

THE REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TAJIKISTAN AND ITS ROLE IN TURKEY'S CENTRAL ASIAN POLICY

Turkey and Tajikistan established diplomatic relations immediately after the latter's independence. The Turkish Embassy in Dushanbe was opened in 1992 and the Embassy of Tajikistan in Ankara in 1995. Tajikistan has an important but somewhat different place in Turkey's Central Asian policy.

Dávid Biró

Ph.D. Student, Department of Modern and Contemporary History, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new independent states emerged in Central Asia. The independent Central Asian republics were not in an easy position after independence. Turkey was the first country to recognize all Central Asian countries. Referring to common historical, linguistic, and cultural ties, Turkey pursued an increasingly active policy with the independent countries of Central Asia. Turkey's economic relations with the Central Asian Republics have developed rapidly and significant progress has been made in the areas of trade, transport, and communication and integration processes. Turkey and Tajikistan established diplomatic relations immediately after the latter's independence. The Turkish Embassy in Dushanbe was opened in 1992 and the Embassy of Tajikistan in Ankara in 1995.

Tajikistan has an important but somewhat different place in Turkey's Central Asian policy. This paper outlines Tajikistan's recent history, regional role, and the importance of its relationship with Turkey. It also aims to present the regional significance of Tajikistan and its place in Turkey's Central Asian policy.

Decades of Hardship: Independent Tajikistan's Relations with its Neighbors

The central goal of the newly independent Tajikistan's foreign policy was to develop relations with as many states

as possible.¹ Special diplomatic attention was paid to two groups of countries: other former Soviet republics and Tajikistan's close neighbors, Iran and Afghanistan, which are inhabited by culturally related peoples. At the same time, Tajikistan also had contacts with a number of other countries, including the USA, Turkey, and Pakistan. In 1995, Tajikistan opened its embassy in Turkey, the first embassy outside the former Soviet Union. In the Tajik case, the wish for gaining political support and economic aid was at least as important in shaping Tajikistan's diplomacy as ideological and cultural ties.

Russia

In the mid-1990s, Russia played a role in independent Tajikistan with its military presence in this country. In Dushanbe, Russian advisers served within the post-civil war government. The Russians also held important positions in the Ministry of Defense, which was headed by Aleksandr Shishlyannikov between 1992 and 1995. Yuri Ponosov, for example, became Tajikistan's first deputy prime minister in March 1996.² Both of them were ethnic Russian.

Protecting the Russian minority in the contentious Tajikistan was a stated aim of the Russian government. Russia's concerns were somewhat alleviated by the conclusion of a dual citizenship agreement between the



two countries in 1995.³ Under this agreement, all individuals are treated as Russian citizens regardless of whether they have citizenship of a foreign country. Thereby an exception was made for the citizens of Tajikistan, the only country that has a relevant treaty with Russia. Taking into account recent events Russia also justified its active involvement in Tajik affairs by ensuring the protection of the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border and thus protecting the CIS countries from Islamic extremism, as well as drug trafficking.⁴

Russia has long considered Central Asia a key area of influence. Therefore, the ongoing military build-up in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can be seen in the broader context of active preparations for the projection of active military power into Central Asia. This was possible by strengthening the region's existing military bases and other related facilities, which have been ongoing since 2012 and strengthened after 2014. Russia is not only developing its foreign military bases in the region, but also supporting armies of Central Asian states with arms sales and joint military exercises to training and assistance programs, in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).⁵

There is a stable trend in the development of Tajik-Russian relations and it is gradually expanding to today's

reality. There is a mutual desire for closer and multidimensional cooperation in line with their needs, interests, and positions on regional and global policy issues. Very significant areas of cooperation cover the spheres of education, science, culture, and technology innovation.⁶

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan

Independent Tajikistan had several conflicts with the two neighboring former Soviet republics, namely, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which began long before independence. In the 1980s, the dispute over two scarce resources in Central Asia, water and arable land, damaged relations between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In June 1989, the situation culminated in spontaneous, bottom-up violence over the demand for a small piece of land. In addition, tensions were heightened in 1992 because of Kyrgyzstan's worries about possible spread of the Tajik population to its territories.⁷ Despite tense relations between the two republics, Kyrgyzstan tried to play a role to end Tajikistan's civil war and sent medicine and other aid to its neighbor. After the civil war, Kyrgyzstan sent troops to Tajikistan as part of a joint CIS peacekeeping mission.⁸

Leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan repeatedly emphasized the need for regional economic and environmental cooperation in the early 1990s. In reality, however, there has been only limited progress towards such cooperation.

