

Eldor Aripov outlined key areas for the development of strategic partnership between Central Asia and the GCC countries



The First Central Asia –the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Think Tank Forum on the topic: “Strengthening Strategic Partnership: From Historical Ties to Comprehensive Cooperation” has started in the capital of Uzbekistan today.

Delivering a welcoming speech at the event, Eldor Aripov, Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ISRS), emphasized the importance of the event. He noted that “the Tashkent forum will be a turning point in terms of strengthening scientific and expert dialogue between regions, creating an effective platform for exchanging opinions and developing initiatives aimed at filling the common cooperation agenda with new strategic content.”



He further presented a comprehensive analysis of the dynamically developing relations between Central Asia and the GCC countries.

As the head of the Institute stated, the regions are connected not only by a common past, but also by a similar vision of the future. The Great Silk Road, which for centuries connected markets, cultures and ideas from Central Asia to the shores of the Arabian Peninsula, served as the basis for economic and civilizational interconnectedness. A special role in this process was played by the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, where scholars from Central Asia and the Arab world jointly created scientific works that changed the course of world history.

Today, Eldor Aripov emphasized, “by reviving these historical ties, we are creating new bridges of cooperation in energy, logistics, scientific, technical and investment spheres.”

According to him, the key step on this path was the first ever Central Asia-GCC summit, held in Jeddah in July 2023. This event became a new milestone in the development of interregional cooperation and created an institutional basis for regular political dialogue. Within its framework, meetings of foreign ministers, investment forums were organized, a Joint Action Plan for 2023-2027 was adopted.

The ISRS Director emphasized that this cooperation is already yielding real results. In particular, over the past three years, the volume of trade between Uzbekistan and the GCC countries has tripled (from 257 million to 812 million), the number of joint ventures has reached about 400, showing a twofold increase.

The total volume of investments from the Gulf countries in the economy of Uzbekistan exceeded \$3 billion (KSA - 1.1 billion; UAE - 1.5 billion; Oman - 250 million; Kuwait - 220 million). In addition, about 100 projects worth more than \$30 billion are being developed. Positive shifts are also taking place in tourist exchanges. By 2024, the flow of tourists from the Gulf countries to the republic exceeded 12 thousand people, which is twice as much as in 2021.

At the same time, as the speaker emphasized, despite the impressive achievements of recent years, the

scale of cooperation does not yet reveal the full potential of interaction between the regions.

Moving on to the prospects for developing the partnership, Eldor Aripov dwelt in detail on a number of key aspects that, in his opinion, will contribute to the qualitative deepening of cooperation in the coming years.

First, he pointed out, this is the absence of serious contradictions between the regions and their common focus on global stability and sustainable development. The countries of the two regions continue their course of mutual support within the framework of such influential international structures as the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Secondly, the expert believes, it is important to jointly respond to new global challenges, such as the investment downturn, increased protectionism, trade wars and instability in global supply chains. "Only by joining forces will we be able to develop effective and sustainable models for responding to the above challenges," he specified.

Thirdly, he said, both regions are going through a historically important stage of rapid transformation. At the same time, not only modern economic processes, but also development strategies in the Gulf and Central Asian countries are surprisingly similar. "Saudi Vision 2030", "Qatar National Vision 2030", "Oman Vision 2040" - these strategic documents have much in common with "Kazakhstan-2050", "Uzbekistan Vision-2030", the Development Strategy of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan until 2030 and other modernization programs in Central Asia.

Fourthly, as the expert pointed out, active regionalization processes are observed in both regions: if the Gulf countries have many years of experience in this, then Central Asia has only just begun to build the foundations of cooperation and consolidation. In these conditions, the expert is convinced, support from the GCC for regional initiatives and projects in Central Asia aimed at sustainable development of the region is of particular importance.

According to the representative of the ISRS, analytical centers should play an important role in maintaining the dialogue. "I am convinced that our current and future joint work will give new impetus to information and analytical support for high-level meetings and strengthening the dialogue between the regions," concluded Eldor Aripov.

The event, organized by ISRS and the Saudi Gulf Research Center, is attended by more than 70 authoritative experts from Central Asian and GCC countries, as well as representatives of the GCC Secretariat, diplomatic corps and business community.

The forum participants will discuss key aspects of current and future interaction between Central Asian and Gulf Arab states. The focus will be on strengthening political dialogue and coordinated approaches to ensuring regional security, deepening trade and investment ties, implementing promising projects in the field of "green" energy and developing transport corridors.

