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Politics In Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

Analyzing the achievements and results of the past period, we can see that cooperation between the Central Asian states is entering a new stage at a time when multilateral cooperation around the world is in crisis and mutual trust is declining. In a historically short period, unprecedented progress has been made in relations between Central Asian states. Most importantly, important and mutually beneficial agreements have been reached on the use of borders and water resources, which were previously an obstacle to the development of regional cooperation. At the initiative of our President, new mechanisms of cooperation have been established. Examples of this are the Consultative Meetings of Central Asian Heads of State, the establishment of inter-parliamentary groups, the Council for Cooperation in Border Regions, ministerial and interdepartmental commissions, and investment funds.

KEYWORDS

Countries of Central Asia, Uzbek diplomacy, close neighbors, UNO (United Nations Organization), meeting, policy of openness, constructive policy, international conference.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2017, a qualitatively new page has been opened in Uzbek diplomacy, and it can be said that the activity of our republic in the international arena has reached a new level. The main reason for this is the policy of

openness pursued by the President of our country Shavkat Mirziyoyev, first of all, cooperation with our close neighbors, the countries of Central Asia. In his speech at the 72nd session of the UNO General Assembly, the

head of our state emphasized the priorities for foreign policy.

For more than a quarter of a century, a number of problems have arisen between the countries of Central Asia. These include the use of water and energy resources and transport communications, the delimitation of state borders, and the crossing of border crossings.

In line with the chosen direction of the new foreign policy, the head of Uzbekistan has been conducting a constructive dialogue with the leaders of the Central Asian countries over the past three years to jointly resolve pressing issues of regional security, peace and tranquility, sustainable economic development.

THE MAIN PART

Located in the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is an important link between all countries in the region and a key catalyst for regional cooperation. As a result of the dialogue that has taken place in recent years, a completely new climate of trust has been created in Central Asia, and relations based on friendship and good neighborliness are strengthening. Since 2017, our country has been pursuing an open foreign policy in all areas for mutually beneficial cooperation and security in the region.

President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed to hold regular consultative meetings of Central Asian leaders in November 2017 as an important mechanism for strengthening regional cooperation and mutual trust, as well as for the timely resolution of existing problems, and this initiative was supported by the countries of the region. In particular, the first summit of Central

Asian leaders was held on March 15, 2018 in Astana (now Nur - Sultan). The summit focused on expanding political, trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation, joint fight against terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking and arms smuggling, strengthening security and stability. It was recognized that Central Asia is not only a geographical and geopolitical, but also a unique cultural and civilizational space.

On June 22, 2018, the UNO Assembly adopted a resolution on "Strengthening regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in the Central Asian region", initiated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. The document was co-authored by 55 countries in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa, and the resolution was unanimously supported by all UNO member states. The resolution recognizes the important role of the Central Asian states in ensuring peace and sustainable development in the region, as well as in strengthening regional and international cooperation. Welcoming the initiatives of Central Asian leaders to hold regular consultative meetings, the resolution calls for the effective use of such a consultative platform to jointly address pressing issues in the region.

The document states that the General Assembly will support the efforts and initiatives of Central Asian states to strengthen stability and economic cooperation in the region.

On November 29, 2019 in Tashkent was held the second consultation meeting of the heads of Central Asian countries. The Presidents of Central Asian countries discussed the issues of use of cross-border water, development of

transport infrastructure, border regulation and regional security. The consultation meeting held in Tashkent demonstrated that Uzbekistan continues to follow the path of renewal and regional cooperation¹.

One of the important practical steps in the implementation of the initiatives put forward by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev from the rostrum of the 72nd session of the UNO Assembly is the Central Asia: One Past and One Future, Sustainable Development and Mutual Assistance. Partnership for Prosperity. It was attended by delegations led by Central Asian foreign ministers, high-ranking official delegations from the CIS, Europe, Asia and the Americas, heads of more than 10 international organizations, as well as more than 100 foreign experts and media representatives. At the conference, the President of Uzbekistan proposed the establishment of associations of governors and business circles of the Central Asian border areas. This initiative is currently reflected in the development of interregional cooperation in border areas.

To ensure security and stability in Central Asia, Uzbekistan is actively involved in resolving the conflict in neighboring Afghanistan. Significant agreements on mutually beneficial cooperation have been signed with this country, and practical work on new economic projects is underway. Pacific Afghanistan gives Central Asian countries access to ports in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, and

connects Central and South Asia with European markets in a cheaper and more convenient way.

To stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, a high-level Tashkent international conference on "Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Partnership" was held on March 27, 2018 at the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Muhammad Ashraf Ghani, UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Tadamiti Yamamoto, as well as the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Turkey, Russia, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Saudi Arabia and heads of foreign ministries of the United Arab Emirates, representatives of 25 countries and international organizations². Following the conference, the Tashkent Declaration³ was signed. This document embodies the noble goals of ensuring peace and security in the region, strengthening cooperation in all areas, and further expanding good neighborly relations.

