

Conflict Studies Research Centre



**Turkmenistan:
People! Motherland! Leader?**

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Key Points

- * President Niyazov's rule has been devastating for the country in many ways and it has inflicted huge cultural and financial damage on the nation.
- * Moscow seems willing to put up with such unpredictability in its direct region of interest because it is financially rewarding to do so.
- * The International Community – with the exception of the War on Terror – seems to be indifferent.
- * Rather than upholding the notion that human rights are an internal matter, the International Community should try to find ways to change the situation.

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Turkmenistan: People! Motherland! Leader?¹

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Early in March 2005, Western media reported that the president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, also referred to as Turmenbashi - father of all Turkmen, had decided to close down the country's hospitals save for one hospital in the nation's capital, Ashgabat. Regional hospitals were to be replaced by diagnosis-centres that are to refer - if treatment is needed - to the hospital in the capital. The president also declared that all libraries - with the exception of the Central Library and libraries for students - were to be closed, because he was under the impression that they are of little use. Some of the reports carried in the Western media had somewhat of a joking undertone, as if to say "look at what that deranged dictator is doing now". In fact, however, although his conduct is ridiculous there is nothing even remotely amusing about Niyazov, who has had virtually full control of Turkmenistan for over 20 years.

The objective of this paper is to describe the present Turkmenistan - a country that is listed by Freedom House as "Not Free" with regard to both Political Rights and Civil Liberties² - and to try to identify the reasons why both the West and Russia seem to tolerate Niyazov's rule. It will become apparent that Niyazov has made a mark on Turkmenistan - it is impossible to discuss anything about the country without mentioning him - but that his influence has negatively affected the country in many ways.

History

The territory that is presently known as Turkmenistan has been populated since ancient times. It was here that agriculture and cattle farming first appeared in Central Asia. The settlement of Dzheitun near Ashgabat is the oldest agricultural settlement (6000 years BC) on the territory of the Former Soviet Union.

In the 4th century BC Alexander the Great conquered the region on his way to India. In the 7th century AD, the region was overtaken by Arabs, who introduced Turkmenistan to the Middle-Eastern culture and brought with them their Islamic religion. It was roughly around this period that the famous Silk Road, the trading route between Europe and Asia was established. In the 11th Century, the Turks of the Seljuk Empire increased their presence in Turkmenistan, which they wanted to use as a jumping board to overtake Afghanistan. By the second half of the 12th century, the Seljuk Empire fell apart and when Genghis Khan conquered the Eastern Caspian Sea region, Turkmenistan lost its independence. From this period onwards, Turkmenistan was part of a number of empires, until it was annexed by tsarist Russia between 1865-1885. At that time the country also included some regions that are currently in Iran and Afghanistan.

The October Revolution of 1917 also resulted in a declaration of Soviet power in the Caspian region. However, in 1918 anti-Bolsheviks supported by British forces took control in Turkmenistan, which was the starting point of the foreign intervention and civil war in the region that would last for about 18 months. In 1919, the Red Army conquered Ashgabat and in 1924 Turkmenistan officially became a Soviet Socialist Republic. It would remain part of the USSR until the country declared its independence on 27 October 1991, which began a new chapter in Turkmenistan's history.³

Geography

Turkmenistan is a Central Asian state that borders Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran and Afghanistan; the country also borders the Caspian Sea, as can be seen on the map below.



The country occupies an area of 488,100 km² and about 90% of this area is covered by the Garagum desert.⁴ Turkmenistan has a subtropical desert climate with little rainfall and with mild and dry winters. The country has relatively large amounts of natural resources, such as petroleum, natural gas, sulphur and salt.⁵

People

The country has a population of approximately 4.9 million people,⁶ of which roughly 400,000 live in Ashgabat, the capital. The population consists of about 85% ethnic Turkmen. Other large groups are Uzbeks, who compose about 5% of the population and Russians with an estimated 4% in 2003.⁷ The population is about 89% Sunni Muslim, with Russian orthodox Christianity being the second largest religion.⁸ The average life expectancy is approximately 58 for men and 65 for women.⁹ In recent years, an increasing amount of publications and articles note that ethnic minorities are being discriminated against, something that will be addressed later in this paper.

In 1990, the Supreme Council of Turkmenistan passed a “Law on Language” that made Turkmen the official state language of the republic. In 1992, on the eve of the adoption of the new constitution for independent Turkmenistan, there were calls to give the Russian language a special status as a means of communication among ethnic groups. However, this proposal was eventually rejected and, although in practice Russian remains an important language in the country, it has no official status in Turkmenistan.¹⁰

In 1993, the newly independent Turkmenistan also decided to reintroduce the Latin alphabet to replace the Cyrillic alphabet that had replaced the Latin in 1940.¹¹ However, this proved to be more difficult in practice than in theory. Despite a high level of literacy that hovers around 99%, many citizens had difficulties getting accustomed to the new alphabet. The goal of the language reforms was to establish Turkmen as the language for all official (government) business from 1996 onwards. This initiative posed great difficulties for the non-ethnic citizens of Turkmenistan, who often did not speak the language, whereas the state did nothing to provide special language courses. However, the difficulties that arose regarding these reforms are probably part of the reason why of late the authorities appear less rigorous in their pursuit of a full language reform.

Economy

The demise of communism in Turkmenistan also officially resulted in the end of the planned market economy. However, this did not mean that the country was hasty to implement a package of measures to build an open-market economy. On the contrary, the country’s economy retains quite a few elements of the Soviet-era economic system. Nevertheless, the declaration of independence inflicted economic changes that were felt immediately: in 1994, inflation hovered at around 2400%! It was not until 1995 that the government undertook efforts to curtail this problem. However, it remained reluctant to accept recommendations and support from the IMF and the World Bank.

In the middle of the 1990s, Turkmenistan implemented limited privatization primarily in the service industries. Important branches of business such as industry, agriculture, energy resource management, transport and communication remain in government control. Many government services are highly subsidized and are available at minimal cost. The implementation of further market reform is a bullet that the regime in Turkmenistan - not unlike other countries in the region - is still trying to duck from. The country has apparently adopted the approach that it may hurt less if reforms are stretched out over a number of years. The high quantity of natural resources and the high prices on the international market for oil

and gas have helped the country's leadership to postpone significant economic reforms until this very day.

