



Turkmenistan's New Challenges: Can Stability Coexist with Reform? A Study of Gülen Schools in Central Asia, 1997–2007

by Victoria Clement

In the 1990s, Turkmenistan's government dismantled Soviet educational provision, replacing it with lower quality schooling. The Başkent Foundation schools represent the concerted efforts of teachers and sponsors to offer socially conscious education grounded in science and math with an international focus.

This case study of the Başkent Foundation schools in Turkmenistan establishes the vitality of Gülen schools outside of the Turkish Republic and their key role in offering Central Asian families an important choice in secular, general education. The paper discusses the appeal of the schools' curriculum to parents and students, and records a decade-long success both in educating students and in laying the foundations of civil society: in Turkmenistan the Gülen movement offers the only general education outside of state provision and control. This is particularly significant as most scholars deny that there is any semblance of civil society in Turkmenistan.

Notes: The author has been conducting interviews and recording the influence of Başkent schools in Turkmenistan since working as Instructor at the International Turkmen-Turk University in 1997. In May 2007 she visited the schools in the capital Ashgabat, and the northern province of Daşoguz, to explore further the contribution Gülen schools are making. The recent death of Turkmenistan's president will most likely result in major reforms in education. Documentation of how a shift at the centre of state power affects provincial Gülen schools will enrich this conference's broader discussion of the movement's social impact.

Panel:
Education and Common
Values in Practice

Venue:
D202,
Clement House, LSE

27.10.07 Panels	Parellel Session 1	Parellel Session 2
9:30-11:30		Presentation: 03
13:00-15:00		
15:10-17:00		

Victoria Clement (PhD, The Ohio State University, 2005, on 'Rewriting the Turkmen "Nation": Literacy, Education, and Power in Central Asia, 1904–2004'): Assistant Professor of History, Western Carolina University, with major research interest in Islamic World history, esp. Central Asia and Russia. She has lived in, and studied the languages of, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Russia.

Among recent papers: 'Alphabet Changes in Turkmenistan: State, Society, and the Everyday' in Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca (eds.) *Daily Life in Central Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); 'Post-Niyazov Turkmenistan' for the SOAS Roundtable, January 2007; 'al-Zamakhshari (1075–1144): a Medieval Khwarazmian Philologist' for the MIRAS Institute conference in Ashgabat, July 2007.

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