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Part 1: News Analysis

Since the death of his predecessor, Saparmurat Niyazov, in December the country and outside observers have been groping for insight into Turkmenistan's future path. In a one-man state, the words and deeds of the president receive priority scrutiny, so two events this week were weighed carefully.

On August 4 President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov took another step toward consolidating power in the hands of the president by being elected chairman of the state-controlled Galkynysh (Revival) movement – which comprises state-controlled trade unions, youth groups and others -- and of the country's sole political party, the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (former the Community Party of the Turkmen SSR). His comments in a rare personal interview, published on August 7, also promoted his image as being a moderate man.

In his first six months as president, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov has continued the regular staff shake-ups that Niyazov made a routine feature of governance. While some of his sackings may have softer landings than Niyazov's – shifting senior officials to new positions, rather than blacklisting or imprisoning them – he, too, is moving some senior officials from corner offices to jails and prisons. Last week it came to light that Akmurat Rejepov, the head of the State Security Council and a close Niyazov ally, his son and a business associate had been sentenced to lengthy prison terms in a closed trial on unconfirmed charges. This week brought the news that Payzgeldi Meredov, former Turkmen Minister of Agriculture, and his two sons, Kurban and Batyr, had been detained by the Ministry of National Security on July 29. According to an August 8 statement by Payzgeldi Meredov's daughter, Maya, the sons had been held for four days and released without charges but continue to be called in for questioning by the Ministry of National Security, and Payzgeldi Meredov continues to be held without charges. The detentions fuel concern that government impunity has been untouched by progress achieved and promised in other areas of life, such as education.

In a speech at an extraordinary session of the Mejlis, or nominal parliament, the president said, "I hope nobody will ever be able to reproach us for stifling democracy because democracy is in the blood of the Turkmen, we received it from our mother's milk," a claim belied by the absence of alternative parties and social movements and tolerance of dissenters.

In a rare media interview tied to his election as chairman of the Democratic Party in the state-run journal *Turkmenistan*, reprinted in the August 7 issue of *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, President Berdimukhamedov stressed that his achievements have come through hard work, and characterized his life's watch-word as "moderation." While the Turkmen leader dismissed the honorific of "great," when an admirer at the session began to gush that he was "a great leader," he accepted that praise was due, noting his reform of agriculture and education and even the election of Turkmenistan to the ceremonial position of vice president of the UN General Assembly.

The president continued the theme of modesty in the second set of significant remarks, in a televised presentation on August 7. He noted that "In order to become great, you must write historical pages in life. I'm a simple son of my people, and not yet great. I still have to do a lot." But the words did not square easily with the occasion for the remarks: his acceptance of the leadership of Galkynysh and the country's sole political party.

Official Ashgabat received a preliminary delegation this week in advance of the August 15-16 state visit to Ashgabat of Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The Iranian deputy foreign minister met with counterparts and attended a Turkmen-Iranian commission on border and customs issues. The major issue likely to be discussed at the presidential summit is demarcation of the Caspian Sea bed. Without agreement among all littoral states, plans for pipelines to bring Turkmen gas to foreign markets cannot proceed.

The U.S. Congress took a step toward incentivizing accountability in oil-rich countries with the passage of an amendment to the New Direction for Energy Independence, National Security and Consumer Protection Act (H.R. 3221) which attempts to deter kleptocracy and encourage transparency. It is not yet apparent how the adoption of this amendment will impact US-Turkmen bilateral relations, if at all.

Part 2: News Digest

The digest of primary news and information sources from which this News Analysis is in part derived is available in the News Digest -- Part 2 of the *Turkmenistan Weekly News Brief* -- which is attached. This week's Digest includes the following:

Summary: President Berdymukhamedov further consolidated power by taking the leadership of both the state-controlled movement Galkynysh and the Democratic Party. Payzgeldi Meredov, former Agriculture Minister, is being held on unspecified charges, prompting concerns about the government's impunity.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. Iranian Delegation Arrives in Ashgabat

Original title: Iranian Delegation Arrives in Turkmenistan for Three-Day Visit. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: turkmenistan.ru/08/06/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=10721&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: In anticipation of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's official visit to Turkmenistan on August 14-15, a government delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran, led by Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Mohammadli Shahidi, arrived in Ashgabat on August 7, turkmenistan.ru reported. The delegation is to consult with counterparts in various ministries and take part in the fifth session of a Turkmen-Iranian commission on border, customs, and consular issues.

b. U.S. House of Representatives Passes Energy Security Amendment

Original title: Hastings Lauds Passage of Energy Security Amendment to Energy Bill.

