

CASA 1000: Electricity from Central Asia will be supplied to the south

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Work started on 11 May in Tajikistan on the implementation of the CASA 1000 project, which entails the construction of an electricity transmission line running from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The project is being implemented by state-controlled companies from the four countries and is intended to enable the export of as much as 5 TWh annually from the large hydroelectric power plants in Central Asia which were built in the Soviet era (Nurek in Tajikistan and Toktogul in Kyrgyzstan) to the energy-thirsty Pakistani market (Afghanistan has announced that it does not intend to import electricity for the time being). CASA 1000 is planned to be put into operation in 2018, and electricity will be exported in the summer period, when both the demand for electricity in Pakistan and its production levels in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are at their highest. The project, which will cost US\$997 million, will be financed from grants and preferential loans. The World Bank will pay half of the cost. The project is also supported, for example, by the Islamic Development Bank and the USA.

Commentary

- CASA 1000 was one of the projects initiated after the intervention in Afghanistan as part of the US geopolitical strategy for building economic and political bonds between Central and Southern Asia. Its goals included weakening Russian influence in Central Asia and stabilising Southern Asia, above all Afghanistan, through economic development. At present, the project has lost its initial geopolitical aspect. Even though it still complies with the US interests, due to reduction of American presence and interest in the region it is now of purely economic and regional significance. The country which will also benefit from building the connection, apart from those directly engaged in the project, is China, which has been engaged in an expansive economic policy in the region and is interested in keeping it stable.
- CASA 1000 is not the only energy infrastructure project directed from Central Asia running southward. A high-voltage transmission line is being built between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, and the implementation of the TAPI gas pipeline, the planning of which began in the 1990s, commenced in December 2015 (work started on the Turkmen section). The existing infrastructure enables the import of electricity to Afghanistan from Uzbekistan (high voltage line running from Termez to Kabul) and from Tajikistan (the

Sangtuda–Pol-e Khomri supplying electricity to the northern part of the country), as well as small local import from Turkmenistan and Badakhshan in Tajikistan. There are plans to combine these projects and create a power grid connecting the Central Asian and the Southern Asian countries, known as TUTAP. All the parties will benefit from electricity exports: the Central Asian countries have extra capacity in the summer, Afghanistan is electrified to a small extent (only one third of its population have access to electricity), and Pakistan, with a population of 190 million, has for years faced problems with the undersupply of electricity and energy crises in the summer period.

- The factor which prevented similar projects from being implemented in the past was the lack of stability in Afghanistan. The situation in this country is still far from stable. However, Pakistan's engagement in the project guarantees the safety necessary to carry it through. Islamabad is the main patron of the Taliban, who are fighting the government in Kabul, and the import of electricity that will make it possible to ease the energy crisis is a top priority for Pakistan. China, which has significant influence in Pakistan, is also interested in the implementation of similar projects, including transport infrastructure projects (for example, the construction of a railway running from Turkmenistan to Tajikistan via Afghanistan).