

VALENTINA SCHENSNOVICH. TURKMENISTAN:
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Abstract. This review examines inner processes in Turkmenistan in the years of perestroika. It also analyzes changes in the elite structures in the late 1980s – early 1990s and characterizes the authoritarian regime of S. Niyazov. Talking about the present development stage of Turkmenistan, the review discloses the basic aspects of the new comprehensive innovative policy of cultural unification pursued by the President of Turkmenistan G. Berdymuhamedov. Special attention is devoted to the economic problems of the republic, specifically to the priority branch today – the gas industry.

Introduction

Looking through recent publications on Turkmenistan it should be noted, first of all, that political and economic observers, above all, turn to one of the most discussed subject today, namely, authoritarian power in the country. The powerful structures of the republic were not interested in the openness of society and political culture, and were striving to consolidate the

positions they had gained. The more open and liberal strata of society wishing to change the positions of the state authorities had no levers to bring pressure to bear on the powers that be. From the point of view of today and with account of the centralization and personification of power, as well as the character of the leader, the chance for an alternative and more open development of the political system and political culture was hardly possible. Researchers show the basic aspects of the new complex innovative international policy of cultural unification proclaimed by the President of Turkmenistan G. Berdymuhamedov. In its foreign economic policy of the country the priority was taken by the diversification of gas transportation routes to foreign markets.

Turkmenistan during Perestroika Years (1990–1991)

A researcher from the Czech Republic (Prague University) asserts that in the late years of the existence of the Soviet Union Turkmenistan revealed quite clearly a trend to the authoritarian development of the state system, which became fully pronounced after the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. He examined the problems which brought the country to an authoritarian regime. The personal characteristic features of the first person of the state proved to be the essential factors. It was these features that prevented alternative possibilities to develop. The researcher supposes that the events of 1989–1991 determine to this day the present development trend of the republic and its political culture, moreover, the country's development for several decades ahead.

An analysis of the intra-elite struggle in Turkmenistan by the end of the Soviet period shows that in the period of Brezhnev's stagnation stability was one of the decisive factors of the entire Soviet and the Central Asian areas. For this purpose persons close to Brezhnev have been elected, just as in the case of Sh. Rashidov in Uzbekistan or persons who had to balance

various elite groupings. The latter factor was behind the appointment of M. Gapurov, First Secretary of the CC CP of Turkmenistan. He was a representative of a definite elite grouping, opposing the central Akhal-Tekin clan. Realizing the striving of the central clans for power he subjected the brightest representatives of them to reprisals, especially those from the cultural elite.

The career of the future First Secretary of the CC CP of Turkmenistan S. Niyazov, too, shaped in this medium. The future President of the country worked at the time at the CC CP of Turkmenistan, and in 1980 became the First Secretary of the Ashkhabad Regional Committee as a representative of the clan of the capital city. In 1984 he became the First person of the republic, despite the fact that he originated from the noble Akhal-Tekin family. In order to strengthen his loyalty to the Center S. Niyazov stayed for a probation term in Moscow for a year. Thus, the central authorities received a quite loyal figure to preserve calm in the far-off republic. S. Niyazov well understood his role and up to the end of the Soviet Union played it well enough. He remained more loyal to Moscow bosses than to the representatives of his own local clan. He was not a typical perestroika leader, and from the very beginning stemmed any attempts to promote an alternative development in the country. He had practically no people reliable enough in Turkmenistan whom he could trust one hundred percent, therefore, not wishing to lose power, he had to control unilaterally all major political, personnel and ideological processes in the republic.

To the above-mentioned factors we should add certain character traits of S. Niyazov himself, who was rather harsh and strict to his subordinates, on the one hand, and on the other, quite loyal toward higher persons and institutions.

On the basis of a psychological analysis of S. Niyazov's person, one can safely say that the latter aspect played the key role in the establishment of political culture of independent Turkmenistan. The personal factor, historical experience and

political culture in the country have become the reasons for suppressing any trend potentially threatening S. Niyazov's position in his republic, and subsequently the establishment of his personal power in the already independent state, the Czech researcher asserts.

