

Eldor Aripov: Central Asia is open to multilateral cooperation with Japan



On March 6, an expert dialogue titled “Central Asia + Japan: Current Trends and Prospects” was held in Astana.

The event was organized by the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (KazISS), in collaboration with the Embassy of Japan in Kazakhstan and Maqсут Narikbayev University. The dialogue brought together representatives from leading analytical centers and academic circles of Central Asian countries and Japan.



In his speech, ISRS Director Eldor Aripov emphasized that “Japan is a reliable and time-tested partner. It is difficult to overestimate Tokyo’s contribution to ensuring the sustainable and progressive development of Central Asia”, he stated.

According to him, “since the independence of Central Asian countries, Japan’s official assistance to the region has exceeded \$5 billion. These funds have been allocated to implement socially significant projects, support for economic and administrative reforms, and the region’s integration into global economic

relations”.

It was noted that several vital projects in healthcare, education, energy, transport, and telecommunications have been launched through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). As an example, the Uzbek-Japan Innovation Center of Youth and the Uzbekistan – Japan Center for Human Development were established in Uzbekistan.

The expert also highlighted the active development of trade and economic cooperation. According to him, since 2000, Japan’s trade turnover with the region has increased sixfold, from \$400 million to \$2.4 billion in 2024.

“The institutionalization of dialogue has played a significant role in achieving such high levels of cooperation between the countries”, Eldor Aripov emphasized. “Japan became the first country to initiate the “Central Asia – Japan” dialogue at the level of foreign ministers in 2004. This platform has proven to be effective for discussing cooperation in various fields. Essentially, Japan set the precedent for creating “Central Asia Plus” formats, encouraging other partners to follow its example”.

Expressing satisfaction with the results of the cooperation, the ISRS representative stressed the need for further development. In his view, Central Asia’s positive transformations open new prospects for expanding multilateral collaboration.

Referring to the words of the President of Uzbekistan, Aripov quoted: “Today, this is a different Central Asia – united and strong, open to dialogue and full-scale partnership”.

In light of regional development priorities, the ISRS Director proposed considering several promising areas of cooperation that require the joint efforts of Central Asian countries and Japan.

First, Eldor Aripov emphasized that promoting joint industrial cooperation projects is becoming particularly relevant. Cross-border trade and industrial zones, bilateral investment funds, and large-scale industrial initiatives are already successfully operating in Central Asia. The expert paid special attention to the Action Plan for the Development of Industrial Cooperation for 2025-2027, which Central Asian leaders approved in August last year. This document opens new opportunities for cooperation with foreign partners, including Japan.

Mr. Aripov described Japan as a global leader in science and technology and a promising partner for introducing innovations into the region. He highlighted the importance of establishing a mechanism for transferring Japan’s expertise in high-tech development.

Second, according to the ISRS Director, the growing population of Central Asia, which has increased by 20% over the past decade, reaching 80 million, highlights the importance of human capital development. He noted that the region’s young demographic (with an average age of under 30 years) presents significant opportunities for the education market, where Japanese partners can explore new prospects.

Eldor Aripov emphasized that more than 50 branches of foreign universities are already successfully operating in Central Asia, and the region’s countries are actively working to establish a unified educational space.

The expert proposed expanding cooperation with Japan in education, focusing on training highly qualified specialists.

Third, Eldor Aripov emphasized that enhancing resilience and adapting to climate change remain key priorities. He noted that Central Asia is particularly vulnerable to climate change, as temperatures in the region have risen by 1.5 degrees Celsius over the past 30 years, which is twice the global average.

By 2050, the region could face a 30% water deficit. More than 90% of water resources are used for irrigated agriculture, where water losses exceed 50%.

According to the ISRS Director, Japan can significantly strengthen the region's resilience to environmental challenges by sharing innovative solutions in the agricultural sector, smart farming technologies, and water resource management.

Fourth, Eldor Aripov emphasized that a balanced and consistent green transition is becoming a priority for Central Asia. He noted that the region has significant potential for renewable energy. For example, Uzbekistan alone can produce 500 gigawatts of solar energy, 100 gigawatts of wind energy, and 10 gigawatts of hydropower.

It was highlighted that Central Asian countries have adopted the regional Green Agenda to develop a unified approach to implementing clean energy sources. Given Japan's achievements in this field, Mr. Aripov sees excellent prospects for cooperation by introducing Japanese energy- and resource-saving technologies into the region.

According to Mr. Aripov, implementing these measures will enhance the resilience of Central Asia, allow the region to fully leverage its internal potential, and create new opportunities for cooperation with Japan.