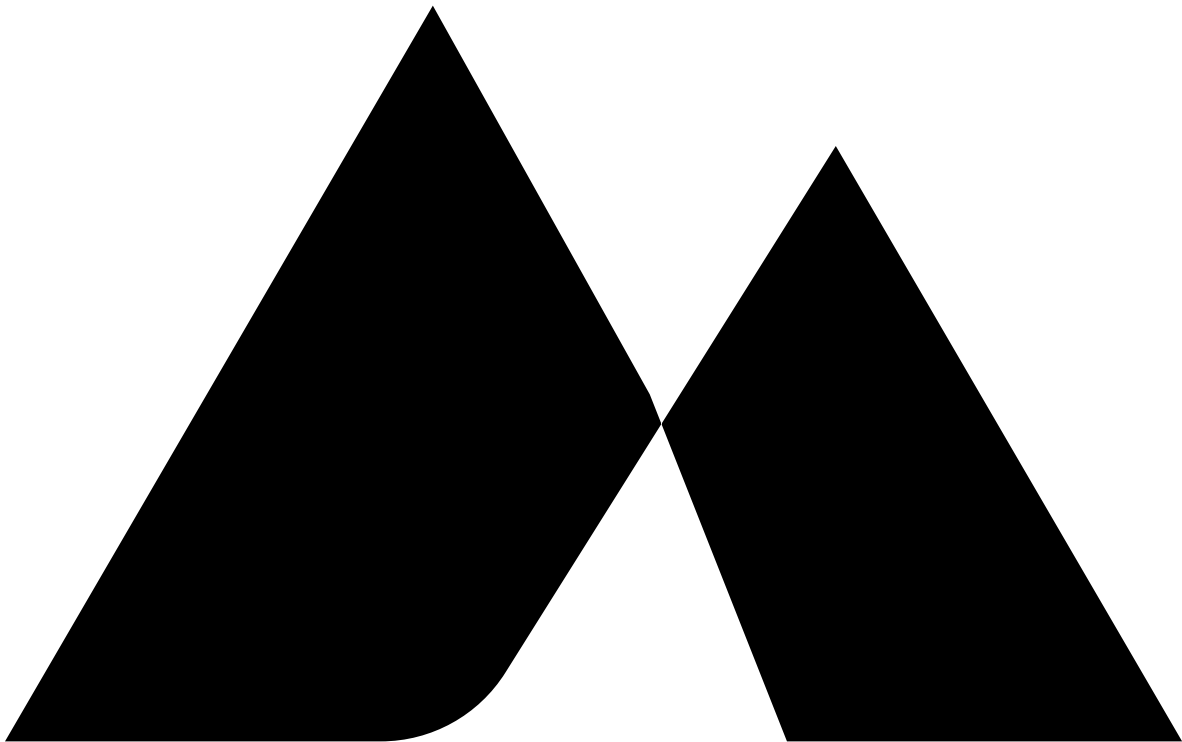


# Key foreign policy priorities of a renewed Uzbekistan



Committed to the development of mutually beneficial relations with all foreign partners, Uzbekistan concentrates its main foreign policy efforts on the most important areas identified in the Strategy of Actions for five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021.

This document formulates the country's key priorities in the field of foreign policy:

- strengthening the independence and sovereignty of the state, further strengthening the place and role of the country as a full-fledged subject of international relations, joining the number of developed democratic states, creating a belt of security, stability and good-neighborliness around Uzbekistan;
- strengthening the international image of the Republic of Uzbekistan, bringing to the global community objective information about the reforms being carried out in the country;
- improvement the regulatory and legal framework for foreign policy and foreign economic activity of Uzbekistan, as well as the legal framework for international cooperation;
- settlement of issues of delimitation and demarcation of the state border of Uzbekistan.

In general, Uzbekistan's foreign policy priorities aim to build a stable, just and democratic state, promoting the country's external openness and developing regional and multilateral interaction.

"Basic foundations" of the foreign policy of a renewed Uzbekistan

The priorities of the country's modern foreign policy are in the plane of the tasks specified in the "Strategy of Action" and are reflected in practical steps to develop new approaches to expand ties in the international arena.

