significance. The professionalization of traditional medicine is an attempt to provide an answer in a multi-cultural therapy context.

As we have seen in Uzbekistan, the institutionalization of traditional medicine provides food for thought about the reality of such a process, driven by a desire to re-appropriate an identity. It excludes a broad swathe of traditional practitioners while trying to place them under state control to reduce their autonomy and what is believed to be their bad influence on people. However, thanks to the physicians-*tabib* we were able to glimpse a small area of the Uzbek political system as well as the interactions and correlations in the health system, because the physicians-*tabib* are at the heart of the government’s “rehabilitation” of tradition, and also synthesize the cohabitation of numerous practices, which ultimately, are the result of Sovietization. By attempting to unify and standardize societies and their socio-cultural representations, Soviet

⁴⁵ Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, p. 134.

⁴⁶ Georges Balandier, *Le désordre. Eloge du mouvement* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).

⁴⁷ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La religion pour mémoire* (Paris: Cerf, 1993), p. 125.

power actually obliged them to preserve themselves. Both individuals and communities in Uzbekistan integrated Soviet society while maintaining a certain autonomy, and it is precisely that social autonomy which has reappeared since the end of the USSR - but for how long and in what form?

Officializing a limited sphere of traditional medicine is part of post-Soviet national construction, and the Uzbek heritage lies at the heart of this policy. The country is going through a partial rejection of Russian-Soviet culture. There was a resurgence of national culture after independence and an attempt to reinstate practices that had more or less gone underground. The Uzbek government has promoted this movement by mobilizing society around heroic and popular national figures, and endowing myths and legends with a political meaning. It has transformed heroes into historical figures, including the poet Alisher Navoi, the physician and philosopher, Avicenna, the philosophers and scientists al-Bukhari, Ulugh-Bek, al-Biruni, al-Khorezmi while the main political figure is incarnated by Tamerlane, who embodies this re-appropriation of the past. Uzbek national identity policy is also claiming a body of "tradition", that includes Islam as well as beliefs prior to its arrival, but in this case it only selects those elements that may be integrated into an identity strategy underpinned by the construction of a nation state, but will not allow the population to veer away from the "traditionalization" process of its culture. As Paul Veyne stressed in his discussion of rhetoric in antiquity: in order to win, and therefore to convince, you have to start out with what people think, and the rhetoric used by the Uzbek government is certainly "the art of winning rather than that of being right."⁴⁸

Lastly, in contemporary Uzbekistan, as in Soviet Uzbekistan, the government is ossified whereas society is changing. The social change that followed independence demanded choices in political management and reorganization, which in turn needed to be adapted to the health, social, and economic situation inherited from the USSR but which could not be reformed rapidly because of the reproduction of Soviet operating methods. The new problems that have arisen, such as the spread of epidemics, emerging diseases and the poverty of a large segment of the population, are not only the result of globalization but of the government's considerable difficulty in departing from an ideological framework with which it continues to identify politically. The way out, represented by the creation of a nation-state and the adaptation of traditions, lies at the heart of the contradictions that are disrupting Uzbekistan. But this process, which is something of a government-controlled tug-of-war, has never lost sight of the persistence of preserved tradition, because tradition has reformulated itself in line with social change.

⁴⁸ Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leur mythe?* pp. 66-67.

The Geopolitical Consequences of the U.S.-Russian “Military Airbase Race” in Central Asia

Fabio Indeo^{*}

ABSTRACT

The geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the United States over Central Asia has progressively strengthened in the past few years. Despite their agreement to cooperate in handling the shared threats derived from the instability of Afghanistan, their different strategic interests are pushing them towards a “military airbase race” aimed at obtaining military facilities in the region. The bases used by the U.S. to implement the Northern Distribution Network represent a serious threat to traditional Russian influence in the regional military and security field, pushing Moscow to attempt to contain American expansion. This new geopolitical scenario allows the Central Asian republics to implement a “multi-vector” strategy in their foreign policy aimed at strengthening military and economic cooperation amongst “geopolitical players”, in order to ensure internal stability and security, to preserve the political status quo and to reduce their dependence on Moscow and Beijing.

Keywords • Central Asia • Geopolitical Competition • Russia • United States • Military airbase in Central Asia

Introduction

In the last two years there have been some important transformations in the Central Asian geostrategic situation, which have allowed the United

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¹ Russia and China partially achieved their goal to expel U.S. military forces from Central Asia by means of the SCO, exercising strategic pressure to the Central Asian members (in order to establish a departure date for the U.S. military forces from Central Asian military airbases) and convincing them that their own national interests and the region’s stability

States to regain a position of influence in the region after the interruption of 2005 following the Andijan events and the forced eviction from the Karchi-Khanabad Uzbek airbase.

The maintaining of the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan, (after months of troubles because of the Kyrgyz threat of eviction), the Uzbek concession of the Navoi airport and the use of Termez airbase (managed by the NATO German military forces) to implement the Northern Distribution Network, the military facilitations in Turkmenistan and the opportunities to enhance military cooperation with Tajikistan have legitimized the return of the United States as an important geopolitical player - together with Russia and China - on the regional geostrategic chessboard.

This strengthening of the U.S. military presence in Central Asia is destined in the long term to fuel the discontent of the two biggest regional powers; Russia and China, which fear and mistrust U.S. strategic intentions in the post-Soviet era, and where they exercise a strong geopolitical influence in the economic, energy, military and political fields. However, at present all the geopolitical players in the area (Central Asian republics, Russia, U.S., China) share the same concerns about the worsening situation in Afghanistan - where increasing instability represents a serious threat to the security of the whole region. Furthermore the instability linked to the Kyrgyzstan crisis following President Bakiev's dismissal in April and the interethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Osh region which could provoke a potential "domino effect" and affect the strategic and energy interests of foreign geopolitical players.

Apparently, these shared concerns should reduce the Russia-U.S. rivalry and improve their cooperation, following the effects of the so called "reset policy" supported by U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev aimed to manage international issues. In spite of this scenario of cooperation however, American and Russian strategic moves in Central Asia are destined to open a new chapter in the geopolitical competition characterized by a "military airbase race", in order to consolidate their influence in this area by obtaining military concessions from the Central Asian republics.

From their perspective, Central Asian presidents are seeking to exploit this new geopolitical scenario by strengthening the cooperation with the United States and implementing a "multi-vector" policy in order to maximize the economic and strategic benefits linked to their geopolitical-geographic position regarding Afghanistan and to reduce their dependence on Moscow and Beijing. However, the economic and political weakness and the unsolved problems of Central Asian republics

will make them weak pawns in this modern version of the “Great Game”.

U.S.-Russian Military Cooperation with Central Asian Republics

The recent geostrategic moves of the United States in Central Asia and the strengthening of military cooperation with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan appear to modify the present balance of power between the involved geopolitical players. This outlines a renewed American influence in the region and the enhancement of its position in the post-Soviet space, after some years in which it exercised a marginal influence.

Since 2005, the Central Asian geopolitical scenario has been characterized by the weakened position of the U.S. compared to the growing Sino-Russian influence over the five Central Asian republics, exercised through the deepening of bilateral ties and through the strengthening of the existent regional multilateral organisations in the economic field (the EurAsian Economic Community - EurAsEC) and in the military-security sphere¹ (as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization - SCO, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization - CSTO).²

The deterioration of the U.S.-Uzbekistan strategic partnership and the eviction from the Karchi-Khanabad Uzbek military airbase (K2 airbase) represented a clear signal of the American geopolitical retreat in Central Asia. With the loss of Uzbekistan as a strategic partner in the region and its realignment with Russia, confirmed afterwards through the agreement for a Mutual Defence Pact with Russia in November 2005 and with the Uzbek adhesion to the Moscow-led regional organisation OTSC and EurAsEC in 2006.³ Another signal of the US geopolitical marginalization is the progressive cooling of the strategic cooperation with Central Asian republics - following 9/11 and the American military intervention in Afghanistan - which were perceived as the western calls for human rights’ protection and for the adoption of reforms as interferences⁴ in the management of their internal affairs.⁵

² Alexander Cooley, “U.S. Bases and Democratization in Central Asia,” *Orbis* 52, 1 (2008), pp. 66-68.

³ John C.K. Daly, Kurt H. Meppen, Vladimir Socor and S. Frederick Starr, “U.S.-Uzbekistan relations, 2001-2005,” *Silk Road Paper* (Washington DC: The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, February 2006), pp. 49-64, <http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2006_daly-et-al_silk-road-paper_anatomy-of-a-crisis.pdf> (May 24, 2010).

⁴ Moreover, the supposed U.S. “*longa manus*” to support the “Coloured Revolutions” in the post-Soviet space (Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in 2005) stressed in the Central Asian presidents a general mistrust about the real aims of the U.S. geopolitical strategy in the region. Lastly, the substantial reduction (compared to the 2002-2003) of the U.S. financial support in the 2004-2005 - which was conditioned to progress in the

Five years later, the United States can boast of two important successes in Central Asia, both closely interlinked to the American strategy to strengthen its geopolitical influence in the region: firstly, the involvement of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan in a framework of reinforced cooperation have permitted the realization of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a commercial logistical corridor connecting Baltic and Black Sea ports with Afghanistan via Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus with the goal to ensure resupply operations towards Afghanistan.⁶

Secondly, the maintaining of the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan as a major logistical hub for operations in Afghanistan, the military facilities obtained in Turkmenistan (even if less publicized), the Uzbek concession of the Navoi airport and the use of Termez airbase for resupply operations in Afghanistan. As well the opportunities to implement military cooperation with Tajikistan and its involvement in the NDN show the U.S.'s renewed role as an important geopolitical player.

This U.S. strategy towards Central Asia is motivated by both geopolitical reasons - linked to the competition with Russia and China in order to extend influence- and by security reasons linked to the Afghan situation and the necessity to strengthen the military extension in the area with the aim to guarantee regional stability and security.⁷

In the energy sphere we can observe that the U.S. Administration has maintained a marginal role in the growing Sino-Russian energy rivalry, where the implementation of the Sino-Kazakh oil pipeline and the realization of the Sino-Turkmen gas pipeline have surely damaged the Russian monopoly over Central Asian exports and could form the basis

democratisation process and in the adoption of reforms - represented another factor which contributed to push Central Asian presidents to reorient their geopolitical position towards Russia and China, strengthening the cooperation in the security and economic spheres.

⁵ Martha B. Olcott, "Eyes on Central Asia: how to understand the winners and losers," in Iwashita Akihiro (ed.), *Eager eyes fixed on Eurasia*, (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007), pp. 6-8; Pinar Ipek, "Challenges for democratization in Central Asia: what can the United States do?" *Middle East Policy* XIV, 1 (spring 2007), pp. 95-106.

⁶ For more information on the Northern Distribution Network, see Andrew C. Kuchins and Thomas M. Sanderson, *The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2010).

