

# The Multidimensional Foreign Policy of New Uzbekistan



In today's rapidly changing world, Uzbekistan confidently positions itself as one of the key players on the international stage. The country's foreign policy, reinvigorated with the election of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as President in 2016, demonstrates impressive results, transforming the republic into a significant center for regional and global diplomacy.

The foreign policy of New Uzbekistan showcases remarkable versatility and dynamism, grounded in principles of peace, mutually beneficial cooperation, and openness to the world.

## **Key Aspects of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy:**

- **Regional Cooperation:** Uzbekistan actively fosters relations with all Central Asian countries, striving to enhance regional security and economic integration.
- **Global Partnerships:** The country is expanding ties with major world powers, such as the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union, as well as international organizations and financial institutions (UN, SCO, CIS, OTS, BRICS, World Bank, ADB, EBRD, etc.), strengthening cooperation in various fields.
- **Multivector Diplomacy:** Uzbekistan pursues a balanced foreign policy, refraining from aligning with any single country or bloc.
- **Economic Diplomacy:** Special attention is given to developing trade and economic relations, attracting foreign investments, and modernizing the economy.
- **Cultural and Humanitarian Engagements:** Uzbekistan actively participates in international cultural events, promoting intercivilizational dialogue.

Uzbekistan's foreign policy is based on the norms and principles enshrined in the Constitution, as well as in laws such as "On the Basic Principles of Foreign Policy Activities of the Republic of Uzbekistan," "On International Agreements of the Republic of Uzbekistan," and "On Defense." It also adheres to Uzbekistan's Military Doctrine, the principles of the United Nations, and obligations arising from

international treaties and agreements ratified by the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan.

In 2023, the new edition of the Constitution introduced several updates defining the main principles of foreign policy.

Notably, it was established that Uzbekistan prioritizes strengthening and developing friendly relations with the international community based on cooperation, mutual support, and peace with neighboring countries.

The principles of state foreign policy were further enriched in Article 17 of the Constitution with the rule of “territorial integrity of states.” Article 18 underscores that the Republic of Uzbekistan conducts a peaceful foreign policy aimed at fostering bilateral and multilateral relations with states and international organizations.

In 2016, under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan formulated a new, comprehensive foreign policy doctrine. This doctrine outlines Uzbekistan’s vision and approach to pressing global and regional security issues, modern challenges and threats, and the formation of a new world order.

The doctrine emphasizes multifaceted cooperation with developed nations, grounded in equality, mutual respect, trust, and consideration of each other’s interests. Particular focus is given to maintaining consistent political dialogue with leading countries in Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Africa, as well as reputable international organizations.

Among the key principles shaping the new foreign policy course are:

1. **Pragmatism:** A defining feature of Uzbekistan’s modern foreign policy is pragmatic engagement with both traditional partners and countries near and far.

In this context, Uzbekistan’s foreign policy is guided by internal development priorities, including sustaining high economic growth, modernizing and ensuring sustainable development, improving living standards, and achieving full integration into global economic structures.

These goals are pursued alongside large-scale domestic reforms, supported by a regional strategy that emphasizes closer ties with neighbors and coordinated planning within international organizations such as the UN, SCO, CIS, WTO, EAEU, and others.

**2. Multilateralism:** Uzbekistan consistently promotes the principle of multilateral engagement in its foreign policy activities. The country advocates constructive globalization processes and equitable international cooperation based on dialogue, mutual trust, and respect for each other’s interests.

This principle stems from the transnational nature of contemporary challenges, including the socio-economic aftermath of the epidemiological crisis, terrorism, transnational crime, food crises, poverty, and global climate change. Addressing these challenges requires collective effort.

Recognizing this, Uzbekistan actively shapes both regional and global agendas, building collaborative mechanisms to address challenges affecting the safety, prosperity, and sustainable development of the international community.

**3. Proactivity:** The country emphasizes proactive foreign policy, distancing itself from the role of a passive observer in regional and global processes.

Uzbekistan’s increased initiatives in various forums, the mutually beneficial nature of its proposals, and their focus on solving issues of collective interest underscore the nation’s active engagement in international relations.

**4. Openness:** A significant characteristic of New Uzbekistan’s foreign policy strategy is openness. Declaring dialogue with the people as a key principle of governance has encouraged greater public

participation in the country's political life.

