

## CONTEMPORARY TRENDS OF UZBEKISTAN'S REGIONAL POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This article analyzes good neighborly relations and pragmatic regional policy of Uzbekistan in Central Asia over the past five years. In particular, the article notes that the consultative meeting of the leaders of the Central Asian countries served as a platform for a friendly political dialogue between the countries of the region, a platform for further deepening ties. According to the author, the regional policy of Uzbekistan not only increased the international prestige of the country, but also made Central Asia a place of stable and close cooperation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Uzbekistan, Central Asia, Consultative Meeting, sustainable development, foreign policy, regional cooperation*

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### INTRODUCTION

The fundamental changes taking place in Uzbekistan over the past five years are being assessed as the beginning of a new era in the history of the country, a stage of growth and development.

The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev has consistently developed fundamentally new political approaches and their mechanisms to raise democratic reforms in the country to a higher level. The Action Strategy for the five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021 is a vivid example of this. [1]

The domestic policy pursued on the basis of new views and approaches, as a logical continuation of it, is also reflected in the foreign policy of the country. In this regard, pursuing an open, pragmatic and practical foreign policy, strengthening close relations of friendship and cooperation with the countries of the world, especially with neighboring countries, are identified as priorities of our country's foreign policy.

One of the important aspects of the new stage of development of Uzbekistan is the harmonious combination of domestic and foreign policy. Today, no state, no nation can develop on its own. The announcement of the Central Asian states as a priority in the foreign policy of Uzbekistan has become an important geopolitical process.

Conceptually, Central Asia is a region with a strong civilizational heritage, huge resource potential, excellent transport and communication capabilities. The processes taking place here have a major impact on the security situation of the entire continent. Therefore, it is impossible to "divide" the cultural and historical heritage of the region. Common history and religion, single water arteries and transport corridors are the common property of the peoples of Central Asia. That is why the main goal in the region is to reduce the potential for conflict, build trust and establish mutually beneficial relations.

On June 22, 2018, at the initiative of the President of our country, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled "Strengthening regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in Central Asia" was of historical significance as it

laid a solid foundation for the further strengthening of the style. The resolution recognizes the important role of Central Asian states in ensuring peace, stability and sustainable development in the region, as well as strengthening regional and international cooperation. [2]

## **DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

In recent years, the Fifth Priority of the Action Strategy has been pursuing an active foreign policy aimed at developing open, practical and mutually beneficial relations with Central Asian countries. The first official visits of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev were made to the countries of the region. During the visits, Uzbekistan demonstrated its readiness for constructive dialogue on all painful issues in the region. Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan Strategic partnership with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan has been strengthened with a new legal framework.

As a result, in a short period of time, a completely new political environment has been established in relations with neighboring countries, and the level of political trust has been further enhanced. New foundations have been laid for the development of bilateral trade and economic relations, and the process of negotiations with neighboring countries on the delimitation and demarcation of state borders and the solution of water and energy problems has intensified. [3]

In his speeches at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly in September 2017, at the UN-sponsored international conference “Central Asia: common history and common future, cooperation for sustainable development and progress” in Samarkand in November 2017 President Sh. Mirziyoyev proposed a format of regular informal Consultations of Central Asian leaders, which do not set a separate agenda, in order to raise efforts to jointly address pressing issues of the region to a whole new level. [4]

The initiative was supported by countries in the region. One of the new key aspects of regional foreign policy is the holding of Consultative Meetings of Central Asian leaders, which is undoubtedly a major foreign policy event.

