

REPUBLIC OF KOREA AND KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: PROSPECTS OF COOPERATION

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Abstract: *The main purpose of this article is to thoroughly look through the main points of cooperation progress between Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Korea, analyze it, considering different aspects of mentioned cooperation, given that such topic is severely overlooked and lacks in depth analysis, and using the obtained conclusions, try and see what prospects and predictions, maybe even proposals for future plans of cooperation, can be made.*

Keywords: *South Korea, Kyrgyz republic, cooperation, policy.*

РЕСПУБЛИКА КОРЕЯ И КЫРГЫЗСКАЯ РЕСПУБЛИКА: ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА

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Аннотация: *основная цель данной статьи состоит в тщательном рассмотрении главных моментов развития сотрудничества между Кыргызской Республикой и Республикой Корея, проанализировать их, учитывая различные аспекты упомянутого сотрудничества, а также то, что такая тема часто упускается из виду и не подвергалась глубокому анализу, и, используя полученные выводы, попытаться увидеть, какие перспективы и прогнозы сотрудничества могут быть сделаны.*

Ключевые слова: *Южная Корея, Республика Кыргызстан, сотрудничество, политика.*

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History of relations between Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Korea, despite being relatively short, shows various objectives and prospects of cooperation of two differently developed nations that started rising from the ground of severely damaged political, economic and social conditions.

Relations with South Korea are an important aspect of Kyrgyz Republic's foreign policy. Korea's priority position is determined by its increasing importance in the world and regional affairs, significant economic and demographic potential. Developing relations with this country is a necessary component of developing communications, as well as mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation.

In general, it is necessary to note the dynamic development of Kyrgyz-Korean relations based on deep mutual interest, sincerity and mutual understanding. Kyrgyzstan and Korea have signed many agreements that create a legal framework for cooperation between both countries. A significant amount of them is actively working in favor of both states.

This work is devoted to the political problems of bilateral cooperation between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Korea in the context of their development of political processes at the present stage. Political, economic and cultural relations and the process of their development are studied. The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that for the Republic of Korea, relations with Kyrgyzstan will serve to bring the Kyrgyz and Korean peoples closer together and develop all socio-political ties. A significant role in this bilateral political process was played by the fact that Kyrgyzstan has a large Korean Diaspora, which served as a kind of link between the two countries. In this regard, Kyrgyzstan is interested in studying the economy, history and culture of Korea.

In the turn of the 21st century, the relationship between South Korea and Kyrgyzstan shifted from that of a refugee seeking asylum in times of war to a mutually beneficial relationship seeking socio-political and economic exchanges involving both of the nations. Recent developments have also seen Kyrgyz students and youths visiting Korea seeking cultural exchanges and educational opportunities, wherein Kyrgyzstan began to consider Korea as a “model of success in transforming the



economy”. Overall, past and present developments between Korea and Kyrgyzstan are still very much in a state of development; nevertheless, resources and qualities unique to Kyrgyzstan and Korea alike can be interpreted as promising prospects for both countries in the 21st century. Although the trade volume between the two countries is small, political exchanges continue to take place. The characteristic of bilateral exchanges is the nature of exchanges of existing experience and technological development. Kyrgyz Republic has received, and continues to do so, various help of Korean experts and more advanced Korean technology in the necessary fields. Such help is an undeniably useful asset for Kyrgyz further developmental progress.

The modern-day Republic of Kyrgyzstan manifested in 1992 with its declaration of independence from the USSR. The Kyrgyz departure from USSR was a landmark event carrying several important consequences which would serve as the foundation for all subsequent Korean-Kyrgyz relations. First, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan began to pursue an independent foreign policy with its transition from a communist to a democratic government². Though Korean-Kyrgyz relations improved significantly with both parties participating in a mutually beneficial relationship, financial ties between the two countries have not solidified as significantly as that of Korea and Uzbekistan or Korea and Kazakhstan. One of the key reasons for this may be that Kyrgyzstan is relatively deprived of natural resources compared to its neighboring CIS countries; whereas both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan feature rich deposits of natural ore, the only prominent resource Kyrgyzstan naturally produces is gold. It comes as no surprise that mining rights for gold in Kyrgyzstan is not only highly demanding compared to other forms of economic investment (infrastructure, professional manpower, community relationships) but competitive as well. It may be worth noting that the two Kyrgyz revolutions in 2005 and 2010 may have also undermined the fostering of Korean investments securing a foundation in Kyrgyzstan: political stability was only achieved in the December of 2011 after Almazbek Atambaev became president.

