

March 17, 2000

APPENDIX C: TAJIKISTAN

Background

I spent January 24-25th and February 16-17th in Tajikistan. The first two days were spent in Dushanbe. I then made a separate trip to Khojand via Tashkent. I met with leaders of seven universities, a former Minister of Education now adviser to the President, and officials of the Regional Education Department in Khojand. I benefited from the advice and encouragement of US Ambassador Robert P. Finn, strong support from USAID representative Peter Downs, and substantive guidance on the program from USAID professional staff aide Max Narzibekov. Sayora Khalimova, USAID Administrative Assistant, organized my schedule. The external meetings were as follows:

Monday, January 24::

Tajik State National University Professor Yashit YULDASKOV, Director, Department of Finance and Banking.

Russian-Tajik Slavic University Nabichov Nasirovich NACIROV, Dean of the Economics Faculty, and a group of about 30 faculty and students.

Tajik Technical University Alfia Dadahanova AHROROVA, Vice Rector, and group of eight faculty members.

Tuesday, January 25:

Office of the President Munira INAYOTOVA, Senior Adviser, formerly Minister of Education.

Tajik State National University Tavarali Boboevich GANIEV, Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management; G.B. BOBOSADIKOVA, Deputy to the Dean and President of the Management and Marketing Development Center; other faculty, and advanced students.

Technological University Pulat A. PULATOV, Rector, and then with Vice Rector and group of perhaps 30 faculty and students.

Wednesday, February 16 (Khojand):

Tajik Technical University (Khojand Branch) Abdugaffor K. KADIROV, Rector, Deputy Rector, and colleagues.

Khojand State University Rano RAHMANATOVA, Vice Rector for International Affairs.

Regional Government of Khojand area Khairiniso MAVLONOVA and Khairiniso TEMIROVA, senior education officials.

Tajik Institute of Management (Kairakkum) Yusuf F. MAJIDOV, Rector, and colleagues.

Thursday, February 17:

Tajik State University of Law, Business, and Politics Khamidjon PULATOV, Rector.

Analysis

Higher education in Tajikistan has problems endemic to the region--limited resources, insufficiently updated curricula, corruption, a weak economic base, etc. But they are compounded by civil conflict, which has exacerbated both poverty and isolation. It is in Dushanbe that I heard the lowest figure for professors' salaries--7000 Tajik rubles a month (less than five dollars) at the Faculty of Finance and Accounting of Tajik State University. There is also isolation caused by geography and national boundaries. The north of the country seems less security-threatened (I did not have to travel with an armed guard there) but it is separated from Dushanbe by high mountains and from Tashkent, its traditional big-city neighbor, by the Uzbek border and tense bilateral security relations.

Given these stark circumstances, what was impressive was not that there were deep problems. Rather it was the fact that there were, in both the capital and the north, institutions that were not just surviving but innovating and progressing. Moreover, to judge by an interview with a senior education policy official, the marketization of higher education is widely viewed as inevitable, and in some ways desirable. So government is, at minimum, not an active force against innovation.

Most interesting, and it appears most successful, has been the quasi-private Technological University, a young institution which has, by its account, been able to draw on business earnings to pay decent faculty salaries and computerize more than most. It was founded in 1990, and offers the traditional 5-year undergraduate degree. It has campuses in Khojand and south Tajikistan in addition to the main one in Dushanbe, and also some lycees and lower schools, where economics games are said to be introduced in the fifth grade. It features such innovations as exams-taken-by-computer. (A student said she liked this because it eliminated faculty bias--the computer graded you without knowing

who you were.) Fifty percent of the 1700 students pay tuition, and 30 percent are supported by the state budget. The remaining 20 percent are supported by what the Rector called their gold reserve, money accumulated from grants and enterprises (such as textile production) run by technical parts of the university. (The government is supposed to pay 50 percent of total university costs; it actually pays 15-20 percent.)

Technological University has also been successful in building some international connections, including the Winrock Foundation and the University of Nebraska in the United States. Forty percent of the students are enrolled in one of the economic specializations: International Economic Relations; Banking; Accounting and Audit; or Economics and Management of Enterprises. There is an English language requirement for admission, and nine applicants for every place, I was told.

