Руководитель Института Diplomatic World Барбара Дитрих передала Посольству Туркменистана в Брюсселе новый 74-й выпуск журнала. В этом номере освещены важные события, связанные с внешнеполитической деятельностью Туркменистана на треке взаимодействия с институтами ЕС и странами Бенилюкс.

H.E. RASHID MEREDOV
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan and the EU:
Towards a New Economic Partnership

In the framework of the working visit by H.E. Rashid Meredov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, to Brussels in March 2024, a round table was organized with the European business community on the subject of "Turkmenistan and the EU: towards a new economic partnership".

The event brought together more than 120 representatives from various countries in a hybrid format, where opportunities for cooperation in key areas such as energy, investment and trade were discussed. The event was attended by heads and representatives of international organizations, including UN agencies, EU, OECD, political, diplomatic and financial institutions, media, commercial companies, trade and economic associations and agencies, research centres and other organizations. Leading European companies represented included "Sarens Group", "Cargolux", "Philips" and "Royal HC", among others.

In his speech, Minister Meredov emphasized the great potential for expanding the economic partnership between Turkmenistan and the EU, and the important role that European companies play in this regard.

A dynamically developing economic system, rich natural resources, favourable geographical location, as well as an "open door" policy provide Turkmenistan with wide prospects for effective economic partnership. Turkmenistan welcomes European companies to actively participate in economic projects focusing on using sustainable and climate-friendly technologies.

Speaking about the economic potential of Turkmenistan, Minister Meredov provided some macroeconomic indicators: stable GDP growth was ensured in 2023, reaching 6.3 percent, and the foreign trade balance of Turkmenistan for 2023 amounted about USD 21 billion US dollars, with exports being 1.7 times bigger than imports.

Turkmenistan continues its policy of diversifying energy exports. In 2023, Turkmenistan exported natural gas to countries such as China, Russia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. The geography of exports of petroleum products, electricity and mineral fertilizers is expanding. This was also facilitated by widespread introduction of advance technologies and digital systems in all areas of production.

Photo: Embassy of Turkmenistan in Brussels

Additional income from the export of hydrocarbons allows Turkmenistan to implement an active investment policy aimed at developing industries with high added value. Investments in the Turkmen economy are growing and in 2023 amounted to over USD 11 billion. Turkmenistan stimulates implementation of balanced macroeconomic and structural policies, mobilization and efficient use of resources. All these measures facilitate the creation of new jobs – including in the private sector – and the transition to a green economy.

Turning to bilateral Turkmen-EU trade and economic relations, Minister Meredov noted the big potential for cooperation in areas such as energy, transport, industry, and high technology, noting the positive experience of cooperation with Belgian companies "Picanol", "Vandewiele", Dutch companies "Philips", "Royal HC", Luxembourgish company "Cargolux" and others.

At the same time, the mutual potential of Turkmen-EU business cooperation can be used much more effectively. In this regard, Minister Meredov proposed to consider the following specific areas of cooperation:

In the energy sector, Turkmenistan is ready to discuss the supply of machinery and equipment from European companies for oil, gas and electrical industries of Turkmenistan. Minister Meredov invited major European business to consider possibility of working in oil and gas fields located in Turkmen sector of the Caspian Sea.

At the same time, Turkmenistan pays great attention to the development of renewable energy. Understanding that "green" energy is the energy of the future, Turkmenistan today is taking a number of practical actions at national level. Special attention is paid to the development of international cooperation in the field of hydrogen energy.

A separate topic is interaction with foreign companies and international structures on the projects of reducing methane emissions and utilization of by-pass gas at hydrocarbon resource fields. On December 1, 2023, during the COP28 Summit in Dubai, the President of Turkmenistan announced that the country was joining the Global Methane Pledge.

Одна из ключевых статей журнала посвящена визиту министра иностранных дел Туркменистана Рашида Мередова в Брюссель в марте текущего года, в ходе которого министр провел ряд встреч с руководителями институтов ЕС и Бельгии, обсудив перспективы двустороннего и многостороннего сотрудничества.

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Photo: Diplomatic World

Turkmenistan is following the course of "low-carbon economic development," which involves transition to the use of modern ecologically friendly and resource-saving technologies in industry and transport. Turkmenistan would also like to study Europe's experience in the field of hydrogen energy in order to create high-tech production facilities in Turkmenistan.

In the chemical industry, Turkmenistan invites companies to consider the possibility of participating in projects for the construction of new and modernization of existing chemical plants.

The next area is transport and communications. For a number of years, Turkmenistan has successfully worked with European companies to implement projects to expand cellular communication services, satellite systems and maritime transport.