Migration processes also present a problem, given their often illegal nature. A significant change in the situation in the migration sphere has been the emergence of



various institutions and organizations — state, international, and non-governmental — that deal with migration issues. Recognition of the emergence of new subjects of interaction and development of cooperation between them is one of the conditions for solving migration problems. In this regard, Kyrgyz-Korean relations are no exception. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, there has been mainly labor migration between the two countries, mostly illegal, when citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic began to travel to Korea in search of a better life.

The Republic of Korea is the most beneficial state for cooperation in the diversification processes of Kyrgyz Republic's manufacturing and production spheres. In this regard, there are highly beneficial prospects of expanding cooperation in trade, investment, infrastructure development, technological progress, ICT, agriculture, encouraging the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, education, healthcare and medicine in order to diversify the economies of both countries.

Trade and economic cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Korea is one of the most important aspects of beneficial relations between the two countries. Currently the main exported items to the Republic of Korea are goods of the radio-electronic and chemical industries, textiles and several types of agricultural products. At the same time, the Korean side is interested in increasing the export of agricultural products, wheat, and legumes. Hence, in order to improve mutually beneficial trade, it is necessary to appropriately adjust the mechanism for applying anti-dumping and countervailing duties and protective measures as soon as possible [1].

Nevertheless, it is possible that in the current crisis, Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Korea may also need more drastic decisions, providing for the initiation of a number of administrative restrictions for the period of structural transformations aimed at protecting domestic production and creating preferential terms for the sale of their own products.

Also, the problem that needs underlining is an absence of direct transportation routes between Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Korea. In order to improve cooperation, there is a need to establish direct flights between the Kyrgyz Republic and



the Republic of Korea. A direct flight route between Bishkek and Seoul will significantly improve bilateral relations.

With the growth of global economic scale, the investment industry is expected to expand. The Republic of Korea is expected to focus on investment policy in the near future. It should be noted: there are very frequent cases when it has suffered from insufficient analysis of non-targeted investment, which was carried out without specifying the objects of capital injection. The basis of economic theory is profit first. It would be beneficial for each of the parties if the relations developed on the basis of an investment that corresponds to the theory of the market, and would serve as a fertilizer for the progress of mutual benefit.

Also, Kyrgyz Republic is in the process of creating the most favorable investment climate. Currently there are more than 200 joint Kyrgyz-Korean enterprises operating in the Republic, which mainly cover the sphere of trade and services. Recently, there has been an active promotion of Kyrgyz-Korean relations. Quotas have been allocated for Kyrgyzstan citizens to work freely in South Korea, and grant assistance is being provided. The necessity to revive trade and economic cooperation between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Korea was also noted. Korea has repeatedly stressed that the economy of Kyrgyz Republic is currently at its recovering stage and our country welcomes the arrival of South Korean investors. It was said that Korean investors can find their niches in the Kyrgyz economy in such sectors as hydropower, mining and tourism. It is also worth noting that in 2019 the delegation from Kyrgyz Republic visited the “K-Water” Korean Water Corporation and met with Mr. Lee Hak-Suu the President of the corporation. The Ambassador of Kyrgyz Republic expressed interest of the Kyrgyzstan in cooperation in the field of hydropower, water supply, irrigation and the use of new technologies in water resources management. The interlocutors discussed the possibility of the Korean side participating in the implementation of the Taza-Suu project in Kyrgyzstan. During the meeting, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the National Institute for Strategic Studies of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Korean Water Resources Corporation “K-Water”, which will



allow the exchange of experience and knowledge in the field of water resources management [4].