The first such meeting was held on March 15, 2018 in Astana, and it launched a new phase of regional cooperation. The second meeting of Central Asian leaders on November 29, 2019 in Tashkent was a real turning point in regional diplomacy. The results of the summit and the subsequent course of events showed that the dialogue has moved to a new format. During the meeting, the parties stressed that they are far from the idea of creating a new international organization, as well as do not want to direct their actions against the interests of other countries. President Sh. Mirziyoyev proposed the creation of a “barrier-free” Central Asia, which would remove barriers at the borders, formalities at checkpoints, and would not impede the free movement of people and goods. [5]

On August 6, 2021, the third Summit of Central Asian Leaders was held in Turkmenistan. At the next summit of the consultative meeting, the initiatives put forward by the President of Uzbekistan had several directions. Including:

- Formation of a “new model of economic cooperation” in the region, based on the requirements of modern economic relations;
- Transformation of the transport system into an important transit hub of the Eurasian continent that meets modern requirements;
- ensuring consistency of efforts to form a common energy space;
- solving problems in providing the population with food in a pandemic;
- coordination and mutual assistance in combating the pandemic;
- constant focus on environmental issues, expanding cooperation in this area;

- Bringing Central Asia's relations with other major regions of the world to a new level;
- Implementation of a number of cultural and humanitarian projects to educate young people in the spirit of patriotism, respect for national and universal values;
- Increasing the exchange of domestic tourists, development and implementation of a joint program "One trip – the whole region";
- "People's diplomacy", the broad involvement of parliaments, civil society institutions and the media, as well as the support of contacts aimed at women's dialogue, global goals in the field of gender equality. [6]

At the event in Turkmenistan, the proposals of the leaders of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, the signing of the Treaty of Friendship of the President of Kazakhstan in Central Asia in the XXI century were of great importance. As part of the consultation meeting, such actions show that the environment of good neighborliness and trust in the region is developing despite all the difficulties.

The activities of the consultative meeting reflected the essence of all the events taking place in the current situation in Central Asia, that is, the Renaissance is being revived in a new form and in a new context. In addition, there are currently dramatic changes in the minds and worldviews of the people of the region. As a result, new directions have emerged in the political, economic and social spheres, which call on countries, scientists and entrepreneurs to cooperate. In this regard, the Consultative Meeting helped to understand the essence and role of new trends in the foreign policy of Central Asian states. [7]

The consultative meeting is helping to create a completely new political, business, economic and humanitarian space in Central Asia. At the same time, mutual trust, brotherhood and friendship are deepening in the region instead of the previous "struggle for leadership". [8]

In practice, the Consultative Meeting demonstrates that cooperation has its place as a mechanism and conditions for decision-making based on the identification of drivers of development and is an event that has a significant impact on the development of the region. This consultative meeting provides a convenient and effective opportunity for dialogue on the formation of a "new model" of the strategy of sustainable development of Central Asia as a form of "regional dialogue".

The direct participation of the heads of state in such an event, despite any difficulties, confirmed the practicality, necessity and prospects of this regional dialogue.

Thus, the practice and results since the consultation meeting show that these processes are of a constant nature and will be of great importance not only for the future of Uzbekistan, but also for the entire Central Asian region, including Afghanistan. The consultative meeting created the conditions for a new dialogue platform to seek a constructive solution to the problems in the region without the involvement of a third party, without any claims, confrontational moods and mutual alienation.

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Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region has reached a new level. In 2017 alone, the President of Uzbekistan held 16 high-level meetings, 18 telephone conversations, three state and two working visits of the head of our state. In 2018, high-level visits were made between the countries of

the region. Following the first state visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Tajikistan, a statement on strengthening friendship and neighborliness of strategic importance and an agreement on separate territories of the Uzbek-Tajik border were signed. During the official visit of the President of Turkmenistan to Uzbekistan, the parties reaffirmed their readiness to fully use the transit potential of both countries to increase the volume of cargo to European countries, the Middle East and Asia.

23 high-level visits and 12 high-level visits by government agencies on foreign policy and economic activities in 2020 to bring the relations with the countries of the Central Asian region to a new level in terms of friendship, good neighborliness and strategic partnership in all areas. measures were taken. In this process, “people’s diplomacy” was observed to be very active in practice. In particular, more than 90 different meetings, conferences, video conferences and other similar events were held with the participation of people’s representatives - scientists and artists, cultural and religious figures, businessmen and youth, tourism and sports organizations, public associations and NGOs. In 2021, an active regional foreign policy will be pursued. In particular, on February 16-18, 2021, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan A. Kamilov paid a working visit to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The first state visit of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic S. Japarov was also held.

