

# T U R K M E N I S T A N



**The Republic of Turkmenistan** is a country in Central Asia, bordered by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to the north, Afghanistan to the south-west, Iran to the South and the Caspian Sea to the West. The climate is mostly desert with over 80% of the country covered by the Karakum Desert. Turkmenistan has a population of 5.6 million, one of the most sparsely populated in Asia, 91% of which are ethnic Turkmen, 3% Uzbek and 2% Russian, 93% are Muslim, almost all being Sunni. Since 1992 Turkmen is constitutionally the official language of Turkmenistan although Russian is widely spoken, especially in the cities.

After 69 years as part of the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan declared independence on 27 October 1991. Saparmurat Niyazov, then the head of the Communist Party of the Turkmen SSR, retained absolute control over the country and in 1999 he was declared President for life by the Mejlis, and ruled until his death in 2006.

President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, his successor, repealed many of Niyazov's most idiosyncratic policies, and has increased contacts with the West, which is eager for

access to the country's huge natural gas reserves, albeit by western standards, the country remains secretive.

**Turkmenistan is a presidential republic**, with the President both head of state and head of government. In September 2008, the People's Council unanimously passed a resolution adopting a new Constitution permitting the formation of multiple political parties. The former Communist Party, now known as the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, is the dominant party. The second party, the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs was established in August 2012. In 2013, Turkmenistan's the first multi-party Parliamentary Elections were held.

The parliamentary system is unicameral with the Assembly (Mejlis) having 125 deputies elected every 5 years. The President has the authority to ignore their advice and to legally dissolve the Assembly.

**Turkmenistan has been at the crossroads** of civilizations for centuries. In medieval times, Merv (today Mary) was one of the great cities of the Islamic world and an important stop on the Silk Road, a caravan route used for trade with China until the mid-15th century.



In 1995 Turkmenistan declared its “permanent neutrality” which was formally recognised by the United Nations, believing that it would prevent Turkmenistan from participating in multi-national defence organisations, whilst still allowing for military assistance, if ever required. This neutral foreign policy is at the heart of the country’s constitution and helps keep good diplomatic relations with over 130 countries.

**Education is universal and mandatory** through to secondary school level. In 2007 it was decreed that for each child it shall be mandatory to complete at least 10 years of education, in 2013 that was increased to 12 years. – Elementary (years 1 -3), High School first cycle (years 4-8), High School second cycle (years 9-12).

**Turkmenistan is divided into** five provinces or welayatlar and one capital city district, Ashgabat. The provinces are subdivided into districts or etraplar. According to the constitution cities may be designated as either provinces or districts.

**Turkmenistan possesses the world's** fourth largest reserves of natural gas and has taken a cautious



approach to economic reform, hoping to use gas and cotton sales to sustain its economy. Gas production is the most dynamic and promising sector of the national economy and is operated by Turkmengaz under the auspices of the Ministry of Oil and Gas.

In 2010 Ashgabat started a policy of diversifying export routes for its raw materials initiated by a presidential decree, stating that companies from Turkmenistan will build an internal 483 mile long East-West gas pipeline, allowing the transfer of gas from the biggest deposits in the east of Turkmenistan to the Caspian coast, which was completed in 2015 and has an annual capacity of 30 bn m<sup>3</sup>.

More recently Ashgabat has also taken concrete measures to accelerate progress in the construction



of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI), as well as a fourth Trans-Asia Gas Pipeline (TAGP) into China, which is now the biggest importer of Turkmen natural gas and Ashgabat's main external financial donor. Additionally, the Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCP) project, backed by the European Union, has so far remained on paper, partly due to disputes about the Caspian Sea's legal status.

Turkmenistan is a net exporter of electrical power to Central Asian republics and southern neighbours. The most important generating installations are the Hindukush Hydroelectric Station, and the Mary Thermolectric Power Station.

Although some 94% of Turkmenistan’s export revenue derives from the sale of oil & gas almost all of this is from Natural Gas, with 3% from Cotton, 1% Salt, Sulphur, Stone and Cement, 1% Plastics and 1% from Fertiliser.