For many years, most checkpoints between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan were closed to the public. There were also a number of serious problems with the delimitation and demarcation of state borders. During the state visit of the President of Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan, an agreement on the state border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan was signed on September 5, 2017. In addition, on

¹ Press service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan <https://president.uz/oz/3093>

² Press service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan <https://president.uz/oz/3093>

³ The Tashkent Declaration: A Political Document for Peace, Stability and Development in Afghanistan. It

was signed at the Tashkent High-Level International Conference on "Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Partnership" on March 27, 2018, initiated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan.

March 9, 2018, Uzbekistan signed an agreement with Tajikistan on delimitation and demarcation of borders. As a result of the implementation of these important documents, all restrictions at border crossings with neighboring countries have been lifted. Agreements on delimitation and demarcation of borders signed with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will create favorable conditions for the development of economic cooperation and cross-border trade, increase the volume of mutual trade and, most importantly, the movement of citizens living in border areas. In particular, if five years ago the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border was crossed by 200-300 people a day, today this figure exceeds 30,000. Following the signing of the agreement with Tajikistan, all 17 previously closed border checkpoints became operational. Today, 20,000 people cross the Uzbek-Tajik border every day.

Thanks to the open and constructive policy of the President of Uzbekistan, a compromise was reached on the issue of the territory bordering the state borders between Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The agreement was signed in November 2017 in Samarkand as part of a high-level international conference on Central Asia.

Another strategically important area of regional cooperation is the development of trade and economic ties. At the initiative of Uzbekistan, the Central Asian Economic Forum was held on March 15, 2018 in Tashkent with the participation of Deputy Prime Ministers of the region. Representatives of more than 200 government agencies, business circles of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, attended the forum. The forum participants discussed issues of expanding investment cooperation, promoting regional

trade, as well as increasing the attractiveness of tourism, transport and transit capacity. During the meetings, it was noted that the trade turnover between the Central Asian countries increased by more than 35% compared to 2017 and amounted to 12.2 billion dollars, but the economic potential of the countries in the region is not yet fully used. In order to improve the investment climate and attract more foreign investors, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev initiated the establishment of an investment forum for Central Asian countries at the Second Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of the region.

At the same time, the President's annual address emphasizes environmental security, rational use of water and other natural resources, the Aral Sea problem and the consequences of environmental degradation. As a practical implementation of the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan at the 72nd session of the UNO General Assembly, the United Nations Multilateral Trust Fund for Human Security was established in the Aral Sea region. The presentation of the Foundation took place on November 27, 2018 at the UNO Headquarters in New York. In his speech to the deputies of the Oliy Majlis on January 24, 2018, the President reiterated the importance of the Foundation's activities. In October 2019, at an international conference dedicated to the solution of the Aral Sea problem in Nukus, the President initiated the declaration of the Aral Sea region as a zone of ecological innovation and technology and the adoption of a special resolution of the UNO General Assembly. Consistent work is underway to implement this initiative.

Cultural and humanitarian cooperation plays an important role in the development of cooperation between the Central Asian states. The countries of the region have a common history and common culture. They have similar traditions, values, and a common religion. Therefore, Uzbekistan is taking a number of initiatives to strengthen cultural and good-neighborly relations. In particular, at the Second Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of the region, Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed to hold university forums and regional sports games, as well as to establish the Central Asian Prize for outstanding achievements in science, culture and art. “Every year, on the eve of Navruz, we consider it important to organize Days of Central Asian Culture in each country. All this will bring our brotherly peoples closer”⁴, - the President said.

As a practical implementation of this initiative, 2018 has been declared the Year of Uzbekistan in Kazakhstan. It has hosted more than 80 cultural and sporting events, film days and various festivals.

During the talks of the Second Summit of the Heads of State of the region, the President of Uzbekistan also put forward an initiative to hold an international tourism conference and create a single tourism brand in Central Asia.

Uzbekistan, which shares a common border with all Central Asian states, is undoubtedly interested in transforming the region into a region of stability, sustainable development and good neighborliness. Addressing all-important issues of our country's development, from the security of our borders

to the rational allocation of water resources, is closely linked with our region. Economically developed and secure Central Asia is a key goal for Uzbekistan. Major regional projects in the field of transport, communications and energy cannot be implemented without active cooperation with neighboring countries and ensuring their high level of integration.

Moreover, Central Asia is not only a geographical and geopolitical, but also a unique cultural space with common values. The peoples living in the region are united by common spiritual values and a past, similar national traditions and customs, a mentality formed over the centuries. This partnership is a solid and reliable foundation for regional cooperation.

H. Fraser, UNO resident coordinator and UNO permanent representative of the development program in Uzbekistan He stressed that it is a guarantee of further prosperity and sustainable development of Uzbekistan, but also the whole of Central Asia. In this regard, the UNO fully supports Uzbekistan's efforts to strengthen regional cooperation.

On December 29, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev addressed the Oliy Majlis. Due to its relevance and strategic importance, the address of the head of our state arouses great interest and heated discussions among political experts today.