Turkmenistan is a desert country that has only about 4% of arable land. Agriculture, however, remains traditionally a large employer, in which about half of the labour force is engaged. Nevertheless, productivity in agriculture decreased upon independence and the country was forced to import food-products for some time. Approximately half of Turkmenistan's irrigated land is planted in cotton, which makes the country the world's tenth largest producer of this material. The objective of the regime is to become a fully self sufficient country, which has led to the partial replacement of cotton by grains to reduce the necessity of importing food.¹²

The country has vast natural gas reserves as well as significant oil resources, which generate approximately one third of the country's income. Its main difficulty is the lack of its own pipelines to reach markets in Europe. The country is largely dependent upon Russia to transfer its resources to Western Europe. In 1994, Russia refused to export Turkmen gas, which led to a downturn in production. In order to avoid similar situations in the future, Turkmenistan made it a priority to establish new gas export pipelines through Iran or under the Caspian Sea via Turkey. In 1998, it began exporting gas to Iran, and the country - albeit only officially - still contemplates building a pipeline under the Caspian Sea, although in practice it virtually torpedoed all negotiations in 2000 by making unreasonable demands and requesting pre-financing from potential investors.¹³ In 2003, a 25-year agreement was signed between the Russian Gazprom - the company that controls the CAC Central-Asian pipeline - and Turkmenistan, according to which Gazprom will, starting in 2005, buy up to 10 billion m³ gas per year and from 2009, the amount will rise to 70-80 billion per year.¹⁴

Turkmenistan states that the country puts an emphasis on foreign economic relations and that it has an open door trade policy. It is true that the export of industrial and agricultural resources remains the cornerstone of the Turkmen economy and Turkmenistan trades with a great number of countries, the most important of which are the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and Russia.¹⁵

The economic statistics of Turkmenistan are a state secret and therefore impossible to verify, but according to estimates the GDP has a purchasing power parity of approximately 27.88 billion USD, which totals approximately 5,800 USD per capita. Reportedly, the government provides gas, water and electricity to the general population free of charge, but shortages are frequent. Prices for fuel and basic necessities are kept artificially low. Nevertheless, many Turkmen citizens live in poverty, with an estimated annual income of about 240 USD in 2001.¹⁶

The president of the country squanders a large percentage of the revenues for his self-glorification. Throughout the country, but especially in Ashgabat, the figure of Niyazov is everywhere: books, pictures, sculptures, etc. One of the biggest and most expensive projects is the Column of Neutrality: a 75 metre high column with a 12 metre golden statue of Niyazov that rotates with the sun. In Ashgabat, this statue is better known as the "sunflower". The column and statue cost approximately 12 million USD.¹⁷ This is but one example of the way that the Turkmenistan government allocates the funds it has at its disposal.

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Neutrality Square in Ashgabat, with the Neutrality Column on the left.¹⁸

Politics

Administratively, Turkmenistan is divided into 5 provinces or *welayatlar*, all with their own local government.¹⁹ The heads of these provinces, *khyakimy*, are presidential representatives appointed directly by the president and it is their job to oversee implementation of the laws of the country.



1. Ahal Welayaty (capital Ashgabat)
2. Balkan Welayaty (capital Nebitdag)
3. Dashhowuz Welayaty (formerly Tashauz, capital Dashhowuz)
4. Lebap Welayaty (capital Turkmenabat, formerly known as Charjew)
5. Mary Welayaty (capital Mary).

The right to appoint or remove leaders of the five provinces is but a small part of the presidential powers in Turkmenistan. The first article of the Constitution of Turkmenistan states that the country is a democratic, secular, presidential republic and that the branches of power in Turkmenistan, the legislative branch - the Medzhlis or Parliament and the Khalk Maslakhaty or People's Council,²⁰ the judicial branch - the Supreme Court - and the executive branch - the president, are to balance each other. In reality, however, there is just one institution or person that carries real power in the country: the president.

In 2003, a new law was passed that significantly diminishes the powers of the Medzhlis in favour of the Khalk Maslakhaty. Most importantly, Parliament no longer has the right to adopt or amend the constitution and it can be dissolved by the Khalk Maslakhaty, of which the president is Chairman for Life. It has given President Niyazov the possibility to directly influence the Medzhlis and therefore full control of both the executive and the legislative branches of power. Furthermore, the president also appoints judges and therefore controls all power in the republic.²¹

The list of issues that are under the direct control of the president is an extensive one. For example he is the Supreme Commander of the Turkmen Armed Forces, he formulates Turkmenistan's foreign policy, he is a member of the People's Council and briefs the Council on the situation in the country, he appoints and fires ministers and ambassadors and submits the draft budget to Parliament; and this list is by no means comprehensive.

Since Niyazov was elected president in June 1992, his rule quickly acquired traits of a dictatorship. According to some statistics, the number of employees of the security and intelligence services was tripled in the first three years of independence.²² Furthermore, there was strict control of all media. Turkmenistan, despite its independence and alleged choice for democracy, also remained a one-party state. At the last congress of the Communist Party of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, the Communist Party was renamed the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan. The entire party structure, its hierarchy, at least 50% of its membership, and the privileges of party members were retained.²³ The Democratic Party of Turkmenistan is the only political party that is allowed in the country²⁴ and all formal opposition parties or even independent political activities are outlawed. Political gatherings are only allowed with prior approval of the government, which is almost never granted. There are some small opposition movements that exist either underground or abroad. The two most prominent groups that operate from afar have been Gundogar and Erkin, which operate out of Moscow and there is also a Union of Democratic Forces, which is a coalition of opposition groups in exile that is based in Europe.²⁵

Whereas the Turkmen people retain some small say with regard to parliamentary elections, there is no way for them to change the executive leadership of their country, because there have not been presidential elections since Niyazov won the elections in 1992.²⁶ In 1993, the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan proposed to extend his term in office for another 5 years in 1997, without new elections. At a referendum held in 1994, the majority of the people supported this proposal.

According to the 1992 Constitution, no person had the right to run for president for more than 2 5-year terms,²⁷ but by carefully selecting candidates that were to run for parliament, Niyazov managed to amend the constitution and had that particular paragraph dropped. In 1999, the Medzhlis - that had just taken office itself after

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elections that were generally thought to have been rigged - even appointed him President-for-life. In 2001, however, Niyazov rejected that idea, because he felt that a person older than 70 would not have the strength and endurance needed to be president.²⁸

In February 2005, Niyazov turned 65, which means that unless there is a revolution, which seems unlikely, he will remain Turkmen president for at least 5 more years. How he came to the fore and what exactly he has done with Turkmenistan will be described in the following sections of this paper. It will also be made apparent that the approach both the West and Russia have taken to the situation in Turkmenistan has fallen short on many levels.

President Saparmurat "Turkmenbashi"

The fall of the Soviet Union - despite hope and expectations to this effect - did not result in the establishment of democratic regimes in the region. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to state that in most countries, communist officials readily gave up Lenin, but had more difficulties in giving up their offices. In particular, the appeal of power seems to be very strong in the five Central Asian FSU republics: **Kazakhstan** has been ruled by Nazarbayev since 1990; in **Kyrgyzstan**, Akayev was president from 1990 to 2005;²⁹ in **Tajikistan**, Rakhmonov became chairman of the Supreme Council in 1992 and was elected president in 1994; in **Uzbekistan**, Karimov became First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan in 1989, president of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist republic in 1990 and was elected president in 1991; in **Turkmenistan**, Niyazov came to the fore in 1985, when he became First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan. In 1990 he also became Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic and in 1990 he became president.³⁰

The Central Asian leaders have all been in power for a very long time and all have reputations for being authoritarian leaders with little or no regard for such notions as accountability to their people, free and democratic elections, freedom of opinion etc. In this group of states, however, Turkmenistan clearly stands out as the most authoritative and undemocratic, largely due to the character and conduct of president Niyazov.

