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Belarus, Kazakhstan Work Together in Volatile Economic Times

ASTANA – In his interview with The Astana Times, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to Kazakhstan Anatoly Nichkassov underlined the importance of growing economic relations between Belarus and Kazakhstan and stressed further development of current relations, including under the conditions of the newly-created Eurasian Economic Union, as well as establishing new projects and deepening cultural exchange.

How would you describe the current bilateral relations between Belarus and Kazakhstan in politics, economy and culture?

Our countries have had traditionally friendly relations. Belarus and Kazakhstan maintain an active dialogue on the highest levels and are strategic, trade-economic and foreign partners.

We hold regular meetings and develop further cooperation on the basis of different organisations, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union. Our countries represent constructive interaction and share common positions within the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and other international organisations.



Belarus is interested in a close partnership with Kazakhstan in all spheres and calls for a systemic deepening of bilateral relations. Despite the negative factors that we are facing in the global economy today, bilateral trade and economic relations between Belarus and Kazakhstan are developing dynamically. The trade and economic relations with Kazakhstan are of high priority for Belarus. In light of the negative processes in the Russian economy and in general a rather complicated situation on the world markets, it is beneficial for both Belarus and Kazakhstan to increase foreign trade turnover, improve the efficiency of joint projects and deepen and broaden cooperation in the industrial, scientific and technological spheres.

Currently, special attention is paid to the development of industrial cooperation between Belarusian and Kazakh engineering enterprises. In this direction, we are focusing our efforts on the development of existing assembly productions of Belarusian machinery that are present in Kazakhstan as well as the creation of new industries.

For this year we plan to transfer the production of a BelAZ-7547 dumper from the Belarusian company BelAZ to KazBelAZ, a joint venture located in Karaganda. We will also transfer the production of another dumper such as BelAZ-7540V and BelAZ-75473 in the future. It is also planned to organise the production of Belarusian agricultural, municipal and road-building equipment at the site of the joint Belarusian-Kazakh Industrial and Technological Park of agricultural and municipal vehicles located in Kokshetau and to organise assembly production of Belarusian automotive engineering from the Minsk Automobile Plant on the basis of Semipalatinsk Machine Works.

In 2015, it is planned to organise an assembly of five models of the MAZ make. Agromashholding (Kazakhstan) and Gomselmash (Belarus) are working on the establishment of a joint production of combine harvesters. The realisation of large transnational projects in space and energy spheres is promising for us, including cooperation on nuclear power plant construction, development, production and processing of hydrocarbons, engineering, trade and logistic activities.

The growth of investments and the allocation of Kazakh capital in Belarus is the core of bilateral relations. Belarus is ready to create favourable conditions for Kazakhstan business in our country. At the governmental level, we are ready to support proposals for future projects in various fields like petrochemicals, energy, transport and logistics, innovation and new technologies where Belarus and Kazakhstan could implement two or three major projects together.

Today one of the most important tools for strengthening and developing the cultural ties, friendly relations and cooperation between our nations is the organisation of joint cultural events, exhibitions, forums, festivals and creative competitions. Belarus and Kazakhstan Culture Days have become a good tradition. The Days of Culture of Belarus in Kazakhstan were well organised in 2014 and this year it is planned to hold Days of Culture of Kazakhstan in our country.

The organisation of such large-scale events raises interest and respect abroad, while the creativity of Belarusian and Kazakh artists helps strengthen friendship and promotes the rich and unique cultures of our countries.



Could you describe the volume of bilateral trade-economic relations during the past four or five years, as well as the key spheres of the cooperation?

In the context of the global crisis, the trade turnover between Belarus and Kazakhstan reached a historic high and amounted to \$1.17 billion in 2014; the general growth composed 22.9 percent in comparison to 2013. The Belarusian exports to Kazakhstan amounted to \$877.6 million and have increased by 0.8 percent, while imports from Kazakhstan composed \$293.8 million and have increased by 3.6 times. Compared to 2007, foreign trade turnover between the two countries increased by 2.3 times.

The dynamics of trade between Belarus and Kazakhstan (Millions of U.S. dollars).

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Belarusian products for export in 2014 were mostly oil products (\$88.5 million or 10.1 percent of total exports), tractors and truck tractors (\$76.9 million or 8.8 percent), milk and dairy products (\$68.5 million or 7.8 percent), trucks (\$59.5 million or 6.8 per cent), furniture (\$51.8 million or 5.9 percent), machinery and equipment for harvesting and threshing (\$44.4 million or 5.1 percent), tires (\$39.7 million or 4.5 per cent), sugar (\$38.4 million or 4.4 percent), meat products (\$20.7 million or 2.4 percent), railway freight cars (\$19.5 million or 2.2 percent), fresh fruits (\$18.2 million or 2.1 per cent) and pharmaceuticals (\$16.8 million or 1.9 percent).

Investment cooperation has been actively developing in 2014; Kazakhstan has invested \$101.7 million in Belarus, including direct investments totalling \$4.2 million in 2014, and Belarus has invested \$117.3 million in Kazakhstan, including direct investments in the amount of \$107.2 million.

In the field of industrial cooperation 13 joint assembly plants have been established in Kazakhstan: BelAZ quarry and mine equipment and MAZ tractors, forage and grain harvesters, freight lifts, special fire and municipal vehicles and excavators. The project on the creation of the Belarusian-Kazakh Industrial and Technological Park of agricultural and municipal vehicles is under realisation now. This project will help establish a joint venture for the production of MT3 Bobruiskagromash tractors, MAZ municipal vehicles, Amkodor road-building equipment, Lidselmash agricultural machinery and Gomselmash combine harvesters.

Could you name some positive and negative aspects of the Eurasian Economic Union?

With the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Belarus and Kazakhstan have reached a new level of bilateral relations.



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The Eurasian Economic Union is aimed at creating conditions for sustainable economic development of its member states and improving living standards. I would mention the fact that among its main advantages, the EAEU provides a free movement of goods, services, capital and labour and helps to coordinate a coherent and unified economic policy.

