

# Central Asia, European Union strengthen multilateral cooperation



**On September 30, an international virtual conference took place on “Central Asia and the EU: Multilateral cooperation to achieve sustainable development of the Eurasian region”.**

The event, organized by the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan together with the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation branch in Central Asia, was attended by representatives of foreign policy departments, heads and leading experts of analytical and research centers of the EU, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

The participants of the conference exchanged views on the state and prospects for development of mutually beneficial cooperation between the Central Asian countries and the EU in ensuring security and sustainable development of the Eurasian region, enhancing multilateral interaction in the Afghan direction.

First Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, A. Nematov, noted that today Central Asia is a kind of exemplary model of multilateral cooperation. It is turning into a region of opportunities, its investment, tourism attractiveness and economic power are growing.

According to the expert, thanks to the multilateral cooperation based on mutual respect, consideration of each other's interests and mutual benefit, an atmosphere of mutual trust has formed in Central Asia, a systemic dialogue is maintained, and mutually beneficial cooperation is developing. Thus, compared to 2016, the inflow of foreign direct investment to Central Asia increased by 40%, amounting to \$37.6 billion in 2019. The trade turnover of Central Asia with the third countries in 2019 increased by 56% and reached \$168 billion. The number of tourists visiting the Central Asian countries in 2019 exceeded 18 million. This is 93% more than in 2016. The volume of the region's GDP is also growing. In 2019, regional GDP grew by 19.6% compared to 2016 and amounted to \$302.8 billion.

Referring to the UN forecasts, the expert noted that mutually beneficial cooperation in the region will increase the regional GDP in the next ten years by two times.

As A. Nematov emphasized, against the background of a decrease in production and consumption in all countries of the world, disruption of global production chains, the Central Asian and EU countries need to consolidate efforts to enhance trade and economic ties and investment cooperation, strengthen energy and transport interconnection. The geostrategic location at the “junction” of Europe and Asia, the resource and human potential of Central Asia makes the region attractive as a key link in global chains of production and supply of competitive goods to the EU markets.

In this regard, he pointed to the timeliness and relevance of the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to create a Regional Centre for the Development of Transport and Communications under the auspices of the United Nations. This will create a common platform for formation of a single, ramified and outwardly integrated transport space in Central Asia, its connection with the Trans-European transport network, which will significantly strengthen the relationship between Asia and Europe.

Speaking with the support for multilateral cooperation, B. Yaroshevich, Head of the Central Asian Countries Administration of the European External Action Service noted that the European Union welcomes the new dynamics of regional cooperation in Central Asia, is actively restructuring its foreign policy taking into account the new realities in the region. According to him, the adoption of the new EU Strategy for Central Asia and the Strategy for development of interconnection between Europe and Asia testifies to the firm

intention of the European Union to move to the practical implementation of the existing potential of mutually beneficial multilateral cooperation, both in Central Asia and between the European Union and the region.

Chief Research Fellow at Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, M. Laumulin, emphasized that when implementing the new Strategy in Central Asia, the European Union should take into account those colossal changes in interstate relations in Central Asia that have been taking place in recent years in politics, economy and culture, but “do not move on the rolled rails”. As promising areas, the expert pointed to the attraction of technology and investment in transport, energy and economy, in which the EU has advanced experience.

According to a Senior Researcher at the National Institute of Strategic Studies of Kyrgyzstan, K. Toktorbaev, by introducing well-known European technologies and know-how in Central Asia, Europe can contribute to the disclosure of trade, economic and investment potential of the region. “Central Asia has not only mineral resources, but also great opportunities for the export of goods with high added value”, he said.

Director-General of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, D. Moradian, noted the significant contribution of the Central Asian countries to the advancement of the peace process in Afghanistan and restoration of the country’s peaceful economy. According to the expert, the approaches of the Central Asian states and the EU to form an inclusive government in Afghanistan based on democratic principles of the country’s development meet the interests of the Afghan people and will contribute to ensuring sustainable and long-term peace in Afghanistan.

#### **Source**