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TURKMENISTAN

35th Anniversary of Independence

“Year 2026 - Independent Neutral Turkmenistan – Homeland of purposeful heavenly horses”



Bridges of peace

THE EVOLUTION OF TURKMENISTAN'S CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE ERA OF INDEPENDENCE

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The acquisition of state sovereignty in 1991 marked a profound political, structural, and cultural turning point for Turkmenistan. For nearly seven decades prior, the rich historical contributions, scientific discoveries, and unique artistic expressions of the Turkmen people were largely represented within a centralized regional framework. Independence acted as a powerful catalyst, allowing the newly sovereign state to define its own cultural identity and establish independent relations with the international community.



The strategic foundation of Turkmenistan's foreign relations is its status of Permanent Neutrality, officially recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1995. Rather than functioning as a policy of isolation or passive withdrawal, Turkmenistan's neutrality operates as an active "Open

Doors" humanitarian doctrine. Within this unique geopolitical framework, cultural diplomacy and educational exchange are not treated as secondary elements of state policy; they are prioritized as primary pillars of international cooperation. By forging intellectual, scientific, and artistic partnerships across borders, our Motherland has successfully projected a national image centered on peace, tolerance, and constructive dialogue. As the world undergoes a rapid transition toward digital economies and hyper-connected global networks, Turkmenistan continues to adapt. Today, its cultural and educational initiatives are designed to preserve the nation's historical legacy while simultaneously preparing its youth to lead in an increasingly specialized and technologically driven global landscape.

Cultural diplomacy and the UNESCO partnership. A cornerstone of Turkmenistan's sovereign foreign policy has been its constructive relationship with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which the nation officially joined on August 17, 1993. In 1994, Turkmenistan ratified



the UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, laying the groundwork for systematic preservation programs. Over the past three decades, this partnership has transformed from standard heritage preservation into an active collaborative platform coordinated by the National Commission of Turkmenistan for UNESCO and the Permanent Mission in Paris. Occupying a central geographic position along the historical Great Silk Road, Turkmenistan possesses a vast concentration of archaeological and architectural landmarks. Through direct scientific collaboration with UNESCO experts, five exceptional domestic locations have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List: 1. Ancient Merv (1999): Recognized as one of the oldest and best-preserved oasis-cities of Central Asia. The expansive archaeological park captures more than

two millennia of urban evolution, with the restoration of the 12th century Sultan Sanjar Mausoleum representing a major triumph of international conservation standards. 2. Kunya-Urgench (2005): Located in northern Turkmenistan, this site contains the ruins of the medieval capital of the Khwarazmian Empire. It features architectural achievements spanning the 11th to 16th centuries, including the historic Gutlug Timur Minaret, which exemplifies medieval brickwork and geometric tile design. 3. The Parthian Fortresses of Nisa (2007): Comprising the ancient royal quarters of Old and New Nisa, these fortresses protect the remains of the early Parthian Empire, displaying an artistic and architectural synthesis of traditional Central Asian, Persian, and classical Hellenistic traditions. 4. Silk Roads: Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor (2023): A transnational cultural route stretching across Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. It charts the rugged geography, ancient mountain routes, and desert oases that served as the primary arteries of trade and intellectual exchange in antiquity. 5. Cold winter deserts of Turan (2023): Inscribed as Turkmenistan's first natural World Heritage site, jointly



nominated with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, this ecological complex spans the Bereketli Garagum, Gaplangyr, and Repetek Biosphere reserves, protecting highly specialized desert ecosystems and vulnerable flora and fauna adapted to severe continental climates.



Safeguarding intangible heritage and local identity.

Recognizing that a nation's living heritage is preserved within its cultural practices, oral traditions, and craftsmanship, Turkmenistan has successfully nominated several core traditions to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: The epic art of Gorogly (2015): A vibrant oral tradition telling the heroic tales of the legendary hero Gorogly, which emphasizes values of courage, honesty, and multi-ethnic friendship. The Kushtdepdi rite of singing and dancing (2017): A traditional performing art that blends poetic, vocal improvisations with synchronized, energetic physical movements. Traditional Turkmen carpet making (2019): An ancestral art form where the complex, hand-woven geometric patterns (gols) serve as historical markers of regional Turkmen tribal identity. The craft of Dutar making and playing (2021):

Celebrating the craft of constructing the long-necked lute and the narrative musical performances of the *bakhshys* (traditional folk singers). Equestrian and canine heritage (2023): The dual inscription of "The Art of Akhal-Teke Horse Breeding and Traditions of Horse Decoration" and "The Art of Breeding the Turkmen Alabay" highlights the profound historical connection between the Turkmen people, their native animal breeds, and their traditional pastoral lifestyle. These cultural milestones have elevated Turkmenistan's global profile, demonstrating

how a sovereign state can utilize cultural conservation to promote intercultural dialog. **Modernizing education: International standards and partnerships.** While cultural heritage honors the past, comprehensive educational reform is essential to securing the nation's future. Turkmenistan has embarked on a systematic modernization of its academic frameworks, updating curricula, assessment methodologies, and





technological access to align with international standards. In October 2025, President Serdar Berdimuhamedov signed a decree approving the Strategy for the Development of Higher Professional Education in Turkmenistan for 2026–2052, along with its initial Implementation Program for 2026–2030. This policy marks a significant shift in national education planning. It focuses on the following four primary pillars:

1. Academic accreditation: Transitioning Turkmen uni-



versities toward international accreditation frameworks to ensure global recognition of domestic degrees.