From Jan.1, Belarus took over the presidency of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, Eurasian Intergovernmental Council and the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission. Belarus has already outlined its priorities, such as assistance in promotion of the four fundamental economic freedoms of the union, the total abolition of exemptions and restrictions in the movement of goods, common industrial and agricultural policies and improving the efficiency of the Eurasian Economic Commission.

Speaking about negative factors, I would single out the presence of the exceptions and limitations in the union that significantly impede an economic integration process. We still have a long and difficult path to go in order to develop the union. A comprehensive modernisation of industrial capacity should take place. Moreover, we have to increase the cooperation between our companies and the competitiveness of national economies in the framework of the global economy.

Are you expecting any Belarusian high officials to come to Astana this year? Maybe some cultural events are going to be organised?

A lot of events will take place in the framework of the political and economic agenda this year. First of all, we expect the President of Belarus and the President of the Russian Federation, who were invited by Nursultan Nazarbayev to come in the near future [March 12-13].

The most important bilateral political event that is planned for 2015 is an official visit of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of Belarus. Because of the chairmanship of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the CIS this year, Kazakhstan will hold several meetings of the Council of Heads of State and Government of the CIS. Kazakhstan will also organise the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council and the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council meetings as a member state of the Eurasian Economic Union.

The year 2015 is the year of the 70th anniversary of the Great Patriotic War (World War II). The event is extremely important and is truly a milestone. First of all, it is our common history; it is the memory of the combat brotherhood, unparalleled courage and heroism of soldiers of all nationalities who gave their own lives fighting for the freedom and independence of our countries. The Great Victory unites and will continue uniting our countries and nations. As we know, a commemorative medal titled 70 Years of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 has been approved. This award will be given to the veterans of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, as well as to others within the CIS member states. The award ceremonies in Belarus and Kazakhstan and other CIS countries have already begun.

The celebration programme of the 70th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of the CIS states has been approved. According to this programme, the heads of CIS states will hold speeches and military parades will take place in the capitals and cities for the heroes, as well as rewarding and honouring ceremonies for veterans.



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During the celebrations, participants will be able to use the international and long-distance telephone service for free. Also, they will be entitled to travel on all types of transport (except taxis) in the territory of the CIS for free.

A number of joint Belarusian-Kazakh projects are going to be implemented. In particular, numerous archive documents about the participation of the natives of Kazakhstan in the partisan movement in Belarus have been revealed and now a joint scientific publication is anticipated.

Within the framework of agreements and memorandum on cooperation between museums of Belarus and Kazakhstan, several exhibitions will be organised. In May 2015, the exhibition “The harsh, military, simple ...” will be held in Astana at the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan. These collections will be presented by the National History Museum of Belarus.

Numerous Belarusian ethnic organisations represented in Kazakhstan by 13 ethno-cultural associations will all have opportunities for the preservation and enhancement of the Belarusian language and culture in Kazakhstan and are actively involved in the conduct and organisation of various events dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan.

We are very pleased to realise that Belarus and Kazakhstan have friendly strategic relations and that both countries are firmly aimed at further close cooperation across the whole spectrum of issues included in the bilateral agenda. I am confident that our relations will continue developing on the basis of the strong friendship, mutual respect, understanding and trust between the peoples of Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Fuente: astanatimes

Kazakhstan: The Slumbering Steppe

One day last summer, Viktor Kazachenko set off across the steppe from his village in northern Kazakhstan, driving to the nearest town on some errands – but he never arrived.

“My brain switched off,” he says. “That’s it. I don’t remember.”

Kazachenko had been hit by a mysterious sleeping sickness that is plaguing Kalachi, a remote village 500 kilometers west of the capital Astana. The malady has sent residents into comas lasting days on end.

“I was going to town on August 28,” Kazachenko told EurasiaNet.org, still disoriented by the experience. “I came round on September 2. I understood [on waking up] in the hospital that I’d fallen asleep.”



Kazachenko blacked out while driving his motorcycle, with his wife riding pillion. “It’s good it wasn’t that foreign vehicle,” he jokes, gesturing at his car standing beside his neat white cottage. “That’s fast – a motorbike isn’t so fast!”

The motorcycle incident was actually his second extended journey to the land of Nod. “The first time I slept for three days,” a chuckling Kazachenko said, flashing a sense of humor about his predicament.

Ultimately, the ailment is no laughing matter. For two years, residents have been falling into comas and suffering debilitating symptoms – from dizziness and nausea to blinding headaches and memory loss.

“After this slumber, my blood pressure started going up for no reason,” Kazachenko explained. “Headaches – that’s not the word. For six weeks, I didn’t know where to put myself. It strongly affects your mentality. I’m very on edge.”

Since it first struck in spring 2013, 120 villagers have suffered – around a quarter of Kalachi’s population. The latest two cases – which hit on March 1 – brought the tally of incidents to 152. Some, including Kazachenko, have experienced more than one bout.

The ailment is baffling doctors and scientists alike. Despite a procession of nuclear scientists, geologists and ecologists through Kalachi to run tests on soil, air, and water, the cause of the sleeping sickness remains a mystery.

Lacking hard scientific facts, many inhabitants are convinced they know the source of the health hazard: a disused Soviet-era uranium mine on the village’s doorstep. “We’ve been thinking it was radiation,” says housewife Tatyana Shumilina. “We have a uranium mine here,” although it has been “a ruin for years.”

Next to the village stands a ghost town: Krasnogorskiy, an incongruous urban landscape rising out of the snowy steppe. It was once home to miners dispatched from Russia and elsewhere in the Soviet Union to extract uranium, which powered Soviet nuclear weapons and energy plants. Some of the descendants of those miners now populate Kalachi.

Krasnogorskiy was gradually abandoned after the mine closed in the 1990s, following the Soviet Union’s collapse. Several dozen families remain living in intact homes interspersed among the ruins, where desolate apartment blocks – with gaping holes instead of windows – are collapsing into the soil.