Memorandum of understanding was also signed between Kyrgyz republic and the Republic of Korea in the field of agricultural sciences and technologies. Within the framework of this Memorandum, the Center of Korea Project on International Agriculture (KOPIA) in Kyrgyzstan will be established, which will promote cooperation in the field of agricultural research, capacity building of Kyrgyzstan in crop and seed production, cultivating seeds adapted to local conditions and generally raising agricultural productivity [3].

Despite the fact that Kyrgyz Republic has become an object of economic interest of Republic of Korea primarily due to trade and economic interests and incentives, such activity may also be noted as a possibility that the leadership of the Republic of Korea is striving to acquire sources of influence on the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan, competing with other states.

In April 2019, Deputy Prime Minister Genish Rajakov Kirghiz met with Lee Geon-ki, president of the Korea Overseas Construction Association, and representatives of major Korean companies, and discussed priorities and prospects for joint investment cooperation. The deputy prime minister has stressed that Korea is a major trading and investment partner in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan to the Asia-Pacific region, and noted that the government is taking certain steps to improve the investment environment for foreign investors. It also expressed interest in Korean businesses, including urban and regional development, hydroelectric power generation, mining, industry, transportation, hotel complex construction, and tourism facilities. Further development in the humanitarian sphere is perceived as another essential element of the relationships between Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Korea. The residence of the Korean diaspora in Kyrgyzstan is exponentially growing larger, which can be perceived as another reason for the necessity of strengthening cooperation between the two states. Also, there is a frequent dialog between Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Korea concerning labor migrants problems. Both parties agreed to work together to enhance the potential of the Kyrgyz Republic in the field of labor migration,



and also discussed the employment opportunities of Kyrgyz citizens in new labor markets in the Republic of Korea [5].

Close cooperation in humanitarian sphere, as well as spheres of education, science and art, presents paramount importance for maintenance of a relationship built on tolerance and mutual understanding of each state's cultures, traditions and overall societal behavior, assuring friendly relationship not in sole political view, but in citizens' mindview as well. This year in May the Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Republic of Korea, Dinara Kemelova met with the delegation of the Asian Culture Center of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea, headed by Director of the Department of International Cooperation and Research of the ACC Lee Chel Woon. During the meeting, the parties discussed the possibility of implementing a joint project on the cultural development of the Kyrgyz Republic through ODA (official development assistance). The parties agreed on the need to preserve the cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz Republic with the assistance of the Korean Asian Culture Center. Given the importance of regional development and digitalization of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Korean side proposes to digitalize the tangible and intangible heritage of the Kyrgyz people. The project is important for preserving the cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz Republic, promoting the Kyrgyz culture abroad. Also, at the end of the meeting, the ACC presented the Kyrgyz fairy tales translated into Korean, Russian and English to the Embassy [6]. Such close cooperation guarantees positive influence in other spheres of intergovernmental relations. This year in September the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Republic of Korea Dinara Kemelova met with representatives of South Korean companies and organizations for discussing the issues on the fight against coronavirus, the implementation of projects in the field of health and energy. During the meeting was noted that the situation with coronavirus might require consideration of the possibility of establishing medical products and masks manufacturing plants in Kyrgyzstan. Korean side also noted the great interest in Kyrgyzstan and expressed the willingness to assist in attracting investment by Korean companies to Kyrgyz Republic. The idea of establishing ties between Kyrgyz and



Korean companies through the organization of business forums was also highly supported [7].

In general, Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Korea are quite active in their cooperation, and the Republic of Korea considers Kyrgyzstan as an equal partner with which trade and economic relations have reached sufficient index so far, which is also of high importance to Korean enterprise from the point of view of a strategic perspective. It should also be noted that despite the fact that Kyrgyzstan has become an object of South Korean economic interest primarily due to trade and economic interests and incentives, it cannot be excluded that the leadership of the Republic of Korea seeks to acquire sources of influence on Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy, competing in this with other states.

At present, it is obvious that the further development of Kyrgyz-Korean relations will contribute to the establishment of Kyrgyz Republic as a full-fledged partner on the global political playing field and its global and regional processes of interaction and cooperation will enter a new stage.

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