



OPPORTUNITIES OF UZBEKISTAN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUTUAL COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Received: 20 th August 2023 Accepted: 20 th September 2023 Published: 23 rd October 2023	In this article, Uzbekistan's policy of strengthening friendly, mutually beneficial relations with neighboring countries in the trade, economic and social spheres is analyzed. The development of mutual cooperation of the Central Asian countries is one of the most urgent issues that are waiting to be solved in terms of regionalism and national interests in the context of new global changes.
Keywords: Central Asia, Great Silk Road, European culture, Brahmaputra, Mongolia, China, Encyclopedia, cooperation, export.	

As the territory of Central Asia is located at the intersection of the Great Silk Road, it has incorporated the samples of Asian and European culture, and as a result of these cultural processes, it has embraced various nationalities and peoples, creating the basis for the multi-ethnic nature of the region. In this regard, the gradual improvement of socio-cultural processes formed the polyethnic nature of the population living in the region. The stability of the values specific to the indigenous population, in which the priority of moral factors is an important factor in the development of mutual cooperation in the conditions of polyethnicity in multi-ethnic Central Asia.

According to the sources: "Central Asia is a natural area in the interior of the Asian region. The area is 6 million square kilometers. The northern and western edges are up to the state border between Mongolia, the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, and the east is surrounded by the Big Khingan, and the south by the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) River in Tibet and the upper part of the Indus River»[1.-p.476]. In the "Big Geographical Encyclopedia" published in Russia: "Central Asia is a natural region in the center of Asia, which includes China, Mongolia, borders the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan in the north, and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the west" [2.-p.560] - and its territory is interpreted unilaterally. However, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are fully part of Central Asia. About Central Asia in the "Great Soviet Encyclopedia": "Central Asia is a natural country of Asia consisting of steppes and semi-steppes, highlands and plains... its total area is from five million to six million square kilometers. Central Asia covers a large part of China and Mongolia, Mongolian peoples (Khalkha, etc.), Chinese, Uyghurs, Tibetans, etc. live in this area" [3.-p.498], it is said.

In fact, it is important for each country to establish mutual cooperation between the independent countries located in this region, which has such a huge area, natural resources, and human capital.

After gaining independence, Uzbekistan paid special attention to establishing and developing cooperation with Central Asian countries in its foreign policy. Extensive work has been done in this regard over the past years. It should be noted that during the next four to five years, the foreign policy of Uzbekistan in this direction was fundamentally updated and opened the door to greater opportunities.

Uzbekistan's policy of strengthening good-neighborly, friendly, mutually beneficial relations with neighboring countries creates a reliable basis for expanding trade-economic, cooperation, investment cooperation, as well as relations in the field of transport logistics between the countries of the region.

Development of trade-economic and investment cooperation between the countries of Central Asia is a factor of ensuring development

Foreign countries and international experts associate the activation of the foreign policy priorities of the Central Asian countries with the period when Shavkat Mirziyoyev started working as the President of Uzbekistan. It is recognized that the practical actions and initiatives of the leader of Uzbekistan are of great importance in this process.

In fact, the foreign policy of the leader of our country, which is aimed at strengthening friendly relations with neighboring countries, primarily ensured stability and security in the region. This, in turn, paved the way for the investment attractiveness of Uzbekistan, as well as our region.

Philip Bennett, the first vice-president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, said, "The world community is paying more and more attention to Central Asia as a region of great opportunity and development. Based on the processes taking place in the region today, it can be said that we look to the future with full confidence. The Action Strategy adopted in Uzbekistan has ambitious goals. We are amazed at the initiatives that are being brought to life with renewed vigor. These initiatives cannot be realized without the support of a strong private sector.

The currency reforms carried out in the country strengthen confidence in the success of the reforms in Uzbekistan. We support your country's efforts to reduce the administrative burden on business, strengthen communication, deepen judicial reforms, simplify customs procedures, and improve the investment environment. Consequently, these innovations increase the attractiveness of the region for world business.

I am sure that Uzbekistan will make a great contribution to achieving the goals of sustainable development in the entire region. In our turn, we are ready to support the Central Asian countries in the way of strengthening mutual cooperation relations" [4].

