

## **Tajikistan Seeks Pragmatic Economic Ties With Russia**

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Russian president Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Tajikistan this month reflected the increasingly practical nature of the longstanding relationship between the two countries, analysts in Dushanbe say.

Much of the focus of talks was on security issues, and the two sides agreed that the Russian army's 201st division would stay on Tajikistan, where it has been based since the Soviet Union broke up in 1991.

But no resolution was reached on the controversial issue of who should guard the border with Afghanistan. There have been strong hints from Moscow that it would like its forces to return to Tajikistan and form the first line of defence against infiltration by insurgents and drug smugglers. Tajikistan has resisted the idea.

As Abdughani Mamadazimov, who heads the National Association of Political Scientists, said in this report, such a concession would be tantamount to admitting that Tajikistan was a failed state.

At the meeting, Medvedev offered to invest hundreds of millions of US dollars in the proposed CASA-1000 scheme, a project to take electricity generated by hydropower plants in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Mamadazimov sees this as part of a "very major transformation" in Moscow's relationship with Tajikistan, from one where security cooperation is paramount to a more pragmatic kind of intervention with an economic focus.

As for Tajikistan's future as northern neighbour of unstable Afghanistan, from which NATO-led combat forces are due to withdraw in 2014, political analyst Rashidghani Abdullo sees a "multi-vector" foreign policy as the key to success.

"We basically have three large powers and one somewhat lesser one in our neighbourhood - Russia, China, the United States, and further down, Iran," he said. "There will always be problems if we tilt too far in one of those directions and the two other major powers see that as a threat to their national interests.... We can't allow a situation like that to arise."

In fact, Abdullo sees another state, neighbouring Uzbekistan, as one of the major foreign policy headaches facing Tajikistan. He believes Tashkent will only enter into negotiations if the Tajiks have some bargaining-chips to put on the table.

"Talks and dialogue will only be possible when the two sides are more or less equal; when they're equal there will be a dialogue on equal terms," he said, noting that the Roghun hydroelectric power plant, nearing completion in Tajikistan, will place that country in a stronger position.

*The audio programme, in Russian and Tajik, went out on national radio stations in Tajikistan, as part of IWPR project work funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

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

**Focus:** [Central Asia Radio](#)

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