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## **Uzbekistan's multivector foreign policy: balancing Russian and Chinese influence**

Under the new President Mirziyoyev Uzbekistan has undertaken a proactive approach in foreign policy, based on a profitable multivector strategy aimed to strengthen cooperation with both Russia and China, also attempting to balance their geopolitical and strategic interest on the country.

Between April and May 2017 Mirziyoyev visited Russia and China, enhancing bilateral relations with these two regional geopolitical superpowers which will allow Tashkent to benefit of important investments to modernize national economy, to develop transport infrastructures, to upgrade military capacity.

During the summit in Moscow, even if Uzbekistan and Russia signed investments and economic cooperation deals for \$16 dollars, Mirziyoyev reiterated the Uzbek traditional approach in foreign policy, refusing to join the regional organization backed by Russia in the security field - the Collective Security Treaty Organization - and in the economic field (the Eurasian Economic Union). In addition to the Russian engagement to develop Uzbek energy sector and to upgrade the legal protection of Uzbek workers in Russia, the cooperation in the military sphere represents one of the most significant steps. As a matter of fact, the Russian Duma ratified the military-technical cooperation agreement between the two sides, which was signed in November 2016: following this deal, Tashkent has expressed interest to buy Russian military helicopters, also envisaging the creation of joint centres to repair military airplanes and tanks.

In May Uzbek President visited China in order to sign a bilateral deal with President Xi Jinping as well as to attend the important conference on the Belt and Road initiative. During the bilateral summit Uzbekistan and China signed nearly 100 deals worth a total of \$20 billion, which legitimize China's role as the main trade partner of Uzbekistan. In 2016 bilateral trade turnover hits \$4,2 billions and both countries aim to reach \$10 billion in the future.

China invested several billion of dollars in Uzbekistan, helping the country in the process of modernization and in the economy's diversification. The realization of the Angren-Pap railway - which connects the Ferghana Valley (Eastern Uzbekistan) with other Uzbek regions - represents the key project: this railway is a segment of a larger OBOR project which aims to realize a transregional railway from China, crossing Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan before to reach Afghanistan.

The Sino-Russian mutual interests to deepen cooperation with Tashkent support Uzbek ambition to play a new significant geopolitical role in the region: moreover, the scheduled official visit in Washington (September 2017) will allow the Uzbek President to further implement this multivector

strategy in foreign policy, benefiting of lucrative strategic gains due to this tripartite geopolitical competition.

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