

Dialogue Without Borders: How Central Asian Countries Are Strengthening Cooperation



“The future of our region is shaped by every state of Central Asia. A solid foundation and a guarantee of its sustainable development and prosperity lie in the readiness and sincere desire for cooperation, as well as in the shared responsibility of all Central Asian nations for their common future. Our main goal is to jointly turn Central Asia into a stable, economically developed, and prosperous region.” These words, spoken by President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev back in 2017, resonate with particular significance today.

In recent years, the leaders of the five Central Asian countries have reaffirmed their strong commitment to deepening and expanding regional cooperation across all areas. Political trust and mutually beneficial collaboration have become the cornerstones that have enabled the countries of the region to address challenges independently and to build their own effective model of interaction.

Speaking at the 80th anniversary session of the UN General Assembly, the President of Uzbekistan noted that the countries of the region had achieved their strategic goal of transforming Central Asia into a space of peace, good-neighborliness, and partnership. “Today, the process of forming a New Central Asia has begun. Owing to its unity, stability, and growing regional identity, it occupies an increasingly solid place in the system of international relations as an independent actor,” Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized.

These words reflect the key outcome of the countries’ consistent joint efforts: today, Central Asia is no longer a space of unresolved disputes and conflicts, but a new space of cooperation and creation.

The Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia – an initiative put forward by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2018 – have become a key platform for shaping the new architecture of the region. They have proven their effectiveness as a forum for open dialogue, the exchange of initiatives, and the launch of joint projects that have visibly transformed the region. Today, the summits are held on an institutional basis and rely on regulatory frameworks designed to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of high-level meetings.

An important step in this direction was the adoption, at the second summit in 2019, of the Rules of Procedure for organizing the Consultative Meetings. This document introduced greater structure to the

format, institutionalizing regular meetings of foreign ministers as well as expert working groups as mechanisms for comprehensive preparation ahead of the Central Asian Heads of State Summit.

Another significant milestone in strengthening the institutionalization of regional cooperation was the establishment of the Council of National Coordinators for Consultative Meetings in 2023, an initiative proposed by Uzbekistan. The new body is intended to serve as a permanent mechanism for preparing and ensuring the coordinated implementation of high-level agreements.

At the same time, inter-parliamentary cooperation has been expanding, dialogue on security matters has intensified, and sectoral meetings along with various thematic forums on trade-economic and cultural-humanitarian issues have been taking place. All of this is shaping a new political architecture of the region, built on the shared interest of the countries in sustainable development.

Uzbekistan's chairmanship, conducted this year under the motto "A New Central Asia: A Space of Unity, Stability, and Prosperity," marked a new stage in the development of regional cooperation, fully reflecting the philosophy of regional renewal. It made an important contribution to improving the Consultative Meetings format. Notably, for the first time the work was carried out on the basis of a Chairmanship Concept, which imparted a more systematic and strategic orientation to the process. Key priorities were agreed upon and an annual action plan was developed, ensuring coordinated efforts among all countries and enhancing the effectiveness of practical cooperation.

This approach has proven particularly relevant in an era of global uncertainty, where strengthening unity and mutual support has become Central Asia's main resource – its foundation for resilience in the face of external challenges and an essential condition for long-term growth.

It is also worth noting that Uzbekistan's chairmanship this year was guided by key strategic documents, above all the Concept for the Development of Regional Cooperation "Central Asia-2040" and the roadmap for the development of regional cooperation for 2025-2027 adopted to support its implementation. These documents codified the principles of openness, inclusivity, a focus on sustainable development, and mutual benefit, providing clear guidance for Tashkent's chairmanship.

Comprehensive Strengthening of Political Dialogue

The modern world is facing a set of global challenges — a deficit of trust and diplomacy, the intensification of geopolitical rivalry, the growth of protectionism, the escalation of sanctions confrontation, and an increase in conflict potential. Under these conditions, the countries of Central Asia are demonstrating an example of forming an indivisible security space, based on the principles of equality, mutual respect, and consideration of the interests of all states in the region.

Uzbekistan, consistently developing systemic and multi-level contacts, is creating platforms for open and constructive interaction. One of the key priorities of Uzbekistan's chairmanship has been the comprehensive strengthening of political dialogue as the foundation of trust and mutual understanding among the Central Asian states.

