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# HISTORY OF TOPONYMS IN TASHKENT IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET PERIODS

*KHAYRIYA BURIEVA*

## ABSTRACT

*The article studies the interrelation of historical events and the processes of formation of urban toponyms, on the example of the structure of toponymic groups of names of districts and streets of Tashkent in the 20th century and during the period of independence of Uzbekistan. The toponymic landscape changes under the influence of geographical, natural, political, cultural, and economic factors and further increase their informatics function. The classification of these groups of toponyms and examples of toponyms reflecting historical events in the life of the city is given.*

*Since the 1990s, new transformational processes began in the toponymy of Tashkent, which are very different from the processes of previous years. These changes are connected with a major political event in the statehood of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan became an independent state.- the Republic of Uzbekistan. on 31 August 1991. Significant transformations took place in the toponymy of Tashkent during the years of independence, which is connected with the revival of historical, national names, in the interests of the Uzbek people*

**Keywords:** Toponyms, Tashkent, history, systematic measures, national, traditional and popular interests, Soviet system, districts, Uzbekistan, independence.

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan, one of the major centers of culture, art, science, technology, industry, and commerce in the Asian continent. According to the results of archaeological excavations, the city's age was determined to be 2,200 years old. From a historical point of view,

its history can be divided into the ancient, medieval stages, the period of the three Khanates, the colonial, Soviet times, and the era of independence. The political, socio-economic, cultural and spiritual processes of these times are reflected in the historical sources of various types.

One of the peculiar types of historical sources is toponyms - names of localities. They appear at various stages of the history of regions and carry information about the nature, topography, climate, population, ethnic structure, administrative division, political structure, social and economic life, religion, and languages of the region. It is advisable to investigate them according to geographical, linguistic, and historical classifications. Forming over many centuries, the historical toponyms of the city of Tashkent, from the point of view of language groups, have formed certain linguistic layers, such as Sogdian, Turkic, Persian-Arabic, Russian-European, and mixed. Their occurrence on the territory of Tashkent is closely connected, first of all, with political processes that entailed ethnic and other transformations on its territory. The study of the structure of toponymic groups, as well as the etymological analysis of toponyms, allows for deeper and more reliable coverage of the history of the capital at various stages and in general.

### TOPONYMIC STRUCTURE OF DISTRICTS AND STREETS OF TASHKENT IN THE SOVIET PERIOD

There are a number of scientific works of specialists, where, against the background of disclosing the historical development of the capital from antiquity to the present, information is given on the origin and etymology of some toponyms of the city of Tashkent<sup>1</sup>. Studies have also been carried out directly on the historical toponymy of Tashkent in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the emergence of toponyms, their classification, structure, quantitative indicators, dynamics, etymology, and semantic and linguistic toponymic groups<sup>2</sup>.

The emergence of a Russian-European stratum of historical toponyms in Tashkent began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues to



the present. More precisely, they were included in the structure of the toponymy of the city under the rule of the Turkestan Governor-General, then during the Soviet period. In the years of independent development of Uzbekistan, the share of toponyms borrowed from foreign languages in the city, as well as throughout the country, is increasing due to the active integration of Uzbekistan into the world community, the expansion of its foreign relations, the attraction of foreign investments, establishing comprehensive cooperation with many countries of the CIS, Europe, America and Asia.

Of particular interest is the classification of toponyms according to their semantic meaning, which allows to identify the specificity of urban names and their relationship to the history of the city. Thus, on the territory of Tashkent during the period under study there existed toponyms that can be divided into the following groups: anthroponyms, toponyms associated with the geographical features of the region, names reflecting the economic and social development of the capital, toponyms associated with the cultural and spiritual development of the region related to ethnic groups, historical events, etc.

The position of Tashkent as a city that has been developing since ancient times, one of the major trade and cultural centers located on the Great Silk Road, its socio-economic life in the past and in the modern era, cultural relations, political-strategic importance has been elaborated by several studies<sup>3</sup>.

This article, looks at changes in the structure of the toponymy of Tashkent in the 20th century (the Soviet period and the first years of independence) taking the example of the names of districts and streets of the city. As a result of the establishment of the Soviet power in Russia and on the territory of the neighboring regions, a unified control system of the USSR was introduced with the center in Moscow, and Russian was adopted as the official language. Tashkent became the capital of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, incorporated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This political situation played a definite role, both in the history of the republic and its capital city. For more than seventy years, the republic

developed according to the programs of five-year plans approved by the state center, where all directions were coordinated with the political regime and ideology of the Soviet state. This specificity was reflected in the toponymy of various territories of the country, including the city of Tashkent.

It is known that during the rule of the Turkestan General Governorship (1867–1917), the city of Tashkent was its center and consisted of two parts - the Old City and the New City<sup>4</sup>. This division was maintained in the first years of Soviet power. After the establishment of the Soviet power, the new municipal authorities began to carry out administrative and territorial changes in the city, the initial stage was the 1920s. In 1929, a decree of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee on the organization of city councils was issued, according to which the territory of Tashkent was divided into four districts, as indicated in the document of the Executive Committee, “firstly, for the Council and, in general, the city government to establish constant control over the life of the city and its related territories, and secondly, to create conditions for attracting people to the cause of Soviet construction”<sup>5</sup>.

At first, these four city districts were simply called by numbers - “I, II, III, IV districts”. In November 1929, the decision of the Executive Committee gave them the following names: “Leninsky, Oktyabrsky, Proletarsky, Stalin’s”. In the 1930s, the territory of Tashkent expanded with the annexation of former collective farm lands around the city, and two more urban districts were added - Kirovsky and Frunzensky. During these years, the Proletarsky District was renamed Kuibyshevsky. So, in the names of six urban areas, five were the names of famous political figures of the Soviet state, and one (October) was named after the historical event of that period - the victory of the October revolution of 1917, which resulted in the establishment of Soviet power.

During World War II, over 1 million people were evacuated to Uzbekistan from the territories of Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, and other regions of the USSR. After the war, most of this population returned to their former places of residence, but there were also those who remained

to live in the republic. Due to the mechanical growth of the population during this period, the number of residents increased, which was one of the reasons for the formation of two more new urban areas - Moscow and Central. However, in 1956, Moscow and Stalin, and in 1959, the Central districts were abolished, and the city now consisted of five districts.

In the same period, an intensive expansion of the residential area of Chilanzar in the south-west of the capital began, where neighborhoods were erected, along with local residents, representatives of various nationalities and ethnic groups, most of whom remained in the city after evacuation, were settled. As a result, in 1962 a new administrative unit in the city was formed - Chilanzar district. The toponym "Chilanzar" refers to the group of natural names, i.e. it means "a place with many gardens." However, the full etymology of this place name has not yet been established.

Not only political events but also natural factors influenced the toponymy of Tashkent in the 20th century. A large earthquake of up to 8 points occurred on April 26, 1966 in Tashkent, the epicenter of which was in the Kashkar and Labzak mahalla, the maximum damage zone reached 10–12 sq.kms. As a result of this natural disaster, many buildings in the city center were destroyed: more than 2 million square meters living space, 236 administrative buildings, about 700 trade and catering facilities, 26 utilities, about 180 educational institutions, schools for 8,000 places, 26 cultural and educational institutions, 185 medical institutions, 245 buildings of industrial facilities, 300,000 people, there were victims<sup>6</sup>.

To restore Tashkent, a large number of people were attracted from all regions of the republic, as well as from other territories of the Soviet state. The city was rebuilt in 3.5 years. According to statistics, housing and a lot of kindergartens, schools, institutes, buildings of state, commercial, public institutions, commercial enterprises were built. The reconstruction of Tashkent was carried out according to a specially developed plan. As a result, due to some expansion of the urban area, construction of new buildings, increase in population, especially due to labor migration from other territories of the country, it became necessary to increase administrative and territorial units. In 1967-1977 four more urban districts

were formed in Tashkent: Sergeli, Khamza, Sabir Rakhimov, Akmal Ikramovsky. Sergeli district is located in the southwestern part of the capital, originated on the basis of Sergeli massif, and was mainly built up after the 1966 earthquake. This name of the area is considered an ethnotoponym. In 1968, the Khamza district was established in the eastern part of Tashkent, where many industrial facilities and residential areas of the population were located.

The name of the region is an anthropotoponym, since it is named after the famous Uzbek poet, playwright, composer, director, teacher, statesman Hamza Hakimzade Niyoz (1889–1929). In 1970, during the years of the restoration of the city after the earthquake, in the north-western part of Tashkent, another new district was formed as a result of joining to the city of some rural districts, as well as pieces of land from the October and Kirovsky districts. It was given the name of General Sabir Rakhimov (1902–1945), who died heroically in battles during World War II. The fourth district emerged in 1977, as a result of the alienation of certain territories from the Chilanzar and Oktyabrsky districts (since these regions became very densely populated). This area was named after the statesman of the republic during the years of Akmal Ikramov's Soviet rule (1898–1938). In the 1980s, the city already had ten districts. Their names can be classified according to the following toponymic groups: anthropotoponyms (7 names) - Akmal Ikramovsky, Kirovsky, Kuibyshevsky, Leninsky, Sabir Rakhimov, Frunzensky, Khamza districts; place name associated with the nature of the area (1 name) - Chilanzar region; ethnotoponym (1 name) - Sergeli district; a toponym that reflects a historical event (1 name) - Oktyabrsky district.

In the period under review, along with the new administrative-territorial units, many streets were formed in Tashkent, which was connected with political and socio-economic factors. The list of names of city streets was considerably enlarged by the names of new streets, as well as by renaming some of the old streets. So, in the 1930s there were more than 500 large and medium-length streets<sup>7</sup>.

Semantic analysis of the names of city streets of this period allows

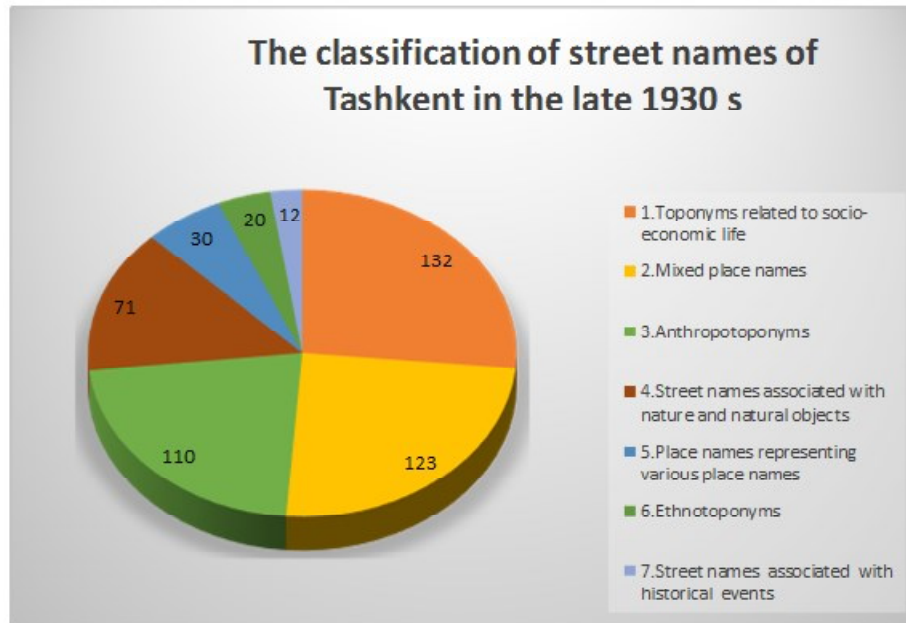
them to be classified into toponymic groups and identify the quantitative correlation, which is important in studying the dynamics of toponyms of the city, establishing the relationship between the toponymic structure of the region and its historical development (see table 1 and diagram 1).

**TABLE 1**  
THE CLASSIFICATION OF STREET NAMES OF TASHKENT IN THE LATE 1930 s.\*

<i>Toponymic groups</i>	<i>The number of place names in the group</i>	<i>Examples of street names and their meaning</i>
Toponyms related to socio-economic life	132	Gulbazar street (means "flowers market"), Temiryolchilar street (named after the railway station)
Mixed place names	123	3-rd Akkurgan street (the third street with the name Akkurgan is "white hill"), 2nd Saperny lane (named after the Saperny battalion, previously located here)
Anthropotonyms	110	Zengi-ata street (on behalf of the famous shrine in the Islamic world), Rosa Luxemburg street (on behalf of the famous Polish-German scientist philosopher and economist)
Street names associated with nature and natural objects	71	Salar street (from the name of the river Salar, which flows through the area), Almazar street (meaning "apple orchard")
Place names representing various place names	30	Khorezm street (from the name of the region in Uzbekistan, now it is the name of the region), Baltic street (from the name of the Baltic Sea in the north of Europe)
Ethnotonyms	20	Kara-Kirghiz street (the name of the Turkic tribe), Turkmen street (from the name of the people in Central Asia)
Street names associated with historical events	12	8th March street (named after the holiday - International Women's Day March 8), October street (named after the October revolution of 1917 by the Bolsheviks in Russia)

\*The table was compiled by author based on the analysis of street names recorded in the 1936 Tashkent card.

**DIAGRAM 1.**



Further, due to the expansion of the city in the post-war years and during the restoration of the city after the earthquake of 1966, the territory of the city expanded, new quarters and streets were built; the status of the capital city, its position as a political and socio-economic, cultural, educational and spiritual center led to the concentration of many buildings of various institutions and enterprises, the construction of new neighborhoods and streets, each of which had its name, This position of Tashkent was directly reflected in its toponymy. Thus, in the 1980s, there were 1,107 major city streets and streets of average size.

In 50 years, that is, compared with the 1930s, not only the number of city streets changed, but also their toponymic groups. In the 1980s, the number of large and medium-sized city streets increased by 2.1 times, the names of these streets included 1) the anthrotoponyms presented the most numerous group and their lot grew almost 5 times (the state policy was aimed at strengthening measures to perpetuating the memory of statesmen of the country, heroes of the Great Patriotic War, heroes of labor, honored workers of scientific and other spheres); 2) the number of place names associated with geographic names increased by 7 times (here

there is an increase in interregional and external relations of the republic, and as a result, the geography of names has increased, that is, the addition of names associated with numerous regions of the Soviet Union, as well as with the names of cities in other countries of the socialist system); 3) street names reflecting the socio-political life of the city, more than 2 times (this indicates an increasing role of the political and ideological factor, as well as the development of branches of the national economy, expanding the network of educational and medical institutions in the capital); 4) toponyms pointing to natural objects, also increased by 2 times (due to the growing number of parks, residential areas, as well as the territorial expansion of the city due to the outskirts, which had agricultural objects with the corresponding names); 5) the number of streets named after historical events increased by 2.8 times (mainly due to events related to anniversaries of political organizations, also historical events that took place in various regions of the Union and in a number of foreign countries that collaborated with him); 6) however, the number of ethnotoponyms remained almost unchanged (perhaps this can be explained by the fact that the Soviet government sought to consolidate the nationalities that lived on its territory without highlighting the national factor). Two new semantic groups appeared in the toponymic composition of street names of this period; 7) names associated with cultural and spiritual factors in the life and activities of the population; 8) toponyms, which are oriental names of people.

The appearance of these two toponymic groups testifies to the increased attention of society to the development of cultural life, to aesthetic growth, to an increase in the human need for spiritual perfection, quest for freer thinking, capturing the beauty of the world and its essence, as well as its good intentions in the places of the name, objects that surround it in everyday life (see table 2 and diagram 2).

TABLE 2  
CLASSIFICATION OF STREET NAMES OF TASHKENT IN THE EARLY 1980 s.\*

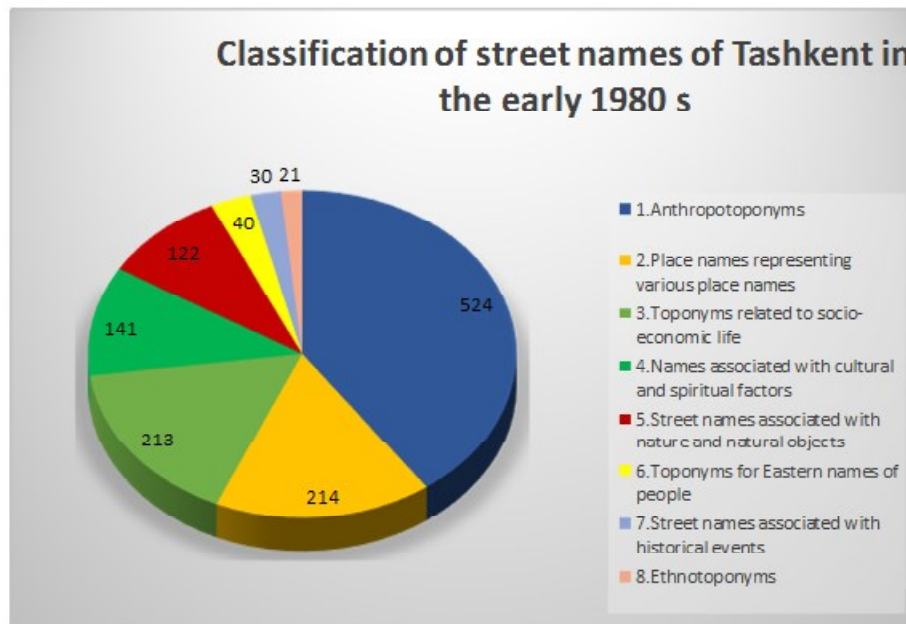
<i>Toponymic groups</i>	<i>The number of place names in the group</i>	<i>Examples of street names and their meaning</i>
Anthropotonyms	524	Ashrafi street (on behalf of the famous Uzbek composer of the twentieth century Mukhtar Ashrafi), general Petrov street (named after the Soviet general, hero of World War II), Shastri street (named after the political leader of India)
Place names representing various place names	214	Altai street (in honor of the Altai Mountains in the south of Siberia), Odessa street (from the name of the city in the Crimea), Leninabad street (from the name of the city in Tajikistan)
Toponyms related to socio-economic life	213	Airport Square (due to the location of the street near the airport), Petersburg State University street (due to the location along the street of Central Asian State University), Textile street (from the name of the Tashkent Textile Factory)
Names associated with cultural and spiritual factors	141	Mehribon street (translated from Uzbek means "merciful"), "Izvestia" street (from Russian "news" and this is the name of the newspaper "Izvestia", which was a periodical of the governments of the Soviet Union), Madaniyat street (translated from Uzbek means "culture")
Street names associated with nature and natural objects	122	Archazar street (in Uzbek means "spruce garden"), Ariqli street (named for the location of the street near the river), Sadovaya street (from Russian "garden" and due to the location of a large garden on the street).
Toponyms for Eastern names of people	40	Gayrat sreet (male name, means "energetic, decisive, hardworking boy"), Gulsanam sreet (female name means "the most beautiful flower among the most beautiful, that is, girl of incomparable beauty"), Zumrad sreet (female name, its meaning is "a gem of green (emerald); priceless, like an emerald, or a girl with green (blue) eyes").
Street names associated		Pobeda Street (from Russian "victory" and



with historical events	30	named after the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II (1939-1945)), 40 years of the Komsomol street (associated with the celebration of the 40 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the political all_ union youth organization of the Young Communist League).
Ethnotoponyms	21	Karamurt passage (associated with the name of the Turkic tribe of Kara Murut), Tatar street ("Tatars" – the name of the Turkic people).

\* The study is based on: composition: A short tour guide / N.A.Dekhkankhodzhaev, A.I.Grishenko, S.R.Rakhmanov, A.S.Zeltser. 1981. 302 p.

DIAGRAM 2.



In general, studies on the structure of the historical toponyms of Tashkent, in particular, the names of its districts and streets in the 1917-1980s, indicate the expansion of the urban area, growth of its population, economic growth, development of social, cultural, spiritual life of the population, which vividly reflected in its toponymy.

In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed due to the imminent political and economic crisis in the country. Independent states were formed in the

post-Soviet space. Among the first to declare its sovereignty was the Republic of Uzbekistan. In the years of independence, the city of Tashkent retained its metropolitan position as the center of a sovereign state. The territory of the city and the urban agglomeration is expanding to this day. The role of Tashkent is growing as an important center not only in the country but throughout Central Asia. Such an important political change is also reflected in the toponymic structure of Tashkent. A new district, Bektemirsky, was formed, dozens of streets, and hundreds of new buildings were built.

### CHANGING THE NAMES OF DISTRICTS AND STREETS OF TASHKENT IN THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

During the years of Uzbekistan's independence, great efforts have been made to strengthen national identity, revive values, restore many ancient toponyms that were unjustifiably changed under the former Soviet system. In the capital of the country, Tashkent, systematic measures were taken to regulate the names of toponymic objects. In Tashkent, first, changes were made to the names of the administrative units of the city - districts and dahars, and then to the constituent parts of settlements - quarters, as well as the names of streets, squares, parks, avenues.

These changes were implemented on the basis of laws and other legal and regulatory documents adopted in the sovereign state. First of all, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the State Language" (1989) paid special attention to the fact that place names should be in the state language, and Article 22 stated that "The names of geographical objects shall be reflected in the state language"<sup>8</sup>. Next, on August 30, 1996, the Law "On the procedure for resolving issues of administrative-territorial structure, naming and changing names of toponymic objects in the Republic of Uzbekistan" was adopted. In accordance with the law, the works of changing the names of geographical objects in the republic in connection with the history of the country, the nature of the territory, population and social situation, and national values have been initiated.<sup>9</sup>

In 1992, one of the legal grounds for renaming five of the existing eleven districts in Tashkent was created. The city map published in 1994 lists the names of 11 districts of the city: Yunusabad, Mirzo Ulug'bek, Hamza, Mirabad, Sergeli, Yakkasaroy, Chilonzor, Shaikhontahur, Akmal Ikromov, Sabir Rahimov, Bektemir<sup>10</sup>. Of these, 6 district names were given during the period of independence: one is a newly established urban district - Bektemir district, five are renamed: Yunusabad, Mirzo Ulug'bek, Mirabad, Yakkasaroy, Shaikhontahur districts. These toponyms were created in place of the previous names of Kirov, Kuibyshev, Lenin, Frunze, Oktyabr districts.

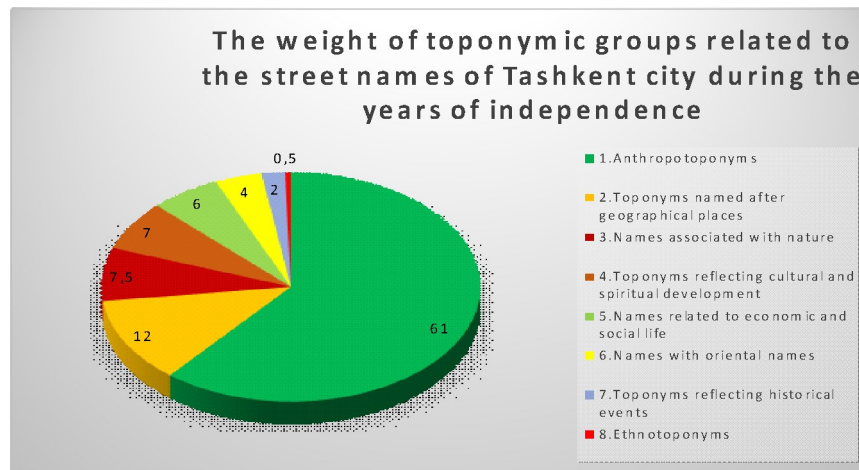
During the period of independence, the tendency to change the names of places in the spirit of national traditions and history was clearly manifested in the names of streets in the capital. In 1989-1992, a total of 342 streets, cul-de-sacs, and alleys were given new names in the city of Tashkent (see table 3 and diagram 3).

TABLE 3  
SHARE OF TOPONYMIC GROUPS RELATED TO THE STREET NAMES OF TASHKENT CITY DURING THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE\*

1994	Share of the total composition, %
Anthrotoponyms	61
Toponyms named after geographical places	12
Names associated with nature	7,5
Toponyms reflecting cultural and spiritual development	7
Names related to economic and social life	6
Names with oriental names	4
Toponyms reflecting historical events	2
Ethnotoponyms	0,5

\*The table was compiled by the author as a result of the analysis of the street names given in the 1994 map of the city of Tashkent.

DIAGRAM 3



The analysis of the content of the new street names shows that they were named in connection with various factors.

- famous historical figures who lived in the country, famous figures of science and culture, famous figures and specialists of other countries of the world, names of heroes who showed courage in the Second World War, people who sacrificed their lives for the peace of the people of Uzbekistan (Ali Kushchi, Shukur Burkhanov, Bilal Nazim, General Karimov, Matkarim Matchonov streets);
- Names of geographical places in different regions of the republic (Vadil, Arol streets);
- the historical name of the area where this street is located (Fergana road, Akkurgan streets);
- Names related to natural conditions (Bugishamol, Chirchikboyi streets);
- names related to the cultural, socio-economic life of the city (Press Streets, Marfat, Poygoh Streets);
- Names reflecting human emotions and spiritual world (Oli himmat, Hulkar streets);
- Names given in order to add order to street names (Katta Mirabad

1-tor, Kichik Halka Yoli Streets).

To sum up, special attention was paid to restoring the historical name of the place and nationalizing the name of the place when giving new names to the streets of the capital. In order to simplify existing adjacent street names, the practice of combining satellite street names with the main street names, renaming recurring neighborhood names by connecting them with large streets or large buildings and monuments in the neighborhood was widely used. To perpetuate the names of people who contributed a lot to the development of the national economy, science, and art of the republic, microtoponyms named after individuals were created as a result of taking into account the situations requested by the residents of the neighborhood and district governors, state and public organizations to give their names to the street or neighborhood.

## CONCLUSION

In general, the 20th century was a period rich in historical events in the history of the city of Tashkent, and during this time the city served as the capital of three types of states (Governorate General of Turkestan, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan, and the independent Republic of Uzbekistan). Its rich history is reflected in its toponymic landscape.

As a result of the revolution 1917, the Bolsheviks established Soviet power, which pursued here a centralized policy aimed at the approval of the ideology of the Soviet state. These events were reflected in the names of urban areas, neighborhoods, streets, and objects, in the names of which there are toponyms, both related to the local nature, history and traditions, and practically unrelated to the specifics of the region and not reflecting its historical development. The analysis of the semantic meaning and dynamics of the growth of urban toponyms allows us to trace the picture of the historical events that took place in this period in the capital itself and in the whole country.

The transition of the state of Uzbekistan to the path of sovereign development in 1991 was a huge event in the history of the statehood of

the Uzbek people, and it led to great positive changes in the dynamics of the development of this state. In particular, transformation processes have begun in the toponymic status of the capital city of Tashkent, and when choosing a new form of place names, factors such as restoration of history, promotion of national culture, preservation of natural heritage, ensuring its stability without being indifferent to the ecological situation, formation of good feelings in people, education of patriotism in the hearts of young people was the main focus.

Toponyms reflect a wide range of information about the nature, history, and population of a certain area. The toponymic landscape changes under the influence of various - geographical, natural, political, cultural, economic factors, and this situation further increases their informatics function. As a result of the study of such changes, the study of the events that happened in the history of a certain state in a certain period, provides an opportunity to shed light on historical questions that have not yet been explored.

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# CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN UZBEKISTAN: *Problems and Prospects*

SURAYYO ADILKHODJAEVA

## ABSTRACT

*The article details the features, legal nature, essence, and significance of the amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The following issues are considered within the framework of the article: the evolution of constitutionalism in Uzbekistan; the main directions of reforming the constitution of Uzbekistan. The article analyzes the constitutional foundations of the formation of a social, legal state. guarantees of rights, and freedoms of citizens and the limits of their restriction are an important principle of the new vision of Uzbekistan's Constitution. For more than 30 years of independent development, Uzbekistan has gained a well-deserved authority in the world community, thanks to a consistently pursued comprehensively balanced, pragmatic foreign policy. The article analyzes the norms of the Uzbekistan's Constitution, which reflect the peaceful, multi-vector foreign policy pursued by Uzbekistan. The author concludes that the fundamental law of the country not only determines the democratic structure of the state but is also a strategic legal document, on the basis of which the national statehood continues to improve.*

**Keywords:** Constitution, Uzbekistan, evolution, human rights, peaceful, multi-vector, foreign policy, social state, legal state, national statehood.

## INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the main law of the country, which determines its democratic structure. The national statehood of Uzbekistan has been revived and continues to be improved by the Constitution of Uzbekistan as the main strategic legal document of our



country. Constitutional reforms in Uzbekistan are new progress in expanding democracy in the country and improving national statehood. The Constitution is the legal foundation of the state, a product of the political wisdom and thinking of the people, and reflects the will, spirit, public consciousness and culture.

### THE EVOLUTION OF CONSTITUTIONALISM IN UZBEKISTAN

The evolution of constitutionalism in Uzbekistan fully reflects the permanent process of democratization of the state, development of democratic institutions and civil society, and improvement of statehood as a whole. The effectiveness of statehood is determined not only by the presence of a range of democratic institutions, but by their interaction, mutual influence, adequacy of social development, and this is what the Constitution provides, being the legal foundation for progressive transformations in Uzbekistan. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan was adopted on December 8, 1992, when Uzbekistan had gained Independence and left the USSR.<sup>1</sup> For more than 30 years, a transition has been made from an administrative-command to a democratic state, from a planned economy to a market economy. The state, which has significant natural, energy and human resources, has to develop in accordance with its potential. A new personnel training system was created, aimed at developing the creative abilities of each individual, meeting the increasing demand of the time, a social protection system was formed and developed.<sup>2</sup> Cardinal transformations have taken place in Uzbekistan since 2016. The state and its institutions began to open up for ordinary people, public reception rooms began to function, where any ordinary person could turn. In the modern world, the worthy place of the state in the international arena depends on a number of factors and, above all, on the country's consistently pursued foreign policy. Over the years of sovereign development, Uzbekistan has gained a well-deserved authority in the world community, thanks to a comprehensively balanced, pragmatic

foreign policy. A special role was played by the foreign policy initiatives of Uzbekistan, which were announced by the President from the highest international tribunes, including from the rostrum of the UN. Changes have taken place in the business sphere; the state has stimulated the development of entrepreneurship. The principle “state - society - person” was replaced by “person - society - state”, where the rights and interests of the individual became a priority. The activity of civil society, the self-consciousness of the people has increased significantly. During meetings with the President in 2020, people expressed their opinion on additions and changes to the Constitution of Uzbekistan. The President of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev proposed to fix Uzbekistan as a constitutional norm - a social state.<sup>3</sup> The Constitutional Commission was formed in May 2022. A lot of proposals were received - more than 220,000 about amendments and additions to the Constitution.

### MAIN REFORMING DIRECTIONS OF CONSTITUTION IN UZBEKISTAN

Constitutional reforms in Uzbekistan are objectively necessary in order to consolidate the achievements and to give way to new public relations. So, what are the main priorities and directions of the Constitutional reform in Uzbekistan in 2023?

- a. Changes of a strategic nature that improve the national statehood of Uzbekistan.
- b. The guarantees and mechanism of constitutional protection of personal rights and freedoms are expanding. At the same time, constitutional restrictions are introduced by the state body and officials.
- c. Creation of constitutional foundations for a welfare state, expansion of social rights of citizens.
- d. The Constitution is supplemented with a section on Civil Society institutions, where their rights are regulated and protected.
- e. The Constitution has been supplemented with norms that

significantly liberalize economic relations, even better conditions have been created for entrepreneurial activity and for the development of free market relations.

- f. The Power of the *Oliy Majlis*, the Parliament of Uzbekistan, have been substantially expanded constitutionally.
- g. Regulations have been introduced separating the powers of representative and executive in the regions. This contributes to the implementation of the principle of separation of power and the development of a system of checks and balances between the executive and representative branches of power in the regions of Uzbekistan.
- h. The Constitution is supplemented by norms that ensure fair justice. The Constitution is supplemented by a new chapter - the Bar. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan has changed in volume, in particular, the number of articles has increased from 128 to 155 articles, and the number of norms - from 274 to 434 norms. The text of the Constitution of Uzbekistan has changed by 65%, so it is legitimate to talk about the Constitution in the New Edition.

#### ADDITIONS MADE TO THE PREAMBLE OF THE CONSTITUTION

The preamble of a normative legal act is an introductory mandatory, integral, specifically structured, set out in a peculiar legal language, part of a legal document that has a normative character, acts as a special regulator of social relations, a center of self-regulation and a means of integrating all its other elements, performing original functions and causing diverse legal consequences. The interpretation of the preamble of a normative act in a number of political and legal situations can be decisive in making a law enforcement decision.<sup>4</sup> International justice actively uses the interpretation of the preambles of normative legal acts to clarify the will of the “international legislator” and formulate legal positions.<sup>5</sup> The preamble reflects in a concentrated form the main ideas, mentality, history,

and goals of the people of the state that adopts the Constitution. The Preamble of the New Constitution reflects that Uzbekistan has statehood with a deep historical past: based on more than three thousand years of historical experience in the development of our statehood, as well as the scientific, cultural and spiritual heritage of the great ancestors who made an invaluable contribution to world civilization. Uzbekistan really has a national statehood and this is confirmed by numerous studies. Statehood is a complex set of elements, structures, and institutions of public authority, determined by the originality of the socio-economic, political, spiritual and moral conditions of life of a particular people or association of peoples at a certain stage in the development of society. Most scholars agree that statehood in jurisprudence is a relatively new and undeveloped concept.<sup>6</sup> There is no sufficiently complete definition of statehood in legal and political science.<sup>7</sup> However, this is an oversimplified concept and does not reflect the full depth of the content of statehood. Statehood is a property, quality, and state of society at a particular historical stage. This is the system of social relations that affects not only state power but also other public institutions.<sup>8</sup> Statehood is a broader concept than the mechanism of the state, it includes both the mechanism of the state and socio-political institutions. At the same time, statehood includes such elements as political culture, political traditions, and historical memory. Statehood is a set of political, economic, social, and cultural factors that evolve in the process of civilization, the core of which is the state machinery that ensures the sovereignty and sustainable social development of the state.<sup>9</sup> Uzbek statehood has ancient roots and is more than three thousand years old.<sup>10</sup> Evidence of this is the sacred book of Zoroastrianism *Avesta* (*Unasta* - in translation means law), which streamlined social relations in the state, including contractual ones, fixed rights, and obligations. *Avesta* as a legal, cultural heritage has influenced the formation of the mentality of our people.

The Preamble of the New Constitution was supplemented with the paragraph: "Resolved to increase and protect for present and future generations the invaluable natural wealth of the country and preserve a

healthy environment.” Uzbekistan has rich natural resources, practically in the bowels of this fertile land are all the elements of the periodic table. More than 2,700 deposits and promising ores various minerals, including about 100 types of mineral raw materials, of which more than 60 are already involved in production, have been discovered in Uzbekistan. More than 900 fields have been explored with proven reserves estimated at \$970 billion. The total mineral resource potential is estimated at more than 3.3 trillion USD. In the bowels of the Republic there are huge deposits of gas and oil<sup>11</sup> Of course, the main task is to create comfortable conditions for human life, the rational use of natural resources, and the conservation of biodiversity.

One of the essential contents is the paragraph: “strive to strengthen and develop friendly relations between Uzbekistan and the world community, primarily with neighboring states, on the basis of cooperation, mutual support, peace and harmony.” One of these wisdoms: “The neighbor is calm - you are calm.” Uzbekistan came up with a number of initiatives that made it possible to establish mutual understanding and cooperation between fraternal peoples.<sup>12</sup> Since 2017, on the eve of the Navruz celebration, consultations have been held between the leaders of the Central Asian states on a regular basis, trade turnover has grown significantly, trust is growing based on common interests - all this testifies to the implementation of a new principle - striving to strengthen and develop friendly relations between Uzbekistan and the world community,, with neighboring states, on the basis of cooperation, mutual support, peace and harmony, which is reflected in the Preamble of the New Constitution.

### UZBEKISTAN IS A SOVEREIGN, DEMOCRATIC, LEGAL, SOCIAL AND SECULAR STATE

The first article of the Constitution has not only legal but also strategic significance. The New Constitution proclaims that Uzbekistan is a sovereign, democratic, legal, social, and secular state with a republican form of government. The previous edition of the Constitution, stated:

“Uzbekistan is a sovereign democratic republic”. The large-scale reforms carried out in Uzbekistan strengthen, fill the definition of our country, given in Article 1 of the Constitution, with a new concrete historical democratic content. The President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev emphasized that the processes of further democratization, liberalization and reform of all spheres of society are consistently continuing in our country. Actual problems, no matter what sphere or industry they concern, are openly discussed and solved with the participation of the population. A procedure has been introduced by public authorities, including departments of the economy, the banking and financial sector, utilities, internal affairs, education, healthcare, the judicial and legal system, reports and information in parliament and local Kengashes<sup>13</sup>. Article 1 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan was based on the provisions of the Declaration of Sovereignty, adopted on June 20, 1990, and the Constitutional Law of Uzbekistan “On the Foundations of State Independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan”, adopted on August 31, 1991.

The sovereignty of the state is the property, ability, and possibility of the state, independently and regardless of the influence of other states, of any other political forces, to carry out the functions assigned to it on the territory of its country and beyond its borders, based on the dominant national interests. There are two sides to state sovereignty internal and external. Internal sovereignty implies the absence of another higher public authority throughout the country, expresses the supremacy and completeness of state power in relation to all other organizations in the political system of society. The power in the state is one, and has a monopoly on legislation, administration and jurisdiction within the entire state territory.

A universal property, a sign of state sovereignty is the ability of a state to determine its foreign policy in the international arena independently, without the influence of external forces.<sup>14</sup>

Rule of law is the highest form of political structure, inherent only in a civilized, democratic society, free from arbitrariness and unreasonable violence.<sup>15</sup> A rule of law state has a number of features: the priority of the

right of the individual, ensuring human rights and freedoms; the rule of law, which expresses and embodies the obligatory will of society; division of power into three branches - legislative, judicial and executive, a system of checks and balances between these branches of government. On the way to becoming a state of law in Uzbekistan, all the above signs are taken into account. On the one hand, the Republic takes into account international standards in the field of guaranteeing and observing human rights, there is an obvious departure from totalitarianism and authoritarianism, which is expressed in the institutionalization of public life on the basis of constitutionalism, giving a legal character to relations between the state and the individual, the state and the economic sphere, etc.<sup>16</sup>

The social state is an ideal model of the state, to which any state should strive, implementing its social policy.<sup>17</sup> Having proclaimed in Article 1 of the New Constitution that Uzbekistan is a social state, Uzbekistan has set a goal to build a social state and is only at the beginning of its journey. The welfare state is the highest form of a democratic constitutional state. The state implements the social function through branches of public law. Uzbekistan strives to form a socially just state based on the development of human capital, equality of opportunity, creation of conditions for self-realization of the individual and social partnership of the state, business structures and civil society. The modern welfare state focuses not on privileges and subsidies to all those in need, regardless of their status, but on helping those who want to actively realize their abilities, retraining, training.<sup>18</sup> Human capital is an important component of the progressive economic development of the state, including health, innate abilities and talents, as well as education and acquired qualifications. In the modern world, it is already an axiom that one of the most profitable investments is investment in human capital. These are carried out by promoting health, providing good nutrition, playing sports, timely vaccination, treatment and dispensary examination of children. Investments are also made through spending on education, libraries, computer equipment, sports facilities. This includes time spent on education

and health promotion. At the same time, Uzbekistan activates social functions, focusing on three components of the formation of a social state: education, healthcare, and assistance to those in need<sup>19</sup>.

The proclamation of Uzbekistan as a secular state means that religion is separated from the state and does not affect the policies and laws implemented by it. The state does not interfere in the activities of religious organizations. Everyone can profess any religion or not profess any. And professing any religion, and atheists are equal before the law.

### CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF FOREIGN POLICY OF UZBEKISTAN

The worthy place of the state in the international arena in the modern world depends on a number of factors, but above all, on the country's consistently pursued foreign policy. For more than 30 years of independent development, Uzbekistan has gained a well-deserved place in the world community, thanks to a consistently pursued comprehensively balanced, pragmatic foreign policy. The foreign policy initiatives of Uzbekistan, which were voiced by the President of Uzbekistan from the highest international tribunes, including from the rostrum of the UN, also played their role. Chapter IV of the New Constitution is dedicated to the foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Article 17 determines that the Republic of Uzbekistan is a full-fledged subject of international relations. The foreign policy of Uzbekistan is based on the principles of sovereign equality of states, non-use of force or threat of force, inviolability of borders, territorial integrity of states, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and other generally recognized principles and norms of international law. The article reflects that Uzbekistan has full external sovereignty. A universal property, a sign of state sovereignty is the ability of a state to determine its foreign policy in the international arena independently, without the influence of external forces. External sovereignty, the independence of the state means its complete independence in the implementation of not only domestic but



also foreign policy. The external sovereignty of a state as a full-fledged subject of international law is expressed in the establishment and development of relations with other sovereign states on an equal footing, the ability to independently make foreign policy decisions based on the national interests of the country, the inadmissibility of interference in domestic affairs from outside.<sup>20</sup> Uzbekistan recognizes the principles of international law, has assumed obligations to comply with the norms of international law and respect the sovereignty of other countries. Article 18 regulates that Uzbekistan pursues a peaceful foreign policy aimed at the comprehensive development of bilateral and multilateral relations with states and international organizations. The Republic of Uzbekistan can enter into alliances, join commonwealths and other interstate formations, and also withdraw from them based on the highest interests of the state, people, their welfare and security.

Uzbekistan pursues a peaceful policy and does not take part in military-political blocs, reserves the right to withdraw from any interstate entity in the event of its transformation into a military-political bloc. Based on the highest interests of the people, national interests, Uzbekistan reserves the sovereign right to form, enter, participate in the work of international and regional organizations and leave them. Uzbekistan takes political, economic and other measures to prevent its involvement in armed conflicts and hotbeds of tension in neighboring states, and also does not allow the deployment of foreign facilities or military bases on its territory. The armed forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan are created solely to protect the state sovereignty of the country's territorial integrity, peaceful life and security of its population and are not involved in peacekeeping operations abroad. The foreign policy tasks of Uzbekistan are the consistent development of international cooperation in the political, trade, economic, cultural, humanitarian, scientific, technical and other fields; promotion of international initiatives of our country; strengthening the international image of the state, etc.

The multi-vector foreign policy of Uzbekistan lies in the fact that its main priority is to ensure peace and stability in the region and close

cooperation with the Central Asian states. The problems of Central Asia should be solved by the states of the region themselves without the interference of external forces.

“The Uzbek people need peace and stability” - this idea is gradually becoming clear to the world and this is reflected in the New Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Defending his rights, a person protects the right in general and contributes to the establishment of justice in society. The new Constitution is a Constitution of direct action, which means that every person, having opened the Basic Law, will be able to use its norms and refer to them when protecting their rights. The New Constitution enshrines human rights and 45 articles are devoted to this. For example, human life is the highest social value. and the natural, inalienable right of every person, no one can deprive her. The New Constitution provides for the abolition of the death penalty. After all, the civilization of society is determined by the attitude to human life. Life is given to a person neither by the state, but from above and no one can take it away. Another example is the principle of proportionality, this constitutional principle is based on the ideas of moderation, the “golden mean”, equality, justice, reasonableness. It should be noted that this constitutional principle ensures the fairness of social relations, for example, the distribution of material goods equivalent to labor, and this is fair. If a person works harder, spends his abilities, then he receives more reward. Art. 50, 51 of the Constitution of the law provides for the introduction of changes aimed at ensuring the constitutional right to education. constitutional human rights. Education plays an important role as a social lift, being a powerful tool to break the vicious cycle of poverty. In Uzbekistan, at present, all age categories of the population are covered by education, from pre-school, school, university, to postgraduate and advanced training throughout life. This is the realization of human rights, which refers to the positive, socio-economic human rights that the state provides, and these, of course, are our achievements, which should be reflected in the Constitution. It is very important that the state guaranteed equal access to education for all segments of the population. This means if a girl or a guy is capable, talented,

but the parents do not have enough money to pay for the contract, then the state should take over his education at the University or other higher educational institution, and this legal norm should be enshrined in the Constitution. The state will also benefit from this, because education is one of the main factors of human capital. The issues of legislative provision of health care and the protection of the health of citizens in our country are considered by the state as the most important priorities, which predetermines the further nature of management decisions taken by state authorities in the form of laws and other regulatory legal acts. The content of the constitutional right to health protection and medical care is a set of individual powers of everyone to improve and maintain health, as the most important socio-economic benefit, the ability to access the conditions necessary for the formation of a healthy lifestyle, the timely provision of preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitation measures aimed at preservation and promotion of health in Article 48. The right to housing is considered by the international community as one of the elements of the right to a decent standard of living (Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). In Uzbekistan, the right to housing was not previously provided for in the Constitution. In the New Constitution, for the first time, the constitutional right to housing is indicated in Article 47 and corresponds to the duties of the state: encouragement by state authorities and local self-government of housing construction; providing housing to preferential categories of citizens according to established standards; ensuring the sustainability of tenure and use of housing and its well-being.

### GUARANTEES OF THE RIGHTS, FREEDOMS OF CITIZENS AND THE LIMITS OF THEIR RESTRICTION

In a democratic state, the rights and freedom of a person - a citizen, as well as their duties, constitute the most important social and political and legal institution, objectively acting as a measure of the achievements of society and as an indicator of its maturity and civilization.

In the process of realizing the rights and freedom of an individual, various interests collide: a person, his rights and freedoms, the rights and freedom of other people, which are equally guaranteed by the Constitution, as well as public and state interests. One of the significant principles of the doctrine of the law-governed state is the principle of equality of all before the law. Based on this, restrictions on human freedom in the state and a clear definition of their limits by positive law are established. And it is an objective need of society. At the same time, it is very important to maintain a balance of interests of an individual and society and the state as a whole.

The establishment of restrictions on the constitutional rights and freedom of citizens is directly related to the fundamental rules of jurisprudence, which are directly related to the concept of 'justice' - fairness. The genesis of the fundamental principle of law - equality of rights for all comes back to ancient legal thought, which can be noted among the great thinkers of the East - Farabi, Ibn Sino, Beruni, Yusuf Khos Khodjib, as well as in Ancient Rome - Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Cicero. Thus, the proposition "Do not treat people the way you would not want people to treat you" or "In everything you want people to do for you, do the same for them" comes from the origins of jurisprudence, evolving throughout the history of the development of law.<sup>21</sup> The meaning and content of "Ensuring justice for all equally" in a modern state are when "the rights and freedom of one person end where the rights and freedom of another person begin." This provision has become one of the fundamental principles of modern jurisprudence - the principle of formal legal equality, which means that no person has any privileges over other people in the field of law. The principle of "equality of all people before the law", along with the principles of "division of power into three branches" and "rule of law", formed the basis of the law-governed state. Without this it is impossible to create and function any law-governed state.

Establishment of restrictions on the constitutional rights and freedom of citizens is acceptable to all democratic states. Moreover, they are regulated by international acts. In paragraph 2 of Art. 29 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, the goals of restricting human rights are reduced to: 1) ensuring due recognition and respect for the rights and freedom of other people; 2) satisfaction of the due(tribute) requirements of morality, public order and public welfare in a democratic society.

These goals are also marked in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (clause 3, article 12; clause 3, article 18; clause 3, article 19; article 21; clause 2, article 22). The procedure for restricting the rights and freedom of an individual, provided by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, provides with the possibility of restricting rights and freedom only by law, and no other legislative acts.

