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NEUTRALITY AND STEADFASTNESS: TURKMENISTAN IN THE VORTEX OF GEOPOLITICS

— *Mr Ambassador, could you elaborate on the current state of relations between Ukraine and Turkmenistan? How has the dynamics of bilateral cooperation changed since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine?*

— Some aspects have not changed, while others have either slowed down or accelerated. Unfortunately, high-level political contacts between Ukraine and Turkmenistan, as well as with all Central Asian states, have been suspended. Since the full-scale aggression began, there has been no communication between foreign ministers and their deputies, heads of central government bodies and relevant state institutions. Turkmenistan, unfortunately, paused the dialogue, officially explaining it by its neutrality and unwillingness to pursue a political agenda given the sensitivity of many issues related to Russian aggression in Ukraine, which Turkmenistan does not want to raise publicly.

As part of figurative political cooperation, I would like to mention the operation of the Joint Intergovernmental Ukrainian-Turkmen Commission on Economic, Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation, which, for a number of reasons, had not met since 2015, but was put on the political agenda at the beginning of the full-scale war. I believe this pause is temporary, and we will resume our dialogue.

Meanwhile, contacts between the Ukrainian and Turkmen ministries of justice and consultations at the consular level of the foreign ministries have recently taken place. Such cooperation was regular throughout 2023. Against this background, we will do everything possible to ensure that Turkmenistan resumes political consultations and high-level contacts, allowing us to move forward. As of today, work in all other areas has not been suspended, but rather intensified.

— *What are the most promising areas of cooperation? What areas are the basis for the current bilateral relations?*

— The most dynamic bridge between Ukraine and Turkmenistan is trade and economic relations. In 2023, compared to 2021, the trade turnover doubled, with Ukrainian exports growing at an accelerated pace. Given that in 2021, the negative balance was approximately 70–80% of the trade turnover, in the first

quarter of 2024, we achieved a positive balance, albeit a small one. Whether we can maintain this result and finish 2024 as strongly remains uncertain, but the trend is promising, and we will support it in every way possible.

Previously, Ukraine's trade with Turkmenistan used to occur via traditional routes, and one of the main ones was the Volga route through Russian territory, with 80% of Ukrainian exports reaching the Central Asian states this way. Following the start of the aggression, Russia blocked the entire Ukrainian transit, and we had to look for new, complicated, and expensive routes, which led to a rapid and significant decline in Ukrainian exports. For example, agricultural products have always been in demand in Central Asia, and at some point, the cost of transporting one tonne of Ukrainian goods amounted to 70% of their cost. Under such conditions, competing with other agricultural suppliers in these markets was impossible.

We were looking for cheaper alternative routes, and to date, finding solutions to transport and logistics problems and optimising routes has substantially increased Ukrainian exports and secured the delivery of critical imports from Turkmenistan to Ukraine. We have resumed supplies of ferrous metals, primarily pipe products for the oil and gas sector, dairy and food products, and machinery.

It is worth noting that a new range of commodities and companies have joined the traditional pre-war exports, actively involved in trade and economic cooperation with Turkmenistan. I hope that starting from May 2024, another route for Ukrainian products to reach Central Asian markets will be launched: a ferry route between Chornomorsk and Batumi or Chornomorsk and Poti. According to our estimates, this will significantly reduce transportation costs by about 20–25%, boosting Ukrainian exports.

At the same time, some products fall into the category of critical imports. In this context, we primarily supported supplies of two items: diesel fuel and carbamide fertilisers. Thanks to Ukrainian companies, particularly Naftogaz of Ukraine, which has been operating in Turkmenistan for more than 20 years, we agreed with the Turkmen side that a considerable amount of oil extracted in the country should be transported to the Turkmenbashi refinery complex as tolling raw materials, with the entire output supplied to Ukraine. As a result, we received almost 200,000 tonnes of diesel fuel in 2022 and more than 200,000 tonnes in 2023. The volumes are impressive, and I think this helped the Armed Forces and farmers to address the extremely critical problem of fuel shortages.

As you know, Ukraine's main suppliers of mineral fertilisers had always been Russia and Belarus, and when we stopped importing from there, we faced a serious shortage. However, Turkmenistan proved to be a friend and partner by supplying large volumes of carbamide and mineral fertilisers, greatly aiding Ukrainian farmers.

