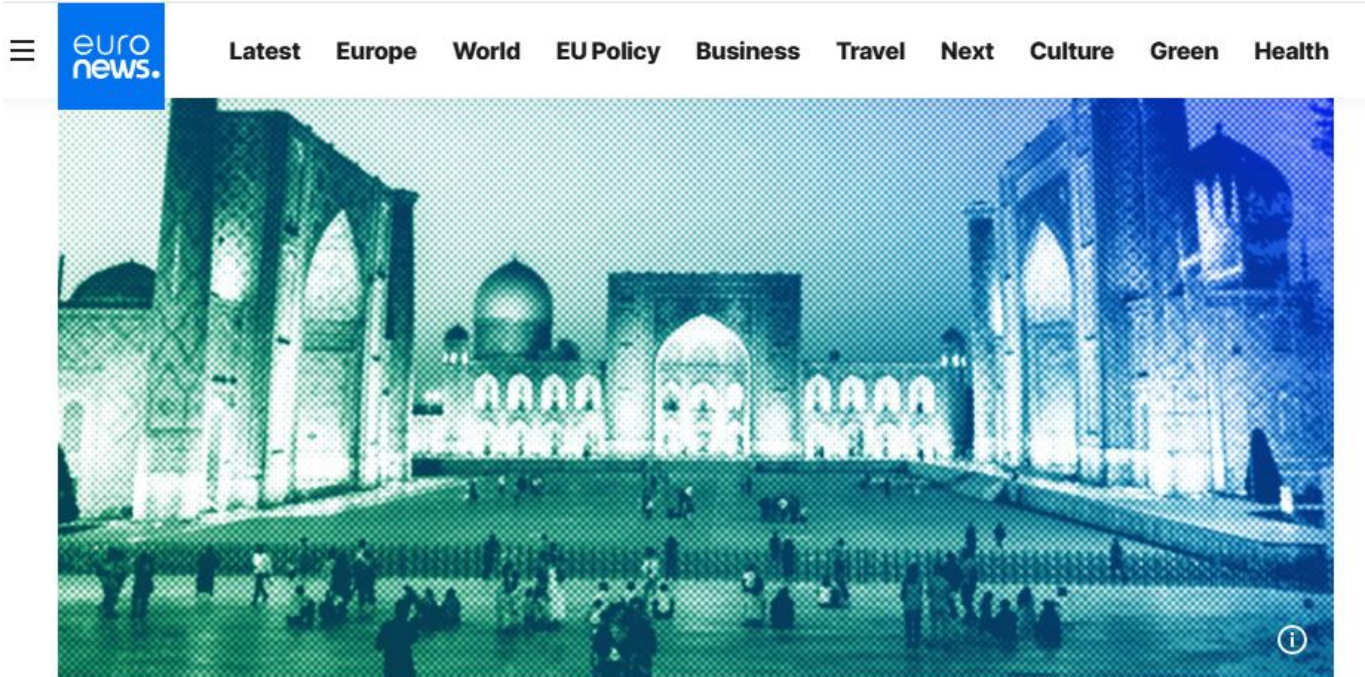


# Central Asia at the forefront of the fight against climate change and Uzbekistan's regional policy



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On Thursday and Friday, the city of Samarkand will host the international conference "Central Asia Facing Global Climate Challenges: Consolidation for Shared Prosperity."

The event will bring together the heads of state from Central Asia, leadership of the European Union, high-ranking representatives of international organisations, as well as experts and specialists from Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

This international climate conference is being organised to implement the Samarkand Initiative for Solidarity in the Name of Common Security and Prosperity, which the president of Uzbekistan announced

in 2022.

The essence of this initiative lies in creating a global dialogue platform to address pressing contemporary challenges, facilitating joint reflection and the development of new approaches to ensuring security and sustainable development.

For several days, Samarkand will once again become a hub for international dialogue and cooperation, providing a platform for discussing urgent issues related to climate change.

This event will undoubtedly make a significant contribution to uniting the global community's efforts in tackling climate challenges.

The high-profile lineup of participants and the conference's multilateral format underscore the relevance and importance of its agenda.



Today, climate change represents one of the most serious threats of our time. This issue remains at the forefront of global expert discussions and is regularly raised on the highest international platforms.

In this regard, UN Secretary-General António Guterres has described the current situation as a "triple planetary crisis," encompassing climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution.

### **Increasingly severe climate issues pushed to the background**

Specialists are particularly concerned about the rise in global temperatures, which has numerous adverse effects, including glacier melting, water scarcity, drought, desertification, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and reduced agricultural yields. Rapid population growth and intensified economic activities further exacerbate these challenges.

For instance, the recently published reports by the World Meteorological Organization and the World Glacier Monitoring Service confirm the accelerating problem of glacier melting.