Restrictions on constitutional rights are neither a derogation, nor a discrimination and not a violation of the rights and freedom of a person and a citizen, but a reduction in the scope of rights and freedom granted in order not to violate the rights of others. For example, in accordance with Article 33, "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, speech and belief. Everyone has the right to seek, receive and disseminate any information." Part 3 of the same article provides with the restriction of this right: "restriction of the right to search, receive and disseminate information is allowed only in accordance with the law and only to protect the constitutional order, public health, public morality, rights and freedom of others, ensuring public safety and public order, as well as preventing the disclosure of state secrets or other secrets protected by law."

According to Article 66 of the new Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "the owner, at his own discretion, owns, uses and disposes of his property".

The essence of restricting the constitutional rights reflects the correlation and interaction of private and public interests, contributes to the balance and harmonization of private and public law, the establishment of justice in society and improvement of law in general.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, in the process of restricting the constitutional rights and freedom of citizens, on the one hand, state bodies should participate, and on the other hand, subjects of civil society, the public should be involved in resolving issues of

expediency, effectiveness, and significance of their establishment.

However, when restricting constitutional rights, it is necessary to establish their limits, because the state, officials with authority can broadly understand and apply the restriction of rights which violate the balance of interests, in favor of the state and its structures. This can lead to the suppression of the rights and freedom of an individual. Taking into account this circumstance, Article 31 regulates that: "everyone has the right to the inviolability of the home. Penetration into a dwelling, as well as seizure and inspection in it, is allowed only in cases and in the manner prescribed by law. The same article provides the limits of restriction: "A search in a dwelling is allowed only in accordance with the law and on the basis of a court decision." This rule also provides for a mechanism of checks and balances between the executive and judicial branches of government, i.e. only the court, can decide, after examining all circumstances, whether there are sufficient grounds for a search or not.

Establishing the limits of restriction of the constitutional rights and freedom of citizens constitute a new constitutional value of the law-governed state. What principles should be followed when establishing the limits of restriction of constitutional human rights and freedom?

First, clear legislative regulation of the limits of restricting the constitutional rights and freedom of a person. Paragraph B.15 of the Siracusa Principles on the Interpretation of Limitations and Derogations from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that no limitation on the exercise of human rights shall be imposed except in accordance with a national law of general application.<sup>23</sup> A similar rule is contained in paragraph 48 of the Limburg principles for the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1986). It states that restrictions on the exercise of economic, social, and cultural rights are not imposed except in accordance with national law of general application, which is not contrary to the Covenant and which is in force at the time when the restriction is introduced. Therefore, the limits of the established restrictions on the constitutional

rights and freedom of citizens should be extremely clearly fixed in the legislation so that the state power could not go beyond them. This is the principle of legality when the freedom and rights of the individuals are restricted.

Article 21 of the new Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan regulates restrictions on the constitutional rights and freedom of citizens, according to which "Human rights and freedom can be limited only in accordance with the law and only to the extent necessary to protect the constitutional order, public health, public morality, rights and freedom of others, ensuring public safety and public order". Following this norm, it can be stated that along with the right of an individual person, which is of paramount importance in a democratic state, it is also necessary to take into account reasonable requirements for ensuring the security of society, maintaining stability, ensuring civil peace and national harmony, and the territorial integrity of the state. While we are talking about the restriction of human rights and freedom, we should note that the limits of restriction of constitutional rights should be clearly established. This is the principle of targeted restriction of the rights and freedom of an individual.

The source of the principle of inadmissibility of restriction of absolute rights and freedoms of the individual is the norm specified in paragraph 2 of Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It contains the limit of possible restriction of the rights in the form of a complete ban on torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, on being subjected to medical and other experiments without consent. This ignores the effect of the presumption of innocence and freedom of conscience and bans keeping in slavery and servitude. State imprisonment is implemented in case of failure to fulfill contractual obligations, as well as a guarantee of recognition of legal personality regardless of location and non-retroactivity of criminal law.

A person's right to life may be an inalienable right if the State has committed itself to abolish the death penalty.<sup>24</sup> Thus, according to articles 25 and 26, the right to live is an inalienable right of every person and is protected by law. Encroachment in human life is the gravest crime. In

Uzbekistan, the death penalty is prohibited. The honor and dignity of a person is inviolable. Nothing can be the reason for belittling them. No one may be subjected to torture, violence, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. No one may be subjected to medical and scientific experiments without his consent.

The principle of fairness and proportionality of the restriction of the rights and freedom of an individual is enshrined in paragraph 2 of the Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the provision on the exclusivity and justice of the established restrictions. The extent of any restriction on a right must be strictly proportionate to the needs or higher interests for which the restriction is introduced. The essence of this principle is that when developing and applying a legislative restriction, the state should not restrict rights and freedom more than is required to achieve the goal in connection with the restriction which is introduced. For example, Article 20 of the draft Constitutional Law "On the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan" contains a provision according to which "Measures of legal influence on a person applied by state bodies must be based on the principle of proportionality and be sufficient to achieve the goals stipulated by laws." Violation of this principle may manifest itself in the use of excessive punishments for offences whose social danger or harm is small and insignificant.

The principle of the priority of individual rights and a clear regulation of the rights and obligations of civil servants restricts the rights of civil servants in accordance with the legal regime "Only what is not prohibited by law is allowed."

Article 20 regulates that "all contradictions and ambiguities in the legislation that arise in the relationship of a person with state bodies are interpreted in favor of a person."

The mechanism for implementing the limits of restriction of constitutional rights and freedom of citizens will be incomplete if control is not provided. The functions of monitoring the constitutionality of legislative restrictions on the constitutional rights and freedoms of a person and a citizen in organizational and legal relations must be assigned to the



Constitutional Court of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The limits of restrictions on the constitutional rights and freedom of citizens should be understood as the establishment of restrictions which meet the principles of legality, necessity, justice, proportionality, equality of rights and freedom, due to the natural and external factors of their introduction.

Establishing the limits of restriction of constitutional rights and freedom of citizens, obviously, must meet the following requirements:

- A. To be established by laws;
- B. To be established only for the purposes specified in Part 3 of Article 21 of the Constitution, including the need to protect the foundations of the constitutional order, public health, public morality, the rights and freedom of others, ensuring public safety and public order;
- C. To be proportionate to constitutionally significant goals and corresponding threats to which the rights and interests protected by law are exposed;
- D. To comply with the democratic principles of our state;
- E. To establish the priority of private rights over public ones and regulate the rights and obligations of state bodies;
- F. To be formulated with a sufficient degree of certainty (clarity and accuracy).

## CONCLUSION

Improving national statehood is, first of all, expanding the possibility of democratic government, and increasing the efficiency of the state. Each state forms its power structures based on historical experience, legal traditions, and human resources, gradually improving and adapting them to the requirements of the needs of society. The effectiveness of statehood is determined not only by the presence of a range of democratic institutions, but by their interaction, mutual influence, and adequate to social development, and this is what the Constitution of Uzbekistan provides,

being the legal foundation for progressive transformations in the country. These principles, laid down in the Constitution of the country, determine the democratic nature of the structure of state power. And the main social value of our society - the Personality in the system of statehood is represented in interaction with the subjects of the political system. As elements of statehood, the Constitution highlights such important general principles as democracy, the rule of law, humanism, justice, internationalism, and patriotism. Among the specific constitutional principles of the relationship between the individual and the state: mutual responsibility, legality, equality, universal respect for human rights and freedoms, his legitimate interests, political and ideological pluralism. Uzbekistan's Constitution ensures the recognition, observance and protection of human rights and freedoms, reflects all the fundamental provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: personal rights and human freedoms, political and economic rights. Based on the priority of individual rights, a new legal doctrine will be formed. The policy of the future is aimed at progressive changes in society, they remain as a state with a democratic mechanism, as a prosperous life, as a sustainable economy - these are values that will be appreciated by history.

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## GENDER EQUALITY AND PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN UZBEKISTAN

*IHTIBOR SULTANOVA*

### ABSTRACT

*This article reveals the essence of Uzbekistan's policy on ensuring gender equality and protecting the comprehensive rights of women. The emphasis is on the need to solve women's problems, based on the current complex international environment and violation of human rights in general. The article gives the example of Uzbekistan, based on its legal framework, the implementation of the state policy aimed at ensuring gender equality and protecting the interests of women in all spheres of life: at the level of public administration, at the level of the activities of various ministries and departments, the activities of political parties, legal bodies, the education system, education, entrepreneurship. This is confirmed by the data of sociological surveys conducted by the Center for the Study of Public Opinion "Ijtimoiy fikr". Special attention is paid to the activities of the state to create conditions for women, based on proposals, in the process of multilateral contacts, such international organizations as the UN (its special agencies: UNDP, ILO, WHO, UNICEF), SCO, OTS, OIC, etc.*

**Keywords:** Transformation, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Uzbekistan, gender policy, women's rights, Sustainable Development Goals, strategy, education, social policy, international organizations.

### TRANSFORMATION OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND ROLE OF WOMEN

Currently, we are witnessing the transformation of international relations, there are new challenges and threats. "Powerful of this world" are using variety of previously unknown techniques and methods in politics to

achieve the purely selfish interests, disregard of international legal norms by individual world hegemony makes itself felt. Traditional diplomacy begins to feel the need to carry out its activities together with other types of diplomacy: public, sports, scientific, cultural. In these conditions, the interpersonal factor of communication between various political actors is becoming more and more relevant: states, international organizations, social movements, individuals. It is actualized, especially on the platform of comprehensive contacts of women. Women should now be considered as full-fledged subjects of politics, contributing by their vigorous activities to ensuring social and economic stability in society<sup>1</sup>.

The importance of considering women's rights, first of all, as human rights, that is, the individual, with all her status powers, is increasing. The States of the world claiming to be civilized and democratic, are called upon to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in their policies. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights draws attention to such basic rights and opportunities of women as "1. The availability of rights and opportunities regardless of skin color, language, religion, national and social origin; 2. The right to life and personal integrity; 3. One should not be subjected to torture degrading treatment; 4. The legal personality of a woman should be recognized; 5. The right to freedom of opinion; 6. The right of access to social security, the development of a woman as a person in the economic, social and cultural fields; 7. The right to work, to protection from unemployment; 8. The right to a standard of living (including food, clothing, housing, medical care) that is necessary to maintain health and well-being; 9. Motherhood and infancy entitle a woman to special care; 10. The right to receive an education"<sup>2</sup>.

Its main provisions formed the basis of the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", adopted in 1979, which became the international Bill on Women's rights. The Convention is also in the 21st century, the main program of action for States in providing conditions and guarantees of women's rights. Its main ideas are also reflected in the documents of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the 1995 Action Plan adopted by it, and in subsequent

documents of the signatory States.

The issues of granting women's rights are reflected in the adopted articles of constitutions, legislative acts of many countries of the world. An important impetus in the further solution of women's rights is the fact that at the end of 2013, the UN Women, having studied the Constitutions of 195 UN member states and observers, began to evaluate them from the point of view of taking into account issues of ensuring women's rights, including on the basis of the gender equality factor. It is also progressive that in 2014, actress Emma Watson suggested that men also should advocate for gender equality<sup>3</sup>. After all, gender equality concerns not only women but also men. The term "gender" means "social equality of the sexes", and not equality in physical and biological terms. Gender equality means equality in obtaining the necessary conditions for normal human living, the use of medical services, equal access to all types of education, participation in political decision-making, government and society.

Creating the necessary legal guarantees for women is the dictate of the triumph of true justice, since the ancient Greek philosopher Antiphon said that nature created men and women equal, but people themselves created laws that belittle people<sup>4</sup>. Now it's time to return to the natural, not invented state of people in society. It is quite legitimate that in 1791, the fighter for women's freedom, Olympia de Gouges, in the Declaration "On Citizenship and Women's Rights" wrote about the legitimate right of a woman to think freely and express her thoughts.

In early 21st century, we are once again raising questions about the need to solve women's problems at the global level. Although they represent half of humanity, they are largely deprived of many of their rights. They are the most vulnerable. According to the United Nations data: a large number of poor people who do not have education, qualified medical care, jobs, migrants who are constantly forced to look for work, deprived of the most necessary amenities in life, suffering from various cardiovascular, infectious diseases, which is increasing in the conditions of a pandemic are mainly women. 2/3 of the illiterate in the world are also women. According to UNICEF, it will take another 100 years for all

girls from the poorest families in sub-Saharan Africa to be able to get secondary education<sup>5</sup>. Accordingly, having no education, there are few of them in scientific activity, where women in the world make up one quarter of the total number of scientists. In the entire history of Nobel Prize Laureates, there were only 3 percent of women.

### WOMEN'S SUPPORT STRATEGY IN UZBEKISTAN

The issues of ensuring gender equality are of concern to all civilized society at the present stage and it becomes quite natural that many documents adopted at the global, regional, and national levels that affect certain problems of women largely coincide with the goals of such documents as: the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015), planned to be implemented by 2030, SCO Development goals and Strategies planned to be resolved by 2025, The Strategy of Actions on Five Priority Areas of Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021, The Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026, the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030.

The fundamental tasks at the present stage are the Sustainable Development Goals put forward by the UN General Assembly, where 17 Goals and 169 tasks are set for humanity that require a speedy solution. As the First Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed, noted, "The Sustainable Development Goals are a compass by which to navigate the economic development of all countries of the world." The conditions created for women are an important indicator of Sustainable economic development in society, a factor of competitiveness of its capabilities. Taking into account the need for attention to women, first of all from the state, special attention is paid to the development of women's opportunities in Uzbekistan.

Working with women, their political, economic, spiritual and moral potential, has been elevated to the rank of a state strategy in Uzbekistan since the first days of independence. The establishment of the rule of law in the country and the formation of civil society contribute to the growth

of socio-political activity of women. They create conditions everywhere for a full-fledged life, work, and education of the younger generation. The legal basis of the world experience in providing certain benefits to women is taken into account.

Over the past 30 years of independence, Uzbekistan has joined 80 basic international documents in the field of women's rights<sup>6</sup>. In his speech at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev stated: "Our goal is to jointly form a fair global system that will ensure the fundamental rights and freedoms, health and well-being of every person... Gender policy has become a priority issue for us"<sup>7</sup>.

In recent years, more than 40 legal documents have been adopted in support of women: decrees and resolutions of the President of Uzbekistan, resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers. As part of the implementation of the Strategy of Actions of Uzbekistan, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in the context of the development of the New Uzbekistan, 9 tasks have been developed to ensure gender equality and empowerment of women and girls until 2030. According to economists, the empowerment of women and girls on a global scale plays an important role in accelerating economic growth and promoting social development. Full participation of women can increase the growth rate of the world's economy by more than 10 percent, and investments in education for girls and an increase in the age of marriage will allow you to receive an income 5 times higher than the amount invested. In accordance with these tasks, it is planned to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls in the country, ensure gender equality, provide conditions for education, and, accordingly, full participation of women at the decision-making level in the political, legal, socio-economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres of state and public life. Based on this factor, the policy of New Uzbekistan pays attention to the upbringing from childhood of a woman herself fully aware of her rights, opportunities and responsibility to society for education, upbringing of a full-fledged harmoniously developed current and future generation. Tangible support in the motivational mood of women, as well



as assistance in obtaining objective information by state bodies about the state of solving women's issues, is provided by a permanent public opinion poll among women of Uzbekistan conducted by the Republican Center for the Study of Public Opinion *Ijtimoiy Fikr*, established in 1997. Let's focus on some indicators of sociological surveys<sup>8</sup>. They provide answers to many interesting topics.

To the question "What role do you think women currently play in our society?", the absolute majority (88.4%) of respondents answered that "women play an increasing role by taking an active part in the processes of state and social construction....Women began to express their opinions more openly, which characterizes their degree of participation and role... They participate in the work of the *Oliy Majlis* of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in the work of the *khokimiyats* of regions, cities, districts, in self-government bodies... The degree of women's participation in the field of private entrepreneurship, small business, culture, art and sports, education, health, social security has increased".

...Appreciating the degree of security and protection of rights in various spheres of life, 88.9 percent noted that favorable conditions have been created in the country for women to receive education, further professional development and professional level...

...The majority (87.2%) highly appreciated the level of ensuring women's right to protection of honor and dignity, enshrined in article 27 of Uzbekistan's Constitution...

83.5 percent of respondents noted that reproductive rights are fully ensured in Uzbekistan, that is, the right of a woman to decide on the birth of a child herself...

...Research results have shown that work is the most important life value for women. For them, work is the main sign of life: "as long as a person works, he is alive." Women see work as a way to self-affirmation in society and an opportunity to realize their creative potential. Work for them is a way of socialization...

...The level of education is an important factor necessary for promotion in the labor market. A woman with a higher education is applying for

more prestigious and highly paid positions, has prospects for promotion, success in her career and life. The importance of higher education was noted by 74.3% of women, and among girls aged 18-19, this figure reached 85.7%...

...The analysis of the results of sociological surveys revealed a positive trend of increasing the number of women who have expressed a desire to engage in entrepreneurial activity, observed in recent years, as well as those women who already have their own businesses. Women's participation in entrepreneurship is of great social importance: women become active participants in social and economic life, their income serves to replenish the family budget, a woman's financial independence makes her self-confident, leads to an increase in social status.

Studies have shown that a successful businesswoman is more responsible about her duties, tends to carefully work out the little things, delves into the nuances. The participants of the survey note that in order to combine a leadership position and a family, self-discipline is necessary, the ability to plan and calculate their strength and the consequences of each decision several steps ahead.

...In the course of research, it was revealed in which field women entrepreneurs work. The following areas are most popular among women: trade and services, agriculture, including the production, storage, processing and canning of fruit and vegetable products, the production of textiles and ready-made garments, the organization of catering facilities, the opening of private preschool institutions, learning centers, language courses and vocational training, the opening of private medical clinics, diagnostic and rehabilitation centers"<sup>9</sup>.

In a word, women prefer, by virtue of their natural gifts, to engage in that entrepreneurial activity that requires economy, precision and accuracy. Identical requirements are imposed on their participation in such areas as healthcare, where they constitute 82 percent, science, education, culture, art, where they constitute 72 percent. In modern conditions, the appointment of women to the post of Deputy Prime Minister, Chairman of the Senate, *khokim*, rector of the university is a

confirmation of the assessment of the managerial, intellectual potential of women. Although history knows many examples of selfless feat, talent, intelligence and ingenuity of women. Let's mention them. The wise ruler of the Massagets, Tomaris, who bravely defended her tribe from King Cyrus. The wife, kind and wise adviser of the great Amir Timur - Bibikhonim, who not only gave advice in solving various issues of public administration, but also helped in the implementation of diplomatic receptions. Nadira Begum, the wife of the ruler Umarkhan, who contributed to the transformation of the Khan's palace into a center of communication of leading scientists, poets, writers, artists, musicians of that time. In the 20th century - the famous poet, stateswoman, winner of a number of state awards and prizes, the wife of the poet Hamid Alimdjan - Zulfiya Israilova, in whose honor in 1999 the Zulfiya State Prize was established in Uzbekistan, which is awarded for achievements in the field of literature, art, science, culture and education to gifted girls between the ages of 14 and 30. Or the first Uzbek woman - academician, Doctor of Chemical Sciences Zarifa Saidnasirova - the wife of the poet and novelist Tashmukhamedov Aybek, who for a number of years of her husband's illness, when he lost the power of speech, determined by the movement of his lips what he wanted to say and prepared a five-volume book dedicated to the great poet Alisher Navoi.

And today, at the beginning of the 21st century, such famous personalities are known as academician, Doctor of Economics, professor, one of the founders of the school of sociology in Uzbekistan - Rano Ubaydullayeva, Honored Worker of Culture, one of the first women conductors of Uzbekistan, composer, Doctor of Sciences, professor, founder of the Sogdiana Chamber Orchestra - Abdurahimova Feruza, the first female Minister of Economy of independent Uzbekistan, Doctor of Economics - Galina Saidova, the first announcers of Uzbek television, Honored Artists of Uzbekistan: Galina Melnikova and Nasiba Ismailova and many others.

## ACTIVIZATION OF WOMEN'S POTENTIAL

Uzbekistan's contacts with international organizations are of particular importance in the activation of women's potential. Currently, Uzbekistan is cooperating on the issue of creating conditions for women with such UN special agencies as the International Labor Organization, UNICEF, UNESCO. Besides with the OSCE, SCO, OIC, OTS. There are 70 national women's NGOs operating in the country. In 2021, a platform for cooperation between women leaders of Central Asian countries was created, the Tashkent Forum of Women Leaders of the SCO countries was held on the initiative of the SCO Center for Public Diplomacy in Uzbekistan and the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, dedicated to increasing the activity of women in ensuring sustainable development<sup>10</sup>. In August 2022, in the Year of Uzbekistan's Chairmanship in the SCO, the SCO Women's Forum was held.

The formulation and solution of women's problems is determined by the legal framework for their protection, the Strategy of Actions on Five Priority Areas of Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021 adopted in 2017, relevant state programs for each year, as well as the decree of the President of the Republic "On measures to radically improve activities in the area of supporting women and strengthening the institution of the family" dated February 2, 2018, have become relevant. This Decree strategically focuses on the implementation of such a state policy, where social policy assumes support for women, protection of their rights and interests, which will enhance their role and activity in the implementation of reforms in the country. In the conditions of the New Uzbekistan, gender-oriented laws have also been adopted, such as: "On guarantees with respect to equal rights and opportunities for women and men", "On the protection of women from harassment and violence", "On the protection of reproductive health of citizens", "On amendments and additions to Article 15 of the Family Code", "On amendments to the Labor Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan". Amendments have also been made to the electoral legislation. Article 70 of the Electoral Code states that "the number of women should be at least 30 percent of the total number of

candidates for deputies nominated from a political party”.

Along with national scientists, specialists, and experts, representatives of such UN agencies as the UN Development Program, the Population Fund, the Children's Fund, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Organization for Migration, and the International Labor Organization participated in the development of the above-mentioned legislative acts in support of women, protection of their rights, and interests.

The resolutions adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan are also timely and helpful: “On measures to improve the socio-spiritual atmosphere in society, further support of the mahalla institute, as well as raising the system of work with families and women to a new level” dated February 18, 2020, “On additional measures for social support of women” from January 8, 2021 and “On additional measures for the rehabilitation of women victims of violence” dated May 19, 2021.

The real factor influencing the growth of women's political activity is their involvement in the activities of political parties. There are five of them in the republic: UzLiDeP, the Social Democratic Party *Adolat*, the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, the Party *Milliy Tiklanish*, Ecological Party of Uzbekistan. Currently, each party has a “women's wing”, through which women actively participating in the party have the opportunity to constantly undergo training and retraining at the Academy of Public Administration, where, in addition to the general educational content of information on political, economic, legal plans, training takes place from among these women leaders. According to the results of the elections held in Uzbekistan in 2019, the number of women deputies of the Legislative Chamber of the *Oliy Majlis* of Uzbekistan was 32 percent, in the Senate of the *Oliy Majlis* of the Republic of Uzbekistan was 25 percent. According to this indicator, Uzbekistan ranked 45th, leaving behind Germany, Canada, Australia, the USA, Central Asian countries, in a word, 130 states<sup>11</sup>.

Motivational conditions have been created in Uzbekistan to support talented girls aged 14 to 30 years. Every year girls who have shown special

talents and achievements in the field of education, science, culture, sports, art, social work have been awarded the Zulfiya State Prize since 1999 and today their number has reached 367. Older women are awarded a breastplate for outstanding achievements in the field of science, education, and youth education the sign *Mo'tabar ayol* (which means "Respected woman"). Today they number 855 people<sup>12</sup>.

In 2022, the movement *Oqila ayollar* (Movement of "Wise Women") was created. Every year, new benefits are created for girls when they enter universities or get master's degree programs. The state assumes financing and lending at the same time. This is a specific motivation for girls to get an education, especially from low-income families.

The Parliament of the country makes a decisive contribution to the initiation of a specific national legislative framework, the ratification of international documents on the support of women. The Chairman of the Senate in the conditions of the New Uzbekistan is for the first time nominated a female leader, Doctor of Sociological Sciences Norbayeva Tanzilya Kamalovna. Under her leadership, a Commission on gender equality was established under the Legislative chamber of the *Oliy Majlis* of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and a Committee on Women and Gender Equality was established under the upper house of Parliament – the Senate. This Committee monitors the implementation of laws and regulations adopted in the republic concerning certain issues of women and children. The Parliament hears reports from ministries and departments not only on the implementation of certain politically important tasks, tasks in the field of socio-economic reforms, but also on the extent to which conditions are provided to women in the state and non-state sectors, the degree of ensuring gender equality in practice, the realization of women's legitimate rights in education, social protection, promotion of their employment, involvement in sports, involvement in cultural events.

Social protection of women is currently carried out both through State bodies and through public-private partnerships. Targeted assistance to women is carried out on a systematic basis, thanks to the introduction of a new system, a constantly updated electronic database of the program:

“women’s notebook”, “youth notebook” (their main goal is to provide material, psychological, legal and financial assistance), as well as through the established Fund for the Support of Women and Families. At the same time, the Republican Working Group is active, which includes representatives of executive authorities - *khokimiyats*, prosecutor’s offices, tax authorities, employees of the Committee on Family and Women’s Affairs, the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic, who work to identify vulnerable segments of the population among women and youth in a particular region to solve their problems. Assistance is provided in nine areas: those in need of housing, work, obtaining a loan for the development of entrepreneurship, obtaining a place in a preschool institution, receiving psychological assistance, medical care, etc. Social support is targeted, it is provided primarily to low-income, single women, disabled people, their families, girls who have lost their parents and want to study at universities.

According to the decision of the UN General Assembly, which adopted 17 Goals and 169 tasks, the fifth goal raised the issue of the need to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment in all countries. Uzbekistan has identified the solution of 16 goals, 125 tasks involving the consideration of 206 indicators. All of them proceed from the National Strategy of Uzbekistan for Ensuring Gender Equality, calculated until 2030. Based on it, it is expected to solve the following tasks by 2030:

- eradicate the extreme form of poverty of the population;
- reduce the proportion of low-income men, women and children of all ages, in all its manifestations, by half;
- reduce the maternal mortality rate by one third;
- raise primary and general secondary education to a qualitative level;
- ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and high-quality secondary, specialized secondary, higher, vocational and additional education;
- ensure universal access to safe drinking water;
- ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy

supply;

- ensure sustainable and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value<sup>13</sup>;

In addition, the strategy provides for:

- strengthening the targeting and effectiveness of the social protection system, achieving full coverage of all those in need with social protection measures;
- developing and improving strategic forecasting, development, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that take into account the interests of low-income citizens and gender aspects to facilitate accelerated investment in measures to eliminate low-income population;
- strengthen control and monitoring of the prevention of the worst forms of child and forced labor.

According to Alan Armitage, Regional Director of the United Nations Population Fund for Eastern Europe and Central Asia: "As a result of the implementation of this Strategy, more women leaders will appear in Uzbekistan, stable socio-economic development will be ensured, new opportunities will be created, especially for girls - current and future leaders<sup>14</sup>". Girls' clubs have been established in Uzbekistan's schools, and Girls' Clubs have been functioning in the country's universities since 2017. Competitions are held every two years among undergraduates and doctoral students of universities and research institutes *Ilm Yulduzi* (Star of Science), where the intellectual potential and scientific level of knowledge of the applicants are determined.

Close attention is paid to the issues of ensuring the employment of women. There are Centers of women's entrepreneurship. In order to provide financial assistance, they are provided with preferential loans from state and commercial banks, information support is provided, legal services are provided, including free of charge through the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan and the Madad Center. A number of state



programs are being implemented, such as: "Every family is an entrepreneur", "A well-maintained village", "A well-maintained mahalla", "Five important initiatives". Within the framework of these programs, sewing workshops, short-term professional courses for women entrepreneurs are organized in remote areas, the People's Bank of Uzbekistan has been implementing a new system of training women in entrepreneurship for a number of years, developing standard business plans for them, providing practical assistance in obtaining loans.

The establishment of the Ministry of Preschool Education in 2017 determines a lot in the support of mothers, which began to contribute to the upbringing of preschool children in a variety of directions: pedagogical, legal, medical, cultural, educational, spiritual and moral. Moreover, the main task of all measures is the implementation of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Guarantees of the Rights of the Child", the "United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" (UNDCP) of 2008. Child protection is considered in the conditions of the New Uzbekistan as an important step in the implementation of the Strategy of Uzbekistan, as a moral and legal obligation to the future, to society. It should be noted that the Minister of Preschool Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan was appointed a woman - Agrippina Vasilyevna Shin, who made a great contribution to the work on the formation of conditions for the development of preschool education in our country. As UNESCO Deputy Director for Education Stephanie Giannini noted: "The level of coverage of children in the preschool education system has increased almost 2.5 times. Today Uzbekistan is leading and has become a Champion in this field".

From the period 2017 to 2022, the pre-school enrollment rate reached 69.5 percent. Holding for the first time in the years of independence, in the conditions of the New Uzbekistan, the 2nd World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education in the capital of Uzbekistan Tashkent on November 14-16, 2022 under the auspices of UNESCO, demonstrated the level of achievements in the field of preschool education in our country. The Ministry of Preschool Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan has

developed cooperation with such foreign countries as the Republic of Korea, China, the USA, the Russian Federation, Japan, Singapore, Turkey, Belarus and international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, KOICA, JICA, OSCE, the Saudi Development Fund. About 80 memoranda and agreements have been signed to promote the development of the preschool education system.

At all stages of the formation of the personality of girls and women, respect for family values is also brought up, which unite personalities, humanize them. As the Central Asian thinker Rizouddin ibn Fakhritdin said, "The family is a ship, and the steering wheel is in the hands of a woman. The more educated she is, the more intelligent, the more delicate, the more attentive, the wiser, the attitude in the family is kind, there is mutual understanding, there is growth of everyone in the family"<sup>15</sup>. That's what a woman means in a family.

The issues of gender equality and the protection of women's interests in Uzbekistan are being addressed comprehensively, in many ways:

taking into account the National Strategy of the New Uzbekistan in the direction of the development of the welfare state;

providing care for the creation of legal guarantees for the protection of women's interests in housing, education, participation in State and public administration;

ensuring the need for women's productive employment as a factor in the development of the country's economy, the growth of family incomes, the objective possibility of conditions for the self-realization of women's potential;

increasing the number of women in political decision-making.

Women represent a strategic resource of the State in the formation of gender policy. As the Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres noted on March 11-17, 2019 at the 63rd session of the UN on the Status of Women: "Where women participate in politics and public life, the economy grows, stability strengthens and the well-being of citizens grows"<sup>16</sup>.

The strategy for achieving gender equality has a long-term perspective,

we need to continue to implement its priority areas reflected in Goal 69 of the New Uzbekistan Development Strategy for 2022-2026 "Support for women and further increase of their activity in society":

"Creating an atmosphere of intolerance to harassment and violence against women in society, ensuring the rights and legitimate women's interests;

Continuation of the policy of ensuring gender equality, increasing the socio-political activity of women, continuing the implementation of reforms to support them;

Providing comprehensive assistance in training, mastering professional skills and providing women with decent work, supporting women's entrepreneurship, identifying and correctly orienting the abilities of gifted girls and women;

Improving the efficiency of work to ensure the quality of medical and social services provided to women in the regions, especially in rural areas, and introducing them to a healthy lifestyle;

Definition of systematic measures to provide housing for women in need of housing, improve living and working conditions, increase their income;

Provision of socio-legal, psychological assistance to women who find themselves in a difficult social situation, their targeted support;

Organization of targeted work with "women's notebooks", implementation of public control over the timely solution of women's problems by responsible organizations" is provided by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026" No. UP-60 dated 28.01.2022.<sup>17</sup>

In short, gender policy and concern for the protection of women's interests should be implemented in all States and all mankind should be interested in this.

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## UZBEKISTAN'S URBAN FUTURE

*FREDERICK STARR and MICHAEL SELLMAN*

### ABSTRACT

*Housing construction in the cities is important element of urbanization of modern Uzbekistan, but it faces number of challenges. This article describes current problems and possible prospects for the development of urbanization processes in Uzbekistan, analyses traditional and Soviet types of housing, and gives recommendations for improving urban architecture. The work uses general empirical methods of cognition, elements of historical, anthropological and cultural approaches, methods of comparison and generalization, statistical analysis. The proposed options for solving the problems of urban planning in Uzbekistan and the use of such a complex combination of methods and approaches in the course of the study are distinguished by their novelty and particular relevance for the Central Asian region. As a result of the study, the method of modular constructions was put forward as the most acceptable in the cities of Uzbekistan. The demographic, cultural, economic potential and ambitious plans for the restructuring of the country, the authors conclude, can lead to significant progress in the process of its current urbanization.*

**Keywords:** Uzbekistan, urbanization, city, construction, methods, architecture, future.

### INTRODUCTION

No feature of the modern world is more striking than the mass movement of people from countryside to cities. As commerce and prosperity grow, millions move from the rural to urban environments. As part of the fast-developing world, Uzbekistan, too, faces an urban future. But what will Uzbekistan's future urban centers be like? If effectively developed, Uzbekistan's future cities will draw on the best of the past and on

contemporary experiences worldwide. They will enable Uzbek citizens to make smooth transitions to modern urban life without jettisoning important family and social values. As they achieve this, Uzbekistan's city centers can become models for other countries facing the same problems of rapid urban growth.

Rapid migration from the countryside has created monster metropolises like Shanghai (21 million), Karachi (18 million), and Istanbul (15 million), each of which has more inhabitants than the individual populations of 160 of the 195 members of the United Nations. In many developing countries the mass movement to cities has created slums, urban crime, and corruption. Even in cases where these pathologies have been avoided, urban life has forced millions of rural migrants into faceless megastructures, where they barely interact with their neighbors, let alone feel a sense of community.

How can Uzbekistan reap the benefits of urbanization and avoid its pitfalls? How can it identify and embrace wise modern strategies in urban planning and architecture that harmonize with Uzbek life as it has been lived over the centuries? How should notions of zoning be considered? Should residential and retail or commercial units be contiguous and if so, to what extent? These questions are urgent. How they are answered will determine how the children and grandchildren of today's people of Uzbekistan will live.

## DEMOGRAPHY AND URBANIZATION IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan's State Statistical Committee reports that as of 1 January 2018 the country's population was 32,653,900<sup>1</sup>, placing Uzbekistan forty-fourth among all countries in terms of total population<sup>2</sup>. Tashkent, with a population of 2,481,696, houses 7.6% of all Uzbek citizens, with the rest living in secondary cities or the countryside<sup>3</sup>. It should be noted that every country defines "urban" differently. The World Bank, seeking to clarify the issue, cites that most nations define "urban" in terms of a minimum of 2,000–5,000 inhabitants<sup>4</sup>. The United Nations' report on *World Urbanization*

*Prospects*, which accepts the World Bank's definition, assigns Uzbekistan an urbanization rate of 50.5%, which places it 115<sup>th</sup> among all 231 countries and territories<sup>5</sup>. Studies show that the populations of secondary cities typically range from between 10% and 50% of the populations of capital cities, and that these secondary cities are the fastest growing urban areas in nearly all developing countries.

Several forces impel this movement towards urbanization in Uzbekistan. Relatively high birthrates create excess population in large areas of the countryside. While it is true that the number of children born in 2017 was 10,700 less than in the previous year, and that the birth rate fell from 22.8 per thousand to 22.1 per thousand in the same period, the country's overall birth rate still ranks it at a high position of 71<sup>st</sup> among all 226 countries recorded<sup>6</sup>. Simultaneously, higher incomes in most of the large population centers have long acted as magnets for rural migrants. Further stimulating urban growth today is the fact that Soviet policies prevented many who wanted to migrate to cities from doing so, leaving a legacy of pent-up demand for urban living that still prevails across much of the Uzbek countryside.

Compounding this urban drive has been the spread of education, which has created career expectations among many young people that they most associate with Tashkent and other large cities. Sophisticated transport infrastructures also allow cheaper and quicker access to the capital. For example, the high-speed Afrosiyob reaches from Samarkand to Tashkent in just over two hours. Transport times will continue to shorten as the Uzbek government commissions more dedicated high-speed rail lines.

Finally, Uzbekistan is seeing the easing of the old Soviet *propyska* system of urban registration. Without such a registration permit, urban migrants were prevented from obtaining employment, buying real estate, or even relocating to Tashkent. Across the Soviet Union the process of issuing such *propyskas* was deeply susceptible to corruption. The erosion of this registration regimen is helping to increase migration to Tashkent and other centers.

In one of his many notable pronouncements during his first two years in office, President Shafkat Mirziyoyev challenged Uzbekistan to advance into the ranks of solidly middle-income countries. Since then the President has instituted many programs to achieve this goal, including the establishment of a dozen free economic zones and nearly fifty industrial zones in the past year alone, the promotion of exports, measures to attract foreign investments, and the removal of impediments to entrepreneurship. Even though he has prudently balanced such steps with new measures to improve rural housing, these new initiatives to achieve middle-income country status will continue and likely even strengthen current trends towards urbanization.

We must pause here to ask what constitutes a “middle income country”? The World Bank defines a middle income country as having a gross national income (GNI) per capital between \$1,006 and \$12,235. Uzbekistan’s GDP per capita is \$1,500 but its GNI/capita is \$7,130. The World Bank also distinguishes between “lower middle income countries” and “upper middle income countries” and defines the line between them as \$3,995 per capita; this places 56 of the total of 109 middle income countries in the ranks of “upper middle income countries” and the rest as “lower middle income countries”<sup>7</sup>.

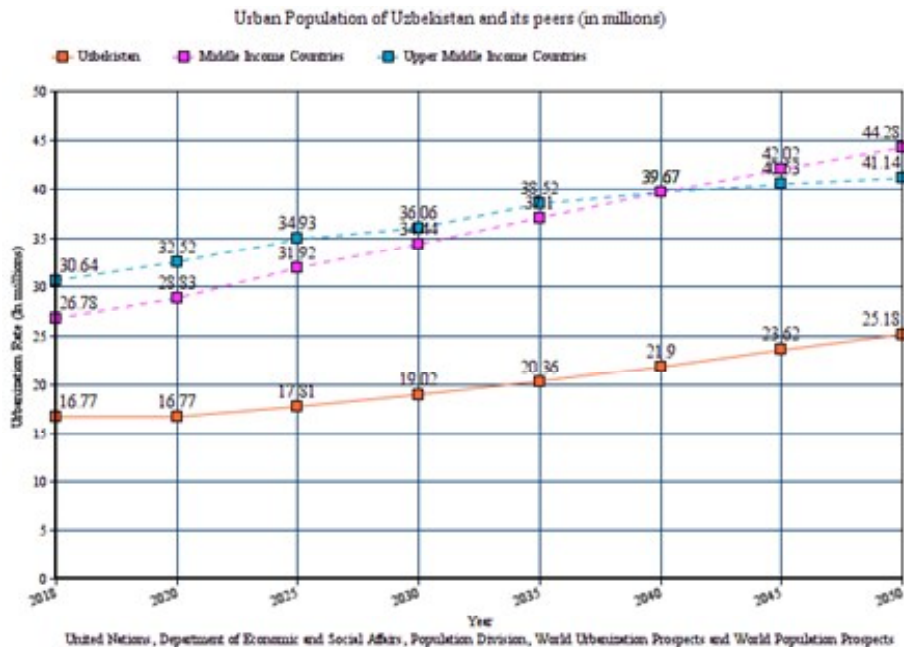
Let us therefore assume that President Mirziyoyev’s goal is to bring Uzbekistan up at least to the middle ranks of middle income countries. Turning to the United Nations’ report on *World Urbanization Prospects*, we find that middle income countries as a group are projected to have become 53.7% urbanized by 2020, 59% by 2030, and 68.3% by 2050. However, it is important to note that all these estimates are notably higher when they pertain only to upper middle income countries. By 2020 upper middle income countries are estimated to reach 68.2% urbanization, 75% by 2030, and a high of 82.6% by 2050.

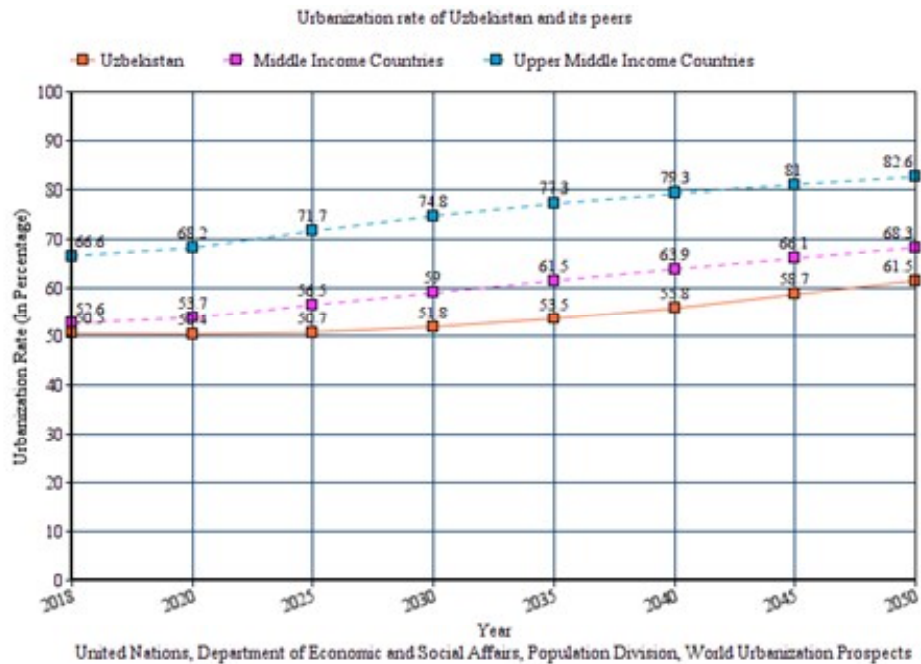
The implications of these UN estimates for Uzbekistan are startling. If by 2030 Uzbekistan attains the same rate of urbanization as middle income countries as a group, then its urban population will have reached 34.44 million, or 17.67 million more than today. This is equivalent to an



average annual increase of 1.47 million urban residents, or 283,173 households, each year. If however, if by 2030 Uzbekistan succeeds in reaching the average level of urbanization of upper middle income countries, then its urban population is likely to reach 36.06 million, or 19.29 more than today. Even if only half of the new urban population is concentrated in Tashkent, the population of Uzbekistan's capital would still reach 12.125 million by 2030 while secondary cities would expand to a total of 23.94 million; a surge of 9.645 million more people in Tashkent than today. Even if only a third of the expanded urban population ends up in Tashkent, the capital would reach 8.49 million people by 2030, or 6.43 million more than today, and secondary cities would add almost 13 million people, growing to a total of 27.15 million. The data is even more striking if we assume that Uzbekistan's future rate of urban growth tracks with that of upper middle income countries.

Thus, whatever metric one chooses, it is clear that if Uzbekistan follows the same pattern as today's upper middle income countries it will experience an unprecedented and vast urbanization during the coming decades. This implies a need for millions of additional urban homes per year.





Before rushing to premature conclusions, let us remember that statistics are not destiny. The same data that might appear to dictate a single course of action may, upon closer examination, open up the possibility of many policy alternatives. This is notably true with respect to urbanization. Left to themselves, the forces making for urbanization will almost surely leave Uzbekistan with an enormous capital city, Tashkent, and just a few very large secondary cities. Places such as Namangan, Samarkand, Andijon, Bukhara, and Nukus could become truly major centers, leaving behind such smaller communities as Qarshi, Qoqon, Chirchiq, Ferganna, Jissax, and Urganch. Alternatively, the government and people of Uzbekistan might adopt policies that promote the equalization of development in a larger number of secondary centers. Or, through vigorous interventions by the government, another extreme could emerge—more Uzbeks might be incentivized to move to smaller centers or to stay in the countryside, thereby curbing the growth of Tashkent and moderating the growth of the principal secondary centers. The choice between these alternatives—or the mix among them—may be the most fundamental question of domestic life facing Uzbek society over the coming generation. It

is one which only Uzbeks themselves and their government can decide.

### URBANIZATION AND SOCIETY

Related to this is the possibility of establishing satellite cities around Tashkent or near major secondary cities. In fact, the Government of Uzbekistan has already given a green light to the construction of satellite cities adjacent to both Samarkand and Bukhara, projects which will be of decisive importance for the future of Uzbek urbanism.

But what of the dwellings themselves? What exactly will be constructed to house the future citizens of Uzbekistan? From their first institution in the early 1960s through the end of Soviet rule, the near-universal model for housing across the USSR involved vast ensembles of prefabricated, largely undecorated, and utterly standardized blocs, usually of five stories. These “Khrushchebas” all had the same cladding—or lack thereof—and were thrown up with little or no attention paid to actual patterns of pedestrian and vehicular circulation or of social behavior. In fact, Soviet planners scarcely acknowledged the use of personal automobiles as they designed ingresses and egresses for housing blocks; single lane secondary roads often ended up serving both vehicular and pedestrian traffic, a recipe for constant congestion and traffic jams.

Initially defended as a distinctly Soviet contribution to urban life, these monotonous, unsafe, and staggeringly bland apartment blocs could not have been more sharply juxtaposed to the lively spirit of traditional urban life as it had existed for millennia across the entire territory of Uzbekistan.

This paradox leads us deeper into the actual lives of families and communities in Uzbekistan, which in turn gives rise to further questions. What are the essential features of traditional residences across the expanse of Uzbekistan and to what extent do they define national identity and character? Even casual foreign visitors are immediately struck by the warmth and civility of Uzbekistan's traditional courtyard houses and their

capacity to serve multiple generations of single families while also assuring each family unit a degree of privacy. At the same time they effectively foster strong neighborhood ties through the *mahallah*. No less striking is how closely these courtyard houses interact with nature, thanks to ubiquitous fruit trees and grape arbors.

Of course, mayors and urbanists across Uzbekistan are well aware of these issues, and have begun the dialogue with their citizenry that is essential to any successful process of urbanization as a whole. Still, many of the most urgent questions remain open, or have not even been defined with the clarity that is needed. Bluntly, should Uzbekistan's urban heritage be dismissed as a quaint relic of the past that has no place in the new and thoroughly international style of urban living that is cropping up everywhere—what French sociologist Claude Levi-Strauss called “the global monoculture”? Or should it instead be treated as a priceless national resource, to be explored and *adapted* to the present as an essential element of any new urbanism in Uzbekistan? Such questions become both more complex and more urgent when they are raised in the context of large metropolises, where budgets demand the most careful calculations of costs per square meter and where large, quickly erected housing blocs may seem at first to be the quickest and easiest solution.

It is worth noting that even the world's most regimented planned cities have rarely evolved according to their architects' intent: Brasilia, St. Petersburg, New Delhi, Washington, Islamabad, and Beijing are only a few of the many examples that spring to mind. Over time the deeply engrained social habits of ordinary citizens interacted with the demands of commerce and unanticipated uses of space. Even the most carefully planned cities grew organically, forcing planners to recalibrate their designs to keep pace. Given the inevitability of this process, close attention to the dwellings and habits of the people of Uzbekistan through the millennia becomes of critical importance—masterplanning and design must pay heed. Climate and available building materials caused traditional Uzbek housing to fall into two broad categories: single wood frames in more temperate low-elevation zones; and double wood frames in

mountainous regions where winters are harsher. Until the end of the nineteenth century most homes lacked foundations or insulation other than the occasional use of *saman*, or chopped straw. In all locales structures had to be light, sturdy, flexible, and not more than two stories tall in order to withstand the earthquakes that have always wrecked the region.

Such homes were simple but ergonomically quite sophisticated. Most were divided into two zones: internal and external courtyards. The former consisted of more private family space reserved especially for women and children, and therefore more modestly decorated with quilts or *suzannes*; the latter, being more public, frequently featured ornately carved gates and carpets that were functional and decorative. Elm trees (*gudjim*) cooled the ambient air, while small pools provided water for animals and fostered a sense of tranquility. In two-story structures, verandas further helped blur the distinction between indoors and outdoors, capturing breeze and making even long hot summer days pleasant.