The biography of Saparmurat Niyazov as it can be found in a number of books and sites seems - with one or two exceptions - rather typical for a Soviet-era *nomenklatura* official. Niyazov was born on 19 February 1940 in Ashgabat. His father died at the front during World War II³¹ and his mother and two brothers were killed in the Ashgabat earthquake of 1948. The young Niyazov was raised in an orphanage. Upon completion of high school in 1959, he began his career as an instructor with the Turkmen regional committee of the worker-union for people in the field of geological exploration. In 1962 Niyazov became a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which is probably also what enabled him to enroll in the Leningrad Technological University - something that would have been rather difficult if not impossible for a young Turkmen orphan without relations, from which he graduated in 1967. He returned to Turkmenistan to work as engineer at a power-plant for some years.

From 1970 onwards he steadily made a career within the party structures and in December 1985 he became First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan³² and member of the Central Committee of the

Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1986. In January 1990, Niyazov was elected Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic and later that year, when the presidency was created in Turkmenistan he was elected president by popular vote. Turkmenistan gained its independence from the Soviet Union on 27 October 1991 - which is still celebrated as Independence Day - and passed a new constitution in May 1992. Upon its adoption, new presidential elections in which Niyazov was the only candidate were held in June 1992. He was once more elected president and received 99.5% of the votes.³³

In 1993 Niyazov first referred to himself as "Turkmenbashi" - Father of all Turkmen. The original concept, developed by the press-secretary of the president, was that the term Turkmenbashi would be used for the position of the leader. The president personally explained to his people that this would give the newly independent country a symbol: the leader of the first independent Turkmen state in history would be known as Father of all Turkmen. However, it was not long before Niyazov changed his mind and started to use it as his second name and began to sign presidential decrees as "the President of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Turkmenbashi".³⁴

The entourage of the president and almost everybody who worked in the governmental structures shortly after Turkmenistan gained its independence were former communists, who had simply changed their party membership cards when the Communist Party changed its name to the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan. It is fair to say that these people had no experience of Western-style democracy and in fact most were very much against the concept. The former communists successfully managed to keep people who had not been members of the Communist Party as far away from power as possible. The status of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, the increased apparatus of the secret service and fierce media control - each media outlet was under control of loyal people, who had already proven themselves to the state - helped Niyazov to quickly eradicate all remainders of Gorbachev's *glasnost'* policy in the republic and to curtail democrats and reformists, who had come to the fore when Turkmenistan gained independence.³⁵

In the Soviet Union, the First Secretaries of the republican communist parties were only accountable to Moscow and some ran their own republics as if they were private enterprises. It was not customary - Gorbachev's attempt at democratization excepted - for communist party members to disagree with party leaders.

It was the objective of Niyazov-Turkmenbashi to manifest himself as a real nationalist leader, but, possibly due to the fact that Turkmenistan did not have a history as an independent state, he was not sure how to manifest himself as such. The result was that he took the easy route and strove towards the "Turkmenization" of the country. The Turkmen language was accepted as the official state language and government officials were reportedly increasingly hostile towards non-ethnic Turkmen. It is no coincidence that most non-ethnic Turkmen state that this early period was especially difficult.³⁶ It was not until the government faced difficulties in the application of the new language laws - for example, the reintroduction of the Latin alphabet proved difficult for Turkmen as well - that this changed somewhat. However, some observers believe that the government is still in effect hostile towards non-ethnic Turkmen, but that it has simply become better at influencing and curtailing the media.

The president demonstrated a similar approach to religion. The majority of Turkmen consider themselves to be Muslim and shortly after the country gained its

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independence Niyazov also declared that he had always been a Muslim and that Allah had guided him in his activities as a Communist Party official.³⁷ The Constitution of Turkmenistan states that the country respects freedom of religion, but in practice the situation was slightly more complex. Religious groups were required to have at least 500 members before they could register, and unregistered activities were criminal offences. Up until 2004, the only two religions that were officially registered were Islam and Eastern Orthodox Christianity.³⁸ However, even these were subject to strict government control and are headed by government bureaucrats. Pressure from the international community led to the relaxation of the legislation about religion in 2004, when the membership conditions for registration were reduced from 500 to 5 members.³⁹ This appears to be an effort to appease the International Community, however, rather than Niyazov actually seeing the error of his ways and it is likely that little will change in practice.

Niyazov's manifestation as the great leader of all Turkmen also spawned the beginning of (self) glorification that is reminiscent of those "personality cults" that existed around Stalin and Ceausescu, but even more grotesque. His face started to appear on virtually everything: on products such as vodka and yoghurt, and also factories and farms were named in his honor, but all this was still just the early phase. The city of Ashgabat looks somewhat like a shrine for Turkmenbashi: golden statues of the great leader can be found throughout the entire city and his image is literally on every street corner. However, this also applies to the rest of the country, albeit in a slightly less concentrated fashion. In 1995, at a session of the Khalk Maslakhaty, Niyazov stated that the people were overdoing it a bit and that from now on permission would be needed before something could be named after him.⁴⁰ In reality however, he appeared to be more than eager to grant people this permission and there are over 100 objects in Turkmenistan - including a city, numerous streets and military units - that carry the name of the president.⁴¹

More recently, Niyazov also appealed to journalists to stop praising him constantly and criticize more.⁴² Obviously this is something that is not done in practice: the press is under government censorship and journalists would face great difficulties if they actually listened to the president in this regard. According to estimates, the glorification of Turkmenbashi has cost the state approximately 600-700 million USD between 1992 and 2003.⁴³ However, the appetite of Niyazov for his expensive pet projects has not lessened over time. One of Niyazov's most significant innovations to honour himself was the adoption of a new calendar for Turkmenistan in 2002, in which he named January after himself and April in honour of his mother.⁴⁴

It was not enough for Niyazov to be the undisputed leader of Turkmenistan: he wanted to be the spiritual leader of the country as well. The president wrote a book called "Rukhnama" or Book of the Soul,⁴⁵ in which he describes the history and culture of the Turkmen people as well as giving spiritual advice. The book has become the "spiritual-ethical" code of the country and is surpassed in importance only by the Holy Quran. Knowledge of Rukhnama is essential for all Turkmen school children and is a prerequisite to enroll into university. A huge man-high statue of the book can be found in Ashgabat.⁴⁶ A second volume of his musings appeared in August 2004.