Source: U.S. Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe/csce.gov.org/08/05/07

Full version:

http://www.csce.gov/index.cfm?Fuseaction=ContentRecords.ViewDetail&ContentRecord_id=566&ContentType=P&ContentRecordType=P

Full text of the amendment: http://www.csce.gov/index.cfm?Fuseaction=Files.Download&FileStore_id=718

Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL), Chairman of the Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission), introduced an amendment to the New Direction for Energy Independence, National Security and Consumer Protection Act (H.R. 3221), the Commission reported on its website. The amendment, which passed the House of Representatives unanimously, calls on the United States to further efforts regarding global energy security and promote democratic development in resource-rich foreign countries. Furthermore, the amendment requires that the U.S. Secretary of State submit an annual report to Congress on the progress made in promoting transparency, including detailed descriptions of U.S. participation in Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) to deter kleptocracy and promote transparency in the international energy market.

According to Transparency International, six of the top ten oil-exporting countries to the United States are ranked as some of the world's most corrupt countries. Corruption and kleptocracy often lead to political instability and subsequently higher oil prices, which have the potential to impact the economic and national security interests of the United States. The Hastings amendment reflects the culmination of a series of hearings on energy security held by the U.S. Helsinki Commission including, "Pipeline Politics: Achieving Energy Security in the OSCE Region," on June 26, 2007 and "Energy and Democracy: Oil and Water?" on July 23, 2007.

[Passages omitted on details of legislation.]

c. Ashgabat Hosts Meeting on Caspian Biological Resources

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: turkmenistan.ru/08/07/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=10718&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: The 27th regular meeting of the Commission on Biological Resources of the Caspian Sea, established in 1992 and organized by the Turkmen State Committee for Fisheries, was convened in Ashgabat August 6, turkmenistan.ru reported. The heads of national fisheries of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan as well as experts in the field, scientists, environmentalists and lawyers met to discuss the preservation and rational use of the Caspian Sea. The conference discussed quotas for sturgeon fishing as well as joint research to assess biological resources and diversity and their preservation.

d. U.S. Department of Agriculture Official Visits Turkmenistan

Original title: USDA Research Leader to Visit Turkmenistan and attend Melon Day Events

Source: U.S. Embassy—Ashgabat/08/09/07

Full version: <http://turkmenistan.usembassy.gov/>

On August 10, United States Department of Agriculture researcher James D. McCreight will arrive in Turkmenistan for a week-long working visit to include Melon Day festivities, the U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat reported. [Passage omitted on sponsors]. His schedule in Ashgabat includes presentations on melon breeding in the United States for officials and staff of the Departments of Science and Crop Protection at the Ministry of Agriculture. He will also conduct a presentation for staff of the National Institute of Desert, Flora and Fauna on strategies to control melon pests.

Mr. McCreight will travel to Mary, Lebap and Dashoguz provinces (*velayats*) to meet with local farmers and continue his discussions on agriculture at a variety of agricultural sites. Local agricultural specialists, including alumni of the Cochran Fellowship Program, will also have the opportunity to meet with Mr. McCreight during his visit.

[Passages omitted on background of McCreight].

The Cochran Fellowship Program is sponsored by the U.S. Government and offers a two-week training program in the United States for agricultural specialists. Since the program began in Turkmenistan in 1993, over 100 Turkmen specialists have been provided training in the U.S. on a variety of agricultural topics including plant protection, animal health, water management, agribusiness development, and farm management.

e. USAID and UN Support for HIV/AIDS Prevention in Turkmenistan

Original title: USAID and International Support for HIV/AIDS Prevention in Turkmenistan

Source: U.S. Embassy—Ashgabat/08/08/07

Full version: <http://turkmenistan.usembassy.gov/>

On August 2, representatives of the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan, as well as public and international organizations met to discuss opportunities for cooperation in implementing the National Program on HIV/AIDS Prevention, the U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat reported on its website. The Ministry of Health organized the meeting with technical support from the CAPACITY Project, funded by the U.S. Government through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

During the meeting, participants had the opportunity to discuss the draft of CAPACITY's work plan which was developed jointly with partners working in the area of HIV prevention. This work plan provides wide opportunities for joint activities in increasing public awareness of HIV/AIDS, especially among youth, on issues of sexual education, in developing specific national programs and strategies, and in conducting training with the participation of national and international experts. CAPACITY is planning to implement its activities in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the National AIDS Prevention Center, youth and women's unions as well as international organizations such as WHO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNODC, UNICEF, and MSF.