Tajikistan's relations with Uzbekistan are contradictory. Tajik intellectuals and at times the Dushanbe government have criticized Uzbekistan for discrimination against the Tajik minority. In response, Uzbekistan closed its Tajik-language schools in mid-1992, citing fears of Islamic radicalism. Due to the civil war, Uzbekistan closed its border with Tajikistan in the fall of 1992 to prevent Tajik opposition refugees from fleeing to Uzbekistan. After the civil war, Uzbekistan's relationship with Tajikistan became increasingly ambivalent.⁹

Leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan repeatedly emphasized the need for regional economic and environmental cooperation in the early 1990s.¹⁰ In reality, however, there has been only limited progress towards such cooperation. Oil and gas producers in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have cut off fuel supplies to Tajikistan hoping¹¹ that they can improve the terms of purchase agreements under the Soviet system.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that in Tajikistan, consumer goods are generally scarce, so the country has taken measures to prevent citizens of neighboring republics from buying such products from Tajik stocks. Tajikistan is also wary of regional water use plans that could increase Uzbekistan's and Turkmenistan's share in water resources from Tajikistan.¹²

Iran

When Tajikistan declared its independence, Iran was one of the first countries to extend diplomatic recognition and was the first to establish an embassy in Dushanbe. In 1992, Iran trained a group of Tajik diplomats. After 1991, bilateral relations in media and sports increased significantly, and Iran supported the construction of several new mosques in Tajikistan.¹³ In the early 1990s, Tajikistan's most important relations with Iran were of a cultural nature. For example, an Iranian film festival and an Iranian art exhibition were held in Tajikistan. Likewise, Dushanbe was the host for international conferences on Persian culture and the Tajik language.¹⁴ Iranian books and magazines became increasingly available in Tajikistan, and

television channels in Dushanbe received programs from Iran.¹⁵ The main obstacle to these cultural contacts is the fact that only a very small part of the population of Tajikistan can read the Arabic alphabet. Despite the obvious ideological differences between the Islamic regime in Iran and the newly independent secular communist regime in Tajikistan, Rahmon Nabiyev (the second President of Tajikistan 1991-1992) actively nurtured his relations with Iran.¹⁶

Leading personalities of the Islamic Awakening movement in Tajikistan have firmly advocated an Islamic regime in Tajikistan. Since the 1970s, a worldwide Islamic revival has emerged, owing in large part to popular disappointment with the secular nation states and Westernized ruling elites, which had dominated the Muslim world during the preceding decades, and which were increasingly seen as authoritarian, ineffective and lacking cultural authenticity.¹⁷ In Tajikistan the development of political Islam took a different course. Like in Uzbekistan the origins of the movement lay in the Islamic parallel society of the Soviet era. It consisted of a network of young mullahs and their students and stood, as in Uzbekistan, in sharp opposition to both the communist cadres and the Hanafite establishment of the Spiritual Administration.¹⁸ Yet, significantly, they did not choose Iran as a model to follow. One reason for this is that Iran is predominantly Shiite Muslim, while Tajikistan is chiefly Sunni, and this difference has important implications on the organization of the religious leadership and its relationship with the state. Equally important is the fact that the social structures of Tajikistan and Iran are considered too different, therefore Tajik Islamists did not accept the Iranian model of state-religion relationship.¹⁹

Iran and Tajikistan have a motivation to work together, but the other three countries - Russia, China and Turkey - have their own reasons for worrying about this cooperation. Russia opposes any external involvement in the former Soviet space, especially in the security area. And while it may welcome Iran's opposing Turkish influence in Central Asia, it is likely to be concerned that Iran's cooperation with Tajikistan could actually exacerbate Turkish-friendly feelings elsewhere. Furthermore, Russia may be concerned about the cooperation with Iran.²⁰

China

The main source of tension between China and Tajikistan is China's demand for the Gorno-Badakhshan region in eastern Tajikistan. Even after sixteen rounds of negotiations between 1992 and 1995, no agreement was reached on this border dispute. After the Tajikistan civil war, governments of China and Tajikistan are often hostile to reformist political movements, especially those that

profess Islamic fundamentalist principles. By the mid-1990s, this common understanding had become the basis for the working relationship between the two governments.²¹

Tajikistan has been a key strategic partner for China, particularly in terms of its development plans within the framework of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is due to two vital factors. First, Tajikistan will become a central gateway for China's natural gas imports from Turkmenistan. Although Tajikistan does not have its own gas supply, shorter and easier routes are available for gas transportation. Beijing has offered this opportunity to Tajikistan in good faith, to gain stronger political influence.²² On the other hand, Tajikistan, as part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2001), is a vital geostrategic partner for China for forestalling the threats of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism.²³ As China has already established (since 2017) a military base in the Badakhshan Autonomous Province of Tajikistan,²⁴ which aims to monitor the strategically important Afghan Wakhan Corridor, Tajikistan is likely to be seen as a key ally in China's counter-terrorism strategy; a point that has become more prominent due to Tajikistan's geographical proximity to Xinjiang.²⁵