Experts from Kazakhstan’s National Nuclear Center – based in Kurchatov, in the country’s east – have conducted tests in and around Kalachi since last April, and they say radiation levels are within the norm. Scientists have detected elevated levels of radon, a radioactive gas, and carbon monoxide, but ruled out this as a cause of the sleeping affliction. Doctors are mystified, with somnolent patients sent to hospitals in Kurchatov and Astana for tests, to no avail.



“On this sleeping sickness, we don’t have the results of the studies in our hands yet,” Asel Sadvokasova, Kalachi’s mayor, acknowledged. As soon as there are conclusive findings, residents will be informed, she said.

Meanwhile, “we’re all in fear of falling asleep,” as villager Tatyana Pavlenko puts it.

Authorities in Astana are now opting for a radical, and controversial, solution: moving the villagers out of Kalachi to prevent exposure to what is clearly a health hazard, albeit a perplexing one. “Some measures must be taken,” the mayor, who has herself suffered a bout of sleeping sickness, told EurasiaNet.org. “This is a good chance for the residents of our village to find a new home and a new job.”

Working with local administrations and employers, authorities have already resettled around 100 residents elsewhere in Akmola Region, the 150,000-square-kilometer administrative area of northern Kazakhstan in which Kalachi is situated. There are 425 people still living in the village.

It is a “voluntary resettlement,” Sadvokasova insists – but some villagers are resistant.

“I’m not going anywhere,” asserted sleeping sickness victim Kazachenko belligerently. “Why should I go? I’ve been here for 40 years. I’m going to die here.”

His wife Raisa, who nursed him through two comas, is equally adamant. “I’ve lived in this house for 20 years. I’ve lived on this street for 60 years,” she told EurasiaNet.org, between hauling water from a standpipe through the icy streets on a sledge. “Now where will they send me? What’s awaiting me there?”

“There are families that are not agreeing to move,” acknowledged Sadvokasova. “For now we’re working with the families that want to resettle. It’s all on a voluntary basis.”

The authorities are “open to dialogue,” she added. In December, officials visited every home to ascertain residents’ desires and needs – evidence of an “individual approach.”

Some villagers have expressed a preference for some form of compensation for living next door to a health hazard. Despite the dangers, many residents remain opposed to leaving the place where they grew up. “They say it affects the brain; they say it gives people headaches,” Raisa Kazachenko said, referring to the sleeping sickness. “But our headache now is where we’re being resettled.”

Fuente: astanatimes



Kazakhstan aims for 22,800 tU output in 2015

Kazatomprom, the world's biggest uranium producer, plans to increase output this year to 23,400 tU, up from 22,800 tU in 2014.

Nurlan Kapparov, head of the state-run company, announced the production target at its annual meeting to personnel held in Astana yesterday.

Kazatomprom has retained its leading position in the global uranium mining industry, he said, providing about 40% of the world's total uranium production.

The company faces new challenges in 2015, however, in particular volatile spot uranium prices alongside an increase in uranium output, and issues related to cutting production costs, he said.

Kazatomprom remains committed to the principles of corporate social responsibility, he said. The company is focused on strengthening its human resources, including improvements to working conditions and staff morale, he said.

The average monthly salary at Kazatomprom enterprises increased in 2014 by 5.8% and the company funded the training of 295 students as prospective employees. The company employs 20,000 people.

An example of the importance the company attaches to social responsibility, Kapparov said KZT 2.5 billion (\$13 million) had been allocated to maintaining the residential and recreational standards of mining villages in the Kyzylorda, East-Kazakhstan and Mangystau districts.

Kazatomprom enterprises regularly monitor safety and security at their uranium production sites and last year the number of detected violations of occupational and industrial safety requirements dropped by 28% compared to 2013, Kapparov said.

In 2014, Kazatomprom enterprises continued to ensure ecological safety at its production facilities, he said, adding that 23 of the company's affiliates and subsidiaries have ecological management standards certification. More than KZT 1.19 billion (\$11 million) was spent last year on measures to reduce the negative environmental impact of uranium mining, including efficiency improvements to dust and gas collecting installations and water purification units.

Fuente: world-nuclear



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OECD Strengthens Partnership with Kazakhstan

On Jan. 22 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Karim Massimov and Secretary General of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Angel Gurría signed a memorandum of understanding between Kazakhstan and the OECD on the implementation of the Country Programme of Cooperation for 2015-2016.

The country programme acknowledges Kazakhstan's commitment to a plan of reforms and its willingness and ability to design these reforms taking into account good international policy practices. The programme could lead to more than 20 policy reviews, cooperation in capacity building projects, increased levels of participation in six OECD committees and possible adherence to 28 OECD legal instruments.

Kazakhstan is one of four partner economies that have been selected for this bilateral work programme covering areas such as public sector integrity and governance, environment, health, taxation, competition and business climate and statistics.

After signing the agreement, Massimov said that the "introduction of the OECD best practices in our policies is a prerequisite for strengthening our role in a global economy." Gurría also said "Kazakhstan is a leading economy in Central Asia strategically located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. I am confident that positive spill-over effects of the country programme will benefit the reform agendas of other countries in the region."

The country programme is a new OECD tool that enables partner economies to leverage OECD expertise and standards, strengthen institutions and build capacity for policy reforms. The programme marks the beginning of a new phase of the OECD's ongoing cooperation with Kazakhstan.

The Coordination Council for OECD-Kazakhstan Partnership chaired by Prime Minister Massimov decided March 2 to assign personal responsibility for implementation of the project of the country programme to the heads and first deputy heads of government bodies, which will facilitate the process of strengthening linkages between Kazakh stakeholders and OECD Committees.

Saltanat Janenova is a policy consultant and instructor at the Graduate School of Public Policy, Nazarbayev University.

Fuente: astanatimes



Kazakhstan to allocate \$17.5 million for oil exploration

Kazakhstan will allocate over \$17.5 million for oil exploration in 2015 to conduct geological exploration, Kazakh Investment and Development Minister, Asset Issekeshiev, said at the first forum 'Exploration in Kazakhstan: the focus on oil and gas' today.

