

## The package of Kyrgyz-Russian agreements: a success on paper

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A number of agreements concerning for example military co-operation and co-operation in the area of hydroelectricity were signed during the President Vladimir Putin's visit to Kyrgyzstan on 20 September. Pursuant to these agreements, Russian military objects in Kyrgyzstan will be merged into one base (this will take place in 2017; the deployment term was set for fifteen years and can be extended). Russia undertook to finance and build the Kambar Ata I water power plant and a cascade of power plants in the upper part of the Naryn river. Moscow also wrote off part of Kyrgyz debts (US\$189 million of US\$489 million). The terms of the agreements are quite general, and the parties did not set the essential details, which will be arranged in the future.

### Commentary

- The agreements in the present form are a success for both parties. Russia has gained instruments, which will enable it to consolidate its influence in the area of security and water engineering in the region, and Kyrgyzstan will receive support in the hydroelectric projects, which are of key significance for this country. However, the road to launching the provisions of these agreements appears to be very long. Furthermore, some of the projects have already been covered by agreements which have not been implemented (for example, the agreement concerning Kambar Ata I was signed in 2009).
- The agreements concerning military premises provide for a Russian military presence in Kyrgyzstan until 2032, which is a demonstration of Moscow's influence in the region (a military co-operation agreement is expected to be signed in the nearest future with Tajikistan). At the same time, more detailed conditions of the stationing of the united military base are to be settled within five years. This requires a separate negotiation process (concerning for example financial issues) and its outcome is unknown. Similarly, the announcements on the discontinuation of the US military presence in the Transit Centre at Manas from 2014 made by the president of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, during Putin's visit in response to clear expectation from Moscow, should not be interpreted as final. Similar numerous announcements over the past have never been put into practice. It cannot be ruled out that Bishkek will modify its stance already next month, during the next round of Kyrgyz-US talks.

- Hydroelectricity is one of the most sensitive issues in the region; Uzbekistan opposes the construction of large water power plants in the upper sections of the rivers. To reduce the strong consternation of Tashkent (which has gone as far as suggesting there could be a military conflict over water), the parties declared they were open to the participation of the neighbouring countries in these projects.
- Russia is traditionally a major player who influences the internal situation in Kyrgyzstan. Its role is increasing in line with the intensification of the political crisis (signs of which include the fall of the government in August this year and the worsening conflict between the north and the south of the country) and the worsening of the socio-economic crisis (including the fall in GDP by 4.6% between January and August this year in comparison to the same period in 2011, and workers' strikes at the Kumtor gold mine, which is of key significance for the country's economy). Putin's visit, with its positive media spin, and the agreements which have been signed have temporarily reinforced the political position of President Atambayev, and at the same time (given the initial nature of the agreements signed) point to the potential areas of tension which may arise between Bishkek and Moscow in the future.