In his address, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized that Central Asia is a priority of the foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The development of regional cooperation in Central Asia is always in the focus of the head

⁴ From the speech of the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the 2nd Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Leaders

of our state, which can be seen in the proposals and initiatives put forward by the President on regional issues from the highest tribunes of influential regional and international organizations.

It is important to emphasize the important aspects of the President's address to the Oliy Majlis, emphasizing once again that Central Asia is a priority of our foreign policy.

Firstly, Uzbekistan is an integral and closely linked part of the Central Asian region. Uzbekistan is the only country in the region bordering all the countries of Central Asia, that is, any political, economic and cultural changes in a region have a direct impact on Uzbekistan. In addition, the implementation of major projects in the field of transport, economy, energy and water depends on the level of cooperation between the countries of the region. In this regard, the main goal of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the sustainable development and prosperity of Central Asia.

Secondly, we all know that Central Asia is a geostrategic region. This is because the region is located in a convenient geographical area, at the crossroads of important regional and international transport corridors, rich in natural resources, and on the other hand, borders Central Asia, CIS and Asia, which play an important role in international relations. In other words, Central Asia is a region where the interests of the world's leading countries intersect.

The above factors reaffirm that security and stability in the region can only be achieved through cooperation based on mutual understanding and interests. This, in turn, demonstrates that Uzbekistan's brand new regional policy, based on the principles of

openness, good neighborliness, strategic partnership, mutual trust and rational settlement of existing problems, serves as an important guarantee of stability and sustainable development in Central Asia.

Thirdly, the President's Address to the Parliament raises the issue of further strengthening the centuries-old friendly relations with Central Asian countries, reaffirms Uzbekistan's commitment to sustainable development of regional cooperation and long-term cooperation with neighboring countries based on mutual interest and trust.

The head of our state Shavkat Mirziyoyev, after his election as president, made a speech at the joint meeting of the chambers of the Oliy Majlis dedicated to the opening ceremony of the post of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on December 14, 2016 on the fact that the development of cooperation with the countries of Central Asia.

The political environment in Central Asia, formed as a result of the new regional policy of Uzbekistan, today makes an important contribution to the unlocking of the huge economic potential of the region. As a confirmation of the above, we can see the increase in foreign trade turnover and investment in Central Asia, as well as the number of tourists.

In particular, the volume of foreign trade turnover of the countries of the region in 2019 amounted to 168.2 billion, an increase of 56% compared to 2016. The volume of investments attracted to the countries of the region in 2019 increased by 40% compared to 2016 and amounted to 37.6 billion. The number of tourists visiting Central Asian countries is also

growing from year to year. As an example, the number of tourists visiting the countries of the region in 2019 increased by 93% compared to 2016 and amounted to 18.4 million people.

During the coronavirus pandemic, we were able to see the importance of regional cooperation in ensuring the security and stability of nations. In recent years, Central Asian states have been able to pursue coordinated anti-pandemic policies in a short period as a result of the new political environment in the region.

As a result, the exchange of information and experience in the field of medicine in the fight against the coronavirus during the pandemic, the provision of mutual humanitarian assistance, the establishment of a continuous movement of goods across borders. This has led to a lower incidence of coronavirus infections and deaths in the region than in any other country in the world. In particular, as of December 29, the number of people infected with the coronavirus in Central Asia was 375,000, or 0.5% of the world's total. The death rate from coronavirus was 1.7 percent, compared to 2.1 percent worldwide. In short, regional cooperation has reaffirmed that it is an important guarantee of overcoming modern threats.

The newspaper named after “Московский комсомолец” notes that Uzbekistan's role and importance in Russia's Central Asian policy is growing. The commentator of newspaper Sergei Valchenko wrote, “Uzbekistan has one of the highest economic growth rates in the region. Naturally, almost all foreign countries

are interested in this country. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev paid a successful visit to Washington in May this year, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development approved multibillion-dollar investment projects, and the Investment Forum, which is expected in November, will be a competitive platform for the Uzbek market”⁵.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, it can be concluded that the Republic of Uzbekistan is making consistent efforts to develop not only the country but also the entire region. Cooperation between the countries of Central Asia on the basis of equal partnership and solidarity in all areas has a positive impact on the development of the region. Today, a completely new, constructive political environment has emerged in Central Asia, and favorable conditions have been created to solve the most pressing problems, such as the rational use of cross-border Water Resources, the delimitation and demarcation of borders, the crossing of border punches, the development of cross-border trade.

All this can be considered as a result of the consistent foreign policy of Uzbekistan and Central Asia over the past three years for the development of close and mutually beneficial neighborly relations, as well as a great achievement of independent Uzbek diplomacy.

From this point of view, it is no exaggeration to say that the regional cooperation, which is developing today on the initiative and efforts of our President, has opened a new page in the relations between the Central Asian states. The

⁵ The newspaper named after “Московский комсомолец”.
<https://www.mk.ru/daily/newspaper/>

President's address to the Oliy Majlis reaffirmed that Central Asia is a priority of our foreign policy, which shows that Uzbekistan is mobilizing all its capabilities and potential to further strengthen cooperation with the countries of the region.

7. The newspaper named after “Московский комсомолец”.
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