

Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy Efforts Highlighted in Latest Issue of Diplomatic World Magazine

The head of the Diplomatic World Institute, Barbara Dietrich, handed over the new 74th issue of the magazine to the Embassy of Turkmenistan in Brussels. This issue highlights important events related to Turkmenistan's foreign policy activities on the track of interaction with EU institutions and Benelux countries.



One of the key articles of the magazine is devoted to the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov to Brussels in March this year, during which the Minister held a number of meetings with the heads of EU and Belgian institutions, discussing prospects for bilateral and multilateral cooperation.



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.

Another significant topic of the issue was a round table organized in Brussels with the participation of the Turkmen Minister of Foreign Affairs, which brought together representatives of about 150 European companies, research institutes and various financial institutions. During the event, issues of cooperation and joint projects between European companies and Turkmenistan were discussed.

<https://belgium.turkembassy.gov.tk/en>



**H.E. SAPAR PALVANOV
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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



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AFTER ALMOST TWO YEARS AS AMBASSADOR OF TURKMENISTAN TO THE BENELUX COUNTRIES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION, WHAT HAVE YOU SEEN 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. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov,

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 Ministers 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 Stenqvist, 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 Stenqvist 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.

The magazine also published an interview with the Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Belgium, S. Palvanov.

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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 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 actively 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 Ministers of Belgium and Turkmenistan. This memorandum calls for closer 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 of 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 100 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 2020, we invested about USD 10 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.

The 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 it is 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 800 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 concepts 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 coordinator 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 Einshoven. 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 acceding 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 Ashgabat.

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 Belarusian 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



In his interview, the ambassador talks about the current state and prospects of bilateral and

multilateral cooperation with the institutions of the European Union, the priorities of Turkmenistan's foreign policy in certain areas, as well as about the great thinker and poet Magtymguly and the activities of the embassy in the field of public diplomacy.



Diplomatic World is a quarterly international magazine published in digital and print form that unites the worlds of politics, diplomacy, business, finance, art and culture. The magazine is an exclusive interface between decision makers in economic, political and diplomatic circles. It is distributed to high-level readers, including ambassadors, heads of state, representatives of EU institutions, CEOs of leading multinational companies and

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