According to research, over the past 48 years — since 1976 — glaciers worldwide have lost nearly 9.2 thousand gigatonnes of ice, which is equivalent to a 25-meter-thick ice mass covering an area the size of Germany. As a result, global sea levels have risen by 18 millimetres. Experts estimate that with each millimeter of sea-level rise, 200,000 to 300,000 coastal residents face the risk of flooding.

From 2022 to 2024 alone, glaciers experienced their greatest three-year mass loss in recorded history. Additionally, five of the past six years have seen the fastest retreat of glaciers. Many experts warn that in several regions, permafrost may not survive the 21st century.

Moreover, glacier melting triggers a cascade of severe consequences for economies, ecosystems, and communities — particularly in mountainous regions, but also on a global scale. The growing crisis of glacier melt and water scarcity has become a central theme of international discussions, including at forums in New York and Paris on March 21, 2025, dedicated to the first-ever World Glacier Day and World Water Day.

The international community fully recognises the scale of this crisis and is taking action to address it. In 2015, countries worldwide adopted the Paris Agreement, committing to reducing emissions and working together on climate adaptation measures.

Furthermore, the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COP) are held annually, with the most recent 29th session taking place in Baku in November 2024.

However, rising geopolitical tensions and deepening rivalries among major powers have weakened multilateral cooperation, making it increasingly difficult to achieve consensus on crucial issues of international peace and stability. This has also hindered the efforts of international organisations in addressing key global challenges related to sustainable development.

As a result, climate issues — despite their critical importance for the future of humanity — are increasingly pushed to the background, while resources are being redirected toward armed conflicts and humanitarian crisis management.

### **What is Central Asia doing about this?**

Against this backdrop, Central Asia presents a markedly different development trajectory. Amid global turbulence, the region has demonstrated resilience, unity, and stability, effectively addressing emerging challenges and threats on its own. A key pillar of this success is the established atmosphere of trust, friendship, and good neighborliness, which serves as the foundation for unlocking the region's full potential for cooperation.

In other words, the unity among Central Asian nations enables productive dialogue on pressing regional and global issues, earning widespread recognition on the international stage.

At the same time, climate change has become a key driver of regional cooperation. This is hardly surprising, as Central Asia is one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world. Over the past 60 years, the average temperature in the region has risen by 1.5°C—twice the global average of 0.7°C. Climate change, coupled with inefficient water use and management, has led to increasing water scarcity, a trend that is becoming more severe and irreversible with each passing year.

More than 80% of Central Asia's water resources originate from glaciers, which have shrunk by approximately 30% over the past 50 years. By 2050, water resources in the Syr Darya basin are expected to decline by 5%, while those in the Amu Darya basin could decrease by 15%.

With Central Asia's population projected to reach 100 million by 2050, water shortages could escalate to 30%, while demand for irrigation water could increase by 30% as early as 2030.

These challenges also pose serious risks to food security. According to World Bank forecasts, due to climate change, agricultural yields in Central Asia could decline by 20–40% by 2050.

Fully aware of these pressing challenges, Central Asian nations demonstrate a high responsibility for the region's future. A regional climate dialogue has been launched to enhance coordination on climate adaptation efforts.

Moreover, Central Asian states are increasingly taking the lead in advancing the global climate agenda, proposing major international initiatives focused on adaptation and mitigation. Over the next three years, the region will host several high-profile events on water and climate issues.

In parallel, Central Asian countries are actively engaging in international cooperation through platforms such as the IFAS (International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea) and the United Nations.

For instance, at the 2023 UN Climate Summit in Dubai, the region showcased its unity through the Central Asian Pavilion under the theme "Five Countries—One Region—One Voice." This initiative helped amplify Central Asia's collective voice on the global stage.

## **Turning the region green**

It's worth noting that Uzbekistan is one of the key drivers of regional cooperation in addressing climate change and a leading force in transforming Central Asia into a hub for green economy and clean energy.

Speaking at the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasised that the strategic goal of New Uzbekistan is to ensure environmental sustainability and economic growth by transitioning to a resource-efficient, green development model.

Green development has become a top priority of Uzbekistan's state policy, reflected in the adoption of several long-term strategies aimed at tackling environmental challenges, preserving biodiversity, and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Moreover, the Uzbekistan Development Strategy until 2030 has, for the first time, placed climate issues as a top priority, reinforcing the state's responsibility in addressing global sustainability challenges.

In addition, Uzbekistan is systematically advancing decarbonisation efforts by expanding the share of renewable energy sources, developing electric vehicle and green hydrogen clusters, establishing solar and wind energy hubs, promoting large-scale greening and energy efficiency initiatives.

Uzbekistan has declared 2025 the Year of Environmental Protection and the Green Economy to further consolidate efforts and ensure a systematic approach to climate adaptation.