In 2011, China acquired more than 1100 square kilometers of the disputed land between Tajikistan and itself. This land located in the remote Pamir mountain range. As Dushanbe was unable to repay Beijing's outstanding former loans, an agreement was reached between the two governments; land was offered as an alternative payment in exchange for a write-off of the Eurasian country's growing debt. Some analysts have seen it as a textbook example of 'debt trap diplomacy,' and the episode only serves to revive the debate about the significance of this practice in China's foreign investment and engagement activities.²⁶

Afghanistan

Relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan have developed dramatically since the fall of the Soviet Union. The two countries have a common border of more than 1,200 kilometers, as well as a similar climate and common hydropower resources that were not used in either pre-Soviet or Soviet times. Trade and economic relations between Tajikistan as a separate administrative-territorial area and Afghanistan did not develop in Soviet times. Trade relations have been maintained as part of the political and economic relations between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. However, the situation changed significantly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Both countries underwent tremendous changes in the post-Soviet period. These changes were evident during the

Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) and the Northern Alliance's war of liberation with the Taliban regime (1996-2001). The Northern Alliance was a military alliance of groups that operated between 1996 to 2001. The Northern Alliance fought a defensive war against the Taliban regime. Initially it included mostly Tajiks but by 2000, leaders of other ethnic groups joined the Northern Alliance. In both conflicts, governments of Tajikistan and Afghanistan provided support to each other. During the Tajik Civil War, Afghanistan became a refuge for thousands of Tajik citizens who received accommodation and livelihoods from the Afghan government, as well as various groups in Afghan society. The Afghan government, led by President Burhanuddin Rabbani and Defense Minister Ahmad Shah Massoud, leader of the Northern Alliance, has significantly contributed to the establishment of friendly relations with Tajikistan. In the years of armed conflict with the Taliban, Tajikistan had been a support base of the Northern Alliance. The Tajik Government had not only strongly supported Afghanistan in the diplomatic and political arenas, but also launched massive lobbying campaign in Russia, Kazakhstan, China, the United States and European countries for financial, humanitarian, and military assistance.²⁷

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 was decisive in the future relationship between the two countries. Dushanbe made an open statement about his preferences in Afghanistan, namely forming a government that is not monopolized by the Taliban and that represents the Afghan Tajik population. On August 25, Rahmon said he rejects the Afghan government, which was "formed with humiliation and ignores the interests of the entire people of Afghanistan, including ethnic minorities such as the Tajik, Uzbek and others".²⁸

Turkey's Strategic Goals in Central Asia

Central Asia is strategically important for the security and stability of Turkey and the other western powers. Its energy sources are vital to global energy security and it is a major hub for gas and oil pipelines and trade corridors.²⁹

The twenty-first century has witnessed tremendous changes in global politics. The international system has changed from bipolarity to multipolarity. The transition in the international structure has also affected Turkey's

Iran and Tajikistan have a motivation to work together, but the other three countries - Russia, China and Turkey - have their own reasons for worrying about this cooperation.

power relations with other states, especially the United States. Strategically, Turkey was seen as an important ally of NATO in suppressing communism. However, with the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, Turkey's privileged strategic position seemed to have lost its relevance for the NATO. Thus, Turkey had to look for a new strategic position outside the Western world, and fortunately the emergence of the Central Asian republics provided it with the much-needed strategic relevance. In addition, Turkey has been driven by Western powers to increase its influence in the region and minimize the Iranian influence. The Central Asian republics also considered Turkey the most important ally, which could help them integrate into the international community.³⁰

Furthermore, Turkish foreign policy officials did not pursue hegemonic plans in Central Asia due to Turkey's own economic crisis, domestic political instability in the mid-1990s, and Russian dominance in the region.³¹ Turkey tried to pursue a great strategy based on a 'pan-Turkish ideology' to establish cordial relations with its sister Turkic states. However, Turkey could not fulfill this role and has not become a model and bridge country.³²

Turkey's dependence on Russian oil and natural gas did not allow it to run counter to Russian interests in the

region.³³ Finally, the Central Asian elite also feared Russian power and did not want to break away from the Russian sphere of influence. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002 and has shifted its foreign policy in a pragmatic direction. It continued its 'zero problem with neighbors' policy, which has also helped Central Asian states, for example, in the field of integration processes or in the development of bilateral and multilateral relations. Turkey envisioned its position as a strategic bridge between Eurasia and the Central Asian Republics and promised these 'sister states' access to the world market.³⁴

Turkey's relations with Central Asia are multidimensional. In addition to economic and cultural achievements, strategic and defense relations have also become increasingly important in recent decades. With regard to Turkey's foreign policy in Central Asia, four key objectives should be mentioned:

- contributing to the state-building process in the Central Asian states,
- supporting economic and political reforms,
- supporting their integration into the world community, and



- developing bilateral and multilateral relations based on mutual interests and sovereign equality.³⁵

To achieve these goals, Turkey's energy policy was based on four objectives:

- improving the political independence of these countries,
- encouraging membership of Western institutions,
- building regional cooperation,
- revitalizing the East-West energy corridor.³⁶

These points can help us to understand Turkey's regional policy and also partly explain the essence of Turkish-Tajik relations.

