
EXPERTS: TASHKENT LOOKING CLOSELY TO TRANSCAUCASIA

21.03.2018

EurAsia Daily (20 March 2018)

Developing its activity in the Central Asian region, Uzbekistan is beginning to enter the South Caucasus. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's visit to Azerbaijan is expected to be held in the near future (Azerbaijan's ambassador to Uzbekistan Huseyn Guliyev has informed about the preparations). Probably, the Uzbek leader will also pay visit to neighboring Georgia. These two countries are interconnected by regional energy and transport projects. In particular, Uzbekistan is interested in supplying its gas through the Southern Gas Corridor.

Farhad Tolipov, head of the non-governmental Bilim Carvoni (Karavan of Knowledge, Tashkent) educational institution, said that this is the best opportunity to diversify exports of Uzbek energy resources. According to him, the Uzbek government has been considering the issue of diversifying the exports of Uzbek energy resources for a long time. «Back in the 1990s, Uzbekistan counted on future supplies of hydrocarbons through Azerbaijan to the West. Even the possibility of Tashkent joining the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan strategic oil pipeline project was discussed. Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan for a long time participated jointly in the preparation of the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) project. During the construction of the Southern Gas Corridor, the situation with the routes of gas transportation from the Caspian eastern shore to Azerbaijan will become clear. Regardless of whether this will be a pipeline transport of hydrocarbons along the Caspian seabed or with tankers as liquefied gas, Tashkent is interested in the transit of surplus gas through Azerbaijan and further to European markets,» the expert said.

Igor Pankratenko, political scientist, member of the «Iran-East» (Iran) Central Asian and Afghan Studies Institutes Scientific Council, believes that there is no chance for Uzbekistan's participation in the Southern Gas Corridor, and the reasons are purely technical. «Uzbekistan intended to break into this pipe. Interest was expressed by Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Turkey. Investors were also sympathetic to this. But then it turned out that the specificity of Uzbek gas is such that it cannot go in a mixture with the Azerbaijani gas. Therefore, Uzbekistan has reoriented its work and is now developing two other areas: Chinese and Afghan □ TAPI □ (Turkmenistan □ Afghanistan □ Pakistan □ India),» the expert told EADaily. According to him, Uzbekistan is carefully studying opportunities of a larger project — the Southern Transport Corridor.

The orientalist believes, the fact that Tashkent is not limited itself to regional integration projects is quite natural. A recent summit of the regional states heads in Astana confirmed that Uzbekistan successfully resolves the problems of establishing good-neighborliness, and therefore nothing prevents it from thinking about expanding its vectors. A new stage of integration in Central Asia became possible after the change of power in Uzbekistan. It was Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the president

of Uzbekistan, who initiated the summit. At the same time, he suggested holding an event in Astana under the Nursultan Nazarbayev chairmanship. In eastern politics, this shows that Tashkent does not seek to shake anyones positions. It is important for Uzbekistan to build a real economic cooperation with neighboring countries, and not only in the region.

«There are two scenarios of the Central Asian summit. First, originally this event was conceived as the beginning of a new integration process. But it is clear that the idea is unpromising, since there are no prerequisites, especially political ones, for intraregional integration,» Igor Pankratenko said. Second: if the question on Uzbekistans application for raising its own role in the region was considered in the summit, then, according to the expert, «everything went smoothly, regularly and without obstacles.» «Uzbekistan, the Mirziyoyevs inner circle does not hide that Tashkent should play a big role in foreign policy both in the region and around it, including the AfPak region (Afghanistan and Pakistan with the adjacent territories □ EADaily). From this point of view, a bid through such a tool as „Navruz-Summit is very good,» the expert said.

Uzbekistan, in general, has already succeeded in reformatting relations with its neighbors. While Uzbekistan had no problems with Kazakhstan, its relations with Kyrgyzstan and, especially, with Tajikistan would have to be built from scratch. Director of Risk Assessment Group Dosym Satpayev believes that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan could become the core of economic integration in the region, in the image and likeness of the European Union, where Germany and France play the role of the locomotive. «Astana and Tashkent should initiate joint projects, finance them, as Berlin and Paris do in the EU. In this case, it will be possible to pull the whole region under general projects,» Dadym Satpayev told EADaily.

«The first attempts of cooperation between the countries have already begun. Tashkent and Astana have created a number of joint ventures, in particular, to assemble cars, and it is on the territory of Kazakhstan. Similar projects are developing with Kyrgyzstan; agreements have been signed with Tajikistan. A number of agreements were signed with Turkmenistan in the transport and transit sphere, and in particular, on cooperation between the railway administrations of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan,» he said.

«It is possible to export Uzbek goods through Turkmenistan, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus, and via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTC) railroad to Turkey, and further to the Mediterranean port of Mersin. The port is a trade of relations with the countries of the Middle and Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and even the United States,» Bakhtiyor Ergashev, Director of the Mano Center for Research Initiatives (Uzbekistan) told EADaily.

And this is not fantasy. The other day the US took the first batch □ a ton of Uzbek melons and dried fruits. To make delivery quicker and shorter is one of Tashkents major tasks.

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