"In 2015 the national budget and the National Fund will allocate 3.2 billion tenge to finance new regional oil and gas exploration works. In particular, there will be financed two geophysical surveys of two geotraverses and the drilling of two support appraisal wells," Novosti-Kazakhstan cited him as saying.

"I would like to note that the state will pay for geology works in the least studied areas where it is problematic to attract investors," Issekeshiev noted.

In his turn, Kazakh First Deputy Energy Minister Uzakbai Karabalin said that a total number of 203 subsoil-use contracts in the field of hydrocarbons have been registered with the Energy Ministry so far, including 59 exploration contracts, 64 production contracts, 68 mixed exploration and production contracts and 12 contracts under the Production Sharing Agreement.

Fuente: vestnikkavkaza

Kazakhstan Hit With \$100M Suit Over Rights To Oil Field

Law360, New York (March 11, 2015, 2:06 PM ET) -- A Nevada-based energy company filed suit in California federal court Wednesday seeking \$100 million from a former partner and the Energy Ministry of Kazakhstan in response to an alleged scheme to rob the company of a concession to explore for oil and gas in the Central Asian nation.

Turan Petroleum Inc. says a Kazakhstani judge refused to hear its witnesses and refused to throw out faulty testimony presented by its partner before illegally selling off its \$24 million, 80 percent stake in a company created for the purpose of drilling for oil on 5 million acres granted to Turan by the Kazakhstan government.

Turan says Judge Anar Bidakhmetkyzy Karasheva told Adilzhan Dzhakishev and his companies in December that they could buy the stake for \$0.43 and further ordered Turan to pay the company it created — Turan Enerpetroleum LLP — \$12.6 million.

Aside from the monetary damages it says it has suffered, Turan is asking the California federal court to declare Judge Karasheva's judgment unenforceable in the U.S. "because [of] fraud in the proceedings, the court's failure to provide proceedings compatible with due process, the court's lack of impartiality and contravention of public policy."



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The plaintiff also accuses Dzhakishev and his co-conspirators of Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act violations, fraud, breach of contract and a host of other violations related to their attempt to launder \$5 million of Dzhakishev's father's money through various entities used to purchase a 20 percent stake in the so-called Arys concession.

After Kazakhstani prosecutors seized the 20 percent asset, Dzhakishev began creating new companies just to move the assets around while pretending to step down from his main company — Asia Pacific Oil & Gas Ltd. — and hand the reins over to others, according to the complaint.

Though these others could never present evidence in court that they ran the companies in question, Judge Karasheva became frustrated and told Turan to drop the issue following multiple failed attempts to obtain corporate documents from Dzhakishev's entities, Turan alleges.

The complaint says the judge then turned around and, before she could hear Turan's witnesses, issued a ruling in favor of Dzhakishev.

"The court's ruling based on fraudulent persons being in the court and fraudulent evidence provided by the plaintiff and testimony of APOG effectively destroyed Turan's capital and that of its 231 shareholders," according to the complaint.

The Arys concession is believed to contain 1.1 billion barrels of crude oil estimated by Turan to be worth \$100 billion.

Turan is represented by John M. Hamilton of John M. Hamilton Law Offices.

Counsel information for Kazakhstan's Energy Ministry, Dzhakishev and the rest of the defendants wasn't immediately available Wednesday.

The suit is Turan Petroleum, Inc. v. Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Kazakhstan et al, case number 8:15-cv-00381, in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

--Editing by Philip Shea.



Employee Benefits in Kazakhstan - 2015 Review

By a News Reporter-Staff News Editor at Investment Weekly News -- Research and Markets (http://www.researchandmarkets.com/research/lxzd4q/employee_benefits) has announced the addition of the "Employee Benefits in Kazakhstan" report to their offering.

Kazakhstan's social security system comprises the social insurance system and the social assistance system. The social security system covers a large proportion of the population, and offers a wide range of social benefits and allowances to its people.

The Kazakhstan Agency for Financial Market and Financial Organizations, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MOLSP) and the Ministry of Health are the most important organizations responsible for the management and supervision of social security benefits. Both the state and private benefits markets in Kazakhstan are undergoing transformation, and are expected to improve in the near future as the government is aiming to diversify its economy. Key Topics Covered: 1 Executive Summary, 2 Introduction, 3 Country Statistics, 4 Overview of Employee Benefits in Kazakhstan, 5 Regulations, 6 State and Compulsory Benefits, 7 Private Benefits, 8 Macroeconomic Indicators and 9 Appendix.

Guest post: China and Russia – allies not frenemies in central Asia

By Diana Gapak, Daniyar Kosnazarov and Gavin Bowring

Often likened to being “between a rock and a hard place”, Central Asia’s relatively isolated position has required it to maintain consistent and balanced good relations with two giant neighbours, China and Russia.

Nevertheless, its high degree of integration with Russia has jolted the region’s local economies, the result of their twin exposure to the protracted Ukrainian crisis and the slump in commodity prices, manifested through tanking local currencies and reduced inflows of remittances from workers abroad.

Anxiety has further gripped post-Soviet states in recent months, with the recent 35 per cent slump in the Azerbaijan manat and a 34 per cent devaluation in Turkmenistan, often considered the economy with the least direct exposure to Russia. Concerns are spreading in Kazakhstan of an additional devaluation of the tenge (following last year’s 20 per cent decline) amid calls for early presidential elections.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan arguably face even greater pressure, with both GDP and fiscal revenue highly dependent on remittances from Russia and the transit of Chinese manufactured goods into Russia/Uzbekistan. Neither has a promising outlook; the World Bank currently forecasts remittances to decline 4.9 per cent and 17.8 per cent in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan respectively this year, while Kyrgyz export volumes to Russia slumped 33



per cent year on year last year – also partly the result of a concerted crackdown on Kyrgystan’s re-export industries.

Uzbekistan, the region’s most densely populated country, has also seen an 11 per cent decline in its som currency over the last year, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects inflation to remain in double digit figures as a result.