⁷ The main strategic priority is to avoid that Islamic extremists linked to Al Qaeda or to the Taliban could take power in Pakistan and above all the control of the nuclear arsenal: moreover, it is necessary to protect Central Asian republics from the threat of a political instability promoted by the Islamic extremists with the aim to overthrow the present secular regimes. Christopher M. Schnaubelt, "NATO and the new US 'Af-Pak' Strategy," *NATO Defence College Research Paper* 51 (September 2009).

for future tensions.⁸ However, it is evident that Turkmenistan's new foreign policy orientation under President Berdymukhammedov⁹ - aimed to diversify energy exports in order to attract western investments for the development of the gas sector and to lessen the Russian monopoly on gas exports - represent one of the strategic reasons for the American return, considering the Turkmen geographic strategic position between Afghanistan and Iran and the opportunity to exploit huge gas reserves in order to fuel alternative export routes outside Moscow's influence.¹⁰

In the security field, after the eviction from the Uzbek K2 airbase in 2005, the U.S. military presence in the Central Asian republics was limited only to the Kyrgyz Ganci-Manas airbase, which has become strategically crucial for military operations in Afghanistan. However, the United States has had some difficulties in maintaining this residual military presence in Central Asia, because of the combination of the Kyrgyz intention to economically exploit the strategic importance of the airbase and the Russian pressures to expel Americans from Manas; this situation has pushed the United States in early 2009 to look for some alternative deals in the region to host U.S. military facilities.¹¹

⁸ The Sino-Turkmen gas pipeline also involves Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, because these nations are crossed by the pipeline and they sell to China part of their gas. Moscow's reaction has been the promotion of the Russian-backed Prikaspiiski gas pipeline project which should involve Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan even if this project is now stalling politically and economically. China aims to control Central Asian reserves and the export routes in order to enhance its energy security, while Russia seeks to maintain the strategic monopoly over Central Asian oil and gas exports. Sébastien Peyrouse, "The Economic Aspects of the Chinese- Central-Asia Rapprochement," *Silk Road Papers* (Washington DC: The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, September 2007), pp. 46-69, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/Silkroadpapers/2007/0709China_Central_Asia.pdf> (May 24, 2010); Vladimir Matveev, "China's gas policy in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 5, 53 (2008), pp. 77-87.

⁹ Turkmenistan's entry in the international community has represented the most important geopolitical change in Central Asian scenario, also considering that Turkmenistan has refused up to now to be involved in the regional multilateral organizations (SCO, EurAsEC, CSTO) and its relations with Russia are worsened, especially in the energy field, while Ashgabat has strongly enhanced its energy cooperation with China.

¹⁰ Jim Nichol, "Turkmenistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests," *CRS Report for Congress*, September 10, 2009, <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/97-1055.pdf>> (May 24, 2010); Slavomír Horák, Jan Šír, "Dismantling Totalitarianism? Turkmenistan under Berdimuhamedow," *Silk Road Paper* (Washington DC: The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, March 2009), pp. 44-68, <http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2009_horak-sir_dismantling-totalitarianism.pdf> (May 24, 2010).

¹¹ Farangis Najibullah and Ron Synovitz, "Kyrgyz Threat Sends U.S. Scrambling For Alternative Supply Routes," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, February 06, 2009, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Kyrgyz_Threat_Sends_US_Scrambling_For_Alternative_Supply_Routes/1380483.html> (May 26, 2010).

This need appeared more urgent considering the realization of the NDN: even if the main priority of the NDN is military¹² - in order to boost the American presence in Afghanistan and to prevent the spread of instability in Central Asia - its geopolitical value is evident because the Central Asian republics have become tightly involved in a framework of economic and military cooperation with the United States. The NDN created a set of commercial agreements with the Central Asian states to allow ground/air transit of cargo to supply U.S. forces in Afghanistan and its use has been extended to military transport too;¹³ in addition to ensuring stability and security in the region, the NDN implementation should boost economic development, enhance regional economic integration and cooperation by improving transportation infrastructure and opening Central Asian markets to global competition.¹⁴

To realize this strategy, the U.S. has obtained several military facilities from Central Asian states, towards the strengthening of military cooperation. If the Manas airbase maintains its relevance as a transit center for the U.S. military forces directed to Afghanistan, the renewed cooperation with Uzbekistan - ratified by the concession of the Navoi airport (which it is used to handle non-military cargo bound for U.S. forces in Afghanistan) and of the Termez NATO airbase as a hub for NDN resupply operations - represents the most important geopolitical success of Washington: as a matter of fact Uzbekistan remains the most important geostrategic pawn in the U.S. policy towards Central Asia and it is obviously the fulcrum of the NDN, because of the existence of the only railroad linking the Uzbek-Afghan border.¹⁵

¹² The creation of the NDN was necessary to find an alternative web of resupply routes - compared to the traditional Pakistan-Afghanistan route, which suffered serious disruptions after becoming a target for Taliban attacks since 2008 - in order to help with combat operations facilitating the surge of supplies associated with an increase of 21,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan in 2009 and an additional 30,000 troops in 2010.

¹³ NDN is based mainly on two overland routes: the first one involves Latvia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, while the southern route involves Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In this southern route supplies are transported across the Caspian Sea to the Kazakhs ports of Atyrau and Aktau. At present Turkmenistan is the only Central Asian nation not directly involved, only allowing humanitarian overflights of its territory. To these two NDN routes it must be added the KKT route which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, conceived as a backup to the Uzbek border crossed at Termez: however, the bad condition of Tajikistan roads hinders a real implementation of the KKT route. Andrew C. Kuchins and Thomas M. Sanderson, *The Northern Distribution Network and the Modern Silk Road. Planning for Afghanistan's Future* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2009), pp. 8-11.

¹⁴ Joshua Kucera, Afghanistan: "U.S. Expanding traffic on Central Asian supply network," *Eurasia Insight*, December 17, 2009, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav121709.shtml>> (May 26, 2010).

¹⁵ Kuchins and Sanderson, *The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities*, pp. 6-12, 15.

Moreover the inclusion of Tajikistan¹⁶ and Kazakhstan in the NDN and the Turkmen agreement to open their airspace for nonlethal shipments of supplies to Afghanistan¹⁷ shows the U.S.’s geopolitical success based on its regional approach and the attainment of strategic objectives expressed in the so called “Greater Central Asia” strategy: the U.S. military engagement of terrorism, the aim to ensure security and long term stability in the region, the economic commitment to strengthen sovereignty and promote development and regional integration, has overcome the previous impression held by Central Asian states that U.S. engagement in the region was temporary, episodic and above all without long-term goals.¹⁸

This renewed U.S. influence represents a serious threat to the interests of Russia and China in the region, having consolidated their presence since 2005 and have come to define Central Asia as an almost exclusive Sino-Russian sphere of influence.¹⁹ Nonetheless, Russia and China have tolerated the U.S. military presence because of their convergence of interests, which draws a similar scenario to the situation post September 11 2001, Russia and China share the same concerns as the U.S. and the Central Asian republics,²⁰ about threats to regional security due to the Afghan situation.²¹

¹⁶ Tajikistan is part of the NDN but it has been excluded by the transit of lethal supplies, because U.S. authorities have considered unsafe to allow the transit of weapons and lethal supplies in a country politically weak and threatened by several factors of instability- first of all its geographic closeness to Afghan border.

¹⁷ “Turkmenistan to open airspace for U.S. supplies to Afghanistan,” *RIA Novosti*, February 25, 2009, <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090225/120303895.html>> (May 26, 2010).

¹⁸ “The U.S. recognizes to have long-term vital interests in the region and they are best served by advancing security and development in the economic, political, and social realms.” S. Frederick Starr, “A ‘Greater Central Asia Partnership’ for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors,” *Silk Road Paper* (Washington DC: The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, March 2005), pp. 9-17, <http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2005_starr_a-greater-central-asia-partnership.pdf> (May 26, 2010); Firat Purtaş, “The Greater Central Asia partnership initiative and its impacts on eurasian security,” *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies* 5 (2008), pp. 97-110.

¹⁹ Regarding the U.S. military advance in the former Soviet republics, Russia and China are obviously worried about a potential long-term American military presence in Central Asia: Moscow is not happy to see the presence of U.S. military forces in its so called “near abroad” and fears that an increase of American economic and military cooperation with Central Asian states could weaken its traditional influence in the area. China also distrusts and is concerned about some American goals in the region, considering that Manas airbase and other military facilities in Tajikistan are close to the Chinese border. The Chinese political leadership also fears a destabilizing effect inside the country provoked by an American commitment to develop a democratisation process in the region.

²⁰ Mainly, it is necessary to contain the serious risk that a damaging condition of instability could spill over into Central Asia; this threat has recently been confirmed by the increased armed incursions of Islamic extremists in the Ferghana Valley. Another threat to regional stability is represented by the drug traffic coming from Afghanistan:

The potential spread of instability in Xinxiang, Tajikistan, the Caucasus, and Chechnya could seriously weaken Sino-Russian internal political stability and also damage regional trade and energy infrastructures, causing interruptions of energy supplies and delays in the realization of new pipelines.²² In order to prevent these threats Russia has offered its cooperation to the U.S., accepting participating in the NDN and to be mostly involved in Afghanistan through CSTO activities:²³ the Russian attitude can be explained as one of the main results of the “reset policy” in U.S./Russian bilateral relations, based on the shared cooperation to handle and solve international issues²⁴ (such as Afghanistan).²⁵ In spite of this improvement in relations, Moscow is wary of increasing U.S. influence, hindering the achievement of Russian security goals, to maintain pro-Moscow regimes and to limit American and Chinese influence in the region.²⁶

Consequently in order to maintain its traditional influence and Russia has adopted an aggressive foreign policy in Central Asia, and an ambiguous strategy towards the U.S. - aimed to contain their influence.

this profitable drug flow is fuelling corruption in transit countries and causing a rise in drug abuse and drug related diseases, and a rise in crime.

²¹ Mohammad R. Djalili and Thierry Kellner, *Geopolitique de la nouvelle Asie Centrale: de la fin de l'URSS à l'après-11 septembre* (Paris: PUF, 2006); Russell Ong, “China security interests in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey* 24, 4, (2005), pp. 426-430.

²² Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse, *China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies*, (Washington D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 2009), pp. 38-39, 44-47, <<http://www.isdp.eu/files/publications/books/09/mlogchinaneighbor.pdf>> (May 26, 2010); Eugene Rumer and Angela Stent, “Russia and the West,” *Survival* 51, 2 (2009), p. 100; Kuchins and Sanderson, *The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities*, p. 20.

²³ Roger McDermott, “Medvedev Expands the Northern Supply Route to Afghanistan,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, 129, July 7, 2009, <[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35227](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35227)> (May 30, 2010); Kulpash Konyrova, “Air NATO for Afghanistan May Give Way to Rail NATO,” *New Europe* 778, April 21, 2008, <<http://www.neurope.eu/articles/85705.php>> (May 30, 2010).

²⁴ Medvedev and Obama agreed to allow the transport of NATO non lethal and lethal supplies via Russia at the NATO-Russia summit in April 2008 in Bucharest. Following this responsible engagement in cooperation with the U.S., Moscow achieved some important goals in its foreign policy, such as the freezing of the Bush backed plan to deploy elements of the antimissile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, the suspension of the NATO enlargement process to Georgia and Ukraine, reduced international attention to the consequences of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war and the indepent status of Abkhazia and North Ossetia (recognized only by Moscow).

²⁵ Walter Slocombe, “The U.S.-Proposed European Missile Defence: An American Perspective,” in Michael Emerson (ed.), *Readings in European Security* 5 (Brussels, Centre for European Policy Studies, 2009), pp. 51-59; Rumer and Stent, “Russia and the West,” pp. 98-100.