A prominent feature of traditional housing in Uzbekistan was, and is still, its multi-generational character. Three generations under one roof has been the rule, not the exception, with rooms arranged accordingly. Social activities focused on the courtyards and dining, when family members and guests would congregate around a low table. In wintertime sandal wood would smolder in a sunken pit under the table and *kurpachi*, quilts used as blankets, would provide warmth. Intergenerational conversations that involved friends and neighbors assured the passage of information and customs from generation to generation and cultivated the bonds of stewardship and family.

It goes without saying that most citizens of Uzbekistan are well aware of their rich cultural legacy, but it has been all too easy for them docilely to accept whatever new housing types the government offered, especially if those new apartments provided better electricity, heating, and other amenities than were available in their traditional dwellings. The aura of modernity and sense of participation in modern life as it is purportedly lived in the most advanced countries caused many to close their eyes to

what was being lost in the process.

Thus we return to a fundamental question facing an urbanizing Uzbekistan: to what extent should planners and architects embrace the cultural and historical heritage of the people who will dwell in the housing they design? Since the planning and design process will involve international as well as domestic architects, this question must be posed to foreign architects as well as to Uzbekistan's own design firms. The issue here is not simply to paste onto bland "international" structures "authentic" Uzbek ornaments and patterns. Indeed, this practice would destroy everything that is specifically Uzbekistan's by trivializing and commoditizing it. Instead, the challenge is to look through a cultural and social lens in such a way as to devise new housing types that build on the past rather than negate it.

Both architects and planners from Uzbekistan and international architects should be expected to engage in such study and dialogue prior to their generating actual plans. Fortunately, these issues are front and center on the government's agenda, and President Mirziyoyev has already thrown down the gauntlet. Billions of dollars have been invested in building projects to date, and numerous incentives are in place to increase construction. Further, President Mirziyoyev doesn't limit the change to new buildings. In his 2018 year-end address, he noted that renovation and refurbishment would be focal points for 34,000 existing residential structures. Energy efficiency, cost, and good design are his key considerations here and in new construction. And let us not forget jobs! The Government expects more than 100,000 new jobs to be created annually as a result of home building.

We will explore these dynamics in greater detail below, but before doing so, it is well to remember that Uzbekistan is not the first country to be confronted by such architectural and planning issues. The governments of most developing countries have simply sidestepped them. Instead of calling on their own sociologists, historians, social psychologists, and economists to explore the actual culture and expectations of the urbanizing part of their population, they have adopted generic solutions worked out

elsewhere, which they mechanically apply to their own cases.

Uzbekistan can do better. Instead of repeating that unfortunate history, it has a chance to strike out in new and innovative directions. But to do this, Uzbekistan must still study carefully the successes and failures of other countries in the area of urbanism and residential planning. Only in this way can new neighborhoods, towns, and cities develop that are truly “in the spirit of Uzbekistan.” Thus, the challenge facing Mr. Mirziyoyev’s team of reformers is simultaneously to look inward and outward as they contemplate Uzbekistan’s urban future.

So politics and aspirations aside, where do things actually stand? At least one thing is obvious: there isn’t enough housing. Annual shortfalls across the country are thought to be as high as 100,000 units. Beyond that, we perceive two endemic problems that Uzbekistan must address. First, all housing isn’t safe. Many homes, especially affordable ones, do not meet modern seismic and life safety requirements or international codes. This can be corrected through modern building technologies for new structures and the application of remedial technologies to older ones. Second, too much of the construction sector is rooted in its Soviet past and offers very uneven quality. To be sure, there are Uzbek construction firms that are capable of building to a high international standard, but these are all too few. Better design and closer attention to the details of construction can remedy this, but the task will not be easy.

Critical factors to the improvement of affordable and safe housing in Uzbekistan will be close attention to the most advanced building technologies and to the specific processes through which they are applied. Residential construction in the country today relies almost exclusively on traditional construction methodologies. Thus, superstructures are created using either timber frames or walls made of brick or concrete blocks. It should be noted that such traditional construction methods can be improved through the use of sophisticated concrete blends that produce stronger, safer buildings.

But it is not enough simply to improve the quality of materials while maintaining the old methods of construction. Some may hesitate to

embrace new building technologies on the grounds that they would require the use of expensive materials. For example, they might point out that certain modern construction types entail the use of expensive structural steel imported from Korea. But there are better and more economic solutions to such problems of cost. At \$80 per ton, concrete in Uzbekistan is as inexpensive as anywhere in the world. This suggests that a better solution would be to use modular construction methods (i.e., a new technology) designed around a concrete core (i.e., a traditional material). Modern concrete has advanced far beyond the applications common in the past. Its versatility may not be obvious, yet it is striking. It can simultaneously serve structural purposes while also providing finished surfaces that readily compliment cladding materials such as ceramic tile. Also, the thermal mass of concrete helps manage the swings of temperature from season to season.

Beyond the materials, however, why might a modular building process make sense? For one thing, modular construction methods comprehensively address life safety issues. It will be important for Uzbekistan to update building codes, especially with regards to fireproofing and seismic sensitivity. It should be noted that modular structures are built to meet or exceed the most exacting building codes.

Modular construction methods are also extremely simple and entail enhanced quality control and efficiency. The construction or assembly of a module (LEGO blocks) occurs in a factory setting. Once assembled, each of these LEGO blocks is shipped by rail or flatbed truck to predetermined building sites, where they are erected—stacked one atop another—as high as forty stories or more in some cases. In this process a comprehensive “parts library” is created, and the result is a construction system with full interoperability. All of the parts, or “mods”, can connect with one another in nearly infinite permutations. This is LEGO, quite literally. The benefits of this method cannot be overstated. Individual homeowners exercise greater control of their environments because their living quarters can be repurposed or expanded incrementally by absorbing contiguous modular units into additional living areas or simply adding new ones to an existing



structure. Modular construction also offers greater flexibility to businesses. Traditional street-level retail storefronts can be easily reconfigured to provide commercial spaces shared by multiple entities—such as co-working environments—and can then be re-sized as demanded. To be sure, modular construction is only one of several advanced building methods and technologies, but it would appear that this technique might have wide application in a rapidly urbanizing and cost-conscious Uzbekistan.

An ancillary benefit of the factory-controlled environment is that the fabrication process generates less waste, inflicts fewer disturbances to the site, and allows for tighter construction. Raw materials are recycled, inventory is controlled, and equipment is protected, all within the confines of a closely managed industrial space. Air quality improves, too, because the assembly process uses dry materials. Also, less moisture is captured during construction, ultimately reducing pollution and controlling soil erosion, waterway sedimentation, and airborne dust. No less important, the closely monitored indoor construction environment reduces the risks of accidents and related liabilities for workers. This seamless operating procedure stands in stark contrast to many construction sites in Uzbekistan today, where as many as half a dozen contractors are working simultaneously on sprawling and uncoordinated building projects. The pastiche of structures that results from this then becomes, at best, an inchoate neighborhood.

The standardization of the modules themselves allows for the use of “plug-and-play” fixtures and fit-outs such as windows, furniture, plumbing, and electrical systems that can be integrated on a large scale into the overall architecture of the structure. This is an important point, especially given President Mirziyoyev’s year-end call to reassess Uzbekistan’s existing housing structures. This should include an embrace of the notion of the adaptive re-use of defunct existing structures. An example might be the re-use of Soviet era military hangers for modular construction factories.

Speed is yet another benefit of the modular construction method. To meet its ambitious targets, Uzbekistan must consider ways to accelerate

its building process. Construction of modular buildings occurs simultaneously with site work, allowing projects to be completed in half the time of traditional construction methods or less. One reason for this is the virtual elimination of weather delays since the vast majority of the construction process is completed inside a factory.

What about the second core problem, namely to improve the aesthetic and social value of new urban structures? Whatever the efficiency of modular processes, their value is nil if they are not shaped and guided by a master planning process that fully embraces the aesthetic and social considerations discussed above. In absence of the application of such thinking, the process could still result in endless fields of quickly erected, monolithic modular blocks that fail the needs and expectations of Uzbek society. Uzbekistan needs to balance strategy and tactics—fundamental thinking about culture, life styles, and society and methods of implementing them that are economically and organizationally practical. This is everywhere a tricky combination to manage, given the realities of modern politics and economic cycles. Workable tactics are required to provide tens of thousands of good residences as soon as possible. Wise strategy is required to do so in a thoughtful, culturally and socially literate way.

The key to successful strategy is thoughtful design that translates general principles into attractive and practical plans. The challenge here is to move beyond the superficial application of the clichés of purportedly “Uzbek” design, which usually means a series of trivialized patterns and techniques, and to get to the cultural and social realities of how the citizenry has lived over the centuries and how it aspires to live today and tomorrow. In considering this question, it would be wise to avoid the “one size fits all” approach. Uzbekistan is a highly diverse territory, with different landscapes that have, over the centuries, given rise to many distinctive styles. It would be a tragedy if the forthcoming era of large-scale urban construction were to result in a new national standardization, one as mechanical in its way as the old one dating to the 1960s that it purports to replace. A reasonable variety of approaches is quite possible across the territory of Uzbekistan, but to achieve it the most subtle interaction and collaboration between

architects, technologists, and local populations will be required.

In the end, the success or failure of Uzbekistan's urban future will be measured by its impact on the quality of life of actual citizens. Will the new master planning thoughtfully manage pedestrian circulation? Will it treat public space as a high priority, essential to the enhancement of enjoyment by members of all generations and the reduction of crime? Will it stimulate new modes of invention and commerce? Will it make creative use of the existing topography, and will it make generous use of both indigenous and adaptive vegetation? A successful approach should combine some of the world's best urban design with new building technologies, but also bring to bear distinctly Uzbek responses to the universal problems of rapid urbanization, soaring demand for housing, traffic congestion, and the gap between expectations and resources.

In all these areas workable solutions will have also to be sustainable. The worldwide concern to identify and employ "best practices" has led urban planners and architects to focus on "LEED," which stands for "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design." Indeed, this has become a common language of best practices in buildings around the world. Among successful approaches are those being developed by Google's subsidiary "Sidewalk Lab". Master planned on Toronto's waterfront, the Sidewalk Lab utilizes modular construction and new building technology to construct a complex responsive to community habits and sufficiently flexible to allow for future growth. Another manifestation of such new thinking is New York's "High Line," a 1.5-mile elevated park and walkway constructed atop a defunct rail line that wends its way through the west side of Manhattan. Neither of these, or any other such initiatives, should be mechanically applied to Uzbekistan's cities. But the kind of thinking underlying them, which emphasizes the creation of "living systems" to enhance circulation and interaction among inhabitants, can usefully inspire analogous thinking in Tashkent and other Uzbek cities of the future. Similarly bold initiatives exist in many other aspects of urban development worldwide and warrant the closest attention by Uzbekistan's planners and architects, and by those from abroad whom it engages.

## CONCLUSION

Uzbekistan has the demographics, economic base, ambitious politics, and rich cultural history to propel a proud, ambitious, and talented population into the upper ranks of urbanization success stories. Over the centuries, many cities have achieved success in devising and implementing thoughtful urbanization strategies. Each of such cities becomes a magnet for talent, not only from within the country but from abroad. They also become destinations. We should never underestimate the impact of sheer beauty and attractiveness on the quality of urban life. Uzbekistan cannot avoid taking decisions in all the areas discussed above. Will it make them by the inertia of wooden bureaucratic processes—in other words, by default? Or will it do so consciously, and after thoughtful deliberation involving domestic and foreign architects and planners and the country's own best experts on Uzbekistan's distinctive culture, society, and economy? Everyone who wishes Uzbekistan well must hope that it follows the latter course. Happily, there are hopeful signs that this will indeed be the case.

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## THEORY OF CLIMATE CHANGE INTENSITY DETERMINATION : CASE OF CENTRAL ASIA

*BORY ALIKHANOV, SERGEI SAMOILOV, VADIM SOKOLOV and  
LEYLI SEITOVA*

### ABSTRACT

*Since the mid-twentieth century, the trend of active changes in the climate system of the planet has substantially increased, which has become the subject of research, political decisions, and discussions. The process of change continues to this day, acquiring features of unevenness and progression in the regional context. The purpose of the study is the examination and detailed analysis of the methodology for assessing the intensity of climate change, its impact at the global, regional and local levels, and the search for possible optimal solutions to minimise negative consequences. The study was conducted using general scientific methods of cognition, namely system analysis, synthesis, abstraction, generalisation, concretisation, and formalisation. The study examines the issues of adaptation to global climate change in Central Asia, particularly in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Based on the analysis of data obtained as a result of long-term observations, the degree of increase in the indicators of the warming process in certain parts of the region, and its impact on the progressive degradation processes in the Aral Sea and the melting of glacial masses, was determined. As a result of the study, the use of the formula developed by researchers for assessing the intensity of climate change at the regional level, considering the totality of local factors of influence, is justified. It is proved that an effective assessment of the intensity of climate change can become the basis for further development of preventive and eliminative actions and measures. The results of the study have substantial practical importance for optimising the National Adaptation Plan and the National Drought Management Plan. Therewith, the priority is the synergy of the goals of environmental prevention and economic feasibility, considering modern innovative opportunities for modelling, forecasting, and the direction of the development vectors of Uzbekistan towards a positive global trend of sustainable development and the prevention of climate change.*

**Keywords:** Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Aral, Warming, Air temperature, Precipitation, Water supply, Drought management plan.

## INTRODUCTION

Climate change on a planetary scale is inevitable and undeniable. The main source of such changes is an increase in temperature, that is, warming caused by an increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmospheric air. Researchers have identified that the increase in quantitative indicators of emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases and pollutants is caused by the activity of mankind. Pollution, in turn, causes changes in the process of circulation and formation of the temperature regime of air masses in the lower layers of the atmosphere, causes destructive processes of stratospheric ozone, and even changes the temperature and circulation regimes of the waters of the World Ocean. Attention of the scientific community to this issue is constantly growing. The generalisation of large-scale studies in the field of climate change and the dynamic interaction of natural and social systems is conducted within the framework of the World Climate Research programme<sup>1</sup>.

Long-term studies under this programme allowed establishing that around the middle of the 20th century, there were changes in the circulation of the Southern Ocean, which is the main absorber of excess atmospheric heat on a global scale. Ultimately, carbon dioxide is actively absorbed by cool water masses, concentrating in the depths and, thus, effectively removing it from the atmospheric air. However, for a number of reasons, this circulation process has undergone changes. The wind regime near Antarctica has changed, the Antarctic bottomwaters have begun to warm up, and the process of active absorption of excess heat has noticeably weakened. Such shifts, in turn, led to increased cloud cover over the Southern Ocean, followed by additional heat retention. This combination of factors has led to the phenomenon of progressive warming on a planetary scale.

Within the framework of the above-mentioned programme, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has been implementing a project to compare related models for many years<sup>2</sup>. To date, the sixth

phase of this project is successfully underway. As part of this stage, the expected changes in temperature indicators reach one and a half degrees Celsius, within the projected time frame of the next decades. Notably, the maximum process of increasing temperature indicators will affect Central Asia, which is located in the middle and high latitudes of the northern hemisphere of the planet. An exceptional feature of the circulation processes in this region is due to its location being the central part of the continent. Based on this, it can be argued that Central Asian countries are the most vulnerable to climate change, and Uzbekistan is no exception.

The variability of the intensity of climate change processes is due to the substantial heterogeneity of the terrain and its characteristics. Ultimately, the influence of solar energy has substantial differences in the conditions of different types of underlying surfaces, and solar radiation causes circulation processes occurring in the atmosphere. Cold air masses, which are characterised by high density, cause more pressure and move towards a warmer region with more rarefied air masses. With this movement, the properties of air change. This transformation continues in a time interval of up to seven days and depends on the characteristics of the underlying surface, air masses in the demarcation zones, and a number of other factors. As a result of the transformation of the properties of the air mass, the average daily temperature is set on a constant basis.

Today, using theoretical findings and samples of long-term observations, the need to assess the intensity of climate change, develop further strategies and plans for adaptation to climate change, and minimise the consequences and preventive measures is extremely urgent. Many papers and studies are devoted to the search for optimal solutions to this problem, in particular, modern researchers Clark, B., Otto, F., Jones, R., Hawkins, E., Frame, D., Harrington, L., Joshi, M.<sup>3</sup> pay attention to finding effective approaches to investigating the issue in their recent publications. Abatzoglou, J., Williams, A., Barbero, R.<sup>4</sup> in their study focus on positioning the anthropogenic impact factor as the basis of negative consequences and actively develop models for minimising it, considering global climate changes. Fischer, E., Sippel, S., Knutti, R.<sup>5</sup> conceptualise their study around

the trend of increasing the impact of extreme impact of global climate change in the form of regional and local negative phenomena that directly or indirectly have a substantial socio-economic and environmental impact. A group of researchers led by Gudmundsson, L.<sup>6</sup> in their study argue that effective management of risks that arise for local aquatic ecosystems as a result of global climate change can minimise the negative impact and stabilise degradation processes at the regional level.

Despite the high level of scientific interest in the issue considered in this study, the search for optimal innovative solutions for the effective management of risks arising from the negative impact of global climate change continues. For Uzbekistan, this problem is particularly relevant against the background of the growing trend of desertification and drought. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the scientific base for optimising the climate risk management system, analysing and assessing the impact of climate change intensity, and developing a system of preventive measures.

Since the middle of the last century, active changes in the global climate system have been recorded: an increase in the temperature of atmospheric air and world ocean waters, a decrease in ice and snow cover, and an increase in the level of the World Ocean. The vast majority of such changes are atypical. There is an increase in the frequency and duration of droughts, the spread of the phenomenon of desertification. Finding ways to optimally assess the intensity of climate change for further development of adequate practical programmes and solutions is a problem that many researchers of the present time are working on.

Despite the ambiguity of the conclusions about the nature of global warming and the existing discrepancy in estimates of the impact of anthropogenic factors on climate change, and the lack of effective unanimity in the international community regarding decisions in global climate policy, Uzbekistan needs to develop a long-term regional policy for effective assessment of climate change, followed by the development of a set of preventive and practical measures. This is emphasised in papers by Mygkova, N.<sup>7</sup>, and it is hard to disagree with her.



Modern researchers Clarke, B., Otto, F., Jones, R.<sup>8</sup> insist on the need for a comprehensive assessment of the intensity of the impact of global climate change on regional ecosystems, considering the full range of types of anthropogenic stress as the primary source of negative climate trends. This view is continued in their study by Fischer, E., Sippel, S., Knutti, R.<sup>9</sup>, focusing on the need to develop an effective climate change monitoring system to prevent the occurrence of extreme adverse events. Such phenomena include desertification and drought, which have huge negative consequences not only of an ecological but also of a socio-economic nature.

Most researchers investigating the problem are unanimous that climate change has a substantial impact on the environment and human life. In addition, global warming causes a distorted activation of the hydrological cycle – moisture, which is sorely lacking in regions suffering from droughts, falls in the form of unpredictable extreme precipitation. It is urgent to conduct an effective assessment of the intensity of climate change, followed by the development of comprehensive preventive measures and fix responsibility for insufficient implementation of international standards on sustainable climate.

This thesis is consistent with the conclusions of researchers Hawkins, E., Frame, D., Harrington, L., Joshi, M.<sup>10</sup>, which pay maximum attention to finding optimal innovative solutions for effective management of risks arising from the negative impact of global climate change. Researchers are convinced that only the development and effective implementation of industry recommendations on preventive and localisation measures for climate change, in an integrated approach, can stop the processes of degradation of aquatic ecosystems at the local level, and on a planetary scale, such a preventive policy will allow in the near future to optimise destructive processes in the World Ocean and even reduce the rate of ice sheet degradation. It is difficult to disagree with researchers because only the synergy of monitoring and practical activities can have a substantial impact on global climate processes.

Timely and effective assessment of the intensity of climate change

and the investigation of possible consequences allows for examining the interaction between climate change and its impact on society and the ecosystem in general at the regional and global levels, in all the complexities of relationships. Global risks caused by climate change have substantial political, economic, and social consequences. This study agrees with the opinion of Abatzoglou, J., Williams, A., Barbero, R.<sup>11</sup>, who examine the factors of actualisation of global climate change through possible risks and their global consequences. Researchers note the need to systematise climate data and expand the range of parameters under study.

The current state of scientific knowledge does not yet allow building conceptual large-scale climate models that would open up opportunities for effective monitoring and reliable forecasting. Clark, B. and Otto, F.<sup>12</sup> emphasise that the main source of uncertainty in assessing the intensity and forecasting of climate change remains the destructive state of ice sheets. Based on this, researchers recommend that when assessing the vulnerability of ecosystems to climate change and predicting consequences, an empirical forecast should be taken as the basis of research, considering current trends in climate change.

Since an effective process of adaptation to climate change involves regional development with mandatory consideration of the level of vulnerability and risk assessment, its goal today should be to move from spontaneous and fragmented measures to systems of pre-developed preventive and levelling actions. The use of modern tools for optimal risk assessment, system modelling and impact forecasting will allow the creation of a comprehensive system for assessing the intensity of climate change and its impact on various aspects of life at the regional and global levels. Therewith, the quantitative indicators that can be obtained using the formula proposed in this study can become practical support for further research and the development of effective climate monitoring models.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A critical review of existing methods to assess the intensity of climate change at different available research platforms and frameworks was performed to identify proper approaches and tools. There were observed such platforms as climate change adaptation planning, research and practice platform and Climate Change Knowledge Portal of the World Bank Group<sup>13</sup>. The analysis also was focused on best practices of climate change impact assessments and climatic data and tools at international and regional sites (e.g., official country data portal on greenhouse gas emissions of the UNFCCC<sup>14</sup>, Catalogue for Climate Data of the WMO<sup>15</sup>, the Central Asia Climate Information Platform<sup>16</sup> and Portal of Knowledge for Water and Environmental Issues in Central Asia (CAWater-info)<sup>17</sup>.

The expediency of using the formula proposed earlier by the authors, in particular, for determining the intensity of climate change at the regional level, is justified:

$$J_i = \prod_{t=10} (T \times V) \times R \times G \times K_k \times K_c \times K_{nr} \quad (1)$$

In this formula, the intensity of climate change is calculated based on the values of atmospheric humidity (V), average annual surface air temperature (T), considering the prevailing wind direction (R), geographical location of the region (G), and correlation coefficients according to the specific features of the area ( $K_k$ ), cyclicity ( $K_c$ ), losses of natural resources ( $K_{nr}$ ).

Notably, it is usually suggested to use the values  $R_{nw}=0.7$  (cold season) and southwest Index  $R_{sw}=0.3$ . As for the geographical location of the region, according to the WCRP forecast [1], the proposed values are  $G=2$  for the Temperate Zone,  $G=1$  for the Polar Belt, and  $G=1.5$  for the Tropical and Equatorial Belts. The  $K_k$  value is determined according to the specific features of the territory (forests, rural, or urbanized areas, etc.).  $K_c$  characterizes the number of repetitions of anomalies and natural hazards.  $K_{nr}$  depends on the amount of natural resources lost.

The scientific novelty of this formula is predetermined by the fact that a review of normative, conceptual and empirical sources at the global

and regional levels showed that such a method has not yet been proposed by anyone before.

### CENTRAL ASIA AND UZBEKISTAN

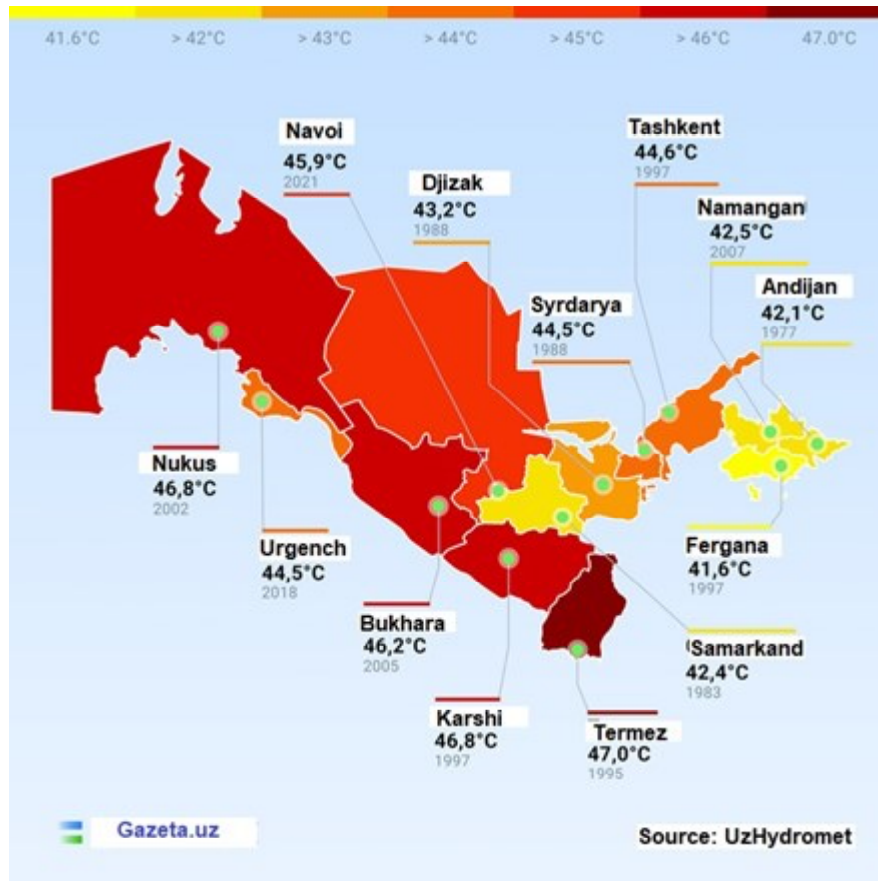
Global warming trends, presented in the studies by hydrometeorological stations in Uzbekistan, are characterized by a stable character<sup>18</sup>. Indicators of average annual temperatures recorded by a series of observations since 1950 by the stations of the country indicate a trend of stable temperature increase, which is almost twice as high as the indicators of natural variability and indicates the relevance of the consequences of global warming for the territory of Uzbekistan. The rate of warming varies in different regions of the country and reaches the highest rates in the northern regions of the Republic and megacities (up to 0.43°C for a period of 10 years), and the lowest – on the territory of mountainous areas (up to 0.14°C for the same time period).

In general, the average value of the temperature increase indicator on the territory of Uzbekistan can be considered the limit of 0.27°C for 10 years since the 1950s. Notably, the process occurs against the background of the influence of natural variability, which gives a synergistic effect and causes substantial fluctuations in the indicators of average annual fluctuations.

The increase in the rate and strength of climate change in the region under study is largely due to the degradation of the Aral Sea ecosystem. The climate of Uzbekistan is becoming drier and hotter every year, and the number of dust storms and snow drifts of considerable intensity is growing.

According to the UN World Meteorological Organisation<sup>19</sup>, the maximum temperature in 2022 was recorded on the territory of Uzbekistan (47°C, observation points in Navoi province). The Center for Hydrometeorological Service (Uzhydromet), at request of Gazeta.uz<sup>20</sup>, provided meteorological data of 13 cities of Uzbekistan for summer months of 49 years – from 1972 to 2021 (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1: INFOGRAPHIC: HOW THE SUMMER TEMPERATURE HAS CHANGED IN UZBEKISTAN OVER HALF A CENTURY**

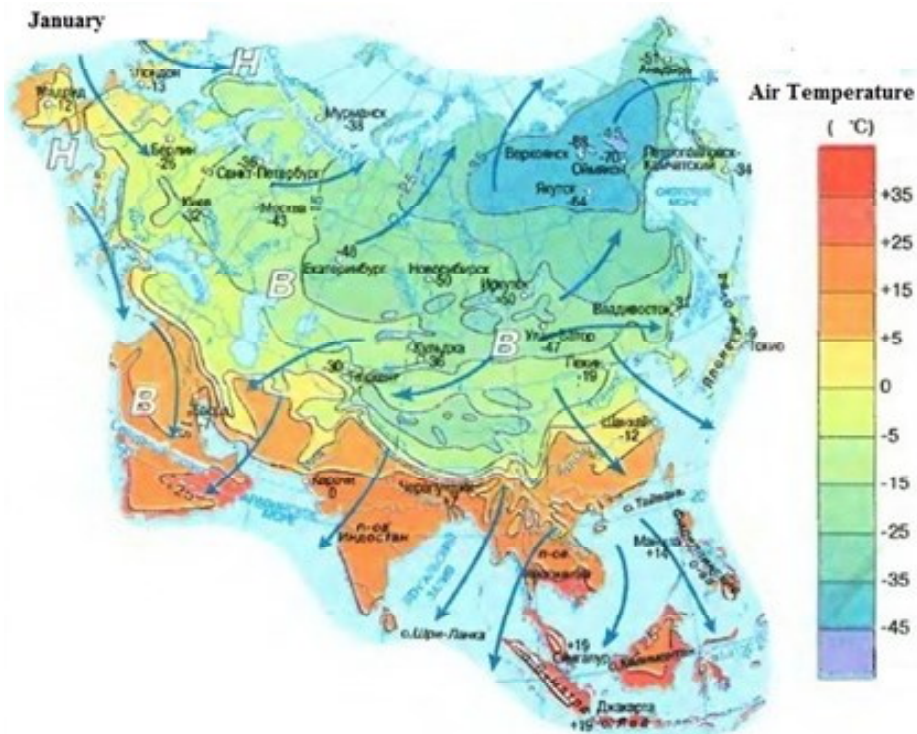


Until the 1960s, the Aral Sea served as a natural climate regulator, levelling sharp fluctuations in temperature indicators in Central Asia, due to the large area of the water surface and the volume of water. Air masses coming mainly from the western direction over the territory of the Aral Sea were heated in winter and cooled in summer. Due to such intensive processes, moisture circulating with air masses fell in the form of precipitation over mountain ranges in the autumn-winter period, replenishing the snow and ice cover. The ecological catastrophe of the Aral Sea caused substantial negative changes in this circulation system, disrupting the distribution of moisture in Central Asia.

The arrival of air masses from the North and West in winter (wet ocean masses from the Atlantic and Arctic belts), which lose maximum

moisture on the way through the continent is typical today. A high-pressure zone is formed due to the cooling of the territory, and the high-altitude systems of the Tian Shan and Pamir along the perimeter of the region (Figure 2). The situation became more complicated after the environmental disaster of the Aral Sea. Notably, climate changes in the Aral Sea basin are characterised by substantial intensity and reach twice the temperature increase ( $0.29^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) compared to world averages ( $0.14^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). This is primarily due to active drying processes in the marine system itself.

**FIGURE 2: THE PROCESS OF AIR AND MOISTURE CIRCULATION IN WINTER IN CENTRAL ASIA**



Thus, it can be argued that in winter in this region there is an area with maximum pressure indicators on a planetary scale – a quasi-stationary Asian maximum. Therewith, the predominance of anticyclones and substantial hypothermia in the depths of the continent cause a decrease in precipitation in the region over the past 20 years, and a substantial decrease in temperature indicators (up to  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). Precipitation is distributed unevenly, most of it falls over a flat area, which leads to a decrease in the

long-term snow and glacial reserves of the region.

The summer period is characterised by substantial changes in meteorological conditions in the Aral Sea basin. This is due to the priority of the low pressure area over the Asian high. Oceanic air masses arriving in summer cause dry and hot climatic conditions, and sea humidity does not substantially affect the situation. Such conditions cause average July temperatures in the range of 30°C with peaks up to 45°C in the time interval of the last 10 years (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3: THE PROCESS OF AIR AND MOISTURE CIRCULATION IN SUMMER IN CENTRAL ASIA**

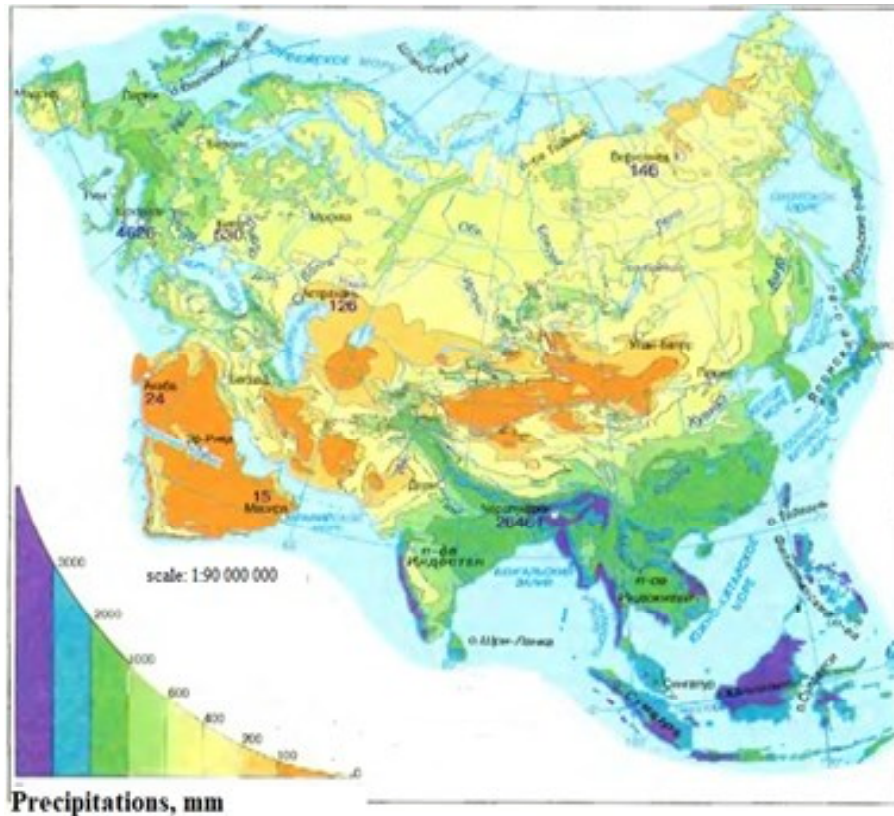


As a result of the described processes, in the last 20–25 years there has been a substantial decrease in precipitation in the summer period and an increase in aridisation (Figure 4). One of the most global and dangerous consequences of such processes is the intensive melting of perennial glaciers (30% of glacial masses over the past 40 years).

Considering the water ecosystem of the region today, its persistent and inevitable disruption can be stated, which has catastrophic global climate



FIGURE 4: ARIDITY PROCESSES IN THE CENTRAL ASIA REGION



consequences. The degradation of the Aral Sea ecosystem and the emergence of new desertification regions are catalysing global warming processes on the territory of Uzbekistan. A separate problem is also the degradation of the glacial system, which inevitably affects the stability of the water system of the country. The processes of desertification that occur as a result of these changes have recently become uncontrolled, with catastrophic large-scale consequences of a social, environmental, and economic nature.

Climate change has a substantial impact on the parameters of the environment and the life of society. There is a shift in the boundaries of the seasons, the cyclicity and distribution of precipitation are disrupted, changes in the land landscape (desertification, waterlogging) occur, and the volume of water use and evaporation increases. Secondary consequences are climate migration and negative impact on the economy.

Based on this, it can be argued that the search for and implementation



of effective solutions to stabilise the water system of the region should become a priority area of action that requires joint efforts. Stabilisation of the glacial system and ecosystems of the upper water intakes is possible through the introduction of innovative measures. Therewith, it is necessary to focus efforts on preserving and increasing water resources, optimising the efficiency of their use, stabilising the state of the Aral Sea, minimising the impact of drought, and stopping desertification processes. An integrated approach that considers the maximum number of influential factors will become the basis for optimising the socio-economic well-being of the region.

### DROUGHT RISKS AND INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS OF UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan was the first country in Asia to ratify the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)<sup>21</sup>. Notably, the Republic took part in all the processes and stages of preparing the agreement. In 1995, Uzbekistan officially joined the Convention<sup>22</sup>. In the same year, the Main Directorate of Hydrometeorology of the country was set up. Obligations under the convention contributed to the development of the national programme of action to combat desertification (1999). This programme has taken active actions in the following areas:

- minimising the process of land degradation;
- regeneration of land that has undergone partial drainage;
- reclamation of areas affected by desertification.

Notably, initially, the programme was rather weak in programmatic and political aspects, despite the support of the international community<sup>23</sup>. The effectiveness was not marked by substantial practical achievements, which is partly due to the lack of adequate funding from budgetary sources. Evidently, the Hydrometeorological Service is not able to fully fulfil its obligations under international agreements, because it does not have the necessary experience, resources, and powers. There was a need to create an authorised body for the implementation of the Convention, which would take on the functions of volumetric monitoring, forecasting,

analytics, training, and coordination of interaction at the local, regional, and national levels. In addition, the forecasting and early warning system should be included in the risk analysis system as an integral component.

In 2017, there was a targeted social observation of public opinion on issues related to drought. The study covered various strata, and as a result, initiated the identification of the main policy vectors in the field of reducing drought risks in Uzbekistan:

- optimisation of efficiency and rational use of water resources;
- selection and introduction of drought-resistant varieties of agricultural crops;
- introduction of irrigation systems and irrigation technologies;
- support of agricultural market participants the introduction of a drought risk insurance system<sup>24</sup>.

A logical continuation was the adoption in 2019 of Special Resolution No. PP 4204 “On measures to improve the effectiveness of work to combat desert and drought in the Republic of Uzbekistan”. This resolution stated:

“In order to increase the efficiency of work to combat desertification, restore degraded lands and ensure the effective implementation of the international obligations of the Republic of Uzbekistan related to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, allocate the following additional functions to the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Forestry:

- implementation of preventive measures for desertification and drought, including reforestation and protective afforestation;
- implementation by the Republic of Uzbekistan of international decisions and commitments to effectively combat drought and desertification processes;
- establishment of a process of effective interaction with regional and international organisations to minimise the effects of desertification and drought;
- development of an effective system for coordinating the actions of government bodies at the regional and national levels”<sup>25</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the course of the study, it was possible to analyse the multi-factor impact of global climate change and the variety of approaches to assessing their intensity, explore the possibilities of developing preventive and elimination

solutions for levelling the negative consequences of global climate change, in particular, at the regional and local levels. As a result of the study, the optimal formula for assessing the intensity of climate change at the regional level is proposed for practical use, considering the variability of local influential factors. Improving the effectiveness of climate risk management can be possible if an integrated approach is adopted for the development and implementation of climate change prevention policies at the national and regional levels.

Priority vectors of further research are proposed and the need to systematise research and practical information on assessing the intensity of climate change is justified, considering environmental and economic efficiency indicators. Besides, there is need to further investigate the possibilities of preventive climate policy, with the involvement of modern opportunities for innovative high-tech monitoring and forecasting, which is especially relevant against the background of the growing burden of degradation processes in the aquatic ecosystems of the region.

Using the proposed formula will open up new opportunities for optimising regional climate change observation systems, which will create an effective basis for developing regional climate monitoring models. The authors believe that applying the climate change intensity evaluation method presented in this paper could suitably guide experts involved in preparing the national plan to combat drought in Uzbekistan.

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# UZBEKISTAN'S STRATEGY ON TRANSPORT CORRIDORS IN CENTRAL ASIA

*IBRAGIM MAVLANOV*

## ABSTRACT

*The article, analyzes the process of conceptualization of Uzbekistan's strategy for international transport corridors in Central Asia. The author bases his research on the analysis of specific events in Uzbekistan and in the international arena in recent years and statements of the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev on the development of the transport and communication sector in the Central Asian region. The article analyzes the specific proposals of the leader of Uzbekistan on international transport corridors in Central Asia, put forward at such international forums as: at the 72nd and 75th sessions of the UN General Assembly, at meetings of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Member States, the first, second and third consultative meetings of the heads of states of Central Asia, the international conference "Central and South Asia: Regional Interconnectedness. Challenges and Opportunities", at the international conference "Central Asia: one past and common future, cooperation for sustainable development and mutual prosperity", at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Organization of Turkic States and others. The author makes his assessments on the basis of official documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan, government decrees and decrees of the President.*

**Keywords:** *Uzbekistan, Central Asia, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, UN General Assembly, Transport Corridors, Communications, International Trade, Routes, Afghan transport corridor, Trans-Caspian International Corridor.*

## INTRODUCTION

From the first days as Uzbekistan President, Sh.M. Mirziyoyev systematically and consistently promotes the development of transport

and communication sphere of Uzbekistan and Central Asia. However, the development of transport and communication sector is not an end in itself, but a deeper and broader task: to provide logistics for the development of trade and a radical increase in exports from Central Asia to international markets and, thereby, the development of the economy of Uzbekistan and the region as a whole. This task is also important because today the countries of Central Asia, “having no direct access to seaports, incur significant transit and transportation costs, which reach 70–80% of the cost of exporting products. Carriers lose up to 40% of the time for transporting goods due to imperfect customs procedures”.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, transport and infrastructure play an important role in the economy of Uzbekistan. In addition to traditional markets such as Central Asia and Russia, the country is increasing supplies to China, European countries, Turkey and other international markets. Wherever the President of Uzbekistan speaks about the need to develop international trade, he always links this issue with the development of transport communications. This, in his deep conviction, is a two-pronged task. Other studies draw attention to the remoteness of Central Asian region from both European and Far Eastern markets.<sup>2</sup> In our study, we took into account the approaches and views of domestic and foreign experts on the development of transport corridors in Central Asia.<sup>3</sup>

In our opinion, the step-by-step promotion of the initiatives of the President of Uzbekistan at various international forums and their implementation will make it possible to form a new architecture of transport flows in Central Asia. In this regard, we should explore and understand the process of conceptualizing Uzbekistan’s strategy for transport corridors in Central Asia. Under the leadership of the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, an impetus was given to the development of the transport and communication sector in the Central Asian region.

## UZBEKISTAN'S TRANSPORT STRATEGY INITIATIVES

The transport strategy of Uzbekistan is constantly linked to the need to activate the trade potential and develop new ways to organize exports. This is based on the huge impact of transport on the economic development of the country, which is confirmed by numerous studies.<sup>4</sup> The "Action Strategy for the Five Priority Areas of Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021" in its section "III. Priority Directions for the Development and Liberalization of the Economy", and paragraph "3.2. Increasing the competitiveness of the national economy through deepening structural reforms, modernization and diversification of its leading industries" specifically formulated the tasks of "diversifying the structure and geography of exports, expanding and mobilizing the export potential of economic sectors and territories" and "further development of road transport infrastructure".<sup>5</sup> The implementation of the Action Strategy led to the doubling of trade turnover of Uzbekistan with the countries of Central Asia from 2016 to 2019 from 2.5 to 5.2 billion dollars. The share of the trade turnover of the republic with the countries of the region increased from 10.2 percent to 12.4 percent.<sup>6</sup>

In order to create additional favorable conditions for the further diversification of foreign trade transport corridors, increase the transit potential, as well as develop and increase the competitiveness of domestic transport and logistics companies in the foreign and domestic markets, President of Uzbekistan issued a Decree on 2 December 2017 "On measures to improve the transport infrastructure and diversification of foreign trade routes for the transportation of goods for 2018-2022".<sup>7</sup> As part of this resolution, the "Comprehensive Program for Improving the Transport Infrastructure and Diversifying Foreign Trade Routes for the Transportation of Goods for 2018-2022"<sup>8</sup> was approved. Within the framework of this program, systematic work is being carried out to improve the bilateral legal framework and practical implementation of international agreements, develop new transport and transit corridors and a network of logistics centers, expand the fleet of vehicles and aircraft, create conditions for the efficient transportation and handling of goods of

Uzbekistan in neighboring countries.

In order to increase the transport and logistics potential of the country, the institutional framework and regulatory framework of this industry is being strengthened. The Decree of the head of Uzbekistan dated February 1, 2019 established the Ministry of Transport, which is defined as a state body for the development and implementation of a unified state policy in the field of development of road, rail, air, river transport, metro, as well as road facilities.

In June 2019, the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan prepared and submitted for discussion the “Strategy for the Development of the transport system of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the period up to 2035”.<sup>9</sup> This is the first strategic document in the history of independent Uzbekistan, which defines the main directions of the country’s unified state transport policy for the long term. Main attention was paid to solving the issues of ensuring transport and communication, spatial connectivity of the country’s regions and the formation of transport corridors that would provide Uzbek cargo with access to seaports in the south, east, and west of the Eurasian continent. In addition, the Strategy provides for: 1) creating conditions for a sharp increase in the volume and quality of passenger and freight traffic; 2) improvement of the transport sector management system; 3) the introduction of fundamentally new approaches to the training, retraining and advanced training of transport system workers.

As a result of these measures, there is a certain increase in freight and passenger traffic. Freight transportation by all modes of transport in 2019 increased by 6.1% and amounted to 1.31 billion tons, and passenger transportation by all modes of transport increased by 2.7%, amounting to 6.1 billion people.<sup>10</sup>

In Uzbekistan, transport accounts for 6.4% of GDP (8-12% in developed countries), 7.4% of total investment, 29.5% of the total services market. Experts suggest that by 2030 the capacity of the transit potential of Uzbekistan will increase by 4.4 times - up to 6.04 billion tons. At the same time, the share of investments in the transport sector relative to the



country's GDP should increase to \$46.7 billion.<sup>11</sup>

In his Address to the *Oliy Majlis* dated January 24, 2020, the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev repeatedly dwelt on the need to develop transport and emphasized that "in order to timely deliver our products to domestic and foreign markets, reduce its cost, we need to develop the transport sector and logistics".<sup>12</sup> In his Address to the *Oliy Majlis* dated January 24, 2020, the President of Uzbekistan stated that "to date, we have taken the first practical steps to implement the project for the construction of the Trans-Afghan transport corridor, which will connect Central Asia with the Indian Ocean. Its implementation will serve to ensure stability and sustainable economic development throughout the region". Referring to the development of transport communications within the country, Sh. Mirziyoyev emphasized that "One of the important factors in the development of regions is the provision of transport links between them. We need to create an interconnected transport network that will allow us to quickly reach the capital, major cities and tourist centers from all settlements of the country."<sup>13</sup>

According to the "Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026", "Development of a unified transport system in conjunction with all modes of transport" is planned (Goal 36). To this end, it is proposed: "Improving the attractiveness of intercity and suburban railway routes; Development of the market for transport and logistics services and infrastructure, bringing the level of electrification of railway infrastructure to 60 percent and accelerated development of the road network: Expanding "green corridors" and transit opportunities in the transport system for foreign trade, as well as increasing the volume of transit cargo turnover to 15 million tons".<sup>14</sup> The volume of transit traffic of Uzbekistan in 2020 amounted to 9.1 million tons, and the total volume of international transportation of goods then amounted to 47.1 million tons, of which 13.3 and 24.7 million tons were exports and imports, respectively.<sup>15</sup>

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## INITIATIVES OF UZBEKISTAN ON TRANSPORT CORRIDORS AT THE LEVEL OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Speaking at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly on September 19, 2017, the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev emphasized that “Today, Uzbekistan defines the Central Asian region as the main priority of its foreign policy. And this is a conscious choice”, while emphasizing that “the region should become a zone of stability, sustainable development and good neighborliness”.<sup>16</sup> To this end, Sh. Mirziyoyev suggested “discussing the fundamental problems of the region at the High-Level International Conference “Central Asia: One Past and Common Future, Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Prosperity” in November in Samarkand under the auspices of the UN.” The President of Uzbekistan also assured that “Uzbekistan is making and will continue to make a feasible contribution to the economic recovery of Afghanistan, the development of its transport infrastructure.” Sh. Mirziyoyev stated that “holding regular consultative meetings of the heads of states of Central Asia would contribute to the consolidation of this trend.”

