

## **Amu Darya Bridge Project Stalled**

Construction of a major bridge in eastern Turkmenistan has ground to a halt because of a contractual dispute with the Ukrainian builders, centring on who should supply the cement for the bridge supports. When it is finished, the bridge spanning 1,415 metres will provide a road and rail link across the river Amu Darya between the town of Atamurat and Kerkichi in the Lebap region.

The construction work has been contracted out to a construction company from Ukraine, which has been working on the project for two years under an arrangement which will also see Turkmen gas supplied to Ukraine.

The dispute over concrete has now reached ministerial level, and does not look like being resolved any time soon. The Turkmen are banning imports of Ukrainian cement, insisting that the domestically-made product should be used in the bridge. But the builders not unhappy about this, arguing that Ukrainian cement meets official standards and is of better quality.

According to an expert involved in the construction project, the Ukrainian engineers are not prepared to back down on the issue as they will ultimately bear the responsibility for safety and quality.

Besides problems with the materials, there are other, more serious issues which have to do with the choice of location for the bridge.

According to employees of the railway and water transport authority Turkmenidenizdemiryollary, the swift current and unpredictable nature of the Amu Darya, which often changes course, make it inadvisable to build a bridge near Atamurat. The river is unusually deep here, and Ukrainian engineers have been unable to find the river bottom and put down supports.

Unfortunately, these recommendations have been ignored. President Saparmurad Niazov, better known as Turkmenbashi, decided the location by pointing his finger – with these unforeseen consequences.

Before the current dispute over cement arose, the two sides had been able to reach agreements on other matters, so that large parts of the bridge – such as metal components and the foundations for the road and railway – were delivered from Ukrainian factories. The rest is being sourced from companies in the regional centre Turkmenabat enterprises, and it is clear that at local level, the technical experts have been able to reach agreement.

Analysts report that the ministry-level dispute is due to Turkmen ambitions to land a major government contract for the cement.

Yet this is a strategic project, comparable to the rail bridge built by Russian engineers more than a century ago, in 1889, which still carries goods and passengers across the Amu Darya.

**Location:** [Turkmenistan](#)

**Focus:** [Turkmenistan: Inside View](#)

