

Gazprom Disbelief Draws Turkmen Ire

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan — Turkmenistan has issued an angry response to Russian skepticism over the size of its natural gas reserves and reinforced its ambition to find new energy markets in Asia and Europe that will cut its dependence on the Kremlin.

BP data ranks natural gas reserves in Turkmenistan as the world's fourth largest. The Central Asian country is seeking alternative export routes to meet its goal of more than tripling natural gas output by 2030.

Auditor Gaffney, Cline & Associates has ranked the South Iolotan natural gas field as the world's second largest after South Pars in Iran, saying last month that it could contain between 13.1 trillion and 21.2 trillion cubic meters.

The auditor also said the Minara and Yashlar deposits, previously thought to be separate fields, were actually part of the same giant structure, whose combined reserves could now total a maximum of 26.2 trillion cubic meters.

But Alexander Medvedev, deputy chief executive of Gazprom, called these estimates into question, saying seismic studies conducted in Soviet days pointed to much smaller reserves.

"I believe that there are no grounds ... and no reason to make such statements that there is such a natural deposit with reserves of this scale," Medvedev said in an interview with Vesti-24 television Friday.

Ashgabat, at odds with Moscow over its plans to export gas to Europe, issued a strongly worded statement at the weekend, expressing "bewilderment over the biased assessment by a professional" and calling Gazprom's remarks "utterly tactless."

Turkmenistan's Foreign Ministry said in the statement that it viewed Medvedev's remarks as "yet another clumsy attempt to distort the real situation regarding Turkmenistan's resource potential, in particular its gas reserves."

"Turkmenistan will continue energy cooperation with all interested parties, based on mutual respect, equal partnership and the diversification of routes to supply its energy resources to world markets," the ministry said.

Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov simultaneously issued a decree ordering that the entire South Iolotan structure be called "Galkynys" from now on.

"Galkynys" is the Turkmen word for "Renaissance" and has become the buzzword for Berdymukhammedov's reign, officially referred to as "The Epoch of New Renaissance and Great Transformations" in the desert nation.

Turkmenistan, one of the least developed Soviet republics when the Soviet Union collapsed two decades ago, is now among the world's fastest-growing economies and is pinning hopes of future prosperity on its huge hydrocarbon reserves.

It has expanded gas exports to next-door Iran and launched a pipeline to China. It has also won strong support from the European Union and the United States for plans to supply gas to a trans-Caspian pipeline that will run to Europe via Azerbaijan.

Baymurad Hojamuhamedov, the deputy prime minister with responsibility for the energy sector, told an energy conference last week that Turkmenistan's total hydrocarbon reserves as of Oct. 1, 2011, stood at 71.21 billion tons, versus 45.44 billion tons as of Jan. 1, 2006.

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