It was during the chairmanship that the work of the Council of National Coordinators was brought to a qualitatively new level. Its first meeting was held in January of this year in Tashkent, establishing a regular channel of interaction at the expert level. In particular, within the framework of this mechanism, more than twenty expert meetings were held, which ensured continuous support for the consultative format and made it possible to give regional cooperation institutional substance.

The chairmanship not only consolidated the course toward maintaining continuity in cooperation formats but also gave them new content. In particular, in September of this year, the third Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Central Asian Countries was held in Bishkek, during which measures to harmonize legislation in the areas of trade, environmental protection, and security were discussed, as well as initiatives for the development of youth and cultural exchange. Special attention was devoted to the role of parliaments in

ensuring the transparency and coherence of foreign policy decisions.

Recently, Tashkent hosted another meeting of the Central Asian Women Leaders' Dialogue, where a wide range of issues related to the expansion of women's roles in the political, economic, and social life of the region was discussed. As a result of the meeting, the Tashkent Declaration was adopted, recognizing significant regional efforts to promote women's rights, gender equality, and sustainable development in the Central Asian countries.

The year of Uzbekistan's chairmanship was also marked by regular meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which became an important tool for aligning positions and strengthening coordination. In particular, during UN Week, joint events involving the foreign ministers of the Central Asian states were held, and on the eve of the summit, another meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers took place, which ensured the practical preparation of key regional initiatives.

A significant result of the joint work on promoting regional cooperation this year was Tajikistan's accession to the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighborliness, and Cooperation for the Development of Central Asia in the 21st Century, signed following the Cholpon-Ata meeting in 2022. This document has particular importance, as it establishes long-term guidelines for cooperation, and the completion of its signing by all states of the region in the near future will allow the spirit of mutual trust and strategic partnership in Central Asia to be fully consolidated.

The current year has also been indicative in terms of the growing role of analytical centers and research institutions in the region. In August of this year, Tashkent hosted the next meeting of the Central Asian Expert Forum, which is gradually becoming a "laboratory of ideas" and a key platform for developing conceptual recommendations and proposals for the further advancement of regional cooperation. For the first time, a comprehensive analytical report was presented at the forum, summarizing the outcomes of previous meetings and offering a systematic vision of the region's development prospects.

During Uzbekistan's chairmanship, the architecture of regional security was also significantly reinforced. The discussion of security-related issues at the level of Secretaries of Security Councils, heads of security services, and ministers of defense has become a key element of the new format of cooperation.

The second meeting of the Security Council Secretaries, held in April of this year in Samarkand, focused on a wide range of current threats — in particular, combating terrorism, extremism, radicalization, and transnational organized crime, as well as environmental and transport security and the development of the region's transport and transit potential.

During the meeting, Uzbekistan presented a draft Concept of Regional Security and Stability in Central Asia, prepared on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The document affirms the central role of the Central Asian states in maintaining peace and sustainable development, reflects a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to security, and highlights openness to partnership with all interested parties. In essence, the Concept lays the foundation for developing coordinated actions aimed at effectively addressing common challenges and threats.

In turn, the first meeting of the heads of security services, held in Tashkent, made it possible to discuss the development of unified approaches to assessing modern threats and enhancing the effectiveness of joint responses, including issues of cybersecurity, intelligence sharing, and coordination of preventive measures.

Cooperation in the field of security was also raised to a new level. In October of this year, Samarkand hosted the first meeting of the defense ministers of the region's countries, which became a logical continuation of these efforts. Moreover, work continued on conducting joint military exercises aimed at strengthening defense readiness and enhancing interaction among the armed forces of the Central Asian states. At the Kattakurgan training ground in the Samarkand region, the "Birlik-2025" exercises were held,

during which military personnel carried out training and combat tasks using artillery, drones, armored vehicles, and other types of weapons. These maneuvers are intended to strengthen unity and peace in the region and to promote the development of practical cooperation in the field of defense.

Joint Efforts to Identify and Activate New Drivers of Economic Cooperation and Growth

The countries of Central Asia are gradually moving from political consolidation toward practical steps aimed at forming a unified economic space. The foundation of this process lies in the complementarity of their national economies and a shared interest in sustainable growth. The region possesses enormous combined potential, including a large consumer market, industrial and production capacities, a substantial labor pool, and a rich natural resource base. Effective use of these opportunities can transform the region into one of the most dynamic centers of economic growth and investment activity in Eurasia.