Public involvement in shaping the foreign policy agenda has grown, alongside the diversification of actors engaged in its implementation. Parliamentary and public diplomacy are gaining momentum.

Members of parliament, representing the people, now play a key role in determining foreign policy directions and priorities, actively promoting Uzbekistan's interests internationally.

Uzbekistan has also joined key interparliamentary organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly.

Additionally, international non-governmental organizations, public associations, twin-city collaborations, and youth and women's organizations are increasingly engaged in the country's foreign policy efforts.

**5. Constructivism:** Uzbekistan firmly believes that confrontational advocacy of national interests in foreign affairs, especially with neighboring countries, will not yield long-term benefits.

The focus is on seeking reasonable compromises and mutually acceptable balances of interests when addressing complex issues in bilateral and multilateral relations. Any contentious matter should be a subject of discussion rather than a barrier to political dialogue.

This approach is grounded in other principles of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, such as peace and good-neighborliness, reflecting the mindset and traditions of the country's people.

The practical application of these principles has, within a short period, resolved many longstanding issues in Central Asia that were considered systemic irritants hindering regional cooperation.

Today, New Central Asia is a region that has radically transformed its image for the better in a relatively short time.

Not long ago, many experts referred to the region as the "Balkans of Central Asia," forecasting the Fergana Valley as a "powder keg" due to acute territorial and water disputes and interethnic tensions.

Seven years ago, borders between regional countries were almost entirely closed. The international community witnessed conflicts, minefields along border areas, transportation blockades, and high trade barriers.

These challenges were exacerbated by a complex international environment marked by deep trust deficits and escalating armed conflicts, negatively affecting the region's stability and sustainable development.

In this context, there was a strong public demand for transformative changes and solutions to longstanding problems. Recognizing these processes, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev prioritized Central Asia in Uzbekistan's foreign policy agenda in 2016.

The primary goal was to find mutually acceptable solutions to all issues based on openness, pragmatism, and constructivism, engaging in proactive dialogue founded on equality, mutual respect, and consideration of interests.

Today, Uzbekistan's new regional policy has not only led to a significant improvement in interstate relations with its neighbors but also laid the groundwork for further consolidation and integration of Central Asia in a new format.

As a result, in 2018, at the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the Consultative Meetings of Central Asian Heads of State were launched. This format has become not only a dialogue platform but also a place for making important political decisions that have defined the key vectors for regional cooperation.

In particular, during the six summits held so far, significant conceptual documents have been adopted, some with long-term implications. For instance, in August 2024, at the Astana summit, an important

document—The Concept for the Development of Regional Cooperation “Central Asia 2040”—was adopted. This document outlined the framework for long-term interaction and reaffirmed the commitment of the countries to make regional cooperation an irreversible and progressive process.

In other words, thanks to the political will and joint efforts of the region’s leaders, Central Asia has undergone a transformation, evolving into a space of good neighborliness, mutual trust, and cooperation. Our countries have created a unique regional model that is resilient to external challenges and demonstrates a commitment to taking responsibility for the region’s common future, ensuring its security and stability.

As a result, Uzbekistan has elevated the status of its relationships with all regional countries: to the level of strategic partnerships with Turkmenistan, comprehensive strategic partnerships with Kyrgyzstan, and alliances with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Moreover, today the region is gradually transforming into a space of new opportunities, aligning interests, and inclusive cooperation.

Central Asia now represents a significant consumer market, rich in natural resources and human capital. This is clearly reflected in the dynamic economic indicators of the region. Over the past decade, the region’s economy has shown sustainable growth (6.2%), double the global average (2.6%). Since 2016, the combined regional GDP has increased by 60%, reaching \$450 billion by the end of 2023.

At the same time, Central Asia has become an important player in the global economy, with its foreign trade volume growing more than twice in the past seven years, reaching about \$225 billion. Intraregional trade has increased 4.5 times (from \$2.4 billion to \$11 billion).

Central Asia now demonstrates a high level of regional cooperation, implementing joint projects in various sectors. For example, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan have established investment funds to finance large-scale initiatives, which have already yielded results. A joint venture for manufacturing passenger cars is operating in Kazakhstan, and a home appliance factory has been launched in Tajikistan. At Uzbekistan’s initiative, cross-border trade zones with neighboring countries are actively being developed, enhancing the region’s economic interconnectedness.

