

## Akramjon Nematov: Uzbekistan is interested in building up mutually beneficial cooperation with the EU



The working visit of a group of experts from Uzbekistan, consisting of representatives of the ISRS, IFMR and the Development Strategy Center, to Germany continues. On the second day, meetings were held with German Foreign Ministry Commissioner for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, M. Luttenberg, with the leadership and experts of the Institute for European Politics, German Council on Foreign Relations, as well as a round table with the participation of deputies of parliamentary factions of the German Bundestag.

Moreover, at the meeting held at the Embassy of our republic in Germany with compatriots living in Germany, representatives of Uzbek youth, studying and working in German universities, research institutions and companies, took part. They were informed about the essence and significance of the constitutional reform being carried out in Uzbekistan.

During the negotiations with the German side, the current state and prospects of regional cooperation in Central Asia, relations between the EU and the countries of the region, as well as the role of Brussels and Berlin in ensuring the sustainable development of the region were discussed in detail.

Speaking about regional cooperation, Akramjon Nematov, First Deputy Director of ISRS, noted that in recent years our region has undergone a radical positive transformation, which is becoming systemic and irreversible. Thanks to a consistent policy of openness, good neighborliness and maintaining a constructive dialogue, Central Asia, even in conditions of high turbulence in the world, remains a space of friendship, trust and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Today, Uzbekistan has established strategic partnership relations with neighboring countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, and with a number of them they have been raised to the level of alliance.

The region is gradually transforming into a zone of sustainable economic growth. According to the EBRD forecast, in 2023 and 2024 the GDP of the Central Asian countries will grow by an average of 4.9% and 5.4%, respectively. This is the highest figure in the regions where the bank is present.

Along with the increase in the size of the economies, the foreign trade of the countries of Central Asia is

also growing. This figure has doubled over the past 6 years alone, amounting to \$200 billion in 2022.

At the same time, Central Asia is becoming an interconnected market, attracting more and more investors. Over the past 5 years, mutual trade between the Central Asian states has doubled. The inflow of foreign direct investment into the region increased by 45%, reaching \$ 40 billion in 2022. These trends, according to experts, indicate an increase in the stability of the region, its stability, since as trade and economic interdependence increases, the willingness of states to negotiate also grows to resolve all issues through negotiations in order to maintain sustainable development.

New forms of economic cooperation are being introduced. In particular, the Central Asian countries are moving from commodity exchange to joint projects of industrial cooperation, export of joint products to foreign markets. In a number of countries in the region, the production of household appliances has been launched, textile factories have been opened, production has been launched to assemble cars and buses, joint agricultural complexes have been created, agreements have been reached on the construction of the Kambarata HPP-1, power plants on the Zarafshan River.

International border trade zones are being formed with all the states of Central Asia, cross-country investment companies are being created. It is planned to launch wholesale distribution centers, build high-speed rail routes (Turkestan-Shymkent-Tashkent) and much more.

Currently, the feasibility study is being completed, and in the very near future, the construction of the project of the century - the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway should begin.

The Central Asian states today demonstrate their interest in participating in the construction project of the Termez-Mazari-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway. This route will open a new and shortest route to the markets of South Asia.



As a result, the First Deputy Director of the ISRS emphasized, today Central Asia is more consolidated, resistant to internal and external challenges, its international subjectivity and image are being strengthened.

A clear evidence of this is the increase in Central Asia Plus formats, the number of which has grown from 4 to 10 dialogue platforms since 2017. This indicates the recognition of the high level of consolidation of the Central Asian states.

Assessing the current state of relations between the countries of Central Asia and the European Union, Akramjon Nematov noted that the political dialogue between the two regions had reached a qualitatively new level. Contacts between the EU leadership and the leaders of the Central Asian countries have intensified.



Established mechanisms of interaction also contribute to the strengthening of relations. A special place among them is occupied by the “Central Asia – EU” format, launched in 2008. It is noteworthy that in 2022 this format was brought to the level of heads of state. Meetings of the heads of foreign affairs agencies are held on a regular basis, as well as the EU-CA High-Level Dialogue on Political and Security Issues.

An important event in the development of interaction between the EU and Central Asia was the holding on November 18, 2022 in Samarkand of the first conference on interconnectivity “EU-Central Asia: Global Gateway for Sustainable Development”. During the event, the parties discussed the development of cooperation between the EU and the countries of Central Asia in order to promote sustainable connectivity, develop coordinated measures to support green development and recovery from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EU is an important trade and economic partner of the region. Over the past 10 years, EU countries

have invested \$120 billion in the region, which is more than 40% of the total foreign direct investment in the region. The EU accounts for more than a third of Central Asia's total foreign trade.

The German side was unanimous in the opinion that in Germany they evaluate the geostrategic importance of Central Asia in a new way. In the context of increasing challenges to the international order, cooperation with the countries of the region "acquires a new necessity" and Berlin "firmly intends" to develop mutual relations between the European Union and Central Asia.

In particular, according to the German Foreign Ministry Commissioner for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia M. Luttenberg, the strategic geographical position and the young dynamic population of the Central Asian region are important for its further development. Separately assessing the relevance of Tashkent's regional policy in Central Asia, the politician stressed that thanks to the proactive and constructive diplomacy of Uzbekistan, many controversial issues in the region were resolved. "In this regard, Uzbekistan plays a key role in the cooperation of Germany with the countries of Central Asia," M. Luttenberg noted.

According to the representative of the German Foreign Ministry, there are trans-regional threats that affect both sides. At the same time, such EU mechanisms as the "Global Gateway" and "Green Central Asia" contribute to their solution, and clearly demonstrate the strong desire of the two regions for strategic cooperation.

Experts from the European Policy Institute also expressed support for strengthening the regional integration of the Central Asian countries. It is noted that the resolution of emerging issues between countries in the course of dialogues leads to a "prosperous society".

Analysts of the German Institute for European Politics noted that the commitment of the Central Asian states to a democratic path of development and an independent multi-vector foreign policy create favorable conditions for deepening relations between the European Union and the Central Asian countries.



During the "round table" with the deputies of the parliamentary factions of the German Bundestag, organized by the Embassy of our country in Germany, the German side separately noted the achievements in the political, economic and social spheres in Uzbekistan in recent years.

The deputies separately focused on the constitutional reform in Uzbekistan, especially in the areas of ecology, education, administration and youth support. As the "most important task" of strengthening interaction, it was proposed to intensify personal meetings at all levels, primarily to provide all kinds of assistance in the practical implementation of the transformation.

Regarding the promising areas of cooperation with the EU, it was emphasized that Uzbekistan is primarily interested in cooperation in such areas as digitalization, transport connectivity and the green economy. Tashkent is also committed to an open, systematic and productive dialogue in the format of the "European Union - Central Asia" in the interests of stability, sustainable development and prosperity of the countries of the region.