Considerable attention was devoted to implementing the initiatives of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, aimed at shaping a new model of regional economic partnership. This model is based on the principles of coordinated development; the free movement of goods, services, investments, and labor within the region; the creation of a unified industrial space with advanced cooperative value chains; and the introduction of innovative mechanisms for joint project financing.

Active work within the framework of Uzbekistan's chairmanship focused on giving these initiatives concrete substance. In particular, in November, Tashkent hosted the first meeting of the Council of Ministers of Trade and Investments of the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan. This event became an important step toward institutionalizing regional economic dialogue, strengthening practical cooperation in the areas of trade, investment, and industrial cooperation, and implementing joint initiatives to increase mutual trade turnover and establish cooperative production facilities. Additionally, the third Interregional Cooperation Forum was held recently, designed to ensure the practical implementation of the agreements reached.

These meetings created the basis for systematic work aimed at eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers, harmonizing technical regulations, and ensuring mutual access to public procurement. Together, these efforts are forming real mechanisms for accelerating economic growth and enhancing the investment attractiveness of the region.

Industrial cooperation has become one of the key areas of collaboration. At the Astana Summit, the Action Plan for the Development of Industrial Cooperation for 2025–2027 was approved, and its phased implementation began this year. The states agreed to create a unified database of investment projects, develop mechanisms for financing joint initiatives, and prepare proposals for establishing an industrial cooperation fund. For these purposes, the first meeting of ministers of industry was held in Dushanbe in June of this year.

It should be noted that Central Asia is already demonstrating stable industrial growth at a rate of around 6 percent per year, which is twice the global average. This is facilitated by the launch of joint ventures and investment funds (Uzbek–Kyrgyz, Uzbek–Tajik, and Kazakh–Kyrgyz), as well as the development of projects in the automotive industry, electrical engineering, textiles, and agriculture. Border trade zones and international industrial cooperation centers are actively developing, stimulating the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The economic results of recent years confirm the effectiveness of the chosen model. The combined GDP of the region's countries has increased almost 2.5 times over eight years, reaching \$520 billion, while foreign trade has doubled to \$253 billion. Intra-regional trade has doubled, exceeding \$11 billion, and mutual investments have grown 5.6 times. Experts believe that eliminating the remaining barriers and fully digitalizing customs procedures could double trade volumes in the coming years.

The consistent implementation of Uzbekistan's initiatives and the coordinated actions of the region's

states are creating a solid foundation for forming a Single Regional Market of Central Asia. As part of this work, a Unified Industrialization Map is being developed, providing for the creation of short value chains, the launch of joint production facilities, and the attraction of leading international companies.

Enhancing Transport Connectivity and Strengthening the Transit Potential of the Region

At the current stage, Central Asia has a unique opportunity to regain its status as a key transport and transit hub of Eurasia. The region's geographical position—linking East and West, North and South - creates favorable conditions for the development of stable trade and logistics flows. Within its chairmanship, Uzbekistan has been actively promoting a systemic approach to strengthening transport connectivity, encompassing both intra-regional linkages and the integration of the region into international transport corridors.

A crucial dimension of this effort has been the harmonization of standards and the digitalization of the transport sector, as well as the improvement of procedures at border checkpoints. The introduction of a unified digital platform for managing transport flows at border crossings with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan has already reduced cargo transit time by 25 percent.

Uzbekistan is currently advancing a number of transport and logistics projects that will enhance Central Asia's attractiveness as a transit hub within the major East-West and North-South international corridors. These projects include the development of multimodal transport routes such as "China - Central Asia - Caucasus - Europe," "Belarus - Russia - Kazakhstan - Uzbekistan - Afghanistan - Pakistan," and "Uzbekistan - Turkmenistan - Iran - Türkiye," as well as the construction of the "China - Kyrgyzstan - Uzbekistan" and "Uzbekistan - Afghanistan - Pakistan" railway lines.

A significant development in strengthening cooperation in this sphere was the first meeting of transport ministers of the Central Asian countries, held in Dushanbe in September 2023. The meeting resulted in the signing of a Joint Communiqué on cooperation in the field of transport and logistics, as well as an Agreement on Enhancing the Connectivity of Land Transport. These documents established the legal foundation for creating a unified regional transport space and forming multimodal corridors.