Overall, due to the measures implemented over the past five years, almost \$20 billion in foreign investment has been attracted to the country's energy sector, and 9.6 gigawatts of modern energy capacity have been commissioned.

In particular, 14 solar and wind power plants with a total capacity of 3.5 gigawatts and two energy storage systems with a capacity of 300 megawatts have been created.

By 2030, the share of renewable energy sources is planned to increase to 54%, and greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced by 35%. Moreover, in the coming years, the "green" components in investment projects are planned to increase to 50%, and national monitoring systems for greenhouse gas emissions and emissions quota trading are planned.

At the same time, as part of the "Yashil Makon" (Green Space) program, at least 30% of urban areas in the country will be greened. There are also plans to cover the entire agricultural sector of Uzbekistan with water-saving technologies.

Meanwhile, Tashkent has significantly intensified its policy on a global and regional scale, advancing important initiatives in climate change adaptation.

One key event was the adoption by the UN General Assembly in May 2021 of a Resolution declaring the Aral Sea region a zone of environmental initiatives and technologies at the initiative of Uzbekistan. The measure aims to restore the ecosystem, develop green technologies, and promote sustainable natural resource management.

As a result of the implemented programs, millions of trees have been planted on the former Aral Sea bed, helping reduce air pollution, restore biodiversity, and improve the climate.

In December 2023, another important resolution was adopted: "Central Asia Facing Environmental Challenges: Strengthening Regional Solidarity for Sustainable Development and Prosperity," which aimed to enhance regional cooperation in addressing environmental challenges.

Moreover, at the COP-28 summit in Dubai and the COP-29 summit in Baku, and other international forums, President Mirziyoyev put forward several practical proposals to combat the negative consequences of global climate change.

Among these proposals are establishing an International Center for Damage and Loss Assessment caused by climate change, creating a regional hub for implementing water-saving technologies, and forming a plant genetic resource bank.

Additionally, Uzbekistan is becoming a platform for several major international events. In February 2024, Samarkand hosted the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, an important international event in environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

In September 2024, Tashkent hosted an international forum on "Food Security Goals and Sustainable Development of Landlocked Developing Countries." The forum was aimed at addressing issues related to agricultural trade, food security, climate change adaptation, and logistics in developing countries that lack access to the sea.

In this context, a notable initiative proposed by the President of Uzbekistan at the COP-29 summit was the creation of a UN Innovation agro-industrial hub for landlocked countries.

Furthermore, on 15 May this year, International Climate Day, the Aral Sea region will host the Global Youth Festival of Digital "Green" Initiatives.

### **Open and constructive dialogue is essential**

At the core of all these international forums is the well-being of Central Asia and the development of effective solutions for the region's sustainable future. Uzbekistan is consistently working in this direction, striving to unite the efforts of Central Asian countries in the fight against climate threats.

The adoption of the "Green Agenda" for Central Asia at the 4th Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia in Cholpon-Ata and the development of a Regional Strategy for Climate Change Adaptation were important contributions to strengthening this cooperation.

These documents lay the foundation for joint actions by the region's countries in key areas such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, developing renewable energy, rationally using natural resources, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Special attention is given to capacity building and scientific research in the field of ecology. Tashkent has opened the region's first "green" university, which will serve as a centre for environmental education and innovation.

The president of Uzbekistan proposed establishing an International Research Network at the university to combat land degradation and desertification, as well as engaging leading scientific institutions and experts



in developing new solutions for sustainable development.

During the Samarkand conference, Uzbekistan plans to present a draft of the Regional Concept for "Green" Development, a project announced by President Mirziyoyev at the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week summit.

It is worth noting that following the climate forum, on 10 April in Tashkent, the Institute for Strategic and Interregional Studies under the president of Uzbekistan will host an International scientific and practical conference on "Water Diplomacy in Central Asia: Trust, Dialogue, and Multilateral Cooperation for Sustainable Development".

This event will serve as a platform for scientific and political dialogue to promote solutions to water-related challenges based on an objective assessment of the current situation.

The conference will bring together leaders and experts from strategic institutions and water management agencies of Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, leading specialists from European nations in water diplomacy, as well as representatives of the Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Essentially, the conference will stand as further proof of Central Asian countries' readiness to constructively address transboundary water resource management issues while considering the interests of all parties.

Therefore, Uzbekistan's proactive climate policy and initiatives in the international arena highlight the country's commitment to sustainable development and environmental security, not only at the national level but also across the region.

In this context, the Samarkand Climate Conference will provide an opportunity to identify mutually acceptable solutions for climate adaptation, draw global attention to regional environmental challenges, and strengthen multilateral cooperation.

Amid global instability, geopolitical disagreements, and growing threats to sustainable development, an open and constructive dialogue based on mutual respect and equal participation is essential. Samarkand can become the very place where this dialogue gains a new dimension.

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**Source**