Throughout the entire period of Russian aggression, our trade and economic relations with Turkmenistan have been not only a link between the two countries but also an important factor that, on the one hand, allowed our exporters to stand firm and increase their export capacity and volumes, and, on the other hand, in 2022–23, significantly helped those who depended on critical imports.

Today, Turkmenistan is one of the few countries, not just in Central Asia and the post-Soviet space but also globally, that is hosting Ukrainian companies. While trade in goods reached about \$300 million in 2023, trade in services was almost \$400 million. Thanks to the services we provide, in particular in the oil and gas and construction sectors, we managed not just to stay in the Turkmen market but also to significantly expand our presence and win several major tenders in 2022–23.

I would like to highlight one more important and positive aspect: the increasingly dynamic activities of Ukrainian construction companies in Turkmenistan were followed by a decline in the engagement of Russian companies. After all, we were and still are competitors in many areas — and it is exactly the proper hyperactivity of Ukrainian companies that has created the basis and conditions for reducing the presence of Russian companies in the Turkmen market. I would like to emphasise that Ukraine currently retains exclusive competence in some areas. For example, in recent years, seven new railway and road bridges have been built in Turkmenistan, and the eighth one is currently under construction. This bolsters not only the image of individual companies but also the state, in the eyes of both Turkmen authorities and citizens, who regard the work of Ukrainian companies as truly remarkable.

We have become pioneers in terms of implementing pilot projects on another important topic for Turkmenistan — reducing methane emissions, as the country has undertaken certain commitments in line with the climate agenda. And Ukraine was the first to take up this issue, with one of our companies implementing significant infrastructure projects in Ashgabat.

It took quite a long for Ukrainian companies to take such a place in the Turkmen economy. But I would like to emphasise that Turkmenistan is a unique partner, as there is no other country where the involvement of Ukrainian companies is so extensive, systematic and deep. I believe that in 2024, those companies already operating here will continue to do so, and new names and companies will emerge, contributing to the implementation of important construction projects in Turkmenistan and enhancing Ukraine's positive image.

I am convinced that after the victory, the additional capacities and experience gained by Ukrainian companies and specialists in Turkmenistan will benefit our country, and these businesses will be happy to participate in post-war recovery, implement projects in the construction sector, and fully and on a large scale apply

their experience in Ukraine. They dream of a time when they can return their construction facilities to work in their homeland, but for now, all companies operating in Turkmenistan have initiated projects to help Ukraine and its Armed Forces, totalling more than €15 million, and the construction equipment of these companies is now helping to build fortifications in our country.

I would like to emphasise that trade and economic relations are the link that binds our countries together, enabling us to return to the usual format, intensify political dialogue and resume the Joint Intergovernmental Commission's activities after the war is over. We have great hope that Turkmenistan will join projects to restore some of the educational institutions destroyed by the aggression, at least those in Kharkiv, Odesa, and Sumy, where Turkmen students used to study.

— *Mr Ambassador, could you tell us more about the particularities of doing business in Turkmenistan? How often do Ukrainian companies ask the Embassy for assistance in this area?*

— The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine has created the Nazovni platform for all those seeking to export their products or services to various countries. A number of Ukrainian companies, such as those in the textile industry, have received either one-time or systematic assistance to enter the Turkmen market through this platform, with the Embassy facilitating contacts with Turkmen producers of textile raw materials.

Turkmenistan is ready to cooperate with us in many areas, especially in the oil and gas sector, which accounts for more than 80% of the state budget revenues. Officially, Turkmenistan ranks fourth in the world by natural gas proven reserves, but there could be more, as many areas remain unexplored. Ukraine supplies reinforcing steel and pipe products. In addition, our companies constructed all the gas compressor stations in Turkmenistan that need modernisation, repair and maintenance — areas in which we provide systematic assistance.

Turkmenistan is also eager to cooperate in the gas and petrochemical industry, agriculture, and food production. It is willing to negotiate the procurement of goods for its needs and the potential localisation of production within joint enterprises or partnerships between Ukrainian and Turkmen companies.

I would like to point out to potential exporters that once products enter the territory of Turkmenistan, they will eventually reach Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. The Ukrainian and Turkmen sides can also consider joint transport, logistics and environmental projects.

Water technology is a promising area for our companies. Given the worsening global situation, Central Asia holds a special place: the Amu Darya River is now the only water source for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, so all projects related to the efficient use of water resources will be of interest to the Turkmen side.

