
TAJIKISTAN TAKES FIRST STEP TOWARDS EAEU

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13.12.2018

Vestnik Kavkaza (12 December 2018)

Tajikistan abolished customs duties for the goods imported from Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and other CIS countries that signed the Free Trade Zone Agreement. This might be Dushanbes first step on its way to joining the Eurasian Economic Union.

The Government of Tajikistan has decided to "apply a zero rate of import duty for the goods originating from the member states that signed the Free Trade Zone Agreement on October 18, 2011," Radio Ozodi (Tajik Service of Radio Liberty) reported in the Customs Service of Tajikistan. The exceptions are the goods withdrawn from the free trade regime. At the same time, the goods imported from these countries are not exempt from other taxes and fees, explained Shahri Sharipova, customs broker at Eastham-2015, which provides services related to customs clearance of goods in Tajikistan.

Independent expert Kubat Rakhimov called a logical step the decision of Dushanbe to null the customs duties on the most goods from the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which amount to the half of all Tajik imports. "This is a consistent movement towards the rapprochement of Tajikistan with the countries of the EAEU. We must look at the realities - the structure of Tajikistans trade is a clear projection of this vector. Therefore, its time to prepare for joining the EAEU, since there is such a tendency. Another matter, that the EAEU cannot provide any political guarantees for the transit of power in Tajikistan. Though, it is quite possible to lay the foundation for Tajikistan to become a full member of this integration association, " Rakhimov told Vestnik Kavkaza. The Russian authorities have repeatedly stated that the doors to the EAEU are open to Tajikistan.

Tajikistan expert Andrei Zakhvatov does not believe that the abolition of customs duties on the goods produced in the EAEU countries can be considered the first step towards the accession of Tajikistan to the EAEU. "Tajikistan has been receiving invitations to the Eurasian Union regularly for more than 5 years, and recently at the leadership level of the Eurasian Economic Commission, Tajikistan has been offered to join this integration association as an observer for a start," Zakhvatov told Vestnik Kavkaza.

According to the expert, the abolition by Tajikistan of the customs duties on the imported goods produced in four countries of the Eurasian Union is clear, forced and quite accurately calculated step made by the government of the republic. For example, Tajikistan imports from Kazakhstan the most important food product - flour - as well as wheat. But as soon as the flour production in Tajikistan was increased, Kazakhstan announced the possibility of reducing the export of grain to

Tajikistan, up to the complete abolition of export. In this situation, the abolition of customs duties on Kazakh grain will allow maintaining price stability in the food market of Tajikistan in the foreseeable period.

"Russia and Kazakhstan were and remain the main suppliers of fuels and lubricants and petroleum products for Tajikistan, and Tajikistans need for them is growing. Most likely, the government of Tajikistan also considered the cancellation of customs duties on this group of imports more preferable than the problems that the republic may encounter on the fuel and energy market, maintaining the same level of customs duties ", Zakhvatov explained.

So far, Tajik officials have given one answer on the invitation to join the EAEU: "We are studying the pros and cons." Apparently, Tajikistan is not in a hurry to enter the EAEU due to one reason, which, in my opinion, Arkady Dubnov, an expert on Central Asia, formulated very precisely in 2015: Tajikistan will join the EAEU when it is not able to refuse Moscows offer. " As far as one can see, there is no such proposal yet, Andrei Zakhvatov said.

Earlier, one of the Tajik governments officials, speaking to the author on the condition of anonymity, said that the experience of Kyrgyzstan and Armenia after the integration shows, that Tajikistan will likely lose a part of its political and economic sovereignty. This may create tension in the relations with Washington and Beijing. But the decision, in any case, is up to the leader of the nation, the source at the Tajik government told Vestnik Kavkaza.

The issue of Tajikistans integration into the EAEU is under consideration by the government of the republic. The deputy director of the Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Saifullo Safarov, in an interview with Radio Ozodi, said that a special group had been established at the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan, which is studying the experience of the EAEU member countries, including Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. According to him, the authorities of Tajikistan prefer to act according to the principle look before you leap. "It is now clear that Tajikistan cannot accept all the conditions for joining this union, as some of them do not meet the interests of the country. If the leadership of the EAEU reconsiders some conditions, the Government of Tajikistan will take a final decision on membership in the organization, the Tajik expert believes.

Experts see China as one of the obstacles for Tajikistan to join the EAEU, as it has invested millions of dollars in the development of the country's economy and infrastructure. Today, China is the main external creditor for Tajikistan. Tajikistans total debt to China is \$ 1.2 billion. This amounts to more than 52% of the total external debt of Tajikistan, which has exceeded \$ 2.3 billion. In exchange for financial assistance, Tajikistan is obliged to import goods, provide control over the deposits, and fulfill other, often unprofitable, terms of agreements. As Kubat Rakhimov noted, Chinese interests in some sectors of Tajikistan will suffer due to the specific structure of investments and sooner or later will enter into conflict with the requirements of the EAEU. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the Chinese side built two oil refineries, and their products no longer meet the requirements and regulations of the EAEU, Rakhimov told Vestnik Kavkaza.

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