Diversifying remains a challenge

The twin factors of low oil prices and Russian weakness have further pushed Central Asian states to diversify their economies. Nevertheless, their ability to integrate into global manufacturing supply chains remains hampered by their relative geographical isolation, problematic infrastructure and mostly low population densities.

As an example, Japanese companies have not expanded manufacturing facilities into Central Asia as they have rapidly done in Southeast Asia, due to this lack of competitiveness. Accumulated financial exposure to Central Asia and the Caucasus by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), Japan’s main policy lender, currently amounts to only ¥642bn, barely 3 per cent of its total ¥21,106bn exposure across Asia, and most of this has also gone towards energy-related services.

Moreover, the declining rouble itself further stymies the potential for local manufacturing, given Russia’s much larger industrial economies of scale. Car dealers in Kazakhstan, for example, have slashed retail prices by an average 30 per cent in recent months to compete with a surge in Russian imports.

Separately, private sector development and local innovation are difficult to implement even in the region’s more advanced economies, due both to the dominance of the state sector in most countries and the lack of access to credit and capital markets.

China’s role in widening the economic base

Diversification is thus largely dependent on an expected massive surge in Chinese investment into the region which, in theory, should help build local industrial capacity and manufacturing supply chains. On paper at least, China has committed to investing \$16.3bn into multiple infrastructure projects across Central Asia.

Central Asian states, particularly Kazakhstan, have also embraced the idea of acting as “transit hubs” for manufactured goods between China and Europe. Kazakhstan’s vice president is known to favour Chinese investment and the Astana headquarters of Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, the state-owned railway firm, beams televised pictures of the China-Kazakhstan partnership in the sector onto the streets.

In addition to collecting transit fees on transported goods, this is also expected to result in some manufacturing spillover. A recent Kazakhstan-China investment forum resulted in agreements to establish 20 JV manufacturing projects in sectors such as construction, transport, logistics, and food production.



Less-developed economies such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which also face greater domestic political uncertainty, are seeking Chinese investment into infrastructure. One major flagship project is a mooted Kyrgyz-China rail project, although this faces both political risks in Kyrgyzstan's democratic environment, as well a clampdown on Kyrgyzstan's re-export trade. The deputy finance minister of Tajikistan, meanwhile, announced that China plans to invest \$6bn into the Tajik economy over the next three years.

Turkmenistan also aims to become a regional transit hub in which China has a special investment interest. Kazakhstan in late 2014 inaugurated the first direct railway link connecting Iran with western Kazakhstan via Turkmenistan, to more fully diversify from Russian transit routes to Europe. Positioned as a halfway point, this new route also enables Turkmenistan to act as a gate for traded goods simultaneously between Russia, other post-Soviet states, and southwest Asia.

According to Shohrat Kadyrov, a researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Science, Ashgabat is not only a major provider of gas, but also acts as an interlocutor between China and neighbouring states in the negotiation of supranational infrastructure corridors that aim to facilitate economic integration. In this regard, Turkmenistan is using the prospect of retaining its gas market share in China by investing in additional pipelines, which in turns allows it to bargain for infrastructure investments to facilitate the transit of Chinese-produced goods, arguably at Russia and Kazakhstan's expense.

The importance of Russia

Media attention has mostly focused on the surge in aspirant Chinese investment in the region coming "at the expense of Russia", with the economic downturn luring Central Asian governments towards China's trade and investment prowess.

Nevertheless, it is also clear that Russia remains a crucial partner and ally not just for Central Asian states themselves, but for ensuring the stability of China's investments in the region, in particular its energy supplies.

Indeed, despite the recent pain caused by Central Asia's economic alliance with Russia, countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan appear to be making what amounts to a political decision to join the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which currently includes Kazakhstan, Belarus and, most recently, Armenia. This comes despite the clear evidence in Kazakhstan's case that its participation in the EEU has not yielded significant economic benefits, as well as the concomitant exposure to Russian domestic political cycles.

Russia-led structures such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), beyond bland gestures of Sino-Russian geopolitical alliance and common interest, are acquiring real significance through the emphasis on maintaining, expanding, and modernising Russia's network of military bases in countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia. Russian bases remain strategic for the security of Central Asian governments themselves, since nearly their entire domestic military budgets go to Russia.

In this respect, Sino-Russian co-operation is maintained out of a common interest to keep the Central Asian region stable. Chinese investment is required to buffer stagnant inward foreign direct investment flows into Central Asia from Russia.



However, Beijing needs Russia to provide security in a politically complex region subject to periodic unrest, as a means to ensure its massive investments into the region's energy and infrastructure sectors. This is particularly crucial given the security imperatives in China's own restive Xinjiang province, through which all energy supplies pass.

This pattern of Sino-Russian cooperation is arguably being replicated elsewhere, such as in the ambitious pending construction of the Nicaragua canal, whereby China will finance the majority and Russia will provide military and other forms of security during the construction process.

While media reports often emphasise the "historical distrust" between China and Russia, evidenced by long-drawn and sometimes acrimonious negotiations over bilateral gas supply contracts, it is clear that China does not aspire to undermine Russia's sociopolitical and security influence in the region, while Russia in turn is not resisting China's economic encroachment into the region. It might be a stretch to call the relationship symbiotic, but it is certainly mutually tolerant.

Diana Gapak is a Russia/CIS analyst. Daniyar Kosnazarov is a head of Central Asia and Caspian Region department, Geopolitics and Regional Studies Division, The Library of the First President of Kazakhstan. Gavin Bowring is a researcher at Asean Confidential, a research service at the Financial Times.

Fuente: Financial Times

Central Asia is bursting at seams

By Laman Sadigova

As Russia suffers from an economic slowdown on the back of EU and U.S. sanctions, Central Asia's economy has suffered more than it cares to admit. Hit by the devaluation of the ruble, Central Asian countries have seen their economy dive and their currency struggle.