One of the key initiatives of the head of Uzbekistan - the adoption of a UN resolution on Central Asia received wide international support, and in June 2018 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution “Strengthening regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in the Central Asian region”<sup>17</sup>. In the resolution, a special place is given to the development of transport infrastructure and transit corridors, strengthening the interaction of all modes of transport, including through the opening of new roads and railways, as well as air routes.

Speaking at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2020, the President of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev noted that “today, the Central Asian states face an important strategic task. This is to ensure deep integration of our region into the global economic, transport and transit corridors”. In this regard, he put forward a new initiative “to establish a Regional Centre for the Development of Transport and Communications under the auspices of the United Nations.”<sup>18</sup>

The establishment and operation of the Center under the auspices of the UN will, in our opinion, contribute to the solution of such tasks as:

- effective and mutually beneficial use of international transport corridors together with neighboring countries, as well as the formation of a single, branched and externally integrated transport space in Central Asia to strengthen relations;
- intensification of joint efforts to develop existing and form new transport corridors, including the construction of a new railway in the direction of China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan, Mazar-i-Sharif-Herat;
- formation of reliable transport, including transit corridors for the supply of foreign trade goods to the largest markets of the world and the region;
- creating favorable conditions for international transportation by harmonizing and simplifying cross-border transport procedures, including border, customs, phytosanitary and veterinary control, in international transportation;
- increasing the competitiveness of the Central Asian states in the world market of transport services, improving the quality of transport services for foreign trade flows;
- attraction of transit cargo flows from third countries, etc.

In addition, the Center will also draw the attention of the world community to the initiatives of the President of Uzbekistan put forward at the international conference “Central Asia in the system of international transport corridors: strategic prospects and unrealized opportunities” in Tashkent in 2018. In particular, on the development of a Strategy for the Development of Regional Transport Corridors in Central Asia, the adoption on its basis of a regional Program for the sustainable development of the transport system of Central Asia and the formation of the Regional Council for Transport Communications of the countries of Central Asia, which will become a coordinating structure in solving existing problems in the transport and logistics sphere.

At the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, President Sh. Mirziyoyev speaking about the need “to broadly involve Afghanistan in the process of economic integration in the region”, said that Uzbekistan “started the implementation of major infrastructure projects such as “Surkhan-Puli Khumri” power line and construction of a railway from Mazar-i-Sharif to the sea ports of the Indian Ocean”.

Cooperation within the framework of the SCO in the field of transport is being stepped up. In order to expand mutually beneficial trade between the SCO member states, create new and improve existing transport and logistics infrastructures, the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, in his speeches at the meetings of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States, put forward a number of initiatives aimed at consolidating the efforts of the SCO members in the transport sector.

At the meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States (Qingdao, China, June 10, 2018), it was proposed to consider the possibility of establishing the SCO International Transport and Logistics Association. The Qingdao Declaration of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States supported the holding in Uzbekistan of the first meeting of the heads of railway administrations of the SCO member states.<sup>19</sup> At a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Member States in Bishkek (June 2019), the President of Uzbekistan proposed to develop a Strategy for SCO Cooperation on the Development of Interconnectivity, Effective Economic and Transport Corridors. The initiatives and proposals of the Head of Uzbekistan are widely supported among the SCO member states. A vivid example is the approval during the meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the SCO States in Tashkent in November 2019 of the Concept of interaction between the railway administrations of the SCO member states, developed at the initiative of Sh. Mirziyoyev.

At a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Member States in Samarkand on September 16, 2022, the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, speaking about the “SCO Concept for strengthening Connectivity and Establishing Effective Transport Corridors”, proposed “to establish an Interregional Center for Connectivity in the city of

Tashkent, with the support of the United Nations". The leader of Uzbekistan called "the trilateral Agreement on the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway as a historic event as a part of the summit", and he also called "to support another strategically important project – the construction of the Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway corridor. According to Sh. Mirziyoyev, "Implementation of these two projects shall open up the broad opportunities for strengthening the connectivity, increasing the mutual trade and investment, and, in general, ensuring the sustainable economic growth in the space of our Organization". The President of Uzbekistan also proposed to "discuss all promising projects in the field of transport and communications at the site of the first SCO Transport Forum" in 2023 in Uzbekistan.<sup>20</sup>

The implementation of the route "China - Kyrgyzstan - Uzbekistan" will reduce the distance from China to South-Eastern Europe to 900 km, which is equal to 7-8 days.<sup>21</sup> According to the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulla Aripov, Uzbekistan expresses "hope for the early start of the construction of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China railway." According to him, this road "should become an important link in the new transport corridor from China through Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, then through the newly built Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway to the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and to the ports of the Mediterranean Sea within the framework of the project "East-West".<sup>22</sup>

### PROMOTION OF TRANSPORT POLICY BY UZBEKISTAN IN CENTRAL ASIA

Speaking at the first consultative meeting of the heads of state of Central Asia in Astana in March 2018 President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev noted that "In the coming years, we intend to increase the volume of mutual trade to \$5 billion."<sup>23</sup> He stated that the most important transport arteries connecting our countries have been restored and modernized, new land and air routes have been launched, and thanks to mutual discounts, the volume of cargo transportation, primarily transit, is growing.

As priority areas for interaction between the countries of Central Asia, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, offering “the search for new reserves and effective mechanisms for expanding effective regional cooperation” in Central Asia, noted the importance of developing specific partnership programs in trade, economic, transport and communication areas.

Sh. Mirziyoyev proposed “concrete mechanisms for implementing the priorities of regional cooperation”, stated that “the strategic area where it is extremely important to combine joint efforts is a cardinal increase in the transit and logistics potential of the Central Asian region.” As the President of Uzbekistan emphasized at the meeting, in this matter “the priority should be the implementation of transport and communication projects that will connect Central Asia with the largest seaports and world markets. And to implement this, Sh. Mirziyoyev proposed: 1) within the framework of the Ashgabat agreement on the international transport and transit corridor, by joint efforts to effectively use the trans-regional route Central Asia - the Persian Gulf; 2) to start the early formation of the Trans-Afghan corridor with access to South Asia, as well as the construction of automobile and railway highways China - Kyrgyzstan - Uzbekistan; 3) speed up the coordination and adopt at the next Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization the SCO Road Development Program proposed by the Russian partners. At the meeting in Astana, the President of Uzbekistan stated that “for the practical solution of these pan-regional tasks, we intend to hold an international conference “Central Asia in the system of international transport corridors: strategic prospects and unrealized Opportunities” in October this year in Tashkent.”

At the Second Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia in Tashkent on November 29, 2019. Speaking about the priorities of the expanding regional partnership, the President of Uzbekistan emphasized the need to “focus on the practical implementation of tasks in the trade, economic, investment, transport, communication and energy sectors.” In this regard, Sh. Mirziyoyev proposed to “accelerate the creation of a regional council for transport communications”, justifying this by the

fact that "Uzbekistan's trade turnover with the countries of Central Asia has more than doubled in recent years."<sup>24</sup>

At the Third Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia in Turkmenistan on August 6, 2021, the President of Uzbekistan, speaking about common strategic interests, noted the need to "effectively use the transport and transit potential of the region". He expressed his deep conviction that "the extensive and integrated transport system of our countries is able to become a key transit hub on the Eurasian continent". In this regard, Sh.Mirziyoyev made a proposal to "support the fullest possible loading of the existing transport corridors and infrastructure, including the ports of the Caspian Sea, large trans-border logistics centers". The President of Uzbekistan pointed at the possibility of using in the future "the potential of the Trans-Afghan corridor Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan road and railways."<sup>25</sup>

The existing problems of the regional transport system in Central Asia are systematically studied, which show that these problems (financial, project and others) must have a comprehensive solution.<sup>26</sup> Uzbek studies also pay attention to legal issues and problems of regional transport logistics and transportation.<sup>27</sup> Other studies pay attention to the development of transport infrastructure in the regions, emphasizing its importance for ensuring the economic development of the regions and the exchange of goods.<sup>28</sup> International economic institutions also pay close attention to this issue.<sup>29</sup>

### INITIATIVES OF UZBEKISTAN ON TRANSPORT CORRIDORS AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Speaking in Samarkand on November 10, 2017 at the international conference "Central Asia: one past and a common future, cooperation for sustainable development and mutual prosperity", the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev stated that "our main goal is to turn Central Asia into a stable, economically developed and prosperous region by common efforts"<sup>30</sup> and outlined specific priority tasks to achieve this goal.

Sh. Mirziyoyev highlighted the following two tasks: firstly, this is the development of trade and economic ties and the creation of favorable conditions for the growth of trade and the strengthening of cooperation; secondly, it is necessary to more effectively use the transit and logistics potential of the region and ensure the rapid development of transport infrastructure. In order to implement them and agree on our common approaches, he then proposed “to hold an international conference in Tashkent in 2018 on the topic “Central Asia in the system of international transport corridors: strategic prospects and unrealized opportunities.”

On the initiative of Sh. Mirziyoyev on September 20-21, 2018 Tashkent hosted a high-level international conference on the development of the transport and transit potential of the Central Asian region: “Central Asia in the system of international transport corridors: strategic prospects and unrealized opportunities.”<sup>31</sup> The conference was attended by over 500 people, including 300 foreign guests from 37 countries and 25 international organizations, financial institutions and leading transport companies.

At the conference, interest was expressed in developing a strategy for the development of transport logistics in Central Asia with the participation of the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Asian Development Bank and other international financial institutions. The experts discussed the possibility of developing and adopting a regional Agreement on the joint development of the transport system in Central Asia. The parties also emphasized the demand for the formation of integrated transport management systems aimed at regulating and simplifying the movement of goods and vehicles. The participants supported the initiative of Uzbekistan to create the Regional Council for Transport Communications of the Central Asian countries, whose activities will be aimed at enhancing regional cooperation in the transport, transit and logistics sector.

Taking into account the scale of the tasks to eliminate the problems facing the Central Asian states in the development and modernization of the region’s transport system, the parties expressed interest in adopting a regional program for the development of transport communications. In



addition, a proposal was made for the consistent convergence of national legislations with international standards in order to facilitate international freight traffic, transit and border crossing procedures, and the importance of international documents adopted at the initiative of the countries of Central Asia aimed at strengthening regional cooperation, interregional transport links and successful integration of the region into the world transport and economic relations.

Speaking at the international conference “Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities” on July 15, 2021, the President of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev proposed “the development of modern, efficient and secure transport and logistics infrastructure in Central and South Asia”. According to Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, “a key element of the entire architecture of connectivity of our regions should become the Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railroad. Its construction project has already gained a broad support, including on the part of the leading international financial institutions.” As the head of Uzbekistan emphasized, “the construction of this railroad will make it possible to fully realize the transit potential of the two regions, form the shortest route, significantly reduce the time and cost of transporting goods between South Asia and Europe through Central Asia and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States”<sup>32</sup>. Our research also confirmed the strategic interests of South Asia in the Central Asian region.<sup>33</sup>

At a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Organization of Turkic States in Samarkand on November 11, 2022, the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, speaking about the Trans-Caspian International Corridor, said that “Uzbekistan transports 10 percent of its foreign trade cargo through this corridor.” He proposed that “by the end of the year, the ministers of transport should develop a detailed plan and effective mechanisms for cooperation on the basis of the Program adopted today.” At the same time, Sh. Mirziyoyev stressed that “the main attention should be paid to: increasing the competitiveness of transit corridors in our region, introducing the most favorable tariffs for business, and creating a modern transport infrastructure.”<sup>34</sup>

The importance and prospects of the Trans-Caspian International Corridor for the countries of Central Asia is also confirmed by studies initiated by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and funded by the European Commission. The EBRD study aims to identify the most sustainable transport connections between Central Asia and Europe. It also follows from these reports that “Uzbekistan is actively developing transport links with all its neighbours” and “the route through Kazakhstan to its ports on the Caspian Sea seems to be most stable option for cargo travelling through Uzbekistan”. It is said that “Uzbekistan is currently pursuing multimodal transportation (road and rail) from China, through Kyrgyzstan then onwards through the Trans-Afghan route or through Turkmenistan and Iran”.<sup>35</sup> The importance of the “Trans-Caspian International Corridor” for the countries of Central Asia has increased significantly in recent years in the studies of international experts and scientists.<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The facts, events of specific events and speeches of the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev on transport and communication corridors in Uzbekistan and in the international arena show that the process of conceptualizing Uzbekistan’s strategy for transport corridors in Central Asia is underway. The trade flows require the sustainability of transport corridors. Therefore, Uzbekistan revised its transport strategy and implemented several important reforms listed above.

Implementing the noted steps under the leadership of Sh. Mirziyoyev, a holistic program for the development and modernization of engineering, communication and road transport infrastructure is currently being implemented in Uzbekistan, which provides for the development of a single comprehensive strategy in the development of the national transport industry. This meets high international requirements and standards, ensuring its wide integration into international transport communications, taking into account the long-term needs of republican producers in

promoting their products to regional and world markets.

The growing export potential of Uzbekistan and the need to expand sales markets for domestic products require the adoption of additional anticipatory measures to create favorable conditions for further diversification of foreign trade routes, the formation of alternative, most efficient transit corridors that ensure the exit of export products of Uzbekistan to promising international markets. The leadership of Uzbekistan is well aware of the shortcomings and constantly notes that at present the existing significant transit potential of the republic is not fully utilized. The current inflexible transit and tariff policy hinders the attraction of additional transit traffic. Therefore, the task is constantly set to further improve the bilateral legal framework and the practical implementation of international agreements on the development of new transport and transit corridors, the creation of conditions for the efficient transportation and handling of Uzbekistan's goods in neighboring countries.

To this end, Uzbekistan, under the leadership of Sh. Mirziyoyev, attaching strategic importance to the development of the transport industry, is taking the above-mentioned large-scale measures aimed at developing transport infrastructure at the national and regional levels, and is consistently working to integrate it into the international transport system.

The analysis shows how difficult the tasks set by the President of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev in the field of development of transport and communication flows of Uzbekistan and Central Asia, and how the head of state has consistently, step by step, set specific tasks for the modernization of this sphere. Therefore, in order to solve and practically implement them, not only further practical actions of ministries and departments, business structures, but systematic and deep both fundamental and applied scientific research are needed, the result of which should be the development of strategic conceptual approaches and effective mechanisms for regional transport cooperation in Central Asia. The President Mirziyoyev, systematically and constantly puts forward new

ideas and initiatives for the development of traffic flows and the conceptualization of Uzbekistan's strategy for transport corridors in Central Asia. This also confirms that Uzbekistan is comprehensively striving to develop the northern, northwestern, southern, southwestern and eastern international transport corridors, which will allow the country to gain access to the markets of European countries, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China and others.

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# FROM UNIVERSITY BENCH TO DIPLOMACY? UZBEKISTAN'S STRATEGIC MANEUVERING IN THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC LANDSCAPE

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper highlights that the Uzbek government's efforts to promote collaboration in education and research serve a dual purpose of advancing academic development and branding post-dictatorial Uzbekistan. The paper argues that this approach is problematic, as issues related to the representation of Uzbek educational institutions in international academic rankings are being inaccurately treated as matters of public policy and diplomacy. The paper demonstrates that educational collaborations constitute subsystems that impact a country's image but cannot be significantly influenced by public policy and diplomacy alone. It is, therefore, important for public policy officials to recognize and understand education as a subsystem operating independently from inter-state relations, and to acquire the necessary skills to navigate it effectively.*

**Keywords:** Uzbekistan, education, Central Asia, discourse; functional differentiation; a global society in science.

## INTRODUCTION

With his election in 2016, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan set the task of promoting the international image of Uzbekistan in various sectors such as economy, education, research, welfare, and other<sup>1</sup>. Such a policy of international outreach has had a tremendous impact on the country's engagement in the international scientific landscape. The government of Uzbekistan stressed the importance of the inclusion of the

country's educational institutions into international academic ranking systems not only as a matter of educational/scientific development but also as a matter of changing the international image of the country in terms of diplomacy and international public policy.

There are various views on the motivations of governments in encouraging educational institutions to expand their international outreach. Several academic studies analyze government motivations for international educational cooperation and inclusion in academic rankings. Gita Steiner-Khamsi and colleagues<sup>2</sup> examine the motivations behind international educational borrowing and lending, arguing that countries engage in such practices to promote their own interests and achieve specific policy goals. Wagemaker et.al<sup>3</sup> explore the factors related to why governments participate in international student assessments such as PISA, finding that they do so to benchmark their own educational systems, identify areas for improvement, and compare their performance to other countries. Furthermore, Hazelkorn et.al<sup>4</sup> analyze the motivations behind countries' participation in global university rankings, arguing that they do so to attract international students and faculty, improve their research performance, and enhance their global reputation. Alternatively, Ka-Ho Mok and Kar Ming Yu<sup>5</sup> explore the motivations behind the internationalization of higher education in East Asia, arguing that governments engage in such practices to promote economic development, enhance their global competitiveness, and prepare their students for the challenges of the future.

Regarding the motivations of governments to participate in academic rankings, Marginson<sup>6</sup> highlights the implications of global university rankings for the field of education and argues that these are becoming increasingly important for governments, universities, and students. Marope, Wells and Hazelkorn<sup>7</sup> examine the uses and misuses of academic rankings in higher education, arguing that while these can be useful for benchmarking and improving quality, these can also be misused for purposes of competition, prestige, and commercial gain. Overall, these studies suggest that global rankings are becoming increasingly important



in the field of education and have significant implications for governments, universities, and students. They also highlight the politics surrounding rankings and the potential for their misuse, emphasizing the need for critical analysis and careful consideration of their impact.

These studies provide an important assessment of the role and place attributed to educational rankings by developing countries to encourage their universities to participate in the global educational exchange. However, when considering the case of Uzbekistan, the factors primarily important for such proactive educational internationalization are not clearly defined, while there is a general assumption that internationalization for educational institutions automatically brings positive outcomes. In the light of this problem, this paper attempts to uncover the reasons primarily related to the active policies in respect to international outreach in higher education undertaken by the government of Uzbekistan and Uzbek educational institutions in recent years.

What factors can account for Uzbekistan's government's keen interest in engaging with the international scientific community? What are the practical and theoretical challenges of Uzbekistan's academic and educational outreach to foreign partners for its government and academic institutions?

By answering a set of questions, this paper sheds light on the motivations of the Uzbek government in promoting educational and academic collaborations among national institutions. Specifically, the paper emphasizes that while the government's goal is to achieve higher standards of education and training for economic development, it also considers participation in such collaboration schemes as an essential element in enhancing the international prestige of Uzbekistan. The government believes that Uzbekistan's recognition is crucial in attracting foreign investments. Therefore, the purpose of the Uzbek government's policy of promoting collaboration in education and research goes beyond the goals of academic development and includes the branding of post-dictatorial Uzbekistan.

The paper also argues that issues regarding the representation of

Uzbek educational institutions in international academic rankings are incorrectly interpreted as a subject of public policy and diplomacy. While the government's intentions are well-intentioned, it is not possible to easily correct or improve educational and academic performances through a single policy or investment initiative. Educational collaborations form subsystems that affect the image of countries, but they cannot be changed voluntarily over a short period and through the channels of public diplomacy alone. Global rankings, such as the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings (QS), exemplify these sub-systemic functions, which include metrics such as "Academic Reputation (AR)," "Employer Reputation (ER)," "Faculty/Student Ratio (F/SR)," "Citation Per Faculty (CPF)," "International Faculty Ratio/International Student Ratio." It is vital for Uzbekistan's government officials and university administrators to understand the educational/academic subsystem's logic to properly define their educational policy goals in the long term.

This article develops its argument in the following three sections. The first section outlines the conceptual framework for understanding the governmentally enforced internationalization of educational institutions. While doing so, we will demonstrate how educational/academic sectors operate, aside from politics, based on their logic of constituting societies at a global level. The second section interprets Uzbekistan's international politics from this scientific perspective, focusing on how the country's foreign policy choice is being guided by the functional differentiation logic within the science. The third section concludes with a discussion of the implications of our analysis for understanding the motivations of the Uzbek government in promoting educational and academic collaboration.

### FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION: THEORIZING UZBEKISTAN WITHIN THE SCIENCE

The interpretation of Uzbekistan's international politics from the science perspective entails scrutiny of the science as a functionally self-organized

international entity, in contrast to the notions of geopolitics, balancing/ bandwagoning, regime security, inclusion/exclusion context, and strategies and discourses of world/regional powers in Central Asia which often dominate coverage of regional states representation at the global level. Therefore, this section focuses on the interpretation of the science, its global (self-referential) institutions such as QS, and how Uzbekistan and its public engagement with this institution shape its global identity.

Recent studies on functional differentiation in IR (Albert; Buzan and Albert; Albert and Hilkermeier; Albert, Kessler, and Stetter; Cerny; Helmig and Kessler, Azizov)<sup>8</sup> have plausibly argued that the modern world consists of functionally differentiated subsystems: for example, a subsystem in science (i.e., the science), a subsystem in politics (i.e., the politics), and others. In this regard, this paper refers to the academic and educational sector when using "the science" as the term. Each subsystem organizes societies according to its own (transnational) tasks that state- and non-state actors fulfill at a global level. Thus, under this functional differentiation logic, international politics is not only characterized by the cross-border interactions of state- and non-state actors from the domination/opposition perspective but also by the knowledge production functional logic (in the science, for example).

Functional differentiation regards the science as the autonomous social subsystem, implying that each subsystem operates based on its own functional logic; thus, neither the science nor the politics could impose their own perspective on each other. For example, the functional logic of the science is characterized by its code of true/false, while the politics is driven by the code of domination/opposition. In the modern world, societies are organized by fulfilling transnational tasks based on true/false as well as domination/opposition perspectives. As such, the politics can only tackle its own problems and can generate its own intersubjective rules and meanings, which cannot be binding in the science and vice versa<sup>9</sup>.

Consequently, the science should be approached separately from the politics. Societies that are organized around the function of producing knowledge (based on the verification of a new theory that falsifies other

theories) have little if anything to do with the notions of struggling for domination (either in domestic or foreign politics) or power. This paper does recognize that even academic rankings are produced in Western institutions and represent the way to empower certain countries and control the narration of the knowledge generation and the images projected by non-Western states and Central Asia in particular (see Cooley and Snyder, Dadabaev, and Heathershaw)<sup>10</sup>. This point is also similar to those already mentioned by others such as Fehl and Freistein<sup>11</sup> pointing at how international organizations rank their members into unequal social positions, stating that international organizations “define what social positions exist, to what socially valued rewards these positions are entitled or not entitled, and who gets access to these positions”.<sup>12</sup> However, as far as the operationalization of these rankings is concerned, the academic community is primarily concerned with the problem of verifying or falsifying certain approaches, and recognizing the value of certain theories/methodologies/notions, which are communicated through publications, citations, attracted research funds, academic infrastructure and the number of students among many other criteria (Ziemann; Gren and Zierhofer; Luhmann; Moeller)<sup>13</sup>.

The division of the modern world into subsystems took place gradually due to the process of globalization and specialization of each subsystem (based on its functional code). Modern societies are ordered less and less by a single center (i.e., the politics); rather, they are organized more and more around global functions they are engaged within different self-referential subsystems. For example, the science’s self-referential logic is conditioned by “[o]perations of the same kind have to be capable of connecting to each other so that a network of operations arises”.<sup>14</sup> This implies that at an operational level, the science refers to its own operation (verification/falsification communicated via publications) to be capable of producing social connectivity for societies globally.

As such, the science is “composed of elements (events [e.g., falsification/verification communicated via publications]) that refer to themselves by including their connection with other elements of the same

process".<sup>15</sup> "Therefore, communications (publications) are determined by nothing else but communications (other publications)".<sup>16</sup> Hence, communication in science is not characterized by the "physical quality of its signs nor in the conscious states of its speakers and listeners, readers, and writers", but by any possibility of "constituting self-generated forms".<sup>17</sup> Uzbekistan, like other actors, observes how communications communicate self-referentially according to the science's code, program, operation, and medium; the country is also observed by the science concerning how it (and its public) participates in the science's operation at a global level.

The science's metrics interpret cross-border interactions taking place in-between state and non-state actors, universities, scholars, experts, students, and others who are engaged in producing knowledge at a global level. For example, the metrics collect "the expert opinions of over 94,000 individuals in the higher education space regarding teaching and research quality at the world's universities" (AR).<sup>18</sup> Research quality is in turn determined by self-referentiality, implying that an assumption developed in a published article refers to nothing else but the assumptions discussed in previously published articles. Thus, CPF takes into consideration cross-border systemic communications in the form of "citations received by all papers produced by an institution across a five-year period by the number of faculty members at that institution." Using data from Elsevier's Scopus database, the "QS assessed 74 million citations from 13.5 million papers" in 2019 across the globe.<sup>19</sup> And, it continues to do so annually as the science continues securing social connectivity and constructing functional spatiality among societies.

Following this self-referential communicative logic, the science produces and reproduces states' conceptual boundaries, which are less and less about distinctions between territorial units and regional constituencies (e.g., Central Asia and its external Others) and more and more about a functional division between the science and other subsystems.<sup>20</sup> Within the scientific borderland, the QS itself constitutes who the Self is and whom the Others are based on actors' participation in the subsystem's operation. Thus, the science consists of a set of observable

communicative events (publications) as well as of a set of perceptions (norms, identities) of actors about these events.<sup>21</sup> Identity construction within the science hence “relies neither on the need for the denial and suppression of the Other (e.g., Uzbekistan and its excluded Other) nor on the conscious selection of behavior based on a particular norm (e.g., Turkic-speaking nation)”.<sup>22</sup> Such identity constitution in science is determined functionally in terms of inclusion (a global society in the science) and its exclusion (other functionally determined global societies). In this regard, the construction of Uzbekistan’s international image occurs in terms of this global scientific functional borderland rather than Uzbekistan’s branding policy or diplomacy. The government of Uzbekistan however, displays signs of lacking the understanding of this essence of educational rankings as it pursues a very active policy of nation-branding through public diplomacy acts.

### THE SCIENCE, THE QS, AND UZBEKISTAN’S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SUBSYSTEM

To exemplify a few cases, MOFA of Uzbekistan has reported that for instance, the ambassador of Uzbekistan to the Benelux countries, Dilyor Khakimov, met with the representatives of the Dutch company Elsevier on January 28, 2020, to discuss the prospects of the Ilm-Fan [Science] 2020 project launched in March 2018 together with the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education to provide all higher education institutions and research institutes with the access to the most cited scientific journals and books, the largest scientific and analytical platform, Scopus, and facilitating more than 230 training workshops.<sup>23</sup> It was also stated that such support from Elsevier resulted in two universities of Uzbekistan – Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers and Tashkent University of Information Technologies – having been included in QS World University Rankings rating for the quality of teaching certain subjects.

Another step directed to meet the Presidential agenda of promoting

the image of Uzbekistan abroad has been setting up new educational institutions with foreign partners. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan on January 28, 2019, released an announcement about a plan to open the University of Technology of Malaysia (UTM) in the city of Khorezm, Uzbekistan.<sup>24</sup> The earlier news released on June 17, 2017, via the official webpage of the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Germany also announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Leicester University, England, to establish the Leicester School of International Studies at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan.<sup>25</sup> Here, it is important to note that the (functional) images of Malaysia and the United Kingdom are perceived through the science that it produces for Uzbekistan. UTM is ranked 228th by the QS World University Rankings and 47th by the QS Asian University Rankings<sup>26</sup>, Leicester University “is one of leading public research universities of UK and within 1% of top universities according to Times HE ranking, 2% – according to the QS World University Rankings and 25th in the list of the top university of UK”.<sup>27</sup>

In a similar manner, the Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan annotated the meeting of the Uzbek ambassador to Italy Otabek Akbarov with the representatives of the University of Pisa (ranked 389th in the QS ranking of 2020) to discuss the possibility of establishing a branch of the university in Tashkent.<sup>28</sup> On a separate, but conceptually related, occasion, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov met with a member of the Board of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Rector of Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) Anatoly Torkunov on December 9, 2019. Mr. Torkunov arrived in Uzbekistan to attend the official opening ceremony of MGIMO in Tashkent<sup>29</sup>, the image of which is supported by QS (ranked 355th in 2019).

Other programs and engagements carefully considered by the Uzbek government included the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), The Bologna Process (a series of reforms that aim to promote student mobility and quality assurance in higher education), the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development as well as

the Global Education Monitoring Report (annual report produced by UNESCO that tracks progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of providing inclusive and equitable quality education for all).

On October 25, 2019, the central TV channel of Uzbekistan “Axborot 24” showed a film<sup>30</sup>, analyzing the sector of higher education in the country. The film criticized that none of the 114 public universities functioning in Uzbekistan have been ranked globally so far by the QS among the top 1000 world universities. Comparing other institutions in close geographic proximity to Uzbekistan, the film mentioned Russia’s Lomonosov Moscow State University (ranked 90<sup>th</sup> by the QS in 2019), Kazakhstan’s Al-Farabi National University (ranked 220<sup>th</sup> by the QS in 2019), and Gumilyov Eurasian National University in Kazakhstan (ranked 394<sup>th</sup> by the QS in 2019)<sup>31</sup>.

The demonstration of the film came right after Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev approved the Development Concept of the Higher Education System of Uzbekistan by 2030.<sup>32</sup> The Development Concept points at the necessity for Uzbekistan public universities to engage with the QS, and by doing so, to achieve the goal of being ranked among the top 1000 world universities by 2030. Earlier, ex-Minister of Higher Education of Uzbekistan Inom Majidov and QS Regional Director Zoya Zaitseva signed a strategic agreement to support Uzbekistan universities to join World University Rankings (WUR) within the framework of the Ilm-fan [Science] 2020 program. According to this agreement, the QS Intelligence Unit is now assisting in clarifying the methodology of joining WUR and justifying the strengths and weaknesses of Uzbekistan public universities on the QS’s key indicators.<sup>33</sup> In recent years, the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers has been ranked 323<sup>th</sup> in QS University Regional Rankings: Emerging Europe and Central Asia. The Ministry of Higher Education of Uzbekistan hurried to highlight this exemplary role model which should be followed by other public universities in the country.<sup>34</sup>

As is illustrated above, Uzbekistan’s public and educational policy



which encourages international tie-ups is heavily informed by the international standing of various countries in prestigious academic rankings. For instance, for the Uzbek government, the image of the United States as projected in various rankings is positive (i.e., the successful Self) as the QS annually ranks the United States universities among the top best world universities. According to the QS World University Rankings 2020<sup>35</sup>, out of the top 10 universities ranked by the QS, 5 are from the United States. Other countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, Russia, South Korea, etc. are listed within the top 1000 world universities.<sup>36</sup> Since the Uzbek government promotes the policy according to which its universities need to be listed among these 1000 world universities by 2030, the country tries to imitate the functional successes that the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Russia, and South Korea have achieved in the science so far. Uzbekistan develops a sense of these countries through how the scientific rankings construct their images (within the top 1000 world universities). In such a structure, the essence of the collaboration or the value of the product produced by the tie-ups with these top-tier universities becomes of secondary importance for the government as it sees collaboration as a part of the branding strategy of the country.

Consequently, Uzbekistan President Mirziyoyev's decree<sup>37</sup> on launching the US Webster University in Tashkent implies that the opening of this university in Tashkent is a way of becoming closer to the success of the United States in science, and learning how the country could achieve the goal of being ranked amongst the top 1000 world universities by 2030. In this regard, the decree reasons that the attraction of modern pedagogical technologies (from the United States) will help to train cadres in Uzbekistan based on international educational standards. In this functional reasoning context, there is a possibility for Uzbekistan and the United States (as well as for others that are listed within the top QS 1000 world universities) to coexist within the common functional space in the science without attaching the images of hegemon or balancer in the Central Asian borderland.

Generally, Uzbekistan's interaction with the QS is characterized by its willingness to be recognized in a global society in the science. In this scientific subsystem, the representation of Uzbekistan is defined by the functional performance logic of individual researchers with little direct input and impact of the government in this functional differentiation process. The images of the United States and/or Russia or other countries which do well in the academic rankings are transmitted to Uzbekistan via the operation logic of the science. QS's AR is a metric, through which expert reflections of over 94,000 individuals from 140 countries travel across national borders each year, projecting the image and the role of the particular country in the international standing of this scientific subsystem.

At the same time, although the government of Uzbekistan operates with the vision that representation in global educational rankings is part of the country's foreign policy and relates to the images projected on the country in the field of international relations, there are little, if any operational tools the government possesses or can apply to change country's standing in a short-term. There is a need for a deeper understanding among policy officials that the academic subsystem of interactions has its own functional logic, which is not necessarily compatible with the notions often cited in the field of diplomacy or international politics.

Consequently, Uzbekistan's interactions with the United States and/or Russia within the realm of the science are not characterized by the logic of domination/opposition, which involves strategies and discourses of world/regional powers that shape perceptions of influence in Uzbekistan and the region. Instead, these interactions are conditioned by the production of knowledge that is assessed and perceived through the functional logic of the metrics such as AR and CPF. Therefore, regardless of how the discourse of the five Stans assesses the United States and/or Russia as geopolitically dangerous Others in Central Asia, these assessments and perceptions have no bearing on the images of the United States or Russia that the QS constructs in its functional self-referential context for the Uzbek government.

## PUBLISHING AS A SYSTEMIC SELF-REFERENTIAL EVENT

In a similar manner to the issue of improving international collaboration, the issue of increasing international visibility and academic representation of scholars from Uzbekistan is also considered to be an important pillar of governmental policy and diplomacy. For instance, on December 6, 2019, the Ministry of Higher Education of Uzbekistan jointly with the Elsevier Company (Netherlands) hosted a ceremony, “the Scopus Award – 2019”. The ceremony was attended by Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Aziz Abdukhakimov, then Deputy Minister of Higher Education of Uzbekistan Uzoqboy Begimqulov, the representative of ranking agencies such as QS, Times Higher Education, etc. During the ceremony, several Uzbek scholars were announced as awardees.<sup>38</sup> Uzbekistan hosted the same ceremony in 2018 and plans to conduct it in years to come with more and more Uzbek scholars to be nominated for this award.

The Scopus Award is a process of ranking individuals based on the logic of self-referentiality in the science. This ranking is characterized by assessing the number of publications in journals (indexed in Scopus) and of citations that these publications have by other publications. Scopus's ranking is not a political act (no single center could decide on this ranking); but, it obeys the self-referential logic of the science. Previous publications cause new publications, which cause future publications to be written. Thus, Uzbek scholars' participation through their publications in the science is a systemic self-referential decision. As such, these Uzbek scholars are connected with other international scholars through academic debates communicated via publications. This systemic communicative connectivity among scholars takes place within Scopus; that is, Elsevier's citation database, which covers more than 23,000 titles from more than 5,000 international publishers. Scopus is also used by the QS to rank universities in World University Rankings each year. Scopus Awards initially were awarded in 2004. Since that time, Scopus Awards have been granted to scholars from Latin America, Asia (including Uzbekistan), Europe, and Russia.<sup>39</sup>

Although the events associated with the Scopus Awards are considered to boost the public image of a country and serve as another marker for international recognition, there is a misinterpretation of these awards among the Uzbek policymakers as signifying the national (as opposed to individual scholars) achievement of a particular country, which they do not. In this regard the following needs to be reasserted. Scopus does not draw conceptual boundaries based on factors such as nationality, ethnicity, or political views. It only recognizes the value of what has been published based on the citation code, implying that Uzbek and other scholars are motivated by the desire to verify or falsify their ideas at the operational level of science. Consequently, citations are indexed and assessed through the h-index and i10-indexes which eventually define whose ideas are appreciated the most among fellow academics. In the same way, Google Scholar identifies scholars, not their countries of origin, using the h-index and i10-index. The choice of which articles to cite does not follow the political will of a government, but the logic of self-referentiality within the subsystem. Thus, within the science, whether one belongs to the United States, Russia, or Uzbekistan, scholars remain socially connected individually at a systemic level once their papers/works are accepted for publication/presentation etc., and this cross-border connectivity is assessed and observed only through the categories similar to h-index and i10-indexes (however artificial they are), and not through the politics (implying public diplomacy or national influence/power).

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined Uzbekistan's participation in educational and academic rankings from a functional perspective, arguing that in the era of functional differentiation, "the politics" alone cannot fully explain all cross-border societal interactions. This paper also communicates the message that academic/educational collaborations constitute subsystems that impact a country's image but cannot be significantly influenced by public policy and diplomacy alone. It is therefore important for public

policy officials to recognize and understand education as a subsystem operating independently from inter-state relations, and to acquire the necessary skills to navigate it effectively.

The paper has highlighted that contemporary interactions in various sectors, including science, are made up of functionally determined subsystems that are characterized by their differentiated nature and driven by their respective codes. As a result, the construction of Uzbekistan's international representation in science is distinct from its representation in the field of diplomacy and international relations, that is, politics. Each subsystem produces and reproduces different meanings and images for Uzbekistan's international politics. To assume that the issue of representation in academic/educational reputation rankings is the same as the representation of the country in the diplomatic field, and to generalize these meanings and images, leads to a failure in understanding the differentiated cross-border practices in international public policy.

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated the importance of analyzing cross-border societal interactions from a functional perspective and taking into account the differentiated nature of subsystems. It aims to contribute to the understanding of how Uzbekistan's participation in educational and academic rankings at a systemic level fits into the larger context of its international politics and diplomacy and provides a basis for further research in this area.

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# DEVELOPMENT OF EXTERNAL TRADE OF UZBEKISTAN, 2017-2022

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper, analyzes the current trends of Uzbekistan's foreign trade for the years 2017-2022. Special focus is given to the development of net exports of goods and services which differs from the traditional approaches to analyzing exports. The authors put emphasis on main trends of the development of foreign trade and net exports based on such determinants as the liberalization of national currency market, effect of prices on major export commodities on export volumes, increase in budget deficit causing a fall in net exports. Increase in official reserves as a source of financing the deficit of external balance (reducing net exports), liberalization of imports, obtaining preferential GSP+ trade regime with EU, simplification of customs procedures and border control are also examined. Data on exports and imports of the Central Bank of the Republic of Uzbekistan, types of goods and services, as well as the empirical results taken from their own and related studies of some international organizations and experts, have been used.*

**Key words:** Uzbekistan, net exports, foreign trade dynamics, currency market liberalization, regional trade.

## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Uzbekistan is undergoing major changes in the structure of the economy and foreign trade due to substantial structural economic reforms carried out by the government since the end of 2016. Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017-2021 proposed by president Shavkat Mirziyoev became a strategic document, implementation of which brought

tangible changes in the political, legal, economic and social spheres<sup>1</sup>.

In the economic sphere, an exchange currency policy reform was carried out in 2017, which led to the transition from a regime of limited currency convertibility to full convertibility regime encompassing the current account of the balance of payments. The government tried to liberalize external trade by reducing import tariffs and abolishing them for hundreds of commodities. Afterwards, tax reform was implemented which led to the reduction in tax burden and simplification of tax collection procedures. Besides, many other reforms accompanied the trade and currency market liberalization process. As a result of the reforms, small business sector has noticeably grown. In 2016 there were 27,000 small businesses registered in the republic, which rose to over 90,000 in 2020. These reforms and macroeconomic policies focused on boosting foreign direct investment and expansionary fiscal policy influenced the external trade of Uzbekistan. The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On New Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2022-2026" continuing liberalization policy put more large-scale tasks in all spheres<sup>2</sup>.

The level of external public debt has increased several times in recent years, and huge foreign trade deficit has become a chronic phenomenon. This paper seeks to answer questions, such as how justified is such a macroeconomic strategy in conditions of transition of the economy of Uzbekistan to a new state, and what solutions are needed in order to switch from the import-oriented model to an export-oriented one. The trends in the development of foreign trade and the dynamics of net exports are analysed. It identifies the main factors that caused its tremendous increase in recent years, and in conclusion, formulates recommendations on the formation of macroeconomic and institutional conditions for turning to the export-oriented development of the economy.

There are a few studies analyzing the determinants of Uzbekistan's external trade. Islamov et al. critically analyze the existing econometric approaches to estimating gravity models of exports for Uzbekistan from the point of view of solving such problems as zero observations, bias, inconsistency and inefficiency of estimates<sup>3</sup>. Recently, Islamov and Yusupov

investigated foreign economic activities in Uzbekistan contributing to its economic growth<sup>4</sup>. The study of foreign experience regarding the export promotion policy may be very useful for drawing important ideas.<sup>5</sup> The same is true of studies regarding regional trade integration processes on the example of Asian countries. Ekanayake et al. analyzed the trade creation and trade diversion effects of regional trade agreements (RTAs) in Asia and their effects on intra-regional trade flows using annual trade data for the period 1980-2009<sup>6</sup>. We will make use of the results taken from these studies when discussing the determinants of the trade.

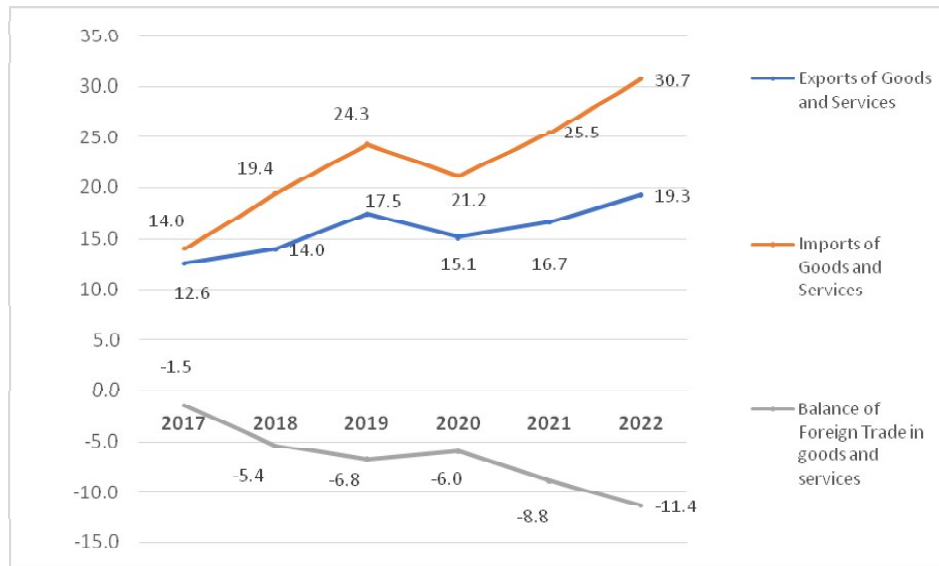
We use adjusted data on exports and imports compiled from the balance of payments and offered by the Central Bank of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The trade data is broken down by destinations, types of goods and services. It is compiled in accordance with the methodology of the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual<sup>7</sup> and may differ from the trade balance statistics published by Statistics Agency.

### DYNAMICS AND STRUCTURE OF UZBEKISTAN'S EXTERNAL TRADE, 2017-2022

According to the Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2022, foreign trade turnover of the republic increased by almost 1.9 times, while the volume of exports increased by 1.5 times, and the volume of imports - by 2.2 times, that is, the foreign trade deficit for this period increased by 7.8 times from about \$1.5 billion up to \$11.4 billion.

Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover in 2022 reached \$50 billion, an increase by \$7.84 billion, or 18.6%, compared to the previous year: export for 2022 increased up to 19.31 billion (+15.9%), import rose up to 30.67 billion (+20.4%), that is, the external trade deficit was 28.7% more than in 2021<sup>8</sup>. In other words, net exports of Uzbekistan became traditionally negative during the structural reforms since imports significantly exceeded exports. Fortunately, largely due to the almost the same volumes of remittances from abroad and a high volume of gold exports, the balance of payments remained far from deterioration.

**DIAGRAM 1 : DYNAMICS OF EXTERNAL TRADE OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN (2017-2022), \$ BILLION**



Source: Based on the data provided by the Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. [www.stat.uz](http://www.stat.uz)

Currently, there are a number of systemic problems that domestic enterprises face in the process of exporting commodities. The problems are mainly related to difficulties in obtaining credit resources by exporters, the lack of appropriate transport and logistics infrastructure locally, obtaining the necessary export permits, resolving tax issues, returning previously paid value added tax amounts, searching for foreign customers and other aspects.

In addition, the risks of reducing the remittances of labor migrants are increasing, one of the main partners - Russia - is expected to have a decrease in economic indicators, which may adversely affect Uzbek exports to this country. This threat requires the government to accelerate the increase in exports, mainly of finished products (primarily, clothing and knitwear, footwear, agricultural products, cars) and tourism services.

As a result of the impact of coronavirus pandemic on international markets, the foreign trade turnover of Uzbekistan in 2020 amounted to \$36.3 billion showing a decrease by 13.1% as compared to 2019. At the same time, exports in 2020 decreased by 13.4%, and imports by 12.8%.

After the Covid-19 pandemic, the dynamics of Uzbekistan's foreign trade accelerated again. According to official data, in 2022 total number of exporting entities amounted to 7199 units, which ensured that the volume of exports without gold reached \$15.2 billion (an increase of 21.1% compared to the same period in 2021), while, taking into account the supply of gold to foreign markets, in the structure of exports, gold ranked first (21.3%, or \$4.1 billion), services - second (20.5%, \$3.96 billion), textiles and clothing knitwear is third (16.5%, \$3.18 billion) and food is fourth (9.4%, \$1.8 billion)<sup>9</sup>. The share of non-ferrous metals was 7.5%, chemical products and related articles 7.4%, the share of machinery and equipment was 5.1% (\$975.7 million), and the share of natural gas was 4.8% (910.9 million)<sup>10</sup>.

The growth in exports in 2017-2022 was achieved mainly due to the growth in sales of textile, clothing and knitwear products (more than 2.8 times), machinery and equipment (almost 2.8 times), foodstuffs (2.1 times), black and non-ferrous metals (more than 1.6 times). The volume of exports of services in 2022 amounted to \$3.95 billion, or 20.5% of the total volume of trade exports and increased by 53.4% compared to the same period in 2021. As part of the export of services, the lion's share is occupied by transport services (44.3%), travel (tourism) (40.7%), telecommunications, computer and information services (6.8%), other business services (3.9%).

TABLE 1  
STRUCTURE OF THE EXPORTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN (2017-2022)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>1. Exports of Goods and Services</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>1.1. Export of goods (in FOB prices)</b>	80.3	78.1	80.3	86.8	84.5	79.5
-Gold	26.0	20.8	28.2	38.4	24.7	21.3
-Textiles, sewing, and knitwear products	9.0	11.5	6.7	7.2	17.6	16.5
-Food Products	7.0	7.9	8.8	9.5	8.8	9.4
-Nonferrous Metals	6.1	6.1	5.5	6.1	8.8	7.5
-Chemical Products and Related Articles	7.0	6.5	5.0	5.8	7.4	7.4
-Ferrous Metals	1.2	2.3	1.7	2.1	1.1	1.3

-Energy and Oil Products	12.8	19.1	14.5	4.4	5.5	6.3
-Machines and Equipment	2.8	1.5	2.5	3.1	4.2	5.1
-Cotton-Fiber	3.8	1.6	1.6	1.0	0.8	0.0
-Other	4.6	0.9	5.9	9.3	5.6	4.6
<b>1.2. Export of services</b>	19.7	21.9	19.7	13.3	15.5	20.5
-Construction	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.1
-Transport	12.8	12.1	10.1	9.4	10.5	9.1
-Trip	4.4	7.4	7.5	1.7	2.5	8.3
-Other services	2.3	2.2	1.8	1.9	2.4	3.0

Source: The Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. [www.stat.uz](http://www.stat.uz)

In 2022, in the structure of imports, the first place was occupied by machinery and equipment (35.7%, \$9.64 billion), the second place was taken by chemical products (16.4%, \$4.23 billion), the third place was taken by food imports (12.9%, \$3.39 billion), fourth place and an important place in imports is occupied by energy products (5.8%, \$1.79 billion).