[Passages omitted on details of project and its coordination.]

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. President Berdymukhamedov Elected Chairman of Nation's Only Party

Original title: To the President of Turkmenistan, Respected Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov . Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Source: *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*/no. 193/08/07/07

Synopsis: President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov was elected to the post of Chairman of the Galkynysh National Movement and of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan* reported. In congratulating President Berdymukhamedov on behalf of the Mejlis A. Nurberdyev noted that

Turkmenistan's recent election as vice president of the UN General Assembly, and the UN's acceptance of a Turkmen proposal to host a regional preventive diplomacy center were credited to the president. He was also lauded for reforming the agricultural and education systems and creating a national tourist zone on the Caspian Sea.

"The movement you have launched for renewal is a serious and long-term government program to raise the popular spirit, develop the economy, and strengthen Turkmenistan's international authority; it is a guarantor that in this new stage of state development the people, along with their elected leader, preserving adherence of the national path of development, happily, and with great pride, will perform great deeds," wrote Nurberdyev.

b. Turkmen Leader Further Consolidates Power

Original title: Turkmen President Elected Head of Nation's Single Party. Copyright (c) 2007. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036.

Source: rferl.org/08/05/07

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/08/ecc6df31-74bd-4b0c-a011-453c666c6535.html>

Synopsis: Turkmenistan's president has taken the helm of the only existing political party in the country, RFE/RL reported, citing the AP. State television said today that President Berdymukhamedov's election on August 4 as leader of the Democratic Party further consolidates his power in the gas-rich Central Asian state.

[Passage omitted on succession after Niyazov].

Berdymukhamedov was also named on August 4 as the leader of the Galkynysh (Revival) political movement, which includes the unions, as well as youth, veteran, and other organizations. There were no other candidates.

c. Turkmen President Favors Stronger Democratic Party, More Reforms

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Interfax News Agency/08/06/07

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov said that the Democratic Party of 148,000 members should be strong, assist authorities in governance and become "an active canvasser of the policies we have developed in the interests of our homeland's independence," Interfax reported, citing the president's speech in Turkmen newspapers. "I hope nobody will ever be able to reproach us for stifling democracy because democracy is in the blood of the Turkmens, we received it from our mother's milk," he said.

Berdymukhamedov said free natural gas, electricity, water, and salt will continue to be distributed to the public, and oil, bread, transportation, and utility prices would be subsidized.

d. Turkmen President Believes He is Not Yet "Great"

Original title: Turkmen President Considers He's Not Worthy of Title "Great". Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: RIA Novosti/rian.ru/08/04/07

Full version: <http://www.rian.ru/politics/cis/20070804/70360299.html>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov believes he is not worthy of the title "great," used in a speech by Onzhuk Musaev, first secretary of the political council of the Democratic Party. Berdymukhamedov was elected head of both the Galkynysh (Renewal) movement and the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan.

"In order to become great, you must write historical pages in life. I'm a simple son of my people, and not yet great. I still have to do a lot," Berdymukhamedov remarked after the televised extraordinary session of the Democratic Party.

e. Turkmen President Says His Success Due to Hard Work, Not Patronage

Original title: *President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Myaligulyyevich Berdymukhamedov: Brief Biography; Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov About Himself. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan/no. 193/08/07/07*

Synopsis: In an interview for the journal *Turkmenistan* reprinted in the state newspaper *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, President Berdymukhamedov characterized his life's watch-word as "moderation," and cited his father's favorite expression, "Never run where you can walk." The Turkmen leader said he reached his position not through any "patronage or family ties," but due to his own abilities, persistence, and hard work. His family upbringing developed in him a sense of empathy which led him to practice medicine. Berdymukhamedov said his talent for administration came naturally, and was in demand. He worked 14-16 hour days in his field of dentistry, and while barely having time to read a book, kept up with the literature in his field. Today, busy as leader of Turkmenistan, he still finds time keep up with medical literature in his field.

The Turkmen president said that former president Saparmurat Niyazov, whom he called "Turkmenbashi" ("head of the Turkmen") was a great role model and authority for him as were Turkmen thinkers of the past such as Makhtumkuli Feraghy. Avicenna (Ibn Sina), whom the president read widely, was also influential.

f. Former Agriculture Minister Held in Detention in Turkmenistan

Source: *Statement from Maya Meredova, 8 August 2007, received by OSI Turkmenistan Project via e-mail. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Payzgeldi Meredov and his two sons Kurban Meredov and Batyr Meredov were detained by the Turkmen authorities on July 29, Maya Meredova said in a statement sent by e-mail from Georgia Payzgeldi Meredov has been held in detention since July 29th. Kurban and Batyr were released after being interrogated for four days, although they continue to be called for questioning daily To date, no charges have been pressed against Payzgeldi Meredov and his sons.