Torn by many problems Central Asia is now trying to move toward economic growth and generate economic opportunities by becoming pertinent international partners, in line with international requirements.

Cowering under a long list of problems -- poverty, lack of education, corruption and water-energy problems, only to name a few, Central Asian countries are struggling.

Events in Russia only help to exacerbate those difficulties.

At a summit held in Astana in 2010, former U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said that Kazakhstan has become the most valuable and leading country in the Central Asia region, a stabilizing force.

Located in quite a favorable geopolitical position, Kazakhstan relies on its neighbors to export its products, especially oil and grain. In recent years, foreign trade was significantly diversified. EU member states take the top places in the structure of Kazakhstan's trade turnover. These relations are enormously perspective with non-



CIS countries, including China, Turkey, Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, the U.S., the UK, South Korea, and others.

Still Russia remains a main trading partner of Kazakhstan. The devaluation of the Russian ruble hit Kazakhstan's economy hard. Kazakhstan's close dependence on Russia meant that the country spiraled down into a monetary crisis, forced to purchase hard currencies to remain afloat, while all the while losing much needed export trade volumes.

To make matters worse, Russian gas giant Gazprom announced it is planning to stop its purchase of gas from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It is not hard to imagine how deeply this factor will affect both countries' economy. And though Uzbekistan is planning to replace Russia with China it is uneasy at the thought of depending so entirely on China to sustain its economy. Trade and economic contacts between Uzbekistan and Russia (constituting a single economic space in the format EAC) are essential for Tashkent.

The new migration policy in Russia makes Uzbekistan nervous as well, just as it does other countries in the region. During his last visit to Uzbekistan, President Vladimir Putin said Russia is not planning to exert pressure on Tashkent. Though, from a geopolitical point of view, Uzbekistan, which share borders with all the countries in the region, is the most convenient way to keep U.S. influence in Central Asia at bay. Unless Uzbek President Islam Karimov decides to "flirt" with the U.S., he might receive Russian support. But Russia also needs to mitigate its migration system.

Another country of the region which has suffered is Tajikistan. Tajiks represent the brunt of Russia's illegal migrants. It is hard to imagine that both countries will enjoy favorable relations now that Russia has reviewed its migration policy.

Moscow is canceling its quotas for migrants from countries with a visa-free regime. Now, instead of obtaining a permit, migrants will need to be issued a patent for labor activity.

Unfavorable terms make migrants give up their low-paid jobs and leave. Perhaps, Russia is just trying to get rid of its low-skilled citizens from Central Asia? Regardless Tajikistan will suffer, especially since its economy is weak to begin with.

Low energy resources, monetary pressure due to the devaluation of the ruble and low skills have left Tajikistan in a bit of a situation.

As for Turkmenistan, despite its gas resources, the country has no reliable and significant buyer and partner. President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov called on the country to increase its production of petroleum products. And though the Trans-Caspian project stands a light in the dark, it still remains a long way away.

The country's major task remains for now to increase the share of the business sector to 65 percent excluding fuel and energy complex.

However, given the specifics of the Central Asia region is it difficult to imagine that countries will look for alternative partners, preferring instead to leave things as they are.



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Fuente: azernews

Kazakhstan reduces the volume of trade with EAEU

According to the Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan, in January 2015 the volume of trade of Kazakhstan with the EAEC member states fell by 7.8% to \$1.27 billion, relative to January 2014.

"The mutual trade of Kazakhstan with the EAEU member states amounted \$1 269.5 million this January, which is 7.8% more than the data of January 2014. Exports were \$256.7 million, imports were \$1012.8 million," TASS cited the Committee.

Mineral products prevail in Kazakhstan's export structure (53.4%). Machinery and equipment prevail in Kazakhstan's import structure (38.4%).

Fuente: vestnikkavkaza



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Kirguistán



USAID supports women entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan

BISHKEK (TCA) — The 9th National Garment Trade Fair “Fashion Industry 2015. Manufacturers and Equipment” is taking place between March 11 and 16 in Bishkek, hosted by the Kyrgyz Association of Light Manufacturing Enterprises LEGRPOM and supported by the USAID Women’s Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprises (WLSME) program.

The fair has become a major platform where national garment companies promote new collections, customers and wholesalers negotiate agreements, and the latest trends in design and technology in garments market are discussed. Over 110 garment companies from Bishkek and other regions will exhibit their products along with the equipment providers from Germany, the software providers from Ukraine and importers of fabrics from India and packaging products from Russia, China and Europe.

Some 24 women entrepreneurs, participants of WLSME will take part in the fair, the US Embassy in Bishkek reported. The idea behind the WLSME program is that women entrepreneurs can establish successful businesses if they actively engage in marketing activities providing them with opportunities to make new connections and to access key market information.

The USAID WLSME program is implemented by ACDI/VOCA in partnership with Bai Tushum Banking Group. The program goal is to increase the number and the size of women-owned small and medium enterprises by providing training for 960 women entrepreneurs across the country. The program also helps the entrepreneurs establish better connections with the suppliers and the buyers, with key industry associations, and service providers.



The WLSME program works with women entrepreneurs in garment production, tourism, and agro-processing value chains across Kyrgyzstan. The program offers access to business management training series, including marketing, business planning, financial planning, human resource management, productivity of enterprises, and contracts & negotiations.

Fuente: Timesca

EU and Central Asian countries agree to cooperate in field of security

Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan yesterday discussed cooperation with European partners in the area of security and migration at the second meeting of high-level dialogue on security issues between the EU and Central Asia, Interfax agency reported.

As noted, the representatives of Afghanistan invited as special guests, and Deputy Secretary General of the EU External Action Service Helga Schmidt presided over the meeting.

Participants agreed to cooperate. In particular, it was decided to open the regional center of excellence in the prevention of illegal traffic in hazardous chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials in Tashkent in the spring of 2015.

In March in Brussels, and in May in Bishkek will be held a meeting of experts to combat terrorism and violent extremism. Partners supported the participation of the countries of Central Asia in the activities of the Centre of Excellence in countering violent extremism in Abu Dhabi.