The main factor in the dynamics of imports is the growth in the imports of machinery and equipment for 2017-2022 by about 2.2 times. The fastest dynamics of imports was observed in imports of ferrous metals (an increase of about 3.4 times), and in food imports (an increase of 3.1 times). Imports of energy products also grew at a fast pace - over the period under review, its volume increased by about 2.4 times. The volume of imports of services in January-December 2022 amounted to \$2.52 billion, or 8.2% of its total volume, and increased by 42.9% compared to the same period in 2021. As part of the import of services, the main share is occupied by travel (tourism - 56.6%), transport services (15.5%), telecommunications, computer and information services (9.4%), other business services (5.3%).

TABLE 2  
STRUCTURE OF THE IMPORTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN (2017-2022)

<b>1. Imports of Goods and Services</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>1.1. Import of goods (in CIF prices)</b>	85.9	89.1	90.0	94.3	93.1	91.8
-Chemical Products and Related Articles	15.6	13.0	13.2	16.3	16.7	16.4
-Ferrous Metals	8.1	8.1	7.6	7.0	7.8	7.6

DEVELOPMENT OF EXTERNAL TRADE OF UZBEKISTAN, 2017-2022

-Nonferrous Metals	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.6
-Energy and Oil products	5.3	4.5	3.9	5.2	6.1	5.8
-Machines and Equipment	35.7	43.0	43.8	42.1	37.1	35.7
-Food Products	9.1	8.1	7.8	10.2	11.5	12.9
-Other	11.1	11.2	12.7	12.2	12.7	11.7
<b>1.2. Import of services</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>8.2</b>
-Construction	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.5	0.2
-Transport	2.2	2.0	1.7	0.8	0.8	1.3
-Trip	9.7	7.8	6.8	2.1	3.5	4.7
-Other services	1.5	1.1	1.4	2.4	2.1	2.1

Source: The Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. [www.stat.uz](http://www.stat.uz)

### GEOGRAPHICAL STRUCTURE OF UZBEKISTAN'S EXTERNAL TRADE, 2017-2022

Currently, according to the data obtained from the Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan has trade relations with 204 countries of the world. The largest volume of foreign trade turnover was recorded with the Russian Federation (18.6%), China (17.8%), Kazakhstan (9.2%), Turkey (6.4%), the Republic of Korea (4.7%), Kyrgyzstan (2.5%) and Germany (2.3%).

In 2022, Russia overtook China and became the main foreign trade partner for Uzbekistan - at the end of the year, the volume of trade with Russia amounted to \$9.27 billion: Russia accounts for the largest share of Uzbekistan's exports (\$3.06 billion) and the second largest share of imports (\$6.21 billion). At the same time, China remains the main supplier of goods to the country (\$6.4 billion) and the second largest export market (\$2.51 billion). In addition to these two countries, Kazakhstan (\$4.62 billion), Turkey (\$3.22 billion) and South Korea (\$2.34 billion) are among the main trading partners of Uzbekistan. By groups of countries, the largest volume of foreign trade falls on the CIS countries - \$19.2 billion, of which the EAEU countries account for \$17.1 billion, and trade turnover with other countries amounted to \$30.8 billion, including with the EU countries - \$4.5 billion. The share of foreign trade turnover of the CIS countries in

the period under review, compared to the same period in 2021, increased by 0.6% and their share in foreign trade turnover, in January-December 2022, amounted to 38.4%.

TABLE 3  
GEOGRAPHICAL STRUCTURE OF UZBEKISTAN'S EXPORTS (2017-2022), %

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Exports, total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1. Russian Federation	14.4	15.0	14.8	8.9	12.1	16.9
2. China, People's Republic of	13.8	19.9	13.0	10.2	13.1	11.9
3. Turkiye	8.3	7.9	8.2	7.5	11.7	9.5
4. Kazakhstan	9.8	12.4	9.3	5.8	7.3	8.1
5. Kyrgyz Republic	1.7	3.0	4.7	5.6	5.5	6.0
6. Afghanistan	5.0	4.3	3.2	4.4	3.6	3.9
7. Tajikistan	0.7	1.3	1.6	2.2	2.4	2.7
8. Canada	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	1.4	1.3

Source: calculations based on the data from National Summary Data Page (NSDP)-Uzbekistan.  
<https://nsdp.stat.uz/>

The volume of foreign trade turnover of other states in January-December 2022, compared to the same period in 2021, respectively, decreased by 0.6% and amounted to 61.6% of the total foreign trade turnover. The foreign trade turnover of the Republic of Uzbekistan with the CIS countries reached \$19.18 billion. Of these, the volume of exports amounted to \$7.85 billion, and the volume of imports was \$11.32 billion. The largest volume of foreign trade turnover with the CIS countries was recorded with Russia (48.4%), Kazakhstan (24.1%), and Kyrgyzstan (6.6%). The foreign trade turnover of Uzbekistan with the Euro-Asian Economic Union (EAEU) states in the period under review amounted to \$15.72 billion, of which the volume of exports was \$5.57 billion, and the volume of imports was \$10.15 billion.



**TABLE 4**  
**GEOGRAPHICAL STRUCTURE OF UZBEKISTAN'S IMPORTS (2017-2022) %**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Imports, total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1. China, People's Republic of	22.6	20.6	23.4	22.4	20.6	22.6
2. Russian Federation	21.3	19.5	18.2	20.4	22.5	21.4
3. Kazakhstan	8.1	8.9	8.7	10.5	11.4	11.4
4. Korea, Republic of	9.6	11.2	11.5	9.7	7.3	7.7
5. Turkiye	4.9	6.3	5.9	5.4	7.0	5.9
6. Germany	4.8	4.0	4.0	3.5	2.7	3.6
7. Turkmenistan	0.9	1.4	1.8	2.0	3.0	2.6
8. India	2.3	1.5	1.5	2.1	1.9	2.3

*Source:* calculations based on the data from National Summary Data Page (NSDP)-Uzbekistan.  
<https://nsdp.stat.uz/>

Thus, Uzbekistan is becoming increasingly dependent on the export markets of the CIS countries, i.e., Uzbekistan is increasingly expanding trade relations with the CIS countries. Due to the decrease in trade turnover with other foreign countries, share of the CIS countries increased to 40% 37%. Dependence on export markets in the CIS increased from 31.5% to about 41%, mainly due to Russia. At the same time, the share of imports from the CIS countries, compared to the same period in 2021, decreased by 4.2%. The covid-19 pandemic also affected the geography of foreign trade of Uzbekistan, but this did not affect large trading partners (Russia and China), which retained their status as major partners.

### EFFECTS OF THE CURRENCY MARKET LIBERALIZATION ON NET EXPORTS

A moderate devaluation of the national currency led to an increase in the cost of servicing foreign loans, a deterioration in the financial position of commercial banks and an aggravation of the budget deficit. The latter led to an increase in the issue of credit and money, further increase in prices and non-payments. In turn, the rise in prices caused by these and other

reasons (for example, a centralized increase in prices for the most important types of resources, raw materials, transport tariffs, housing and communal services) accelerated the devaluation of the Sum in the parallel market, and as a result, the Central Bank was forced to further devalue the national currency. Thus, prices for imported consumer products slowly rose which led to moderate economic growth (4-6%) in the country.

### EFFECT OF PRICES ON MAJOR EXPORT COMMODITIES AND BUDGET DEFICIT ON EXPORT VOLUMES

An increase in the average price of polyethylene products by 24%, apparently, led to an increase of the volume of exports of this type of goods by 22%. Another factor affecting exports is a budget deficit. If there was no deficit in the public budget, there would be no attraction of international loans and portfolio investments. Hence, increase in the deficit of the trade balance is linked with the deficit of the public budget, and for 2021 its contribution to the deficit of the trade balance amounted, according to our estimations, to \$2.37 billion. Reduction of the external trade deficit at an unchanged level of savings and investment in the private sector requires a significant reduction in the public budget deficit.

### INCREASE IN OFFICIAL RESERVES AS A SOURCE OF FINANCING EXTERNAL BALANCE DEFICIT (REDUCING NET EXPORTS)

The analysis of data for recent years shows that the operations of the Central Bank in the foreign exchange market as a whole are not neutral, but, on the contrary, stimulate exports. The official gold and foreign exchange reserves of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021 increased by \$8 billion (from 27.1 to \$35.1 billion). Through interventions in the foreign exchange market, the Central Bank bought more foreign currency than it sold, thereby increasing the official gold and foreign exchange reserves. This means that without the intervention of the Central Bank, the exchange rate of the Uzbek Sum would be higher, and, consequently, the volume of

exports would be less, and imports and the trade deficit would be even greater. Therefore, Uzbekistan's trade deficit may also be partly explained by changes in official reserves.

### LIBERALIZATION OF IMPORTS: REDUCTION OF CUSTOMS TARIFFS

Over the past five years (2017-2021), customs tariffs have halved. If the average customs rate was 15.8%, today it is slightly less than 8%. A study of 14 countries found that growth in a liberalized emerging economy is associated with a larger trade deficit than in an unliberalized economy<sup>11</sup>. This suggests that liberalization tends to boost imports and is indeed consistent with the rise in the share of imports in the GDP of developing countries as a whole, from 21.5 % in 1990 to over 27 % in 1996. The growth of imports in the case of Uzbekistan is associated primarily with the purchase of technological equipment to increase the competitiveness of domestic industries for the subsequent increase in the export of their products.

### OBTAINING PREFERENTIAL GSP+ TRADE REGIME WITH EU

On April 10, 2021, Uzbekistan became a member of the European Union's special system of preferences for sustainable development and good governance (GSP+), where Uzbekistan was accepted as a beneficiary country under the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP). By joining the EU GSP+ scheme, low- and low-middle income countries commit to effectively implement the 27 core international conventions on human and labor rights, environmental and climate protection and good governance.

The provision of GSP+ preferences by the European Commission to Uzbekistan created additional opportunities to increase trade between the European Union and Uzbekistan, as the number of commodity items that domestic producers can export duty-free to the EU countries has

grown to 6,200, which is two times more than was earlier. In 2020 the textile enterprises of Uzbekistan exported products worth \$74 million to the countries of the European Union, then in 2022, with the application of the GSP + system of general benefits, this figure exceeded \$240 million.

## REGIONAL TRADE INTEGRATION

Uzbekistan has signed many bilateral free trade agreements. But agreements with countries that are geographically far apart can hardly be called factors contributing to regional trade integration. Perhaps the most important treaty that was an important factor in trade integration within the CIS was the CIS Free Trade Agreement, which entered into force on September 20, 2012 between Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, the first three countries to ratify it. On May 31, 2013, a protocol was signed on the application of an agreement on a free trade zone between its parties and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Tajikistan also joined this Treaty.

Hornock and Koren evaluate the econometric equation of gravity and show that administrative costs can be expressed as bilateral ad valorem trade costs: the gravity model showed that a 50% reduction in export administrative costs is equivalent to a 9% reduction in tariffs. Their model and estimates help explain why there is more trade within customs unions than trade in free trade zones.

The seven landlocked countries of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have not yet been given a broad opportunity to attract foreign investment and technology by pooling their resources, efforts and markets. Three main characteristics are fundamental to trade in the countries of Central Asia: lack of access to waterways and necessity of intercontinental transport corridors<sup>12</sup>; unequal distribution of natural resources and labor force; border regions with different economic and trade dynamics. These characteristics can become a relative advantage if countries cooperate, build regional trade integration and use their potential as countries in

transition. Breakthroughs in bilateral relations of Uzbekistan with Central Asian States initiated by President Shavkat Mirziyoev and supported by neighboring leaders is a base for better regional Cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

Regulatory barriers deter trade. Wilson, Mann, and Otsuki suggest that improvements in customs and greater electronic business use significantly expand trade<sup>14</sup>.

Bilateral free trade agreements are not harmonized in accordance with WTO rules, which is contrary to the logic of global trade. Free trade agreements in Central Asia should focus on the elimination of non-tariff barriers. Customs duties are not so high in comparison with other countries. To date, non-tariff barriers remain a serious problem. Licensing, differing technical standards and regulations, lack of mutual recognition of standards and laboratory tests, as well as illegal taxes, all mean that low tariffs and free trade agreements have no economic effect.

## GLOBAL TRADE INTEGRATION WITHIN THE WTO

Uzbekistan received observer status in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in June 1994, in 1998 a working negotiating group was established on the country's accession to the WTO. However, as Uzbekistan pursued a policy of import substitution and did not strive for trade openness, the negotiations stopped. In 2017, economic reforms began in Uzbekistan, and the country began to strive for an open economy. At the end of November 2017, Uzbekistan resumed work on joining the WTO. In July 2019, the Uzbek side submitted an updated memorandum on the foreign trade regime to the Organization for consideration of the application for the country's membership in the organization. In July 2020, the representative office of the republic, the WTO and representatives of a number of other countries held fourth meeting of this group online after an almost 15-year break. However, the fifth meeting in 2022 did not take place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Currently, experts are studying the impact of WTO membership on the domestic auto industry, food, textile industry and metallurgy. Uzbekistan also intends to develop a system of

protection by non-tariff measures of the domestic market, support and subsidies for exports, in accordance with WTO rules. Uzbekistan, by joining the WTO, intends to receive the privileges of a country with a developing economy. The impact on exports from Uzbekistan's accession to the WTO will generally be positive<sup>15</sup>, since the WTO member countries will apply import duty rates to Uzbekistan agreed within the framework of the WTO and these rates may be lower than those currently applied to Uzbekistan.

### TRADE BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND INDIA

In recent years, there has been an intensification of trade and economic relations between Uzbekistan and India. In January-December 2021, trade increased by 10.3%, amounting to almost \$490 million. Uzbek exports increased by 36.8%, while Indian imports increased by 9.0%.

Currently, Uzbekistan exports to India such goods as beans, balsams, raw silk, earth metals, fertilizers, etc. The goods imported from India are mainly pharmaceutical and medical products, ferrous metals, various technological equipment, spare parts for cars.

Uzbekistan and India have all the necessary prerequisites for further expansion of ties in the economic sphere. Telecommunications, agriculture, automotive industry are rapidly developing in Uzbekistan. India has advanced a lot in pharmaceuticals, automotive components and other high-tech products.

Representatives of the governments of Uzbekistan and India held talks on July 28, 2022, in New Delhi on developing cooperation in the agricultural sector. Uzbekistan provided phytosanitary permits for the import of 6 types of goods from India, including bananas, mangoes, soybeans and rice, while the Indian side granted permission for the supply of Uzbek grapes, plums and cherries. In order to bring bilateral trade to \$ 1 billion, an agreement was reached to accelerate the harmonization of the draft Preferential Trade Agreement between Uzbekistan and India.

## CONCLUSION

The main factors that influenced the foreign trade of Uzbekistan for the period 2017-2022, were a gradual increase in economic activity in domestic and foreign markets, an increase in the volume of remittances, as well as the recovery of global business activity and other factors. Russia displaced China from the first place in the list of the main foreign trade partners of Uzbekistan in 2021<sup>16</sup>. Uzbekistan is experiencing a significant trade deficit with both the Russian Federation and China. Also, Kazakhstan, Turkey and South Korea take the leading positions in the total volume of trade.

The negative balance of the trade balance (goods and services) is partially offset by the positive balance of primary and secondary income.

Such determinants as the liberalization of national currency market, effect of prices for major export commodities on export volumes, increase in budget deficit causing a fall in net exports, increase in official reserves as a source of financing the deficit of external balance (reducing net exports), liberalization of imports, obtaining preferential GSP+ trade regime with EU, simplification of customs procedures and border control seem to play a significant role in the development of net Uzbekistan's exports.

Currently, there are a number of systemic problems faced by domestic enterprises in the process of exporting commodities. The problems are mainly related to difficulties in obtaining credit resources by exporters, lack of an appropriate transport and logistics infrastructure locally, obtaining the necessary export permits, resolving tax issues, returning previously paid value added tax amounts, searching for foreign customers and other aspects.

In addition, the risks of reducing the remittances of labor migrants are increasing. One of the main partners - Russia - is expected to have a decrease in economic indicators, which may adversely affect Uzbek exports to this country. This threat requires the government to accelerate the increase in exports, mainly of finished products (clothing and knitwear, footwear, agricultural products, cars) and tourism services.

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16. COVID-19 pandemic may have played a decisive role in reducing trade volumes with China. Supply chains in trade with China have become more complex, resulting in increased transport costs.

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## NEW REGULATION OF EXTERNAL LABOR MIGRATION PROCESSES IN UZBEKISTAN

*BAKHTIYOR ISLAMOV, ZULAYKHO KADIROVA and  
SULKHIYA GAZIEVA*

### ABSTRACT

*In order to increase the efficiency of providing employment, special attention is being paid to the creation of new jobs along with the regulation of processes related to labor migration. The position of Uzbekistan towards the international labor markets has tangibly changed in recent 6.5 years under President Shavkat Mirziyoev. Active participation of the country in the international labor market is now considered to be a comparative advantage of Uzbekistan as well as one of the important components of its foreign economic activity. However, during the participation in these processes, along with positive results, there are also some negative situations and problems. Regulation of labor migration processes is of urgent importance in preventing such undesirable problems and situations. Digital tools and platforms are being used in all sectors, including labor migration and service management. Although some of these technologies raise privacy and security concerns for migrant workers, they offer migrants easy access to information, fast and secure services. In new circumstances, the Republic of Uzbekistan has favorable conditions for using digitization opportunities to support labor migrants. Lessons from Indian experience are of great significance for Uzbekistan.*

**Keywords:** Uzbekistan, India, external labor migration, regulation, labor market, digitization, electronic platforms.

### INTRODUCTION

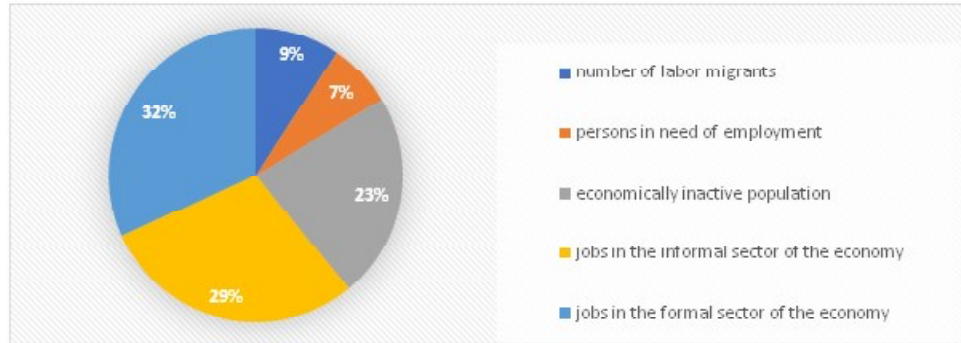
Today, most countries of the world actively participate in international labor migration, which is a component of the world labor market.

According to the International Organization for Migration, the number of international labor migrants would reach 281 million people in 2022, of which 169 million are labor migrants, and 67.9% of them are concentrated in high-income countries and 18.6% in middle-income countries. As of 2021, 1.6 million citizens of Uzbekistan worked abroad<sup>1</sup>.

The theoretical issues of labor migration processes are reflected in the scientific works of foreign scholars, such as E.Ravenstein<sup>2</sup>, J.Hicks<sup>3</sup>, A.Sovy<sup>4</sup>, G.Borjas<sup>5</sup>, and processes of virtual labor migration, such as A.Aneesh<sup>6</sup>, B.Xiang<sup>7</sup>. The researches of Uzbek scientists have studied the development trends of international labor migration and specific features of labor migration processes in the country. The evolution of scientific concepts of labor migration, its importance in the development of labor market and economy were studied by K. Abdurakhmanov, N. Zokirova, B. Islamov<sup>8</sup>, migration processes in Uzbekistan by L. Maksakova<sup>9</sup>, in particular, its regulatory and legal foundations and related problems, and issues such as pension provision of labor migrants by B. Umurzakov<sup>10</sup>, integration of Uzbekistan into international labor market were researched in the works of Z. Kadirova<sup>11</sup>.

The Republic of Uzbekistan is one of the active donor countries in the international labor market. This was influenced by a number of economic, social and demographic factors that occurred in the country after the 1990s. Every year in Uzbekistan, 700-750,000 young people graduate from secondary educational institutions, and 150,000 of them continue their studies in higher education, and the same number in secondary special education. According to the representative of the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 300-350,000 new jobs are created in the labor market of Uzbekistan every year. This situation creates about 100-150,000 unemployed youth<sup>12</sup>. These conditions encouraged citizens to participate in external labor migration processes in order to ensure their employment.

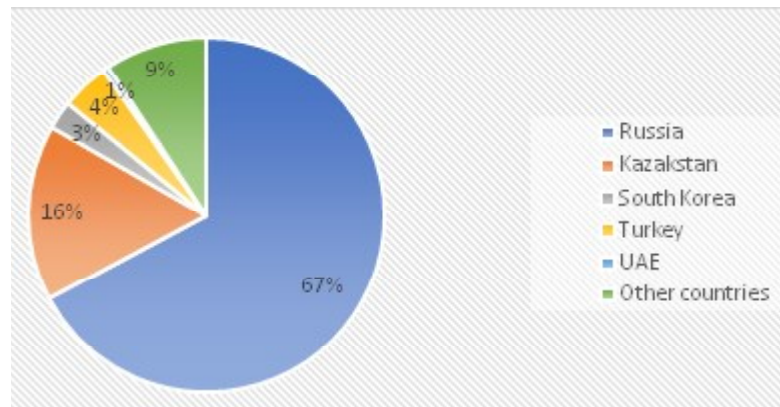
**FIGURE 1. LABOR MARKET STATISTICS OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN (JANUARY-MARCH 2022)**



According to statistics, in 2021, the total number of labor resources in Uzbekistan was 19.3 million people, and 1.67 million of them were labor migrants, and in 2022, the total labor resources were 19.4 million people, despite the pandemic conditions.<sup>13</sup>

The main part of labor migrants who left Uzbekistan, 67% work in Russia, 16% in Kazakhstan, 3% in South Korea and 4% in Turkey<sup>14</sup>.

**FIGURE 2. UZBEK LABOR EMIGRANTS WORKING ABROAD (2021)<sup>15</sup>**



Since the second half of the 1990s, the processes of external labor migration have been actively developing in Uzbekistan, but until 2017, there were intergovernmental agreements in the field of labor migration only with the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea. It was observed that citizens went to work abroad without special professional training.<sup>16</sup> In the last 5 years, the introduction of the practice of sending labor migrants to work abroad on the basis of special training by the

government has led to an increase in the volume of export of labor force not only individually, but also in an organized manner<sup>17</sup>. In 2017, 3,595 labor migrants were sent abroad in an organized manner, and despite the pandemic conditions, in 2021, this figure increased 4.5 times to 16,278 people.

Therefore, in a country with such a large phenomenon in the field of labor migration, the need for a law on external labor migration and the improvement of mechanisms for the protection of the rights and freedoms of labor migrants at the level of demand created the need to regulate this field at the state level and to develop its regulatory and legal framework in the time required<sup>18</sup>. Under new circumstances, the Republic of Uzbekistan has favorable conditions for using digitization opportunities to support labor migrants. Lessons from Indian experience is of great significance for Uzbekistan and is important to be introduced in the country.

### PROGRESS IN LABOR MIGRATION REGULATION IN UZBEKISTAN

Over the last 5 years, the Republic of Uzbekistan has made great progress in regulating labor migration. During 1991-2022, there have been significant changes in the process of regulation of international labor migration in Uzbekistan, mainly after 2018. It includes the regulation of labor migration by the state, the powers of higher state bodies in the field of external labor migration, sending citizens to work abroad in an organized manner, creating a database of potential migrants, working with foreign employers, as well as organizing the activities of foreign citizens in Uzbekistan and electronic service for labor migrants. important issues related to the organization of the “labor-migration” information system were included<sup>19</sup>.

Until 2018, the authority to export the labor force abroad in Uzbekistan was given only to the Foreign Labor Migration Agency (FMMA) under the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of

Uzbekistan, which was established in 2003. Since 2018, this authority has also been granted to private employment agencies operating on the basis of a license.

A private employment agency (PEA) is a commercial organization that provides job selection and placement services to job seekers, and personnel selection for employers. As of March 25, 2022, there are 114 PEAs registered in the register throughout the Republic<sup>20</sup>. However, there are many cases of fraud observed among private employment agencies when sending citizens to work abroad. These include the operation of unlicensed private employment agencies, the conclusion of contracts that do not correspond to the promised service, and the charging of excessive service fees. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the most common type of fraud in 2020 is 13.9% related to promises of sending people to work abroad<sup>21</sup>. In 2021, the license of 71 out of 114 private employment agencies was revoked<sup>22</sup>.

Today's modern foreign labor migration policy in Uzbekistan is implemented in the following directions, which is reflected in 13 regulatory and legal documents in the field of labor migration adopted in 2018-2022:

1. Development of international cooperation;
2. Strengthening relations with fellow countrymen and Uzbek diasporas abroad;
3. Vocational training and teaching of foreign languages;
4. Financial and social support;
5. Integration of persons returning from labor migration;
6. Promotion of entrepreneurial initiatives.

## DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

According to the Presidential Decree No. 4829 of September 15, 2020 "On measures to introduce a system of safe, orderly and legal labor migration", in the presence of diplomatic missions, consular institutions, and representative offices of the Foreign Labor Migration Agency, compatriots abroad, employers and citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan are regularly

informed. According to Presidential Decree No. 3743, representative offices of the agency were opened in Kwangju (Korea) and Moscow (Russia), as well as in Russian cities such as St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg, Samara, and Ufa.

As of 2021, the Foreign Labor Migration Agency has signed 382 cooperation agreements with employers from 25 countries, such as Germany, Japan, Slovakia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Latvia, and Lithuania, in order to expand the geography of foreign labor migration. More than 3,000 citizens of Uzbekistan have been sent to 5 districts and provinces of Korea for seasonal work.

According to the Presidential Decision No. 4829, the practice of holding international labor fairs, conferences and seminars with the participation of invited employers, qualified specialists and experts from developed countries was established. The Foreign Labor Migration Agency conducted negotiations with 427 recruiting agencies and employers in the international labor market to find more than 71,000 available vacancies, mainly for masters in the field of general construction, production, technical professions, agriculture, and services. It was found that there is a high demand for small specialists from Uzbekistan in these fields<sup>23</sup>.

It is important to enter into active relations with international organizations in the development of international cooperation. In accordance with the "Measure Plan for 2021-2023 on Expanding Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)", creating a pilot center for professional training of potential labor migrants in Uzbekistan, "Migration Governance Indicators" (MGI) is being implemented in Uzbekistan, training migrant workers before going abroad, providing them with financial support. In the future, it is planned to establish visa centers in the country to diversify the field of labor migration in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to assist in the process of issuing visas for our citizens who wish to work in foreign countries<sup>24</sup>.

## STRENGTHENING RELATIONS WITH COMPATRIOTS AND UZBEK DIASPORA ABROAD

According to Presidential Decree No. 5220 of August 11, 2021 on the establishment of the “Vatandoshlar” public fund, actively involving compatriots living abroad in entrepreneurial, investment, scientific, educational and cultural activities in the territory of Uzbekistan, expanding contractual and legal cooperation in the fields of migration and education. In order to develop proposals, the public fund “Vatandoshlar” was established and 5 billion soums were allocated to it<sup>25</sup>. To date, a list of more than 480 Uzbek potential investors, qualified specialists, representatives of international organizations, scientists and talented students living in more than 30 foreign countries, has been formed<sup>26</sup>. In order to contribute to the development of the economy of Uzbekistan, they are engaged in tourism, programming and information technologies, science, education, medicine, household services, agriculture, farming, livestock, food products, construction goods production, export, import, banking and finance, plans to implement projects in such fields as transport-logistics, energy.

Cooperation agreements were also signed with 40 Uzbek diaspora and 2 compatriot teams. Of these, 31 agreements were signed with the Russian Federation, 6 with Kazakhstan, and the rest with the diasporas of Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Japan, Thailand, and Portugal<sup>27</sup>.

### **Vocational training and teaching foreign languages**

Presidential Decree No. 4829 of September 15, 2020 “On measures to introduce a system of safe, orderly and legal labor migration” serves as an important program for creating decent working conditions, professional training and teaching foreign languages to citizens working abroad. In this regard, in the period of 2017-2021, 207 vocational and foreign language training centers, i.e. 17 Ishga Merhamat monocenters, 67 vocational training centers, a new system consisting of a vocational training institution was created. At the same time, more than 51,000 citizens were involved in 25 types of professions and 2,200 citizens were involved in



learning foreign languages (Russian, English, Korean, Japanese, etc.) in vocational centers in Uzbekistan. 12,243 citizens were trained in about 30 professions in a short period of time in the 17 “Ishga Marhamat” monocenters that exist now, and 7,530 of them were prepared for work abroad.

Based on the geography of foreign labor markets, short training courses for more than 20 professions, Russian, English, Korean and Japanese languages have been launched. In accordance with the cooperation agreement concluded with the People’s Friendship University of Russia (PFUR), Russian language training courses were launched in 25 vocational training centers of the ministry system and in single centers in Tashkent and Fergana. In the monocenter “Ishga Merhamat” in the city of Tashkent, the representative office of the PFUR in Uzbekistan and the branch of the Multidisciplinary Migration Center in Moscow were opened. Based on the memorandum of cooperation signed between PFUR and the “WorldSkills Russia” union, training courses were organized in 14 educational institutions in 7 regions of Russia and 723 citizens were trained in order to train Uzbek citizens living in Russia in the Russian language.

In sending labor migrants to work abroad based on professional and language training, the form of sending in the order organized by the Foreign Labor Migration Agency has been expanding in recent years. Organized labor migration, which initially comprised 5,532 people, attracted 16,200 people in 2021, and 18,000 citizens to work abroad in the first half of 2022. At the same time, more than 28,000 citizens are being trained in vocational centers in Uzbekistan to send them to work abroad in an organized manner<sup>28</sup>.

**FIGURE 3. LABOR MIGRANTS SENT TO WORK ABROAD IN AN ORGANIZED MANNER(2010-2022)**



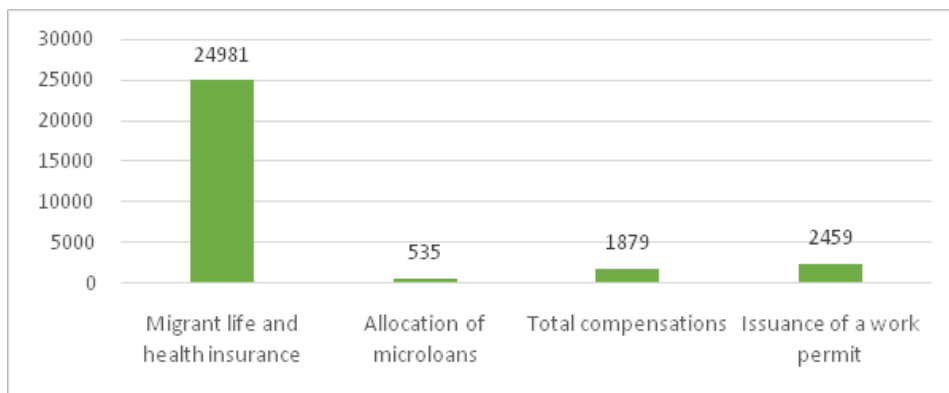
As of July 1, 2022, 54% of them were sent to Russia, 37% to Korea, 6% to Serbia, as well as Kazakhstan, Germany, Latvia, Japan, UAE, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Israel<sup>29</sup>.

*Financial and social support*

At this point, legal, social, and material support of their family members is of great importance in the regulation of foreign labor migration processes at the international level. The Presidential Decree No. 1149 “On additional measures to support citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan who are temporarily working abroad and their family members” adopted on March 1, 2022 in Uzbekistan places special emphasis on the issue of protection of migrant workers’ family members. It is planned to provide a one-time free pass to sanatorium and preventive treatment facilities in the trade union system to family members of citizens who have gone on labor migration who have reached retirement age or have group I and II disabilities living with them in Uzbekistan<sup>30</sup>.

The Foreign Labor Migration Agency provided legal assistance to 2,167 labor migrants, counseling services to 51,498 labor migrants, social assistance to 2,930 labor migrants, and material support to 976 labor migrants.

**FIGURE 4. NUMBER OF SERVICES PROVIDED TO LABOR MIGRANTS GOING ABROAD, AS OF JULY 1, 2022<sup>31</sup>**



According to the information of the Foreign Labor Migration Agency, in 2022, a total of 29,854 citizens who applied to work abroad for

temporary work were provided with services, and the main part of them was health insurance for labor migrants at the expense of subsidies.

In order to improve the regulatory and legal basis for regulating international labor migration, concluding international agreements for the implementation of labor activities abroad, and creating favorable conditions for ensuring that migrants can safely reach their workplaces outside the republic, the July 5, 2018 “External labor migration system is further improved” Presidential Decree No. 3839 “On additional measures for improvement” was adopted and the Fund for supporting persons working abroad and protecting their rights and interests was established<sup>32</sup>. Up to 3,000 US dollars for the services of organizations providing legal services to labor migrants whose labor rights have been violated at the expense of the fund, and up to 333 US dollars for the services provided by hostels for up to 3 days for citizens without funds, air and railway tickets for the return to the Republic of Uzbekistan, specified in the country one-time financial assistance to the amount of one time the minimum monthly salary and up to 1,500 US dollars for emergency medical care and up to 1,000 US dollars for the removal of the body of a deceased person and other related services are provided<sup>33</sup>.

In 2022, there were 1393 cases of wages collected from the employer, 115 cases of compensation, and the amount of collected funds amounted to 523,000 US dollars.

**FIGURE 5. THE NUMBER OF CASES IN SUPPORT OF LABOR MIGRANTS (JULY 1, 2022)**



The total number of legal, material and social assistance provided this year was 99,347. In turn, in 2022, 82,826 information and consultation

services were provided to labor migrants by the offices of the Foreign Labor Migration Agency abroad<sup>34</sup>.

## INTEGRATION OF PERSONS RETURNING FROM LABOR MIGRATION

Presidential Decree No. 4829 of September 15, 2020 “On measures to introduce a system of safe, orderly and legal labor migration” places special emphasis on the integration of persons who have returned from labor migration. providing them with loans and subsidies, training them in professions, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy, registering migrant workers as self-employed, providing them with legal and psychological assistance, providing mortgage loans for housing, and their children’s education, and the support of returning labor migrants was defined as one of the main tasks.

Ensuring the employment of people returning from labor migration is one of the problems that directly affect the domestic labor market. According to the survey results, 46.1% of labor migrants said they would continue their work abroad, and 33.6% of respondents said they would return to Uzbekistan<sup>35</sup>.

According to the results of the survey conducted by the Foreign Labor Migration Agency in 2022, more than 60% of those who want to return to Uzbekistan from Russia made the decision to return due to the “push” factor in Russia, that is, the loss of jobs abroad and the decrease in the value of the ruble. 40% of the respondents expressed their desire to continue their activities in Russia. As the “attractive” factors in Uzbekistan are not attractive for those who want to return, it is of urgent importance to improve the processes of reintegration of labor migrants returning from abroad by the state.

In January-December 2021, 502,400 citizens returned from foreign labor migration processes, of which 400,500 (79.7%) were men, 101,900 (20.3%) were women, and 164 4,000 people (32.7%) were young people. Including, in 2021, 68,200 (67%) of the 101,900 women who returned

from labor migration, and 111,600 (68%) of the 164,400 young people were provided with employment.

During 2021, 169,500 citizens who returned from abroad and could not go to work abroad were provided with employment. 135,300 of them were employed in vacant jobs in the “Uniform National Labor System”, 23,900 were retrained in the professions of their choice and improved their skills, 4,500 received subsidies and were involved in entrepreneurship, 5,800 preferential microloans were allocated for entrepreneurship and self-employment activities<sup>36</sup>.

**FIGURE 6. ENSURING EMPLOYMENT OF CITIZENS RETURNING FROM LABOR MIGRATION(JULY 1, 2022)<sup>37</sup>**



As shown in the figure, in 2022, 49% of returning labor migrants were assisted in self-employment, 16% received vocational training and retraining, and 20% were placed in vacant and newly created jobs.

### *Encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives*

Presidential Decree No. 4829 is important in encouraging business initiatives, and within its framework, 22,300 labor migrants who returned from abroad were trained in professions and entrepreneurship. 2,900 of them were trained in entrepreneurship in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, of which 247 labor migrants started their own business<sup>38</sup>. 955 citizens who returned from abroad were trained in the basics of entrepreneurship in short-term training courses under the “Entrepreneurial Migrant” project and were given a certificate<sup>39</sup>.

In order to encourage the entrepreneurial activity of persons who have returned from working abroad, a subsidy of up to 10 times the amount

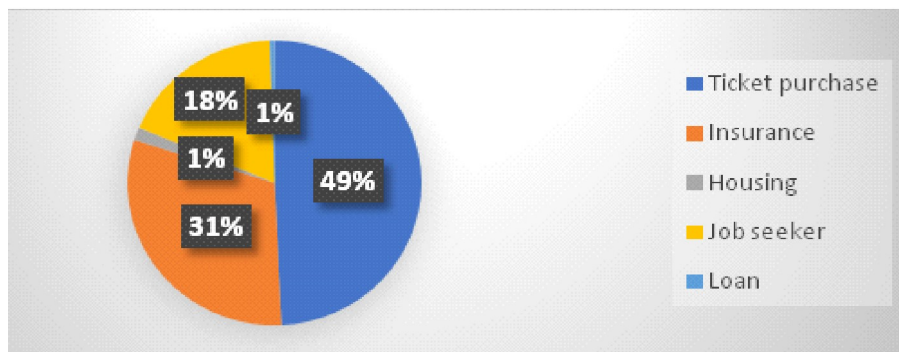
of the basic calculation has been allocated. From 2019, the practice of providing housing to labor migrants, providing microloans up to 2 million soums to partially cover the costs of departure, and providing subsidies for their life and health insurance, was initiated<sup>40</sup>. Within the framework of the project, 4,900 returned migrants received subsidies for entrepreneurship, and 1,400 people received preferential microloans. During the past period, about 751,000 of more than 1.3 million citizens who returned to Uzbekistan after working abroad were provided with employment.

As the issue of digitization processes of economic sectors is one of the most important tasks, the regulation of foreign labor migration processes has become one of the urgent directions in this regard. On August 20, 2019, the “labor-migration” software was created in accordance with paragraph 10 of the Presidential Decree “On measures to further strengthen guarantees for the protection of citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan and their family members engaged in temporary work abroad”<sup>41</sup>. This software provides online submission of the rules of stay in the receiving country for citizens who want to work temporarily abroad, activities of the Foreign Labor Migration Agency and Private Employment Agencies, job vacancies offered by foreign employers, vocational training and retraining monitoring and support, includes the remote submission of applications by migrant workers and the formation of a database on migrant workers and their employment geography and areas of activity.

The software is necessary for applications, resumes of potential labor migrants from Uzbekistan, information on labor issues on the official websites of the recipient countries and information on the rights and freedoms of migrants there, media files on organized labor migration, services with various privileges, lists of vacancies abroad filled with elements. As of 2022, a total of 1,624,213 citizens have been registered under the “labor-migration” program, as part of which contracts were concluded with 426 employers, 10,658 job vacancies were filled, and a total of 2,186,488 services were provided<sup>42</sup>.

Currently, through the “labor-migration” software, services such as

**FIGURE 7. TOTAL SERVICES PROVIDED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE “LABOR-MIGRATION” PROGRAM<sup>43</sup>**



providing preferential tickets and insurance policies, obtaining preferential loans and housing, vocational training and foreign language training, “Unified database of workers’ information”, assistance to citizens abroad, “Unified migration center” are provided.

Within the framework of the labor-migration program by regions, the largest share of total services, that is, about 20%, belongs to the Fergana region, and the least amount of services corresponds to the city of Tashkent. In terms of direct services, Khorezm (21.4%), Fergana (24.7%), insurance (24.7%), and Andijan (31%) have a high share in buying tickets.

The application provides ample opportunities to receive information on job vacancies and foreign employers identified by the Agency for Foreign Labor Migration, where the situation in the labor markets of Russia, the largest recipient of Uzbek migrants, is systematically analyzed by region and sector, which helps to make decisions for potential migrants. makes it easier to do.

## CONCLUSIONS

Currently, there are several problems that need to be solved in Uzbekistan:

- the number of young people entering the labor market every year is 100,000 more than last year. The problem of providing them with work;
- consequences of smart young people going abroad and not coming

back - brain drain problem;

- the problem of reintegration of returning labor migrants;
- violation of the rights of female labor migrants abroad;
- departure and non-return of male labor migrants who went to work abroad. As a result, a family loses its breadwinner;
- parents go abroad together and their children are left unattended.

The following suggestions are made for improving foreign labor migration in the country.

- In order to provide employment to young people and reduce the negative consequences of external labor migration, which is one of the biggest problems for Uzbekistan, it is appropriate to expand their opportunities to work in the virtual space without leaving the country and bring significant income to the state economy. As Uzbekistan has a favorable time range for global outsourcing, English-speaking programmers, wide opportunities for receiving orders from abroad, diverse services and wage dumping can motivate it to become an IT center like India and reduce the pressure on the labor market. For example, “Digital Uzbekistan 2030”, “1 million programmers” records as a priority of the country serve as a basis for ensuring the above tasks.
- to establish a special structure using the experience of India’s “Overseas India Facilitation Center” (OIFC) in order to establish cooperation between foreign compatriots and Uzbekistan: encourage Uzbek investments abroad and facilitate business partnerships, create and support a knowledge network of the diaspora, with investments acting as a clearinghouse for all related information, assisting in the organization of investment projects, providing real-time world-class services that reduce transaction costs for doing business.
- Building smart cities based on a project similar to the “Make in India” project, developing internal labor migration due to the creation of jobs there in information technology and other fields.
- Establishment of inter-provincial collection and logistics centers



serving abroad in Uzbekistan.

- Activation of the participation of intermediary firms in ICT support.
- development of a unified and effective system of job vacancies in partner foreign countries, as well as strict control by the state of the activities of private employment agencies offering vacancies, especially for female migrants.

In conclusion, it should be noted that digital tools help in solving a number of important tasks, including the wide use of information technologies, simplification and unification of migration rules, increasing the effectiveness of state management of migration and the practical effectiveness of state control in the field, at the edge can play an important role in covering the large number of migrants from the regions.

The above-mentioned measures and legal basis serve as an important factor in protecting the rights and interests of labor migrants and organizing labor migration in a legal, safe and orderly manner.

In its experience, India has demonstrated the effective operation of outsourcing and regulation of labor migration through it, i.e., virtual labor migration, a new form of external labor migration with the help of information media in the context of digitization. One of the biggest challenges for India is to provide employment to the youth and at the same time prevent them from leaving the country and working in the virtual space without leaving the country has proven that it can bring significant income to the national economy. It is important that a single call center provides employment to more than a thousand workers and at the same time helps them to become qualified specialists.

Currently, 700-750,000 labor force enters the labor market of Uzbekistan per year, and as the majority of the labor force is young, in the conditions of digitalization, Uzbekistan needs implement the programmes such as “Digital Uzbekistan 2030”, “1 million programmers”.

It is important to apply India’s experience in virtual labor migration. Taking into account the problems faced by labor migrants, they can export their labor to foreign corporations and companies online, i.e. virtually,

without leaving the country, having acquired other professional skills.

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## UZBEKISTAN IN THE FRAMEWORK OF CIS AND SCO

*MIRZOKHID RAKHIMOV and SADRIDDIN RAKHIMOV*

### ABSTRACT

*This article analyzes the key areas of multilateral cooperation within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as well as Uzbekistan's participation in the institutional development of these organizations. In the course of the study, empirical (observation, study of documents, comparison) and theoretical (analysis and generalization) methods based on an interdisciplinary approach were used.*

*The authors highlight the history of the creation and formation of organizational and legal activities of the CIS and the SCO, the dynamics of the development of cooperation of Uzbekistan with the participating countries in the formation of the free trade zone in the Commonwealth space, the activities of the Republic during the chairmanship of the CIS and the SCO, role of multilateral cooperation on contesting modern threats of security in the framework of the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) in Tashkent. Based on the results of the study, conclusions are drawn that the participation of Uzbekistan in the activities of the CIS and the SCO is fully consistent with the foreign policy of the republic, since in the conditions of the modern world, ensuring peace, stability and sustainable development in the region requires the development of effective multidisciplinary cooperation. The republic attaches priority to strengthen the constructive interaction between the countries participating in these organizations in matters of ensuring international and regional security, expanding economic ties and industrial cooperation, developing transit and transport potential and other spheres. At the same time, the principles of compliance with the rational balance of national and regional interests, as well as the steady execution by all member countries made within the CIS and SCOs based on trust and mutual benefit, should be an indispensable condition for the further effective activity of these associations.*

**Key words:** CIS, SCO, Foreign Policy, International Organization, Regional Security, Stability, Globalization, Cooperation, Uzbekistan.

## INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan in the conditions of complex global geopolitical processes, implementing a balanced foreign policy based on national interests, attaches importance to the preservation and strengthening of peace and stability in Central Asia. To effectively solve problems on a regional and global scale, the republic is actively developing interaction with all interested countries and international organizations based on a multi-vector approach, and in the processes of regional cooperation, it has the highest level of interaction within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in which are practically all countries of Central Asia participate.

## HISTORICAL CONDITIONS FOR THE FORMATION OF THE CIS

The termination of the existence of the USSR caused the need to make significant adjustments to the system of international relations, as a result of which Uzbekistan, taking into account geopolitical and economic interests, as well as the presence of problems and challenges to regional stability in the context of progressive globalization, in its foreign policy had to choose new vectors for the development of interstate cooperation, including through participation in the creation of integration associations.

One of the priority areas of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation within the framework of the CIS, which, along with other states formed after the collapse of the USSR, was co-founded by Uzbekistan. The beginning of a new association - the CIS was laid by two documents - the Agreement on the Creation of the CIS and the Statement of the Heads of State of the Republic of Belarus, the RSFSR, and Ukraine, signed on December 8, 1991 by Chairman of the Supreme Council of Belarus S. Shushkevich, President of Russia B. Yeltsin, and President of Ukraine L. Kravchuk.

On December 13, 1991, a meeting of the presidents of five Central Asian countries took place in Ashgabat: Uzbekistan - Islam Karimov,

Kazakhstan - Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kyrgyzstan - Askar Akaev, Tajikistan - Rahmon Nabiev and Turkmenistan - Saparmurat Niyazov, following which the heads of all Central Asian states expressed their readiness to enter into the CIS, as founders, and not as joiners<sup>1</sup>.

On December 21, 1991, a meeting of the leaders of the former Soviet republics was specially organized in Alma-Ata to jointly resolve all issues related to the creation of the CIS. During the meeting, the participants of the meeting signed the Protocol to the Agreement on the establishment of the CIS on December 8, 1991, which stated that all the republics (the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan and Ukraine) were on an equal footing with the Commonwealth of Independent States.

During this meeting, the Alma-Ata Declaration was also adopted, which had the provision that the interaction of the participating countries will be carried out on the principle of equality through coordinating institutions, which are neither a state nor a supranational entity. To ensure strategic stability, the document also recorded the preservation of the unified command of the military-strategic forces and unified control over nuclear weapons.

The final stage in the formation of the organizational structure of the Commonwealth was the adoption on January 22, 1993, of one of the most important fundamental legal acts regulating the activities of the new association - the Charter of the CIS. Interaction within the CIS is carried out mainly through the statutory bodies: the Council of Heads of State, the Council of Heads of Government, the Councils of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ministers of Defense and Commanders of the Border Troops, the Economic Council, the Economic Court, the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States, etc.