²⁶ Alexander Frost, “The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia’s Strategic Goals in Central Asia,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 7, 1 (2009), p. 85.

These strategic reasons explain the contradictory Russian attitude about the U.S. Manas airbase, because on the one hand Russia agreed to participate in the NDN but on the other hand Moscow lobbied with Kyrgyzstan in order to expel U.S. military forces from Manas, providing the Bakiyev government in February 2009 with a financial aid package. Moreover, we can also explain the subsequent Russian attempts to obtain a second military airbase in Kyrgyzstan as a consequence of the U.S.-Russian geopolitical rivalry:²⁷ although the implantation of a new CSTO base stalled, this kind of renewed “military airbase race” involving Russia and U.S. underlines another interesting similarity with the period 2001-2004, when the U.S. military presence in Central Asia (Manas and K2 airbases) helped Russia to gain strategic military concessions in Kyrgyzstan (the Kant airbase which operates under the CSTO) and in Tajikistan (the establishment of a permanent Russian base in Dushanbe after the eviction of the Russian border army from the Tajik-Afghan border).²⁸

Regarding Uzbekistan, Moscow is profoundly worried about the deepened cooperation between Tashkent and Washington which shows a new geopolitical reorientation towards the West in foreign policy: for the moment Karimov has not allowed deployment in Uzbek territory, the hub-role of Termez and Navoi airbases in the NDN resupply operations, the strengthened economic and military cooperation with the U.S. and the Uzbek decision to freeze its participation in Russian-led regional organizations (e.g. the decision to suspend its membership in EurAsEC) are all factors which are annoying Moscow, because it fears losing its influence over a key nation in the region.

The Eurasia region is considered by Russia as an exclusive sphere of influence which should be protected from external interferences through the CSTO activities,²⁹ which can be defined as a counter-balance to

²⁷ After the new U.S.-Kyrgyz agreement in June 2009, which allowed the US to use the Kyrgyz airbase as a Transit Centre for resupply operations, Russia and Kyrgyzstan signed a Memorandum on military cooperation in August 2009 which might give Moscow the opportunity to deploy the Rapid Reaction Force CSTO in a base in southern Kyrgyzstan (maybe near Osh).

²⁸ Vladimir Paramonov, Aleksey Stokov and Oleg Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia: Policy, Security and Economics* (New York: Nova Publishers, 2009), pp. 20-38, 57-59; Roy Allison, “Strategic reassertion in Russia’s central Asia policy,” *International Affairs* 80, 2 (2004), pp. 286-288; Olcott, “Eyes on Central Asia: how to understand the winners and losers,” pp. 6-12.

²⁹ The CSTO role in the regional security sphere has also been affirmed in the new Russian Foreign Policy Concept and in the New Defense Law, which substantially recognizes the existence of Russian privileged interests in Central Asia and the possibility to militarily intervene in other states where there are risks to the Russian “minority interest and dignity” (or even to counter an attack or to prevent an aggression against Russian forces). President of Russia, “The new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation President of Russia”. President of Russia-Official web portal, July 12, 2008,

Western/Chinese influence.³⁰ CSTO is an effective tool for military and political integration between Moscow and the Central Asian states, in order to maintain its influence in the region by means of joint military exercises, delivering modern military equipment at Russian internal prices, CSTO military bases in Central Asian republics such as the Anti-Terror Center in Tashkent, the airbase at Kant in Kyrgyzstan, and the Russian 201st Motor Rifle Division at Kulyab in Tajikistan.³¹

The Central Asian Republics' Role in the Geopolitical "Great Game"

With regard to the increasing rivalry between Moscow and Washington to extend their influence in the region, Central Asian republics have been trying to profitably exploit the U.S.-Russian "military airbase race", in order to get strategic dividends (such as economic investments, the strengthening of regional security, the modernization of military equipment) through the implementation of a "multi-vector" strategy in their foreign policy which can also loosen the strong ties of dependence on Russia.

Since 2008 Central Asian presidents have strengthened military cooperation with the U.S. by concessions on military airbases and agreements to participate in the NDN and thus partially overcoming the past mistrust about the American geopolitical intentions. We can observe that the same strategic interests, which pushed them to develop military cooperation with the U.S. after 2001 are once more valid. Firstly, a deepened cooperation in the military sphere strengthens national security and offers a strong guarantee for Central Asian internal political stability, seriously threatened by the return of Central Asian Islamic militants due

<<http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>> (May 18, 2010); Andrew Wallace, "Russia's new defense law & draft military doctrine," *The ISCIP Analyst* XVI, 4 (October 29, 2009) <<http://www.bu.edu/phpbin/news-cms/news/?dept=732&id=54722>> (June 2, 2010).

³⁰ In 2007 CSTO and SCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding in order to enhance the cooperation in the military and security field. This agreement could be interpreted as Moscow's attempt to engage China in a fully-fledged military alliance, engaging the regional rival in a deepen military cooperation in the framework of a multilateral organization with the aim to better control Chinese ambition and demonstrating Russia's preeminence in the field of regional security. Marcin Kaczmarek, "Russia attempts to limit Chinese influence by promoting CSTO-SCO cooperation," *CACI Analyst*, October 17, 2007, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4716>> (May 15, 2010).

³¹ It appears evident that the CSTO role is not only to ensure internal stability for Central Asian regimes and regional security but also to legitimize Russian exclusive influence towards an integrationist strategy in the energy, security, economic and political sphere, aimed especially at Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, who are extremely dependent on Russian economic, military and political support. Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia," pp. 84-92.

to the increasing number of American military operations along the Afghan-Pakistani border and consequently the growing number of armed attacks and incursions in the inter-republican borders.³² Secondly, the military cooperation also has economic benefits, because the Central Asian states' participation in the NDN framework ensures their involvement in transnational trade routes and this cooperation with the U.S. is widely awarded with massive investments to boost national economy sector and to develop energy sector.³³

U.S. economic support and assistance represent a profitable alternative for Central Asian republics compared to the Russian difficulties, as a consequence of the economic global crisis, which is heavily setting back Moscow's strategic ambition. Indeed, the global economic meltdown has severely damaged Russia's domestic economy and has consequently weakened its geopolitical weight in Central Asia, slackening the implementation of several projects because of the lack of money to invest.³⁴ Besides the financial aspects³⁵, Central Asian states are worried about Russia's aggressive strategy, clearly shown during the 2008 Georgian war, which has reinforced their wary attitude towards Russian initiatives³⁶, which has harmed Russian efforts to promote itself as the major power in Central Asia, while the U.S.'s increasing influence in the region has allowed for a better balance of power in the region, offering economic, military and strategic alternatives.³⁷

³² Sanobar Shermatova, "Should Central Asia Fear Taleban Spillover?" *IWPR Reporting Central Asia*, 595, November 19, 2009, <<http://iwpr.net/report-news/should-central-asia-fear-taleban-spillover>> (May 8, 2010).

³³ Kuchins and Sanderson, *The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities*, pp. 8-12.

³⁴ Some of the above mentioned projects are the planned expansion of the Prikaspiiski pipeline network (in order to strengthen Russian control of Central Asian gas exports), the envisaged investments to develop the Uzbek energy sector and also the delays in Russia's strategy to forge a broad customs union, mainly for the Central Asian reluctance to join it and for the Uzbek decision to withdraw from the EurAsEC. Sergei Blagov, "Caspian Basin: Russia faces a collapse of its economic and political clout," *Eurasia Insight*, December 30, 2008, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav123008.shtml>> (May 28, 2010).

³⁵ Silvana Malle, "The impact of the financial crisis on Russia," *NATO Defense College Forum Paper* 12, December 2009, pp. 6-10; See also the June 2009 Russian Economic Report of the World Bank at <<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRUSSIANFEDERATION/Resources/305499-1245838520910/rer19-eng.pdf>> (May 26, 2010).

³⁶ One of the most important signs of the attempt to oppose Moscow's policy was during the SCO summit in Dushanbe in September 2008, when the Central Asian republics and China did not support Moscow's desire to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Indeed one of the main strategic goals of both Central Asian states and China is to prevent separatism while the Russian invasion represented a clear violation of the key SCO principles on separatism and non-intervention.

³⁷ Niklas Swanström, "Georgia: The Split that Split the SCO," *CACI Analyst*, September 3, 2008, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4930>> (May 26, 2010); Rajan Menon, "The limits of Chinese-Russian partnership," *Survival* 51, 3 (2009), p. 120; Frost, "The Collective

The purpose of the second part of this paper is to analyze the geopolitical repercussions on the Central Asian republics of this U.S.-Russian military and strategic competition, showing their impact on the decisions and the strategies in foreign policy adopted by Central Asian presidents and the future perspectives concerning security and stability issues, taking into consideration the unpredictable consequences of the regime change in Kyrgyzstan and the interethnic clashes in the Ferghana Valley on the regional stability. Attention will be focused on the Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan situation, because at present the consequences of the U.S.-Russian geopolitical competition are more evident than those of Kazakhstan - which is included in the NDN transit agreements but it does not host foreign military airbases - and Turkmenistan, which has officially opened its airspace for humanitarian goods to Afghanistan but it is not directly involved in the NDN, according to its traditional policy of neutrality.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's geopolitical orientation is highly significant to understand how the Russian-American competition to influence Central Asia is evolving: thanks to its geographic position of centrality - bordering the other four republics and above all Afghanistan - to its political and military weight in the regional context, and its larger population, Uzbekistan has always been an important regional player.

Since 2007, Uzbekistan has gradually adopted a westward looking foreign policy - characterized by restored cooperation with the United States in the security and economic fields - which has partially reversed its strategic partnership with Russia consolidated after 2005;³⁸ however, even if Uzbekistan has progressively frozen its participation in the Moscow-backed multilateral regional organizations, it is difficult to clearly affirm a new and definitive Uzbek westward geopolitical shift, because Karimov's strategy during the last 19 years has been based on a profitable balance between American and Russian geopolitical interests in order to achieve internal aims of security and stability, maximizing the strategic benefits deriving from its crucial position.³⁹

Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia," pp. 89-92; Laruelle and Peyrouse, *China as a Neighbor: Central Asian Perspectives and Strategies*, p. 30.

³⁸Roger McDermott, "United States and NATO re-engagement with Uzbekistan," *Eurasian Home Analytical Resource*, October 1, 2008, <www.eurasianhome.org/xml/t/expert.xml?lang=en&nic=expert&pid=1748&qmonth=0&qyear=0> (June 2, 2010).

³⁹ This interpretation has been confirmed after the reversal of the Kyrgyz president Bakiyev, because the threat of instability which could spill over the Kyrgyz borders has pushed Karimov to meet Medvedev seeking Russian support for regional security.