D. John Edward Herbst, director of Eurasia Center named after Patriciu, Atlantic Council (USA) said about the cooperation of regional countries and the role of Uzbekistan in it: "We have witnessed how the countries of Central Asia have developed over the past 25 years. The countries of the region have maintained peace and stability thanks to great efforts. This is a huge success. However, there were many problems in the area at the time. On the initiative of Uzbekistan, a zone free of nuclear weapons was established in Central Asia. Despite being a neighbor to countries with large nuclear weapons, Central Asia remains committed to this principle.

In the future, Central Asia can develop only thanks to the cooperation of neighboring countries in the region. The United States is ready to provide all possible assistance in this process." [4]

In the foreign policy section of the President's last Address to the Oliy Majlis, special attention was paid to the issue of cooperation with Central Asian countries. The head of state emphasized that special attention will be paid to strengthening our relations with the Central Asian countries, which are the priority direction of our foreign policy, in the spirit of centuries-old friendship and good neighborliness, strategic partnership and mutual trust.

On the initiative of Shavkat Mirziyoev, the International Institute of Central Asia was established in Tashkent last year, and on July 15-16 of this year, "Central and South Asia: regional interdependence" will be held in our capital. A high-level international conference on "Threats and Opportunities" is planned.

The initiative of the President of Uzbekistan to organize annual consultative meetings of the heads of state of Central Asian countries also served to strengthen regional cooperation. The first such meeting was held in Nursultan in 2018, the second in 2019 in Tashkent, and the third was postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic.

It is important to note that the head of our state started his first foreign visits in March 2017 from the countries of Central Asia: first he visited Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, then Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. During these visits, business forums were held, significant packages of intergovernmental agreements on trade-economic and investment cooperation were signed. This served to develop mutual trade and cooperation relations between Uzbekistan and Central Asian countries. In addition, the practice of establishing direct relations between the regions of neighboring countries bordering Uzbekistan and holding regional economic forums has been established [5].

The return visits of the leaders of the Central Asian countries to Uzbekistan further strengthened the foundation of multilateral cooperation and expanded the directions of economic and investment cooperation.

Only in March 2021, the head of Kyrgyzstan visited Uzbekistan, and in June of this year, the head of our country visited Tajikistan. During these visits, agreements were reached on further deepening of cooperation through industrial cooperation, joint implementation of large investment projects and creation of joint production facilities.

In particular, in the following years, the goals of doubling mutual trade turnover were set with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and agreements were reached on the joint implementation of hydropower projects that will significantly improve water supply in Uzbekistan. In order to promote our products in the markets of Central Asia, trading houses of Uzbekistan have started opening in neighboring countries.

In this way, Uzbekistan's policy of strengthening good-neighborly, friendly, mutually beneficial relations with neighboring countries created a reliable basis for expanding trade-economic, cooperation, investment cooperation, as well as relations in the field of transport logistics between the countries of the region.

Uzbekistan's trade turnover with Central Asian countries from 2016 to 2019 has more than doubled, from 2.5 billion dollars to 5.2 billion dollars.

The growth rate was 1.8 times with Kazakhstan, 5 times with Kyrgyzstan, 2.7 times with Turkmenistan and 2.4 times with Tajikistan.

The share of Uzbekistan in the total trade turnover with Central Asian countries also increased from 10.2 to 12.4 percent [6].

In particular, in 2019, the volume of foreign trade turnover of the countries of the region increased by 56% compared to 2016 and amounted to 168.2 billion. In 2019, the amount of investments attracted to the countries of the region increased by 40% compared to 2016 and amounted to 37.6 billion. The number of tourists visiting Central Asian countries is also increasing year by year. As an example, the number of tourists who came to the countries of the region in 2019 increased by 93% compared to 2016 and reached 18.4 million people.

We were able to see how important regional cooperation is in ensuring the security and stability of countries during the coronavirus pandemic. In recent years, Central Asian countries have been able to implement a coordinated policy against the pandemic in a short period of time as a result of the new political environment in the region.