Further momentum for integration was provided by the Sixth Summit in Astana, at which key directions for the development of the regional transport system were agreed upon. The outcome included the signing of a Memorandum on Cooperation in the Sphere of Transport and Logistics Centers and the adoption of the Astana Communiqué following the Second Meeting of Transport Ministers of Central Asia.

This year, Uzbekistan's chairmanship strengthened the practical implementation of these initiatives. In the Tashkent region, the multilateral "Great Silk Road Business Cooperation Forum" was held under the theme "Cooperation Without Borders," bringing together governments and the business community to advance joint transport and logistics projects.

The Third Meeting of Transport Ministers of the Central Asian Countries also took place within the chairmanship, during which priority regional projects were agreed upon to reinforce intra-regional connectivity and enhance the integration of the region into the international transport system.

Regional Cooperation in Water, Energy, and Climate Issues

Amid rapid climate change, Central Asia is increasingly facing mounting challenges, including water scarcity, land degradation, and growing energy demand. These processes affect key sectors that form the backbone of the region's economies and necessitate the development of coordinated, long-term, and evidence-based solutions.

At the same time, the interconnection of water, energy, and food systems offers new opportunities for joint growth. The region possesses significant potential in renewable energy, abundant agricultural resources, and broad opportunities for the introduction of digital technologies. The development of a comprehensive

model based on the rational use of these resources has become a strategic priority for regional cooperation.

Within the framework of its chairmanship, Uzbekistan initiated the development of a Comprehensive Sustainable Development Program for Central Asian Countries, which will include measures to improve water-use efficiency, implement water- and energy-saving technologies, and promote innovation in the agricultural sector.

Additionally, in April of this year, Samarkand hosted the first-ever Central Asian Climate Forum. The forum provided a platform to discuss strategic initiatives aimed at combating climate change and ensuring green and sustainable development in the region.

During the forum, it was noted that, at the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, the “Green Development” Concept for Central Asia is being developed. This document encompasses a wide range of measures for climate change adaptation and is planned to be presented at the COP30 Climate Summit currently taking place in Brazil.

A significant milestone in this direction was the International Scientific and Practical Conference on “Water Diplomacy in Central Asia: Trust, Dialogue, and Multilateral Cooperation for Sustainable Development,” held in Tashkent in April. During the conference, the Concept for the Rational Management of Regional Water Resources was presented. The document provides for the development of coordinated mechanisms for managing transboundary rivers, data and technology exchange, and the implementation of digital monitoring systems based on principles of mutual benefit and respect for the interests of all states. In this way, water diplomacy is evolving not only into a tool for dispute prevention but also into a factor of trust and sustainable development, strengthening the foundation of regional partnership as a whole.

Equally important remains cooperation in the energy sector. In January, the second meeting of the region’s energy ministers was held, during which readiness was confirmed to gradually form a self-sufficient regional energy market.

Central Asian countries are gradually developing a unified climate vision, which includes green growth, sustainable construction, carbon footprint reduction, and the rational use of natural resources. Uzbekistan has taken the initiative to create a Regional Platform for Green Development and Innovation, which will unite the efforts of governments, the private sector, and the expert community to promote green technologies and climate adaptation.

Cultural and Humanitarian Partnership: Developing Youth Potential and Fostering a Central Asian Identity

Central Asia is one of the oldest cradles of human civilization. Over millennia, the shared historical roots of the region’s peoples have shaped and transmitted values of tolerance, humanism, peacefulness, and hospitality. Today, this heritage serves as an important resource for cultivating a regional identity, especially among the younger generation, inspired by the region’s great history and unique cultural legacy.

In recent years, the frequency of joint cultural initiatives has significantly increased. These include Cultural Days, film festivals, creative intelligentsia forums, and “Friendship Evenings,” which help build strong public support for the economic and political rapprochement of the region’s countries.

In the near future, the launch of the International Media Platform “History and Culture of Central Asia: One Past, One Shared Future” is planned, along with the development of joint media projects, including regional TV and radio channels and online resources promoting people-to-people rapprochement. The practical implementation of these initiatives was demonstrated at the Second Central Asian Media Forum, held this year in Astana. The forum facilitated experience exchange and strengthened networks of young journalists and media specialists across the region, creating a platform for promoting cultural values and a shared identity.