In 2017-2019, trade turnover with Central Asian countries will grow by an average of more than 50% annually, reaching 5.2 billion dollars. According to the results of 2020, despite the global pandemic, the total trade turnover of Uzbekistan with Central Asian countries will reach 5 billion dollars.

In particular, the share of Central Asian countries in the total foreign trade turnover of Uzbekistan increased from 12.4% in 2019 to 13.6% in 2020. In the total foreign trade turnover of Uzbekistan in the region, the share of Kazakhstan was 61%, Kyrgyzstan - 18.2%, Turkmenistan - 10.6% and Tajikistan - 10.2%.

Such an improvement in trade and economic relations between the countries of Central Asia has helped to increase the investment attractiveness of the region. In particular, between 2017 and 2020, more than 300 agreements were signed between Uzbekistan and the countries of the region, as well as agreements and contracts worth about \$ 75 billion.

Despite the threat of a global pandemic, active cooperation between the countries of Central Asia has continued. Countries in the region have been providing social assistance to each other since the early days of the spread of coronavirus infection. Uzbekistan has repeatedly sent humanitarian aid to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In response, our neighbors, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, have provided humanitarian assistance to restore the Sardoba Reservoir. Also, in December 2020, with the support of Uzbekistan, a 200-bed infectious diseases hospital was commissioned in Kyrgyzstan, fully equipped with the necessary medical equipment and furniture.

In addition, during the pandemic, the exchange of information and experience in the field of medicine in the fight against coronavirus, the provision of mutual humanitarian assistance, the establishment of a continuous movement of goods across borders. This has allowed the region to have a lower incidence of coronavirus infection and its resulting deaths than other countries in the world.

An important political event was the signing of the Declaration on Allied Relations between the two countries on December 6, 2021 at the end of the state visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev to Kazakhstan. The document reflects the vital and long-term national interests of the two brotherly countries, the goal of full realization of the potential of the multifaceted partnership.

The parties also expressed their desire to work closely in the field of foreign policy, promoting

mutual interests and the idea of regional rapprochement in order to ensure peace and stability in Central Asia. The Presidents agreed to work purposefully to improve the format of the Central Asian Summit of Heads of State in order to make full use of the existing potential on the basis of strict respect for the interests of the participating States.

In short, since 2016, during the presidency of President Sh. Mirziyoyev, many problems with Central Asian countries have been resolved. Uzbekistan's foreign economic and political potential has increased, and the attitude of neighboring countries to our country has changed radically. The stability and solidarity of the Central Asian states, firstly, contributes to the well-being of the people, and secondly, to increasing the investment attractiveness of the region and creating ample opportunities for cooperation with foreign partners and investors.

## **CONCLUSION**

Uzbekistan's current foreign policy, in particular, good neighborliness and pragmatic regional policy, not only enhances the country's international prestige, but also serves to make Central Asia a place of stable and great cooperation.

As a result of regular meetings of Central Asian leaders, a friendly political dialogue platform has been established between the countries of the region. It has become a platform for deepening trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian ties.

Uzbekistan is directly interested in the transformation of the Central Asian region into a region of stability, sustainable development and good neighborliness in its modern development. As the only country in the "heart" of Central Asia that shares a common border with all the countries in the region, the development of Uzbekistan is in many ways closely linked to the overall development of the region.

In this regard, the active efforts of Uzbekistan will play an important role in ensuring peace and sustainable development in the region. Strengthening the strategic partnership through strengthening the spirit of good neighborliness and brotherhood in bilateral relations, active trade and economic ties, consistent implementation of projects in the transport and humanitarian spheres is becoming a priority in Uzbekistan's foreign policy based on new approaches.

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