After the Andijan events in 2005, the need to strengthen internal security and to guarantee the stability of the Karimov regime represented the main focus of Uzbek geopolitical realignment with Russia⁴⁰: Moscow's political support for the official Tashkent version of the Andijan events and the signing of the Pact of Mutual defence in November 2005⁴¹ showed Russia as the main and most reliable security partner in terms of containing the inter-republican border incursions by armed Islamic militants and to ensure the survival of Karimov political power.⁴² The rupture of the strategic partnership with the U.S. and the withdrawal of American forces from the K2 military airbase reflected this strategic change in Uzbek policy,⁴³ followed in 2006 by the adhesion to the CSTO and EurAsEC.⁴⁴ But this Uzbek-Russian rapprochement - characterized by Uzbek integration in Russia influenced regional economic and security organizations- was too restrictive for Uzbek foreign policy, which is traditionally based on a cautious approach towards regional integration initiatives while preferring instead the establishment of several bilateral relations with different countries;⁴⁵ in addition, unfulfilled Russian promises in the economic sphere - Gazprom did not make the planned investments for the development of the Uzbek energy sector - its aggressive war in Georgia in 2008, the planned establishment of a new CSTO military base in southern Kyrgyzstan and support for Kyrgyz hydropower projects, pushed Karimov to diversify Uzbek foreign policy by restoring cooperation with the West.

This renewed cooperation - mainly based on Uzbek participation in the NDN which grants NATO forces the use of the Termez airbase and the Navoi airbase as transit hub for supplying ISAF operations in Afghanistan⁴⁶ - has strongly bolstered Uzbekistan's position in Central Asia because it has become the key transit state for the NDN and for the

⁴⁰ Daly, Meppen, Socor and Starr, "U.S.-Uzbekistan relations, 2001-2005," 61-64.

⁴¹ According to the Uzbek authorities, the Andijan uprising was a plot by terrorists and extremist groups with the aim of overthrowing Karimov. As a result of the Mutual Defence Pact of November 2005 Russia also obtained access to an airbase at Navoi, some months after the American eviction from K2.

⁴² Cooley, "U.S. Bases and Democratization in Central Asia," pp. 77-78.

⁴³ The failure of the U.S.-Uzbek strategic partnership signed in 2002 must be interpreted as a progressive deterioration of relations, because Karimov perceived the increasing U.S. criticism over Tashkent's handling of events in Andijan and the pressure to allow an international and independent inquiry over the events as external interference over Uzbek internal policy.

⁴⁴ Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Uzbekistan and the United States: friends or foes?" *Middle East Policy* XIV, 1, (2007), pp. 108-114; John Heathershaw, "Worlds apart: the making and remaking of geopolitical space in the US-Uzbekistan strategic partnership," *Central Asian Survey* 26, 1, (2007), pp. 126-133.

⁴⁵ Resul Jalcin, *The rebirth of Uzbekistan* (Reading: Ithaca, 2002), pp. 237, 235-295.

⁴⁶ This air-land corridor offered by Uzbekistan will be completed with the opening of a new railroad from Hairatan checkpoint on the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan border to Mazar-i-Sharif, a US\$129 million project funded by the Asian Development Bank.

U.S. strategy towards Afghanistan:⁴⁷ this crucial role has allowed Karimov to obtain important political and strategic benefits, such as containing Russian influence, to legitimize his ambition to play a regional role offering its cooperation to stabilise Afghanistan, to strengthen internal stability and security and to regain some international legitimacy after the Andijan events.⁴⁸

However, the armed attacks which targeted Uzbekistan in May 2009 have shown once again the existence of serious threats to the stability of Karimov's power,⁴⁹ underlining Uzbek vulnerability, Karimov's implemented a "multi-vector" policy in the security field aimed to find a security partner able to help Uzbekistan to fight against these threats and to ensure internal stability for his regime.⁵⁰

Before the Kyrgyz crisis in April 2010, Uzbekistan perceived the military cooperation with the United States as being more profitable than with Russia; such strategic orientation has contributed to worsen Uzbek-Russian relations, already damaged by the Russian initiatives in Central Asia such as Moscow's support to Kyrgyz hydropower project of Kambarata and the decision to establish a new military base in southern Kyrgyzstan.⁵¹ As a consequence, in December 2008 Uzbekistan decided to suspend its membership in the EurAsEC - because of the organization's inability to promote greater regional cooperation on water and energy

⁴⁷ Farkhad Tolipov, "Uzbekistan's recent gestures and foreign policy formulation problem," *CACI Analyst*, June 25, 2008, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4889>> (June 2, 2010); Roger McDermott, "Uzbekistan playing renewed strategic role in NATO's Afghanistan mission," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 6, 38, February 26, 2009, <[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=34558](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34558)> (June 2, 2010).

⁴⁸ The Uzbekistan strategic position explains in geopolitical terms the EU decision not to renew the sanctions imposed on Tashkent in the aftermath of the Andijan uprising in 2005, without registering any important progress in the democratization process, but with the aim to better involve Central Asian republics in an enlarged framework of dialogue.

⁴⁹ In Uzbekistan in May 2009, there was a suicide bombing in Andijan, an armed attack aimed at a border post on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border and a clash between gunmen and security forces in the Uzbek border town of Khanabad. Farangis Najibullah, "Uzbek attacks trip alarm bells in Ferghana," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, May 27, 2009, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Uzbek_Attacks_Trip_Alarm_In_Ferghana/1740949.html> (May 26, 2010).

⁵⁰ Daniel Kimmage, "Uzbekistan: is Tashkent's foreign policy going multivector?" *Eurasia Insight*, March 10, 2007, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp031107.shtml>> (June 2, 2010).

⁵¹ Uzbek opposition to the construction of Kambarata hydropower project - officially to prevent environmental risks and maintain water balance - is mainly based on the need to hinder the energy-dependent neighbours to become independent in energy exporting, a position which was previously supported by Moscow. Russia's recent decision to support Uzbekistan's call for international feasibility studies of the Tajik Rogun and Kyrgyz Kambarata-1 dams (and not to grant the promised loan to Kyrgyzstan to develop its hydropower project) shows the Russian awareness that a profitable partnership and cooperation with Uzbekistan is crucial in the Russian strategy towards the region.

issues - and during 2009 Uzbekistan did not participate in several SCO and CSTO meetings, thus fuelling speculations about a possible future suspension of its membership.⁵²

Moreover, the Uzbek decision not to sign a key agreement to establish the CSTO Rapid Reaction Forces (RRF) has represented the most important geopolitical signal against Russia's desire to forge a new security infrastructure.⁵³ Karimov outlined four conditions to join the CSTO RRF, among them the condition that CSTO RRF can only be deployed on non-CSTO territory and that the CSTO RRF cannot be used to resolve conflicts within the CSTO, because they reflect the Uzbek aim to prevent Russia from interfering with Uzbekistan's internal affairs.⁵⁴ According to Karimov's position, this collective military force should be used only for confronting external aggressions, as to exclude a direct involvement of CSTO or Russia in a potential crisis between Uzbekistan and its neighbours (Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan), linked to border disputes or water management issues.⁵⁵ If Karimov confirms the refusal to join the CSTO RRF, this Russian initiative will lose its strategic relevance, considering Uzbekistan's geographical position and its strong military potential.

The Uzbek opposition to the Russian plans to establish a second military base in southern Kyrgyzstan to host the CSTO RRF reflects some serious concerns about the potential location of the base and the intensified Russian military presence in the region: Karimov was profoundly suspicious about the strategic meaning of the Russian decision to establish a new base close to the Uzbek border, after the Uzbek refusal to join the CSTO RRF: this Russian military presence near the Uzbek border is perceived as a threat and as an attempt to condition Uzbek internal policy, and as a Russian geopolitical move against the improvement of U.S.-Uzbekistan military cooperation. Moreover, Uzbekistan appears profoundly worried about the increasing militarization in Central Asia, and according to Tashkent the establishment of a new military base in Osh could spread instability and nationalistic confrontation in the potentially explosive area of the

⁵² Umida Hashimova, “Uzbekistan and regional integration in Central Asia,” *CACI Analyst*, June 17, 2009, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5128>> (June 3, 2010).

⁵³ The main goal of the CSTO RRF is strengthening security in the CSTO member states, preventing and fighting against security threats such as terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking, but the Russian economic and military predominance points to Moscow's role as the unchallenged leader of this organization.

⁵⁴ The other Uzbek conditions are that the CSTO RRF can only be used by consensus of CSTO members; that the CSTO RRF document cannot enter into force before it is signed by all CSTO. In addition, Uzbekistan refused to permanently avail its troops for deployment as part of the CSTO RRF.

⁵⁵ Vladimir Socor, “Uzbekistan Quietly Stalling on CSTO Collective forces,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, 115, June 16, 2009, <[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35130](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35130)> (June 2, 2010).

Ferghana Valley. The interethnic clashes in June 2010 which involved Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks seemed to confirm Karimov's concern about regional stability.⁵⁶ The Kyrgyz upheaval in April 2010 and the following tensions in the southern Kyrgyz region have undoubtedly accelerated an Uzbek-Russian rapprochement based on the shared aim preventing instability in the region. Following Karimov's visit to Moscow in April, Uzbekistan obtained support from Russia in the security field, through a strengthening of bilateral military cooperation thus excluding, in the short term, an Uzbek withdrawal from the CSTO.⁵⁷ At the same time, Washington's decision to strengthen military cooperation with Tashkent is destined to enhance the position of Uzbekistan in the Central Asia.

Kyrgyzstan

In the last few years Kyrgyzstan has been deeply involved in the rivalry between Russia and the U.S. in Central Asia, characterized by the presence of a Russian airbase in Kant (hosting CSTO military forces) and a U.S. airbase in Manas. Consequently, while Washington has engaged itself in order to maintain this key transit hub for U.S. military personnel and equipment into Afghanistan, Moscow has steadily sought to evict the Americans from Manas, and the ousted Kyrgyz President Bakiyev played an opportunistic "double game", exploiting this rivalry with the goal to maximize economic and political benefits by means of a kind of "multi-vector policy"⁵⁸ based on the military cooperation with both Russia and the United States.⁵⁹

When Bakiyev came to power in July 2005 following the Tulip Revolution, the United States faced a profoundly transformed Central Asian scenario, where Russia and China had restored their political influence.⁶⁰ The deterioration of the Uzbek-U.S. partnership and the loss

⁵⁶ Farkhod Tolipov, "The metamorphosis of Collective Security in Central Asia: Russia's new base in southern Kyrgyzstan," *CACI Analyst*, September 16, 2009, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5176>> (June 4, 2010); "No Reason for New Russian Base in Kyrgyzstan," *IWPR News Briefing Central Asia*, April 21, 2010, <<http://iwpr.net/report-news/no-reason-new-russian-base-kyrgyzstan>> (May 29, 2010).

⁵⁷ M. K. Bhadrakumar, "A Russian-Uzbek challenge to the US," *Asia Times*, April 23, 2010, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/LD23Ago2.html> (June 5, 2010).

⁵⁸ Eugene Huskey, "Foreign Policy in a Vulnerable State: Kyrgyzstan as Military Entrepot Between the Great Powers," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6, 4 (2008), pp. 12-14.

⁵⁹ Nevertheless Bakiyev failed in his attempt (aimed mainly at strengthening its leadership) because - unlike Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan - the Kyrgyz Republic is politically and economically too weak to successfully adopt a multi-vector policy: moreover its authoritarian policy fuelled growing opposition and internal dissent which, in combination with degrading living standards, culminated in the April 2010 upheaval and the reversal after five years of the "tulip" revolution.