I would like to emphasise that our exporters should view Central Asia as a cohesive region rather than isolate each country. If we are able to transport Ukrainian products to the port of Turkmenbashi, then they can be distributed anywhere in the region: to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, etc. That is why I am very optimistic about the growing interest of Ukrainian companies and exporters in Central Asia, as evidenced by specific figures and trends, and I hope that 2024 will mark another step forward in the development of our trade and economic relations.

— *On 12 December 1995, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the Permanent Neutrality of Turkmenistan. Your Excellency, what are the advantages of this status for Turkmenistan, and what challenges does it face in this context? How does permanent neutrality affect Turkmenistan's foreign policy relations with other states and international organisations?*

— Turkmenistan obtained this status in 1995, and its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is the only neutral state *de jure*, not *de facto*, as the overwhelming majority of states in the UN General Assembly voted for it and adopted a resolution. There is no other example of an official neutrality status in the world, although we do know of examples of states that have refused to participate in any political or military alliances: Austria, Switzerland, and, until recently, Finland and Sweden.

The UN has acquired a special significance for Turkmenistan, having become a platform for implementing various initiatives, which are mostly supported by more than half of the UN member states, including Ukraine, which has also been a co-author of some of them.

Why did Turkmenistan's political establishment make this decision? I think this is primarily explained by the wisdom of the state's leadership of that time, which clearly understood that Russia's rejection (for certain reasons and circumstances) of a part of the territories it used to dominate before the collapse of the Soviet Union was a temporary phenomenon. Sooner or later, depending on who would be in charge of this entity, Russia would want to return to the pre-1990 status quo. In fact, this is what happened, and it remains the case. That is why they decided on neutrality: to avoid the need and prevent the state from being drawn into various post-Soviet unions and associations initiated by Russia, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States, or all kinds of bilateral and multilateral alliances. Nowadays, almost all Central Asian states are members of these alliances, except for Turkmenistan, which is not a member due to its neutrality status and the article in its constitution prohibiting the state from participating in any alliances. This foresight has helped them to defend their position in many areas, as the Central Asian region borders Russia on the one hand, China on the other, and Iran and Afghanistan in the south, and such a neighbourhood does

not provide for a peaceful life and the development of their own state models. Turkmenistan took care of this in 1995 and has hardly ever regretted taking such steps.

If we draw parallels and look at Turkmenistan's neutrality from the perspective of Ukraine as a state fighting against Russian aggression, we would certainly like to have less distancing and neutrality in our relations with every friendly state. This is not only about Turkmenistan but also about Switzerland, which bans the supply of military products to Ukraine, or Austria. Of course, as Ambassador, I would like to see a more active position and more assistance from Turkmenistan, including military support, but now, the maximum we can hope for is humanitarian support. We are grateful to the authorities of Turkmenistan for two tranches of humanitarian aid for children's hospitals and territorial communities with medicines, clothing, food, etc. in 2022 and 2023, respectively. I expect that humanitarian aid will be delivered this year as well.

In addition, we are actively promoting the idea that Turkmenistan should agree to accept a group of children for rehabilitation. The country has excellent capabilities in the medical sector, where the leadership has invested heavily, with good children's medical facilities in Ashgabat and beyond, the Avaza tourist zone on the Caspian Sea coast, and so on.

Turkmenistan has never voted for anti-Ukrainian or pro-Russian resolutions either within the UN or elsewhere. The representative of the state did not participate and just left the hall. In doing so, Turkmenistan has avoided any of Russia's attempts to increase the number of states it considers its friends. Turkmenistan is definitely not among them. We are extremely grateful to the country's leadership for finding the strength and ability to stay outside Russia's direct influence and pressure despite the complex geopolitical situation.

To summarise, the neutrality declared in 1995 helps Turkmenistan to defend its position and prevent itself from being drawn into various opportunistic projects or controversial initiatives by Russia.

— *It is well known that Russia seeks to exert substantial political, economic and energy influence on the Central Asian states. How does Turkmenistan manage to counter this, apart from its policy of neutrality?*

— Turkmenistan's leadership is pursuing a balanced policy to defend its political and economic independence. In 2022, presidential elections took place in the country, and the state entered this turbulent period for the region with a new leader, Serdar Berdymukhamedov, who immediately faced a number of serious challenges related to the need of maintaining political, economic and social stability and avoiding various misadventures. Given the geographical location and economic dependence of most Central Asian countries on the Russian market along with transport and logistics routes, this was and still is a difficult task for Turkmenistan and the rest of the region. I can state that from

2022 to the present day, Turkmenistan has not only maintained the status quo that existed before the war in terms of political and economic sovereignty but has also strengthened its position and achieved a higher level of independence in decision-making.