Following Article 34 of the Charter of the Commonwealth and based on agreements between member states on cooperation in the economic, social, humanitarian, and other fields, bodies of sectoral cooperation were

established, which develop agreed principles and rules for such cooperation and contributed to their practical implementation. The sectoral cooperation bodies include the heads of the relevant ministries and departments of the CIS countries, which coordinate the activities of national departments in such areas as agriculture, transport, communications, energy, trade, finance, industry and construction, education, healthcare, tourism, and natural disasters and other. The Coordinating Conference of Heads of Law Enforcement and Special Agencies (Ministers of Internal Affairs and Justice, Prosecutors General, Chairmen of Courts, etc.) and the Anti-Terrorist Center also carry out their activities. In total, as of the end of 2022, 87 bodies were created within the CIS, including 66 bodies of sectoral cooperation<sup>2</sup>, whose activities are regulated by their constituent documents, as well as other legal acts of the association.

According to the Charter, the supreme body of the Commonwealth is the Council of Heads of State (CHS), which discusses and resolves fundamental issues related to the activities of the member states in the sphere of their common interests, and also considers issues within the interest of the member countries without prejudice to the interests of other members of the association. The CIS Executive Committee is the sole permanent executive, administrative, and coordinating body of the Commonwealth with headquarters in Minsk and a branch of the Executive Committee in Moscow<sup>3</sup>.

Decisions in the statutory bodies, as well as in the bodies of sectoral cooperation on the merits of the issues under discussion, are taken by consensus. At the same time, any state can declare its disinterest in a particular issue, which will not be an obstacle to making a decision. After analyzing the statistical indicators on legal acts and other documents adopted within the framework of the CIS in the period from 1991 to 2022, it was found that Uzbekistan, based on its national interests, signed only 24 out of 37 providing for ratification, as well as 230 out of 432 documents requiring implementation of domestic procedures<sup>4</sup> (Table E1).



TABLE 1

DATA ON RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL PROCEDURES BY UZBEKISTAN ACCORDING TO DOCUMENTS ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL OF HEADS OF STATE AND THE COUNCIL OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT OF THE CIS IN THE PERIOD FROM 1991 TO 2022.

	<i>Number of documents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Information about the ratification of documents</i>		
Total documents for ratification	37	
Signed	24	64.9%
Not signed	13	35.1%
<i>Implementation of the Republic of Uzbekistan's domestic procedures</i>		
Total documents providing for the implementation of domestic procedures	432	
Signed	230	53.2%
Not signed	202	46.8%

Thus, it can be noted that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the integration of its former republics (except Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) into the CIS, taking into account the existing developed military-political, socio-economic, cultural, and humanitarian ties, which determine the trend of unification within the Commonwealth, as a whole can be considered as an objective process. And various types of participation and mechanisms for making and implementing decisions that operate within the organization make it possible to selectively participate in its activities, while not contradicting the processes of strengthening the sovereignty of the participating states.

In this situation, the creation of the CIS has become a unifying factor in the development of mutually beneficial cooperation between the participating countries in the political, military, economic, transport and communication, cultural, humanitarian, and other spheres in compliance with the principles of equality and mutual respect. Unlike the USSR, the

Commonwealth is neither a state nor a supranational association, and the interaction of the participants of the new association is carried out based on the sovereign equality of all members of the organization through coordinating institutions laid down in its fundamental documents.

### MAIN STAGES AND DIRECTIONS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND THE CIS

With the collapse of the USSR, the connecting and integrating factors within the former Union ( unified armed forces, a closed all-Union economic space, a single energy and transport system, the absence of formalized inter-republican borders, visa-free movement of citizens, etc.) continued to operate and influence the formation of foreign and domestic policies of new states, including the Republic of Uzbekistan. Under these conditions, Uzbekistan, taking into account that the adopted fundamental documents of the CIS met the generally accepted norms of international law, supported the idea of establishing the Commonwealth based on the sovereign equality of all its members and became one of its founders.

Having studied and analyzed the main legal documents and other materials related to the formation of the CIS and the participation of the Republic of Uzbekistan in this process, the history of the development of the Commonwealth can be conditionally divided into four stages.

*The first stage* (December 1991 - January 1993) as a whole was a period of active formation of the CIS activities and the formation of its institutional mechanisms, during which several important documents were adopted, among which the Charter of the Organization is the most important, designed to regulate the whole range of issues of the activities of the new associations. At the CIS meetings, the main attention was paid to the regulated military-political and economic delimitation of the post-Soviet republics. Within the framework of the Commonwealth, attempts were made to maintain the mutual socio-economic, cultural, and humanitarian ties that existed in the Soviet period and preserve the ruble zone, the problems of control over nuclear weapons, the unified command

of the armed forces for the transitional period, and the organizational transition from unified armed forces to the creation of national armies was resolved. However, due to the rupture of previously existing mutual economic ties (loss of markets for raw materials, machinery, and equipment, sales of finished products, etc.), unsettled pricing mechanisms, and monetary and financial relations during this period, there was a sharp deterioration in the economic situation of most Commonwealth countries

In *the second stage* (1993-1999) of the development of the CIS, many important decisions were made on the formation of integration processes within the Commonwealth in the economic, military-political, and humanitarian spheres. To establish effective multilateral trade and economic cooperation, attempts were made to create a free trade zone in the CIS. In particular, on April 15, 1994, the heads of all Commonwealth countries, including Uzbekistan, signed the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The document provided that in the FTA being created, tariff and non-tariff restrictions in mutual trade would be abolished, various obstacles to the movement of goods and services would be eliminated, and trade would be carried out without duties, which as a result would increase the level of mutual trade and create conditions for the economic growth of the Commonwealth countries. However, since the participating countries did not find a common approach to the formation of an FTA, and the decisions they made in practice were only advisory in nature, trade and economic relations between the countries of the association continued to be carried out based on bilateral agreements.

To coordinate military cooperation and security of external borders within the framework of the Commonwealth, the Council of Ministers of Defense and the Council of Commanders of the Border Troops were created<sup>5</sup>. And to promote the development of interaction in the cultural and humanitarian sphere between the CIS countries and coordinate their joint activities, the Council for Cultural Cooperation, the Council for Cooperation in Education, the Council for Tourism, etc. were formed.

By the beginning of *the third stage* (2000 - the first half of 2016), one of the main areas of interstate cooperation within the Commonwealth

was trade and economic cooperation. However, the absence of a single free trade zone in the CIS space and over a hundred mutual trade agreements in force between the countries at that time created inconvenience in the implementation of balanced economic cooperation within the framework of the association.<sup>6</sup>

Given the need to create conditions for the free movement of goods within the CIS and integration into the international trading system, Uzbekistan in May 2013 became a member of the Free Trade Area Agreement.

In matters of cultural and humanitarian cooperation within the framework of the CIS, the interaction of Uzbekistan with the participating countries was mainly carried out on a bilateral basis.

*The fourth stage* (the second half of 2016 and subsequent years) is characterized by the intensification of Uzbekistan's participation in the work of sectoral bodies of the CIS. The republic has joined more than 10 bodies of sectorial cooperation, whose activities cover such areas as the fight against crime, science, and innovation, economy, and energy, as well as the implementation of joint projects in the social and labor sphere, on youth issues and ensuring the protection of consumer rights of citizens member countries in the territory of the association.

In 2020, following the decision of the Council of Heads of State, Uzbekistan chaired for the first time during the existence of the association in SNG. During the period of its chairmanship, the Republic carried out significant work to improve the legal framework for cooperation in the field of transport and the implementation of a coordinated policy to ensure transport security, develop the union of international transport corridors in space, increase the effectiveness of the agreed tariff policy in the field of international rail transportation and address other topical issues.

Important decisions were taken to increase the authority of the organization in the international arena. Thus, on November 23, 2020, within the framework of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, a special resolution "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Commonwealth of Independent States" was adopted by

Uzbekistan<sup>7</sup>. Important decisions were made to increase the authority of the organization in the international arena.

The result of the chairmanship of Uzbekistan in the CIS was the holding on December 18, 2020, under the chairmanship of the head of the republic Shavkat Mirziyoyev, meetings of the Council of Heads of State in the format of a video conference, during which the state and prospects for the development of political, trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation within the CIS, as well as issues of joint counteraction to new challenges and threats. In his speech, the head of our state noted that Uzbekistan considers the CIS an important and effective platform for deepening practical partnerships in all areas and voiced several proposals to expand multifaceted cooperation within the Commonwealth<sup>8</sup>, etc.

In general, Uzbekistan during its chairmanship gave a new impetus to the development of multilateral cooperation within the CIS, as evidenced by the international events organized at a high level and a solid package of decisions made. Despite the difficult conditions for the participating countries that arose in connection with the coronavirus pandemic, under the chairmanship of the republic, two meetings of the Council of Heads of Governments were successfully held in the format of a video conference (May 29 and November 6, 2020) and more than 60 planned international events in online and offline formats, about 70 important documents on priority areas of multilateral cooperation within the association were adopted.

Uzbekistan considers the CIS as an effective platform for the development of multifaceted and multilateral cooperation among the participating countries. Within the framework of the CIS, an extensive regulatory and *legal framework has been created* and mechanisms for multilateral cooperation have been formed in almost many vital areas, such as the further development of trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian relations, communication, and transport links, ensuring stability and sustainable development in CIS space.

## THE FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF SCO

In today's world, against the backdrop of growing tensions in some regions and increasing threats to international security, as well as the growing influence of globalization processes, ensuring stability and sustainable development both at the national level and throughout the Central Asian region depends on the formation of effective mechanisms for multilateral cooperation. Uzbekistan, being one of the founders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization stands for the consistent and systematic solution of issues of ensuring stability in the region, as well as an effective counteraction to non-traditional threats to global security. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established on June 15, 2001, in Shanghai based on the Declaration on the Establishment of the SCO, signed by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as a permanent regional international organization. In 2017, India and Pakistan were admitted to the SCO as full members.

The SCO is one of the most dynamically developing young international structures. June 2022 marked the twenty-first anniversary of the founding of the Organization. For a short period of its functioning, the association has established itself as an important platform for discussing topical issues of ensuring regional and global stability and has acquired a worthy place in the modern system of international relations. At the same time, it is also important to emphasize that the SCO "is not an alliance directed against other states and regions", but, on the contrary, "adheres to the principle of openness"<sup>9</sup>.

The association is particularly attractive due to the "Shanghai spirit", the main content of which is equality, mutually beneficial cooperation, mutual respect, and trust, non-interference in internal affairs<sup>10</sup>. Being the most important principle of the SCO, the "Shanghai spirit" has enriched the theory and practice of modern international cooperation, putting into practice the general desire of the world community to democratize international relations<sup>11</sup>.

At present, the SCO is one of the influential structures of the

multilateral format. The total area of the Member States is more than 34 million square kms, or about 60% of the territory of Eurasia, and the population is more than 3 billion people, which is almost half of the world's population. Currently, the permanent member states of the SCO are China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan<sup>12</sup>. Interaction with interested states is also carried out by granting the status of "observer" and "dialogue partner".

The fundamental statutory document that creates the legal foundation for a new international association is the SCO Charter, which defines the goals and objectives of the Organization, outlines its structure, the procedure for establishing relationships with other states and international organizations, etc. The main areas of cooperation within the SCO are the maintenance of stability and security, and the encouragement of effective regional cooperation in political, economic, humanitarian, energy, transport, and other areas of common interest.

For the effective implementation of the tasks facing the SCO, the Organization has established: councils of heads of state, heads of government, and ministers of foreign affairs, a meeting of heads of ministries (departments), a council of national coordinators, as well as permanent bodies: the Secretariat, functioning in Beijing, and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure in Tashkent.

However, there are critical assessments of the activities of the SCO institutions, since, according to experts, the Secretariat does not have the authority to make independent decisions, functioning as an "administrative and bureaucratic center" for implementing decisions approved at meetings of the SCO supreme bodies<sup>13</sup>.

In general, according to its status, the SCO is an international organization, since it meets all the criteria for such an organization. It was established following international law, i.e. on a legal basis; established based on an international treaty; cooperates in specific areas of activity; has independent rights and obligations<sup>14</sup>.

## SCO IN THE SYSTEM OF COUNTERING NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY THREATS

An important role in maintaining stability and security in the SCO space, coordinating the practical activities of the competent structures of the member countries of the association on issues of combating international terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and other transnational threats is played by the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), whose headquarters is located in Tashkent.

The two permanent bodies that “symbolize the birth of the SCO as a full-fledged international organization”<sup>15</sup> are the Secretariat and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). The RATS structure includes the Council and the Executive Committee. RATS Council<sup>16</sup> is the governing body that determines the procedure for the implementation of the main tasks and functions, the annual agenda, and plans of the anti-terrorist structure. The Executive Committee is a permanent body of the SCO. Its main tasks are to coordinate and interact with the competent authorities of the participating countries in the fight against terrorism and extremism, conduct anti-terrorist exercises, improve the legal framework for cooperation, carry out information and analytical activities, form and replenish the database of the anti-terrorist structure, cooperate with international structures, involved in the fight against terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking, as well as the practical implementation of the decisions adopted within the framework of the SCO regarding the work of the regional anti-terrorist structure.

The Director of the Executive Committee is the highest administrative official appointed by the Council of Heads of State of the SCO on the recommendation of the RATS Council from among the citizens of the member states for a period of three years (Table E 2). Since 2022, this position has been occupied by the representative of Uzbekistan Ruslan Mirzaev.



TABLE 2  
HEADS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE RATS SCO

<i>Period of performance</i>	<i>RATS SCO</i>	<i>FULL NAME</i>
of duties as Director of the IC		Representative participating countries
2004 - 2006	KasymovVyacheslav Temirovich	Uzbekistan
2007 - 2009	SubanovMyrzakan Usurkanovich	Kyrgyzstan
2010 - 2012	Dzhumanbekov Dzhenisbek Mukhamedkarimovich	Kazakhstan
2013 - 2015	Zhangxinfeng	China
2016 - 2018	SysoevEvgeny Sergeevich	Russia
2019 – 2021	GiyosovDzhumakhon Fayozovich	Tajikistan
From Jan 2022	Mirzaev Ruslan Erkinovich	Uzbekistan

Within the framework of the new mechanism of anti-terrorist cooperation and with the coordinating role of the RATS, the competent authorities of the SCO member states, both in a bilateral and multilateral format, are implementing measures to identify and detain persons put on the international wanted list. The solution to this problem is facilitated by the leaders in the RATS Executive Committee of the Unified Investigative Register of persons declared internationally wanted by special services and law enforcement agencies of the SCO member states for committing or on suspicion of committing crimes of a terrorist, separatist or extremist nature, which includes more than 6,000 persons and the list of terrorist, separatist and extremist organizations whose activities are prohibited on the territories of the SCO member states consists of more than 100 organizations<sup>17</sup>.

In the context of globalization, the issues of strengthening multilateral cooperation in combating threats and challenges in the information sphere are also becoming relevant, because the intensive development and implementation of modern information and communication technologies in various spheres of human life open up new opportunities for

international terrorism.

Taking into account the importance and relevance of this problem and to improve the coordination and interaction of the competent authorities in the field of international information security within the framework of the SCO, the necessary organizational and legal basis has been created and work has been launched to strengthen the interaction of the competent authorities of the Organization with countries in the field of identifying, preventing and suppressing the use of modern information and communication technologies by international terrorist organizations (MTO) in their criminal activities. To improve the mechanisms of interaction, joint exercises are being held to counter terrorist activities in the global network, during which the issues of applying the provisions of the SCO legal framework governing the conduct of joint activities in the field of countering cyberterrorism, as well as mechanisms for searching and detecting terrorist and extremist content, collecting and fixing electronic evidence, conducting forensic examinations and technical research, analyzing and evaluating the received digital data, establishing and neutralizing MTO.

In general, it can be noted that the targeted measures taken by member states within the framework of the RATS and other SCO structures to counter non-traditional security threats are effective. In 2019 alone, with the coordinating role of the SCO RATS, 288 crimes of a terrorist and religious extremist nature were suppressed at the preparation stage, the activities of 78 underground terrorist cells were suppressed, and 193 militants were neutralized. As a result of joint work on information security in 2019, it was possible to remove or restrict access to more than 23,000 Internet resources containing materials of a terrorist and extremist nature. At the same time, as SCO Secretary-General Zhang Ming noted, "the fight against terrorism and extremism requires the joint efforts of all countries, as well as broad international cooperation"<sup>18</sup>. In this regard, to build a multi-level security system at the global level, the SCO calls for strengthening international actions to effectively combat terrorism with the coordinating role of the UN.

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## UZBEKISTAN AND SCO

Uzbekistan, being one of the founders of the SCO, has played and continues to play an important role in the formation and institutional development of the integration association, the creation of effective mechanisms for cooperation within the Organization, the development of interaction with other interested countries and international organizations aimed at further expanding the format of the SCO and its international contacts. During the period of Uzbekistan's chairmanship in the SCO, a new vector of development of the Organization was identified, which contributes to granting the SCO observer status in the UN General Assembly<sup>19</sup>, signing memorandums and resolutions of understanding between the SCO Secretariat and the executive bodies of the UN, ASEAN, CIS, CSTO, CICA, etc.

On the initiative and with the active participation of Uzbekistan, the Rules of Procedure of the SCO and the Regulations on the Admission of New Members to the Organization (2010) were developed, which are important documents for regulating procedural issues within the association. The reason for the adoption of the Rules of Procedure was the fact that within the framework of the SCO, there were no uniform requirements governing the procedure for the development, coordination, and adoption of regulatory legal acts, which were reflected in this document.

A historic event was the signing at the Tashkent Summit (2016) of memorandums on the obligations of the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to obtain the status of a member state of the SCO, and next year in Astana Summit (2017) the first expansion of the membership of the Organization's member states for the entire period of the SCO. Obtaining by these countries the status of a full member contributed to an increase in the potential of the Organization and further enhancement of its role as an international organization to resolve global and regional problems and challenges of our time. However,, the existence of some unresolved disputes between the two new full members of the SCO - India, and Pakistan, which contribute to the emergence of conflict

situations between these countries, can negatively affect both the image of the SCO in the international arena as a whole and the effectiveness of its activities.

In February 2019, due to another border conflict between India and Pakistan, relations between the countries cooled, while the airspace of Pakistan was closed for a certain time for the flight of airliners to India. So there is need to form within the framework of the SCO a mechanism for responding to crises, “anti-crisis management” to promptly resolve problems that threaten regional security and stability.

In the foreign policy strategy of New Uzbekistan, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is also seen as an effective platform for an open and constructive dialogue, contributing to the further development of multilateral cooperation in priority areas that meet the interests of all member states.

In the period 2017-2021, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and other officials took an active part in the SCO summits, during which he put forward about 50 initiatives aimed at developing trade and economic cooperation within the framework of the association, increasing the transport and transit potential of the region, strengthening partnership on the development and widespread introduction of high technologies, the digital economy, alternative energy, and modern medicine, the development of tourism, support for young people and protecting them from extremist ideas, as well as solving urgent problems of regional and international security. To implement the initiatives and proposals put forward by the Republic of Uzbekistan at the Astana SCO Summit (2017), on January 29, 2019, the SCO Public Diplomacy Center was opened in Tashkent, the main task of which is to promote the development of cooperation between the countries of the Organization in the information sphere, the formation of information resources and interaction with the media, as well as strengthening mutual trust and good neighborliness, interethnic and interfaith harmony.

On September 17, 2021, by the decision of the Council of Heads of State of the Member States of the Association, Uzbekistan for the fourth

time assumed the chairmanship of the SCO. In 2022, as per the Action Plan of the Chairmanship of the Republic of Uzbekistan, more than 80 events were successfully held, covering almost all areas of multilateral cooperation within the association. Under the chairmanship of Uzbekistan, high-level meetings of the councils of foreign ministers, defense ministers, national coordinators, a meeting of secretaries of security councils, meetings of ministers of transport, industry, energy, culture, sports, healthcare, heads of ministries and departments of the Member States responsible for environmental issues, as well as other sectoral bodies, were held.

On September 15-16, 2022, a summit of the heads of SCO member states was held in Samarkand under the chairmanship of Uzbekistan. It was for the first time in the past three years that leaders of SCO member states gathered together in person and that this summit was held in such a wide format for the first time - the leaders of 14 countries took part in the expanded meeting. The summit was attended by leaders of participating countries (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, India, and Uzbekistan), observer countries (Belarus, Mongolia, and Iran), SCO dialogue partner countries (Azerbaijan and Turkey), and also as an invited President of Turkmenistan.

As the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoev noted, "After a three-year pandemic pause, which caused serious disruptions in trade, economic and industrial ties, the countries and peoples of the SCO need direct communication"<sup>20</sup>. On the sidelines of the summit, the prospects for further development of cooperation within the framework of the SCO in the field of politics, economy, and security, as well as in the cultural and humanitarian spheres were identified. A record number of agreements, concepts, and other decisions were adopted (44 documents in total) regarding the further development of the SCO, increasing regional trade and industrial cooperation, ensuring food and energy security, developing cooperation, and implementing joint projects in the field of transport, logistics, green economy, smart agriculture and the introduction of agro-innovations, digital technologies, medicine, tourism, and other popular areas.

One of the important outcomes of the Samarkand summit was the signing of memorandums on the obligations of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a member state of the SCO (since 2005 it has had observer status), opening a direct path for this country to full membership in the SCO, on granting observer status to the Organization to Azerbaijan and Armenia (since July 10, 2015, these countries have been cooperating with the SCO as a dialogue partner), the status of the SCO dialogue partners Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as the decision to start the procedure for admission to the association of Belarus. To expand the network of partner organizations, memorandums of understanding were also signed with the League of Arab States and the UN specialized agencies - ESCAP and UNESCO. And the common positions of the SCO member states on the most important problems of a regional and global scale were formulated in the Samarkand Declaration adopted at the end of the summit.

The Republic of Uzbekistan is one of the active participants in the SCO, contributes in every possible way to achieving the goals of the Organization, and is interested in fully unlocking the potential of the association, taking into account its transformation. The significance for Uzbekistan is because the SCO, firstly, confirms its commitment to generally recognized principles of international law, secondly, the main priorities of the Organization are the strengthening of mutual trust and good neighborliness between the Member States, the development of multidisciplinary cooperation to maintain and strengthen peace, security, and stability in the region through joint actions and based on equal partnership, the promotion of effective cooperation in the political, economic, social, cultural and humanitarian spheres between the SCO countries to steadily increase the level and improve the living conditions of the peoples of the member countries, as well as the development of relations with other states and international organizations.

## CONCLUSION

The geopolitical transformation of the world and the destruction of the former system of security and stability *that occurred* at the end of the 20th century, the active development of globalization processes, the formation of independent states in the post-Soviet space led to the need for Uzbekistan to search for new forms of multilateral cooperation, both in the regional, as well as at the global level.

Uzbekistan, along with other states, was a co-founder of the CIS and SCO, within which it takes an active part in strengthening the security, stability, and sustainable development of the Central Asian region. The participation of Uzbekistan in the activities of the CIS and the SCO is fully consistent with the foreign policy of the Republic, since in the conditions of the modern world, ensuring peace, stability, and sustainable development in the region requires the development of effective multidisciplinary cooperation. The Republic attaches priority importance to strengthening constructive interaction between the member countries of these organizations in matters of ensuring international and regional security, expanding mutually beneficial economic ties and industrial cooperation, partnership in the field of high technologies and innovative development, transport and transit, education and science, tourism, healthcare and in other areas.

At the same time, new trends in international relations, the active development of globalization processes, and the emergence of new challenges and threats to the stability of states dictate the need for constant adaptation of the CIS and SCO to the political and economic realities of the modern world. At the same time, an indispensable condition for the further effective activity of these associations should be the principles of maintaining a rational balance of national and regional interests, as well as the steady implementation by all member countries of decisions taken within the framework of the CIS and SCO based on trust and mutual benefit.

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## INDIA-UZBEKISTAN CULTURAL AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE RELATIONS

*RASHMINI KOPARKAR*

### ABSTRACT

*Culture transcends borders! Culture binds nations in an organic way, creating a strong basis for diplomatic relations. Being ancient civilizational nations, India and Uzbekistan cherish age-old linkages reflected in their shared cultural heritage, intellectual wisdom; in the commonalities in traditions, art, music and literature, and in common value systems. The cultural, commercial, intellectual and spiritual 'give and take' of thousands of years has given a way to strong and vibrant relations in the contemporary era.*

*India and Uzbekistan established formal diplomatic relations in 1992, and have maintained robust bilateral cooperation ever since. Culture and people-to-people (P-2-P) links form the vital thread in this relationship. This is underlined by the popularity of Indian culture in Uzbekistan, which includes Indian cinema, television serials, music, dance, art, cuisine and Yoga. The Indian government plays a limited role in this, as most of the cultural interactions are people-driven. Rising number of Indian students, tourists and businessmen travelling to Uzbekistan is a testimony to this. On the other hand, Uzbek culture has gained unprecedented recognition in India in recent years because of the efforts of government and other stakeholders. This article is an attempt to assess the cultural and P-2-P aspects in India-Uzbekistan relations.*

**Keywords:** India, Uzbekistan, culture, cultural relations, soft power, people-to-people contacts, diplomacy, civilization, bilateral relations, Central Asia.

## INTRODUCTION

The international system has seen a number of shocks in recent years; including the COVID-19 pandemic, the military engagement between Russia-Ukraine, Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, and so on. The Climate Change and a series of natural disasters have added to the misery of humankind. In such scenarios of crisis and conflict, culture has acquired centrality in international relations. Nations are trying to navigate themselves through these challenges by seeking answers from their age-old wisdoms.

Culture transcends borders! Culture binds nations in a more organic and long-lasting way. Being an ancient civilization, India has enjoyed strong cultural bindings with many neighboring countries and regions. In fact, it has witnessed the cultural, commercial, intellectual and spiritual 'give and take' with these regions for thousands of years. Throughout history, Indian subcontinent and Central Asia saw exchanges of men, materials and ideas, which led to mutual enrichment of each other's cultures.

Age-old cultural and civilizational linkages between India and Uzbekistan have prepared a solid basis for the modern relationship. Even in the contemporary period, cultural and people-to-people (P-2-P) contacts form one of the strongest links between the two. The countries recently celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Their cooperation has grown in recent years, with its spread across a range of arenas, like political, security, trade and commerce, connectivity, energy, health, education, agriculture and culture. The cultural sphere itself has seen qualitative as well as quantitative intensification with several new sectors opening up.

As India-Uzbekistan cooperation deepens, this is an opportune time to take a stock of the progress of the bilateral relationship in various areas. Accordingly, appropriate steps can be taken by the policy-makers on both sides to further strengthen the ties, especially in the fields where there is untapped potential. This article is an attempt to assess the partnership

mainly in the field of cultural relations and P-2-P contacts.

After a brief conceptual framework, the article gives short history of India-Uzbekistan relations in general. This is followed by an in-depth account of cultural and P-2-P relations. It also tries to include some major government initiatives to promote these relations. In conclusion, some concrete suggestions are made as the way forward.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Culture generally means the way of life of a particular population nurtured through generations. It comprises of dress, cuisine, language, religion, rituals, festivals, arts, music, theatre, architecture, ideas, manners, values and philosophy. English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor defined culture as "...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>1</sup> As such it is a broad term encompassing various aspects of human life. Culture is deeply rooted in past, but is still a dynamic concept. Cultural patterns are slowly but constantly evolving.<sup>2</sup>

Culture has always been a part and parcel of international relations. However, it seems to have assumed the centrality of the field in twenty first century. As a matter of fact, there is no accepted definition of cultural relations. It mainly refers to interaction with foreign cultures with an aim of enhancing inter-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Cultural relations not only play an important role in promoting peace, security, stability and prosperity; but they also take international relations beyond the realm of military, diplomatic and economic considerations.

Cultural relations operate at two broad levels: direct and indirect. At the direct level, there are physical interactions between people and objects of various cultures, including dress, cuisine, languages, art forms, music and dances. At the indirect level, there are subtle influences involving each others' ideas, values, beliefs and philosophies.<sup>3</sup> However, this distinction is never watertight as there is fluid movement between direct and indirect interactions.

Governments play a limited role in developing and promoting cultural relations, as most of these interactions are driven by the people. When governments initiate or sponsor such links, it becomes cultural policy or cultural diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> Although the two terms are often confused and used interchangeably, there is a peculiar difference between cultural relations and cultural diplomacy. There is an element of mutuality and reciprocity in the former; whereas the later have a hint of instrumentalism and self-interest.<sup>5</sup> In other words, cultural relations are multi-dimensional and wider; and cultural diplomacy is unidirectional and narrow. Cultural diplomacy is mostly aimed at promoting one's own culture in foreign countries.

Beyond the limited role of governments in the arena, there is vast body of interaction between peoples of different nations, which is described through the concept of people-to-people (P-2-P) relations. In simple words, P-2-P relations mean interactions between general citizens of the countries without much official interference. Such contacts are established at multiple levels, including educational institutions, diaspora communities, business links, theatre, festivals, cultural activities, and tourism. P-2-P contacts generally fill the vacuum left because of the absence of formal diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> Though governments do not have any direct role to play in establishment of P-2-P contacts, they take certain measures to boost the same. To put it differently, cultural relations and P-2-P contacts complement each other in bringing any two nations closer.

### EVOLUTION OF INDIA-UZBEKISTAN RELATIONS

India considers Central Asia as part of its 'extended neighborhood'. It was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Uzbekistan in 1991. The two countries established formal diplomatic relations in March 1992 and Indian consulate at Tashkent was upgraded to the level of the embassy.<sup>7</sup> Indian Prime Minister (PM) Narasimha Rao visited Tashkent in 1993. The first president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, paid visits to India in 1994, 2000, 2005 and 2011. Another visit from the Indian side came in

2006 by PM Manmohan Singh.<sup>8</sup> For almost two decades since Uzbek independence, bilateral cooperation remained limited as both countries were facing their respective internal and external challenges.

India-Uzbekistan relationship was alleviated to the level of 'Strategic Partnership' in 2011, during President Karimov's visit to New Delhi.<sup>9</sup> In 2012, India announced its '*Connect Central Asia*' Policy that provided further impetus to India's engagements in Eurasia. Relations started improving at a faster pace after Narendra Modi took over as the Prime Minister of India in 2014. He paid a visit to Uzbekistan in July 2015, and again in June 2016 to participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit. During his 2015 visit, he held discussions with the then Uzbek President Islam Karimov on issues like counter-terrorism, trade, connectivity and culture.<sup>10</sup>

After the demise of President Karimov in 2016, the then prime minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev became the President. He has introduced number of reforms in fields of administration, legal system, economy, and foreign policy, leading to the emergence of 'new Uzbekistan'. His attempts to radically improve relations with the other CARs have led to enhanced political cooperation in the region. These developments also have a bearing on the current Indo-Uzbek relationship.

President Mirziyoyev visited India in October 2018, when 17 bilateral agreements were signed covering a wide range of issues.<sup>11</sup> He also paid a short visit in January 2019 to participate in *Vibrant Gujarat* Summit as Guest of Honour. Another summit between the leaders was held in December 2020 in virtual format. In September 2022, Modi visited Uzbekistan again, where he held talks with Mirziyoyev and took part in SCO summit.

Apart from bilateral contacts, India has also ushered in the process to engage with the Central Asian countries at multilateral level. India joined the SCO in 2017 as full member, which was strongly supported by the Uzbek side. This membership has given the leaders an added opportunity to meet at regular intervals. Additionally, India-Central Asia Dialogue at the foreign ministers' level was inaugurated in Samarkand in

January 2020. This gave a way for the India- Central Asia Summit at the highest level, the first edition of which took place virtually in January 2022. President of Uzbekistan participated in this summit along with other Central Asian leaders. The two countries share similar worldview and identical positions on various international and regional issues.<sup>12</sup>

India's strategic inclination towards Uzbekistan comes from its central location, natural resources, and security challenges<sup>13</sup>. The need for greater economic and energy cooperation and quest for connectivity have brought the two countries closer. India's accession to Ashgabat Agreement and Uzbekistan joining the Chabahar Port were significant steps in this regard. Currently, annual bilateral trade stands at USD 442 million<sup>14</sup> which is much below potential. An inter-governmental commission on trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation was set up to this end<sup>15</sup>. Defense and security have emerged as a vital segment in the relationship, underlined by mutual visits by both defense ministers and initiation of 'Dustlik'- the joint counter-terror exercises.

In recent years, heightened political contacts between the two countries have led to exchanges of several visits, setting up of joint working groups and signing of number of memorandums of understanding. The bilateral cooperation has seen an upward swing in qualitative and quantitative terms, spanning arenas of national security, defense, counter-terrorism, parliamentary affairs, diplomatic training, trade, connectivity, energy, education, skill development, science and technology, space, health, pharma, agriculture, textile, tourism and culture.

### INDIA-UZBEKISTAN CULTURAL AND PEOPLE- TO-PEOPLE RELATIONS

Intensification of political relations between India and Uzbekistan has led to strengthening of cultural cooperation as well. However, these two nations have always enjoyed vibrant cultural relations, which are based on the commercial, cultural, intellectual and spiritual links that go back for centuries. There has been a constant flow of people, goods and ideas

through this space, which led to emergence of these unique cultures and civilizations.

During ancient times, '*Uttar Path*' or what can be translated as the 'Northern Route' connected Indian cities like Varanasi, Pataliputra, Ujjaini with Central Asian cities.<sup>16</sup> Ample evidences in ancient scriptures substantiate the links that existed during that era. The land of Uzbekistan historically played the role of a bridge connecting India with the rest of the world. Indian merchants, traders, moneylenders played an important role in the Silk Road economy. They were present in large numbers in cities like Samarkand and Bukhara.<sup>17</sup>

The trade and economic contacts also facilitated transmission of ideas and values. Through this route Buddhist thought travelled from India to Central Asia and further to China and beyond. Also, Central Asian renaissance during the Islamic golden age was deeply inspired by Indian mathematics, medicine, astronomy and philosophy. Three outstanding personalities of that era, namely Al Khworezmi, Al Beruni and Ibn Sina have documented the Indian influence on their work<sup>18</sup>. The political, economic and cultural interaction intensified after Babur from Uzbekistan established Mughal Empire in India. Exchanges of that era have left deep impact on Indian languages, literature, dress, music, dance, architecture and cuisine.

During the Russian and Soviet domination over Uzbekistan, political relations were mainly dominated by Moscow. However, this era saw some vibrant cultural and P-2-P interactions. During the Soviet era, Tashkent emerged as a center for studies in Indology and Indian languages. There were several exchanges between the scholars, students, writers, artists, historians and archeologists. Tashkent Television showed Indian movies which were widely watched; and the pair of Raj Kapoor-Nargis had become extremely popular amongst the masses.<sup>19</sup>

20<sup>th</sup> century saw number of unprecedented upheavals in the region. Creation of the Soviet Union in 1922 and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924, the partition of India in 1947 and independence of Uzbekistan in 1991 were among those few events that brought change in the regional



political scenario. The partition of India and creation of Pakistan in between broke the geo-cultural continuum and physical connectivity that had existed for centuries. This restricted the peoples' movement as well as interactions. However, cultural relations and P-2-P between India and Uzbekistan seem to have broken all the physical barriers; and have flourished despite that.

In the aftermath of independence of Uzbekistan, as formal diplomatic relations were established between the two countries, governments started looking at cultural cooperation with a fresh outlook. An agreement on cultural cooperation was signed by the sides in 1994, which covered the fields of education, art, cinema, television, broadcasting, science, sports, youth activities, press and publications.<sup>20</sup> This agreement was initially for the period of five years and was eventually renewed by the two sides.

The popularity of Indian culture in Uzbekistan is unparalleled, which ranges from its movies, television serials, dances, music, cuisine and Yoga. Dilshod Akhatov, the ambassador of Uzbekistan in India, stated, "India is well-known in Uzbekistan for a long time as the country with rich history and unique culture; the country with which Uzbek people are connected with centuries-old cultural, trade, and economic relations, and, above all – with bonds of sincere friendship."<sup>21</sup>

Indian Cultural Centre in Tashkent, which was established in 1995, can be considered as the focal point of Indian cultural activities within Uzbekistan. It functions under the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) under the Ministry of Culture of India. The Centre organizes regular *Kathak*, *Tabla* and Yoga classes in its premises, which has a considerably high enrolment. Weekly programmes including film screenings, dance and music concerts, *mehendi* workshops, art exhibitions, public lectures and seminars are organized too. Activities like quiz competitions on India, singing of Indian songs, recitation of Hindi poetry, and essay writing receive great response. The Centre organizes cultural programmes on Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations of India. Moreover, programmes like International Yoga Day, *Hindi Divas*, Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary are organized along with festive celebrations

like *Diwali*, *Holi* and *Navratri*. As part of the 'outreach activities', the cultural centre regularly facilitates visits of its *Kathak* dance and Yoga students to different provinces to organize joint cultural programmes.<sup>22</sup> Indian Diaspora community participates in centre's activities with great enthusiasm; however, its main popularity lies in the response from Uzbek people especially the youth.<sup>23</sup>

Tashkent has been a centre for Hindi and Indology learning since Soviet times. PM Modi during his visit in 2015 mentioned in his speech, "Few countries can match Uzbekistan in nurturing Hindi and Indian culture". He met a group of Indologists and Hindi linguists.<sup>24</sup> Three educational institutions in Uzbekistan teach Hindi language, from primary to post-graduate level.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, two students are selected and sent for training in Hindi to the Central Institute of Hindi, Agra, under the ICCR fellowships.<sup>26</sup> Increasing popularity among Uzbek students to take up Hindi underline the fact that Indian influence has not declined since Soviet disintegration; it has rather expanded.

Popularity of Indian films, music, dance and serials in Uzbekistan is extraordinary. ICCR regularly sends music and dance troops, which are met with enormous response not only in Tashkent but also in cities like Samarkand, Bukhara and Andijan. Indian musical troupes regularly participate in the *Sharq Taronalari* or 'Oriental Tunes' festival held annually in Samarkand since 1997.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Uzbek singers like Kakhramon Gulomjanov have earned fame from signing Hindi songs in concerts organized by his *Havas Guruhi* band.<sup>28</sup> Uzbek Radio completed 50 years of Hindi broadcasting in 2012, where a programme *Namaste Hindiston* ran for years containing information on Indian culture, customs and festivals.<sup>29</sup> Indian movies are regularly translated in Uzbek and are released in movie theatres or on television. TV serials are also shown in Uzbek and are very popular among women in Uzbekistan. Recently, because of Uzbek embassy's efforts, many filmmakers are coming forward to shoot Indian movies in Uzbekistan.

India has risen as one of Uzbekistan's partners in the fields of education and skill development. Two Indian universities Amity and

Sharda have opened their campuses in Uzbekistan. Besides, number of Uzbek students come to India to pursue higher education every year, some of them receive the government of India scholarships at various levels from graduation to PhD programmes. Uzbekistan is also a partner country in Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme since 1993. Till now, more than 2,400 students from Uzbekistan have received training in information technology, English language, journalism and management under ITEC fellowships. In the year 2019, as many as 164 slots were utilized for Uzbek students<sup>30</sup>

Indian Diaspora in Uzbekistan is very small. There are about 1800 Indian nationals living in Uzbekistan, most of whom are situated in Tashkent. The community enjoys a positive image amongst the locals. They are involved mostly in pharmaceutical and hospitality businesses; while some are university and school teachers. There are some Indian doctors in hospitals.<sup>31</sup> Indians living in Tashkent maintain close contacts with the Indian Embassy and Indian Cultural Centre. Number of Indian medical students has seen a steady rise in recent years. In the wake of Russia-Ukraine crisis, Uzbekistan provided 2,000 seats in its medical colleges for Indian students who had to leave their medical education in order to evacuate from Ukraine.<sup>32</sup>

Indian restaurants are very popular all over Uzbekistan. There are dozens of restaurants serving Indian food in Tashkent. They are mostly flooded with Indian tourists; but are also popular among the locals. This is partially because of the similarities in the Indian and Uzbek cuisine. Restaurants like *Raaj Kapoor*, *Patiala House*, *Brham ji*, *Ragu* and the *Host* are among the top-rated ones. Uzbeks have developed inclination towards Yoga and Ayurveda in recent years. The Yoga sessions at Indian Cultural Centre are extremely popular, apart from which there are Yoga classes conducted by number of Uzbeks who are trained in these classes.<sup>33</sup>

India is one of the leading countries in Uzbekistan's inbound tourism market. Number of Indian tourists has seen a steady rise in recent years barring the pandemic years. Destinations like Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara provide attractive sites which appeal to Indian tourists. The Uzbek

government has extended e-Visa facility for Indian tourists. In the year 2017, as many as 40,000 Indians visited Uzbekistan for tourism.<sup>34</sup> A joint working group (JWG) on Tourism was set up between the two countries, the first meeting of which was held in Tashkent in August 2018. On the other hand, Uzbekistan has emerged as an important source of medical tourism with about 8,000 Uzbeks seeking medical treatment in India every year.<sup>35</sup>

The Uzbek culture has received increasing popularity in India in recent years. Most of this is a result of the efforts by Uzbekistan's embassy in New Delhi. In 2019, fashion designer Ritu Beri was appointed as the first Cultural and Tourism Ambassador of Uzbekistan in India. This recognition came because of her personal efforts to bring two cultures closer through her clothing collections<sup>36</sup> She was one of the invited guests to participate in the Kokand International handicrafts festival in 2019.<sup>37</sup> She has displayed in various fashion shows clothing ranges using Uzbek textiles popularly known as *Adras*. This underlines the exchanges in fields of textile and fashion.

Uzbekistan has been participating in Surajkund International Crafts Mela since 2019 as a partner country. The stalls displaying Uzbek ceramic pottery, puppets, and clothing have met with great interest and enthusiasm. The Surajkund Crafts Mela entered into an agreement with Kokand International Handicrafts Exhibition in 2019 for mutual participation and cooperation in each other's events. Artisans and craftsmen from Uzbekistan also have exhibited their handicrafts at the *Vibrant Gujrat* summit and at several other occasions. Uzbekistan Culture Day was celebrated in New Delhi in September 2018, which was jointly organized by the ICCR and the Uzbek Embassy in India. This was marked by the Uzbek dance performances, display of handicrafts and serving of delicious Uzbek food.<sup>38</sup>

There is very limited knowledge of Uzbek language in India despite the fact that there are thousands of common words between Uzbek and Indian languages. An Uzbek language centre at the Jamia Millia Islamia University has been conducting undergraduate level courses since last

several years. Recently, centres for Uzbek language were also inaugurated in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Delhi University. The centre at JNU offers one year certificate course in Uzbek language.

The recently signed agreement on Cultural Exchange Programme for the years 2021-25 encourages and facilitates cultural exchanges between the two countries. This agreement is much more comprehensive and wider compared to its previous versions. It provides for exchanges between music ensembles, classical and folk dance troupes, theatre performances, art exhibitions, publications; and promotes participation in festivals, conferences, seminars and joint research. This also provides for exchange of one expert annually in the field of archeological conservation.<sup>39</sup>

A lot of new initiatives are taken up by governments on both sides to promote and strengthen cultural cooperation. They have established JwGs on several areas like tourism, IT, agriculture, textiles, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, and so on. Moreover, efforts have been made to take the relationship beyond the capitals. The agreement of cooperation between Andijan region and the State of Gujarat and sister city agreement between the cities of Samarkand and Agra were signed during the visit of Uzbek President in October 2018. These initiatives signal at the horizontal as well as vertical expansion of bilateral cultural cooperation.

## CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

After an in-depth analysis of the Indo-Uzbek cultural and P-2-P relations, it can be said that these contacts are solid, multi-layered and diverse. They cover wide range of areas like education, healthcare, music, dance, films, television, cuisine, Yoga and tourism. Nevertheless, the common theme underlying all these areas of P-2-P relations is the mutual trust and respect for each other's cultures and traditions. Uzbeks carry tremendous goodwill towards India, and Indians are made to feel welcome there. On the other hand, Indians are also positively disposed towards Uzbeks and their culture. The cultural commonalities in cuisine and languages play a positive

role in bringing these peoples even closer.

A brief account of the history of Indo-Uzbek bilateral relations conveys that cultural relations have always been one of the strongest links in this relationship. In fact, P-2-P contacts between the two countries have flourished despite political and economic limitations and physical hindrances. Nonetheless, there is still a lot of scope for improvement in each of the sectors under this umbrella.

First and the foremost, educational cooperation needs a boost from both sides. A specialized campaign can be designed to attract Uzbek students to Indian institutes. More symposiums and seminars should be arranged in Tashkent and other cities whereby common Uzbek students can gather information about various opportunities of higher education in India. With the implementation of the new National Education Policy in India, attention can be paid to more academic collaborations, creating joint courses, exchange programs, and joint research projects. Promotion of Uzbek language studies within India through government and private institutes can be helpful in strengthening relations.

Moreover, there is a need to create awareness about Uzbekistan amongst common masses of India, for which one has to look beyond the image portrayed by the major media sources. More films festivals, road shows, exhibitions, literary fests, concerts can be arranged for more awareness about Uzbek culture. The nodal authorities need to go beyond the metro cities, and create reach in the tier-II and tier-III cities in India. This can have several direct as well as indirect effects on overall relations.

In 2022, India celebrated 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence; similarly, India and Uzbekistan also celebrated 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishment of their diplomatic relations. This is an opportunity to expand the base of cooperation within the cultural sphere and to open new vistas. A lot has been already happening; but there is still a lot of untapped potential. After all, sky is the limit when it comes to cultural relations.

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# UZBEKISTAN-IRAN RELATIONS: NEW REALITIES AND POTENTIAL FOR RAPPROCHEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines new tendencies and potential for rapprochement between Iran and Uzbekistan in the context of the toughened sanctions, outcomes of the Russian-Ukrainian war and unstable Afghanistan in 2022-2023. There are some assessments that Iran is an unfamiliar actor for the Central Asians, and that Central Asia attracts the Iranian interest only as “a key Eurasian regional player”. In contrast, the author forwards a thesis about the objectiveness of the rapprochement between Iran and Uzbekistan due to their geographical, historical, religious and cultural closeness, the growing economic interdependence in conditions of the globalized world. Yet, this process is uneven and prone to the influence of many variables. The author uses the system-analytical and problem-chronological approaches, including such scientific methods spread in the social science like analysis, synthesis and observation methods, comparison, as well as statistics. She concludes that present-day complex realities can slow down but not stop the objective rapprochement of the two states.*

**Keywords:** Iran, Uzbekistan, Central Asia, relations, historical, security, economic development, transport, trade.

## INTRODUCTION

The events of the last years could not but influence Uzbekistan-Iran relations that stimulated a new wave of interest in this issue. The current complex situation is the outcome of the protracted geopolitical tension around Central Asia (CA) in the context of the pandemic outburst, its aggravation after the full withdrawal of the American forces from

Afghanistan and the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, including the failure of the Iranian nuclear negotiations. This demands a thorough investigation of the new tendencies in the Iranian-Uzbekistan relations, working out some prognosis and recommendations to facilitate decision-making on the issue for all interested sides.

The author tries to explain the local, dominating Uzbek point of view on the process, using the new data demonstrating ongoing changes in the bilateral relations, and personal experience of contacts with Iranian counterparts and ordinary people. The thesis is forwarded that the present-day Iranian interest in Uzbekistan and the activation of bilateral ties have not been accidental and have been a logical outcome of the long-term aspirations to restore the historical-cultural ties of the two kindred countries. It is clear that despite the existing political and economic barriers, the bilateral relationships are destined to grow. Yet, considering current international sanctions and transitional difficulties, these relations will certainly be uneven and dependent on many variables, able to slow down but not stop this objective rapprochement.