The Central Asian country is ready for a substantive discussion on the development of railway transport, shipbuilding equipment, effective use of transport and logistics potential of Turkmenbashi International Seaport, and the opening of new forms of interaction in the field of telecommunications, which could be done under the framework of the EU's Global Gateway Initiative. Along with this, the Turkmen side invites European companies to also participate in projects to develop its digital economy.

Financial and banking sector can become a leading vector of Turkmen-EU cooperation.

In this regard, European banks, export credit institutions, insurance organizations are invited to actively develop direct relations with state and commercial banks of Turkmenistan.

The Turkmen side is also interested in cooperation in water management sector for the modernization of its water supply and water distribution system. In this regard, European companies could consider the possibility of participating in the implementation of the renovation project of the Karakum Canal. A separate topic is the purification of water for drinking purpose in cities and rural areas, as the problem of groundwater remains relevant for Turkmenistan.

Minister Maradov also noted the social orientation of the Turkmen economy, reflected in the attention paid to medicine and healthcare. Over the past 25 years, dozens of medical institutions have been built in Turkmenistan, equipped with modern medical equipment and advanced technologies in the field of healthcare. Thousands of qualified specialists have been trained.

In June 2023, the opening of the first stage of the new smart city of Arkadag took place in Turkmenistan which will occupy area of 744 hectares and will become home to 107,000 Turkmen citizens. The construction of the second phase has begun. One of its planned components is an industrial cluster, with a number of plants focused on the production of certain types of products of medical industry, pharmacy, and baby food. In this context, European companies are invited to explore possibilities of participation in creation of this cluster.

In conclusion, Minister Meredov reiterated the openness of the Turkmen side to constructive ideas and proposals. There are significant potential of opportunities that need to be realized, and Turkmenistan counts on the strong support and active participation of the European institutions and companies.

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Еще одной значимой темой выпуска стал круглый стол, организованный в Брюсселе с участием туркменского министра иностранных дел, который собрал представителей около 150 европейских компаний, исследовательских институтов и различных финансовых институтов. В ходе мероприятия обсуждались вопросы сотрудничества и совместных проектов между европейскими компаниями и Туркменистаном.

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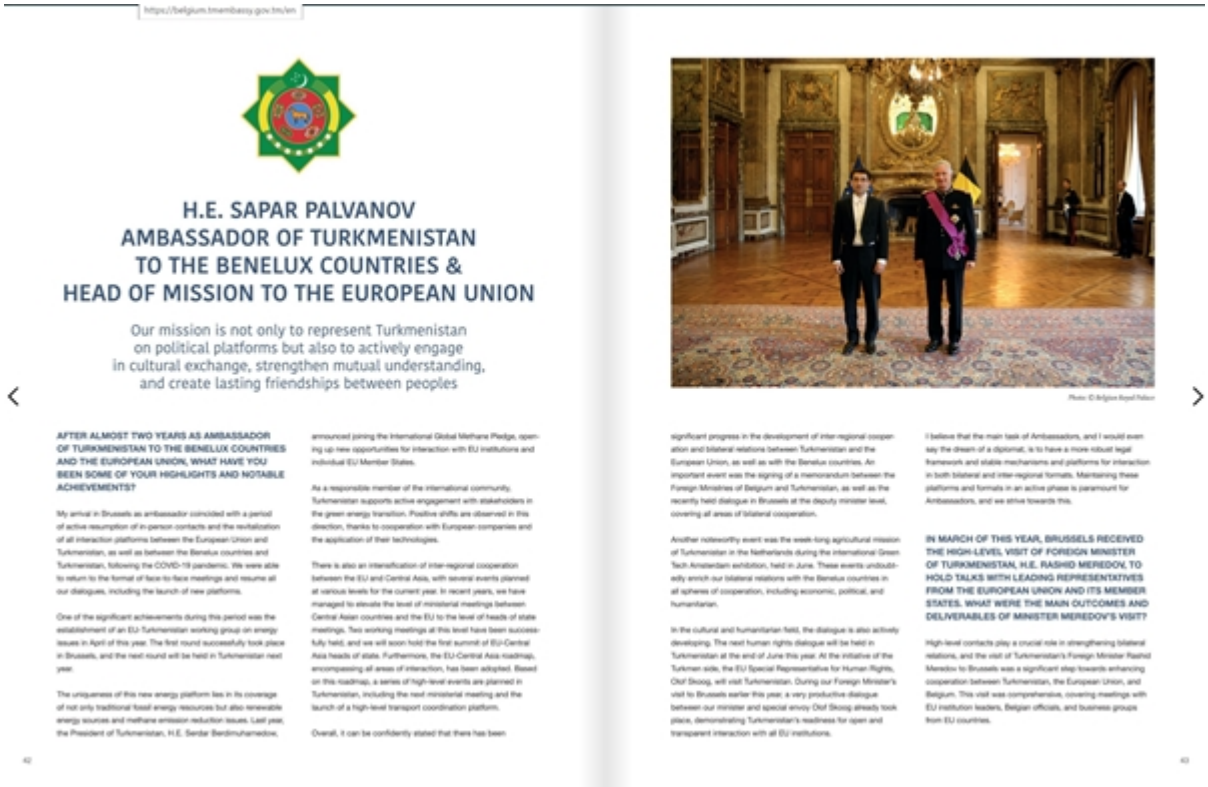

