

On April 17-18, the official visit of the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon to Russia took place. Despite the historical partnership of Moscow and Dushanbe, this is the first visit at this level for the past 12 years.

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Many experts link this visit with the upcoming presidential elections in Tajikistan, which are scheduled for November 2020.

Tajik analyst **Umed Jaihani** is confident that during the meeting, Emomali Rahmon and Vladimir Putin will discuss the issue of power transition to the son of the Head of Tajikistan.



Photo: kremlin.ru

“Tajik president wants to enlist Putin’s political support in this election, where his son, the current mayor of the capital, Rustami Emomali, will be the main contender”, said Jaihani.

However, independent analyst **Muslimbek Buriev** believes that it is too early now to speak about the power transition in Tajikistan:



Muslimbek Buriev. Photo: CABAR.asia

Most likely, Rahmon will run for a new term. Therefore, he is trying to improve relations, to revitalize old ties before the upcoming presidential elections.

There is also an opinion that the President of Tajikistan counts on attracting investments from Russia, needed in light of recent messages that the country requires additional funds to complete construction of the Roghun hydropower plant.

Launched in November last year, its first unit is now suspended. The entry into operation of the second unit was postponed from April 2019 to a later date.

How Roghun Was Created

See also: [Central Asian Hydropower System: Doomed to Joint Development](#)

In early April, the first deputy head of the National Bank of Tajikistan, Jamoliddin Nuraliev, called on the World Bank to help the country in attracting foreign investments to complete Roghun construction. However, the answer was very vague and ambiguous.

“Therefore, this topic could come out during the negotiations, but Russia is unlikely to be interested in financing, because now Moscow is rather passive in Central Asia in terms of financial support for projects”, said Muslimbek Buriev.

EAEU Expansion and Migrants

Russia leads among Tajikistan’s trade partners. According to the Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, in 2018, foreign trade turnover between the countries amounted to \$893 million.

The issue of EAEU expansion and the accession of Tajikistan to it has been discussed for a long time. However, so far there has been no obvious progress. In a press statement on the results of the current meeting, Vladimir Putin only briefly mentioned this topic:

“We welcome the aspiration of Tajikistan to establish closer contacts with the Eurasian

Economic Union, not only in the economy, trade and investment, but also in other areas of mutual interest”.



Photo: kremlin.ru

According to the expert on economics **Ali Mastov**, Tajikistan has a number of reasons not to rush into joining the EAEU. Among them are: the probability of losing the Chinese market, which significantly exceeds the Eurasian Union market; unwanted external customs control of Tajik exports and imports, as well as the fear of being absorbed by Russia, which is economically stronger.

“In addition, the long-term economic and political sanctions of the West against the flagship of the Union, Russia, whose share in total EAEU GDP is 86%, will directly affect the economic situation of another member country”, said Mastov.

According to recent [statements](#) of the Minister of Labor of Tajikistan Sumanguli Tagoyzoda, more than a million Tajik citizens work in Russia.

According to the [Central Bank](#) of the Russian Federation, in 2013, before the introduction of Western countries’ sanctions against Russia, Tajiks sent home almost \$4.2 billion. Last year, remittances from Russia amounted to only \$2.5 billion.

Improving and easing conditions for labor migrants is one of the issues that could be solved by Tajikistan’s accession to the EAEU. However, independent analyst Muslimbek Buriev believes that the issue is not as much in the country’s unwillingness to join the Eurasian

Alliance, but rather in being not prepared for it.

“The country, in general, will not manage it. Rhetoric has emerged that Kyrgyzstan, a recent member of the alliance, should be taken as an example, but its experience is not very positive. Whether Tajikistan wants it, the answer is yes. This could improve the conditions for Tajik migrants in Russia”.

According to Buriev, the Russian migration policy is controversial. According to official documents, Russia tries to attract migrants and eases conditions for them, but then issues other documents to support anti-migrant rhetoric.



Negmatullo Mirsaidov. Photo from personal Facebook page.

