

GEORGIA AND TURKMENISTAN: SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS

OIL & GAS

Georgia is a key strategic point for both Russian and Western interests in terms of fuel transportation.

Oil and gas flows from Azerbaijan to Georgia and is then sent onwards to Turkey and the EU. This system, known as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the South Caucasus (gas) Pipeline, is owned by a consortium of energy companies, primarily BP (formerly British Petroleum), the operator of the oil pipeline. The pipelines are essentially a major Western initiative to enable transport of fossil fuels without passage through non-favoured territories such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Russia being required.

There has been much speculation on whether a Trans-Caspian gas and/or oil pipeline system will be created to connect Turkmenistan to the TBC/South Caucasus network but as yet no firm details are available. In April 2008, spokeswoman for EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said she had received a commitment from Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov that the country would supply the EU with 10bn cubic metres of Turkmen gas per year from 2009. This would be transported via the South Caucasus Pipeline and then on through the planned Nabucco pipeline to Central Europe.

Reports on meetings between the Russian government and those of its Central Asian neighbours seem to contradict this statement. At the CIS summit in St. Petersburg on June 6, Berdymukhammedov was enthusiastic about the continuation of Turkmen-Russian relations. The official Russian RIA-Novosti news agency reported that Medvedev would be visiting Ashgabat in early July. "With great pleasure, Turkmenistan is awaiting the distinguished guest," Berdymukhammedov said, referring to the visit.

More information:

Wikipedia: Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan_pipeline

EU secures Turkmenistan gas deal
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7347051.stm>

Western Diplomatic Offensive in Central Asia Throws Russia on the Defensive
<http://eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav060608.shtml>

GEORGIA'S ENERGY DEBT TO TURKMENISTAN

Georgia and Turkmenistan have been active trading partners since the immediate post-Soviet era. In 1994, in the midst of economic crisis, the Georgian government's natural gas debt to Turkmenistan stood at \$500 million. This has been paid off gradually since then, in the form of goods and services such as sugar, pipes, dredge ships and spare parts, and military aircraft and helicopters. According to a 2005 article published by the Turkmenistan State News Agency, president Mikhail Saakashvili had repeatedly expressed sincere gratitude to Turkmenistan and its leader for supporting Georgia. Though the Georgian prime minister Zurab Zhvaniya informed the press that the debt could be completely repaid by 2005, it was still being repaid in 2006, when the latest figure given cited \$60 million US currency debt remaining.

More information:

Georgian Ambassador to Ashgabat Aleksi Petriashvili hopes for soonest payment of Turkmen debt
http://www.turkmenistan.ru/index.php?search=saakashvili&lang_id=en&op=search

Georgia can pay off its state debt to Turkmenistan already in 2005
http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=5326&type=event&highlight_words=georgian&sort=date_desc

Georgia pays off its debts by... dredgers
http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=8&lang_id=en&elem_id=7781&type=event&highlight_words=georgian&sort=date_desc

THE NIYAZOV ERA

In September 2002, the former president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, sent the bizarre gift of a 6-month-old brown Caucasian bear to Niyazov symbolizing, as the cover letter addressed to the Turkmen leader read, "the power and force which characterize presidential power in Turkmenistan". Upon the dictator's death, Shevardnadze made the following comment:

GEORGIA AND TURKMENISTAN: SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS

Some say [Niyazov] was overly strict and demanding and, of course, there was cast-iron discipline in his country. Maybe some people did have some fear of him, but he brought order to the country, built such a large state, developed the capital, and that should be taken into account too. Of course, the methods used to achieve all that are also something to consider, but I personally do not believe that he was a such a dictator that he burdened his subjects with his rule.

More information:

Shevardnadze gifted caucasian bear to Niyazov

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=4077&type=event&highlight_words=georgian&sort=date_desc

Turkmenistan: Could Niyazov's Death Lead To Political Struggle, Instability?

<http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1073626.html>

THE BERDYMHAMMEDOV ERA

The current leaderships of Georgia and Turkmenistan have had an active relationship and have met on numerous occasions. In February 2007, Mikheil Saakashvili visited Turkmenistan for the first time and met the "newly elected president", Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov. In March, a Georgian government delegation headed by Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli arrived in Ashgabat for a two-day visit. A meeting between Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov and the head of the Georgian delegation took place, in which, Turkmen-Georgian cooperation issues were discussed. The main issue on the agenda was the transportation of Turkmen natural gas.

The Georgian and Turkmen presidents have met in CIS country conferences in June and October 2007, where they agreed on cooperation in the trade-economic and humanitarian spheres. The presidents also discussed the potential opening of a Turkmen embassy in Georgia.

More information:

Newly elected president of Turkmenistan meets foreign dignitaries

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=9334&type=event&highlight_words=georgian&sort=date_desc

Turkmen, Georgian presidents agree on ways of further interstate cooperation

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=10260&type=event&highlight_words=georgian&sort=date_desc

THE FRIENDS OF TURKMENISTAN

In June 2007, the "Friends of Turkmenistan" was formed in the Georgian parliament. The chairperson of the Georgian parliament, Nino Burjanadze, instructed vice speaker Michael Machvariani to head the group. In October of the same year, Turkmen president Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov signed a resolution approving the composition of an intergovernmental Turkmen-Georgian commission for economic cooperation "with a view to expanding the bilateral trade-economic relations between Turkmenistan and Georgia".

More information:

Georgian parliament forms "Group of friends of Turkmenistan"

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=10317&type=event&highlight_words=georgian&sort=date_desc

Nazarguly Shagulyyev to head Turkmen-Georgian commission for economic cooperation

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11184&type=event&highlight_words=georgian&sort=date_desc