⁶⁰ The collapse of the Akayev regime in Kyrgyzstan and the rise of a new political leadership imposed by the U.S. as well as the necessity to consolidate relations with the new president to consolidate the U.S. presence in Manas.

of the K2 Uzbek airbase have enhanced the strategic relevance of the Manas airbase, which has remained the only U.S. military base in the country and crucial to supplying and refuelling operations in Afghanistan and to promote U.S. interests in the region.⁶¹

From the Russian perspective, a long-term U.S. military presence in Kyrgyzstan is unwelcome, as a Western-oriented Kyrgyzstan could prevent Russian expansion as Kyrgyz adhesion to Moscow's regional initiatives (such as the CIS, Custom Union⁶² or the RRF CSTO) is necessary to avoid its failure.⁶³ Furthermore, Uzbekistan refused to join the RRF CSTO and Turkmenistan does not take part in regional organizations due to its policy of neutrality.⁶⁴

Bakiyev profitably bargained with Washington regarding the lease of Manas - the only US military airbase in Central Asia - to obtain an increase of the base rent and additional investments (which played a substantial role in supporting the weak Kyrgyz economy)⁶⁵, and at the same time he also exploited the Russian hostility to the American military presence in Manas in order to obtain economic investments from Moscow and political support for the regional framework.⁶⁶

At the beginning of 2009 - as its financial crisis worsened - Kyrgyzstan obtained a US\$2.15 billion assistance package from Moscow, including US\$150 million in grants, US\$300 million in loans and about US\$1.7 billion which Moscow pledged to invest in the construction of the Kambarata-1 hydro-power plant: even if it was not explicitly mentioned in the agreement, Russia hoped that Kyrgyzstan would realize Moscow's

⁶¹ Gregory Gleason, "The expulsion of US forces and realignment in Central Asia," *Problems of Post Communism* 53, 2 (2006), pp. 49-60.

⁶² The CIS Customs Union comprises at present Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. During his presidency, Bakiyev expressed the will to join this organization and also the new interim president Otumbaeva has confirmed this aspiration with his policy of strengthening economic relations with Moscow.

⁶³ The RRF CSTO would comprise 15000-16000 troops, Russia would contribute 10000 troops, Kazakhstan 3000-4000, while Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Armenia 1000 troops each. It appears evident that in the case of the potential exclusion of Kyrgyzstan, the strategic impact of the RRF in Central Asia would be very weak.

⁶⁴ Farkhad Sharip, "Russia's Customs Union tinged with failure," *Asia Times*, August 20, 2010, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/LH20Ago1.html> (August 22, 2010); Irina Ionela Pop, "Russia, EU, NATO and the strengthening of the CSTO," *Central Asia, Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 3, 3 (2009), pp. 285-287.

⁶⁵ After months of negotiations, in July 2006 Kyrgyzstan and the U.S. announced a deal on extending U.S. use of the base, according to which Washington would provide over US\$150 million in total assistance and compensation while the rent for the Manas lease payment rose from US\$2 million annually to US\$20 million.

⁶⁶ Cooley, "U.S. Bases and Democratization in Central Asia," pp. 76-81; Huskey, "Foreign Policy in a Vulnerable State: Kyrgyzstan as Military Entrepot Between the Great Powers," pp. 12-14.

geopolitical aspiration to expel U.S. military forces from Manas.⁶⁷ In February 2009 Bakiyev announced the decision to close Manas, apparently satisfying the Russian will and pushing the U.S. to look for alternative military facilities in Central Asia in order to develop the NDN.⁶⁸ After obtaining the consent of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan for the transit of non lethal goods to Afghanistan and the Turkmen approval to the humanitarian goods transit, in May 2009 Uzbekistan grant the U.S. the use of the Navoi airbase, which could partially compensate the potential loss of Manas as a hub for supplying operations and showed a renewed U.S. cooperation with Tashkent.⁶⁹

In June 2009 Bakiyev reversed his policy with the decision to continue his anti-terrorism cooperation with the U.S., granting it the use of the Kyrgyz airbase,⁷⁰ but changing the Manas status to that of a “transit center” rather than a military base. So Bakiyev appeared as the real winner in the Russian-American competition because he obtained some important financial gains.⁷¹ However this prolonged U.S. presence in Manas has engendered a Russian reaction, triggering the “military airbase race” between the two countries. Furthermore Kyrgyz economic weakness hindered Bakiyev’s ability to resist external pressures and the explosion of economic and social tensions led to his loss of power.

In July 2009 Bakiyev’s decision to accept Moscow’s proposal to establish a new CSTO base in southern Kyrgyzstan’s Ferghana Valley - in the city of Osh - was a kind of compensation for the renewed U.S. presence in Manas.⁷² The opening of a second Russian base in Kyrgyz territory would represent a Russian geopolitical success, but this decision

⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, “Kyrgyzstan: A Hollow Regime Collapses,” *ICG Asia Briefing*, 102 (April 27, 2010), pp. 5-6.

⁶⁸ Najibullah and Synovitz, “Kyrgyz Threat Sends U.S. Scrambling For Alternative Supply Routes”.

⁶⁹ Jim Nichol, “Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests” *CRS Report for Congress*, May 28, 2010, pp. 24-26, <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33458.pdf>> (July 10, 2010).

⁷⁰ According to this new agreement Kyrgyzstan will receive US\$60 million in annual rent (instead of the previous US\$17 million) in addition to US\$110 million earmarked for military (including anti-narcotics initiatives and anti-terrorist training) and humanitarian projects.

⁷¹ Indeed, the US\$60 million paid by Washington from the Manas rent and the first tranche of the Russian loan (US\$450 million) have undoubtedly contributed to support the Kyrgyz budget (which amounts US\$1.1 billion per year) but this money was also invest in the Presidential electoral campaign which ended with Bakiev re-election in July 2009. Erica Marat, “Bakiyev wins new geopolitical game over Manas base,” *CACI Analyst*, July 1, 2009, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5137>> (June 12, 2010).

⁷² “Kyrgyzstan: Russia Seeks Second Military Base in Central Asian Nation, Rattling Uzbekistan,” *Eurasianet*, July 12, 2009, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eavo71309.shtml>> (June 10, 2010).

would trigger serious destabilising repercussions in the region.⁷³ Considering Bakiyev's unfulfilled promise to evict U.S. military forces from Manas, in February 2010 Moscow decided to postpone the loan of US\$1.7-billion earmarked to realize the Kambarata project - claiming that the first tranche of US\$450 million was not used for the correct purposes - while the realization of the CSTO military base in Osh stalled.⁷⁴ Russia then took a position supporting Uzbekistan's call for international feasibility studies of the Tajik Rogun and Kyrgyz Kambarata-1 hydropower projects and the delay concerning the US\$1.7 billion promised loan must be interpreted as Moscow's attempt to side with the gas-rich and strategically relevant Uzbekistan, rather than a weak Kyrgyzstan. One month before his dismissal, Bakiyev announced a new deal with the U.S. in order to open a military training center in Batken province⁷⁵ - in the Kyrgyz part of the Fergana Valley bordering Tajikistan's Tavildara area - with the aim to defend the porous borders identified by Bakiyev as “the biggest threat” to the nation's security, as they have been affected by Islamic extremists and drug trafficking networks.⁷⁶

Following the April upheaval and Bakiyev's ousting the U.S.- Russian “military airbase race” in Kyrgyzstan has been partially frozen.⁷⁷ Although the new interim government and President Roza Otumbaeva want to continue a multi-vector foreign policy of cooperation with both Russia and the U.S., the balance of power appears to be changing in

⁷³ In fact, the geographical location of the base could represent an additional element of tension in the fragile Kyrgyz-Uzbek border relations - which have deteriorated following the extremist attacks in May 2009 in the Uzbek portion of the Ferghana Valley - and recently further affected by the explosion of violence in Osh and Southern Kyrgyzstan (June 2010), which seems to confirm the dangerous instability of the Ferghana Valley.

⁷⁴ “Russia suspends promised loan to Kyrgyzstan,” *New Europe*, 879, March 28, 2010, <<http://www.neweurope.eu/articles/100032.php>> (June 14, 2010).

⁷⁵ This decision reflected Bakiyev's disagreement on the Russian delay regarding the expected financial arrangements and his contrary opinion on the base location in Osh - which Russia prefers for the presence of the international airport and to better control Ferghana Valley and Uzbekistan - because he insisted on Batken instead.

⁷⁶ Roman Muzalevsky, “The U.S.-Kyrgyz military center and Kyrgyzstan's multi-vector foreign policy,” *CACI Analyst*, March 17, 2010, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5285>> (June 10, 2010).

⁷⁷ The April upheaval and then Bakiyev's ousting was the result of an explosive combination of Russian economic and political pressure and the people's reaction against authoritarianism; the deterioration of living standards, the rise of electricity prices, which was provoked by the revoking of the preferred customs duties that Kyrgyzstan had been receiving on Russian diesel and energy imports. Russia achieved success by undermining Bakiyev in order to punish his “geopolitical disobedience,” by means of a concerted action including economic power, a national media offensive denouncing Bakiyev's corruption and immediate support for the new interim government. Stephen Blank, “Moscow's fingerprints in Kyrgyzstan's storm,” *CACI Analyst*, April 14, 2010, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5305>> (June 3, 2010).

favour of Moscow. Russia is affirming itself as Kyrgyzstan's main partner, as Moscow gave immediate political recognition to the new interim government - also offering economic and financial support - even though Moscow did not intervene to help the Kyrgyz government during the interethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan.⁷⁸ It is easy to predict that Moscow will have a growing influence in the Kyrgyz future choices in foreign policy, such as the strategic decision concerning the fate of Manas. However, military cooperation with the U.S. and the realization of the military training center in southern Kyrgyzstan would seem to be an effective method of preventing more instability in the volatile Ferghana Valley.

Tajikistan

Following its inclusion in the NDN in March 2009⁷⁹, Tajikistan has considerably enhanced its geopolitical position. The Tajik decision to allow the transit of non-military goods for Afghanistan on its road and rail networks was linked to economic and security considerations because strong cooperation with the U.S. could potentially lessen its dependence on Russia and help to solve its internal and regional issues. The Tajik leadership hopes that this agreement represents only the first step in a vast expansion of U.S.-Tajik military cooperation, which could potentially lead to the opening of an American military base on Tajik soil.⁸⁰ In the first months of 2009 - when Washington was seriously looking for alternative military facilities in Central Asia in order to compensate for the threatened loss of Manas airbase - the possibility of a base in Tajikistan was an option which Americans took into consideration, mainly for its crucial geographic position - sharing long borders with Afghanistan - and in order to strengthen and better control the destabilising threats coming from the porous Tajik-Afghan border.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Gregory Feifer, "Russian moves in Kyrgyzstan raise questions over U.S. base," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 9, 2010, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_Moves_In_Kyrgyzstan_Raise_Questions_Over_US_Base/2007784.html> (May 29, 2010); Deirdre Tynan, "Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek plans no immediate changes in strategic cooperation with US, Russia," *Eurasianet*, April 12, 2010, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eavo41210.shtml>> (June 4, 2010).

⁷⁹ Roman Kozhevnikov, "Tajikistan Allows NATO Cargo Transit to Afghanistan," *Reuters*, February 20, 2009, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/newsMaps/idUSTRE51J1DE20090220>> (April 3, 2010).

