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UZBEKISTAN AS A LEADING INITIATOR IN CENTRAL ASIA

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a detailed analysis of the projects and initiatives implemented in the foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as the expected plans. It is proved by important facts that Uzbekistan is one of the leading countries in the Central Asian region as a country with an important geostrategic position. At present, the achievements of Uzbekistan as one of the key players in international relations and its work in establishing cooperation within the region are highlighted. In addition, the initiatives of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the process of consolidating peace in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the new stages of cooperation between the two countries were covered in detail.

Keywords: “Nowruz Summit”, Integration Processes, Economic And Humanitarian Cooperation, Transport Infrastructure, Regional Security, Potential Investors, “Road Map”, “Mazar-I-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar”.

INTRODUCTION

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

First of all, the arrival of ShavkatMirziyoyev as President of Uzbekistan had a positive impact on the environment in Central Asia. In other words, there has been a revival in relations between the countries of the region, which has not left out the attention of other major countries and organizations but has increased their interest in the region.

As a state in Central Asia, Uzbekistan has put forward major initiatives of regional significance, which have been warmly welcomed by neighboring countries. First of all, we have made great strides in resolving the border issues that have accumulated over the years with our neighbors Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. It has also radically changed the environment in the region and strengthened good neighborly relations. It is no exaggeration to say that this, in turn, will serve as a basis for Uzbekistan's initiatives in the region.

First, Uzbekistan has resumed integration processes in Central Asia that were stalled many years ago. President of Uzbekistan ShavkatMirziyoyev proposed to hold regular consultative meetings of Central Asian leaders in November 2017 as an important mechanism for strengthening regional cooperation and mutual trust, as well as for the timely resolution of existing problems, and this initiative was supported by the countries of the region. In particular, the first summit of Central Asian leaders was held on March 15, 2018, in Astana (now Nur-Sultan). The heads of state called the conference a consultative meeting. However, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow was unable to attend the meeting due to his visit to Qatar. In fact, it was a protest against Tajik President EmomaliRahmon, who refused to participate in the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway project. The date of the second consultative meeting dubbed the "*Nowruz Summit*", has been delayed due to similar disputes¹. The summit discussed issues of expanding political, trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation, joint fight against terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling, strengthening security and stability. It was recognized that Central Asia is not only a geographical and geopolitical, but also a unique cultural and civilizational space.

One of the important practical steps in the implementation of the initiatives put forward by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan ShavkatMirziyoyev from the rostrum of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly is the International Conference "*Central Asia: one past and a common future, cooperation for sustainable development and mutual prosperity*" in Samarkand on November 10-11, 2017. It was attended by delegations led by Central Asian foreign ministers, high-ranking official delegations from the CIS, Europe, Asia, and the Americas, heads of more than 10 international organizations, as well as more than 100 foreign experts and media representatives. At the conference, the President of Uzbekistan proposed the establishment of associations of governors and business circles of the Central Asian border areas. This initiative is currently reflected in the development of interregional cooperation in border areas.

On June 22, 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*" initiated by President ShavkatMirziyoyev. The document was co-authored by 55 countries in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa, and the resolution was unanimously supported by all UN member states.

The resolution recognizes the important role of the Central Asian states in ensuring peace and sustainable development in the region, as well as in strengthening regional and international cooperation.

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

On November 29, 2019, the Second Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Leaders was held in Tashkent. An important aspect of the meeting was the participation of the leaders of all countries in the region. This will play a special role in addressing the various issues between these countries and finding effective solutions. The Presidents of Central Asian countries discussed issues of transboundary water use, development of transport infrastructure, border regulation, and regional security. During the talks of the Second Summit of the Heads of State of the region, the President of Uzbekistan also put forward an initiative to hold an international tourism conference and create a single tourism brand in Central Asia.

The consultative meeting in Tashkent demonstrated that Uzbekistan continues to pursue the path of renewal and regional cooperation. The next meeting of the region's leaders is scheduled for Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic and the political crisis in Kyrgyzstan, the date is being extended.

Second, to ensure security and stability in Central Asia, Uzbekistan is actively involved in resolving the conflict in neighboring Afghanistan, calling on other countries in the region to cooperate. Significant agreements on mutually beneficial cooperation have been signed with this country, and practical work on new economic projects is underway. Pacific Afghanistan gives Central Asian countries access to ports in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, and connects Central and South Asia with European markets in a cheaper and more convenient way.

To stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, a high-level Tashkent international conference on "*Peace Process, Security Cooperation, and Regional Partnership*" was held on March 27, 2018, at the initiative of President ShavkatMirziyoyev. The conference was attended by President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Muhammad Ashraf Ghani, UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto, as well as the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Turkey, Russia, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Saudi Arabia, and heads of Foreign Ministers of the United Arab Emirates and representatives of 25 countries and International organizations.

Following the conference, the Tashkent Declaration was signed. This document embodies the noble goals of ensuring peace and security in the region, strengthening cooperation in all areas, and further expanding good neighborly relations.

Uzbekistan will continue to develop relations with Afghanistan and will continue to take an active part in international efforts to resolve the situation in this country peacefully. The Uzbek side supports the recovery of the Afghan economy and the development of its transport, manufacturing, energy, and social infrastructure. Indeed, a stable and prosperous Afghanistan is one of the key factors of regional security and stability in Central Asia.

As the coronavirus pandemic, which is now a global issue, began to enter the region, in mid-March 2020, President ShavkatMirziyoyev spoke by telephone with leaders of neighboring countries. He called for cooperation and close assistance to neighboring Afghanistan².

Third, Uzbekistan is offering new markets to its neighbors. In other words, new opportunities are being sought to connect Central Asia directly with South Asia through transport and communication projects. In this regard, Uzbekistan is scheduled to hold a conference in Tashkent on 15-16 July this year on "*Central and South Asia: Regional Interdependence. Threats and*

Opportunities” was initiated by a high-level international conference. It provides a strong impetus to discuss all issues and put them into practice.

February this year has been rich in high-level meetings on the implementation of the above issues. On February 2, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev received a delegation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan - Minister of Foreign Affairs Muhammad Hanif Atmar and Head of the Presidential Administration Mohammad Shaker Kargar. The parties stressed the importance of speeding up the preparation and implementation of the project, the active involvement of foreign partners and potential investors on the basis of the adopted “road map”³. On the same day, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev received Adviser to the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Abdul Razak Dawood on 2 February. The Adviser’s initiative to build a railway project that would connect Central and South Asia via Afghanistan as the shortest route, provide access to Pakistan’s seaports and ensure the efficient operation of their infrastructure is evaluated and supported in Pakistan⁴.

After that, the Uzbek Foreign Minister began working trips to Central Asia. On February 17, 2021, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov met with the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Rashid Meredov. On February 18, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan was received by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and met with the Deputy Prime Minister - Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tileuberdi. On the same day, the Minister was received by the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon⁵. The three-day visit of the Uzbek Foreign Minister to Central Asia has ended in Tajikistan. During the talks with the heads of state, in addition to the bilateral agenda, the issues of developing economic ties with Afghanistan and South Asia were discussed.

The talks in Ashgabat, Nur-Sultan, and Dushanbe focused on the prospects for the development of multilateral cooperation in Central Asia, the implementation of infrastructure and transport, and communication projects to enter new regional markets. This is important for Tashkent, which is developing its products. In addition, it was agreed to launch a new project in the Republic to build a railway from Afghanistan to Pakistan – “*Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar*”.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov, who arrived in Kabul on a working visit on February 23, 2021, was received by the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani and met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Hanif Atmar. On February 25, in New Delhi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of India Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. On February 27, he held talks with Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov and Foreign Minister Ruslan Kazakbayev⁶. The main topic of the meetings was the new opportunities for transport corridors connecting Central and South Asia. This is in the interests not only of Uzbekistan but also of the two neighboring countries, which will increase the diversity of foreign economic relations.

The new trans-Afghan railway will provide access to Pakistan’s seaports of Karachi, Qasim, and Gwadar and connect the South Asian railway system with the Central Asian and Eurasian railway systems. This will help increase Central Asia’s transit capacity, attract significant freight flows, and restore the region’s historic role as a bridge connecting Europe and Asia by the shortest land route.

In short, the initiatives put forward by Uzbekistan serve the interests of all Central Asian states. They also play an important role in the peaceful, mutually beneficial, and long-term development of the region.

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