### CURRENT APPROACHES ON IRAN-CENTRAL- ASIA RELATIONS

Present-day published analytical papers on the Iran-Central Asia relations can be conditionally divided into those, which state that Central Asia has only recently turned into a priority in Iran's foreign policy, and those who acknowledge the long-term bilateral interests of the sides, and objectiveness of this tendency. The Central Asia Barometer (CAB) Survey experts write: "Only recently has Central Asia become a policy priority for Tehran, which now sees the region as a potential "bridge" between Iran and the East. They base their assessments on the CAB collected data, according to which "Iran is seemingly perceived in CA as an unknown: unproven, untested, and unfamiliar"<sup>1</sup>.

On the contrary, Arab analysts state: "Iran-Central Asia relations were on an upswing even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in

February 2022”<sup>2</sup>. Indian authors also acknowledge that Iran has close historic and economic ties with Central Asia, which “provide a strong foundation for forging relations with each other”. However, they write that some Central Asian countries accuse Iran of trying to over-reach their region and fear losing their independence.<sup>3</sup>

Acknowledging the Iran-Central Asia closeness, Italian experts, stress that Central Asia attracted the Iranian interest largely as “a key Eurasian regional player in the context of “the theatre of clashes between the great powers in recent centuries ... nowadays between Russia, the United States and China”<sup>4</sup>.

There is still some kind of misunderstanding and odd knowledge about Iran-Central Asia relations. For instance, CAB Survey assessments on Central Asian perceptions of Iran are not quite correct. They only partially describe the situation. It seems the respondents were not simply frank enough in the context of the overwhelming cautiousness about Iran in their governmental institutions.

Iran’s historical, territorial, linguistic and cultural proximity could not but attract the flows of the Central Asian citizens into Iran, and vice-versa. There have always been various informal groups of people busy with shuttle diplomacy whose products of trade are sufficiently presented in the markets and shops of Uzbekistan. There are also those who visited their historical motherland with private or professional goals (local Iranians and Tajiks in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). I personally met even Kazakh and Kyrgyz specialists living in Iran for more than a decade, whose parents and relatives often travel to Iran. One should also take into account the rising number of intermarriages (for example, more than 200 Iranians married Uzbek citizens), and some level of academic exchanges between the Central Asian universities and Iran, although not at a wide scale. A small number of Iranian businessmen and various specialists temporarily live and work in Central Asia, sometimes for more than 20 years. All of them spread a certain portion of knowledge about Iran. This is evidence of inevitable mutual rapprochement, despite all obstacles.

As to the Central Asian fears of losing independence, it seems too

much exaggerated as there are obviously many other security issues (illegal migration, terrorism, drugs trafficking, etc.) to tackle where Iran since its proclaimed Dialogue of Civilizations in the 1990s has been regarded not as a threat but rather a potential partner<sup>5</sup>. The Central Asian states' role in the present-day Iranian policy cannot be restricted only to the role of key Eurasian players in the ongoing geopolitical games around Iran. The region of Central Asia has always been considered as a continuation of the vitally important area of the Persian Gulf. In this connection, the Islamic Republic traditionally defends the project of the energy routes from Central Asian states through its territory as the cheapest and economically grounded. It is in this context that Iran focuses much at developing ties with Uzbekistan, the main strategically located country in the midst of Central Asia.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Uzbekistan's historical-cultural, religious and linguistic closeness to Iran is linked with the facts of the common centuries-old coexistence of their ancestors within the same Akhemenid in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and Samanid empire in 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries with Bukhara as its capital and close economic and human ties up to the October Revolution of 1917. Since its independence, Uzbekistan has been regarded as a key country of post-Soviet Central Asia, given the geostrategic position of the republic in the "core" of Central Asia, the demographic factor being the most densely populated territory in Central Asia and the presence of Tajik diaspora. This makes the republic the most important link in the implementation of long-term plans for the gradual involvement of Tehran into the region<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, Iran considers Uzbekistan as "the most significant player in building a regional consensus"<sup>7</sup>.

However, the Iranian strategy met the following problems on the way to the realization of its strategy:

1. Differences in the political build-up – Islamic regime in Iran and secular states in Central Asia; the inability of the Iranian economy

to provide the Central Asia states high-quality technology and big investments. Besides, there are differences between Sunni and Shia, Persians and Turks, which present commonality in one case and the basis for differences – in another.

2. Long-term Iranian-American contradictions have resulted in the suspension of many Central-Asian projects with the participation of Iran, first on construction of the transport corridors through Iranian ports to the world markets.

As a whole, the US economic sanctions, non-admission of Tehran to the energy projects of the Central Asia, as well as formation of the negative image of Iran as a state-sponsor of international terrorism prevented the development of full-fledged relations of Iran with Uzbekistan<sup>8</sup>.

The Central Asian countries understand that Iran was pursuing a policy of good neighborliness and its primary goals in Central Asia were achieving stability and economic development in the region. Considering that the leaders of Uzbekistan and Iran signed an agreement in 2002 on non-interference in each other's internal affairs, the need to build a policy based primarily on national interests. Tehran and Tashkent expressed their mutual interest to cooperate within the framework of an international transport program involving the European Union and 12 member states of the Eastern European, Caucasus, and Central Asian region – the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA), initiated by former Uzbekistan President I.A. Karimov. However, construction of the trans-Afghan railway transport corridor Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif and further to the Iranian ports of Bender Abbas and Chakhbahar, carried out under the TRACECA program, depends on stability and infrastructure of Afghanistan<sup>9</sup>. On April 25, 2011, an agreement was signed in Ashgabat on constructing the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman transport railway corridor.

For Uzbekistan, not only do Iranian ports offer the shortest and cheapest route to the sea, but several future rail projects cannot be accomplished without Tehran's active participation<sup>10</sup>. Not surprisingly, in December 2017, the Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev issued a

decree to diversify the country's transportation options mentioning the "Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman," "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan," and the Trans-Afghan corridors. The three Trans-Afghan corridors start with an existing rail line from Uzbekistan's Termez to Afghanistan's Mazar-i-Sharif. In future, from Mazari-Sharif the route will go to Afghanistan's Herat and from Herat the railroad would branch into three corridors – the first connecting to Iran's Bandar Abbas seaport; the second to Iran's Chabahar; and the third to Iran's Bazagan, which is close to Turkey and opens the possibility of access to the Black Sea. Within this context, in 2018 even under the Trump administration's reimposed sanctions bilateral trade between Iran and Uzbekistan grew by 40%<sup>11</sup>.

Simultaneously, on November 2018, Chabahar project was withdrawn from US sanctions due to the US President's strategy in South Asia, aimed at supporting the growth of the Afghan economy and developing its partnership with India. On 14 December 2020, Uzbekistan, India and Iran held their first meeting of the trilateral working group on the joint use of the Chabahar port. The sides focused on the issues of the Ashgabat Agreement, which came into force in 2016, and on the Chabahar infrastructure project. The importance of the corridor is also that it runs through the Afghan territory and is linked with the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a transport route stretching from Russia to India. The official opening of the Chabahar corridor took place on February 24, 2019, in Kabul.

The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, the stalled Iranian nuclear negotiations and the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan only fuel the two states' long-term strive for rapprochement out of the aggravated regional social-economic crisis.

## THE ROLE OF AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan plays significant role in Iran-Uzbekistan relations both as a transit route for the international corridors joining the two sides and hence bringing benefits to all involved parties, including Afghanistan itself, and

as a security problem challenging the safety of these corridors due to persistent instability in the country. Therefore, Iran and Uzbekistan attach great attention to the Afghan issue in their partnership. On 27 October 2021, the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs held talks in Tehran where the parties gave priority to discussing the efforts of Uzbekistan and Iran to resolve the Afghan crisis.

During the last years, Uzbekistan hosted a series of international conferences on Afghanistan focused on economic development and security issues, issues of regional connectivity. Tashkent tries to engage both bilaterally and multilaterally with the present Taliban regime owing to the country's geographical proximity that prioritizes Afghanistan in the economic policy of Uzbekistan, and its strategic significance in Tashkent's plans to connect Central and South Asia. Moreover, due to sanctions against Russia and Belarus amid the ongoing war in Ukraine, northern transport corridors are becoming complex and risky for Central Asia. Alternative shipping routes across the Black Sea have also been compromised by the ongoing Russian naval blockade against Ukrainian ports<sup>12</sup>.

The same can be said about Iran. For both countries, neighboring Afghanistan is a source of instability with radical forces like Islamic State (IS), remnants of Al-Qaida and others still operating in the country. For the weakened Iran's economy under sanctions, engaging with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries is an opportunity to revive its economy and relieve Western economic pressure.

## ECONOMIC SITUATION

In 2022-2023, the economies of Iran and Uzbekistan are being influenced by the economic outcomes of the intensified geopolitical confrontation of world powers, aggravated by the new international sanctions and the continued uncertain situation due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Despite being relatively stable (GDP growth is expected to reach 5.3% in 2023 and accelerate in the following years), in 2022, the gross domestic

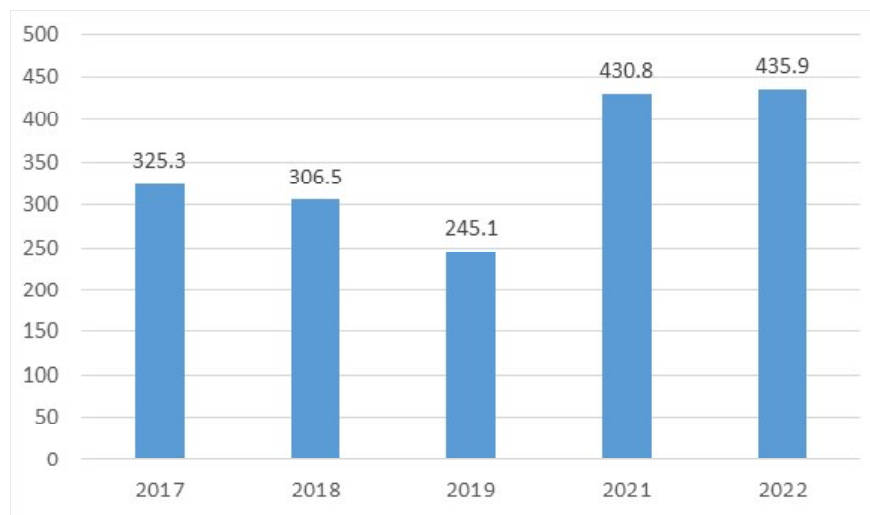


product (GDP) of Uzbekistan grew by 5.7% in 2022, which is less than in 2021 (7.4%), inflation increased from 10% in 2021 to 12.3%, the price of food products increased by 15.6% (13% in 2021) and the price of non-food products by 10.7% (7.8%)<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, in 2023 winter, the governmental mismanagement of the energy sector and reduction of gas production caused natural gas shortages in Uzbekistan. According to the 2020 EIA report, Uzbekistan annually produced around 60 billion cubic meters (bcm), out of which domestic gas consumption was approximately 39 bcm<sup>14</sup>, excluding gas export. In this context, the Uzbekistan Ministry of Energy is reconsidering the issues related to the import of natural gas and electricity, coal and fuel oil this year, conducting negotiations with some alternative partners.

In October 2022, the International Monetary Fund forecasted that the Iranian economy would grow 3% in 2022/23, down from 4.7 percent in 2021. Inflation in Iran was hovering near 50%. Consumer prices near the end of 2022 were up 48.5% compared to a year earlier, according to the Statistical Center of Iran. Iran was like Uzbekistan struggling to meet domestic demand for energy – a rise in consumption overtook the increase in production by 35 mln cubic meters per day in 2022. If consumption is not curbed, Iran will need to resume imports of gasoline, predict specialists<sup>15</sup>.

This short overview demonstrates similar problems in the two countries' economic development that intensifies mutual rapprochement in search of a way out of these economic difficulties. Currently, 397 enterprises with Iranian investments operate in Uzbekistan. Of these, 212 joint ventures, 185 – were foreign. In 2022, 105 new Iranian enterprises were registered, and it should be noted that this figure has grown 3 times over the previous 5 years. Over the past three years, mutual trade has almost doubled. At the end of 2022, this figure exceeded \$435 million, in the first quarter of this year - more than \$113 million<sup>16</sup>. (See Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1. TRADE TURNOVER BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND IRAN IN 2017-2022**  
(IN MLN DOLLARS)<sup>17</sup>



The two sides agreed to increase mutually beneficial trade to \$1 bln US dollars in the near future, to implement some joint projects in the fields of agriculture, pharmaceuticals, oil and gas, production of building materials and metal products, etc.<sup>18</sup>.

### GROWING PARTNERSHIP

Recent international events have only stimulated further Iranian-Uzbekistani rapprochement. A series of high ranking summits took place in 2022 between officials of Uzbekistan and Iran. A meeting was held in Tehran on February 21, 2022 between the Deputy Prime Minister – Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan Sardor Umurzakov with the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyyed Ibrahim Raisi. They discussed possibility of future implementation of a number of new investments project, the issues on deepening industrial cooperation between two countries.<sup>19</sup>

One of the most significant steps consolidating the Iran-Uzbekistan

partnership was the participation of Ebrahim Raisi in 22nd Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit of 2022 in the Uzbekistani city of Samarkand. He was the first Iranian president to travel to Uzbekistan in two decades. Earlier President Sayyed Mohammad Khatami had visited Tashkent in 2002. The leaders of both countries agreed on many issues of mutual concern and signed 17 agreements to boost cooperation in agriculture, energy, customs, technology, environment, tourism, business, visas, and science, including an agreement to work together on transportation via Iran's Chabahar port in the Gulf of Oman.<sup>20</sup>

On May 31, 2023, the 15th meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Iran was held in Tashkent. The creation of a joint commission on security cooperation between the two countries is a new direction in Iran's relations not only with Uzbekistan, but also with all Central Asian countries. This cooperation can positively influence the development of other areas.

Another important event in the bilateral relations was the official visit of President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev to Iran on June 18-19, 2023. During his visit, 18 documents were signed covering various areas of cooperation, such as trade, innovation and high technology, investment, industrial cooperation, transport and communications, tourism and cultural and humanitarian exchanges<sup>21</sup>.

As a whole, three important areas for mutual cooperation can be singled out: energy, transport and industrialization spheres. Iran and Uzbekistan signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in eight different areas of energy. They agreed on the joint implementation of petrochemical projects in Iran, conducting geological and exploration activities in the field of oil and gas, supply of Iranian petrochemical products in Uzbekistan, exchange of crude oil and petroleum products, joint research for development and commercialization of Catalysts and chemicals for petrochemical plants<sup>22</sup>. At the sidelines of the 26th meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) held in Uzbekistan, the two countries' leaders talked about the

development of transport and logistics cooperation, in particular, the efficient use of the ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas<sup>23</sup>, including arranging freight along the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran railroad<sup>24</sup>. According to Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari, Iran is striving to increase its annual transit to 20 million tons through the implementation of a common transport policy with Central Asian countries<sup>25</sup>.

Not less important is industrial cooperation, involving partnership in the agro-industrial sector, water resources management. The parties intend to establish industrial cooperation between the subjects of special economic zones, in particular, between the FEZ "Chabahar", "Aras" (Iran) and the FEZ "Navoi" and "Angren" (Uzbekistan).

### RISKS AND CHALLENGES

However, there are some challenges and risks, which should be taken into account. First, the illegitimate Taliban administration's approach to the operation of the future transport corridors via the Afghan territory is difficult to predict due to the well-known absence of unity among the movement ranks, its cooperation with some radical organizations like *Tehreek-e-Taliban*, etc.

Secondly, protracted transitional difficulties of Iran and Uzbekistan (weak institutes and staff, shortage of resources, etc.) will certainly complicate and decrease the tempos of their partnership. According to some Arab assessments, major global logistic firms will be cautious in shipping large volumes of goods through Iran owing to the outdated Iranian ports, rail, and road networks, and Iranian bureaucracy. Besides, there is not much evidence that the Raisi government has a thought-out plan in this context<sup>26</sup>.

Thirdly, Iran, as some experts state, may seek to advance its regional interests by expanding its proxy network into Central Asia. The Iranian proxy force, the Fatemiyoun Brigade, for instance, established on Central Asia's doorstep in Afghanistan, already estimated at 30,000 to 60,000

fighters and made up of the Shiite Hazara minority, could seek to exert pressure not only on Taliban but to provide it with increased flexibility to pursue its security interests in Central Asia and beyond<sup>27</sup>.

And, finally, the SCO membership seems to be not sufficient, to be able to solve these difficulties. All treaties have been concluded, mostly on the bilateral level that makes Uzbekistan and Iran dependent on many external factors linked with regional geopolitics and sanction policy.

### POTENTIAL FOR PARTNERSHIP

Despite the existing challenges there is still some potential for mutual cooperation. Clearly both countries will continue their involvement into Afghanistan due to the above-mentioned reasons and have already started trans-Afghan projects especially as Afghanistan is among the countries with which Uzbekistan has an active trade balance<sup>28</sup>.

Besides, there is a growing tendency for the extended bilateral cooperation within the Gulf region. On September 7, 2022, the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) foreign ministers met with their Central Asian counterparts in Riyadh to inaugurate the Central Asia Strategic Dialogue, a new initiative to expand cooperation in multiple fields. The sides adopted a Joint Action Plan for Strategic Dialogue and Cooperation for 2023-2027 that will include security dialogue, economic and investment cooperation, and fast-track plans to advance bilateral and multilateral relations<sup>29</sup>. Uzbekistan's relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) do not contradict but supplement in practice relations of Uzbekistan and Iran, for instance, on issues of constructing the Mazar-i-Sharif-Herat railway and within the framework of the international transport corridor "Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman-Qatar"<sup>30</sup>.

Another promising and ever-increasing sphere of partnership is within Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) that has potential to increase cooperation in trade liberalization, energy, migration issues and other 'soft' security issues. Not accidentally, on January 24, 2023 Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian met and conferred with his

Uzbekistani counterpart Bakhtiyor Saidov on the sidelines of the ECO member countries' meeting in Tashkent.

Obviously these tendencies can be developed with or without solution of the Iranian nuclear issue especially that the US strategy towards Iran is not quite consistent and shaky. Officially President Biden declares about the withdrawal from the negotiations, while privately making considerable efforts to return to the negotiations<sup>31</sup>. On its part, Iran is ready to finalize the nuclear talks and revive the 2015 nuclear deal. It is supported in this issue by Iraqi authorities', who also mediated between Saudi Arabia and Iran<sup>32</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the present-day activation of Iran-Uzbekistan relations has been natural and logical development of the mutual interests based on the territorial, historical, religious and cultural closeness of the kindred nations, including the growing economic interdependence in conditions of the globalized world. Despite the previous and current political and economic barriers, the bilateral relationships are doomed to the growth. Yet, considering current international sanctions, transitional difficulties and consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Afghan situation and geopolitical discrepancies between the involved actors, this process of rapprochement will be uneven and prone to influence of many variables, which can slow down but not stop this objective rapprochement. The potential revival of the Iranian nuclear negotiations will only stimulate relations between Iran and Uzbekistan, first through Chabahar port which is vital for both sides.

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## RELATIONS BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND SOUTH-EAST ASIAN NATIONS

SANOBAR TOLIBOVA

### ABSTRACT

*This article discusses the history of establishing cultural ties and modern development prospects between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the countries of Southeast Asia - Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar from 1991 to the end of 2019. Economic ties between Uzbekistan and the countries of Southeast Asia are studied on the basis of a comparative analysis of periods, changes, cooperation and problems between countries. The role of relationships in the spheres of economy and culture is analysed. The article indicates the achievements and problems in cooperation between Uzbekistan and the ASEAN member states. On the basis of experience of the countries of Southeast Asia with Uzbekistan, one can say that relations between Uzbekistan and the countries of Southeast Asia are unevenly developed and Uzbekistan did not maintain active relations with all countries of the region.*

**Keywords:** Uzbekistan, countries of Southeast Asia, foreign policy, development, economic relations, cultural and humanitarian cooperation, education, tourism.

### INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of relations between Uzbekistan and countries of South-East Asia, meetings of heads of state governments, inter-parliamentary cooperation, political activity of embassies and friendship societies, partnership relations between Uzbekistan and ASEAN member states have taken a new character. This study aims at identifying the results, achievements and problems of cooperation in the inter-State trade and

economic, political and cultural-humanitarian spheres, as well as opportunities to use the rich experience of these countries for further development in future.

A comparative analysis of the interaction with Uzbekistan and South-East Asian countries and role of their relations in the political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian spheres in 1991-2016 and from 2017 to the present has been conducted.

### ECONOMIC RELATIONS OF UZBEKISTAN WITH THE COUNTRIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

The end of the Cold War and the transition from a bipolar to a multipolar international system have strengthened the independence of the new states in Asia, opening up opportunities for an increasing role in contemporary international relations.

Uzbekistan, which has been strengthening its place in world policy in recent years is also broadening the geography of its international relations. Relations with Asia-Pacific countries, which constitute one of the main areas of the country's foreign policy, are in line with Uzbekistan's long-term national interests<sup>1</sup>. In this regard, the Government of Uzbekistan, taking into account the specific development and achievements of the countries of South-East Asia, which have initiated integration processes in the Asia-Pacific region, is paying particular attention to the establishment and development of cooperation with the countries of the region.

Uzbekistan has developed its foreign policy priorities since the early years of independence and in recent years has pursued an open, equal, constructive foreign policy. During the early period of Uzbekistan's independence, cooperative relations were established with the states of the ASEAN organization. Partnership relations have been established with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Republic of the Philippines, the Kingdom of Thailand in 1992, the Kingdom of Cambodia in 1995, the State of Brunei

Darussalam in 1996, the Federal Republic of Myanmar in 1997, the Republic of Singapore in 2007. The partnership focuses on political, trade and economic, cultural, and humanitarian relations. Uzbekistan's exchange of goods with the leading countries of the region have been increasing over the years. (Table 1).

TABLE 1  
EXCHANGE OF GOODS BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND LEADING  
ASEAN MEMBER STATES

No. Country	<i>(thousand US dollars)</i>		
	1997	2010	2019
1. Indonesia	1.8	90.3	44000
2. Malaysia	11.54	31.8	72400
3. Singapore	25.657	90.3	193500

Source: Asia-Pacific countries. <https://www.mfa.uz/uz/pages/with-asia-pacific> (15.06.2022)

By 2019, the volume of trade in Uzbekistan's economic relations with the leading countries in the region has increased. Judging from the table, Uzbek-Singaporean economic relations are more active than those with Malaysia and Indonesia. The presence of 32 joint ventures with Singaporean investment in Uzbekistan in the areas of electrical engineering, textiles, food, education, trade and mechanical engineering has increased the share in economic relations. Eight of these joint ventures are currently operating with 100% foreign investment<sup>2</sup>. Singapore is a member of the group of "new industrialized first wave countries"<sup>3</sup> (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong) in the Asian development model, or other words the "Asian Tigers", a prestigious country in global economic politics in the "Little Dragons" category. The state's GDP grew by 3.1 percent in 2018, with the ratio of total turnover to GDP at 215.0 percent<sup>4</sup>.

Uzbekistan's new President Mirziyoyev's official visit to Singapore in 2023 was an important step towards expanding bilateral political, trade and economic relations. Uzbekistan's trade turnover with Singapore has doubled, the number of enterprises with Singaporean capital in the country

has increased fourfold, and the amount of direct investment in Uzbekistan's economy has reached 700 million dollars<sup>5</sup>. Although these countries are important trading partners of Uzbekistan in the ASEAN organization, the above figures allow us to conclude that the level of opportunities and potential of both sides in foreign trade is disproportionate. Factors affecting this include:

*Firstly*, given that geographic position is an important determinant of foreign policy priorities and objectives<sup>6</sup>, factors such as the distance between Uzbekistan and Southeast Asian countries and the fact that almost all countries in the region trade by sea facilitate the development of mutual economic relations with Uzbekistan, which is twice landlocked from the sea.

*Secondly*, the economic crisis of 1997-1998 in Southeast Asia did not fail to affect trade relations with the Republic of Uzbekistan and the ASEAN states, and this situation was felt in mutual economic relations in the following decades.

*Thirdly*, problems such as a certain level of slowness on the part of representatives of responsible authorities and the business community in attracting foreign direct investment needed by Uzbekistan and the existence of certain barriers to the foreign investment mechanism until 2017 did not help the trade relations of both sides to reach high volumes. However, major Southeast Asian countries can play an important role in Uzbekistan's multidisciplinary foreign policy, especially in trying to diversify its economic partners to reduce its dependence on the two great powers of the region, Russia and China. In addition, the countries of the region can help Uzbekistan to be modernized and developed country<sup>7</sup>.

The development of relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and each ASEAN member state has specific goals and objectives determined by the political and economic context<sup>8</sup>. In recent years, the initiatives of the new Government of Uzbekistan to liberalize the economy and build a more open, internationally integrated, and competitive market economy, trade and economic relations with the countries of South-East Asia have led to a new level of development. There is active cooperation

with Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand in the economy, trade, investment, science, healthcare, and tourism, and with Vietnam and the Philippines in agriculture and fisheries, healthcare, and mutual cooperation. However, Uzbekistan's cooperation with Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Brunei Darussalam is still relatively weak due to the unstable foreign policy of these countries, and also because the majority of their economies are based on agriculture or the lack of diversification of the state economy.

In general, there are opportunities for further development of Uzbekistan's cooperation with the countries of Southeast Asia. In particular, the format "11+1" (South-East Asia+Uzbekistan) should be developed in the future, and official meetings of Uzbek and ASEAN heads of government should be organized, a road map for the development of political, trade, economic, and investment cooperation should be created, and the rich experience of Singapore and Indonesia in diversification and modernization of the economy, improvement of agricultural and fishing industries should be implemented.

## COOPERATION IN EDUCATION

In the context of globalization, international cooperation in the field of education is important for developing contacts, studying and applying in practice the rich experience of leading countries in this field, improving the quality of education in Uzbekistan and eliminating existing problems in this area. Cooperation with South-East Asian countries in the field of education is of particular importance in training the qualified personnel for the country's socio-political, economic and cultural life, in studying the experience of leading countries in that region and in introducing innovations in fields requiring much attention.

Leading universities in Southeast Asia established a branch of the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS) in Tashkent in 2008<sup>9</sup>. Although the university was recently established, it has gained positive results. While in the first year, 225 students were admitted to the

university, by 2020 the total number of students has reached 5,100<sup>10</sup>. Singapore has established an effective education and retraining system, and this has been hailed by the Times Educational Supplement (TES) as one of the best in the world<sup>11</sup>. In this regard, cooperation with Singapore will enable Uzbekistan to solve existing problems in education and science and improve the investment climate in the field of education.

One of the main areas of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Malaysia is education. A practical result of cooperation in this area has been the opening in 2021 of the first foreign university - a branch of "Binary" International University in Urgench. In addition, the Republican Higher School of Business and Management after the name Abu Rayhan Beruni and the Malaysian International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance, the Putra Business School, the Samarkand branch of the Tashkent State University of Economics, as well as the City University of Malaysia, the Berdak Karakalpak State University, and Lincoln University College in Malaysia have signed cooperation agreements with the Navoi State Pedagogical Institute and the Bukhara State University<sup>12</sup>. As a result of this cooperation, specialists in international management and entrepreneurship, banking, and marketing are being trained in Uzbekistan. In addition, there are Indonesian, Vietnamese and Malay language and cultural centers at institutions of higher education in Uzbekistan.

Higher education institutions in the region have a prestigious potential in international rankings such as the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings, Times Higher Education, Academic Ranking of World Universities. For this reason, exchange students and international students are keen to study at higher education institutions in the region. Singapore plans to attract more than 150,000 international students in future. This, in turn, generates \$2.4 billion for the country. Education spending in the country accounts for 20% of the national budget<sup>13</sup>. Malaysia has one of the world's top ten foreign student populations, according to UNESCO. There are currently more than 100,000 international students studying in Malaysia. In 2021 alone, more than 40,000 students from around 150 countries were enrolled in a Malaysian university<sup>14</sup>. This is a sign that the

education investment climate of these countries is excellent.

Today, 40 higher education institutions in the top 100 international rankings of South-East Asian countries have nostrified diplomas in Uzbekistan. This is because students from Uzbekistan have been studying at universities in these countries in recent years. However, the participation of researchers and scientists from Uzbekistan in scientific programs on scientific internships in states of this region, academic exchanges for experimental research, and the practice of defending master's, Ph.D., and doctoral dissertations are relatively slow compared to other countries (including leading European and Asian countries). The main reason for this is that the main focus of Uzbek applicants is on Western countries and some leading Asian countries. It should be noted that, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Brunei annually announce special scholarship and research programs. As a result, it is advisable to further develop and strengthen academic exchanges in the developed countries of South-East Asia in various fields of science and to open branches of leading higher educational establishments in that region, as well as joint faculties. It is also necessary to systematically strengthen educational ties with South-East Asian countries, to study the experience of a university education system with a high international ranking in the region and apply aspects of international standards to the Uzbek education system, as well as to develop the direction of academic exchange of professors and teachers in Uzbekistan. Relations should be established and developed between institutions such as the Imam Bukhari International Research Centre in Samarkand and the Centre of Islamic Civilisation in Tashkent, as well as the Abu Rayhan Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies of Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, the Imam Termizi International Research Centre in Termiz and relevant academic centers and universities in South-East Asia.

### COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM

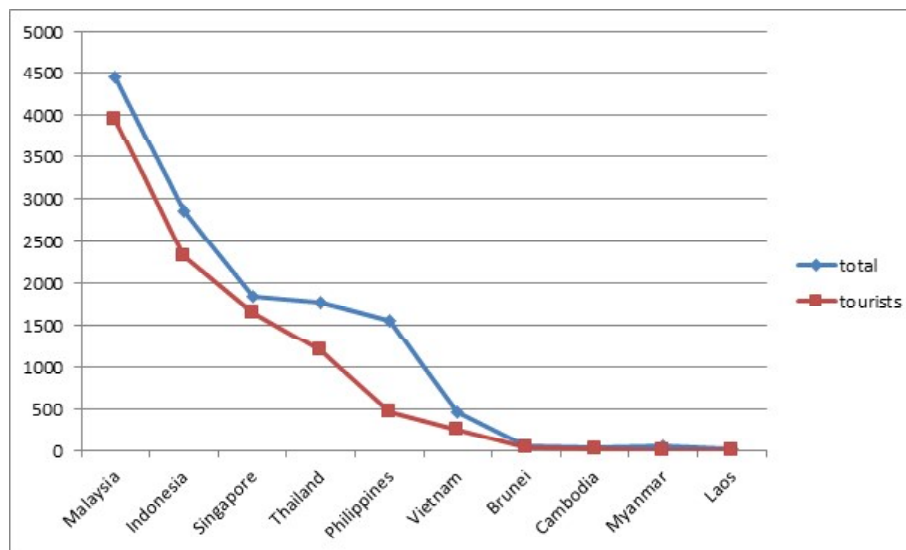
Tourism is one of the priorities of cooperation in Uzbekistan's relations with the ASEAN countries. Well-known architectural monuments in



historical cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and Shakhrisabz, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Common heritage of Islamic civilization, the beautiful nature and climate of Uzbekistan, and the hospitality of the Uzbek people have always attracted visiting tourists from the region.

In 2017-2019, the development of tourism in Uzbekistan reached a new level. In 2018 more than 60 projects of normative legal acts were developed to further develop the tourism sector in Uzbekistan, more than 50 of which were adopted. Tourists from South-East Asia make up the majority of visitors to the country from the Asian continent. The majority of those coming to Uzbekistan for the purpose of tourism are Muslim countries of the region (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1  
VISITORS TO THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN FROM SOUTH-EAST ASIA IN 2019 (PER)



Source: Compiled on the basis of data from the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan. *Socio-economic status of Uzbekistan. Tourist flow-2019*. <https://stat.uz/uz/default/choraklik-natijalar/9388-2019>. (05.08.2022)

This chart shows the proportion of people visiting Uzbekistan from Southeast Asia for various purposes in 2019. It can be seen that the majority of visitors come from leading countries of the region. In this regard, there

are more visitors from Muslim countries of the region, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, and fewer visitors from Laos and Myanmar. This involves the introduction of a 30-day visa-free regime in Uzbekistan for visitors from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand, and the introduction of flights to the Indonesian capital twice a week via the Malaysian city of Kuala-Lumpur from May 2019, the 2018-2019 edition of the Nakshband Tourism Festival international event on pilgrimage tourism, as well as Singapore's S.E.A. Business Centre Pte. LLC In cooperation with the (Uzbekistan-Singapore Tourism Centre), only one in the world, CASEA-InTouReC (Central and South-East Asia International Tourism Research Centre) has been established, which demonstrates the practical results of work in the field. However, the number of people coming from Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia for various purposes, especially tourism, is lower than from other countries in the region. This is due to the fact that no governmental and inter-ministerial agreements have been signed in the area of mutual tourism, no air service has been established, and the promotional work reflecting Uzbekistan's tourism potential in these countries is being carried out slowly.

In the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of Uzbek tourists visiting Malaysia. Uzbekistan has an airline directly to this state. There has also been an increase in the number of visits to Thailand, which is one of the world's top ten countries with developed tourism. The prices of air tickets are affordable and a wide range of promotional activities have been set up by travel agencies. However, Uzbeks fly through other countries to get to this state, due to the lack of direct air links, which is a problem for tourists coming from both states.

Since 2020, one of the global problems having a very strong impact on the world tourism sector, and the economies of all countries, is the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). From January to May 2020 only, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the global tourism industry lost \$320 billion in revenue. According to the World Tourism Organization, this figure is three times higher than the losses suffered by the industry as a result of the global financial and economic crisis in 2009.

The President of Uzbekistan adopted DP-6002 of 28 May 2020 “On urgent measures to support the tourism industry to reduce the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic” and DP-6165 of 9 February 2021 “On measures for the further development of inbound and outbound tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan”. This decree was an important step in the implementation of the set objectives, addressing existing problems and stimulating the industry based on the conditions of the pandemic.

The pandemic period also had an impact on tourism cooperation between Uzbekistan and South-East Asia. During this period, embassies were in constant contact with students and citizens who were in the host country. Charter flights were launched to repatriate citizens who had not been permitted to return to their homeland. As a result of joint efforts, Uzbekistan has developed further cooperation in the field of tourism with the countries of Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam. The embassies have made concerted efforts to promote pilgrimage tourism in Malaysia, one of the region’s Muslim countries. As a result of negotiations at various levels, agreements were reached on the organization of webinars and training courses for representatives of the Republic’s tourism industry, the holding of joint spiritual and educational events, the promotion of Uzbekistan’s tourism at Friday prayers in mosques in Malaysia, and the implementation of joint projects in the halal industry<sup>15</sup>.

In further development of cooperation in tourism, it is necessary to sign intergovernmental agreements in the field of tourism with the countries of Uzbekistan, Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as to expand pilgrimage tourism routes, organize tourist travel routes not only for Muslim countries of the region but also for Buddhists. It serves as an important basis for the development of relations in the field of tourism and the full strengthening of friendship between peoples.

## CONCLUSION

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Central Asian countries went through a considerable

historical and political transformation, but with very limited foreign policy experience<sup>16</sup>. In post-Soviet times Uzbekistan adopted a multilateral foreign policy.

Uzbekistan established diplomatic relations with the countries of Southeast Asia in the early years of independence. Uzbekistan has active cooperation with the countries of Southeast Asia, particularly with Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand. However, Uzbekistan's political, trade, economic and cultural ties with the states of Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia are not active compared to other countries in the region. This is because the economies of these states are agriculture-based and have unstable foreign and domestic policies. Uzbekistan has also established trade and economic relations with the countries of Southeast Asia, and joint ventures and projects have been carried out involving investments from these countries. There is scope for further development of this cooperation. In international formats such as "11+1" (South-East Asian countries and Uzbekistan) and international structures such as the UN, ASEAN, SCO, "One Belt, One Road", it is necessary to strengthen interaction in socio-political, economic and transport-communication spheres.

In the early years of independence, Uzbek scientists studied the advanced experience of the leading countries of South-East Asia in the field of science. The Uzbek Academy of Sciences' sectoral institutes and other research and higher education institutions of the country implemented joint projects, organised international conferences and internships with countries in the region as part of mutual academic exchange programs. However, there are still problems such as Uzbekistan's inability to form a strategy on cooperation between academies, the lack of short and long-term faculty and professor exchanges, and the fact that numbers on student exchanges are lower than the range of opportunities. It is advisable to develop mutual educational and academic exchanges with institutions of higher education in the field of pilgrimage tourism, telemedicine and information technology.

It is very important for Uzbekistan to study the experience of

developed countries in the tourism sector in this region. Uzbekistan is also visited by tourists from countries of the region. Pilgrimage tourism mainly leads the way. In return, Uzbek citizens also travel to major tourist areas in Southeast Asia. The failure to sign an intergovernmental agreement between Uzbekistan and the countries of the region to develop the tourism sector, the lack of direct regular flights to Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam, and the lack of promotion of Uzbekistan's tourism potential in Southeast Asia indicate that the parties are not taking full advantage of the opportunities available through cooperation.

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## UZBEKISTAN AND AZERBAIJAN: *Traditions of Strategic Partnership*

AZER ADYGEZALOV

### ABSTRACT

*The article, based on archival data from various ministries and departments, and scientific literature, reveals the main stages of the formation of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1991 and the opening of embassies, the implementation of high-level visits, 153 agreements have been concluded that contribute to the development of fruitful cooperation between the two countries in political and legal, trade and economic, transport and communication, cultural and humanitarian spheres.*

**Keywords:** Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, political and legal, trade and economic, transport and communication, cultural and humanitarian cooperation.

### INTRODUCTION

Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has been conducting its own foreign policy independently. It is based on such generally accepted principles as the priority of national and state interests of the country, the norms of international law, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, and the peaceful resolution of all disputed issues. The implementation of an active multilateral foreign policy that meets the national interests of Uzbekistan, is a necessary condition and the most important means of strengthening the sovereignty of Uzbekistan, overcoming economic difficulties and improving the lives of the people<sup>1</sup>.

Based on the strategy, principles and priorities of the country's foreign

policy, the Republic of Uzbekistan assigns a special priority and place to the close-minded State – the Republic of Azerbaijan-for establishing a political dialogue, developing mutually beneficial economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation and interaction. Relations between the Uzbek and Azerbaijani peoples go back to centuries. Historical and cultural parallels, common religion, the kinship of language, and proximity of traditions and customs have contributed to the establishment of fraternal relations between the two states. These factors explain the mutual interest of states in each other, as well as the natural desire to lay the legal foundation for interstate contacts and relations, almost from the very first days of gaining political independence.

### POLITICAL AND LEGAL RELATIONS

Meetings of heads of state play an extremely important role in the process of establishing the legal foundation of interstate relations. In this regard, it is worth noting that up to date, the leaders of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have carried out 14 high-level visits: 6 of them from the Uzbek side and 8 from the Azerbaijani side, including meetings during international events. The two countries signed 153 documents that contribute to the formation of multifaceted cooperation between the two states.

On October 19, 1991, a government delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan arrived in Uzbekistan headed by the then President A.Ñ.Ñ. Mutalibov. Its members were the Prime Minister G. A. Hasanov, the Deputy Chairman of the State Social Security Service R.A. Abasov, the Deputy Chairman of the State Economic Committee of Azerbaijan S.I. Taghizade. During the negotiations, a number of important documents, which are fundamental in interstate relations,<sup>2</sup> were signed and laid the foundation for mutual cooperation between states: The Agreement on the Principles of Interstate Relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan<sup>3</sup> and the Agreement between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Principles of Trade and Economic Cooperation for 1992<sup>4</sup>.



On February 26, 1993, a number of documents were signed in Tashkent: the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan on trade and economic cooperation for 1993; the Protocol of implementation of the agreements reached between the Government and the Central Bank of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government and the National Bank of the Republic of Azerbaijan on a technical loan in 1993; and the Agreement between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the procedure and terms for regulating debt obligations and claims for 1992<sup>5</sup>.

However, despite a number of agreements, this period is characterized by a decline in bilateral relations caused by the ill-considered and contradictory policy of the then leadership of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This cold snap contributed to the complete absence of diplomatic ties between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan until October 3, 1993. On June 1993 G. Aliyev was elected as the Chairman of *Milli Majlis* of Azerbaijan due to Elchibey's leaving Baku, he assumed the presidential authorities. On October 3, 1993 he was elected as the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Only after Heydar Aliyev's coming to power, Azerbaijan's political, economic and cultural ties with Uzbekistan were restored and began to develop fruitfully.

An important milestone in the development of mutual relations between the two fraternal states was the establishment of diplomatic relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan on October 2, 1995. Further, embassies were opened to conduct actively the interstate dialogue and lay the legal foundations for cooperation. The Embassy of Azerbaijan in the Republic of Uzbekistan was opened in June 1997, during the official visit of Heydar Aliyev<sup>6</sup>, and in July 1998 the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Azerbaijan was opened.

The next stage in relations between the two countries was the official visit of the first President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov to Azerbaijan on May 26-27, 1996. The visit was held in conditions of mutual understanding and friendship, and a package of agreements was signed between the

two countries, consisting of more than 20 agreements covering a wide range of cooperation<sup>7</sup>. The main and fundamental of them was the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan<sup>8</sup>, which marked the beginning of a close mutually beneficial and strategic partnership<sup>9</sup>.

During the visit of Heydar Aliyev to Uzbekistan on June 18, 1997, which gave a new impetus to bilateral relations, key issues of mutual relations between the parties were discussed, which served to further expand and deepen bilateral cooperation, and their fundamental legal foundations were laid. A distinctive feature of this visit is the conclusion of a number of significant interstate documents, totaling 19 agreements<sup>10</sup>, the main being the Declaration on the Further Development of Comprehensive Cooperation and Partnership Relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

On March 23-24, 2004, at the invitation of Islam Karimov, Ilham Aliyev paid a state visit to Uzbekistan. During the negotiations, a wide range of issues was discussed. The main objectives of these talks were to identify prospects and priority areas for the development of bilateral cooperation, primarily in the trade and economic sphere, exchange views on international and regional issues of mutual interest, as well as expand the legal framework of bilateral relations.

The Presidents drew attention to security issues, in particular, the joint struggle against international terrorism and drug smuggling. It was noted that the current conditions require joint coordinated actions in this direction. An agreement was reached to consistently continue consultations in practical cooperation<sup>11</sup>. The visit resulted in the signing of a Declaration on further strengthening the strategic partnership between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan<sup>12</sup>. This document testified to the launch of qualitatively new bilateral relations and their focus on the future.

On September 11-12, 2008, Islam Karimov arrived in Azerbaijan once again on an official visit. During this visit, 8 documents were signed, including 5 intergovernmental agreements and 3 interdepartmental

agreements<sup>13</sup>. The Presidents also exchanged views on the state and prospects of Uzbek-Azerbaijani relations, and international and regional issues of interest to the parties. They emphasized the similarity of positions of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan in the development of bilateral cooperation, which was especially evident in political issues. The two Presidents paid special attention to security issues, related to the joint struggle against such threats as international terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, and organized transnational crime.

Another step towards fruitful Uzbek-Azerbaijani cooperation was taken during the talks of the heads of state held in Tashkent on September 27-28, 2010. Following the talks, Islam Karimov and Ilham Aliyev signed a joint declaration between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan<sup>14</sup>, which provides for the development of relations on a number of issues covering energy, trade, industry, mechanical engineering, agriculture, transport, communications, as well as other areas. The Presidents stressed the importance of implementing the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project, as well as the development of logistics centers in Baku–Alat, Navoi and Angren.

An intergovernmental agreement on economic cooperation in 2011-2015, an agreement on cooperation between TV and radio companies, an agreement on cooperation between the Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan and the Institute of Architecture and Art of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, as well as a number of other documents indicating further strengthening of bilateral cooperation in various fields were signed<sup>15</sup>.

The next stage in the formation of bilateral relations was the official visit of Islam Karimov to Baku on October 11-12, 2012. During the visit, the Heads of State signed: Joint statement of the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov and the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev; Action plan for the implementation of the Economic Cooperation Program between the Governments; Cooperation Program between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan and of Azerbaijan for 2013-2015<sup>16</sup>.

The formation of the legal framework for cooperation between the two countries continued to develop rapidly in the following years. By

2016, the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan have signed 120 bilateral documents, including 60 international agreements of an interstate and intergovernmental nature, 28 international agreements of an interdepartmental nature, and 32 other documents<sup>17</sup>. By 2018, the two republics had already signed more than 130 documents promoting the development of fruitful cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan in various fields.

Since Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power, Uzbekistan's domestic and foreign policy has changed dramatically. The country's leadership set a course for developing and implementing a number of new ideas and principles for sustainable development of the country, developing good-neighborly relations and improving the image of Uzbekistan in the international arena, embodied in the Strategy of Actions on Priority Areas of Development of the country in 2017-2021 and continued in the Development Strategy for 2022-2026.

Researchers Frederick Starr and Svante Cornell give a fair assessment of the Development Strategy: "This strategy was the culmination of the process of evolutionary changes that took place in Uzbekistan for two generations, and marked the beginning of a fundamentally new stage in the country's development"<sup>18</sup>.

Taking into account the above-mentioned reforms, Shavkat Mirziyoyev's visit to Azerbaijan was a key development of Uzbek-Azerbaijani cooperation. On October 14, 2019, the head of Uzbekistan arrived in Baku to participate in the seventh summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (now the Organization of Turkic States). During the visit, the President of Uzbekistan met with the President of Azerbaijan. Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Ilham Aliyev discussed issues of expanding mutually beneficial cooperation and identified priority tasks for the future. Special attention was paid to establishing business contacts at the level of leading companies and entrepreneurs of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, as well as developing cooperation in industry, agriculture, transport and other key sectors.

An agreement was reached to activate the joint intergovernmental

commission and organize mutual visits of regional delegations of the two countries. At the end of the meeting, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening the Uzbek-Azerbaijani relations of centuries-old friendship and strategic partnership<sup>19</sup>.

The state visit of President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to Uzbekistan, which took place on June 21-22, 2022, opened a new milestone in bilateral relations. The visit began with the opening of a renovated Heydar Aliyev Street, a square and a memorial bas-relief in Tashkent. The President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev attended the ceremony.

The two Heads of State exchanged views on further expansion of the Uzbek-Azerbaijani multifaceted strategic partnership relations. Expressing deep satisfaction with the achieved level of mutually beneficial cooperation, Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted: "It is necessary to use the existing huge potential of cooperation, to use the factors of complementarity of the two countries' economies. In particular, they were invited to increase the volume of mutual trade, expand industrial cooperation, implement a number of projects in the machine-building, electrical, textile, wine-making, food, construction, oil and gas, petrochemical, pharmaceutical, agro-industrial and other sectors<sup>20</sup>."

They also noted the achieved joint projects that reflect the economic issues of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan: An agreement on the establishment of a joint investment fund to develop and promote promising cooperation projects; implementation of joint projects in free economic zones located on the territory of the two countries for exporting products to third-country markets.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway remains an effective mechanism for implementing these joint projects, and agreements have also been reached to improve its efficiency. The result of these measures is a specially created working group under the leadership of the Transport Ministers, which contributes to the timely elimination of obstacles to bilateral trade and transit of goods.

Agriculture is another promising area of bilateral cooperation.

Pointing out the opportunities, the concerned ministers were instructed to agree on a roadmap for creating a silk production cluster, promoting projects in the field of cotton farming, and introducing innovative development.

Direct inter-regional ties play an important role in expanding multifaceted cooperation. The parties agreed that in the near future the capitals and major cities of the two countries will establish partnership relations. Uzbekistan proposed to hold the first Forum of Regions and an exhibition of their industrial potential in Tashkent. It was noted that the expansion of cooperation in the field of tourism will also serve to further strengthen business and humanitarian ties. The Presidents supported the adoption of a separate program and the holding of a joint tourist fair.