As a result, it was possible to exchange information and experience in the field of medicine in the fight against the coronavirus during the pandemic, to provide mutual humanitarian assistance, and to establish the continuous movement of goods at the borders. This made it possible to ensure that the number of cases of coronavirus and the number of deaths as a result of it are low in the region compared to other countries of the world. In particular, as of December 29, the number of people infected with the coronavirus in Central Asia was 375,000, which is 0.5% of the

total number of infected people in the world. The death rate was 1.7% of those infected with the coronavirus, while this indicator was 2.1% in the world. In a word, it confirmed once again that regional cooperation is an important guarantee of eliminating modern threats[7].

From this point of view, it is no exaggeration to say that regional cooperation, which is developing today based on the initiative and efforts of the President, has opened a new page in the relations of the Central Asian countries. The fact that Central Asia is the priority of our foreign policy in the address to the Oliy Majlis by our President once again indicates that Uzbekistan mobilizes all its capabilities and potential to further strengthen cooperation with the countries of the region.

In January-April 2021, Uzbekistan's trade with Central Asian countries increased by 24 percent compared to the same period last year. At the same time, the share of Central Asian countries in the total turnover of Uzbekistan increased by 17.2 percent. This indicates the expansion of internal regional trade in our country.

In 2021, the developing economies of Europe and Central Asia are expected to grow by 3.6 percent

Among the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan's share of Uzbekistan's turnover is the largest. In 2020, Kazakhstan's share in regional trade with Uzbekistan was 61 percent, Kyrgyzstan's 18.2 percent, Turkmenistan's 10.6 percent, and Tajikistan's 10.1 percent.

It should be noted that the most important indicator of Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover is the export volume, which shows the opportunities for the penetration of exported goods in foreign markets and their level of competitiveness [8].

From 2016 to 2019, Uzbekistan's exports to Central Asian countries almost doubled, or from \$1.3 billion to \$2.5 billion, and the share of Central Asian countries in Uzbekistan's total exports increased from 10.8 to 14.5 percent. Also, the volume of exports to Kazakhstan increased by 1.5 times, to Kyrgyzstan by 5.5 times, to Tajikistan by 2 times, and to Turkmenistan by 1.8 times. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, in 2020, exports to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan increased by 13 and 23.5 percent, respectively.

According to the results of January-April 2021, the volume of exports to the countries of Central Asia increased by 21 percent compared to the same period last year. Also, the share of the Central Asian countries in the total export of Uzbekistan increased significantly - by 19.9 percent, that is, almost one fifth of the export went to the countries of the region.

Considering that the finished products of the processing industry are mainly exported to the countries of Central Asia, the share of the countries of the region in the total export volume will be much higher even if the export of supplied raw materials is not taken into account.

According to the end of 2020, Central Asian countries were supplied with agricultural products worth 454 million dollars or 45% of the total export in the sector, textile goods worth 365 million dollars or 20% of the total export of these products.

Joint statement of the United States of America, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan on the launch of the "Central Asia Investment Partnership" initiative

addition, about 150 million dollars worth of cars were exported to Central Asian countries, which is more than 85% of all car exports. Among the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan accounted for the largest share of passenger car exports.

Also, about 20 percent of the exported electrical engineering products are delivered to Central Asian countries, and the regional markets are a "hot destination" for certain product positions, in particular, household appliances. For example, in 2020, the share of the domestic "Artel" company's products in the market of semi-automatic washing machines in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will be 50%, in Tajikistan 70%, for kitchen plates: 65% in Kazakhstan, 20% in Kyrgyzstan, for water heaters: 58% in Tajikistan, 37% in Kazakhstan. percent.

The prospects of further increasing the volume of exports of Uzbekistan to the markets of Central Asian countries are huge. It should be noted that in 2020, the total foreign trade turnover of the countries of the region amounted to 142.6 billion dollars, of which 12.7 billion dollars or 8.9% is the share of internal regional trade [8].

The geographical location of Uzbekistan in the center of Central Asia opens the way for the delivery of goods to the markets of neighboring countries with short routes and to minimize transport costs within the framework of trade in the region. This increases the competitiveness of local products and provides favorable opportunities for increasing the volume of exports.

In conclusion, it can be noted that the policy of open and mutually beneficial cooperation carried out by Uzbekistan is supported by the countries of Central Asia. Neighboring countries highly appreciate Uzbekistan's efforts aimed at creating an environment of trust and close neighborliness, Central Asian countries express their readiness to turn the region into a stable, safe, cooperative and prosperous space.

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