

Turkmenistan, Russia in New Energy Feud

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan — Turkmenistan on Thursday accused Russia of meddling in its efforts to build energy ties with Europe, the latest flare-up in tensions over gas trade between the two former Soviet nations.

The Turkmen foreign ministry rejected suggestions by Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin that the country was unlikely to ever be able to sell its gas without crossing Russian territory.

"Turkmenistan has sealed deals with large European companies — including in the energy sector — that have shown themselves to be trustworthy, honorable and reliable partners," the ministry said in a statement.

The war of words, which comes just days after President Dmitry Medvedev visited the natural gas-rich state, signals a renewed frostiness in relations. It may also be greeted in Europe, which is seeking ways of reducing its dependency on Moscow's gas exports by creating a

separate pipeline.

Russia last year abruptly suspended its imports from Turkmenistan amid mutual accusations over responsibility for a pipeline blast in April. Deliveries resumed in January 2010, but at much smaller quantities.

State-owned Turkmengaz says Russian gas imports are expected to reach about 10 billion cubic meters this year, down from the annual 40 bcm it bought previously.

The European Union has lobbied actively for Turkmenistan to supply the planned Nabucco pipeline, a major project that would bring Caspian and Central Asian gas to Europe, bypassing Russia.

Turkmen officials said signs of waning Russian engagement have made consolidating ties with Europe a pressing necessity.

"This is even more relevant now, at a time when Russia has reduced the volume of Turkmen natural gas purchases," the Turkmen Foreign Ministry statement said.

Russia has steadily lost its grip over gas supplies from this isolated nation, as Turkmenistan has increasingly sought out other clients.

Deliveries to China began through a new pipeline completed late last year and are expected to hit 40 bcm in 2015.

Iran has also increased its imports of Turkmen gas, and Turkmenistan is now actively backing the construction of a 1,680-kilometer pipeline to India, which would cross Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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