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Kyrgyzstan has joined the Eurasian Economic Union

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On 5th August Kazakhstan was the last member state of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) to complete the process of ratifying the agreement which enables Kyrgyzstan to join the organisation. After a delay lasting several days, on 12th August the border between Kyrgyzstan and the EEU, that is between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, was ceremonially opened and custom lifted. Thus the process of Kyrgyzstan's accession to the EEU was accomplished and the country became the fifth EEU member state (the others being Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia).

Commentary

- One reason for the delay in Kyrgyzstan's accession to the EEU was due to the fact that Astana prolonged the process of ratifying the accession agreement between Kyrgyzstan and the EEU (the agreement was signed in December 2014). This was intended to demonstrate Kazakhstan's dissatisfaction with Kyrgyzstan's membership in the organisation and to shape future relations between the two countries within the EEU. The Kazakh government is aware that the decision about the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the EEU had been made by Moscow and neither Astana nor Minsk had had the possibility to halt an enlargement of the organisation which was against their interests. Furthermore, Kazakhstan sees Kyrgyzstan as a burden to the EEU and is reluctant to subsidise the Kyrgyz economy via the EEU's financial institutions which it is a member of. Kazakhstan is the EEU's only state which has a border with Kyrgyzstan and it fears an increase in migrant workers coming from Kyrgyzstan as well as an uncontrolled influx of goods from China after customs have been lifted. This means that Astana is likely to make thorough use of EEU technical regulations in order to limit goods entering its territory from Kyrgyzstan (as it is currently doing so in its relations with Russia).
- Kazakhstan's concerns are Kyrgyzstan's hopes. Bishkek is hoping that its accession to the EEU will make life easier for Kyrgyz migrant workers in Russia and Kazakhstan and will allow Kyrgyzstan to return to the role of a hub for the distribution of Chinese goods in Central Asia. The ineffectiveness of state institutions facilitates the smuggling of goods through the Kyrgyz-Chinese border. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan's entry into the EEU will lead to a loophole in the organisation and will facilitate China's expansion, contrary to Russian expectations. .In practice, however, the lack of reliable economic data, the inefficiency of state institutions and corruption make it impossible to accurately assess results of Kyrgyzstan's accession to the EEU. In the political sphere, the accession is a token of

Bishkek's loyalty to Moscow and it strengthens the Kremlin's influence in the country. Kyrgyzstan believes that its membership in the EEU will bring real financial benefits in the form of loans and grants from the organisation (which is already taking place but on a smaller scale than Bishkek expected). These costs will be borne by all the EEU's member states, which is beneficial for Moscow.

- Kyrgyzstan's accession demonstrates the nature of the EEU's evolution towards the project of the Kremlin's political domination in the post-Soviet area at the expense of genuine economic integration and an effective institutionalisation of co-operation. The EEU's expansion to states which are economically and institutionally weak may cause delays in decision making within the organisation and hamstring it. It is quite likely that Kyrgyzstan, traditionally, will attempt to gain certain economic benefits from Russia in exchange for its support for Russian initiatives in the EEU. This approach on the part of Bishkek and the institutional weakness of new member states may disrupt the functioning of the EEU from the inside. Astana and Minsk will exploit this in order to impede further integration.