

FRANCE AND TURKMENISTAN: SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS

BOUYGUES' TRANSLATION OF THE RUHNAMA

The French Bouygues Group, world's second largest construction company, has been responsible for many large construction projects in Turkmenistan. They instigated the translation of the second book of the Ruhnama into French. The Ruhnama, a propaganda book written by Turkmenistan's late dictator Saparmurat Niyazov, served as the centerpiece of the regime and was a key tool in the government's subjugation of human rights and freedom of speech. The book's first volume had been translated by the Turkish firm Çalık Holding, a strong competitor of the Bouygues Group. Bouygues' translation of the second volume was a direct reaction to this, as the relationship between Çalık and Niyazov had made it clear that the president's ego and megalomaniacal writings were key to success in Turkmenistan.

In September 2006, a huge ceremony was organized in Ashgabat to celebrate the Bouygues translation where the Vice-President of the Bouygues Company, Mr Aldo Carbonaro stated that "a great interest of many people in Ruhnama was caused by its high artistic and scientific value because it is based on the new in principle analysis of the centuries –old historical way of the Turkmen people who made their great contribution to the development of the human civilisation and on deep comprehension of its spiritual and moral guide lines."

<http://www.bouygues-turkmenistan.com/gb/>

BOUYGUES' WORK IN TURKMENISTAN

1993 saw the start of a long and extremely profitable personal relationship between Martin Bouygues and Niyazov. Their closeness resulted in contracts from Niyazov worth hundreds of millions of dollars. These included the construction of the Presidential Palace, the Parliament House and the Kipchak Mosque, Asia's biggest mosque, which features domes made of gold. Bouygues also built the Olympic Stadium and the Olympic Complex, though the Olympic Games have never been hosted in the country and most likely never will be. Bouygues also built the House of Free Media in Ashgabat, although the local people and journalists have never experienced such freedom. Many such projects entailed the destruction of local communities, making hundreds of families homeless with the bill footed by "public" funds.

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http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=176927&apc_state=henirca200403

BOUYGUES, NIYAZOV, AND THE MEDIA

The Bouygues Group owns French television channel TF1. In 1996, Martin Bouygues ordered TF1 to produce a television program in which Niyazov makes a highly flattering personal appearance. Niyazov was given the impression that TF1 was shooting a full program devoted entirely to him. The program was hosted by the well-known French journalist Jean-Claude Narcy and featured Martin Bouygues alongside Niyazov. The program was never broadcast on French television. Niyazov, however, was lead to believe otherwise and Turkmen television showed the program as if it were a legitimate TF1 production. In order to upgrade his propaganda system, Niyazov asked for Bouygues' help in improving the studio facilities for Turkmenistan's own television broadcasts. The Bouygues Group also designed the small gold emblem of Niyazov's head that appeared in the corner of all Turkmen television broadcasts.

BOUYGUES AND BERDYMURHAMMEDOV

The Bouygues Group's business relationship with Turkmenistan has remained strong after Niyazov's death. Although Niyazov's successor Gurbanguly Berdymurammedov has pledged reforms and publicised them to the West, everything has remained the same in terms of freedom of speech and human rights violations. Since his rise to power in 2007, construction contracts awarded by Berdymurammedov to Bouygues total nearly a billion dollars. They include a Military Academy, a fountain and office for the Ministry of Communications, a sea port and airport in Turkmenbashi city, cement plants in Balkan and Lebap provinces, a building Oil and Gas Institute, an architectural complex for the Turkmen Polytechnic Institute, a five-star hotel in central Ashgabat, and new buildings for the ministry of foreign affairs and the ministry of education in Ashgabat. Bizarrely, in 2007 (according to the Turkmenistan State News Agency) Bouygues made a contract with the Turkmen regime reportedly worth US \$2,100 million for the manufacture of fireworks in 2007-2008 to "illuminate" the Turkmen national holidays. Recently, the new president renewed the pressure Niyazov had put on his French partners, publicly stating concerns over whether Bouygues' contractual obligations would be fulfilled.

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BOUYGUES, SARKOZY AND BERDYMURHAMMEDOV

Martin Bouygues is one of Sarkozy's closest friends. The two men have known each other for many years and Martin is the godfather of Sarkozy's son. Bouygues was one of several French companies to see their stocks soar upon Sarkozy's election as president. The company was clearly marked as one which would benefit from his presidency.

In January 2008, Sarkozy announced a plan to ban advertising from public television and revolutionise French state TV along the lines of the BBC. Scrapping adverts from state TV would mean €800m (£600m) in advertising revenue immediately transferring to private stations, of which Bouygues' TF1 is the largest.

In April 2008, Nicolas Sarkozy invited the Turkmen President, Gurbanguly Berdymuramedov, to pay an official visit to Paris. An official statement declared that: "the development of relations between the European Union and Central Asia, and Turkmenistan in particular, is a priority for France. Turkmenistan indeed plays an important role in these relations".

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/05/07/bloomberg/bxsarko.php>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jan/10/france.advertising>

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=12556&type=event&highlight_words=french&sort=date_desc

VINCI ALSO USES THE RUHNAMA TO ENTER THE TURKMEN MARKET

As the world's second largest construction company secured its position in Turkmenistan by a Ruhnama translation, Vinci, the world's largest construction company and Bouygues' major competitor, is also trying to use the Ruhnama to enter the Turkmen market. In September 2008, Berdymuramedov met for the first time with the chairman of Vinci, who presented the president with plans for a Ruhnama University – an institution whose focus was once described by Niyazov as preparing Ruhnama specialists to teach the book in kindergartens, schools, universities, organizations and other establishments. During the meeting, the president was also acquainted with plans for a new building for Turkmenistan's Polytechnic University, a large shopping center, a new office for Ashgabat's mayor and an oceanarium. In November, the meeting bore fruit and the head of state approved several with a combined value of 132.5 million Euros. Another meeting between Berdymuramedov and Vinci representatives took place in January 2009, in which projects such as the Ruhnama University were discussed.

<http://www.neurope.eu/articles/90524.php>

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=14299&type=event&highlight_words=french&sort=date_desc

TOTAL

Bouygues introduced French oil firm Total to the president of Turkmenistan and said that Bouygues and Total could work in tandem successfully in Turkmenistan. Total, the fourth largest oil and gas company in the world with operations in 42 countries, said that it would like to develop close relationship with the oil and gas complex of Turkmenistan. The president responded with enthusiasm, unsurprisingly considering his reputation (and that of his predecessor) for encouraging competition amongst Turkmenistan's foreign partners. Gazprom, Russia's state-controlled energy behemoth that doubles up as the Kremlin's foreign-policy arm, chose France's Total in 2007 to develop a giant offshore gas field in the Arctic. It should be noted that Gazprom is also a major exporter of Turkmen gas.

<http://www.newscentralasia.net/Regional-News/155.html>

http://www.economist.com/business/displaystory.cfm?story_id=9495268

OTHER FRENCH COMPANIES

Other French companies involved in Turkmenistan include Technip, Cifal, Tales, Alstom, Schneider Electric, Thompson, and Sersel.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=4730&type=event&highlight_words=french&sort=date_desc

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=5297&type=event&highlight_words=french&sort=date_desc