⁸⁰ Roman Muzalevsky, "The US Expands Military Ties with Tajikistan," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7, 142, July 23, 2010, <[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=36665&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=cbo2e6d141](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36665&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=cbo2e6d141)> (April 18, 2010).

⁸¹ However, some physical and geographic characteristics hinder this realization, because Dushanbe airport is surrounded on all sides by mountains, posing serious difficulties to refuelling operations. "Tajikistan: the French military remains a welcome presence in Dushanbe," *Eurasianet*, March 3, 2009, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eavo31709a.shtml>> (April 20, 2010).

However, Washington is conscious of the fierce Russian opposition to the establishment of a new U.S. military airbase in Central Asia, which will exacerbate their geopolitical rivalry, outlining a “Kyrgyz scenario” in Tajikistan, Russian pressure on the Tajik government hindered new American tactical success in the region.⁸²

In addition to domestic issues, Tajikistan has become increasingly vulnerable because of its proximity to Afghanistan where drug and weapon traffics, Islamic extremist actions are spreading. The porous Afghan border remains a major security challenge for Tajikistan mainly because of its length (1,344 km) and its mountainous terrain make it difficult for Tajik border guards to carefully police the border. Following the Russian border troops’ withdrawal in 2003 Tajik border guards took charge of the border but they have not been able to implement this task, even with the help and assistance in the form of training, equipment and material support from Russia, the European Union⁸³ and the United States.⁸⁴

The Tajik-Afghan border has consequently become the favourite route for drug traffickers, who smuggle Afghan heroin through Tajikistan and Central Asia and then into Russian, European and Chinese markets.⁸⁵ Besides the social effects related to the narcotics traffic, another serious threat to Tajik stability is represented by the return from Afghanistan and Pakistan of Central Asian Islamic extremists; their cross-border activities throughout the Tajik-Afghan region produce destabilizing effects not only for Central Asian states but

⁸² But the base establishment or even deepened military cooperation with the U.S. would offer additional economic and financial assistance to boost the weak economy of this Central Asian state, supported by remittances of workers and international aid, which has been heavily affected by the global economic crisis. Economic problems - worsened by high unemployment and the return of migrant workers following the effects of the economic crisis in neighbouring countries - and the authoritarian management of power represent a dangerous combination which could threaten internal stability.

Saodat Mahbatsho, “Tajikistan: possibility of expanded security ties with Washington sparks enthusiasm in Dushanbe,” *Eurasianet*, January 29, 2009, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eavor2909.shtml>> (April 20, 2010); International Crisis Group, “Central Asia: migrants and the economic crisis,” *ICG Asia Report*, 183, January 5, 2010, pp. 3-16.

⁸³ The European Union has implemented two programs aimed at strengthening border security in Central Asia, the BOMCA program and CADAP, promote EU assistance in border management and the cooperation among border states.

⁸⁴ Alexander Sodiqov, “Porous Tajik-Afghan border remains a major security challenge,” *CACI Analyst*, July 15, 2009, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5152>> (April 20, 2010); George Gavrilis, “Beyond the Border Management Programme for Central Asia (BOMCA),” *EUCAM EU-Central Asia Monitoring* 11, November 2009, pp. 2-5.

⁸⁵ According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) up to 100 tons of Afghan heroin is smuggled through Central Asian countries every year (25 percent of total Afghan production) and the Tajik-Afghan border represents the main export route towards Russia. “The transnational threat of Afghan opium,” *UNODC*, October 2009, pp. 9-15.

also for China (which fears instability in the Xinjiang region), Russia and for the U.S. efforts to stabilize Afghanistan.⁸⁶

In order prevent threats to national stability, in the first months of 2009 Tajik President Rahmon was confident that military cooperation with the U.S. was the best strategic guarantee in the security field rather than the traditional military cooperation with Russia which - in spite of the Russian military presence on Tajik territory- appeared not fully able to fight against terrorism. Following the Tajik inclusion in the NDN, Rahmon has tried to exploit this foreign policy success in order to review the relations with Russia and to lessen dependence, asking Russia to reassess bilateral military cooperation and the fulfilment of a promise to invest US\$2 billion in the construction of the Rogun hydroelectric power station

However, Rahmon failed in his attempt to obtain from Moscow the payment of rental fees for the lease of the military airbase (which hosts Russia's Motorized Rifle Division 201) while military cooperation between the two countries has been reinforced during several bilateral summits, which have shown their shared concerns regarding the increase in drug traffic, the armed incursions of Islamic militants and the threats to the regional stability linked to the explosive Kyrgyz situation after the events of April 2010.⁸⁷ Maintaining the *status quo* - which allows Russia the free use of the Tajik base until 2014⁸⁸ - underlines the Tajik condition of economic and geopolitical weakness in comparison with Russia, which could react to the proposition to pay for the base by using strategic leverage, like selling arms to Tajikistan at market prices - considering that Moscow is the only military supplier for Dushanbe - without the CIS discount, to collect its US 30 million dollar debt, to introduce restrictions on accepting Tajik working migrants (as a visa regime between the two countries).⁸⁹

At the same time however, Tajikistan represents an important pawn in the Russian security strategy in Central Asia which Moscow cannot

⁸⁶ Sodiqov, "Porous Tajik-Afghan border remains a major security challenge".

⁸⁷ Paramonov, Stokov, Stolpovski, *Russia in Central Asia: policy, security an economics*, pp. 57-59.

⁸⁸ According to the deal signed in 2004 between Russia and Tajikistan, Rahmon agreed to the reorganization of Russia's 201st Motor Rifle Division stationed in Tajikistan into a permanent military base, without paying rental fees until 2014. For its part Moscow committed itself to invest U.S. \$2 billion to build the Rogun power station. In 2007, following Russian delays to invest in the project Tajikistan cancelled the deal with the Russian aluminum giant Rusal, asking Moscow to commit itself to an alternative arrangement.

⁸⁹ Victoria Naumova and Mavjouda Hasanova, "Negotiations on status of Russian military base in Tajikistan to be continued," *Asia Plus*, September 12, 2009, <<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/36/56822.html>> (April 20, 2010); Suhrob Majidov, "The problematic Tajikistan-Russia relationship," *CACI Analyst*, August 19, 2009, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5162>> (April 21, 2010).

afford to lose. Dushanbe's support is crucial to implement the RRF CSTO - considering the Uzbek reluctance to join and the instability in Kyrgyzstan - and Russian airbases in Tajikistan is the largest in the region with 6,800 servicemen deployed in Dushanbe, Qurghon Teppa, and Kulob.

Conclusion

Considering the importance of their strategic goals, U.S.-Russian geopolitical competition and their "airbase race" is destined to continue in the coming years. However, the balance of power among the U.S., the Central Asian republics and Russia is steadfastly changing, as the events in Kyrgyzstan have showed. The evolution of the Kyrgyz situation and the decisions of President Otumbaeva in her foreign policy outlook will definitely condition future U.S.-Russian geopolitical competition. Although Otumbaeva has confirmed that Kyrgyzstan will respect the current Manas deal and the relevance of U.S.-Kyrgyzstan bilateral relations, a review of the terms surrounding the Manas deal will be necessary in the coming months. A decision about the fate of the airbase should be postponed until after the October parliamentary elections; at present the U.S. position is discredited and weakened, because Otumbaeva has criticized the U.S. for its previous support of the undemocratic and repressive Bakiyev government and for allowing pervasive government corruption through lucrative refuelling and supply contracts connected with the Manas base operations.

The U.S. has confirmed its continued engagement in Central Asia planning the construction of military training centers in Osh (Kyrgyzstan) and Karatog (Tajikistan) and the strengthening of military cooperation with Uzbekistan. Moreover, future Turkmen participation in the NDN South and the concession to the U.S. of the ex-Soviet airbase at Mary for training purposes could favour Washington. The growing strategic importance of the NDN makes Central Asian republics a target of armed attacks by Islamists and contributing to the spread of instability in the region. The promotion of regional cooperation is a difficult goal to achieve and this influences the full implementation of the NDN; only a few short months ago, the tension between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan caused an interruption in the NDN framework introduction. Moreover, the U.S. perceived need to secure the support of authoritarian regimes in the struggle with the Taliban has weakened its' commitment to human rights and democracy in the region.

Russian concerns about the region reflect a different approach from the existing military cooperation between the U.S. and Central Asia. According to Moscow, helping the U.S. to stabilise Afghanistan is closely linked to its anxiety about NATO's failure to defeat the Taliban.

Considering NATO and the U.S. planned withdrawal in 2011 from Afghanistan, a nightmarish scenario is one possibility for Central Asian stability and also for Russia. In the Russian strategy U.S.-Central Asia cooperation in the security sphere must be developed inside the CSTO framework and not by means of bilateral deals, so as to maintain Russia's traditional leverage and influence and imposing Russia as an intermediary in the process. In recent years, Moscow's strategy has been based on pressuring NATO and the West to recognize the CSTO as a legitimate security organization, because Russia will not accept Central Asian states interacting independently with NATO.⁹⁰ However, the lack of intervention by the CSTO in interethnic clashes in Osh showed the limits of this organization, conceived to react only against external threats and not to solve internal issues in the CSTO member states, and thus adversely affecting the Russian role as a regional security provider.

⁹⁰ Stephen Blank, "NATO confronts its Eurasian rivals," *CACI Analyst*, March 11, 2009, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5057>> (May 29, 2010).

Labor Migration From Central Asia To Russia: Mutual Social Perception in the Orenburg Oblast

Igor Savin *

ABSTRACT

As a frontier region for centuries with Central Asia, the Orenburg oblast, in Central Siberia, has been characterized by a high level of transience among its population and is now one of the centers of labor migration from Central Asia. Labor migration is an objective process that effectively redistributes labor in the global context but it is accompanied by specific long-term interactions between “locals” and “migrants”. Their mutual alienation cannot be explained by would-be “cultural differences”, but by conflicts caused by the lack of overlap in social practice and mobilization of resources during the social adaptation of different groups. This paper focuses on the societal perception of migrants in the Orenburg region, of their everyday life on the markets and in the construction sector, and on the relations between xenophobic feelings and multiculturalism.

Keywords • Labor Migration • Russia • Central Asia • Orenburg Oblast • Ethnicity • Multiculturalism

Introduction

As a frontier region the Orenburg oblast has been characterized for centuries by a high level of transience among its population. This has also been the case over the last fifteen years, as the first waves of post-Soviet migration had people passing through this territory, followed in 2002, by labor migrants. According to official data, the Orenburg migratory balance became negative in 2004, but at the same time the number of labor migrants started to grow. According to the Federal Migration

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Service, it reached 60,000 in 2006, with 7 percent annual growth, however only 3,610 people have an official working permit. Under the survey conducted by experts and carried out among labor migrants in 2007, around 60 percent of them go on arrival to migratory services and try to get an official working permit. On this basis, it is possible to suppose that official data matches the facts on the ground to a large degree. Yet representatives of migrant communities and several experts place the number of permanent labor migrants closer to 100,000. The majority of them come from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan. This paper focuses on the societal perception of migrants in the Orenburg region, of their everyday life in the markets and construction sector, and on the relations between xenophobic feelings and multiculturalism.

