

# SCO Expert Forum outlines prospects for future collaboration



The 15th session of the SCO Forum was held on September 29 via videoconference. The meeting, organized by the National Institute for Strategic Studies of the Kyrgyz Republic jointly with the SCO Secretariat, was attended by the SCO Secretary-General, Vice Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The forum was attended by 35 experts and specialists from 18 leading research institutes of the Organization's member states, including the Indian Council of World Affairs, the Institute of World Economy and Politics under the Foundation of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the China Institute of International Studies, the Center for Global and Strategic Studies of Pakistan, Center for East Asian and SCO Studies at Russia MGIMO, Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and others.

The Uzbek side was represented by leading experts from the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Information and Analytical Center for International Relations.

The participants exchanged views on the current situation, challenges and threats in the SCO space, new approaches to developing multilateral cooperation, building sustainable peace and stability within the Organization during the pandemic. The experts also discussed the possibilities for improving the scientific research activities of the SCO Forum.

In his welcoming speech, SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov noted that the coronavirus pandemic showed the transboundary and large-scale nature of modern threats to security and stable development of the SCO member states.

The destructive power of this viral disease turned out to be much stronger than any type of terrorist act, with which the world, in particular the SCO, has been actively fighting over the past 20 years.

In these conditions, the SCO, relying on the principles of the Shanghai Spirit, has convincingly confirmed its potential as an effective platform for mutual support and response to emerging challenges, building work to overcome political, social, trade and economic consequences of COVID-19.

V. Norov emphasized the growth in the role of the SCO in solving problems of ensuring security and expanding cooperation in the economic and humanitarian spheres. The SCO, over the period of its existence, has become an important factor in strengthening relations and mutual trust in the region.

Today, the Organization is a responsible participant in the modern system of international relations, a reliable platform for fruitful cooperation in the interests of forming a polycentric world that ensures the supremacy of international law, primarily the UN Charter.

As the Secretary-General noted, the SCO welcomes inclusive negotiations in Afghanistan and is ready to promote the integration of this country into the regional process in Central Asia. The importance of restoring the economy of this country through the development of the transit potential of Afghanistan by the construction of new railways along the routes "Mazar-i-Sharif - Herat" and "Mazar-i-Sharif - Peshawar" was emphasized.

ISRS Deputy Director Sanjar Valiyev noted the importance of strengthening cooperation in security, ensuring readiness for joint actions to combat terrorism, extremism and countering in the information space.

In this regard, he drew attention to the initiative forwarded by the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly to hold an International Conference on the ten-year results of the Joint Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Global Anti-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia. The organization of this event with participation of the SCO, CIS and UN representatives will

allow discussing further directions in the fight against terrorism and extremism.

S.Valiyev emphasized the need for creating effective mechanisms for cooperation in biological safety, ensuring a higher level of readiness to collectively confront new epidemiological threats. The International Code of Voluntary Commitments of States during pandemics proposed by the President of Uzbekistan will also contribute to the effective overcoming of global crises in the future.

The most important task facing the SCO at the present stage, according to the expert, is strengthening the economic component of cooperation. "People of the SCO countries, having experienced the heavy impact of the crisis caused by the pandemic, expect joint actions to restore the sectors of the economy most affected by the pandemic", he said.

According to S. Valiyev, it is necessary to speed up the coordination and start the construction of infrastructure projects in Central Asia, located in the geographical center of the SCO; continue the creation of a network of transport corridors in the region, without which the interconnection of the "Shanghai Family" countries will not develop; establish banking and financial institutions to support economic growth.

The ISRS deputy head of expressed confidence that the implementation of these projects meets the long-term interests of all the SCO countries, and the Organization itself should now show its best qualities that it possesses and come out of this crisis even stronger.

In this context, representative of the Information and Analytical Center for International Relations Kristina Jurakulova noted that Uzbekistan traditionally advocates building up economic cooperation with partners in the SCO, which will allow the country to develop an open export-oriented economy and integrate into world economic relations.

According to the expert, there is an increase in trade turnover of Uzbekistan with organization's members. In 2019, it grew by 20% compared to 2018.

In 8 months of 2020, China (16.4%), Russia (14.6%) and Kazakhstan (7.2%) were included in the country's top three foreign trade partners.

K. Jurakulova believes that the development of transport and logistics sector is of decisive importance for deepening economic ties. The countries of the region are located in the center of Eurasia, at the intersection of the interests of major economic powers and at the crossroads of existing and promising transport corridors from East to West and from North to South.

Implementation of such infrastructure projects as the construction of railways and highways will give a powerful impetus to development of mutual trade and an increase in the inflow of investments in the SCO space.

In this regard, K. Jurakulova called for support of the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to create a Regional Centre for the Development of Transport and Communications under the auspices of the United Nations, which was forwarded at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly. The Center will contribute to the effective and mutually beneficial use of international transport corridors together with neighboring countries, as well as formation of a single, ramified and outwardly integrated transport space in Central Asia for strengthening the relationship between North and South, West and East.

The experts of the event emphasized the importance of information and analytical support of the SCO's activities, which will make it possible to conduct a critical analysis of the current trends and identify the most promising areas of cooperation.

The forum has become an important event of the Organization, aimed at discussing the current development issues ahead of the upcoming meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States. The experts exchanged views and forwarded relevant proposals aimed at resuming trade, economic, cultural

and humanitarian ties, the flow of tourists interrupted by the pandemic.

**Source**