

# Historic Summit in Khujand: A New Stage of Regional Cooperation



On March 31, the city of Khujand hosted a genuinely landmark event – a summit of the leaders of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

As a result of the meeting, the heads of state signed the Treaty on the Junction Point of State Borders, reflecting their firm commitment to transforming state borders into a zone of peace, stability, and shared development – a step that will contribute to strengthening security and prosperity across the entire region.

The resolution of border issues among the three countries that share the Fergana Valley is the result of years of diligent work, sincere dialogue, and cooperation based on the principles of respect for sovereignty, equality, and mutual benefit. This achievement opens entirely new prospects for the development of comprehensive partnerships, contributing to strengthening trust and friendship among the peoples of the three nations and improving their quality of life.

It is also important to emphasize that the consolidation of the entire region played a significant role in this process, effectively laying the foundation for addressing emerging issues exclusively in the spirit of compromise and mutual respect for each other's interests.

Many experts agree that Central Asia has undergone a dramatic transformation in its image, moving in a positive direction within a relatively short period of time. Not long ago, relations between the countries were fraught with unresolved issues and sharp contradictions, whether concerning border disputes or water use.

However, interstate conflicts that once seemed inevitable now appear to be an unlikely scenario. Suspicion, skepticism, and unhealthy rivalry have been replaced by trust, mutual understanding, and a shared commitment to addressing the region's common challenges together.

Today, thanks to the political consolidation of the region's leaders, Central Asia has become a space of trust, good neighborliness, and mutually beneficial cooperation. The region has grown more resilient and stable, effectively addressing emerging challenges and threats on its own. It has embarked on a path of steady development, transforming into a hub of economic and investment activity.

Central Asia has also begun to play an increasingly important role in shaping the global agenda, positioning itself as a responsible and predictable actor in international relations.

The proactive foreign policy of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has made a significant contribution to the process of regional rapprochement. From the very first days of assuming office, he identified Central Asia as the key priority of Uzbekistan's foreign policy.

The primary objectives of the regional policy have included strengthening good neighborly relations and mutual trust, resolving existing issues, promoting intra-regional cooperation, and actively engaging on the international stage.

The high-level international conference "Central Asia: Shared Past and Common Future", held under the auspices of the United Nations in Samarkand in November 2017 at the initiative of Uzbekistan, laid the foundation for further steps toward establishing a fundamentally new format of regional partnership, as well as for holding regular Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of Central Asia (CMCA).

This, in turn, created the necessary conditions for fostering a healthy political climate in the region, significantly improving interstate relations and laying the groundwork for the further consolidation of Central Asia.

The launch of the CMCA mechanism marked a turning point in the history of Central Asia. The Consultative Meetings have evolved into a key platform for discussing strategic issues and making important decisions. In recent years, they have transformed into a practical tool for developing and strengthening the legal and institutional foundations of interstate cooperation in the region.

Various mechanisms have been initiated, including meetings of foreign affairs and sectoral ministry leaders.

Regular events are now held for women leaders, university rectors, scholars, and youth, alongside economic forums, exhibitions, and a wide range of cultural and humanitarian initiatives.

The outcome of years of interaction within this format has been the adoption of conceptual documents, including those of a long-term nature. Notably, during the Astana Summit in August 2024, the Concept for the Development of Regional Cooperation "Central Asia 2040" was adopted, affirming the countries' commitment to jointly addressing pressing issues and further deepening cooperative processes in the region.

Moreover, the Roadmap for the Development of Regional Cooperation for 2025-2027, also adopted at the same summit, demonstrates the region's readiness to intensify joint efforts and underscores the states' determination to implement the agreements reached in practical terms.

At the same time, political consolidation and a high level of mutual trust have contributed to robust economic growth. Since 2016, the region's combined GDP has increased by more than 80%, reaching nearly \$500 billion by the end of 2024.

In recent years, Central Asian countries have moved beyond traditional trade, expanding industrial cooperation, joint investment projects, and the production of high-value-added goods. This is paving the way for the creation of a unified regional market, an integrated transport and energy system, as well as new logistics corridors.

Additionally, cross-border trade and industrial zones are being established throughout the region. Bilateral

initiatives have led to the establishment of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Tajik Investment Funds, which aim to finance large-scale joint projects.

Through these mechanisms, cooperation projects have already begun in the fields of automotive manufacturing, electrical engineering, the textile industry, and agriculture. Collectively, these efforts are creating new opportunities for the production of import-substituting goods and for enhancing the resilience of Central Asia's industrial infrastructure.

In other words, the processes of regional rapprochement have played a decisive role in resolving border issues that had long remained complex and sensitive for certain Central Asian states.

In particular, Uzbekistan – the only country that shares borders with all other Central Asian states – has fully resolved its border issues with Kazakhstan and completed the delimitation of borders with Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

At the same time, visa regimes are being simplified, and the capacity of border crossing points is being improved, facilitating an increase in mutual travel among citizens. Uzbekistan maintains a visa-free regime with all Central Asian countries except Turkmenistan.

Currently, citizens of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan can travel between the two countries for up to 30 days without registration. A visa-free regime of up to 60 days is in place between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Since September 1, 2023, citizens of both countries can use their ID cards instead of international passports for cross-border travel. Likewise, citizens of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan may stay in each other's countries for up to 30 days without a visa.

A landmark event of the past month was the signing of the Treaty on the State Border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In essence, a long-standing dispute between the two countries has been resolved, marking the beginning of a new stage of mutually beneficial cooperation. Moreover, the two sides have reopened two border checkpoints that had remained closed for four years and have agreed to resume air travel.

In this context, the signing of the Treaty on the Junction Point of the Borders between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan holds particular significance for the development of the Fergana Valley, one of the most densely populated and economically active regions in Central Asia. The valley is home to over 16.5 million people, accounting for 20% of the total population of the five Central Asian countries. Its population density is approximately 200 people per square kilometer, which is 12 times higher than the regional average.

The resolution of border issues and the removal of previous restrictions will create favorable conditions for deepening trade and economic cooperation, enhancing transport connectivity, and fostering industrial collaboration. The simplification of border-crossing procedures is expected to have a positive impact on business development, cross-border trade, and expanded opportunities for labor migration.

Moreover, the agreement will open new prospects for joint infrastructure projects, including the modernization of transport corridors, the establishment of logistics hubs, and the development of cross-border trade and industrial zones. In turn, this will stimulate economic activity, attract investment, and create new jobs – an especially important factor for the rapidly developing Fergana Valley.

Thus, the trilateral summit in Khujand will serve not only as a logical continuation of the course toward strengthening regional cooperation, but also as an essential message to the international community that Central Asia is ready to resolve complex issues independently – through dialogue and mutual agreements.

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