The Main Aspects of the Turkish-Tajik Relationship

Tajikistan is trying to strengthen its relations with Turkey on several levels. Cooperation between the two countries is influenced by several factors. It should be recalled that Tajikistan had remained under Russian rule for more than 70 years, and then the Tajik civil war between 1992 and 1997 also posed many difficulties for Tajikistan. Not to mention that Turkey also went through several crises in the 1990s that affected the effectiveness of the two countries' foreign relations. A small country with little economic capacity does not necessarily mean that it has no foreign policy option and many times we need a new approach to understand each country's foreign policy instruments.³⁷

Süleyman Demirel was the first Turkish president to pay an official visit to Tajikistan in the post-independence period. During his visit in 1995,³⁸ Demirel highlighted the cultural and historical ties between the two countries and stated that Tajikistan should not feel like an outsider in the region. After this first visit, with the establishment of the Turkish embassy, Turkish-Tajik relations began to advance.

Strengthening good relations with the independent Turkic republics in the political, economic, cultural, and integration fields is a priority in Turkey's Central Asian policy. A significant part of the population of Tajikistan belongs to ethnic groups of Persian origin. Contemporary Tajiks are the descendants of ancient Eastern Iranian inhabitants of Central Asia, in particular the Soghdians and the Bactrians, and possibly other groups, with an admixture of western Iranian Persians and non-Iranian peoples, Mongols, and Turkic peoples. So this aspect may also be partly decisive in the relations between the two

Turkey's relations with Central Asia are multidimensional. In addition to economic and cultural achievements, strategic and defense relations have also become increasingly important in recent decades.

countries and may show different traits from other Central Asian countries.

Relations between Turkey and Tajikistan were negatively affected by the Tajikistan civil war between 1992 and 1997. In order to strengthen cultural and historical ties between Tajikistan and Turkey, a Turkey Information Center has been established at the Russian Slavic University in Tajikistan with the support of Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). Cooperation in the economy, trade and transport, as well as the existing relationship between the two countries, are expected to further improve in the future. The official visit of Tajik President Emomali Rahmon to Turkey in January 2006 gave a new impetus to Tajik-Turkish relations, during which an agreement was reached on friendly relations between Tajikistan and Turkey.³⁹ The seventh joint conference between the two countries was held in April 2009 and Turkish Minister of State Said Yazıcıoğlu had talks with President Emomali Rahmon, Parliament Speaker Mehmedsaid Ubaydullaev, Prime Minister Oqil Oqilov, and Turkish businessmen in Tajikistan.⁴⁰

The following years have resulted in a number of high-level meetings between Turkey and Tajikistan. The Tajikistan visit of President Ahmet Necdet Sezer in 2001 and Prime Minister Erdoğan's in 2003 were important milestones in the development of bilateral relations. President Abdullah Gül's trip to Tajikistan in 2009 and his talks with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon created a number of opportunities to the benefit of both countries. During President Gül's visit, which was mainly for commercial purposes with the participation of Turkish businessmen, the determination of both sides to accelerate the improvement of relations between the two countries was remarkable.⁴¹

In December 2010, during the Rahmon and Gül meeting at the ECO Summit, both sides raised and successfully addressed a number of socio-economic issues that ultimately yielded effective and efficient results. The parties agreed that Turkey will assist Tajikistan in the establishment of free economic zones (FEZ), joint ventures in hydropower construction, agro-processing, infrastructure development and tourism.⁴² In August 2011, issues of trade and economic cooperation to promote trade between

the two countries and the revitalization of the Turkish-Tajik Business Council were discussed at a meeting in Istanbul chaired by Ambassador Farrukh Sharipov and President of the Tajik-Turkish Business Unit.⁴³

During his visit to Turkey on 18 December 2012, the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon, announced “a joint declaration on the establishment of a Cooperation Council between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Tajikistan” in order to provide an institutional framework for relations between the two countries.⁴⁴ On 21 October 2016, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu paid an official visit to Dushanbe.⁴⁵ On this occasion, a cooperation plan for the two ministries of foreign affairs for the years 2017-2020 was signed.⁴⁶ Tajikistan’s Prime Minister Qohir Rasulzoda attended the Al-Quds Extraordinary Islamic Summit in Istanbul on 13 December 2017.⁴⁷ Sirojiddin Muhriddin, Foreign Minister of Tajikistan, attended the Extraordinary Islamic Summit held in Istanbul on 18 May 2018. He paid also an official visit to Ankara on 22-23 April 2019.⁴⁸ President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid an official visit to Tajikistan at the CICA Summit on 15 June 2019.⁴⁹