As a former Communist Party official, Niyazov had a lot of experience in political intrigue: in particular he is a master of "divide and conquer" tactics. The party discipline resulted in remarkably docile politicians and civil servants. In case of criticism, Niyazov made sure that the source was dealt with. Parliament and local

government structures lacked real power and did not even attempt to express the will of the people. The lack of a free press and the fact that the president has full control of the mass-media⁴⁷ helped him to obtain an aura of infallibility. The result was that before long people were afraid to criticize even the most ridiculous ideas and initiatives proposed by Turkmenbashi and these ideas subsequently materialized into laws, something that had a strong impact on the country. On the basis of his personal preferences, the president has banned such things as ballet, opera, classical music, the circus and even folk dances, as elements that are foreign to Turkmen culture.⁴⁸

The laws and proposals formulated by Turkmenbashi are common in their nature: they all originate from the notion that Niyazov alone can define what is good for society, what is good for him personally is also good for society,⁴⁹ and some of these ideas are highly unpractical. For example, the law on search in the houses of people residing in Turkmenistan stipulates that a man's house is his sanctuary and that it can only be searched by law enforcement agencies if it is believed that explosives or more than 5 kilos of drugs are hidden there. Even then the police require a special warrant from a commission to uphold strict implementation of the law. The membership of this commission and its specific mandate are decided personally by the president of Turkmenistan.⁵⁰ Niyazov's latest feat, the closure of hospitals and libraries, has already been mentioned.

During his rule, Niyazov has gone to great lengths to curtail all groups and institutions that could form a threat to his position. How this affected the media and religious organizations has already been described, but this also affected education: compulsory education was reduced from 11 years to 9 years, which makes it impossible to enroll in a university abroad, and is often little more than study of Niyazov's Rukhnama, his other writings, his biography and also those of his relatives. Important subjects such as physics or English have been struck from the curriculum of schools that tend to begin the year in November rather than in September, because pupils are expected to assist in harvesting cotton. The university programme was also downgraded and now consists of two years of study and two years of applied work. The Academy of Science of Turkmenistan also closed down. The past decade has seen books in Cyrillic mostly removed from libraries; many were simply closed down. In fact, the regime allocated very little resources to education in general, claiming that Turkmenistan does not need scientists: the result is that most school buildings are shoddy, that teachers receive their salaries with great delay and are often forced to use part of their income to purchase school materials, and that the level of education has dropped significantly. In 2004, the regime also passed a law stating that all diplomas of university-level education that were obtained abroad after 1993 were declared void after 1 June 2004, and that all people with these diplomas who worked in government structures were to be fired.⁵¹ Despite his apparent distrust - or dislike - of academics in general, before he closed it down, Niyazov became a member of the Academy of Science of the republic, an honour bestowed upon him for the development and implementation of the concept of Turkmen independence.⁵²

In November 2002, Turkmen media reported that there had been an assassination attempt against Niyazov: his motorcade was attacked by a truck, but the president was unharmed. The circumstances of the attack were rather vague and in Turkmenistan and abroad there were accusations that the whole thing was staged by the authorities.⁵³ The regime, however, blamed the attack on the opposition and used it as a justification to crack down even harder on what it perceived to be dissidents and to limit contacts with the outside world. The result was that over

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50,000 people, including children were arrested, simply because they were related to people who had been convicted. It was the reaction of the regime to the attempt that triggered increased attention from the international community. However, the country refused to admit an OSCE fact-finding mission that wanted to investigate the attempt and denied the Red Cross access to its prisons.⁵⁴

Most observers agree that corruption in Niyazov's Turkmenistan is rampant. The president as the most important political figure also plays a central role here. From time to time, Turkmenbashi fires cabinet-ministers on charges of corruption and these individuals are subsequently convicted and sentenced to long prison sentences. These cases are usually politically motivated - it is a way of dealing with potential rivals - or used to show the people and the outside world that corruption is being fought in Turkmenistan. In 1998, during a series of criminal hearings in cases of high ranking officials charged with corruption, Niyazov personally intervened and suggested to the court that the corrupt officials should return the stolen funds to the treasury as a condition for commutation.⁵⁵ Corruption can still be found at all levels in the state. There have also been media reports that Turkmen officials, including the president himself, share in the profits of drug-trafficking through the country.⁵⁶

Niyazov's Turkmenistan

Official Turkmen documents refer to the rule of Niyazov as Turkmenistan's Golden Century⁵⁷ and, truth be told, for the president and his immediate entourage this phrase is most likely very appropriate. However, for the Turkmen people, the rule of Niyazov has brought little or no improvement to their lives. The president has claimed that, like ancient oriental leaders, he tends to disguise himself and wanders around Ashgabat to learn what is really going on in the country. On one occasion, his convincing make-up, wig and false moustache even helped him to fool his own minister of interior affairs.⁵⁸ It seems more like something from a fairy tale, but if it is indeed true, the situation he would encounter would not be positive.

Niyazov's decrees on popular pastimes has negatively affected many cultural outlets, in particular the ballet, the circus and, albeit it to a lesser extent, theatre. In effect, the president has deprived his people of almost everything that would enable them to express themselves. He has done so because he does not see the point of these foreign cultural phenomena and feared that they would be in the way of Turkmen culture. The fact that many art forms are now forbidden has, however, resulted in a significant decline of culture in the republic.⁵⁹

It was one of Niyazov's goals to isolate Turkmenistan from negative - that is, anything beyond his control - influences, such as foreign newspapers and television. People often face great difficulties when travelling within the country. Internal Turkmen passports show the place where a person is registered, and although this goes against the constitution, it is against the republic's legislation to move or even travel to another part of the country without prior approval.

The Turkmen state indicates that the output of Turkmenistan continues to increase annually and that the people's incomes increase as well. Many products and services are provided at minimal charge for the people of Turkmenistan, but most people would be glad to pay for these services if the state would provide normal work with a corresponding salary. Unofficial statistics sketch a different story: the level of unemployment in the country is over 40%, which causes extra problems for

society, such as excessive drug use, prostitution, and crime. Reportedly, at present every second young man in cities and rural areas is a drug addict and sometimes parents feel forced to sell their daughters in order to feed their smaller children.⁶⁰ The situation is not much better for those with a job, because salaries are paid - especially in governmental structures - with long delays.⁶¹

Turkmenistan's Foreign Relations

In December 1991, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was set up as a loose consultative body and as a tool to interact on cross-border issues for the all but independent Soviet Republics. In the first years after the break up of the Soviet Union, Niyazov made great efforts not to present himself at meetings of the CIS. There are experts who believe that in those years, the Turkmen leader simply could not believe that the USSR was gone for good. He apparently feared that the Kremlin would regain control of all the break-away republics and that it would punish those who had betrayed it. It was only when he finally realized that the USSR was history that he started to act more boldly.⁶² However, the attitude of Turkmenistan towards the CIS has remained more that of an observer than a participant.