They agreed to strengthen cooperation in border management and the fight against drug trafficking within the EU-funded regional updated programs BOMCA and CADAP, to strengthen cooperation with border management program for Afghanistan (BOMNAF). Central Asian countries are stepping participation in the EU program "Examination of migration" (MIEUX) and the Prague process between the EU and third countries.

High-level dialogue on security issues reflects the general interest of the EU and the countries of Central Asia to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in this area. Its first meeting was held in Brussels in 2013.

Fuente:24.kg



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Argentina hopes that with the entry of Kyrgyzstan in EEU trade and economic cooperation will be improved

Bishkek, March 12 / Kabar /. Argentina hopes that with the entry of Kyrgyzstan in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) trade and economic cooperation between the two countries will be improved. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Argentina to Kyrgyzstan Pablo Anselmo Tettamanti expressed such a hope at a meeting with Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation of the Kyrgyz Republic Taalaibek Aidaraliev.

According to the press service of the Ministry, the sides discussed bilateral cooperation in the agricultural sector.

The Ambassador expressed hope that cooperation will be developed with the entry of the KR to the EEU.

Minister offered to exchange experiences in solving the existing problems in water, agriculture, food processing industry.

In turn, the Ambassador drew attention to the prospects of cooperation between Argentina and Kyrgyzstan in the field of agricultural livestock breeding, in the supply of equipment for the processing sector of the country.

Fuente: Kabar

The World Bank is ready to assist the Kyrgyz Government to create jobs for returning migrants

Bishkek, March 12 / Kabar.

According to the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during the meeting the sides discussed the progress and implementation of existing projects, strategies and objectives of the Bank in the near future.

Saroj Kumar Jha informed about the current portfolio of investment projects in Kyrgyzstan and expressed the intention of the World Bank to support the efforts of the government of Kyrgyzstan to create jobs for migrant workers returning from abroad.

The sides noted the need to enhance regional cooperation in Central Asia, which is essential to ensure the safety and strengthen comprehensive ties between the Central Asian states.

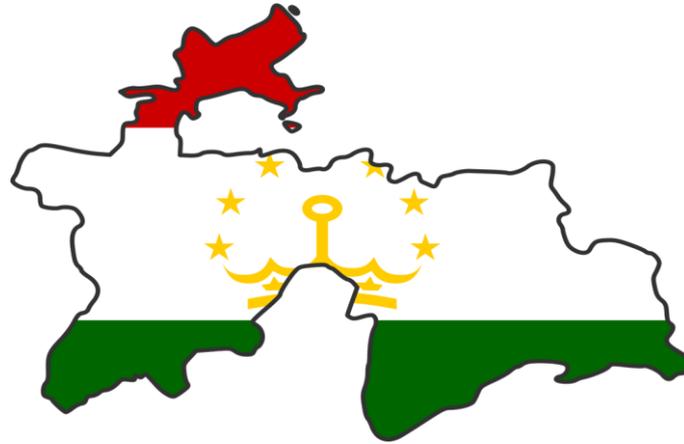
Minister Abdyldaev stressed that the situation in and around Central Asia demands from countries in the region the search for new forms of relations and cooperation on a bilateral and multilateral basis in the fields of economics, politics, education, culture and others.

Following the meeting, it was agreed to deepen cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and the World Bank on joint projects.

Fuente: Kabar



Tayikistán



International Lenders Bet on Tajikistan

With loans from the World Bank and the ADB, Tajikistan strengthens its infrastructure.

Parliamentary elections in Tajikistan have overshadowed the recent commitments by international lenders to finance projects in the country. Both the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the Asian Development Bank (ABD) have allocated funds, giving a boost to Tajikistan's image. Chinese lenders also have turned their eyes towards the mountainous Central Asian country, as Tajikistan may become a crucial node for Beijing's Silk Road initiative. The West is also focusing on Dushanbe, as it is regarded as a solid garrison from which to engage with Afghanistan and Pakistan to the south.

Indeed, Tajikistan has an important role to play with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Recently, Dushanbe concluded several agreements to export electricity to its southern neighbors under the Dushanbe-sponsored and U.S.-backed CASA-1000 program. Afghanistan received around 1.1 billion kWh in 2014 from Tajikistan alone, a slight increase on the previous year. Under the same umbrella program, Pakistan, separated from Tajikistan by the Wakhan corridor, is supposed to receive more than 5 billion kWh every year. Tajikistan will participate with 70 percent of the supply, while the rest will be sent southbound from Kyrgyzstan. In terms of costs, which rounds up to 1 billion dollars, Tajikistan will finance one quarter out of the total tally.

Tajikistan is interested in becoming a regional hub for electricity trade. The EBRD has recently opened up a program to refurbish the 126 MW Kayrakkum hydroelectric project, operating a dam on the Syr Darya. The 75 million dollar project gathered international consultants to assess both electricity production and climate change issues. The World Bank participates in Tajikistan's development through important infrastructure projects, such



as the Central Asia Road Links program, for which Dushanbe is receiving 45 million dollars. Since 1996, the World Bank has allocated almost 1 billion dollars to aid Tajikistan's plans. Most importantly, the World Bank is heavily involved in the co-financing of the Rogun dam, a massive hydroelectric project to which citizens of Tajikistan had to subscribe as well.

Other lenders are helping with infrastructure projects. In this respect, Tajikistan plays a crucial role in the common projects of the Chinese government and of ADB. Tajikistan lies at the crossroads of Beijing's own Silk Road initiative and ADB's CAREC (Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation). ADB vice president Zhang Wencai said in an interview that "Large investment needs for infrastructure in the region create large funding gaps," which in turn create the opportunity for other investors to participate.

The ADB will also assist Tajikistan in the implementation of its five-year plan for 2016-2020, which is focusing on the development of infrastructure (both in the fields of energy and transport infrastructure, access to water, and institutional reform). Tajikistan has been part of the ADB for 17 years, during which time it has received more than 1 billion dollars in loans and grants.