2. Pedagogical digitalization: Integrating cloud-based learning management systems and interactive educational software across all levels of instruction.

3. Advanced technology curricula: Designing specialized academic programs in artificial intelligence, deep machine learning, and data analytics to meet the needs of the global digital economy.

4. Research-to-industry pipelines: Establishing structural partnerships between higher education institutions, scientific research centers, state

enterprises, and the private business sector. Rather than relying on abstract policy goals, Turkmenistan has pursued direct, practical agreements with prominent international education organizations. The year 2026 marked a major milestone in these efforts, particularly through targeted agreements signed in London and Beijing. During a high-level diplomatic visit to the United Kingdom, a Turkmen delegation led by Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov and Deputy Minister of Education Azat Atayev concluded four landmark Memorandums of Understanding:

Pearson Partnership: Signed to reform vocational training, introducing internationally recognized skills certifications and modernizing domestic qualification frameworks.

AQA Global Assessment Services Ltd. Agreement: Focused on improving educational testing, assessment design, and evaluation standards in general secondary and vocational schools.

Norwich Institute for Language Education (NILE) Accord: Aimed at introducing communicative language teaching methodologies and established modern professional development and mentoring programs for English language teachers in Turkmenistan.

Nottingham Trent University Alliance: Signed with the Dovletmamet Azadi Turkmen National Institute of World Languages to support joint research projects, student exchanges, and practice-oriented academic tracks.

The China Linguistic and STEM Initiatives (2026). Simultaneously, Turkmenistan has expanded its East Asian academic partnerships. In 2026, representatives from

Magtymguly Turkmen State University and the Seyitnazar Seydi Pedagogical Institute concluded comprehensive framework agreements with the International Centre for Language Education in China. These agreements support the development of immersive Chinese language programs at Turkmen universities, joint scientific research in digital agriculture, engineering, and biotechnology, and regular student exchanges enabling young Turkmen scholars to pursue advanced STEM degrees at premier Chinese research institutions.

Youth, language, and science. The ultimate objective of Turkmenistan's educational diplomacy is the development of its youth. Establishing institutional ties with global research networks enables Turkmen young scholars and scientists to seamlessly integrate into the international academic community.

A definitive indicator of the country's accelerating integration into the global knowledge economy is the strategic expansion of the UNESCO (University Twinning and Networking) program. By establishing these specialized institutional hubs, Turkmenistan's higher education and research sectors are systematically linking local academics with global scientific networks. Today, this network spans key pillars of diplomacy, cultural preservation, ecological pedagogy, and advanced technological research:

1. UNESCO Chair "Culture of Peace" (Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan) A cornerstone of the nation's academic diplomacy framework is the systematic

operation of the UNESCO Chair "Culture of Peace." Serving as a strategic inter-active bridge between young diplomats and global humanitarian networks, this specialized chair organizes comprehensive scientific-practical seminars, ecological awareness forums, and international simulations such as "Model UNESCO." These initiatives are explicitly



designed to anchor students' legal and political training in the humanistic ideals of the United Nations, thereby equipping future Foreign Service specialists with the multilateral competencies required to facilitate regional stability, conflict prevention, and international dialogue.

2. UNESCO Chair "Cultural Heritage: From Past to Future" (Magtymguly Turkmen State University)

Dedicated to the intersection of history and modern technology, this chair focuses on training the next generation of archaeologists and ethnographers. By equipping young scholars with advanced digital tools to document, map, and preserve physical monuments, the program ensures that Turkmenistan's rich historical legacy is maintained using contemporary international standards of cultural preservation.

3. UNESCO Chair "Environmental

Education for Sustainable Development" (Seyitnazar Seydi Pedagogical Institute)

Based in Turkmenabat, this pedagogical chair addresses the critical need for regional ecological stewardship. Its primary mandate is the development of innovative environmental curricula designed to train future educators. By embedding principles of ecological sustainability and resource management into teacher-training programs, the institute creates a multiplier effect that promotes environmental literacy across the national education system.

4. UNESCO Chair "Digital Science" (Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan)

Established in April 2026 at the International Science and Technology Park of the Academy of

Sciences of Turkmenistan, this chair represents a profound technological advancement in the state's research infrastructure. Managed directly by leading scientific researchers, the chair serves as a high-level incubator for international scientific collaboration, focusing its research trajectory on three critical domains:

Ethical AI implementation: Developing frameworks for the responsible deployment and ethical application of artificial intelligence technologies.

Environmental big data analytics: Analyzing massive data sets to model and understand complex environmental systems.

Geospatial and satellite monitoring: Utilizing advanced geospatial technologies and remote satellite sensing for precision resource management and sustainable agricultural development.

To complement these academic initiatives, Turkmenistan has supported

the active participation of the Magtymguly Youth Organization in international structures. The organization's official acceptance into the UNESCO Global Youth Community provides Turkmen youth with a direct platform to participate in global forums, share local perspectives on sustainable development, and contribute to global conversations on climate action and digital innovation.

Throughout the era of independence, Turkmenistan has demonstrated that preserving cultural heritage is fully compatible with global integration. The nation's historical traditions and permanent Neutrality have served as the foundation for a peaceful, proactive foreign policy.



By expanding its cultural diplomacy and educational partnerships, Turkmenistan has built lasting international connections. The modern implementation of its long-term educational strategy, its active collaborations with global institutions like Pearson, AQA, and UNESCO, and the expansion of its digital science initiatives highlight its commitment to development. These "bridges of peace" ensure that Turkmenistan will continue to safeguard its rich history while actively preparing its youth to participate in and contribute to a changing global landscape.