The main and fundamental document signed as a result of negotiations between the Presidents Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Ilham Aliyev was the "Declaration on Deepening Strategic Partnership and Enhancing Comprehensive Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan"<sup>21</sup>. The comprehensive document covers about 40 areas of cooperation between the two countries, providing for the expansion of trade and economic cooperation, industrial cooperation, and the effective use of transport and transit potential. The parties expressed a common firm political will to establish a strategic dialogue at the highest level in order to identify current and promising areas of strategic partnership between the two states, as well as coordinate positions on issues of mutual interest<sup>22</sup>.

In the presence of the heads of state, 18 documents were signed between the governments, ministries and departments of the two countries. These are, in particular, agreements on cooperation between regions, in the field of industry, international road transport, combating illegal migration, quarantine and plant protection, on military and military-technical cooperation, as well as a program of cooperation in the field of tourism. These documents are intended to contribute to the deepening of practical cooperation in a number of promising areas of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan<sup>23</sup>.

In recent years the geopolitical importance of Azerbaijan in world politics as a bridge between East and West has significantly increased. Thus, Azerbaijan acted as an intermediary in the settlement of Turkey's relations with the Arab countries and Israel<sup>24</sup>. It is known that the gateway to Central Asia is Azerbaijan, which, as a result of the victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020), initiated the creation of the Nakhichevan-Zangezur corridor, allowing the reopening of Turkey to the Central Asian region<sup>25</sup>.

The importance of this initiative was proved by the First Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the trilateral format "Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan-Turkey" held in Tashkent on August 2, 2022. The format touched upon the Trans-Caucasus corridor and the project to connect it to the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad, contributing to the creation of a single transport artery from China to Europe, as well as bringing the trilateral trade turnover to \$7 billion. The meeting resulted in the adoption of the Tashkent Declaration.

So, a strong legal framework of Uzbek-Azerbaijani cooperation contributes to the development and comprehensive improvement of mutually beneficial relations between the two states in the future.

## TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Trade and economic ties are a priority of Uzbek-Azerbaijani cooperation, as they contribute to improving the living standards and well-being of the peoples of the two countries. Cooperation in this area is carried out in a free trade regime and includes a range of goods from various industries and agriculture. Over the past years, the governments of the two countries have done a lot in the trade and economic sphere.

An important mechanism regulating trade and economic cooperation is the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation (IPC) between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, established on February 26, 1998. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, 11 meetings of the IPC have been held so far (the last meeting

was held on August 1, 2022 in Tashkent). The IPC plays a significant role in the development of bilateral cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, being an effective tool for solving problems of mutual interest. Thanks to the work of the IPC, investment and interregional cooperation is developing, transport problems are being solved, ties between customs services are being strengthened, and cooperation in the field of innovation is reaching a new level.

On November 5-7 and December 3-5, 2010, national exhibitions of the achievements of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan were held in Tashkent and Baku, respectively. Thus, during the National Exhibition of Azerbaijan, products of 167 Azerbaijani companies and enterprises representing various sectors of the economy were demonstrated, and more than 40 documents were signed between Azerbaijani and Uzbek companies. In turn, during the National Exhibition of Uzbekistan, Uzbek and Azerbaijani companies signed 50 agreements, protocols of intent and memoranda of cooperation totaling \$37,2 million<sup>26</sup>.

Another important area is the establishment of relations between industrial enterprises and business circles of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. In February 2018, an Azerbaijani delegation headed by the President of the Confederation of Entrepreneurs' Organizations of Azerbaijan M. Musayev visited Uzbekistan. During the event, a business forum was organized with the participation of more than 20 representatives of large companies in Azerbaijan and 50 heads of enterprises in Uzbekistan operating in the fields of construction, trade, pharmaceuticals, printing, and ICT.

At the end of the business forum, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan and the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs' Organizations of Azerbaijan signed a cooperation agreement.

Within the framework of the visit of the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a round table was held on February 5, 2019 with the participation of ministries, departments, business circles and industry companies of the two countries. The Azerbaijani delegation led by the Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Sh. Mustafayev arrived in Tashkent



to discuss with the official circles of Uzbekistan the issues of activation and expansion of cooperation in the transport and communication, investment, trade and economic spheres.

The Azerbaijani delegation included the heads of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs' Organizations of Azerbaijan, and the Export and Investment Promotion Foundation. Representatives of Azerbaijan Caspian Shipping Company CJSC, Baku International Sea Trade Port CJSC, Azerbaijan Railways CJSC, AzerMash OJSC, Azershelk LLC, Alians Logistik and other organizations also took part in the round table.

The parties noted that the volume of trade turnover in 2018 amounted to \$43,95 million. Despite its growth by 50% as compared to 2017, it does not reflect the economic potential that Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan possess.

During the meeting, the Uzbek side expressed its readiness to consider the possibility of creating a joint production of electrical products, household appliances, and automotive industry in Azerbaijan, as well as to develop cooperation in the petrochemical industry within the framework of joint projects. The Azerbaijani side is also interested in cooperation in the production of electrical and textile goods, cotton and sericulture, production and distribution of carpets.

Subsequently, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan and the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs (Employers) of Azerbaijan signed a Memorandum of cooperation between the Khokimiyat of Kashkadarya region and the Azerbaijani construction company Matanat-A, as well as an agreement on the establishment of the Uzbek-Azerbaijani Business Council<sup>27</sup>. To date, the Business Council established in 2020 is successfully functioning, with 3 meetings already held (November 27, 2020, December 10, 2021, and February 24, 2023).

Cooperation in the oil and gas sector is also worth mentioning in the framework of bilateral cooperation. In 2016, a SOCAR delegation headed by the company's president Rovnag Abdullayev arrived in Tashkent to participate in the 20th anniversary exhibition and conference Uzbekistan

Oil&Gas-2016. Following the meetings, Uzbekneftegaz and Azerbaijan's state oil company SOCAR signed a memorandum of understanding on joint exploration and development of oil and gas fields and other areas of potential cooperation, and it was also planned to create a joint venture to introduce energy-saving technologies in the oil and gas industry of Uzbekistan. In 2019, Uzbekneftegaz and SOCAR expressed their intention to explore the possibilities of joint oil production on the Caspian Sea shelf. The parties signed road maps providing for the earliest possible transition to the implementation of SOCAR projects in Uzbekistan. Agreements were also reached to set up production of oil and gas equipment and components for drilling and capital repairs of wells in Uzbekistan. Uzbekneftegaz, SOCAR and BP Exploration (Caspian Sea) signed an agreement to conduct geological exploration in the Uzbek part of the Aral Sea, the Samsko-Kosbulak and Baiterek investment blocks of the Ustyurt region. At the same time, Uzbekneftegaz and SOCAR signed an agreement to increase hydrocarbon production at four fields in southern Uzbekistan using advanced technologies of the Azerbaijani company.

On December 15-17, 2021, Baku hosted the international exhibition of national products "Made in Uzbekistan", which is designed to promote Uzbek products in the Azerbaijani market, strengthen ties between Uzbek and Azerbaijani business circles, increase export volumes, etc. During the business mission, export and production opportunities of more than 80 Uzbek manufacturing companies in the textile, leather and footwear, silk, food, chemical, electrical, pharmaceutical, construction, furniture and machine-building industries were presented. More than 150 business meetings of Uzbek and Azerbaijani business communities in B2B format, company presentations, press conferences, as well as cultural and gastronomic programs were held within the framework of the event for the productive implementation of these tasks. As a result of the three-day exhibition, firm contracts were signed for \$13.5 million<sup>28</sup>.

The special significance and breakthrough nature of President Ilham Aliyev's state visit to Uzbekistan is confirmed by the Uzbek-Azerbaijani business forum in Tashkent, which brought together more than 100

representatives of government and business circles, organized on the eve of the high-ranking guest's visit in June 2022. The forum was organized by the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and the Export and Investment Promotion Agency of Azerbaijan. The parties discussed the prerequisites for further expansion of mutually beneficial partnership in such areas as petrochemical, chemical, electrical, textile, food, pharmaceutical, and jewelry, automotive and other industries. Consistent diversification of economic cooperation between the two countries will allow producers of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan to create new value chains and enter the markets of third countries together.

On the sidelines of the forum, participants met in B2G and B2B formats, culminating in the signing of agreements on the implementation of joint projects and trade contracts worth more than \$500 million, as well as 10 agreements on practical cooperation between the relevant ministries and departments of the two countries<sup>29</sup>.

The positive dynamics of Uzbek-Azerbaijani trade and economic relations is evidenced by an almost six-fold increase in trade turnover since 2016. The trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan in 2022 amounted to \$181.8 million, including: exports of \$132.3 million and import of \$49.5 million.

Main export items included: industrial goods (\$42.4 million), machinery and transport equipment (\$40.3 million), beverages and tobacco products (\$17.3 million), food and animals (\$14.4 million), services (\$5.5 million), chemical industry products (\$4.5 million), various finished products (\$3.8 million), non-food raw materials other than fuel (\$3.4 million).

The main import items are non-food raw materials, except fuel (\$20.4 million), industrial goods (\$13 million), food and animal products (\$5.2 million), chemical industry products (\$4.4 million), mineral fuel (\$3.1 million), services (\$2.4 million)<sup>30</sup>.

TABLE 1  
DYNAMICS OF TRADE TURNOVER FOR 2017-2022

	<i>millions<sup>31</sup> of US dollars</i>					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Turnover	32.4	47.1	73.8	83.7	118.8	181.8
Export	27.5	35.6	52.1	54.2	75.9	132.3
Import	4.9	11.5	21.7	29.5	42.9	49.5

Uzbekistan created 17 free economic zones (FEZs), as well as 47 industrial zones (PZS), which are considered drivers of the modern economy. On their territory, the most favorable preferential conditions have been created for investors and the production of textile, chemical, construction, furniture, food, electrical and other products in demand on the domestic and foreign markets<sup>32</sup> has been established. Today, there are 21 FEZs and 116 PZS functioning in Uzbekistan.

Azerbaijani investors are also making their own contributions to this process. By 2018, 84 Azerbaijani enterprises were operating in Uzbekistan, including 71 joint ventures and 11 enterprises with 100% foreign capital. The main areas of cooperation are trade, mechanical engineering and metalworking, finance and insurance, real estate operations, energy, services, jewelry production and repair, food industry, light industry.

At the beginning of 2023, 248 enterprises operating in Uzbekistan were registered with the participation of Azerbaijani capital, including 87 joint ventures and 161 enterprises with 100% foreign capital. Their main areas of activity are mechanical engineering and metalworking, energy, light industry, food industry, jewelry production and repair, finance and insurance, real estate operations, services, trade.

UzAutoMotors and SamAuto assembly lines opened in the Azerbaijani city of Hajigabul in September 2021. At the end of December 2021, the UzAuto production line moved to the second stage of production development. The plant launched the assembly of Chevrolet Damas, Labo, Lacetti, Tracker and Malibu cars<sup>33</sup>.

On December 15-17, 2021, Baku hosted the international exhibition

of national products “Made in Uzbekistan” to promote Uzbek products in the Azerbaijani market, strengthen ties between Uzbek and Azerbaijani business circles, increase export volumes, etc.

On February 24, 2023, the first Forum of Regions “Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan” was organized. Memoranda of cooperation were signed between the cities of Samarkand and Ganja, Khiva and Shusha, Bukhara and Lankaran, Kokand and Shaki, as well as 11 trade and economic documents in priority sectors of regional development. In order to finance projects within the framework of the Forum, an agreement was signed on the establishment of a joint investment fund with an authorized capital of \$500 million.

### COOPERATION IN TRANSPORT, COMMUNICATION AND LOGISTICS

On September 8, 1998, Baku hosted the most important event under the TRACECA program – an international conference on the topic: “TRACECA – Restoration of the Historical Silk Road”. Within the framework of the TRACECA conference, the first President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov visited Azerbaijan. Besides the organizer and initiator of the conference, Heydar Aliyev, and the first President of Uzbekistan, the conference was also attended by the leaders of Bulgaria, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine, heads of government, transport ministries and experts from 32 countries, as well as representatives of the European Commission, 12 representatives of international organizations.

Three documents were signed at the conference. The most important outcome of this conference was the signing of the “Major Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for the Development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia Corridor” (MLA) and its Technical Annexes on International Rail Transport, International Commercial Shipping, International Road Transport, Customs Procedures and Document Processing<sup>34</sup>.

The second document adopted on behalf of the participants was the Baku Declaration, which reflects the basic principles of comprehensive cooperation and regional integration between the Eurasian countries. In order to plan the work on the TRACECA project and coordinate its implementation, the international conference decided to establish special “headquarters” in Baku.

The third document was the official final communique of the international conference on the restoration of the historical Great Silk Road<sup>35</sup>.

The discussions held at the TRACECA summit focused on the importance of regional cooperation and economic integration of both the European Commission and its member states in Eurasia – the South Caucasus, Central Asia and the Black Sea regions, their expression of mutual interests and their contribution to international integration processes<sup>36</sup>.

Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan communication cooperation within the TRACECA framework is particularly noteworthy, thanks to the document signed in 1996 in the Iranian city of Serakhs between Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which promotes the creation of the Trans-Caucasus Transport Corridor connecting East and West<sup>37</sup>. In this direction, Uzbekistan is interested in using the Navoi – Turkmenbashi – Baku – Tbilisi – Kars railway transport corridor, which will connect the railways of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia with the Turkish network and provide access to the Mediterranean Sea through the port of Mersin.

A new stage in the development of multifaceted Uzbek-Azerbaijani relations in this area was the grand opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, held on October 30, 2017 at the Baku International Commercial Sea Port. The ceremony was attended by President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulla Aripov, the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Bakytzhan Sagintayev, the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili, as well as delegations from Tajikistan and Turkmenistan<sup>38</sup>.

The decree of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev “On measures to improving transport infrastructure and diversifying foreign trade routes for cargo transportation for 2018-2022”<sup>39</sup>, makes it clear that Uzbekistan is interested in participating in this transport project. According to the Decree, measures are being implemented to carry out pilot transit transportation of foreign trade cargo along the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway route. This program provides for Uzbekistan’s participation in the formation of a single transit corridor Azerbaijan – Georgia – Turkey – EU countries. Uzbekistan also considers this corridor as an opportunity to access the ports of Poti, Batumi and Chernomorsk, and then - to the countries of the Middle East and North Africa<sup>40</sup>.

Since the Baku – Tbilisi – Kars railway was put into operation, a large increase in container traffic has been recorded at the Baku International Trade Port. In January-September 2018, transshipment of 16,940 containers was registered in TEV equivalent. The volume of total transportation for 9 months of 2018 amounted to 2 803,8 thousand tons, 86% of these cargo shipments accounted for transit of 2 397,5 thousand tons<sup>41</sup>.

Given the instability of today’s world order associated with the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Western sanctions against Russia, and reciprocal Russian counter-sanctions affecting a wide range of interrelated processes, including energy resources and logistics, there has been significant increase in the strategic importance of the East-West Trans-Caspian Corridor (Middle Corridor). From an eastern point, the Middle Corridor runs from China to Kazakhstan and then reaches the Kazakh and Turkmen ports on the Caspian Sea, linking through maritime connections to ports in Azerbaijan. It then passes through the South Caucasus via Georgia before reaching Turkey and then the European Union. Today, countries in the Caspian and Black Sea basins consider the Middle Corridor an additional logistics network for China’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative and the EU’s Silk Wind project<sup>42</sup>.

During the Uzbek-Azerbaijani business forum held in Tashkent, on the eve of the state visit of President Ilham Aliyev in 2022, the ministers of

economy announced the introduction of specific measures to stimulate the increase in mutual and transit cargo transportation through the territories of the two countries, which will deepen Uzbek-Azerbaijani cooperation in the field of transport and logistics. The leadership of the two countries gives special priority to the development of transport and communication projects that contribute to bringing Uzbek-Azerbaijani relations to a qualitatively new level.

### CULTURAL AND HUMANITARIAN RELATIONS

The Azerbaijani diaspora in Uzbekistan clearly plays an important role in strengthening cultural and humanitarian cooperation. In accordance with the Decree of the President of Uzbekistan "On measures for further improvement of interethnic relations and friendly relations with foreign countries" dated May 19, 2017<sup>43</sup>, the Government of Uzbekistan continues to pay special attention to supporting the diaspora of ethnic Azerbaijanis, their comprehensive social, spiritual and cultural development. This, in its turn, allows preserving and developing the national culture, native language, customs and traditions of more than 41,300 Azerbaijanis.

There are 7 Azerbaijani national cultural centers operating in Uzbekistan, among which the leading place is occupied by the Azerbaijan Cultural Center named after Heydar Aliyev at the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Their activities are coordinated by the Association of Azerbaijani Cultural Centers established in 2003.

The leaders of the two countries sincerely value the existing relations in the cultural and humanitarian field. During the official visit of Ilham Aliyev to Uzbekistan on March 23-24, 2004, the opening ceremony of the Azerbaijan Cultural Center named after Heydar Aliyev was held in Tashkent. The opening of the cultural center was preceded by the assignment of the street where the cultural center named after G. Aliyev is located. In addition, during the official visit of Ilham Aliyev to Uzbekistan, a monument of the Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi and a new building of the Embassy of Azerbaijan were unveiled<sup>44</sup>.



In its turn, during the official visit of Islam Karimov to Azerbaijan on September 11-12, 2008, a monument of the great Uzbek classic Alisher Navoi was unveiled, and one of the streets of Baku was named after the world-famous ruler and scientist Mirzo Ulugbek<sup>45</sup>.

As part of Ilham Aliyev's visit to Uzbekistan in 2022, a renovated Heydar Aliyev Street, a square and a memorial bas-relief were opened in Tashkent. The ceremony was attended by Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Ilham Aliyev.

During the talks, the Heads of State also reached a number of agreements aimed at strengthening cultural and humanitarian ties, in particular, on holding Days of Culture and Cinema, strengthening contacts between universities, scientific institutions, sports and youth organizations.

Meetings between ministers and heads of departments also play an important role in the development of cultural cooperation between the two countries. The Minister of Culture of Uzbekistan O. Nazarbekov visited Azerbaijan in the framework of the International Baku Forum (2018), the World Forum of Intercultural Dialogue (2019) and the International Forum "Nizami Ganjavi: a bridge between cultures" (2021). On May 26-28, 2022, the delegation headed by the Director of the Agency for Youth Affairs of Uzbekistan A. Sadullayev visited Azerbaijan to participate in the "Technofest Azerbaijan" festival.

The tourism industry has always remained an integral part of cultural cooperation between the peoples of different countries, and Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan are also involved in this area. For example, on October 16, 2019, the Azerbaijan Tourism Association (AZTA) and the State Committee of Uzbekistan for Tourism Development signed a Memorandum of Cooperation within the framework of the VII Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States held in Baku. The memorandum implies cooperation in the organization of mutual tourist trips, creation and application of joint tourist products, as well as active promotion of tourist potential, in order to ensure the mutual flow of tourists. In addition, the document provides for the exchange of experience in the development of joint tourist routes and training<sup>46</sup>.

On May 23-24, 2022, the Deputy Minister of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan A. Abdukhakimov visited Azerbaijan to participate in the 7th meeting of the Ministers of Tourism of the AHS, and on June 27-29, 2022, he participated in the XI session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held in Azerbaijan.

Various music and vocal festivals and competitions held in the two countries also play a certain role in strengthening and further improving cultural relations between the states. At the International Makom Art Forum in Shakhrisabz (2018), the Azerbaijani representative Nigar Shabanova won first place, and at the XII Sharq Taronalari International Music Festival in Samarkand (2019), the Azerbaijani singer Parviz Gasimov won first place. In its turn, the representatives of Uzbekistan took part in the International Mugham Festival in Azerbaijan in 2017-2019 and took two first, four second and five third places<sup>47</sup>.

Culture and Film Days, literary weeks and other similar events are important in promoting the cultural heritage of the two countries and making it even more popular. On November 2-4, 2019, in the Khorezm region, on October 20-23, 2021 in the cities of Tashkent, Nukus and Urgench, on April 8-9, 2022 the Days of Culture and Literature of Azerbaijan were held in Termez; in September 2021, within the framework of the Tashkent International Film Festival "The Pearl of the Silk Road" - Days of Azerbaijani Cinema; on December 1-3, 2021, in Tashkent "The Week of the Works of Nizami Ganjavi and Alisher Navoi".

Literary relations between the two countries contribute to strengthening knowledge of the cultural heritage of the two countries, acquaintance with the works of Azerbaijani and Uzbek classics, and translation activities. By this means, the Uzbek public gets acquainted with the heritage of Azerbaijani literature, and the Azerbaijani public gets acquainted with Uzbek literature. For example, during the "Week of Works of Nizami Ganjavi and Alisher Navoi", the book *Alisher Navoi Hikmatlari* was published in the Azerbaijani language.

A special role in this area of cooperation is assigned to science and education. In this regard, it is worth noting the interaction between the

Academies of Sciences of the two countries, which coordinate the entire spectrum of scientific relations. The legal framework for cooperation between the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan and the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, as well as the State Committee of Uzbekistan on Science and Technology and the State Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Science and Technology was concluded back in 1996<sup>48</sup>.

Direct contacts between universities of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan also play an important role in scientific cooperation. In 2011, a delegation of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy visited Tashkent to establish close contacts with the faculty and teaching staff of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy; on December 18, 2013, a memorandum was signed between the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University (ASPU) and the Tashkent State Pedagogical University named after Nizami (TSPU); on April 25, 2014, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Academy of Arts of Azerbaijan and the Kamoliddin Behzod Institute of Arts and Design of Uzbekistan<sup>49</sup>. In July 2019, a Memorandum of Understanding in the field of education and science was signed between the Silk Road International University of Tourism in Samarkand and the Azerbaijan University of Tourism and Management; on November 20, 2019, a Memorandum was signed between the Azerbaijan State University of Oil and Industry (ASOIU) and the Tashkent State Technical University (TSTU). On April 12-19, 2022, 3 teachers and 5 students of the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan visited the Azerbaijan Theological Institute to give lectures.

Another vector in the development of humanitarian cooperation is physical training and sports. Athletes of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, participating in international and bilateral competitions, training camps, friendlies and matches, make their worthy contribution to improving humanitarian cooperation.

## CONCLUSION

Uzbek-Azerbaijani relations were at a fairly high level almost from the

very first days of the republics' independence. In the following years, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan tried to complement and expand interaction, which meets the fundamental interests of the peoples of the two countries, filling it with the spirit of brotherhood and friendship. The Uzbek-Azerbaijani cooperation has developed into a strategic partnership.

Thanks to the wise and far-sighted policy of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, based on economic liberalization and demonstrating Uzbekistan's openness to dialogue and cooperation, Uzbek-Azerbaijani relations have reached a qualitatively new level, covering a wide range of multifaceted cooperation and achieving the goal of bringing the state of trade turnover between the countries to \$1 billion over the next five years.

However, notwithstanding the significance of the success achieved in the development of Uzbek-Azerbaijani relations, there are some omissions. During the June 2022 meeting, the Presidents expressed dissatisfaction with the development of bilateral relations concerned with the incomplete use of the potential of both Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The Heads of State set priority tasks for the relevant ministries and departments:

There is the need to make full use of the vast trade and economic collaboration and increase industrial cooperation. For this purpose, it is advisable to pay attention to the increase in the number of trading houses, both in Uzbekistan and in Azerbaijan, the introduction of digital technologies in conducting trade operations and documentation, as well as the elimination of duties or their significant reduction in mutual trade turnover;

Secondly, the implementation of a number of large-scale transport and communication projects needs to be expedited. The development of new routes and vectors for the supply of energy resources of the two countries to the world market, using the territories of neighboring states, will significantly increase the level of trade turnover, both from direct economic interactions and from transit ones.

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## UZBEKISTAN - SINGAPORE RELATIONS

*GULRUH DJURAEVA*

### ABSTRACT

*The article discusses the features of the foreign policy of the state of Singapore. The peculiarity of the "Singapore miracle" is investigated. The article notes the useful aspects of Singapore's experience for Uzbekistan, which pursues a policy of modernization based on cultural values, within its own civilizational matrix.*

**Keywords:** International relations, Singapore, Asia-Pacific region, Southeast Asia, ASEAN, Uzbekistan, cooperation, foreign policy.

### INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia today is one of the most dynamically developing regions of the world, whose influence is constantly increasing. To a large extent, this is due to the fact that countries that have achieved high achievements are located here. The peculiarity of their development lies in the stability of growth rates, a reliable and solid basis for this progress. One of the leading states in this region is Singapore. The foreign policy of one of the leaders of ASEAN, Singapore, was initially aimed at active participation in regional and, as far as possible, in the global processes of the modern world. For a short period by historical standards, Singapore has turned into a highly developed and stable state.

The main reason for Singapore's political growth is, first of all, the right choice of a model of state development based on the development of various programs aimed at the rapid rise of the state with full consideration of all spheres of life. The merit of the Singapore government was to ensure

a stable socio-political situation in the country, which contributed to the rapid implementation of the tasks put forward by the government.

Of particular interest to us is the ability of the Singapore government to achieve its goals through gradual, step-by-step reforms, which in their approach are similar to the processes of renewal, improvement of welfare, spirituality, legal and political culture of the people carried out in Uzbekistan. In my opinion, Singapore's experience is interesting precisely because it indicates the possibility of active participation of the state in the adaptation processes.

Singapore actively supports the idea of creating free trade zones with the countries of Southeast Asia and with leading world leaders. Unlike Malaysia, the Singapore government adheres to the principle of developing economic cooperation and increasing the level of trade turnover not only with its ASEAN partners, but also with many other states. This position causes dissatisfaction with other ASEAN members, contrary to which Singapore tried to slow down the process of its integration into the global economy, expecting lagging ASEAN partners.<sup>1</sup>

Singapore pays great attention to security issues in foreign policy, in particular, the state initiated the formation of such a structure as the ASEAN Regional Security Forum. According to the Singapore government, it is necessary to break the monopoly of the UN Security Council, strengthen the importance of the UN General Assembly, as well as increase the role of small states in the activities of this structure. It is impossible to pay all attention to the issue of expanding the membership of the UN Security Council and nominating specific candidates, this cannot replace the entire process of reforming this organization.<sup>2</sup>

The researched and analyzed material gives reason to state that the small territory of Singapore did not deprive it of the opportunity to become one of the most active participants in the construction of the security architecture of the region in many areas.<sup>3</sup> This is due to Singapore's incredible desire to take a worthy place on the world stage.

Today, Singapore has reached a high level of development, primarily in the field of transport and communications, has a huge potential in the



areas of banking and finance, trade, and services.<sup>4</sup> It also holds leading positions in the field of high technologies, modern information and communication technologies. Significant results have been achieved in attracting foreign investments and investing their capital in foreign projects.<sup>5</sup>

The peculiarity of the “Singapore Miracle” is that in a historically short period of time it has turned from a poor country into a highly developed and stable state. The expediency of analyzing the origins of this success was based on the fact that:

Firstly, Singapore has chosen the right path of development from the very beginning of independence, has developed a deeply thought-out program. In this pragmatic model, serious attention was paid to the full coverage of all spheres of life, rigorous implementation of all planned areas into practice.

Secondly, Singapore has managed to provide a stable socio-political environment necessary for the implementation of the tasks set.

Thirdly, the definition of a comprehensively strong social policy as a priority has become a decisive factor in achieving the results.

Singapore has reached these milestones without revolutionary leaps, but in an evolutionary way, gradually and consistently following its goal. This fact also brings our states closer together. The State pays close attention to the issues of education and upbringing.

Singapore is a city–state that has achieved unprecedented success in just 50 years. And Singapore’s experience is interesting precisely because it indicates the possibility of active participation of the state in the adaptation processes. Singapore is a unique and vivid example of an effective economic policy of the Government of the country. Among the countries of Southeast Asia, Singapore stands out sharply in terms of the pace of development of its economy and the size of the gross product per capita. During the first ten years of independence, the GDP of the republic increased 3 times. The rapid flourishing of the state, practically devoid of mineral and raw materials resources, was largely due to the rational combination of modern forms of organization and management with the

social traditions of Asian society.

Common features of the cultural characteristics of East Asian countries include:

- respect and unquestioning submission to the authorities;
- high level of education (according to international organizations, the intellectual level of Singapore's youth is the highest in Southeast Asia);
- great diligence and diligence;
- team spirit and elbow feeling ("suivism");
- close family ties.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the study of Singapore's development experience, many politicians identify three key points thanks to which a state of this level has been built. First of all, it is such an important resource for building a state as a human resource. With this in mind, Singapore pays great attention to the development of education, teaching English. The second key point is the creation of development institutions to unlock the full potential of the state and the population. Singapore's authorities are the pillars on which the country's reputation is built. These institutions provide long-term confidence for foreign and domestic investors. The third key area is the country's leadership, which is a factor influencing all the others. The leadership gives a vision of the future, inspires people to unite. Strong leadership is the most important of these three key ones.<sup>7</sup>

The development of Singapore based on the concept of a "global city", taking into account its specific position as a city-state, allowed it to firmly enter the system of world economic relations and establish itself on the world stage, achieving a favorable attitude from both regional and non-regional states.

Despite its tiny size, Singapore is one of the most globalized countries in the world.<sup>8</sup> This is due to its enormous desire not just to fight for survival in modern conditions, where transnational corporations are gradually taking away the functions of regulation and control from nation states, but also to occupy a worthy place on the stage of global actors. Thanks to

the rational policy of the government, Singapore manages to maintain a leading position, which distinguishes this country from the rest of the countries of the Southeast Asian region.<sup>9</sup> Singapore is one of the most prosperous countries in the world. It is a small country with a population of less than 6 million people, but it has one of the most developed economies in the world, a high standard of living and innovative technologies. Singapore is a leader in e-commerce, biotechnology, and information technology, as well as in the development of “smart cities”.

### ESTABLISHING UZBEK-SINGAPORE RELATIONS

In the development of foreign relations, attention has recently been paid to the Central Asian republics, and in particular to the Republic of Uzbekistan, which from the first days of its independence has been striving to develop an active and long-term foreign policy strategy for various countries and regions. Of particular importance for Uzbekistan is Southeast Asia, which demonstrates impressive economic growth and is capable of becoming one of the pillars of a multipolar world in the future.

Firstly, the states of Southeast Asia are strategically important investors in the economy of Uzbekistan.

Secondly, Southeast Asia is extremely important for Uzbekistan in the light of its strategy to strengthen security on the Asian continent.

Studying the positive experience of ASEAN is important for Uzbekistan not only in terms of using it in ongoing initiatives for regional integration in Central Asia, but also in determining the tactics of relations with the countries of the Southeast Asian region individually, as well as with ASEAN and other regional organizations. It is advisable to consider this organization as an important partner of Uzbekistan, since it is one of the potential centers of the emerging multipolar world order.

Finally, the experience of Southeast Asian countries is becoming important for Uzbekistan in the light of its task to become one of the most competitive countries in the world.

Singapore is of particular interest to Uzbekistan, which in a historically

short period of time has managed to make a huge evolution and occupy an important position in world economic relations, while maintaining political stability and not losing its national identity. Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Singapore began in 1992, when the two countries established diplomatic relations. Since then, cooperation between Uzbekistan and Singapore has been developing in various fields, such as economy, trade, investment, education and tourism. Uzbekistan and Singapore are two countries far from each other, which have their own unique cultures, economic and political systems. However, thanks to the developing diplomatic relations, these two countries will be able to realize the potential of their cooperation.

Political relations between Uzbekistan and Singapore can be described as friendly and constructive. The two countries maintain diplomatic relations and mutually recognize each other as sovereign States. Over the past years, both states have consistently developed mutually beneficial cooperation based on mutual trust and respect. Political contacts at the highest level are maintained through regular exchange of messages, inter-parliamentary and inter-departmental ties are consistently developing.

Cooperation within the framework of international organizations is successfully carried out. Singapore supported the resolutions initiated by Uzbekistan within the framework of the UN General Assembly on “Strengthening regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in the Central Asian region” (2018), “Education and religious tolerance” (2018), “Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central Asia” (2019), “Declaration of the Aral Sea region as a zone of environmental innovation and technology” (2021), as well as the recently adopted resolution “Strengthening the role of parliaments in accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals” (2022). In turn, Uzbekistan also supports Singapore’s initiatives and candidacy within various international structures.

The interests of Uzbekistan and Singapore converge in the fight against international terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking, illegal arms sales. Both States express their readiness to carry out a joint struggle against

these threats to ensure stability and security in Central Asia and Southeast Asia. The Joint Statement also attaches particular importance to cooperation in the activities of such international and regional organizations as the UN, the IAEA, and the Asian Development Bank. Singapore supports Uzbekistan's initiative to declare Central Asia a nuclear-weapon-free zone, due to the fact that Singapore once played an important role in creating a similar zone in Southeast Asia. The interest of Singapore companies in working in our country is welcomed in Uzbekistan which is ready to create all the necessary conditions for them. The coincidence of the positions of Uzbekistan and Singapore on most key issues and the absence of any political differences contribute to the deepening of mutually beneficial cooperation. Singapore's experience is interesting for Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries from the point of view of the possibility of active participation in the adaptation processes even in the conditions of the global crisis.

### ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Singapore has an open and successful economic policy, which attracts investors from all over the world. Uzbekistan is also striving to strengthen its economy, with this in mind, cooperation in the economic sphere has great prospects. To date, more than 90 enterprises with the participation of Singapore capital are operating in Uzbekistan, including more than 10 joint ventures and 10 foreign enterprises in the field of electrical engineering, food, woodworking, education and trade. 10 representative offices of Singapore companies operating in the field of trade in cotton, yarn, grain, wood, food and telecommunications products are accredited in the republic. The total volume of investments from this country in 2016-2022 reached almost \$ 400 million.<sup>10</sup> Uzbekistan and Singapore are developing more than 20 major joint projects in the economy, oil and gas, and light industry.

During the state visit of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in early 2007, a package of intergovernmental and

interdepartmental documents was signed, which served as the basis for long-term and large-scale cooperation between our countries. In 2013, the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev visited Singapore, where he met with the leadership of the state and business representatives. He participated in an investment conference and delivered a speech at a seminar for representatives of Singapore and Uzbek companies.

Both sides are interested in expanding ties at various levels. For Singapore, cooperation with Uzbekistan will provide access to the markets of Central Asia and the CIS, and Uzbekistan, through this cooperation, gets the opportunity to develop relations with ASEAN, since Singapore is an active and authoritative member of this organization.

As a result of the visit, the legal framework of bilateral relations was formalized. The commonality of views on many regional and international problems, as well as the importance of mutual exchange of experience in the economic, scientific and cultural spheres, in the field of technology, are reflected in the adopted Joint Statement of Uzbekistan and Singapore. The meetings and negotiations held showed great interest of the parties in intensifying investment cooperation in the energy sector, electrical and petrochemical industries, in the field of information and telecommunication technologies, textile production, tourism, banking and financial sector, as well as in the process of privatization in key sectors of the economy. This was largely facilitated by the business forum of the two countries, which was attended by more than 220 Singaporean businessmen.

At the same time, the parties reached an agreement on the creation of the most favored nation regime in order to attract Singapore investments in such priority sectors of the economy as oil and gas, petrochemical and light industries, information and telecommunication technologies, electrical engineering, transport infrastructure, small business and private entrepreneurship, tourism, and others.

Within the framework of the signed Memorandum, mechanisms for holding consultations on issues related to the harmonization of legislation and methods of regulating foreign economic activity, as well as other measures aimed at improving the efficiency of mutual trade were

discussed. The dynamics of the development of cooperation between the two countries confirms that “the establishment of close cooperation with the countries of the South-Eastern region is one of the priorities of the foreign policy of Uzbekistan.”<sup>11</sup>

In early 2007, a delegation of the Singapore Institute of Management Development headed by Secretary General Dr. R. Davendran visited Uzbekistan to study the issue of opening a representative office of the Singapore Institute of Development in Uzbekistan. In September of the same year, a branch of the Singapore Institute of Management Development was opened in Tashkent.

On September 5, 2007, the Republic of Singapore completed domestic procedures for the entry into force of the Agreement on the Main Directions of Economic and Humanitarian Cooperation, which was previously ratified in Uzbekistan. At the end of September 2007, a delegation of Singapore business circles headed by the Ambassador of Singapore to Uzbekistan visited, during which a joint business forum and negotiations were held in the ministries and departments of the republic. In the autumn of 2008, as part of the visit of representatives of the Singapore company “Capital Land Commercial Ltd”, meetings were held in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Property Committee, and the *Khokimiyat* of Tashkent regarding the establishment of cooperation with Uzbek enterprises. During this period, a delegation of the company “Panasonic Industrial Asia PTE Ltd” visited in order to explore investment opportunities for participation in the project for the production of household and industrial electronics, as well as the supply of electronic equipment, to discuss the issue of establishing cooperation in equipping cars manufactured in the Republic of Uzbekistan with air conditioners manufactured by Panasonic.

In March 2014, Tashkent hosted the Uzbek-Singapore business Forum and cooperation exchange. Following the results of the business forum, the Uzbek-Singapore cooperation exchange was held, which was attended by representatives of the business environment of the two countries. Entrepreneurs and interested investors discussed in a friendly atmosphere

the most interesting and promising projects in such areas as alternative energy sources, mechanical engineering and services, in particular marketing, consulting and others. All participants expressed the hope that the fruitfulness of the negotiations will result in the signing of new contracts and agreements.<sup>12</sup>

In December 2016, representatives of the International Center for the Study of Political Violence and Terrorism at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (Singapore) participated in the presidential elections of Uzbekistan as an international observer. Based on the results of his activities, the Director of the Center, Rohan Gunaratna, stressed that Uzbekistan has a well-thought-out and developed on the best international experience electoral system that provides equal rights to all candidates and voters, which is one of the fundamental foundations of the principles of democratization of society.<sup>13</sup>

At the beginning of 2017, an agreement was signed on the establishment of a joint venture Indorama Kokand Fertilizers with the Singapore Indorama group of companies, for the development of a fertilizer production joint venture in Kokand worth more than \$ 80 million.<sup>14</sup>

The Singapore-based company Keppel Offshore and Marine has recognized Uzbekistan as a potential market for its shipbuilding services. It may begin construction of various types of vessels, including passenger, cargo and tugs, at the shipyards of Uzbekistan. In 2019, an agreement was signed between Uzbekistan and Singapore on the creation of a \$100 million joint investment fund. The Fund is aimed at the development of infrastructure, energy, telecommunications and other sectors of the economy of Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan and Singapore actively cooperate within the framework of regional economic integration processes, such as the SCO and ASEAN. Both countries support the development of interregional trade and economic cooperation. In March 2021, a meeting of the joint commission on economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Singapore was held, at which issues of strengthening trade and economic ties and attracting investment were discussed.



Also in 2021, an agreement was signed between the National Bank of Uzbekistan and the Monetary Authority of Singapore on cooperation in the field of financial technologies and cryptocurrencies.

In general, political relations between Uzbekistan and Singapore remain stable, and the visit of Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2023 provided a new impetus for the further development of cooperation between the two countries. The economic potential of Singapore and the availability of natural resources of Uzbekistan, its geographical location, the existing legal framework for investment and entrepreneurship, opens up wide opportunities for the development of bilateral relations.

Singapore's experience deserves a detailed analysis with subsequent reflection through the prism of its applicability to Uzbekistan. Despite the considerable distance and huge difference between our countries, the example of Singapore can be extremely fruitful on Uzbek soil. It does not seem entirely correct and rather one-sided to consider the Singapore experience mainly in the context of the fight against corruption, since, in addition to successes in this area, Singapore has reached significant heights in other areas of socio-economic development. The country's experience in the field of national relations, building a successful supranational civic identity based on the successes of socio-economic development and modernization, the ideology of building a common home for all nationalities, each of which contributes to the prosperity of the country, can be extremely interesting. Cooperation in the financial and banking sector. The expansion of links between financial institutions and banks can play a crucial role in promoting the growth of mutual investment and trade.

The availability of raw materials in Uzbekistan and high-tech industry in Singapore, backed by financial resources, is a prerequisite for the participation of Singaporean companies in the exploration, production and processing of hydrocarbons and other raw materials in our country. High potential efficiency of attracting investments from Singapore in the extraction and processing of non-ferrous and precious metals. There are large deposits of gold, silver, copper, molybdenum, tungsten, uranium

and other metals and polymetals in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan is interested in attracting Singapore companies doing business in the field of “hi-tech” to cooperation, since information and telecommunication technologies in Uzbekistan are developing at the fastest pace, and such companies receive the highest profits in Uzbekistan. The attractiveness of this sector is confirmed by the presence of the largest companies from Korea, Japan, Germany, Russia, China and other countries in the market of modern technologies of Uzbekistan.

### COOPERATION IN TOURISM, EDUCATION AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

Singapore’s experience is especially useful for Uzbekistan, which pursues a policy of modernization based on its own cultural values, within its own civilizational matrix. Singapore demonstrates to the world that the Anglo-Saxon ideological cliches replicated by the West about the “obligatory” connection between a democratic political regime, liberal values and economic prosperity are not universal. One should not simply copy the experience of Singapore, since the two countries have different histories, climatic, demographic, cultural conditions, as well as they are influenced by various external factors.

In 2015, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev visited Singapore, where he met with Prime Minister Lee Xien Loong. Issues of cooperation in the field of economy, investment and tourism were discussed at the meeting. Uzbekistan and Singapore also cooperate in the field of education. In 2019, an agreement was signed between Uzbekistan and Singapore on cooperation in the field of higher education, research and innovation. The agreement provides for the exchange of students, teachers and researchers, as well as joint research projects.

Over the past 20-25 years, cooperation between Uzbekistan and Singapore has developed in various directions, and education has become one of the key aspects of this cooperation. It should also be noted that Singapore has managed to build such an effective education and training

system, which was noted by the Times Educational Supplement (TES) As one of the best in the world, the study of Singapore's experience in this area is of great interest to our state. In addition, the Singapore Technological University (SUTD) operates in Uzbekistan, which was opened in 2019. SUTD provides education in engineering, data science, information technology, design and management.

There is also cooperation between the universities of Uzbekistan and Singapore. For example, the Uzbek-Korean Institute of Science and Technology cooperates with the National University of Singapore in the field of scientific research.

In 2021, with the support of the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Singapore, a new campus of one of Singapore's leading universities TMCI (Technology, Management, Communication) was opened in cooperation with the English University of Northampton. The new university specializes in teaching students in the field of information and communication technologies, business and economics, is equipped with modern educational and scientific laboratories, as well as distance learning facilities. It will also contribute to the professional development of local specialists and the creation of new jobs in the high-tech sector. Construction of the new University of Singapore in Tashkent is an important step in the development of education and science in Uzbekistan and contributes to the strengthening of partnership between the two countries.

Natural and climatic conditions, the presence of unique historical and religious monuments, as well as the operation of direct flights to all continents and major cities of the world and, accordingly, the existing conditions for tourism, skiing and recreation in the highlands, predetermine cooperation in the field of tourism as one of the promising areas of investment in the economy of Uzbekistan. A Singapore culture center in Uzbekistan was opened in 2016. The center is a place where one can get acquainted with the culture of Singapore, take part in master classes on traditional crafts and enjoy delicious Singaporean cuisine. It is also worth noting that Uzbek culture is also reflected in Singapore. Such cooperation will help strengthen friendly ties between Uzbekistan and Singapore, as

well as attract more tourists to both countries. This will contribute to the development of the economy and the creation of new jobs in the tourism industry. In 2019, a festival of Uzbek culture was held in Singapore, where traditional Uzbek crafts, music and dance were presented. In the field of healthcare, effective relations have been established between the Ministry of Health of Uzbekistan and the Singapore International Polytechnic Institute “Nanyang” on the implementation of the Public Health Management Program. Within the framework of cooperation in the field of healthcare, an agreement was signed between the Ministry of Health of Uzbekistan and the National Health Center of Singapore on cooperation in the field of medical education and research. The agreement provides for the exchange of experience in the field of medical education, research, clinical practice, as well as the organization of training and internships for medical professionals. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, health cooperation between Uzbekistan and Singapore has become even more important. This cooperation can lead to the creation of new methods of treatment and prevention of various diseases, as well as to the exchange of advanced technologies and medical knowledge.

In January 2023, President Sh. M. Mirziyoyev paid a visit to Singapore. This visit was aimed at strengthening diplomatic, economic and cultural ties between the two countries, and it was very successful. During the visit, five key areas of cooperation were identified, including: development of human capital and training of highly qualified personnel in the field of public administration; participation of the Singaporean side in the privatization processes in Uzbekistan; attracting advanced “green” technologies, digital solutions and opportunities to implement Singapore’s achievements in the field of digitalization; improving urban infrastructure and communications, urban planning, landscaping and utilities; supporting investments and expanding mutual trade by promoting joint projects with leading Singaporean companies.<sup>15</sup> This visit to Singapore is another step in strengthening the partnership between Uzbekistan and Singapore.

## CONCLUSION

In recent years, the Government of Uzbekistan has been carrying out large-scale reforms aimed at modernizing the economy, improving the investment climate, developing tourism and strengthening international relations. As a result, Uzbekistan has become attractive for foreign investors and tourists. One of the key success factors of Uzbekistan and Singapore is strategic planning and implementation of long-term goals. Both countries are also actively attracting talented specialists and innovative companies for the development of the economy and science. Uzbekistan welcomes the interest and activities of Singaporean companies in the country. Uzbekistan is ready to create comfortable conditions for the work of Singaporean companies in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan welcomes possible cooperation in the creation and management of specialized economic and export zones, which is supported by the integration of Uzbekistan's transport infrastructure with intercontinental transport corridors.

Today, Uzbekistan is embarking on innovative tracks and is rapidly implementing socio-economic reforms aimed at introducing innovations, developing a digital and "green" economy, the social sphere and the tourism industry. In this regard, the prospects of cooperation with Singapore, which occupies leading positions in world rankings, including in terms of economic freedom and travel safety, ease of creating and doing business, the development of biotechnology, being among the top ten countries in digital competitiveness and innovation potential, are significantly increasing. New opportunities are opening up for the two countries.

The visit of President Halima Yakub, which took place on May 23-25, 2023 to Uzbekistan, is a response to the state visit of President Of Uzbekistan to Singapore in January 2023.

Since the beginning of this year, the mutual trade turnover has grown 6 times. Singapore has become one of the largest investors in Uzbekistan. Currently, projects worth \$ 3.8 billion are being implemented in such areas as transport, energy, chemical and textile industries, urban planning, education and others.

During the visit, seven documents aimed at the development of Uzbek-Singaporean relations were signed.<sup>16</sup> Among them:

Memorandum of cooperation between the Governments of Uzbekistan and Singapore in the field of culture for 2023-2026;

Memorandum of cooperation between the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan and Singapore;

Cooperation program between the Ministries of Justice of Uzbekistan and Singapore for 2023-2024;

Memorandum of cooperation between the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Uzbekistan and the Singapore Tourism Authority;

Cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Uzbekistan and the Singapore National Association of Travel Agencies;

Agreement on cooperation between the Ministry of Economy and Finance of Uzbekistan and the Singapore Cooperation Agency on the development of entrepreneurship, as well as on joint work in the field of green economy;

Memorandum of cooperation between the Agency for Attracting Foreign Investment of Uzbekistan and the Singapore Business Federation.

During the talks, much attention was paid to further strengthening political dialogue and inter-parliamentary ties, mutual support within the framework of international organizations, implementation of training programs in the field of public administration, activation of contacts in the field of public security and cultural and humanitarian exchanges.

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