Great hopes were put upon this visit, as it might resolve the issue of amnesty for Tajik labor migrants who were deported from the territory of Russia. Their number, according to the Ministry of Labor of the Republic of Tajikistan, is about 180 thousand.

“Tajikistan actually addressed Russia to grant an amnesty to at least a part of these migrants, but unfortunately, this did not happen. If we are strategic partners, if we are allies, then we had to take a step towards such things. But we did not see that happening”, said political analyst **Negmatullo Mirsaidov**.

Military Cooperation

The leaders of both states earlier and during this visit made statements that Russia and Tajikistan are strategic partners and allies. However, these relations are not that simple considering military cooperation as well.

Tajikistan hosts the largest Russian military base abroad. It was created on the basis of the 201st division located in Tajikistan since Soviet times. After the collapse of the USSR, the previous president of the country, Rahmon Nabiev, refused to count it in the balance of the Tajik government, so Russia took the 201st division under its jurisdiction.

In the spring of 1993, the new leadership of Tajikistan signed a 10-year agreement according to which the protection of Tajikistan’s border with China and Afghanistan was

officially delegated to the border troops of Russia. After 6 years, Moscow and Dushanbe signed an agreement on the creation of a Russian military base in Tajikistan. The deployment fee was set to be symbolic.

However, after the appearance of the western coalition in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 and the creation of American military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, for which the United States paid hundreds of thousands of dollars, Dushanbe decided to keep up with neighbors.



The Palace of Nations in Dushanbe. Photo: tj.sputniknews.ru

Same year, Vladimir Putin announced that Russia was ready to invest \$2 billion in the development of the Tajik economy. In addition, the Russian company RusAl signed an agreement on its participation in the completion of Roghun hydropower station construction.

The second crisis in military-political cooperation between Tajikistan and Russia took place in 2009, when President Dmitry Medvedev supported his Uzbek colleague Islam Karimov and opposed the creation of high dams in the region.

Negotiations on the extension of the Russian military base deployment in Tajikistan reached an impasse, and only after three years, the contract was signed for a period of up to 2042. The topic of military cooperation, including the issue of the Tajik-Afghan border, was also discussed during Emomali Rahmon's official visit to Moscow. In a press statement, the leader of Tajikistan noted that the problems of Afghanistan do not have a military solution: "Tajikistan is interested in a stable and prosperous Afghanistan and advocates for a peaceful

solution to its problems. In this regard, we called for further joint efforts to promote peace and restoration of stability in Afghanistan through political and diplomatic means”.

Experts note that despite the fact that the US and NATO forces have been present in Afghanistan for 18 years, Moscow has not yet developed a coherent and understandable policy on Afghanistan. Russia’s approaches to Afghanistan are mainly situational and this affects the assessment of the situation on the Tajik-Afghan border.

Tajik expert **Kosim Bekmuhammad** notes that some representatives of the Russian law enforcement agencies exaggerate the scale of Afghan threat to Central Asia. Usually, he says, there is a desire behind this to strengthen Russia’s military presence in Tajikistan and in the region as a whole.

“Statements about the accumulation of 5-10 thousand militants on the border cause people to doubt the effectiveness of such military-political structures as the CSTO or the Russian military base in Tajikistan. But such statements are an indicator of the lack of a holistic and programmatic approach to cooperation with Tajikistan in general and to the situation on the border with Afghanistan in particular”, emphasizes Bekmuhammad.

Hopes Did Not Come True



Photo: kremlin.ru

Summarizing the past visit of Emomali Rahmon to Moscow, political observer **Negmatullo Mirsaidov** believes that although the meeting was held in a kind and positive atmosphere, there appeared no solutions to cardinal issues. According to him, some protocols and agreements of intent were signed, but there were no large agreements in the economic sphere.

“There were hopes, but these hopes, probably, will not come true. Starting from the period of the USSR collapse, Russia has been constantly reassuring Tajikistan in its readiness to finance the economy of Tajikistan – the mining industry, the energy sector. But for some reason it turns out that nothing is working out”, Mirsaidov notes.

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