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ETG sources report from Turkmenistan that the two leaders in the country, acting President Berdymukhamedov and A. Redjepov are trying to do everything to reach an „enormous“ victory on election day next month. It seems that they strategically leave the political path of Turkmenbaschi by promising social reforms and even call back political decisions made by Niyazov in the past: In public Berdymukhamedov promises that his government will pay all loans in the country that are still pending and pensioners, whose pensions were denied by a decree of Niyazov, will get them again.

During a Security Council meeting, Redjepov also told the other candidates for the Presidential Election that they are not allowed to make any own statements; they only should repeat the plans of acting President Berdymukhamedov. The MNB guards, who have the order to be on the side of each candidate, should assure this order. Only one aspect should be communicated to the people of Turkmenistan: The social situation will become better for all citizens and the current administration realized this achievement. In order to prove the willingness of the government, Berdymukhamedov and Redjepov gave the order to the Minister of Finance to find money for the loans and pensions. As well, they gave the order to stop the destruction of houses in Ashgabad. This policy was created by Niyazov for having enough spaces for the palaces and other „representing“ buildings in the capital. The new government also seems to leave the „visual path“ of Turkmenbaschi: ETG sources report that the Security Council decided to print new money and new passports without the picture of Niyazov on it.

With these steps, Berdymukhamedov and Redjepov are confident to win the elections on February 11 without the help of massive manipulation. This confidence is also shown by the fact that an order was given to print poll papers for election day. That means that a „real“ election will take place, probably also for giving a positive sign to Western observers.

The people in the country have the opinion that in fact there is only one candidate who is able and willing to win the presidential election: acting President Berdymukhamedov; no other person has a chance, without the support of the acting administration. In order to underline this view, the security forces and police in the regions received the order to communicate this opinion: Only Berdymukhamedov has the support of all Turkmens and he is the only one who will change the social life of the Turkmen people.

The Security Council also decided to call for a new meeting of the Peoples Council directly after election day. Informations state that one main issue will be the situation of the political prisoners, especially those who were arrested in 2002 (the so-called coup d'etat). Acting President and A. Redjepov do not want to make an own decision on the political prisoners, the Peoples Council should be the body to decide. As for now, ETG has no informations whether this is a positive sign for the political prisoners or not.

ETG sources also report that a group of Russian advisors have direct access to the inner circle of power in Turkmenistan. They arrived in a non-registered jet from Moscow shortly before Niyazov's death was announced. All sources say that this group is still in the capital and the plane is still at the airport in Ashgabad. The Russians seem to play an important role in the new administration, especially focussing on energy policy, economy and social reforms. The group has access to any



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person and information inside the government, with one exception: they do not get informations, how much gas reserves Turkmenistan has; this is a secret, the Turkmen government still doesn't want to share with foreigners. But at the same time ETG informations state that a Chinese business consortium recently were allowed to make some tests regarding possible new gas fields in Turkmenistan.

While pretending to be real reformers, the administration at the same time tries to get total control of all areas in the public life: There are daily briefings in any local administration office, conducted by members of the MNB and Redjepov's Security Guard; they give order to the local authorities how to fulfill the wishes of acting President Berdymukhamedov. Street controls by the MNB and Police were intensified, even on streets without the direction Ashgabad.

The people of Turkmenistan do not have much trust in the new political leadership. ETG sources say that the majority of citizens are more than careful (ETG already reported last week). They do not believe that the promises made by Berdymukhamedov are honest and will be carried out after February 11. It is more than obvious for them that these promises were only fabricated to stabilize the system, to give a clear sign to concurrent forces inside the system, to ensure a victory on election day.