Ankara has implemented a number of development and aid programs in the region, from which Tajikistan has also benefited significantly. The most important of these is the development aid to Tajikistan. Turkey started providing development aid to the region in 1992 and has been pursuing this policy continuously since 1997.⁵⁰ Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Central Asian countries was spread unevenly in the 1991-2018 period. The largest recipient of ODA in the region is Kyrgyzstan, which received around US \$8.1 bn. since independence. Tajikistan is the second largest recipient of ODA – \$5.9 bn., followed closely by Uzbekistan – \$5.8 bn.⁵¹ Between 1992 and 2008, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were the largest recipients of Turkish development aid. Most of the Turkish aid came to Tajikistan in the 1990s and early 2000s. Aid to Tajikistan peaked at \$648 million in 2004 and then by 2008 dropped dramatically to about \$5 million a year.⁵² Tajikistan was not on the list of the ten most Turkish aid receiving countries in 2009, 2010 or 2011.⁵³

An important precondition for a greater economic cooperation in Central Asia is the establishment of strong links between regional markets and also with other key markets such as China, India, Russia, and Turkey. As a transit country, Tajikistan can make a significant contribution to this end.

Aside from the targets of Turkish aid, it is important to discuss how aid money is spent. Following 2003, Turkey started to come into prominence in Central Asia with projects based in five sectors: social infrastructure; economic infrastructure; production sectors; multisector or crosscutting projects; and emergency response and cultural activities.⁵⁴

Over the years, economic relations have also become more effective. Especially after 2003, trade between the two countries increased significantly. The trade turnover was \$86 million in 2003 and increased to \$93.8 million in 2005.⁵⁵ In 2008, the total trade turnover was \$324 million, and in 2010 that amount increased to \$347 million. Turkey’s trade volume with the countries of the region was about 8,5 billion USD in 2019 and almost 4000 Turkish companies have been operating there.⁵⁶ The main products imported by Turkey from the countries of the region are aluminum and cotton.⁵⁷ Turkey can cooperate with Tajikistan in a number of other areas. Investments and projects can take place in areas such as energy, technology, hydropower, construction, agriculture, and metallurgy. Ankara, with the intention of developing these opportunities in a more secure and stable atmosphere, pursues a number of policies in order to further integrate Dushanbe into the international arena.

Given Turkey’s main initiatives in Afghanistan and its significant role in the country, it is clear that Ankara is an important partner that can contribute to the socio-economic development and political stability of Dushanbe. However, Tajik statements on Turkey’s economic and political support are not enough. As the main dynamics determining the country’s stability are linked to the country’s desire for a more stable structure, Turkey’s role in Tajikistan’s political and economic development remains limited.⁵⁸

Tajikistan’s Economic Relations - What are the Possibilities?

An important precondition for a greater economic cooperation in Central Asia is the establishment of strong links between regional markets and also with other key markets such as China, India, Russia, and Turkey. As a transit country, Tajikistan can make a significant contribution to this end. This will require investment and the modernization of transit corridors. The routes of the Central Asian regional corridors need to be reviewed to strengthen their role as a major integrating factor capable of enhancing direct and transit trade between Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and China (especially Xinjiang). Infrastructure modernization needs to be pursued through improved policies and agreements to facilitate trade and transit at border crossings.⁵⁹

Exports of cotton and aluminum continue to generate about half of gross domestic product (GDP), two-thirds of annual foreign exchange earnings and a quarter of tax revenues, and the asymmetry between the country's imports and exports has recently increased.⁶⁰ Tajikistan's key exports include raw materials (primarily aluminum and cotton fiber) to countries that are both end-users for example Turkey and China and non-end users for example Netherlands and Switzerland. Having structural stability in foreign trade with these countries, Tajikistan's economy is extremely sensitive to external price shocks. In addition, the dominant share of the global aluminum markets is concentrated in ten multinational companies. Tajikistan's production is a small fraction of this market. Even if Tajikistan were to increase its aluminum production to reach its long-term development goal (630,000 tons), its world's share of aluminum production would be less than 5%.⁶¹ Over the past decade, Tajikistan has intensified trade with countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey.⁶²

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - A Good Chance for Tajikistan?

BRI is an ambitious, multi-year Chinese effort to improve international transport infrastructure and enhance economic integration. An important objective of the initiative is to create better transport links and greater economic integration by developing transport infrastructure. China wants to achieve all this through better policy coordination between the BRI countries and a greater flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) from Chinese private and state-owned enterprises. As well as promoting the orderly and free flow of economic factors, the highly efficient allocation of resources and the deep integration of markets are also key considerations.⁶³

Tajikistan can benefit from the integration opportunities of the BRI if it implements policies that complement BRI achievements in transport. Decreasing delivery times increase FDI, trade, and GDP. The influx of Chinese FDI into mining and agriculture has already increased, but in order to fully exploit the opportunities for BRI integration, the Government of Tajikistan must continue to implement additional policies that reduce border crossing times, liberalize investment and trade restrictions, remove sectoral barriers, improve sectoral barriers, human capital, and facilitate worker mobility. In order to minimize the fiscal risks associated with expanding infrastructure investments and to maintain the benefits, it will also be important to apply better fiscal and debt management practices.