A smaller, also impressive institution is the Tajik Institute of Management (TIM), in Kairakkum, thirty minutes drive from Khojand. Founded in 1995, it was the first Tajik private institution of higher education to receive a government license. Its 185 students are bussed in daily from that city, I was told, and back at the end of the day (having class out of town minimizes distractions). It graduated 19 students at its first (1999) commencement, survivors from the 34 originally admitted. (The philosophy is to give students a tough time initially with the recognition that some will not make it.) The TIM team is active in Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) competitions, and the Rector is a CIS country coordinator of the program. When asked about a possible Master's program, he said he wants to make a success of the bachelor's program before thinking about such things. He has successfully recruited teachers from local universities (at triple the Khojand State salary) but sees an ongoing need to improve teaching quality, and would like help in doing so.

Among the general universities in Dushanbe, the Tajik-Russian Slavonic University appears the strongest. Like its sister in Bishkek, it is the product of an inter-state agreement, with Russia paying the salaries, which run at least five times those at Tajik State. This has allowed it to build, rapidly, a relatively strong faculty and reputation. It has also allowed it to operate without paying students--unique among the major Tajik universities today. It has about 650 economics and management students (323 full-time), who enroll in one of four specialties: management, finance/credit, accounting/audit, and economic information systems. Slavonic university is clearly interested in USAID support, and its economics faculty handed me a ten-page draft proposal aimed at strengthening their curriculum.

By contrast, Tajik State National University is poor and deeply troubled. But it has an entrepreneurial dean of economics and management, and houses two centers: for academic publication and business training, respectively. Tajik Technical University is working to connect economics and engineering expertise, with its main headquarters in Dushanbe and a branch in Khojand. Khojand State University is large (with 1000

students under its economics faculty) and generally resource poor--professors note that they used to use libraries in Tashkent, but now find it hard to do so. The Tajik State University of Law, Business, and Politics, also in Khojand, is likewise large with an ambitious new Rector. He was the only academic leader visited in any country to give the author of this report a certificate declaring me an honorary professor on his faculty. He did not, however, make a substantive case for US assistance to applied economics education.

Recommendations

Tajikistan is a country USAID/CAR wants to help, but the security situation renders assistance difficult. It prevents an on-the-ground presence. It weakens the economy. And it reduces connections between Tajiks and other Central Asian peoples. Higher education may be one area where aid can do some useful things, if appropriate partners can be found.

Aid to Specific Institutions

The strongest current institutions in the economics/business area are Technological University and Tajik Institute of Management. They have found (very different) formulas for viability in an unfriendly environment, and seem likely to grow in strength--probably in absolute terms, almost certainly relative to their competition. Of the two, TIM might benefit particularly from training of young core faculty, given the rector's interest in improving the quality of instruction. And Technological University might be a focal point for cooperation in pulling together internet teaching resources, given its relatively advanced degree of computerization.

If USAID/CAR wants to give special priority to applied economics education in Tajikistan, it could also consider aid to discrete projects--like Slavonic University's curriculum development project or the publication and training centers at Tajik State.

Regional Programs

Tajikistan is particularly cut off from its neighbors to the north; hence it stands to benefit disproportionately from regional programs if it can be effectively engaged. For example, only one educational institution there (Tajik Technical University) is a member of

CAMAN.¹ A special effort should therefore be made to engage Tajik institutions in the regional initiatives recommended here, specifically:

The proposed Central Asian Economics and Business Educational Resource Center

The existing Central Asian Foundation for Management Development (CAMAN)

Fellowships for graduates of other institutions to enter KIMEP masters programs

Regional competitions in Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), for student and faculty best essays, etc.

Practical research on local economic realities

Support of economic policy study groups, or economic journalism

Underwriting contributions to the Central Asian Resource Center might also be a constructive means of helping the main Dushanbe universities (Slavonic, Tajik State, Tajik Technical) strengthen their curricula and their capacities to conduct and disseminate research.

1.1. TIM's rector said he was reluctant to join because it was hard enough. TIM's rector said he was reluctant to join because it was hard on his program, without having to conform to a third set of (Central Asian) standards as well.