Field materials for this article were collected during research conducted by the order of the administration of the Orenburg oblast with colleagues from the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (Moscow) in 2007, and in part, in July 2009. I used the results of a sociological survey conducted on 1,500 respondents by the Orenburg authorities in 2007. I conducted myself about 30 expert interviews with local scholars, journalists, and state experts, 3 focus groups, and 10 individual anthropological interviews with different groups (local populations, students, labor migrants).

Societal Perceptions of Migrants in the Orenburg Region

According to experts, most migrants are involved in construction and trade. Whereas people have positive views of migrants employed in construction, the perception of market traders is different. This difference can be explained by the tensions harbored by everyday people and their interactions with the traders, who retail daily necessities and have concerns in opposition to those of their customers. The fact that sellers are also visibly “different” makes negative stereotyping even easier. Polls carried out by experts show that 61 percent of the local population think negatively about migrants coming from Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia; 55 percent about those from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan; and 62 percent about those from Vietnam, China, and other countries outside the CIS.

At the same time, only 29 percent have negative views regarding economic migrants from Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova; and 20 percent from other regions of Russia. The same situation applies to the question of desirability of people from different regions permanently residing in the Orenburg region. It is particularly necessary to note that only 12.9 percent are against Russians from former Soviet republics coming to the region, but 66 percent are opposed to Russian citizens with a “Caucasian ethnic background” from doing so.

One can try to locate the basis of this rejection of the migrant “other” in an analysis of how local residents view the impact of migration on their lives: 44 percent of respondents consider the fact that migrants work where locals do not want to as a positive contribution; 44 percent consider them to be a cheap labor force; 17.7 percent talk of them providing cheap construction in the countryside; but only 13.6 percent think that migrants contribute to commerce. At the same time 49.6 percent of the population thinks that migrants increase crime; 48.1 percent view markets as being under migrant control; 35.7 percent believe that they treat local citizens and their traditions with disrespect; 39.9 percent say that they lower wage levels for local citizens; and 28.7 percent consider migrants to be the source of interethnic conflicts. Only 24.6 percent think that migrants worsen unemployment; 23.6 percent that they exacerbate housing, transport, and social security issues; and 16.1 percent that they intensify overpopulation. Even if no surge of criminality related to migrants has been observed in the region, the most problematic aspects related to migrants in public opinion focus on trade and criminality. About one quarter of respondents think that conflicts between locals and migrants are frequent in their region and 18.7 percent assess relations between locals and migrants as conflictual. The respondents harbor particular fears about the excessive presence of migrants in the markets and their role in crime.

As a result, one can view the rejection of migrants as a phenomenon that combines different types of phobias based on cultural distance and that reflect peculiarities of existing negative interactions in certain situations. Russians from abroad and “foreigners” from Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine provoke less rejection than people from non-CIS states, Central Asia, and the Caucasus; citizens of other CIS countries provoke less rejection than those from North Caucasian regions, even those who are compatriots of the respondents. The structure and mechanisms of the construction of negative attitudes toward the migrants necessitates further comprehension and will be referenced when analyzing the research data.

The perception of their situation by the migrants themselves is no less interesting: 80.7 percent of them are satisfied with their living conditions, and 75.5 percent are satisfied with their income and salaries. They identify the high cost of living (39.3 percent), high housing costs (29.4 percent), and low salaries (20.8 percent) among their main problems. The bureaucratic attitude of the government was noted by 19 percent of questioned migrants and extortion from local officials by 15 percent. The subject that the local population considers most related to migrants (interaction with officials and crime) turns out to be unimportant in the lives of migrants.

Migrants overall are aware of the way that the local population treats them, or at least their estimation of the attitude of locals toward migrants coincides with the actual opinions of the locals: 40 percent think that the local population treats negatively people from Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia; 36.8 percent those from Vietnam and China; and 29 percent those from Central Asian states. The least negative attitude is towards people from Central Asia. Only 11.5 percent of migrants have had a personal experience of conflict with a local and only 18.5 percent think that such conflicts occur often. These findings match with local answers to the same questions. When answering questions concerning relations with officials, migrants in general remark on assistance from authorities in solving their problems: 57.5 percent of them had gone to migration services and 47 claim to have received everything they needed, but 45 percent add that they got it with difficulty. Of the respondents, 59 percent appealed personally and 40 percent both personally and with the help of mediators; 10 percent say that had to pay illegal bribes to officials; 20 percent consider this reasonable and 40 percent claim firmly that they would not pay.

It seems that these opinions do not indicate a critical situation in migration because significant portions of migrants tend to legalize their status, collaborate with official bodies, and are quite satisfied with their position. Local administrative officers have played a part by contributing to the emergence of public agencies that represent the interests of the biggest migrant groups, being in constant contact with them and reacting to their requests and proposals. During our visit, there was ongoing preparation for a state level meeting between the government of the Orenburg oblast and the Republic of Tajikistan, which had on its agenda the issue of improving migratory exchange between the two areas, among other things.

Everyday Life of Central Asia Migrants in the Orenburg Region

To obtain more accurate information from local experts, we focused on the lives of labor migrants from Central Asia in Orenburg. In September 2007, we observed them in the places where they concentrate: markets, construction sites, hostels, and catering locations. This observation took place over several weeks and consisted both of observation and interaction with the migrants, and follow up visits in July 2009.

The focus on collective forms of adaption in the new location is a peculiarity of migrant community formation. But in contrast to Caucasian ethnic groups, for whom the family is the main social unit, groups of ethnic Central Asians normally move, settle, and live in larger groups; work teams formed by mediators in the homeland include

neighbors, distant relatives, and classmates from one village. The “family form” is typical only for traders who started to arrive at Orenburg markets 15 to 17 years ago and are no longer in need of assistance. Others prefer the structure of the work team. Back in the homeland, a “team leader” (a local with labor migration experience) recruits teams by promising good jobs and no problems with authorities. The members of the team give the leader 10 percent of their income as compensation.

In transit and at work sites, team members try to minimize contact with the local population. The leader settles all the questions with authorities, at least in half of cases by using illegal methods. The team leader is also in charge of labor relations with customers; he controls the ratio between work and pay. This is the reason for the low efficiency of measures taken so far to regulate labor migration. Contrary to normal patterns between customers, regulators, and employers, the only pattern employed is between customers and mediators. This set up allows for cost reductions at the expense of the payment of proper salaries and taxes, making the labor of such semi-legal migrants rather profitable. But exactly the same thing deprives these migrants the possibility to emerge as independent subjects of the law in labor relations, to employ independent adaption strategies, and integrate into the local community over the long term. A member of the team who is successful for several years does not tend to quit it, but rather tries to create his own team. Local population finds it easy to perceive this as a result of differences between Central Asians, with their collegiality of “them” versus the more modern “us.” But this “collegiality” is seriously driven by the inability to overcome this vicious circle and the disinterest of mediators and customers regarding the legalization of this labor.

This greatly explains the unfavorable image of migrants. Locals do not see them as people who come to earn money and create something that is needed, but rather as representatives of a strange society with its own alien rules, who come to cheat and commit crimes. Unlawful methods of legalization that are beneficial for mediators and customers, explain the halo of “criminality” that surrounds migrants, who do not notice it because they think that there are no other relations with authorities except through their leader and “friendly cop.” This mismatch of migrant images in the recipient society and the self-description established in migrant communities explains the significant estrangement between migrants and locals. Recognizing that attracting foreign labor is necessary, local people are still unsure if their region needs it in its current forms. “I’m afraid of migrants because they deprive the local population of work by doing the same job for less money, as they don’t pay taxes. Their labor enriches only unfair businessmen and their own representatives who take migrants here,” one student claimed during a focus group.

Unfortunately it is difficult to disprove his words due to the persistent silence of migrants and representatives of their organizations on this issue, relevant circumspection, and unwillingness to make public the details of migrants' interactions with authorities. In such conditions, integration in the recipient society is complicated, as it is easier for migrants to solve their problems by taking the way already paved by mediators and the police. There is no need for them to exceed the boundaries of this framework because it might be fraught with interaction with outside authorities. Micro-regions with their own ways of life are emerging in the city, separate social and cultural infrastructures, like cafes and barbers are developing, in which locals do not feel at home.

According to the leaders of Uzbek and Tajik cultural organizations to whom we spoke, they devote 90 percent of their time not to the organization of cultural events, though they are glad to talk about this, but to solving the social problems of their compatriots (like interactions with authorities, obtaining unpaid money, helping those who were robbed, and lost passports). Thus, cultural divergences entail divergences in social strategies, which are different from those used by local communities; social integration is impossible only by the efforts of the ethnic diaspora organizations and local administrative departments tasked with defining cultural divergence and social convergence. In such conditions, migrant laborers, leaders of their unions, and representatives of the local community and authorities see themselves as representatives of cultural communities with specific requests and goals, but not as participants of a single social system within the territory of one district or city. In the latter case, the unity of the social system would be ensured by common rules of interaction between communities and individuals that are different in terms of culture, but have transparent and mutually accessible (yet dissimilar) types of resources used for the achievement of social success.

Unfortunately, on the basis of the data collected, one can conclude that for all the participants of these interactions, the would-be cultural differences inevitably presume divergent social practices. For example, local experts consider the collectivism of Tajik workers and their habit of walking everywhere in groups, speaking loudly among themselves, not to be the consequence of dense living conditions and lack of low volume communication during open air work, but rather as coming from their "absolutely foreign" cultural traditions. In that case, their cultural distinction strengthens social divergence and vice versa, but as a result, leads to further mutual alienation.

Conversely, leaders of Tajik and Uzbek ethnic unions treat all the cases of interaction with locals in terms of the preference of group distinctions of "us" and "them" without going deep into the social

background of every situation. While telling us about the fire in a Tajik café, the leader of a Tajik organization emphasized deliberate arson by ill wishers. He even tried to blame “skinheads,” but could not pronounce this word correctly. He did not know what it meant, but heard from public discourse of their malevolent actions and tried to use them to the benefit of his friends by representing them as victims. There are even more typical cases when Central Asians began to sell vegetables from their cars right in front of the market, in obvious violation of trade rules, and in response to the police, claimed that authorities treated them with prejudice. Such a situation is quite unambiguous for an external spectator (they broke the law and are guilty regardless of their ethnicity), but is understood totally differently by participants inside the conflict. They see that all of their opponents (police, authorities, and passersby) treat them as violators and at the same time they are all outwardly “different.” It is very easy to start to see the situation as a perpetual “us” versus “them” scenario.

It is obvious that something similar happens with locals when they see people of Central Asian origin who differ from them in certain social contexts. There are several markets in Orenburg, but only one of them (Lokomotiv Market) is mainly Central Asian and looks like a Central Asian bazaar. At the other markets, trade is done from special desks that are set in a specified order, whereas at Lokomotiv Market, some goods are just on the ground, in big trunks, and in trolleys. There are also stretched strings with cloth on them that makes these desks look like improvised boutiques and warehouses. It is worth mention that traders in other markets also try to make homemade boutiques, but their attempts are stopped by administrators. It seems as if they have written off Lokomotiv as a lost cause.