Chinese infrastructure financing has benefited the country through the BRI. China also motivated Tajikistan's neighbors to invest more in their own

Although Tajikistan is one of the lesser-known countries in the Central Asian region, it is clear to us that it is an important player in the region in several respects. The geopolitical significance of Tajikistan is unquestionable and looks set to be increasingly important.

transportation and the donors to fund more. One of the six mainland BRI corridors passes through Afghanistan via Tajikistan. Tajikistan also has access to other routes as it has recently invested in the domestic road and rail network, as well as through investments in the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Although Tajikistan is one of the lesser-known countries in the Central Asian region, it is clear to us that it is an important player in the region in several respects. The geopolitical significance of Tajikistan is unquestionable and looks set to be increasingly important. It is located in a geopolitical environment where Russia, China, Iran and Turkey also want to be key players. Each great power has its own interests and a special system of relations with Tajikistan. From this varied scale, the focus is primarily on the specifics of Turkish foreign policy.

Ankara's foreign policy is in many respects increasingly dominant in the region, which has also significantly affected Tajikistan. Tajikistan's relationship with Turkey is extremely complex. All this can be felt both in the diversity of diplomatic relations and in the growing economic and cultural relations. For Ankara, Tajikistan is an important strategic partner, with significant economic and developmental and cultural ties. Cooperation between the two countries is likely to intensify in the future, as Tajikistan is in a strategically important area and over time may become an increasingly important player in Turkey's Central Asian policy. Thirty years of relationship seem forward looking.

Although Tajikistan has been involved in several regional conflicts since independence, it is important to stabilize its relations with its neighbors. It is important for the great powers in the region (Russia, China, Turkey, Iran) to continue to develop their fruitful relations with a stable country. Whether Tajikistan can take advantage of the opportunities offered and thus achieve its economic and social development in the coming years is a huge question.