The first priority for the newly independent Turkmenistan was said to be to protect itself from foreign intervention. Niyazov strove towards good relations with those states that could somewhat guarantee his power against foreign threats. In particular, Turkmenistan focused on Iran, especially economically, but Niyazov also hoped that Iran would help in case of political problems. However, the Turkmen leader understood quite well that Iran was in international isolation after the Islamic revolution of 1979 and had limited influence. It was this notion that led Niyazov to the conclusion that it would be wise to pursue good relations with Moscow. In June 1992, Moscow and Ashgabat agreed on the settlement of all issues concerning Russia's succession in title to the debts and resources of the USSR. The result of this settlement was that Turkmenistan had a claim of 380 million USD against Russia. However, Niyazov proved to be a pragmatic leader and he did not insist on the immediate payment of this sum. In 1993, Yeltsin and Niyazov signed an agreement on the withdrawal of the Russian military units from Turkmenistan, on the shared protection of the state border and also an agreement enabling people to have both Russian and Turkmen nationality.⁶³ This last provision has since been revoked; see below.

In December 1995, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed UN Resolution 50/80 [A] on the Permanent Neutrality of Turkmenistan. The resolution states that, whereas it does not affect the fulfilment of its obligations under the UN Charter, the General Assembly "recognizes and supports the status of permanent neutrality declared by Turkmenistan" and that it welcomes "... the desire of Turkmenistan to play an active and positive role in developing peaceful, friendly and mutually beneficial relations with the countries of the region and other States of the world".⁶⁴

The concept of permanent neutrality is something that is deemed very important in Turkmenistan, which also hoped that it would at least partially stifle criticism from other states. The country's constitution was amended to reflect the UN Resolution and the country considers its permanent neutrality as the cornerstone of both its interior and foreign policies. Turkmenistan's neutrality has indeed been an important factor in its international relations, but only up to a certain level. For

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Niyazov, it never stood in the way of pragmatism: until 11 September 2001, Turkmenistan had very cordial relations with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.⁶⁵

Relations with Russia

Niyazov understood that Turkmenistan was partially dependent on the Russian Federation to transfer gas to Western markets and this played a role in his approach to the country. He therefore operated with great care, to avoid angering Russia, but in a way that he could still implement his agenda of “Turkmenization”.

In 1994, the country reduced the number of flights to and from the CIS countries, which made it difficult for people to stay in contact with relatives who lived in other parts of the FSU. From 1998 onwards, cars from CIS countries that passed the Turkmen state borders were also subject to a mandatory insurance of not less than 56 USD. These are but two examples of how the Turkmen authorities tried to limit foreign access to the country.

The changing situation in the country combined with the increasingly hostile approach of the authorities led to massive emigration among the Russian population of Turkmenistan. Turkmen statistics about emigration are secret, but Russian documents show that between 1992-1996 approximately 94,000 people emigrated from Turkmenistan to Russia.⁶⁶ The Turkmen authorities did their best to stop this emigration by using all legal and illegal means at its disposal. For example it was made impossible for people who wanted to emigrate to sell their apartments. Russia played a very dubious role, siding alternately with Turkmenistan and with their ethnic minority.⁶⁷ Various sources indicate that the state has not given up on its concept of a mono-ethnic Turkmenistan and life in the country remains difficult for non-ethnic Turkmen up to this day.

In her controversial *Baiki Kremlyovskogo Diggera*, in which she heavily criticizes President Putin, journalist Yelena Tregubova gives an account of an encounter she had in Ashgabat with an ethnic Russian girl during Putin’s first visit to Turkmenistan in 2000:

“... an unfortunate Russian girl threw herself before me: - I beg you, help me leave this country! They kill us off here like chickens, as soon as anybody sticks out his head. There is no work, we live in poverty, and we cannot leave this country. Surely you know that they don’t even give us foreign passports! We are like serfs here! And my relatives from Moscow cannot come here: they are refused visas. Tell Putin! I understood that the girl saw my Russian press badge and thought that I would somehow be able to help. But at that very moment, next to us, like a genie from a lamp an oriental lady in civilian dress with the appearance of an SS official appeared and the girl instantly jumped away from me, hysterically whispering: - Act as if we were talking about something trivial. I beg you! Otherwise they will kill me!”⁶⁸

The negative attitude towards non-ethnic Turkmen citizens is well illustrated by the following example. It is customary for Turkmen school children to know the biography of Turkmenbashi and his family in great detail, but nevertheless there was a scandal when a young pupil not only mentioned the ancestors, parents and brothers of Niyazov, but also stated that the president “has a son Murad and a daughter Irina”, because there is a taboo in Turkmenistan against publicly

mentioning the president's non-ethnic Turkmen wife as well as children from this marriage.⁶⁹

The situation remained relatively unchanged when Putin became president. Tregubova also describes the first encounter of Putin, who had just won the 2000 presidential elections, and Niyazov. In Tregubova's account, the Turkmen president sees Putin as a rookie, lacking the vast experience that Yeltsin had had. During his speech, Putin appealed to Turkmen officials to be lenient if he said something wrong. Niyazov apparently saw this as weakness and stated to the people present: "Don't pay attention to the way he delivered his speech ... It is not because that's who he is ... He is still just nervous. And he and I were on the road for a long time ... But in spirit he is a wonderful human being."⁷⁰

In 2003, Turkmenistan signed a 25 year-agreement with the Russian company Gazprom about the transfer of Turkmen gas via Gazprom's Central Asia pipeline to Western Europe. In the same year, Turkmenistan once again amended its constitution making it impossible for people, including ethnic Russian Turkmen, to have dual nationality. This naturally drew protests from Russia. In order to decide what to do with those people who had already been granted dual nationality - around 100,000 people - a joint Russian-Turkmen commission was established. At the time, the deputy chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee for CIS affairs, Vyacheslav Igrunov stated that

"In principle, the norms stated by Turkmenbashi look as if they could have been presented by a European state. If the matter is approached from this point of view, then there cannot be any claims against Turkmenistan. ... If the matter is approached from a pure formal point of view there are no real problems. However, there is a different problem: these norms can function in a country that has long been established, like for instance Switzerland. In this case, we have a state that de facto only became a state during the Soviet period. And naturally a significant part of the population has close ties with Russia and legally over 100,000 Turkmen citizens were guaranteed the right of dual citizenship. And now suddenly they are - post factum - stripped of this right, which naturally impinges on the civil rights of these people. In my opinion this is an inadmissible development. Measures of diplomatic pressure are required ... I think that Russia has to consider also the use of economic sanctions against Turkmenistan. However, I am afraid that few people in Russia would agree and that for many gas is more important than civil rights (...)"⁷¹

The Russian delegation to the joint Russian-Turkmen Commission dismissed the complaints against this law, thus seemingly proving Igrunov's point: that for the Russian state gas profits were more important than civil rights.