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H.E. SAPAR PALVANOV
AMBASSADOR OF TURKMENISTAN
TO THE BENELUX COUNTRIES &
HEAD OF MISSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Our mission is not only to represent Turkmenistan on political platforms but also to actively engage in cultural exchange, strengthen mutual understanding, and create lasting friendships between peoples

AFTER ALMOST TWO YEARS AS AMBASSADOR OF TURKMENISTAN TO THE BENELUX COUNTRIES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION, WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN SOME OF YOUR HIGHLIGHTS AND NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS?

My arrival in Brussels as ambassador coincided with a period of active resumption of in-person contacts and the revitalization of all interaction platforms between the European Union and Turkmenistan, as well as between the Benelux countries and Turkmenistan, following the COVID-19 pandemic. We were able to return to the format of face-to-face meetings and resume all our dialogues, including the launch of new platforms.

One of the significant achievements during this period was the establishment of an EU-Turkmenistan working group on energy issues in April of this year. The first round successfully took place in Brussels, and the next round will be held in Turkmenistan next year.

The uniqueness of this new energy platform lies in its coverage of not only traditional fossil energy resources but also renewable energy sources and methane emission reduction issues. Last year, the President of Turkmenistan, H.E. Serdar Berdimuhamedow, announced joining the International Global Methane Pledge, opening up new opportunities for interaction with EU institutions and individual EU Member States.

As a responsible member of the international community, Turkmenistan supports active engagement with stakeholders in the green energy transition. Positive shifts are observed in this direction, thanks to cooperation with European companies and the application of their technologies.

There is also an intensification of inter-regional cooperation between the EU and Central Asia, with several events planned at various levels for the current year. In recent years, we have managed to elevate the level of ministerial meetings between Central Asian countries and the EU to the level of heads of state meetings. Two working meetings at this level have been successfully held, and we will soon hold the first summit of EU-Central Asia heads of state. Furthermore, the EU-Central Asia roadmap, encompassing all areas of interaction, has been adopted. Based on this roadmap, a series of high-level events are planned in Turkmenistan, including the next ministerial meeting and the launch of a high-level transport coordination platform.

Overall, it can be confidently stated that there has been significant progress in the development of inter-regional cooperation and bilateral relations between Turkmenistan and the European Union, as well as with the Benelux countries. An important event was the signing of a memorandum between the Foreign Ministries of Belgium and Turkmenistan, as well as the recently held dialogue in Brussels at the deputy minister level, covering all areas of bilateral cooperation.

Another noteworthy event was the week-long agricultural mission of Turkmenistan in the Netherlands during the international Green Tech Amsterdam exhibition, held in June. These events undoubtedly enrich our bilateral relations with the Benelux countries in all spheres of cooperation, including economic, political, and humanitarian.

In the cultural and humanitarian field, the dialogue is also actively developing. The next human rights dialogue will be held in Turkmenistan at the end of June this year. At the initiative of the Turkmen side, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Olof Skoog, will visit Turkmenistan. During our Foreign Minister's visit to Brussels earlier this year, a very productive dialogue between our minister and special envoy Olof Skoog already took place, demonstrating Turkmenistan's readiness for open and transparent interaction with all EU institutions.

I believe that the main task of Ambassadors, and I would even say the dream of a diplomat, is to have a more robust legal framework and stable mechanisms and platforms for interaction in both bilateral and inter-regional formats. Maintaining these platforms and formats in an active phase is paramount for Ambassadors, and we strive towards this.

IN MARCH OF THIS YEAR, BRUSSELS RECEIVED THE HIGH-LEVEL VISIT OF FOREIGN MINISTER OF TURKMENISTAN, H.E. RASHID MEREDOV, TO HOLD TALKS WITH LEADING REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MEMBER STATES. WHAT WERE THE MAIN OUTCOMES AND DELIVERABLES OF MINISTER MEREDOV'S VISIT?