An important indicator that Turkmenistan's foreign policy is based on long-term plans is the significant diversification of its political and economic relations. Over the past three years, the intensification of Turkmenistan's relations with our allies — Japan, South Korea, the United States, and the EU — has been developing exponentially. The number of contacts has increased significantly, and groups bringing together five Central Asian states plus one of those I have mentioned are actively working. There were the US — Central Asia summits in Washington and Germany — Central Asia in Berlin in 2023, Japan — Central Asia in Astana in 2024, and very important meetings in Brussels with all EU leaders.

Turkmenistan keeps moving in this direction, as diversification allows it to deepen and strengthen political and economic contacts, reduce economic dependence on Russia or China, and gives impetus to resolving security issues. And Turkmenistan has chosen not Russia and China but Western countries as its main partners in this area.

Another point worth noting is the active development of cooperation with Türkiye, which is a very influential player in Central Asia, and the significant revival of relations with the Gulf states, such as the UAE, which has now become Turkmenistan's comprehensive partner.

— *Mr Ambassador, how would you assess the security situation in Central Asia? What issues are on Turkmenistan's policy agenda?*

— First of all, I would like to mention the situation on the border with Afghanistan because after the Taliban came to power, the level of threats has risen significantly. Unfortunately, unpleasant incidents occasionally occur on the border, provoked by the Afghan side, and Turkmenistan has to respond to this. Despite the neutral status, Turkmenistan has the right to use its armed forces to protect its borders and prevent violations of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and it actively takes such measures. That is why we sometimes witness demonstrations of Turkmenistan's military capabilities, which, in my opinion, are currently sufficient to repel local attempts to create problems on the border.

In addition to the military component, Turkmenistan also uses the factor of cross-border trade and the development of various projects to enhance peace and security on its borders, especially the Afghan border. For example, Turkmenistan has built a railway into Afghanistan at its own expense and constructed two new bridges. A project is currently underway to install power transmission lines to supply electricity, and trains carrying food and oil products are running regularly. By fostering more dynamic trade relations with Afghanistan, Turkmenistan is

preventing potential aggressive actions by the Taliban and promoting a peaceful neighbourhood. By the way, Turkmenistan is undertaking the TAPI project, a gas pipeline that will connect Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. In other words, Turkmenistan is enhancing its security through a combination of soft and hard power instruments and diplomatic efforts, which I believe is an optimal and very effective policy towards the situation in Afghanistan.

Iran is also Turkmenistan's troublesome neighbour to the south. While it does not currently pose a military threat, Iran has always been a potential and active exporter of Islamic fundamentalism. Turkmenistan, being both a Muslim and a secular state, has never allowed Shi'ite fundamentalism to intrude into its territory and has taken measures to prevent such a scenario.

Another security issue concerns the Caspian Sea, through which Turkmenistan borders Russia, as do Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Moscow's actions made the water area a zone of instability long before Russia's aggression against Ukraine, as Russia is now repeating its experience with Syria by launching missile attacks from the Caspian Sea against our country. Despite all the concluded conventions, the status of the sea as a zone of peace, environmental issues and the principle of using this territory for trade, transport and logistics purposes, Russia completely ignores all of its assumed commitments and uses the Caspian Sea as its territory, dictating and imposing the rules of the game on others.

Another example of Russia's aggressive behaviour is that it, in fact, obstructs the implementation of any economic projects. If it had not been for its position, the so-called Trans-Caspian gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan and then to Georgia, Türkiye, Southern Europe, including Ukraine, would have been in operation long ago. Turkmenistan has already fully built its part of the infrastructure, and thanks to this project, gas exports would reach 30 billion cubic metres per year. This would be an effective opportunity for Ukraine to diversify its energy supplies. However, since 2007, Russia has been blocking the project both formally, using the environmental factor, and informally, resorting to direct threats to Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan.

Russia acts as the master of the sea in the Caspian basin, not allowing any step that could theoretically harm Russian interests. Therefore, it is crucial for Turkmenistan, as well as for most of the Caspian Sea states, to take all possible measures to establish a security zone and protect their maritime borders from direct interventions and false flag operations that could cause political, economic and social damage.