Russia's stance in this case proved to be less rewarding than it had apparently hoped it would be. Since the start of 2005, Turkmenistan has stopped gas supplies to Russia under the pretext of maintenance work, but it also stated that it was necessary to return to discussions on the price.⁷² In January 2005, Turkmenistan had already successfully renegotiated a similar contract with Ukraine, resulting in a price increase from \$44 to \$58 per thousand cubic metres of gas. Turkmenistan made similar demands to Russia's Gazprom and negotiations are currently underway. In the past, Russia has frequently made use of its important transit position to renegotiate agreements, resulting in higher transit fares. In this case,

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Turkmenistan is withholding supplies to Russia, on which it is partially dependent for transit. It would seem that the country is playing a dangerous game, but encouraged by the successful renegotiation with Ukraine believes that it might be successful. Demand on the international market for oil and gas is growing and prices are increasing. Turkmenistan knows that it has something that is desired by many countries, and it knows that Turkmen gas is important to Russia. Failed negotiations with Russia might prove an incentive for new export routes. In an interview to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in February 2005, Igor Yusofov, Russian special presidential envoy on international energy cooperation, admitted that Gazprom continued to count Turkmen gas in its balance: "It is impossible to replace such huge volumes of gas which we receive from Turkmenistan with other sources in a short time. We are doomed to successful, mutually advantageous cooperation with Turkmenistan in a good sense of this word."⁷³

Turkmenistan & The West

The collapse of the Soviet Union was generally welcomed in the West as a victory for democracy and the free market. However, it soon became apparent that this optimistic scenario did not apply to Turkmenistan. Niyazov's initiatives were not aimed at constructing democracy, but at the concentration of as much power as possible with the president, which has resulted in the present dictatorship. Yet the bankruptcy of the planned market economy, as it was perceived in the West, did not mean that Turkmenistan was eager to reform.

The events taking place in Turkmenistan resulted in a somewhat dual approach by the West: it established economic ties with the country, while keeping an eye on the deteriorating human rights situation and urging the country to reform its economy. The European Union has allocated millions to aid programmes for Turkmenistan, mostly in food, but it remains one of the most vocal critics of the regime. The United States is one of the most important trading partners of Turkmenistan, although the US has openly stated that it disagrees with the Turkmen view about economic reform.⁷⁴

The September 11 attacks against the United States in 2001 posed a great dilemma for Niyazov, who had established good relations with the Taliban. Nevertheless, the official government newspaper "Neutral Turkmenistan" published a minute article on September 12, in which condolences were offered to the US government for the tragic events. The article did not state what these events were.⁷⁵ However, the US intention to retaliate against Afghanistan was very real and it would not go away by limiting media coverage. Niyazov decided to join the coalition against terrorism. It has granted the US overflight rights and has cooperated with the international community to transport humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.⁷⁶

Relations between Turkmenistan and the West were negatively affected by the strong reaction against the methods used by the Turkmen authorities to investigate the assassination attempt against the president in 2002. More recently, however, Turkmenistan seems to have taken a more pragmatic approach and is cooperating with the West in several areas, such as religious freedom and security issues. Turkmenistan seems to believe that if it accommodates the West on some points, the West will be satisfied: the combined efforts of several countries and organizations to convince the government to improve its conduct with regard to human rights in general have been poorly received.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Niyazov's Turkmenistan is a very authoritarian country, in which almost everything and everybody are accountable to the president. Living conditions for the general population have worsened throughout his rule, but personally Niyazov has gained more power and money. Money that could and should have been allocated to improve lives of the Turkmen people was used directly for the glorification of the "great leader". The president has made claims that his personal fortune, for the most part stored in European banks, amounts to 3 billion USD.⁷⁸

It is rather tragic to realize that the past 15 years in Turkmenistan are lost time. Niyazov's rule is omnipresent and has paralyzed many aspects of life in the country. Furthermore, the majority of laws that have been passed under the presidency of Niyazov have nothing to do with democracy and will surely be cancelled if Turkmenistan becomes a true democracy. The president has gone out of his way to oppress any potential source of opposition and has in the process inflicted serious damage on education and science.

Despite official reports claiming otherwise, the country is waiting for the end of Niyazov's presidency, which might enable it to pick up where it left off in 1992. However this day may still be far away. According to the Constitution, a document that has already been amended on three occasions since it was adopted in 1992⁷⁹ and therefore has little permanent value, he still has 5 more years before he turns 70, and is therefore too old to rule under current provisions. The president has promised that by 2008 or 2010 the topic of presidential elections will once again be open for discussion, but the value of such a promise is questionable. It has to be noted that the current constitution makes it impossible for any opposition politicians currently living abroad to participate in the presidential elections, because candidates need to be resident in Turkmenistan for 10 years. However, opposition leaders visiting their home country face arrest at the very least, so Niyazov has effectively disarmed all opposition from abroad.

It would not be farfetched to assume that the Constitution will be changed once more to reflect the "strong desire" of the Turkmen people to retain Niyazov as president. For some time there has also been speculation in Turkmenistan that Murad, Niyazov's son, might become the officially designated crown prince. Murad is a jurist by education and also graduated from the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry.⁸⁰ At present, Murad lives in Belgium and is a businessman brokering deals on Turkmen gas with foreign companies. On one occasion, Murad was reportedly paid 300 T-72 tanks by Ukraine, which he promptly sold to Pakistan.⁸¹ This resulted in a (brief) conflict with his father. However, this did not prevent Turkmenbashi helping his son with his other business interests: within Turkmenistan Murad is the owner of two firms that trade in alcohol and tobacco. A presidential decree from Niyazov exempted these firms from import tax, which cost the budget over 148 million USD in 2002 alone.⁸² It is obvious that Murad Niyazov has made good use of his father's presidency to better himself. Unless Murad is willing to accept the loss of his current benefits - which would surely be revoked by a new Turkmen leader - he may feel forced to become president himself. The regime in Turkmenistan is already reminiscent of an absolute monarchy.

It is tragic that neither the West nor Russia have made substantial efforts to address the situation in Turkmenistan. In January 2005, the US administration replaced its Axis of Evil with Outposts of Tyranny; 6 of the most repressive and

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undemocratic regimes: Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Iran, North Korea and Zimbabwe. The countries on the list appear to be chosen arbitrarily.⁸³ Washington has its reasons not to include Turkmenistan: dictatorships that cooperate are a lesser evil than those that do not. Both the US and the European Union have been vocal in their criticism of the situation in Turkmenistan. However, so far they have not openly contemplated the use of economic pressure or smart sanctions against the regime.