High-level contacts play a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations, and the visit of Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov to Brussels was a significant step towards enhancing cooperation between Turkmenistan, the European Union, and Belgium. This visit was comprehensive, covering meetings with EU institution leaders, Belgian officials, and business groups from EU countries.

В журнале также опубликовано интервью с послом Туркменистана в Бельгии С. Пальвановым.

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THE ASHGABAT TIMES

Международный журнал Diplomatic World в очередном выпуске освещает события в Туркменистане

During the visit, Minister Meredov held meetings with the EU's High Representative Josep Borrell, Vice Presidents of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis and Margaritis Schinas, as well as with the Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen. These meetings provided an opportunity to discuss all areas of cooperation—economic, political, and cultural-humanitarian. The Turkmen minister conveyed the Turkmenistan government's commitment to mutually beneficial cooperation in priority areas for both parties.

One of the significant and memorable moments of the visit was the signing of a protocol to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Turkmenistan. This is an important step forward in strengthening the legal framework of bilateral relations.

The meetings also addressed issues of bilateral and inter-regional cooperation and the further steps for implementing the roadmap between the European Union and Turkmenistan. We annually draft a bilateral roadmap and strive for the active implementation of this document. This demonstrates that the Turkmen side always aims to institutionalize relations with its partners.

It is also worth noting the meetings with the Belgian side, during which a memorandum of cooperation was signed between the Foreign Ministries of Belgium and Turkmenistan. This memorandum calls for close communication and the conduct of regular political consultations, alternating between Brussels and Ashgabat. The results of this agreement are already visible: recently, in early June, a meeting at the deputy foreign minister level was held in Brussels, where all issues of bilateral cooperation were discussed, and a full-fledged political consultation was scheduled for the end of this year.

A significant event of the visit was the roundtable with the participation of the Belgian business community and some EU countries. This gathered about 150 participants, including European companies and research institutes. The event was held in a hybrid format: about 50 participants attended in person, while around 100 participated online. This demonstrates the great interest of the European business community in conducting business in the Turkmen market.

More than ten companies visited Turkmenistan following this event to establish the necessary contacts for their activities, and it is expected that several more companies will visit Turkmenistan in the near future, especially in the fields of transport, energy, and various industrial sectors.

Thus, Minister Rashid Meredov's visit to Brussels was an important stage in strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations between Turkmenistan and the European Union, laying the foundation for further fruitful cooperation.

IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT, THE FOCUS OF BOTH CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES AND EUROPEAN UNION IS TO STRENGTHEN THE TRANS-CASPIAN INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT ROUTE, IN WHICH TURKMENISTAN PLAYS A CENTRAL ROLE. HOW CAN TURKMENISTAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE REALIZATION OF THIS STRATEGIC CORRIDOR?

In the context of strengthening ties between Europe and Asia, Turkmenistan plays an important role due to its strategic geographical position and large-scale investments in transport infrastructure.

We are currently hearing more about the necessity of enhancing transport connections, especially between Asia and Europe. In this context, one of the main transport corridors is the route through Central Asia, including Turkmenistan. We understand this need and strive to be key participants in these projects by initiating new routes and projects. For instance, it is worth mentioning the Caspian Sea - Black Sea transport corridor, which includes four countries. Currently, we are actively cooperating with these states, making positive strides in this direction.

Despite the growing attention to transport infrastructure today, we have long been actively working in this area, attracting more investments. From 2015 to 2022, we invested about USD 15 billion in this sector, including the construction of roads, railways, airports, and a seaport. Five years ago, the largest seaport in the region, the Turkmenbashi seaport, began operating. The government invested USD 1.5 billion in its construction to ensure the uninterrupted flow of goods through our port.

This port can handle 25 million tons of various cargo through its modern terminals. Our current goal is to maximize the port's potential. We understand that having a port is just the beginning, not the end goal. At present, we are collaborating with European companies and various institutions to attract investments and, most importantly, to incorporate their expertise in port management. Specifically, we have started working with the Port of Antwerp and the Antwerp Maritime Academy.

Another unique feature of Turkmenistan is the growing involvement of logistics companies and the private sector, which play a significant role in reducing transit time for goods from Asia to Europe. If I am not mistaken, the goal is to achieve a transit time of 15 days, and our relevant organizations and logistics companies confirm that this goal is achievable. However, this should not be the final goal; we should aim for further reduction in transit time.