Endnotes

- 1 "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Tajikistan," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan*, January 27, 2015. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://mfa.tj/en/main/view/4255/concept-of-the-foreign-policy-of-the-republic-of-tajikistan>
- 2 "Preferences for Russians in Tajikistan," *Monitor Volume: 2 Issue: 65*, April 3, 1996. Accessed August 31, 2021. Retrieved from <https://jamestown.org/program/preferences-for-russians-in-tajikistan/>
- 3 "Contract between the Russian Federation and Republic of Tajikistan on settlement of double citizenship," *CIS-legislation*. Accessed August 31, 2021. Retrieved from <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=4117>
- 4 Antoine Blua. "Tajikistan: Tajiks To Replace Russian Border Guards On Afghan Border," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 06, 2004. Accessed August 31, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.rferl.org/a/1052661.html>
- 5 "Russia's Recent Military Buildup in Central Asia," *CSIS*, September 25, 2020. Accessed August 31, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/russias-recent-military-buildup-central-asia>
- 6 "Relations of Tajikistan with Russia," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan*, March 01, 2013. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://mfa.tj/en/main/view/142/relations-of-tajikistan-with-russia>
- 7 Gulzana Kurmanalieva. "Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Endless Border Conflicts," *EUCACIS Online Paper*, February 2019. pp. 7-8.
- 8 Natalia Lee, Timur Toktonaliev. "Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Conflict: Mutual Concessions Needed," *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, September 17, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://cabar.asia/en/kyrgyz-tajik-border-conflict-mutual-concessions-needed?fbclid=IwAR3SKJ5d32hpWU3zDOhcGhUoR4fWtRZiXzjFrzdW28EAOwMxugawTLQ>
- 9 "Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential," *ICG Asia Report*, N° 33, April 4, 2002. pp. 11-13 and pp. 18-20.
- 10 Daene C. McKinney. "Cooperative Management of Transboundary Water Resources in Central Asia," In. D. Burghart and T. Sabonis-Helf (eds.). *In the Tracks of Tamerlane-Central Asia's Path into the 21st Century*, National Defense University Press, 2004. p. 198.
- 11 "CAREC Program," *Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program*. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from https://www.carecprogram.org/?page_id=31
- 12 Malcolm Dowling, Ganeshan Wignaraja. "Central Asia after Fifteen Years of Transition: Growth, Regional Cooperation, and Policy Choices," *Office of Regional Economic Integration* July 2006. p. 6.
- 13 "Tajikistan Foreign Policy and Government Guide: Strategic Information and Developments Vo. I." *USA International Business Publications*, Intl Business Pubns USA; Annual, Reprint, 2009. p. 102.
- 14 "Tajikistan and Iran: Is Dushanbe Distancing Itself from Cultural Cousin?" *Eurasianet*, Mar 7, 2011. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-and-iran-is-dushanbe-distancing-itself-from-cultural-cousin>
- 15 Alexander Sodiqov. "Tajik-Iranian Ties Flourish," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, April 13, 2011. Accessed August 30, 2021. Retrieved from <https://jamestown.org/program/tajik-iranian-ties-flourish/>
- 16 Parviz Mullojdjanov. "Tajik-Iranian Relations Under the New Conditions," *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, March 30, 2020. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://cabar.asia/en/tajik-iranian-relations-under-the-new-conditions>
- 17 Ira M. Lapidus. "A History of Islamic Societies," *Cambridge University Press*, University of California, Berkeley, 2015, pp. 521-523.
- 18 Andrea Schmitz. "Islam in Tajikistan," *SWP Research Paper*, March 2015, p. 13.
- 19 Paul Goble. "Iran and Tajikistan Announce Formation of Joint Military Committee," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 18 Issue: 6, April 15, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://jamestown.org/program/iran-and-tajikistan-announce-formation-of-joint-military-committee/>
- 20 Paul Goble. "Iran and Tajikistan Announce Formation of Joint Military Committee," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 18 Issue: 6, April 15, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://jamestown.org/program/iran-and-tajikistan-announce-formation-of-joint-military-committee/>
- 21 Rashid Abdullo. "Tajikistan and China: strategic partnership or lack of alternatives?" *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, February 16, 2015. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://cabar.asia/en/rashid-abdullo-tajikistan-and-china-strategic-partnership-or-lack-of-alternatives-2>
- 22 Fuad Shahbazov. "China's Long March into Central Asia: How Beijing Expands Military Influence in Tajikistan," *CACI Analyst*, February 21, 2017. Accessed August 30, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13429-china%E2%80%99s-long-march-into-central-asia-how-beijing-expands-military-influence-in-tajikistan.html>
- 23 Nargis Kassenova. "China is an Emerging Donor in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan," *Russia/NIS Center*, Nr. 36, 2009. pp. 11-12.
- 24 Stephen Blank. "China's Military Base in Tajikistan: What Does it Mean?" *CACI Analyst*, April 18, 2019. Accessed August 30, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13569-chinas-military-base-in-tajikistan-what-does-it-mean?.html>
- 25 Bob Rehorst, Wouter Kuijl. "Tajikistan's Catch-22: Foreign Investment and Sovereignty Risks," *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2021. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/tajikistans-catch-22-foreign-investment-and-sovereignty-risks/>
- 26 Bob Rehorst, Wouter Kuijl. "Tajikistan's Catch-22: Foreign Investment and Sovereignty Risks," *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2021. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/tajikistans-catch-22-foreign-investment-and-sovereignty-risks/>
- 27 Khodjamakhmad Umarov. "Trade and Economic Relations between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," *Institute of Public Policy and Administration*, Working Paper No.13, University of Central Asia, 2013, p. 6.
- 28 Ivan U. Klyszcz. "Don't Underestimate Tajikistan in the Afghanistan Crisis," *The Diplomat*, September 02, 2021. Accessed September 03, 2021. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/dont-underestimate-tajikistan-in-the-afghanistan-crisis/>
- 29 Yelena Kalyuzhnova, Richard Pomfret. "Trade Corridors in the Caspian Region: Present and Future," *ADB Working Paper 1266*. Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute, May 2021. p. 2. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.adb.org/publications/trade-corridors-caspian-region-present-future>
- 30 Zoltán Egeresi. "A centrum nyomában," *Külgügyi Szemle*, 2017. tél. p. 73. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from https://kki.hu/assets/upload/04_Egeresi.pdf
- 31 Siri Neset, Mustafa Aydin, Evren Balta, Kaan Kutlu Ataç, Hasret Dikici Bilgin, Arne Strand. "Turkey as a regional security actor in