The approach taken by Russia is also not very effective. The country has declared that Turkmenistan is an independent state with its own vision of state building and that Russia has no right to interfere in the processes taking place in Turkmenistan. It is striking that Russia is much more vocal about violations against ethnic Russians in the Baltic Republics than it is in Turkmenistan. It has done little to improve the conditions of Russians living in Turkmenistan. If Russia really wanted to influence Turkmenistan it could impose an economic boycott. It seems obvious that diplomatic pressure is not effective, and that Russia is more interested in cordial relations and profits.

The Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 have set a precedent that is feared by many of the leaders of the FSU republics. The recent developments in Kyrgyzstan following the February 2005 parliamentary elections had different characteristics but also resulted in the ousting of a long time president. But in Turkmenistan it is simply illegal to form any opposition parties or movements. The law enforcement agencies of the republic see political opposition as a threat to the security of the state and crack down upon potential opposition politicians. Pro-Niyazov publications claim that there is no need for a "coloured revolution" in Turkmenistan, because under the current regime the goals of these revolutions: territorial integrity, social justice and anti-corruption are already a reality.⁸⁴

This may not be true, but nonetheless revolution in Turkmenistan seems unlikely. The country lacks opposition, press freedom, and has an extensive security and law enforcement apparatus. The internet could be a useful tool to gather information or plan opposition gatherings, but it remains something alien to most people in the republic. Overthrowing Niyazov's regime is something that the Turkmen people will have to manage on their own. However, it may be a good idea for the UN General Assembly to reconsider the resolution on Turkmenistan's permanent neutrality that the regime uses as a shield against all criticism of its policies.⁸⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ The popular Turkmen slogan "Halk! Watan! Türkmenbashi!" (People!, Motherland, Leader!), <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkmenistan>.

² The list for 2005 can be found at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2005/table2005.pdf>.

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkmenistan>;
<http://www.turkmenistan.spb.ru/history/>.

⁴ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>.

⁵ In April 2003, president Niyzov boasted that Turkmenistan had at least 22.5 trillion m³ of natural gas. April 2003, NATO School's Polaris # 52. It is estimated that Turkmenistan has the world's fifth largest reserve of natural gas and also substantial oil resources. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Turkmenistan. The proven gas reserves of Turkmenistan are 1.43 trillion m³
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>.

⁶ This is a Western estimate that seems accurate (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>). The nation's official statistics show some interesting things: in 1995 a census showed that Turkmenistan has a population of 4.483 million; in 2002 this had increased to 5.799 million (<http://www.mpa.ru/cis/new.php?id=1119>); and by 2004 this is said to be 6.298 million (<http://www2.interfax.ru/rus/news/cis/040119/38967/story.html>). This means an annual increase of about 188,000 people between 1995 and 2002 and an increase of 250,000 people per year between 2002 and 2004! The birth statistics for the past few years, around 28 births per 1,000 citizens, do not explain this sudden increase and immigration to Turkmenistan is virtually non-existent.

⁷ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>. The ethnic Russian part of the population was much larger - about 9% - shortly after Turkmenistan gained independence: <http://hrlibrary.ngo.ru/ins/turkme94.pdf>. Other sources indicate that around the time of the 1995 census roughly 23.4% of the population was not of Turkmen descent: <http://www.memo.ru/hr/politpr/turk/ethnic.htm>.

⁸ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>.

⁹ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>.

¹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkmenistan>;

<http://www.memo.ru/hr/politpr/turk/ethnic.htm>.

¹¹ <http://www.turkmenistan.spb.ru/culture/>.

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Turkmenistan;

<http://www.turkmenistan.spb.ru/economy/>;

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>;

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>.

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Turkmenistan;

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>.

¹⁴ http://turkmenistan.ru/index.php?page_id=5&lang_id=en&elem_id=5600&type=event&sort=date_desc.

¹⁵ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>.

¹⁶ Estimated income of 20 USD per month:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/news/newsid_1177000/1177411.stm; Prospekt, Nr 5, 2003, Alles voor Bashi.

¹⁷ Prospekt, Nr 5, 2003, Alles voor Bashi;

<http://www.erkın.net/chronicle3/news1705.html>.

¹⁸ Photo by Ramis Bakhshaliev (Turkmenphotos),

<http://community.webshots.com/photo/82626095/82629476VvoyXs>.

¹⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkmenistan>.

²⁰ The Medzhlis consists of 50 deputies and it is primarily responsible for passing, interpreting and amending the laws of the republic. Parliament also reviews the budget proposal that is made by the government. The Khalk Maslakhaty consists of 2507 members, including the president, the cabinet of ministers, the members of the Medzhlis and the General Prosecutor. The People's Council has - among other rights - the right to amend the constitution or constitutional laws and furthermore it has the right to set presidential and parliamentary elections or referenda.

http://niyazov.sitcity.ru/ltxt_1310122033.phtml?p_ident=ltxt_1310122033.p_16101539_29.

²¹ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>.

²² <http://turkmeny.h1.ru/prava/pr.html>.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ The only remaining opposition party is the Agrarian Party of Turkmenistan.

However, this Party has only limited goals, such as protection of the interests of farmers, establishing a free economy, etc, and is rather passive.

<http://www.turkmenistan.spb.ru/politics/>.

²⁵ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>.

²⁶ Parliamentary elections were last held in 2004 and the next are scheduled for 2009.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>.

²⁷ <http://humanrights.h10.ru/k10e.htm>.

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²⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/news/newsid_1177000/1177411.stm. In 2002, the People's Council also voted to make Niyazov President-for-Life but Niyazov still declined. <http://www.dosye.ru/archiv/kom100802.htm>.

²⁹ Akayev recently gave up his presidency after the massive public outcry over the outcome of the parliamentary elections in February 2005 forced him to leave the country.

³⁰ <http://www.ias-worldwide.org/profiles/prof2.htm>;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nursultan_Nazarbayev;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imamoli_Rakhmanov;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_Karimov;
http://www.dosye.ru/dosye/tu_bio4.htm.

³¹ In his article *Den' Velikoy Lozhi* (Day of the Big Lie) Leonid Komarovskiy claims that he has heard from eye-witnesses that Niyazov's father was in fact killed in a skirmish with compatriots on his way to the front. Komarovskiy states that Saparmurat Niyazov believed this version of his father's demise would not do at all and rewrote history.

<http://www.mk.ru/numbers/680/article19901.htm>.

³² According to some sources, the Central Committee deliberately appointed someone without an extensive family in order to avoid the establishment of a clan-style leadership that was deemed typical for Central Asia. <http://www.rusedina.org/?id=6518>.

³³ http://www.dosye.ru/dosye/tu_bio4.htm.

³⁴ <http://www.geocities.com/agzybirlik2000/ktotakoybashi.htm>; Opposition politicians have claimed that the fact that Niyazov never officially changed his name and just adopted Turkmenbashi makes all documents he has signed with that name illegal.