Regional sports projects have also become an effective tool for integration and fostering a sense of unity. International competitions such as “Challenge Samarkand” and the Central Asian Badminton Championship, held in Uzbekistan this year, have reinforced the spirit of cooperation. Notably, the achievements of neighboring countries are increasingly celebrated as shared successes. A vivid example is Uzbekistan’s historic qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which sparked waves of joy and pride across all Central Asian countries.

Under Uzbekistan’s chairmanship, active preparations are underway for the Meeting of Ministers of Culture of Central Asian Countries and the Tourism Forum, scheduled to take place before the end of the current year as part of the “Tourism Week.” These initiatives aim to strengthen intercultural ties, develop tourism, and promote the principle of “One Tour – the Whole Region,” thereby expanding business and cultural contacts across Central Asia.

An important step in the educational sphere was the proposal made by the President of Uzbekistan at the last summit to adopt an Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Diplomas from Leading Universities in Central Asian Countries. This initiative will pave the way for creating a unified educational space, allowing young specialists to continue their studies or work in neighboring countries without unnecessary bureaucratic barriers. For a region with a median age of 29, this is particularly significant. Such measures expand opportunities for youth and contribute to the development of a shared regional identity. In this context, the Scientific and Practical Conference held under the auspices of the Central Asian Expert Forum, dedicated to the formation of regional identity as a strategic priority, is especially noteworthy.

Together, these initiatives contribute to the unique phenomenon of the “Spirit of Central Asia” - a spirit of friendship, unity, and solidarity. Young people engaged in educational, cultural, sports, and tourism initiatives are gradually becoming ambassadors of friendship and cooperation, laying the foundation for long-term peace, sustainable development, and strengthened unity among the peoples of the region.

RESULTS OF UZBEKISTAN’S CHAIRMANSHIP

The year of Uzbekistan’s chairmanship has marked a significant qualitative shift in regional cooperation—towards deepening institutionalization and strengthening the legal and contractual foundations of regional collaboration.

In this context, the numerous “Central Asia Plus” (C5+) meetings held throughout the year with leading international actors have also played a crucial role. These actors are key in shaping the global agenda. This year alone saw the summits CA-EU, CA-China, CA-Russia, and CA-USA, reflecting the growing dynamism and strategic importance of the region on the global stage. An increasing number of “Central Asia Plus” dialogues have reached the level of heads of state, demonstrating their rising practical significance and political weight.

Equally noteworthy is the progress in border delimitation and demarcation, which remains one of the most important factors for regional stability. A landmark example of responsible and mature diplomacy was the signing on March 31 of the Tripoint Agreement on State Borders between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. This agreement finally resolved long-standing disputes in the Fergana Valley, paving the way for a new level of trust and regional cooperation.

Another important milestone of Tashkent’s chairmanship was the Fergana Peace Forum, held in October. The Forum adopted a Communiqué calling for societal consolidation and strengthened regional cooperation. As noted by the President of Uzbekistan in an article published ahead of the 7th Advisory Meeting, “The Fergana Peace Forum has become a vivid demonstration of our countries’ mutual commitment to strengthening peace and harmony in the Fergana Valley, reflecting the constructive processes taking place in Central Asia.”

The consultative dialogue initiated by the heads of state has fully justified itself, elevating regional

cooperation to a qualitatively new phase of development. Naturally, challenges remain that require time and coordinated efforts. However, the established legal and contractual framework provides a sustainable and enduring basis for interaction.

The Central Asian regional model relies on consensus and coordinated decision-making - decisions are made in the interests of the entire region rather than individual countries. The key drivers of this process remain political will, trust, and mutual support, which, together with the legal framework, create a solid foundation for further deepening cooperation.

As the President of Uzbekistan emphasizes, Central Asia is entering a new historically significant stage of its development: “Today we are moving towards genuine unity. For the first time in many years, our region is witnessing an atmosphere of trust, good-neighborliness, and mutual respect, which forms the basis for joint progress.”

“This process is not spontaneous; it is the result of the deliberate work of the leaders of our countries, who recognize a shared destiny and the potential for joint development, as well as a broad societal demand for effective regional cooperation. In many respects, Central Asia can become a unique model of regional collaboration and an example for other regions of the world,” stressed Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

The new spirit of trust and mutual understanding cultivated during Uzbekistan’s chairmanship provides a robust platform for further expansion of practical cooperation, joint implementation of strategic initiatives, and the construction of an interconnected, sustainable, and prosperous Central Asia—our common home, where shared interests, development, and security are priorities for all countries in the region.

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