The Chinese government plans large investments in Tajikistan. At the end of February, the Beijing-based Sino-Tajik Mining Company was granted a parliamentary permit by the parliament in Dushanbe to develop the lead deposits in Zarnisori Shimoli for 200 million dollars for the project. The impact on the labor force should result in 2,000 new jobs.

Last January, Tajikistan became a founding member of the Shanghai-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The AIIB is seen as an alternative to the World Bank and the ADB, as its aim is also to provide project loans to developing countries. China will remain AIIB's majority shareholder.

The interest of the most important institutional lenders, together with the investments from Beijing, suggest that Tajikistan's geographical position and its water endowment make it an invaluable partner for outside powers who wish to keep the region interconnected. Neighboring Uzbekistan, on the other hand is not happy with Tajikistan's upstream water management. Spats between Tashkent and Dushanbe are ongoing, but Tajikistan right now is of international interest. Its proximity to the Afghan hotspot might explain both the deep financial involvement and the lack of scrutiny given to its governance.

Fuente: The Diplomat



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Tajikistan interested in Azerbaijani mining, agriculture investments

By Elena Kosolapova – Trend:

Tajikistan is interested in attracting Azerbaijani investments in the mining industry and agriculture, the Tajik ambassador in Baku, Zohir Saidov told Trend March 11.

The ambassador said Tajikistan wants to invite Azerbaijani specialists to work in these sectors of the economy.

“We constantly have an exchange of delegations on economic issues,” the ambassador said. “We had a meeting of the intergovernmental economic cooperation commission in October 2014, and we hope to hold a meeting this year as well.”

“A Tajik delegation is planned to arrive in Baku late this year,” Saidov added.

The ambassador noted that Tajikistan actively cooperates with the Azerbaijani company Azeraluminium.

“Aside from that, talks are currently underway with the Azerbaijani company Azersun on investing in construction of large fruit and vegetable processing enterprises in Tajikistan,” he said.

Saidov added that there are also Azerbaijani construction companies in Tajikistan engaged in construction and facing of houses.

The ambassador also said Azerbaijan and Tajikistan actively cooperate in the areas of culture and education, adding that it is planned, in particular, to hold days of Azerbaijani culture in Tajikistan in 2016.

“It is not yet determined in what month the event will take place,” said Saidov. “The issue is currently being reviewed by the culture ministry.”

He also noted that on March 10, Baku’s Nizami Cinema Center hosted the opening of the days of Tajik cinema, which will last until March 14.

The trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Tajikistan was around \$2.825 million in 2014, according to Azerbaijan’s Customs Committee. The import to Azerbaijan from Tajikistan and the export to this country stood at \$187,960 and almost \$2.637 million, respectively, according to the committee.

The trade turnover was over \$13.8 million in 2013.

Fuente:AzerNews



Money remittances from Russia to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan decreased

BISHKEK (TCA) — Money remittances from Russia decreased by 10 percent to Uzbekistan and by 6 percent to Tajikistan in 2014 compared to 2013, according to Russian analytical agency TMT Consulting and the analytical center of CONTACT money transfer system.

According to their joint press release, in 2014 the Russian market of trans-border money remittances by private individuals amounted to US \$25 billion, with \$20.9 billion remitted from Russia, including \$18.3 billion remitted to former Soviet republics.

According to the agencies, in 2014 remittances to Uzbekistan amounted to a little more than \$6 billion and to Tajikistan around \$4 billion. Exact figures for 2014 are expected from the Central Bank of Russia in the end of March.

At the same time, 2014 saw a 5-percent increase in money remittances to Russia, amounting to \$4.2 billion, mainly from Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Most remittances to Russia were made in the end of 2014 for purchasing real estate, motor vehicles, and household equipment which became cheaper in Russia due to a sharp devaluation of the Russian ruble against the US dollar.

The analytical agencies forecast that in 2015, the number of foreign citizens staying in Russia will decrease by 8 percent and the trans-border money remittances market will shrink by 25-30 percent, down to \$18 billion-\$19 billion.

A large number of labor migrants from Central Asian countries, mainly from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, are currently working in Russia, and the economies of these countries are largely dependent on remittances they send to their home countries.

Fuente:Timesca

Dushanbe hosts EU-Central Asia High Level Security Dialogue

DUSHANBE (TCA) — The second High Level Security Dialogue between the European Union and the Central Asia countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan took place yesterday in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, Avesta news agency reported.

According to the EU Delegation to Tajikistan, Afghanistan was invited as a special guest to the Dialogue.

The meeting was held at the level of deputy foreign ministers and chaired by Helga Schmid, the Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service (EEAS).



The participants exchanged views on key security issues of relevance to the EU, Central Asia and Afghanistan, including radicalization and foreign fighters, migration, regional stability and security connected to the fight against drug trafficking and smuggling.

The parties agreed to intensify joint efforts between the EU and Central Asian states in all these areas, and to extend these efforts also to regional cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asia.

This Dialogue provided a platform addressing political and security issues of shared concern, including terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking and CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) risks.

The participants agreed to reinforce their cooperation in the following areas:

- preventing the proliferation of CBRN materials through the opening of a regional Centre of Excellence in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in spring 2015;
- developing new forms of cooperation between experts of the EU and Central Asian states on countering terrorism and violent extremism in Brussels in March as well as in Bishkek in May;
- promoting the participation of Central Asian states in activities of the Hedayah Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism in Abu Dhabi;
- strengthening further cooperation in border management and the fight against drug trafficking by the renewed EU regional programmes BOMCA and CADAP, now to be implemented by EU Member States agencies directly, and to reinforce their synergies with the EU's border management programme for Afghanistan, BOMNAF;
- deepening cooperation on migration, among others via increased participation of Central Asian states in the Migration EU Expertise (MIEUX) facility and the Prague Process between the EU and third countries, currently led by Poland.

This Dialogue coincided with the ongoing review of the EU's Central Asia Strategy and will contribute to its outcome

Fuente: Timesca