



Turkmenistan Position Paper

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I/ Background Information on Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is a landlocked country located in the southwest of the Central Asia region, with a border to the Caspian Sea. It is the second-largest country in Central Asia after Kazakhstan, and most of its area is inhabitable due to large deserts with small oases. Turkmens (who are Turkic and are one of the branches of the Oghuz Turks) came into the area only in the 11th century, a considerably 'late' arrival as there were civilizations in the area since the mid-3rd century BCE. Turkmens were under the rule of the Seljuq Dynasty (1038-1194) and were invaded by the Mongolians (13th century). Russians started to occupy the land now-called Turkmenistan in 1869, using the rivalries between the Turkmen tribes for their advantage. After the Soviet Revolution and many internal conflicts, the Bolshevik rule was finally established after 1920. Saparmurad Niyazov "Turkmenbashi" led the country after its independence on October 27, 1991, who was a dictator, and corruption was always involved in his term. The next president after "Turkmenbashi" is no different from him. Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov just changed "Turkmenbashi"s name with his. In terms of economy, the country mostly relies on its natural gas reserves. It has the fourth-largest natural gas reserve in the world after Russia, Iran, and Qatar. In order to get further economic income, the country has many natural gas projects which involve pipelines such as the Trans-Caspian Pipeline Project.

II/ Past Achievements and Attempts of Turkmenistan on the Issues

- A. The Question of the Caucasus:** The Caucasus is a region where numerous conflicts occur. The region contains Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and some parts of Russia, thus Turkmenistan is not directly affected by those conflicts. Even though there is a small Turkmen population in the Caucasus region of Russia, especially around Stavropol, the city is too far north (approximately 300 km to the north of Nalchik, the biggest city in Kabardino-Balkaria) to get affected by those conflicts. In addition to the Turkmens' not being affected, Turkmenistan has a "positive neutrality" policy. Positive neutrality means "...gaining international recognition of the republic's independence, agreeing upon mutual non-interference in internal affairs, and maintaining neutrality in external conflicts". When those two aspects are regarded together, it is no surprise that Turkmenistan has no past achievements on the issue.
- B. The Question of the Caspian Sea and Surrounding Territories:** The Caspian Sea is a body of water that



is surrounded in all four sides with land and that has an area bigger than the total land area of Japan. Also, with an oil reserve of seventy-nine billion barrels and a natural gas reserve of 7 trillion cubic meters, its seabed is as important as the surface, if not more. Turkmenistan has the chance to reach and use this body of water for its purposes, as it is lucky enough to have a shore to it. However, Turkmenistan does not have a stance as clear as the other littoral states, on the issue. Turkmenistan wants the division of the Caspian “Sea” to be like it is a lake, according to the median line principle. It also wants the full control of the seabed and the natural resources that fall into its area. The right to deploy submarine cables and build pipelines are some other important things that the Turkmen government wants to achieve. To this end, the Turkmen delegations attended many conferences regarding the issue such as the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea (in Aktau, on 12 August 2018). The Ashgabat Declaration (in Ashgabat, on 1 May 2015) is another one of these treaties. Turkmenistan was the host of the First Caspian Economic Forum. The forum included discussions on “the issues related to the development of trade-economic, transport cooperation, creation of conditions for large projects” as well as “discussions on the role of economy of the Caspian region on a global scale, investment attractiveness in various sectors of the economy of the littoral Caspian States”.

C. The Question of the Shift of Trade Routes in Eurasia: As mentioned before, Turkmenistan has a “positive neutrality” policy. With the help of this neutral and impartial policy, the Turkmen government is mostly focused on economic growth. With that in mind, Turkmenistan sees the New Silk Road as a very important opportunity to increase its economic power and influence. The value of the New Silk Road can easily be noticed by the Turkmen government’s having “Turkmenistan - the Heart of the Great Silk Road” as its slogan in 2018. In order to achieve this plan, Turkmenistan does many things, probably the most important among them being the organization of “The Great Silk Road – Towards the New Frontiers of Development Forum” (on 2 May 2019) that was held in Awaza, Turkmenistan. In the forum, Turkmenistan’s position on the issue as well as some possible improvements to the development program was discussed. Also, it seems that the increased activity of China with the project does not really pose a threat or concern for Turkmenistan. On the contrary, Turkmenistan is happy with the activity since the projects help itself.

III/ Objectives, Aims and Possible Solutions Proposed by Turkmenistan on the Issues

A. The question of the Caucasus: As stated before, Turkmenistan has a “positive neutrality” policy which means that it is not involved in international conflicts as long as those conflicts have an effect either on the country, or the people of the country. As the trade with Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia are minimal, and as the part of Russia affected by the conflicts is negligible in terms of trade, the conflicts do not have much of a negative effect of Turkmenistan, and therefore, Turkmenistan does not have a specific solution proposition on the issue.



- B. The question of the Caspian Sea and Surrounding Territories:** Turkmenistan wants the division of the Caspian “Sea” as a lake and to divide the seabed as if it is a “sea” so that it will have full control on the resources. To this end, Turkmenistan is willing to see Iran’s opposition as an ‘unfortunate event’. Also, it is believed by the Turkmen government that the increase of the conventions and conferences by the littoral states will eventually lead to the solution of the issue. Finally, the government wants to establish many pipelines, the Trans-Caspian Pipeline with Azarbaijan being one of the biggest ones among all. While doing everything that was stated, Turkmenistan, of course, wants to protect the ecology of the lake. Considering all of these, it could be said that “Turkmenistan does not have much to add up to meetings [on the solution], as they do not have a clear policy” as it is stated in the chair report. However, as the former president Saparmurat Niyazov “Turkmenbashi” said, “One can smell blood behind the Caspian Sea, and every one of us must understand that it is not an easy problem to solve”.
- C. The Question of the Shift of Trade Routes in Eurasia:** The Turkmen government not only wants the Belt and Road Initiative to come to life, but it also wants some other railroad projects to be implemented as well. Among those various projects, one of the biggest and the most important ones are the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran Railway and Trans-Asian Railway. The Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran Railway will help Turkmenistan and other land-locked Central Asian countries to have access to the seas or to the ocean, and the Trans-Asian Railway will connect the east with the west. Finally, Turkmenistan tries to be a part of the International North-South Transport Corridor, which is a version of the Belt and Road Initiative with a wider area.



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