Thus, while developing partnerships with Western countries, Turkmenistan emphasises the need to enhance the level of protection of its Caspian borders. At the same time, the state is doing everything possible to transform the port of Turkmenbashi into an artery that will facilitate the creation of alternative routes not running through Russian territory, stretching instead from Georgia

to Azerbaijan and then from the port of Baku to Turkmenbashi and Aktau (Kazakhstan). These arteries would make it possible to supply products to Central and Southeast Asia, bypassing Russia. By building infrastructure, expanding transport and logistics capabilities, and cooperating with neighbouring and other interested states, Turkmenistan is simultaneously improving its security.

Turkmenistan conducts systematic and effective work within the UN. Ukraine has voted in favour of adopting Turkmen initiatives on energy security and protection of energy resources, transport and logistics security, and optimisation of these routes. Currently, the latest proposal from Turkmenistan is a UN resolution to declare 2025 the International Year of Peace and Trust, which Ukraine also supported. In a conversation with the Turkmen leadership, I said directly that ‘we are not just voting with our hands for this initiative, but also with our hearts’.

— *Does Russia conduct information campaigns to discredit the Turkmen authorities within the country regarding decisions that are contrary to the interests of Russia?*

— Russia employs different information strategies in all Central Asian states, depending on the circumstances. Prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia negotiated with Turkmenistan on gas export prices and, through Gazprom, tried to impose its conditions. Specifically, Russia sought to have official Ashgabat allow gas extraction within Turkmenistan, aiming to gain control over Turkmen gas pipelines and exports. Turkmenistan has rebuffed all these attempts. We can only applaud the country’s leadership for finding the courage to resist Russia’s attempts to draw Turkmenistan into energy policy orbit. Once Turkmenistan demonstrated an unwavering stance, Russia launched harsh information campaigns against both the authorities and the state as a whole. Flowing streams of speculation, fabrications, and disinformation dirt — typical Russian style.

In recent months, this has subsided. There is a more or less balanced information campaign on Turkmenistan, but everyone understands that this can change at any moment and is ready to react.

— *How do Turkmenistanis usually learn about Ukraine? What measures does the Embassy take to cover the events taking place in our country? What aspects of common history unite Turkmenistan and Ukraine?*

— The information policy has changed since Russia’s full-scale invasion began. We used to invite people to visit Ukraine and to host the largest number of students from Turkmenistan — more than 18,000 in 2017–19. This was due to the positive perception they have always had of Ukraine — as a friend, brother, and partner. Moreover, unlike in Russia, where ordinary citizens and students from Turkmenistan have constantly complained about chauvinistic and xenophobic attacks by the local population, the Turkmen diaspora in Ukraine has never faced such an attitude over the years. Many graduates of

our universities in Turkmenistan now advocate for our country's interests and strive to assist it, having embraced aspects of our culture, language, history, knowledge, and Ukrainian spirit while studying in Ukraine.

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At the beginning of the invasion, there were 5,000 students, and now there are less than 1,500, as some have left the temporarily occupied territories, others have left cities under constant shelling, and others are studying online.

In addition, medical tourism has been developing very actively, and our resorts used to host many Turkmen citizens. Unfortunately, the war has radically changed this.

We had to switch from practical interaction to dialogue in the information space, making information sources the primary means of spreading messages about Ukraine and the aggression against our country. Fortunately, numerous Ukrainian-language channels are accessible along with satellite receivers that can be set up. We communicated with many Turkmen companies and succeeded in making this service available everywhere. Despite the fact that Turkmen do not understand Ukrainian as easily as, for example, Turkish or even Russian, the primary audience receiving news about the world and Ukraine now watches Ukrainian and Turkish-language channels. Although Russian-language channels hold a certain place in the information space, they are like a shagreen skin — constantly shrinking, while the audience of Ukrainian-language channels and media is growing.

In addition, we are present on Instagram and Facebook, have created the Embassy's Telegram channel, regularly arrange briefings, resumed Sunday school, where children can come to discover Ukrainian culture and language, and offer Ukrainian language courses for adults. We use all available tools to disseminate Ukrainian narratives in Turkmenistan, and the audience in the country is aware of what is really happening in Ukraine. The majority of the Turkmen population was as shocked by the horrific events that took place in Irpin and Bucha as Ukrainians were. Witnessing the actions of the Russians against the civilian population in the occupied territories, the Turkmen audience realised what their neighbour is really like.