Particularly significant are the projects in the field of water-energy cooperation. For instance, a “road map” has been signed for the construction of the Kambaratinskaya HPP-1, and the implementation of a project to build the Yavan HPP with a capacity of 140 MW on the Zerafshan River between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has begun. These steps ensure stable water supply and energy security. Furthermore, a breakthrough in transport-logistical integration has been achieved with the agreement on constructing the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, which will connect Central Asia with European transport networks.

Essentially, the region is transitioning to a new model of economic development based on the complementary nature of the economies and competitive advantages of Central Asian countries. This, in turn, fosters enhanced industrial cooperation, the creation of a production-technological space, and the transformation of the region into a key link in the international value-added chain.

In combination, these factors are increasing the interest of external partners in Central Asia, turning the region into a magnet for world powers and leading nations. This is also reflected in the creation of dialogue formats such as “Central Asia Plus.” Today, more than 10 such dialogue platforms are operating, six of which were created in the past five years. Since 2022, many of these formats have been held at the level of heads of state—with China, the United States, Germany, and the European Union. In the coming year, South Korea will also join this group.

Mutually beneficial relations have been established with distant and neighboring countries worldwide. In recent years, Uzbekistan’s leadership has made more than 100 high-level visits to leading countries such as the United States, European Union countries, Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Iran, the United

Arab Emirates, and others.

This new foreign policy course is manifested in the increased interaction and strengthening of Uzbekistan's positions in regional and international organizations.

### **United Nations (UN)**

Uzbekistan has traditionally placed great importance on developing dialogue and cooperation with the United Nations (UN). In recent years, the level of engagement with the UN and its institutions has significantly increased. As a result, 140 joint programs and projects with the UN have been successfully implemented, and several of Uzbekistan's initiatives have received recognition through the adoption of special resolutions by the UN General Assembly. In recent years, Uzbekistan's initiatives have been acknowledged through the adoption of 10 special resolutions by the UN General Assembly.

High-level visits, including those by five UN Deputy Secretaries-General, and Uzbekistan's election to bodies such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO), underscore this cooperation. The recent opening of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) office in Tashkent also boosts efforts to develop rural regions.

### **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is another important platform where Uzbekistan collaborates on regional security, economic interaction, and cultural exchange. Uzbekistan is an active participant in SCO activities and has chaired the organization four times: in 2003-2004, 2009-2010, 2015-2016, and 2021-2022.

Since 2017, Uzbekistan has actively implemented initiatives to promote cooperation within the SCO. During this period, President Mirziyoyev proposed 91 initiatives to improve collaboration in political, trade-economic sectors, transportation and logistics, innovations, and other areas. Of these, 75 initiatives have already been realized, with 16 still in progress.

Trade-economic cooperation between SCO member states is also rapidly developing. In 2023, Uzbekistan's trade turnover with SCO countries increased by 18.5% compared to 2022, reaching \$31.36 billion.

### **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)**

Uzbekistan participates in the work of all statutory bodies of the CIS and has joined all sectoral cooperation bodies, pursuing an active and initiative-driven policy within the Commonwealth.

Since 2017, Uzbekistan has put forward 90 practical proposals within the CIS aimed at further developing cooperation on a wide range of political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian issues, as well as in the field of security.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has transformed into a diplomatic hub for the CIS, where statutory and sectoral cooperation meetings are regularly held. Not coincidentally, in 2024, Tashkent was designated as the Youth Capital, and Samarkand as the Cultural Capital of the Commonwealth.

As a result of intensified bilateral and multilateral relations with the CIS and its member states, Uzbekistan's trade-economic ties are rapidly expanding. By the end of 2023, Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover with CIS countries reached \$20.6 billion, accounting for 32.9% of the total turnover. In the first half of 2024, this figure reached \$11 billion, with a third of Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover (34.4%) attributed to CIS countries.

### **Organization of Turkic States (OTS)**

Uzbekistan became a full member of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) in 2019 and has since actively participated in regional and international forums, playing a significant role in decision-making and shaping

the overall political agenda of the organization.