He shows that in 1989–1991 there were certain trends in the country alternative to power, especially among Turkmen intellectuals, and attempts were made to participate more actively in the perestroika processes in the republic. Groups were formed alternative to the existing power, which were suppressed. One of them was “Agzybirlik” (“Unity”). They were engaged in reviving Turkmen culture, developing the Turkmen language, and discussing Turkmen history, especially that of the 19th and 20th century. In 1989 the Party of democratic development of Turkmenistan was founded, which had time to hold three congresses in three years (1989–1991). The party was headed by the teacher at the Polytechnical Institute D. Khojamammedov, a well-known opposition leader. The Turkmen Writers' Union has become another center of alternative views and direct opposition to Niyazov. Members of the Turkmen Writers' Union and other unions of creative professions were connected with “Agzybirlik” and other opposition trends. Some writers openly expressed displeasure with S. Niyazov's regime, and the newspaper *Edebiyat ve Sungat* has become a platform for manifestation of these sentiments. Among the alternative movements of opposition was also a non-official discussion club *Paikhas* created at the Republican Academy of Sciences in 1991, which was chaired by the well-known historian and demographer Sh. Kadyrov. This relatively small group proved able to popularize its ideas in the Turkmen mass media, which were not yet suppressed by the Niyazov censorship. But some time later all these groups were suppressed, and Kadyrov himself was forced to emigrate in 1992.

The Czech author notes an attempt to work out a joint platform uniting all opposition forces. In August 1990 a meeting

of representatives of all opposition groups took place. However, the weakness of the opposition and its very limited influence on the situation in the country and the absence of unity among its leaders were clearly demonstrated. On the other hand, Niyazov felt more confident of his position with a well-consolidated entourage, and, what is more important, with a quite strong repressive apparatus. Using the inability of the opposition forces and their disunity Niyazov was able to legitimize his leadership at the presidential elections in October 1990.

After the proclamation of Turkmenistan's sovereignty in 1990, the gap between the supporters of the conservative order and the alternative movement began to be seen and felt much clearer. The opposition was suppressed by various means: one of them was a ban on the publication of articles and other material by potentially influential authors in republican newspapers and magazines, let alone appear on TV.

From 1990-1993 onward arrests began under all and sundry pretexts of the most popular representatives of "Agzybirlik," including Khojamammedov himself. The Democratic Development party actually stopped its legal activity in the spring of 1992 in connection with the general onslaught against all opposition structures in the country.

Niyazov succeeded to use the state coercive mechanism in order to stem or limit the influence of the alternative centers of thinking. The intellectual groups were now able to use partly the central Soviet press to express their views and ideas, however, they had no levers of influence to change the situation in the republic. A certain role was played by disunity and atomism of the groups opposing Niazov. Besides, they had no support from most regions of the republic.

In the conditions of the absence of support from Moscow after the abortive attempt at the coup in August 1991, the repressive and authoritarian method of ruling the country became the only possible way to keep power in his hands. His positions in Turkmenistan itself have strengthened so much that

neither the opposition nor any other clan structure was able to undertake any steps to prevent the switch-over to authoritarianism. The events of the autumn of 1991 have finally determined the development road of Turkmenistan to a centralized personal power, the Czech researcher concludes.

Turkmenistan at Present. Policy of Cultural Unity

The authors of the article "Turkmenistan and the Globalizing World: Innovative Policy of Cultural Unity" by K. Losev, DSc(Econ.) and V. Mikhailov, DSc(Hist.), at St. Petersburg State University of Aero-cosmic Instrument-making, term the policy of cultural unification pursued by the leaders of Turkmenistan's government a systemic range of pattern-forming aspects in politics, which can also be determined as the elements of a new comprehensive innovative international policy of cultural unification, declared by the President of Turkmenistan G. Berdymuhamedov. The proclamation of permanent neutrality on December 12, 1995, at the UN General Assembly was the first step toward shaping international and regional policy of a new type.

In the conditions of the transformation of international systems and transfer from the bipolar world to other forms of world leadership, neutrality is an effective means to preserve cultural and national values, guarantor of the primacy of humanitarian and general human aims in politics. The policy of state neutrality, the researcher emphasizes, has enabled Turkmenistan to reform domestic policy and economics necessary at the first stage of independent development of a state and create conditions for a further innovative policy of national and pan-Turkic cultural unification. Turkmenistan has actively participated in the elaboration and adoption and implementation of international and regional projects to develop innovations, such as, for instance "Strategy of CIS economic development up to 2020, which determined the main principles of innovative

economics – the principle of orientation to all-round basic innovations which are the foundation of the modern technological system – combination of state regulation of innovative activity with effective functioning of competitive market mechanism. Further on the innovative development of the Technological Center of the Academy of Sciences has been opened, international forums on innovative technologies have been held regularly.

