



Afghanistan Reconnected

Advocacy and Outreach Mission to
Tajikistan; Dushanbe, October 12-14, 2015



Businesses Work for Stable Afghanistan and Its Neighbours

The EastWest Institute (EWI), with the support of the Embassy of Germany in Dushanbe, brought a delegation of senior political and business practitioners from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Turkey to Dushanbe.

EWI Vice-President for Regional Security, Ambassador Martin Fleischer, led the delegation, which met and discussed with high-ranking Tajik government officials on ways to enhance cross-border economic cooperation with Afghanistan and the entire region. The mission to Dushanbe was part of a series of visits to the region, aimed at advocating policy recommendations towards reforms to unlock the region's economic potential with relevant decision-makers and ultimately contribute to a secure and stable Afghanistan.

The mission to Dushanbe allowed EWI's group of senior experts, along with top-level Tajik interlocutors, to take stock of the first three-quarters of the year of Afghanistan's post-2014 development, focusing on the challenges and opportunities for Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors.

The mission took place at a time when significant challenges continue to face Afghanistan, affecting not just the country itself, but the greater Central Asian neighborhood. As assessed by one Afghan expert, "The ultimate goal of extremists is not just Afghanistan but an Islamic state in Central Asia which, like in Iraq and Syria, transgresses and ignores state borders." The crumbling security situation in the

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region poses a significant hurdle in continuing economic development. While the Taliban regains ground, a branch of the Islamic State emerges in Afghanistan and national reconciliation progresses slowly, Afghanistan and its neighbors remain far away from a common approach toward countering violent extremism.

Despite these setbacks in security and a lack of regional coordination in regards to extremism, substantial progress has been made on some projects involving cross-border economic cooperation, such as on CASA 1000. These types of projects have figured in EWI's policy recommendations throughout the duration of the "Afghanistan Reconnected" program.

While in Dushanbe, EWI forged a partnership with the Center for Strategic Research under the president of the Republic of Tajikistan. In a workshop with the Center, the EWI delegation had the opportunity to have in-depth discussions about Tajik perspectives on security and cooperation with Afghanistan. These discussions indicated that, despite the already existing electricity export from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, Tajikistan is reluctant to become directly involved in the stabilization process of its neighbor. Rather, the country relies on regional structures such as the Shanghai Cooperation



Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization for its security vis-à-vis the growing instability in Afghanistan.

However, as **H.E. Minister Sherali Gadzhalzoda, Minister of Transport**, pointed out, Tajikistan has an interest in becoming a transit hub in the region. This transformation is requiring Tajikistan to undertake significant reforms, which are made necessary by the country's past in the USSR, during which time goods were delivered only from the north. To facilitate trade from other directions, the Tajik government is planning major infrastructure projects and is open to regional trade and transport

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agreements. In particular, the Minister expressed hopes for the extension to Tajikistan of the Afghanistan Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APPTA). The minister also referred to the difficulty in further developing the international air transport sector in Tajikistan; the relatively small number of passengers flying in and out of the country reduces profit margins for potential investors. However, thanks to the support of the French government, the Dushanbe airport was recently upgraded to become an international hub, allowing for Tajikistan to serve as a connection during longer-haul flights across the region.



instead of genuine cross-border cooperation.

On the other hand, Fleischer warned against slowing down efforts towards regional economic integration in light of the worsening security situation. He also appealed to the Tajik and neighboring governments to lower visa barriers, as they clearly impede cross-border trade.

“Visa regimes,” Fleischer said, “will mostly keep those people out that you want in, namely traders and tourists. But smugglers and terrorists will come in elsewhere over the border anyway.”

Through the Afghanistan Reconnected Process, EWI has established a network of high-level representatives from governments, parliaments, and the private sector from Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, China, the U.A.E., the U.S., and Europe, as well

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as from regional and international organizations. The group of eminent experts has been meeting since 2013 in Istanbul, Islamabad, New Delhi and Berlin to determine and promote opportunities for economic growth both in Afghanistan and in the region, complementing the “Heart of Asia” or “Istanbul Process.” The Afghanistan Reconnected Process, also known under the name of “Abu Dhabi Process”, is co-financed by the governments of the United Arab Emirates and Germany. The next step in the process is an advocacy and outreach mission to Kabul, Afghanistan in November 2015.

The current phase of the Afghanistan Reconnected Process, named “Businesses Take Action to Unlock Trade in the Region”, will conclude mid-2016. However, it is likely that Afghanistan’s security and economy will need the attention of the international community for a number of years to come.

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