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**Research project:** Russian development aid in Kyrgyzstan

## **Summary**

There are multiple actors providing development assistance for countries of Central Asia. One of the biggest aid recipient countries is Kyrgyzstan where varying actors from the US and the EU to China are supporting different projects aiming for development of Kyrgyzstan's society and economy. One of the countries involved in this kind of projects in Kyrgyzstan is Russia, which has re-emerged as a development aid provider, and which deals with different sectors of development especially through its development aid agency Rossotrudnichestvo. Rossotrudnichestvo is carrying out different activities in Kyrgyzstan, many of them focused on Russian language teaching. Additionally, there is also economic cooperation, conducted especially in the framework of the Russian-Kyrgyz Development Fund that was established with the agreement between the government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation in 2014. The fund's aim is to promote economic cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Russia and to modernize and develop Kyrgyz economy, mostly with different projects related to infrastructure, energy and transportation. In 2016, for example, the fund was involved in 569 projects that were worth of \$167 million.

Officially, Russia claims that it does not interfere in recipient countries internal affairs. The 2014 Concept of Russian Federation's State Policy in the Area of International Development Assistance puts an emphasis on Millennium Development Goals, and lists things such as poverty reduction, disaster relief, and the development of trade and economic partnerships as a major goals of its activities as a donor. However, at the same time, other kind of goals are also mentioned: the aid is an instrument to "create a belt of good neighborliness along the Russian national borders", and to "promote an unbiased attitude to the Russian Federation". While the other donors in Kyrgyzstan are emphasizing things such as good governance, democracy and poverty eradication, seems Russian approach to foreign aid in Kyrgyzstan more focused on its own interests and prestige in the recipient country.

## **The topic**

Kyrgyzstan is one of the most foreign aid dependent countries in Central Asia. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the country has continuously received more than \$9 billion in foreign loans and grants for development. In the last few years, especially China's projects related to its Belt and Road -initiative have had a major importance for Kyrgyzstan and its development. Historically, however, Russia has been the dominant power in Central Asia, and it has traditionally had somewhat effective Central Asian policy to protect its interests in Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states. This policy has included various instruments, and economy and economic assistance has been one of them. While the situation has been getting more difficult due to China and other actors competing for influence, Russia has managed to re-emerge as a donor: since 2010, Russian aid has increased 300%, and Kyrgyzstan as a Central Asian nation is extremely important recipient of that aid. In 2015, Kyrgyzstan also joined to the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, and until the recent days, there have been ongoing discussions about construction of the second Russian military base to the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, it is undeniable that Russia keeps having some sort of influence on Kyrgyzstan.

Russian foreign policy towards Central Asian republics is a widely researched topic, often revolving around some sort of power relation between Russia and states such as Kyrgyzstan. Development assistance as an instrument of those relations is a theme not so well researched. In the environment of clear Russian influence, there does not exist any kind of understanding of side effects of Russian financial assistance or institutions such as the Russian-Kyrgyz Development Fund. There have been arguments, presented for example by Makarychev and Simao (2014), that in other places, such as in different African countries, Russia has clearly funded programs that are suitable for its own priorities and goals, and it has had a lot of influence on policies in those countries. In those cases from other parts of the world, development assistance has been a rather efficient way to use power, and the aim of my research is to see whether the situation is similar in Kyrgyzstan where Russia has traditionally been some sort of powerful actor.

### **Research question**

Main question: How does Russian aid differ from other donors' activities in Kyrgyzstan? What does it tell about Russian policies towards Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia?

Working questions:

- What kind of development assistance is Russia offering for Kyrgyzstan?
- What kind of projects are supported?
- What kind of conditions Russia puts for its support?
- How will Russian aid change the Kyrgyz society/economy?
- Are these changes economic/social/political?