No information is available about Meredov's whereabouts, and there is concern about his health as he had been receiving treatment for hepatitis B and suffered from diabetes and high blood pressure. Meredov has been denied the right to hire a qualified lawyer and deprived of family visits. On August 7, Turkmen authorities began confiscating Meredov's personal property without proper warrants

Payzgeldi Meredov was born in 1943 in Mary, Turkmenistan. He was educated in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. He has held various senior government positions including Minister of Agriculture in the early 1990s. His most recent position was as head of the state-owned company Geok-Gushak ("Green Belt") where he was the head of the company. He combined this job with the position of a Governor of Archibil District of Ashgabat. In August 2006 he resigned from the position of the Governor and in Spring 2007, he also retired from Geok-Gushak.

g. Former Agriculture Minister Arrested in Turkmenistan

Original title: *New Arrests in Turkmenistan. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *Vremya novostei/08/08/07*

Full version: <http://www.vremya.ru/2007/140/5/183914.html>

Synopsis: Former Turkmen Minister of Agriculture Payzygelydy Meredov, among the wealthiest men in Turkmenistan, was arrested in Ashgabat this week, *Vremya novostei* reported. Meredov, 64, was dismissed from his post as minister in 1994 under former president Saparmurat Niyazov, but had remained one of his closest confidantes. After Niyazov's death, Meredov was detained, but then released. His son Batyr, who resides in UAE and runs a family business there, was also detained this week.

h. Inter-Agency Caspian Commission Meets

Original title: *Meeting of Interagency Commission of Turkmenistan on Questions of the Caspian Sea*

Source: *Turkmenistan Government website/turkmenistan.gov.tm/08/04/07*

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=070804c>

Synopsis: The Interagency Commission on Questions of the Caspian Sea convened August 4 to coordinate all economic activity related to the Caspian region, including domestic and international projects to exploit natural resources, environmental preservations, hydrometeorology, and drafting of national legislation concerning the Caspian. The Commission approved a plan for 2007 and the first half of 2008. A chief concern is the negotiation of agreements with other Caspian littoral states about the delineation of the Caspian Sea bed. Turkmenistan is preparing a National Plan of Action for the Caspian Sea to expand and diversify international cooperation in exploitation of the Turkmen shelf of the Caspian, transport of Turkmen gas to foreign markets, the development of international tourism; and social-economic programs.

The need for environmental protection of ancient Hazar, to preserve its rich biological resources, was also discussed at the meeting.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. Turkmenistan Eyes Possible Cooperation with Foreign Gas Companies

Original title: Total and Shell Join Turkmen Gas Queue as Country Slowly Opens Up. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project. Source: Heren Energy Ltd. European Spot Gas Markets/08/02/07

Synopsis: France's Total and Royal Dutch Shell have met with Turkmen president Berdymukhamedov in the last week, and the state news agency deemed the meetings an "unusual step," Heren Energy Ltd reported. Turkmenistan may be becoming more receptive to foreign investment. Until now, a limited number of foreign firms have been allowed to develop Turkmenistan's offshore oil reserves for some time (Petronas, Burren Energy, Dragon Oil).

Khadem al-Kubaisi, Shell's vice president for the Middle East, South Asia, and the Caspian, met with President Berdymukhamedov on July 30, but did not disclose the content of the talks, citing commercial confidentiality. Shell has had an office in Turkmenistan for 10 years but has not produced any oil there. A spokeswoman for Total said the discussions covered the future of gas reserves. The exact total of reserves has not been disclosed, but are estimated around 20 tcm, with possibly 6 tcm recoverable, although the Turkmen government claims more.

b. Turkmen Gas Exports To Iran Double in First Seven Months of 2007

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project. Source: BBC Monitoring Central Asia/08/09/07/TV Altyn Asyr/08/08/07

Synopsis: The Korpeje-Kord Koy international gas pipeline, built for the export of Turkmen natural gas to external markets, has doubled its deliveries to Iran this year compared to the same period last year, BBC Monitoring Central Asia reported, citing TV Altyn Asyr.

During the first seven months of this year, some 4.99 bcm. of natural gas was sent via the pipeline, which means a 110.4-per-cent increase.

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

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