



Iranian and Turkmen companies showcase their capabilities at the Specialized Economic Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Turkmen capital of Ashgabat in November 2023. turkmenistan.gov.tm



The photo shows decorations of the inauguration ceremony for a new gas pipeline link between Iran and Turkmenistan. [AFP](https://www.afp.com)

One of the promises made by Pezeshkian in the field of economics is to solve the FATF problem and foster Iran's membership in this financial group. In your opinion, how important is this issue?

Iran joining FATF holds no drawbacks for me as a businessman, and I believe most businessmen and those with economic knowledge consider it a necessary step for the country. FATF has creat-

ed an economic order and has made the banking system accountable. Therefore, the private sector doesn't view our potential membership as an obstacle because financial transparency is a fundamental principle in economics. Even currently, businessmen in our country are subject to audits. However, those seeking rent-seeking opportunities may oppose joining FATF as it would put an end to their exploitative practices.

What steps can the new government take to facilitate trade?

One area that wasn't given sufficient attention in the previous government was the private sector. It wasn't taken seriously at all when it came to business equations. This issue was evident in the relationship with chambers of commerce, and during this period, communication between the government and the private sector was severed. The appointment of inefficient and non-specialist officials further strained the relationship between the public and private sectors. The new government, led by President Pezeshkian, should avoid making the same mistake. The government ought to focus on policymaking in the realm of

commercial and economic cooperation with other countries, leaving the implementation to the private sector and chambers of commerce. If the new government wants to veer away from the mistakes of the past, it should actively involve the private sector and limit its own role in policymaking. In recent years, some executive bodies have demonstrated a reluctance to relinquish any of their powers to the private sector, even though the private sector is more than capable of handling these responsibilities. There has been a lot of talk about downsizing and streamlining the government, but in practice, it has become more bloated, exhausted, and numb. By letting the private sector taking

the lead in implementation, the government should always be the one to ask questions and communicate its expectations to the private sector, not the other way around. Initially, it might be challenging for the government to relinquish some of its powers in commercial matters, especially concerning neighboring countries, to the private sector. However, the reality is that certain economic issues, including the appointment of our economic consultants abroad, should be handled by the private sector. By handing over these responsibilities, the government should focus on bigger-picture issues and not get bogged down in the day-to-day execution of foreign trade.



Iranian Minister of Transport and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash (L) and Turkmen Minister of Foreign Affairs Rashid Meredov hold up signed cooperation documents and agreements worth \$900 million, in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on November 18, 2023. [IRNA](https://www.irna.ir)

How would you assess the future of economic exchanges between Iran and Turkmenistan during the new presidential term?

The trend of economic exchanges and cooperation between the two countries has been positive thanks to the policies of the previous government. If this momentum is maintained and improved, we could see a significant leap forward because Turkmenistan has also consistently demonstrated a willingness to cooperate with us. Enhancing communication and resolving differences through joint commissions, with the involvement of the private sector, will be crucial in fostering stronger ties. The private sector

must play a central role in planning and shaping a suitable economic groundwork. Given the slogans advocated by Pezeshkian, I anticipate a growing trend in economic exchanges with regional countries, including Turkmenistan. Over the last five years, the financial turnover in trade between Iran and Turkmenistan has exhibited strong growth, increasing from \$130 million to \$480 million. With the initiatives and policies implemented in the current Iranian calendar (started March 20, 2024), if the Iranian government successfully addresses existing obstacles, a ten-fold increase in the volume of exchanges within the next five years is within reach.



Managing Director of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Majid Chegeni (2nd-L) talks with Deputy Chairman of the Turkmen Gas State Concern Murad Archaev (2nd-R) on the sidelines of the 28th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show 2024) in Tehran on May 11, 2024. [SHANA](https://www.shana.ir)

What steps must be taken to achieve this goal of enhancing the level of exchanges?

First, it's imperative to fully address and repair the damage inflicted on the level of economic cooperation between the two countries due to past issues and differences. Implementing sufficient oversight of the trade with Turkmenistan is also crucial. Previously, there was a lack of structurally and systematically sound methods, resulting in instances where low-quality goods were sent by Turk-

men-Iranian traders as well as Iranian traders to the other side, undermining the credibility of our exports. Moving forward, we should focus on mitigating the negative impact of sanctions on the country's trade and economy and issue fewer sudden directives. For example, we witnessed times when the trade of one product becomes suddenly allowed in Iran, only to be suddenly forbidden later. These kinds of things disrupted the markets we painstakingly created for our products, losing them to our competitors.

As a businessman in the private sector, what message would you like to convey?

For businessmen like myself, political ideologies, whether fundamentalist or reformist, don't factor into our work. We remain committed to fostering economic cooperation with the government, regardless of its political leanings. The only exception we make is in our refusal to engage in business with the Israeli regime. Our sole consideration is advancing the economic interests

of our country. We don't concern ourselves with the political affiliations or ideologies of officials or fellow businessmen. Our perspective is that we should fulfill our duties as soldiers on the economic front, striving to improve the lives of our people and enhance the country's exports and production. In my opinion, if we as businessmen become entangled in partisan politics, we risk losing focus, which is the biggest harm to the private sector.

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Iranian-made automobiles are put on display at the Specialized Economic Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Turkmen capital of Ashgabat in November 2023. tdh.gov.tm