- the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Levant Region," *CMI Report*, Jun 2021. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cmi.no/publications/7820-turkey-as-a-regional-security-actor-in-the-black-sea-the-mediterranean-and-the-levant-region>
- 32 Zeeshan Fida. "Central Asia's Place in Turkey's Foreign Policy," *Policy Perspectives*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2018. pp. 115-116.
- 33 John Koutroumpis. "Russia and Turkey: An Ambiguous Energy Partnership," *E-International Relations*, September 11, 2019. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/09/11/russia-and-turkey-an-ambiguous-energy-partnership/>
- 34 Zeeshan Fida. "Central Asia's Place in Turkey's Foreign Policy," *Policy Perspectives*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2018. p. 117.
- 35 Ertan Efeğil. "Rationality Question of Turkey's Central Asia Policy," *Bilgi Dergisi* 11 (2), 2009. p. 76.
- 36 Ertan Efeğil. "Rationality Question of Turkey's Central Asia Policy," *Bilgi Dergisi* 11 (2), 2009. p. 77.
- 37 Ramachandra Byrappa. "Building Foreign Policy Resilience in the 21st Century: The Concept of Commonwealth," In Ana Jović-Lazić and Alexis Troude (eds.), *Security Challenges and the Place of the Balkans and Serbia*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade 2020. p. 52.
- 38 "Turkey-Tajikistan Political Relations," *Embassy Of The Republic Of Turkey In Dushanbe*, May 28, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2021. Retrieved from <http://dushanbe.emb.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/ShowInfoNote/353685>
- 39 Hamrokhon Zarifi (ed.). "Tajikistan Diplomacy: The past and the present," *Tajikistan's external policy*, Two-volume edition. Volume 1, Dushanbe, 2009. p. 124.
- 40 "State minister leaves for Tajikistan," *Hürriyet*, April 21, 2009. Accessed August 30, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/state-minister-leaves-for-tajikistan-11474852>
- 41 "Turkey, Tajikistan eye energy cooperation" *Hürriyet Daily News*, December 19 2012. Accessed August 30, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/turkey-tajikistan-eye-energy-cooperation-37167>
- 42 "Summary record – 11th ECO Summit Meeting 23 December, 2010, Istanbul, Turkey," *The ECO Secretariat*, Tehran, 2011.
- 43 M. Efe Çaman, M. Ali Akyurt. "Caucasus and Central Asia in Turkish Foreign Policy: The Time Has Come for a New Regional Policy," *Alternatives Journal*, November 2011. pp. 49-50.
- 44 "Relations between Turkey and Tajikistan," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-tajikistan.en.mfa>
- 45 Emin Avundukluoğlu. "Turkish FM visits Tajikistan, signs Cooperation Plan," *Anadolu Agency*, October 21, 2016. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/turkish-fm-visits-tajikistan-signs-cooperation-plan/669524>
- 46 "Relations between Turkey and Tajikistan," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-tajikistan.en.mfa>
- 47 "Participation at the Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference", *Ministry of foreign affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan*, December 13, 2017. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.mfa.tj/en/main/view/2797/participation-at-the-extraordinary-islamic-summit-conference>
- 48 "The meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan with the Vice-President of the Republic of Turkey" *Ministry of foreign affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan*, April 23, 2019. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://mfa.tj/en/main/view/4015/the-meeting-of-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-tajikistan-with-the-vice-president-of-the-republic-of-turkey>
- 49 "President Erdoğan to Visit Tajikistan" *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, Jun 14, 2019. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.tcgb.gov.tr/en/speeches-statements/558/105656/president-erdogan-to-visit-tajikistan>
- 50 Gülay Mutlu. "Turkey's foreign aid policy toward central Asia," *USAK Yearbook of Politics and International Relations*, 2012, p. 136.
- 51 Arsen Omuraliev. "Donor Activity in Central Asian Countries since 1991," *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, April 30, 2020. Accessed August 30, 2021. Retrieved from <https://cabar.asia/en/donor-activity-in-central-asian-countries-since-1991>
- 52 "Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development," *OECD*, Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/>
- 53 Thomas Wheeler. "Turkey's role and Interests in Central Asia," *Saferworld*, October, 2013.p. 9
- 54 Gülay Mutlu. "Turkey's foreign aid policy toward central Asia," *USAK Yearbook of Politics and International Relations*, 2012, p. 143.
- 55 "Turkey Exports to Tajikistan," *Trading Economics*, Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/exports/tajikistan>
- 56 "Turkey's Relations with Central Asian Republics," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*. Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-relations-with-central-asian-republics.en.mfa
- 57 "Turkey imports from Tajikistan," *Trading Economics*, Accessed August 29, 2021. Retrieved from <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/imports/tajikistan>
- 58 Ryskeldi Satke, Casey Michel and Sertaç Korkmaz. "Turkey in Central Asia: Turkic Togetherness?" *The Diplomat*, November 28, 2014. Accessed August 31, 2021. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2014/11/turkey-in-central-asia-turkic-togetherness/>
- 59 Shokhboz Asadov. "Tajikistan's Transit Corridors and their Potential for Developing Regional Trade," *Institute of Public Policy and Administration*, University of Central Asia Working Paper No. 6., 2012. p.6.
- 60 "Tajikistan Promoting Export Diversification and Growth, Country Diagnostic Study," *Asian Development Bank*, 2016. p. 3.
- 61 Shokhboz Asadov. "Tajikistan's Transit Corridors and their Potential for Developing Regional Trade," *Institute of Public Policy and Administration*, University of Central Asia Working Paper No. 6., 2012. p. 7.
- 62 Shokhboz Asadov. "Tajikistan's Transit Corridors and their Potential for Developing Regional Trade," *Institute of Public Policy and Administration*, University of Central Asia Working Paper No. 6., 2012. p.10.
- 63 "Vision and actions on jointly building Belt and Road," *Issued by the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, with State Council authorization*, March 2015. Accessed August 31, 2021. Retrieved from <http://2017.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2017/0410/c22-45.html>
- 64 "South Caucasus and Central Asia Belt and Road Initiative – Tajikistan Country Case Study" *South Caucasus and Central Asia MTI - World Bank Global Practices*, June 2020, p.1.