During the OTS summits from 2019 to 2023, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed 58 specific initiatives aimed at expanding multilateral cooperation within the OTS. In this context, the OTS summit held in Samarkand marked the beginning of Uzbekistan's chairmanship and played a vital role in strengthening multilateral cooperation within the organization. Cultural and humanitarian cooperation between Uzbekistan and OTS member states has significantly expanded, as evidenced by the designation of Kokand as the Capital of Tourism of the Turkic World in 2022, and Bukhara as the first Youth Capital of the Turkic World.

Furthermore, trade-economic exchanges are also growing rapidly. Over the past seven years, Uzbekistan's foreign trade with OTS member countries has increased nearly threefold. In 2023, this figure reached \$10 billion, showing a growth of 4.6%. At the same time, the number of foreign companies with capital from Turkic countries operating in Uzbekistan has increased by 50%. From 2017 to 2022, OTS countries invested more than \$4 billion in Uzbekistan's economy, accounting for 8% of the total foreign investments during that period.

### **European Union (EU)**

Cooperation with European countries and the European Union (EU) is one of the priorities of Uzbekistan's new proactive foreign policy.

The legal framework for relations includes 15 documents, the key ones being the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the Agreement on Cooperation in the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy, the Agreement on the Establishment of a Diplomatic Mission of the EU in Uzbekistan, the Memorandum of Cooperation in the Energy Sector, and the Protocol on Amendments to the PCA, as well as the Agreement on Bilateral Textile Trade.

In July 2022, Uzbekistan and the EU concluded three years of negotiations and initialed the text of a new Expanded Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) in Brussels, which will replace the previous PCA that had been in effect for more than 20 years.

Trade between Uzbekistan and EU countries benefits from a most-favored-nation (MFN) status. Thanks to the "GSP+" preferential treatment offered by the EU, there has been dynamic growth in mutual trade volumes and the number of successful investment projects. Significant cultural and humanitarian exchange programs are also underway.

### **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is one of the largest international organizations in the world, uniting 57 member states with a combined population of 1.7 billion people. Since Uzbekistan joined the OIC in 1996, trade-economic, scientific, and cultural cooperation has been steadily growing. The OIC fully supports projects and programs initiated by Uzbekistan, which plays a significant role within the organization.

In 2022, the OIC Tourism Ministers declared Khiva as the Tourism Capital of the Islamic World for 2024. In this context, the 12th session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers took place in Khiva in June under the theme "*Khiva - The Tourist City of the Islamic World 2024.*" During this event, the chairmanship was handed over from Azerbaijan to Uzbekistan. It is noteworthy that Uzbekistan places priority on cooperation with the OIC in areas such as education, science and innovation, as well as climate change.

### **Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)**

Since 2017, Uzbekistan has intensified cooperation within the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). In 2022, our country assumed the presidency of the organization for the first time, under the slogan "*Year of Strengthening Connectivity in ECO.*" In November 2023, the 16th ECO Summit in Tashkent focused

on *“Together Towards Economic Stability and Development.”*

This approach has given significant momentum to the connections within the ECO region, contributing to the strengthening of their interconnectivity. One of the key aspects of Uzbekistan’s cooperation within the ECO is the development of trade relations with member states. Uzbekistan promotes proposals and initiatives aimed at increasing trade turnover, eliminating trade barriers, and simplifying the movement of goods and services.

Moreover, one of the main objectives of Uzbekistan’s activities within the ECO is the development of transport and communication links, as well as expanding the region’s transit potential. In addition to these two key priorities, the expansion of industrial cooperation, energy, tourism, climate change, environmental protection, and cultural and humanitarian cooperation are also central. In each of these areas, Uzbekistan has proposed specific programs and roadmaps to strengthen economic and humanitarian ties in the ECO region.

Overall, the foreign policy of New Uzbekistan demonstrates the successful implementation of a strategy based on openness and pragmatic cooperation, grounded in the principles of multivector diplomacy and mutual benefit. The results achieved have not only strengthened the country’s international standing but also created a solid platform for the further development and prosperity of Uzbekistan as a modern, dynamically growing state playing a significant role in regional and international politics.

***Bakhrom Sotiboldiyev,***

***Head of the Department, Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.***

**Source**