It is difficult to identify the main reason that Central Asian traders ignore generally accepted rules. Doing business outside regulated areas can be explained by a will to save money and not pay for special trade desks. Thus goods at Lokomotiv are a bit cheaper than in other places. Local residents note this as well; many of them have been buying goods exclusively at Lokomotiv market for years. This circumstance rouses censure from other market owners, who emphasize order and neatness, but cannot compete with traders from Lokomotiv. Despite constant threat of closure, the market continues to operate. The desire of traders to separate desks with silk and plastic cloths is more difficult to explain. This transforms open lanes to cramped and irregular alleys with shaky walls. One can assume that such a situation makes the market space seem more foreign and less urban. Another reason might be that such constructions allow the storage and concealment of more goods. Traders would not answer this question in a distinct way, saying only “this is better” and “everyone does so” without giving supporting reasons. Even

the visual environment of Lokomotiv Market greatly differs from the Slavonic Bazaar market, which amazes with its cleanliness and rather featureless order, and also from Central Market, which blends together the organization of the first market and the bustling chaos of Lokomotiv.

Local inhabitants have every reason to believe that the specific image of Lokomotiv results not only from trade as a specific kind of activity, but also from the peculiarities of its Asian way of organizing public space. This circumstance certainly strengthens opinions regarding the differences between “their” and “our” customs. Another place where locals often see migrants from Central Asia is on construction sites. Construction where their labor is used does not greatly differ from those sites where they are not present. The only difference is their loud voices in their “strange” languages, which creates a particular background sound. It is also necessary to mention the tradition of the joint trips workers make outside the construction area, for instance, to a shop. This custom is somewhat usual and lets the workers feel more confident in the “alien” city. The appearance of a group of four to ten people, who look unusual and speak an incomprehensible language, in a yard or shop causes the strengthening of “their” image as different from “ours.” Forgotten is the fact that old construction crews consisting only of Slavic people and behaving in the same way, because at present almost all such crews have the sharp traits of another culture.

Another area where the presence of Asian migrants is especially evident is in public cafeterias, trade areas, and services outside the market like cafés, restaurants, open-air food courts, amusement parks, and formal and informal social spaces around railroad stations. In common Russian society, the fields of trade and services, especially shuttle trade (which is not regulated, excluding quality checks after purchase) had and still has a somewhat alien, criminal, and “outsider” aura. The presence in this field of the people who mostly have different appearances merely increases present stereotypes regarding the fact that “they” not only do not look like “us” in their appearance, but “their” style of life is different and based on another type of social structure. The strained emotional background around “cultural” trade is also fomented by the fact that the need for cheap and informal commerce is driven by the low pay given to the people who are not able to shop in regular areas. People who go to the market for cheap but quality goods feel disappointed when they cannot attain this ideal, realize their own social failure, but become stronger in their confidence that “they” (the traders) always have the things “we” do not have, and possibly deprive us of these things.

At the same time, the presence of a considerable number of students of Central Asian nationalities among the students at Orenburg University does not arouse any emotions because they live within the framework of the social system and are integrated among all the students.

In this case the “otherness” of their faces is not accompanied by the “otherness” of their social practices and it is not a source of tension between “us” and “them.” The same can be said about the presence of families with pronounced Asian appearances at the squares and embankments of the city on weekends and holidays; they do not arouse emotions or draw additional attention to themselves, because they behave themselves as everyone else does and nothing in their manners or gestures distinguishes them from the locals around them.

Relations to Migrants and the Multicultural Issue

These peculiarities of interaction between the recipient community and labor migrants are reflected in the dominant images of migrants among locals, as revealed during the questioning of 500 inhabitants of various settlements in the Orenburg region in September 2007. A great number of those questioned were from Orenburg, Buguruslan (situated in the northwest of the region, where the majority of the Tatar population lives and where the influence of Muslim clergy is strong), and Akbulak (a boundary region in the south near Kazakhstan and where there are many Kazakh people). The nationality of those questioned was taken into consideration during the processing of the questionnaires, allowing for different interpretations of some answers. In this article, we analyze the answers to questions that reflect this specific attitude toward migrants.

The results of the questionnaire confirmed the conclusions made on the basis of conversations with experts and migrants during the research in Orenburg. Tajik people took the third place in the rating of groups to which local attitudes are most negative. Chechens and Roma usually took the top places. Rather than Azeri people, who now make up no more than 2 percent of the local population, Tajiks are seen with more disapproval. Depending on region and ethnicity, from 3 up to 11 percent of those questioned think negatively about Tajik people. This new phenomenon seems to be explained by the fact that at Orenburg markets, there is more than a ten-year history of sellers from Azerbaijan and therefore Azeris are more integrated into society. Locals had already created their own modes of explaining the “peculiarities of Azeri behavior” and relations with them. One should also take into consideration the influence of restrictions adopted in 2007 over retail trade by foreign citizens, which spurred the Azeri sellers to engage local vendors, changing the ethnic look of these markets.

As for the negative attitudes toward Tajik people, this is the result of a sudden increase in the number of construction workers over the last three years and the peculiarities of their collective behavior, previously discussed. People see Tajik “otherness,” their way of life, behavior, and unwillingness (or inability) to integrate as threatening to local values.

This cautious attitude toward migrants is shown in the answers to the question on whether migrants threaten the stability of Russia and the Orenburg region. On average 64.6 percent of those questioned answered in the positive. Buguruslan is most fearful, where 80 percent of respondents think migrants threaten stability. It is doubtful that there are more migrants in Buguruslan than in Orenburg or Akbulak.

Most likely the perception of ethnic problems in Buguruslan is the result of religious conflicts. In Buguruslan, about 70.7 percent of people feel the strain of inter-ethnic relations in the region. The arguments posited by the respondents to explain this situation are of interest. The most widespread arguments were also the most opposing in their directions: some invoked anti-migration feelings and the others explained the strained situation in interethnic relations as a peculiarity of local self-consciousness. Fifteen percent of those questioned think that the strained situation in the field of interethnic relations is explained by the fact that "it is not easy to live and many try to blame the newly arrived people," while 10 percent believe that "it is because of the growth of nationalist sentiments in the region." At the same time, 14.8 percent of respondents suppose that the tension is based on the disrespectful, sometimes provocative behavior of newcomers (immigrants) and their refusal to adhere to local customs and traditions, and 10 percent think that it is because of the "worsening of labor and social situations."

Circumstances appear more interesting at the regional level. In Akbulak, respondents are more clearly opposed to migration: two out of the three most popular arguments blame increased tensions on the disrespectful, sometimes provocative behavior of newcomers and their refusal to follow local customs and traditions (13.3 percent) and blame the newcomers for the worsening of the labor and social situation at the labor market and in the social field (11.3 percent). At the same time, 10.7 percent think that the most important reason for the strained situation is that life is difficult and many try to blame the newcomers. In Orenburg the filings of respondents were even more opposed to migration: 25 percent explained the strained situation by the behavior of newcomers and 11 percent blamed them for the worsening of the labor market, but 10.5 percent of respondents said that locals were looking to blame newcomers for a difficult environment.

In Buguruslan the situation is rather different: 27.3 percent think that the main reason for the strained situation is the growth of nationalism in society, 25.3 percent think it is due to making newcomers into scapegoats, and 16.7 percent believe that some people are invested in this strained situation. Only 2.7 percent connected tensions with the arrival of the newcomers, but 9.2 percent think that the tensions relate to the worsening of the labor market, which is close to the results of other regions. Possibly, it is because direct contact with migrants is not

intensive in Buguruslan, since it is situated far from the border. One can suppose another explanation: Buguruslan has a long tradition of multicultural settlement and multi-confessional communities, so people have more experience living with diversity.

In my opinion, the answer referencing disrespect, provocation, and difference from local norms is chosen by default because there is no other possible exact wording. It is difficult to determine whether “local norms and traditions” actually exist in different regional and social contexts. As previously mentioned, the source of such opinions is concrete social situations, which are caused not only by ethnic peculiarities or geography. The “provocative” behavior of newcomers may have its roots in two places: either the openly disparaging behavior of some diaspora youths, who are confident in their impunity based on their corrupt relations with the authorities, or the mutual estrangement of “locals” and large groups of male migrants living apart and eager to integrate.

In the first case, it is typical for families whose members are involved in criminal activity and have connections with the legal authorities to neglect the public order. There were some similar, recent cases initiated by groups of Chechen youth in the Akbulak area and this was borne out in the results of our questionnaire. Certainly such behavior is not explained by ethnic characteristics, but the particular extra-legal status of specific groups of individuals. Of course this situation negatively influences the overall image of migrants in society, especially in the region where the incidents took place. The work of a Chechen-Ingush cultural organization has been mainly directed at reversing these views. It is important to promote the fact that these incidents are not the result of culturally based forms of group behavior, but the result of the unlawful actions of individuals, caused by the corruption of law enforcement agencies.

But again, one cannot speak about “migrants’ customs” as the only ethnic issue that “provokes” the population. It is impossible to ignore the formation of a parallel social infrastructure in their settlements, which is weakly connected to the normal local environment. In these conditions, it is not enough for local authorities to rely on traditional means, like cultural festivals or other one-time events, to consolidate friendship between ethnic communities. More attention should be paid to mutual familiarization through direct communication of communities at the local level and minimization of informal means to settle and find jobs for migrants.

The above thesis is confirmed by the conclusions of the questionnaire after respondents were divided into the ethnic groups for more precise analysis: 23.6 percent of Belarusians, 23.5 percent of Ukrainians, and 18.6 percent Russians, but only 10 percent of Tatars, Kazakhs, Bashkirs, and others cite the behavior of the newcomers as the reason for the strained

situation. One can only suppose that the Slavic peoples feel a stronger cultural distance from the migrants and connect more social discomfort to their presence. At the same time, one can see a more sensitive perception of the migrants by the other groups, whose own social structure have retained some elements that are closer to those of the migrants.

One would expect the anti-migration feeling to be mainly spread among Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians: 20 percent of Ukrainians, 15.4 percent of Russians, and 11.8 percent of Belarusians think that the best way to improve interethnic stability is the limitation of migrants in the region. German and Mordvinian opinion is closest to them. Such opinions are most likely markers of anxiety among these groups regarding the sudden change of the ethnic-social structure of the region, because most people have no direct experience facing the interests of the migrants. It is important to emphasize that the apprehension of the ethnic and migrant-phobic characteristics are not yet dominant among respondents and they place more significance on social problems like terrorism, unemployment, and drug addiction (although there is possibly regional and even ethnic context to the word terrorism).

Conclusion

One can talk about the obvious presence of mainly negative perceptions of migration and of migrants, who are considered to be the initiators of many social problems by a considerable part of the Russian population. It also means the consolidation of stereotypes in the mass consciousness, intensifying evident and latent xenophobia and estrangement. Labor migration is an objective process that effectively redistributes labor in the global context. On the other hand, developing migration processes may or may not be accompanied by specific long-term actions to integrate migrants into an accepting community, possibly complicating the situation in the regions of mass arrival of migrants. The mutual alienation of migrants and locals cannot be explained by would-be “cultural differences”, but by conflicts caused by the lack of overlap in social practice and mobilization of resources during the social adaptation of different groups. Often newcomers, including labor migrants, are forced to choose illegal survival strategies. Multicultural policies focused mainly on emphasizing the cultural differences of various groups reduces integration possibilities for migrants and the recipient communities because they are not directed to the formation of a homogeneous social environment, mutual adaptation, and the overcoming of different customs.

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