<http://www.geocities.com/agzybirlik2000/ktotakoybashi.htm>; Other sources indicate that at one point, Parliament officially decreed that the name Turkmenbashi has been assigned to Niyazov: http://www.dosye.ru/dosye/tu_bio4.htm.

³⁵ <http://turkmeny.h1.ru/prava/pr.html>.

³⁶ <http://www.memo.ru/hr/politpr/turk/ethnic.htm>.

³⁷ <http://www.mk.ru/numbers/680/article19901.htm>.

³⁸ Approximately 89-90% of Turkmenistan is Muslim, 8 % is Eastern orthodox and just over 2% has another religion.

³⁹ http://www.watan.ru/eng/view.php?nomer=541&razd=new_nov_en&pg=12.

⁴⁰ This is very reminiscent of Stalin, who also claimed that the people insisted on honouring him and that he did not want to deny them this right.

⁴¹ <http://www.rusedina.org/?id=6518>.

⁴² <http://www.mk.ru/numbers/680/article19901.htm>.

⁴³ Reportedly, the massive rings that Niyazov wears are alone worth around 1 million USD. <http://www.erkyn.net/chronicle3/news1705.html>.

⁴⁴ The complete calendar: January - Turkmenbashi (named after Niyazov), February - Baidag (month of the Banner), March - Novruz (Spring Muslim Holiday), April - Gurbansoltan-edzhe (named after Niyazov's mother), May - Makhtumkuli (named after the medieval Turkmen poet Makhtumkuli-Fragi), June - Oguz (named after the progenitor of the Turkmen people Oguz-khan), July - Gorkut (named after the hero of the Turkmen epic "Gorkut-Ata", August - Al'p Arslan (named after one of the founders of the Seldjuk Empire), September - Rukhnama (named after Niyazov's book Rukhnama), October - Garashsyzyk (the month of Turkmen independence), November - Sandzhar (named after the last ruler of the Seldjuk Empire, sultan Sandzhar), December - Bitaraplyk (the month in which Turkmen neutrality is celebrated). <http://www.espana.ru/cgi-bin/forum>.

⁴⁵ In *Den' Velikoy Lozhi* Leonid Komarovskiy claims that a book called Rukhnama was first published in 1993 and that it was written by Gurbanov, the former press secretary of Niyazov, who wanted to propose Niyazov for the Nobel prize and was fired when he failed to do so. The first half of Gurbanov's Rukhnama is glorification of the president, whereas the second part deals with the ethical side of the life of the Turkmen. In 1999, all copies of Rukhnama were confiscated and destroyed to make sure nobody could compare Niyazov's Rukhnama with that of Gurbanov. <http://www.mk.ru/numbers/680/article19901.htm>.

⁴⁶ Prospekt, Nr 5, 2003, Alles voor Bashi;
<http://turkmenmedia.cjes.ru/news/index.php?id=10>.

⁴⁷ Foreign publications are also illegal.
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>.

48 On national television, the president stated: “I don’t understand ballet, what is it to me?” <http://www.espana.ru/cgi-bin/forum>.

49 When his German doctors ordered him to give up smoking, tobacco commercials were declared illegal in Turkmenistan. Ibidem.

50 <http://www.geocities.com/agzybirlik2000/ktotakoybashi.htm>.

51 Prospekt, Nr 5, 2003, Alles voor Bashi; <http://www.rusedina.org/?id=6518>;
<http://www.espana.ru/cgi-bin/forum/>.

52 http://www.dosye.ru/dosye/tu_bio4.htm.

53 The article “Pokusheniya na Niyazova - splanirovannaya aktsiya?” (The attempt against Niyazov - a planned action?) states that Turkmen officials have admitted the attempt was staged and that it was planned by the Turkish intelligence service in cooperation with the Turkmen authorities. The author also points out that Turkey was the only country that voted against a fact finding mission to Turkmenistan under the Moscow mechanism.

<http://www.materik.ru/print.php?section=analitics&bulsectionid=3008&PHPSESSID=1fb412d911404ecfb8299aaeb0ba84e4>.

54 <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>;

<http://www.materik.ru/print.php?section=analitics&bulsectionid=3008&PHPSESSID=1fb412d911404ecfb8299aaeb0ba84e4>; <http://www.watan.ru/news/06.12.0213/>.

55 http://turkmenistan.ru/index.php?page_id=4&lang_id=en&elem_id=6152&type=event&sort=date_desc.

56 <http://www.intertrends.ru/three/013.htm#16>;

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>.

57 <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/countri/c&prazd.html>.

58 http://www.dosye.ru/dosye/tu_bio4.htm.

59 <http://www.mk.ru/numbers/680/article19901.htm>.

60 <http://www.mk.ru/numbers/680/article19901.htm>.

61 <http://www.rusedina.org/?id=6518>.

62 <http://www.intertrends.ru/three/013.htm#19>.

63 <http://www.intertrends.ru/three/013.htm#16>.

64 <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/50/a50r080.htm>.

65 <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>.

66 <http://www.memo.ru/hr/politpr/turk/ethnic.htm>.

67 Ibidem.

68 Ibidem, p290.

69 <http://turkmenmedia.cjes.ru/news/index.php?id=10>; according to sources, Niyazov’s wife resides in Moscow.

70 Tregubova, pp288-289.

71 http://www.freeas.org/alt/?site=news_view&id=1651.

72 http://www.watan.ru/eng/view.php?nomer=787&razd=new_nov_en&pg=1.

73 http://turkmenistan.ru/index.php?page_id=5&lang_id=en&elem_id=6154&type=event&sort=date_desc.

74 http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/turkmenistan/intro/index.htm;

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>.

75 <http://www.intertrends.ru/three/013.htm#16>.

76 <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>; the US has allocated millions to pay for Turkmenistan’s cooperation, but also to promote freedom:

<http://fas.org/terrorism/at/docs/WaronTerroraid.html>.

77 <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>.

78 http://www.iicas.org/articles/library/libr_rus_20_03_01_t.htm. In particular, sources refer to Deutsche Bank as one of the banks Niyazov uses.

79 http://www.library.by/portalus/modules/law-int/10.php?subaction=showfull&id=1095956994&archive=&start_from=&ucat=10&;

http://niyazov.sitecity.ru/lttext_1310122033.phtml?p_ident=lttext_1310122033_p_1610153929.

80 http://www.iicas.org/articles/library/libr_rus_20_03_01_t.htm.

81 Ibidem; <http://www.bayki.com/news/787>; the reason Turkmenbashi was displeased was the fact that this sale caused somewhat of a scandal with Russia. However, Russia did not pursue the matter further.

82 <http://www.bayki.com/news/787>.

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83 Vrij Nederland, No 9, p18.

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