We understand that ports depend on other transport infrastructures, such as roads and railways. They are interconnected, so we pay great attention to developing these aspects. For example, two weeks ago, Turkmenistan completed the second phase of the Ashgabat-Turkmenabat express highway, spanning approximately 600 kilometres. This highway will play a key role in regional transport projects and speed up cargo transit.

The same applies to railways: there are both existing lines and new ones that need to be built. We have modernized over 5,000 km of railways, ensuring reliable transportation between the regions of our country and with our neighbours.

We believe that a significant role in the implementation of projects and initiatives in this direction will be played by the new coordination platform that has emerged within the "Global Gateway" program. This platform, which resulted from successful discussions at the recent EU-Central Asia transport connectivity investment forum, attracted not only interested companies and organizations from Europe but also from G7 countries, the Caucasus, and Türkiye. It represents an important step towards achieving our common goals. The main stage of launching this platform will be the inaugural meeting of high-ranking transport officials from Central Asia and the EU in Turkmenistan by the end of this year.

The coordination platform is designed to optimize and coordinate our transport projects. It will serve as a central hub for managing and directing various initiatives. The main tasks of the platform include coordinating project efforts, defining strategic directions, and assessing the current state of infrastructure.

Turkmenistan will continue its role as a vital link in the Trans-Caspian transport corridor, actively cooperating with the "Global Gateway" program for the successful implementation and management of regional infrastructure projects. Our goal is to enhance connectivity and make a significant contribution to the development of the network connecting Europe and Asia, fostering economic growth and strengthening international ties.

ONE OF YOUR PRIORITIES AS AMBASSADOR IS PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OUTREACH. WHAT STRATEGIES AND METHODS HAVE YOU USED TO POPULARIZE THE RICH TURKMEN CULTURAL HERITAGE TO A WIDER AUDIENCE IN THE COUNTRIES OF YOUR ACCREDITATION?

Our mission is not only to represent Turkmenistan on political platforms but also to actively engage in cultural exchange, strengthen mutual understanding, and create lasting friendships between peoples. In today's interconnected world, public diplomacy plays a more crucial role than ever. Turkmenistan employs a multi-faceted approach to cultural and public diplomacy, leveraging both traditional and modern platforms to enhance its influence and foster positive relations with the broader European public.

In the digital age, our embassy actively uses social media to communicate in real-time with people worldwide. Through platforms like X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram, we share information about Turkmenistan's culture, achievements, and the daily lives of our people, creating an atmosphere of openness and interaction.

We regularly organize media briefings with European media platforms and invite them to participate in embassy events. These events range from business forums to cultural exhibitions, providing a comprehensive view of Turkmenistan's multifaceted society. Recently, we actively participated in an international exhibition dedicated to International Women's Day in Eindhoven. The Turkmen pavilion showcased traditional jewellery, musical instruments, and clothing, and organized a fashion show of national women's attire, offering a glimpse into Turkmenistan's traditions.

At all briefings and cultural events, we also present our national cuisine. In the future, we plan to organize Turkmen cuisine weeks or gastronomic festivals in Belgium, which can be an effective way to introduce a broad audience to Turkmenistan's rich culinary traditions.

By inviting and accrediting international media platforms to work in Turkmenistan, we ensure access to our governmental and cultural events for global coverage. This has significantly improved our country's image abroad. An example of this is Diplomatic World, which was accredited in Turkmenistan last year.

Publishing works about the rich history and culture of Turkmenistan in widely spoken languages is a cornerstone of our public diplomacy. An example of a successful project is the publication of the President of Turkmenistan's book about the historical city of Anau.

The launch of a challenge inviting people to recite the poetry of Magtymguly Pyragy on his 300th anniversary attracted significant attention from tourists. Later this challenge was joined by EU leaders and various European institutions. In June, the Embassy organized a contest among schoolchildren to recite Magtymguly's poems, and the winners were awarded national elements of Turkmen culture. The uniqueness of this event lies in promoting the work of the great Turkmen poet, who advocates for peace, good neighbourliness, and good behaviour. Such events serve as a new chapter in the cultural world of the younger generation, helping them learn more about Turkmenistan and its culture, leaving lasting memories.

A clear indicator of our public diplomacy efforts is the increase in the number of tourists visiting our country. We are seeing a rise in the number of visas issued to tourists from the Benelux countries.

In conclusion, I want to share a secret: there is no set formula for promoting public diplomacy. It all depends on your creativity and approach to the task.

Photos: Embassy of Turkmenistan

В своем интервью посол рассказывает о текущем состоянии и перспективах

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