The authors of the article note a harmonious correlation of the mining, processing and manufacturing industries, as well as the regional transit economic policy of the country. The implementation of the innovative economic policy is impossible without the correct distribution of the spheres of the real economy. Turkmenistan's economy is developing in accordance with the interests of the entire country.

The gas industry – an example of foreign economic activity of Turkmenistan

In the article entitled “Turkmenistan: Search for New Gas Export Routes” E. Ionova, PhD(Hist.) notes that after gaining independence the export of gas has become the main product of the country's economy, and from the mid-1990s the diversification of its supplies to foreign markets have become a priority in the country's foreign economic policy. In those years the plans of building gas pipelines to South Asia emerged, as well as the Trans-Caspian pipeline for the transportation of Turkmen raw materials to Europe.

After laying out a gas pipeline to China the latter has become practically the only purchaser of this raw material. In 2017 the PRC accounted for over 90 percent of the entire volume of Turkmen gas (33.6 bln cubic meters) which was by 13 percent more than in 2016. In the first six months of 2018 gas supplies from Turkmenistan to China were bigger by 18.8 percent than in the similar period of 2017. E. Ionova writes that the profitableness

of gas export to China is limited, inasmuch as a considerable part of profit from its sales goes to repay Chinese credits received by Turkmenistan for the development of oil-and-gas deposits, and also the construction of gas pipelines. As a result, Turkmenistan, which financed in its time the construction of the Turkmen-Chinese gas pipeline with a view to avoiding its dependence on Russia, has acquired a less profitable partner as compared with Russia. At present Turkmenistan tries to weaken its dependence on China and examines alternative native routes of gas export, including those to Russia. The resumption of the export of Turkmen gas to Russia may contribute to the strengthening of cooperation between the two countries.

The author of the article examines the project of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to South Asia. Its total length should comprise 1,814 kilometers, of which 774 kilometers should pass through the territory of Afghanistan. The commissioning of the gas pipeline is planned for 2019–2020. The construction of this gas supply route caused doubts due to a very shaky security situation in Afghanistan where terrorist acts and military hostilities do not stop, which naturally scare away potential investors. True, in recent years Turkmenistan has succeeded to draw support from a number of international financial organizations, which expressed readiness to take part in financing the project. In May, 2018, Saudi Arabia expressed its desire to earmark big means for the project.

The author notes that the project was not only economically important for Turkmenistan and Afghanistan lobbied by the United States it was also meant to create transport gas flows from Central Asian countries alternative to the Russian direction, which was supposed to contribute to drawing Central Asian countries away from Russia.

There is another international project, namely, a gas pipeline from Iran to Pakistan and India which is now revived by Tehran, and evokes much interest among potential investors. Among the advantages of this project is the fact that it

presupposes gas transportation not through the territory of turbulent Afghanistan, but directly to Pakistan, however, due to differences between participating countries, its implementation has not yet started. True, Iran has extended a pipe to the border with Pakistan. Another barrier to the project was Washington's opposition due to its position on Iran, particularly, the anti-Iranian sanctions. Thus the exacerbation of geopolitical contradictions in South Asia is closely connected with the gas supplies to several countries in the region. According to observers, the intention of Iran in this respect has induced Saudi Arabia to participate in financing the alternative project involving Russia. In their view, the Saudi offer was put forward on the U.S. initiative, for it was interested in thwarting the Iranian project. E. Ionova notes that Iran becomes a direct rival of Turkmenistan on other gas export routes, too.

Among the risks connected with certain projects, singled out by experts, are strained relations between countries participating in these projects, which can considerably complicate the course of their realization, or become a cause for the disruption of its work. They think that Pakistan can use the gas pipeline as an instrument of intimidation of India, and the latter may at any moment leave the project. However, in the center of attention remain the risks connected with reassuring security of the gas pipeline. And real threats may come not so much from the Afghan Taliban, who even supported the project, as from the ISIS militants ousted from Iraq and Syria. Thus, the researcher believes, if not for the risks connected with the project, it could have brought considerable benefits to the participating countries. Thanks to it Afghanistan could receive 14 million cubic meters of gas a day, and Pakistan and India – 38 million. Apart from that, the gas pipeline could have improved internal economic situation in these countries, by lowering the unemployment level. It is expected, for example, that the implementation of the project will be able to provide jobs for more than 12,000 Afghani citizens.