Every country that experienced coexistence with the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire has faced such challenges at some point in time. For Turkmen, this includes a historical period when the troops of the Russian Empire sought to eliminate the territorial integrity and independence of the then state formations on the territory of Turkmenistan. Not far from Ashgabat, there is a famous fortress called Geok Tepe, which did not surrender to the Russian invaders during their first campaign in 1879. However, during the second

aggression against Turkmenistan in 1881, Russian troops captured the fortress and killed absolutely everyone, including civilians in the surrounding villages and towns — tens of thousands of women, children and the elderly. It was a real genocide, an act of intimidation, and a demonstration of the kind of policy that the Russian Empire brought to these lands.

In its history, Turkmenistan has already learnt the lessons of coexistence with Russia. While Turkmen may avoid raising such sensitive issues, I know the strength of the historical memory of this nation, which values independence, freedom and dignity. Thanks to our efforts, they know what is happening in Ukraine, so they are well aware of what the newly established Russian Empire could bring to Central Asia and Turkmenistan. I am deeply convinced that they will do everything possible to avoid stepping back onto the path they once travelled and we are travelling now.

— *What are the opportunities for cooperation in the field of culture between Ukraine and Turkmenistan? How does the Embassy contribute to the development of Ukrainian cultural heritage in Turkmenistan and maintaining cultural dialogue between the two nations?*

— Ukraine's ties with Turkmenistan go back thousands of years. The famous archaeologist Viktor Sarianidi, who passed away, spent forty years studying the archaeological sites of Turkmenistan, and there are many of them, as the country was the centre of many cultures. Intriguingly, the scientist explored the connections between the Trypillian culture, which inhabited the territory of modern Ukraine, and the civilisations and cultures that developed in the lands of present-day Turkmenistan. Many of the artefacts excavated in our countries today coincide in time and have similar designs and appearances. Evidently, the trade, cultural, economic, and possibly political ties between our ancestors date back several millennia. This plays an indirect role because, during meetings with our Turkmen colleagues, we talk a lot about the cultural basis between our countries today, which was laid down many millennia ago.

In recent decades, we have been very active and committed to building our cultural ties not only at the interstate but also at the interregional level. Prior to the full-scale war, when there were no reservations about travelling to Ukraine, interaction with Odesa and the region was systematically developing, and representatives of Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lviv, and Zhytomyr regions visited Turkmenistan.

After a sharp decline in 2022, we began to gradually restore our cultural and humanitarian cooperation in 2023, because otherwise we would simply be left out of a large social layer, which serves as the basis for normal relations between states. Bearing this in mind, for the first time in a long time, we organised the Ukrainian Film Week in Ashgabat, which aroused great interest among Turkmen.

We regularly hold events at the Embassy to promote Ukrainian history, language, and culture, using various information sources, social platforms and personal contacts with Turkmen citizens. Some projects aim to showcase Ukrainian culture, traditions and history, as well as Ukraine's ties with Turkmenistan. And some events, such as the screening of the film *20 Days in Mariupol* made a significant impact, portraying the events in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine in an unbiased and objective manner.

Of course, we will continue to develop our cultural cooperation. This year, we are celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Turkmen poet and philosopher Magtymguly Pyragy. A bust of the poet was installed in Kyiv, on Prorizna Street. Although it is currently covered with sandbags to protect it from potential damage due to attacks, it used to be surrounded by flowers and admired by ordinary Ukrainians.

It is symbolic that this important event coincides with the 300th anniversary of Hryhorii Skovoroda's birth, celebrated in 2022, as both were outstanding philosophers, poets and travellers. Moreover, at our suggestion, a monument to Hryhorii Skovoroda will be erected on Magtymguly Pyragy's alley. This will be one more centre of Ukrainian culture and history in Turkmenistan, alongside the monument to Taras Shevchenko, first installed in 1926, restored after the 1948 earthquake and eventually moved to a more open and crowded place in 2009, and now the Embassy holds various events for both the Ukrainian community and Turkmen near it.

This year, we are planning to hold cinema and culture days. We want to spread our culture through Ukrainian clothing and organise events to promote the language, songs and history. The year 2023 was marked by culture, and we hope 2024 will be even more eventful.

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