The researcher also turns to the Convention of the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea and the problem of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline. The signing on August 12, 2018, of the Convention by the presidents of the five Caspian states – Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Iran – was the completion of a more than 20-year-long history of difficult negotiations on the division of the water area and the bottom of the Caspian Sea, and also on security in the Caspian region. The document legitimized access of the mentioned five countries to the Caspian resources – oil, gas and fish. A greater part of the water area and bio resources of the Caspian Sea remains in common use. Borders between territorial waters of the neighboring states are set on the basis of bilateral agreements. The problem of laying out pipelines has similarly been resolved. The right of the Caspian states to lay out pipelines on the sea bottom without getting approval of all the five states has been recognized; the pipeline will be laid only on the basis of agreements with the countries through whose sector the pipe will be laid. Thus, the document has a compromise character, and quite a few questions remain to be resolved. Nevertheless, for Turkmenistan the Convention opens up prospects for creating the non-regulated Trans-Caspian gas pipeline which has always been considered the main obstacle for the project

Conclusion

In 1989 Turkmenistan put forward a possibility of a reform of the rule, but the subsequent annihilation of all alternatives of the Turkmenian Republic in 1989–1991 has reduced this possibility and determined the authoritarian character of the country. Turkmenistan has lost the chance to become a more open society, political analysts emphasize today. Examining the present development stage of the country the authors of the articles on the subject have shown the basic aspects of a new comprehensive innovative policy of cultural unification declared

by Turkmenistan's President G. Berdymukhamedov. The five slogans of this policy have been revealed: policy of state neutrality, development of an innovative type of the economy, harmonious correlation of the mining, manufacturing and regional transit economic policy, policy of "cultural neutrality" in regional dimension, harmony of politics and economy in culture and education, innovative policy in the field of international relations.

The successes of the economic and political development of Turkmenistan have resulted in an intensive cultural and political cooperation of the country not only with the neighboring countries, but also at the level of international organizations. Today Turkmenistan is a recognized international negotiation platform on quite a few world problems, including those on cultural and economic cooperation, ecology, international affairs and security. Researchers point to the continuous growth of international prestige of the principles of positive neutrality, which is one of the indisputable and important factors of Turkmenistan's achievements in the international arena.

Turning to foreign economic activity of Turkmenistan, it should be noted the priority importance of its gas industry.

In the center of attention are the risks connected with the security of gas pipelines. To implement Turkmenistan's gas-exporting strategy the ensuring of the country's security is of decisive importance (for instance, of great significance is its ability to rebuff outside aggression, say, from Afghanistan). Turkmenistan has declared its readiness to cooperate with Russia in the sphere of security. This will facilitate a search for compromises in solving disputed questions connected with the projects under study of new gas routes for export. In a broader sense Russia's support bolsters up Turkmenistan's positions in the face of outside threats.

Turkmenistan's policy aimed at long-term development prospects is also advantageous for Russia, which receives an income from transit of trade in Turkmen energy carriers and their

transit, and Turkmenistan itself is also in profit of its connections with the largest world markets of energy carriers. Turkmenistan holds the most crucial geopolitical and geo-economic position from the point of view of the interests of the world's most advanced countries, as well as on the crossroads of the interests of the major Eurasian trade-economic routes, which largely determine the modern foreign policy of Turkmenistan.

Turkmenistan gained sovereignty only at the end of the 20th century, that is, during the twenty-five years of independent development it managed not only to preserve political stability and economic independence, but also to become one of the stable influential global and regional countries. Modern Turkmenistan, researchers maintain, has been able to preserve political stability and economic independence, but also become one of the influential global and regional countries. Modern Turkmenistan has all possibilities to make its experience of state formation and development, and its experience of humanitarian-oriented international policy, free from conflicts, to receive due assessment of experts and become an effective example in the implementation of new standards of practical interstate relations.

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