In this regard, a number of relevant program documents have been developed and adopted, moreover, road maps have been approved for the further development of multifaceted cooperation with countries of

the world, including Turkey, India, China, Japan, Germany, France, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and others.

During visits at the highest and high levels, large-scale work is being carried out to promote a proactive, open, pragmatic and elaborated foreign policy course that meets the national interests of the country and is aimed at expanding relations with the states of near and far abroad.

Certainly, the new priorities and approaches require a radical restructuring of the structure of the foreign policy department. New subdivisions were created in the Foreign Ministry, embassies were opened in Belarus and Oman, a number of consulates general in cities of Russia and Kazakhstan. The economic component of diplomatic activity has been strengthened.

Cooperation in the international arena should assist to solve problems on the socio-economic development of Uzbekistan by studying the best world experience, establishing relations with foreign states, which will contribute to the formation of the most favorable business environment and investment climate in the country.

In this context, the foreign policy strategy of the Republic has acquired new accents in the development of trade and economic cooperation with foreign countries and attracting foreign investment, advanced technologies in production, expanding the geography of domestic exports.

As a result, in 2019, the inflow of foreign direct investment to our country increased. Their volume amounted to \$ 4.2 billion, which is 3.7 times more than in 2018.

According to the results of the first half of this year, despite all the difficulties and restrictions associated with curbing the spread of Covid-19, the volume of foreign investment in the economy of Uzbekistan amounted to \$ 4.8 billion, including direct investment - \$ 3.2 billion.

This was also facilitated by the fact that for the first time in the last 10 years, the country's position in the credit risk rating of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) improved.

According to the World Bank's Doing Business rating, the country rose by 7 positions ranking 8th place among 190 countries in terms of business registration, and was among best reformers.

One of the most authoritative magazines in the world - "Economist" (Great Britain) recognized Uzbekistan as the country of the year - the state where reforms have been carried out at the fastest pace since 2017.

Uzbekistan has introduced a visa-free regime for citizens of 86 states and a simplified visa regime for citizens of 57 states. Last year, 6.7 million foreign tourists visited the country - an increase of 4.7 million, or 3.3 times more than in 2016.

The new foreign policy pursued by Uzbekistan is getting a worthy assessment of the international community. In particular, Richard Weitz, director of the US Hudson Institute's Center for Political-Military Studies, believes that Uzbekistan's foreign policy initiatives open up new opportunities for whole Central Asia. The republic is promoting an agenda that is based on the idea of a joint solution to existing problems.

Researcher of the Eurasian Program of the Rome Institute for Geopolitical Research (ISAG) Fabrisi Vielmini emphasizes that Uzbekistan, which has been aloof from regional processes for a long time, is now acting in a new way. Tashkent, being the heart of the region, is returning to its natural role as a stabilizing state in Central Asia.

Andrei Grozin, senior researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, also draws attention to the fact that the system of interstate relations is currently transforming in Central Asia. According to him, recently Tashkent has demonstrated high activity in various areas. There are signs of a significant recovery in relations between the countries of the region.

A new step in Tashkent's foreign policy was the activation in the Afghan direction. Uzbekistan has

noticeably expanded bilateral ties with Afghanistan, actively joined in multilateral efforts to resolve the Afghan problem.

A major event in bilateral relations was the official visit to Uzbekistan of the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, which consolidated "a qualitatively new level of political relations and practical cooperation between the two countries", including agreements on the implementation of major projects for the construction of the Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line and the Mazar-i-Sharif railway - Herat. An Educational Center for Afghan Citizens opened in Termez. To date, 136 Afghan students have completed their studies at the Center, 96 of which received bachelor's degrees in Uzbek language and literature, 40 took short-term courses in the Russian language, agriculture and entrepreneurship. Today, some of them work in the parliament, ministries and departments of the country, teach at universities in Afghanistan, and run independent businesses.

Tashkent initiated and hosted a high-level international conference on Afghanistan "Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Interaction" that made an important contribution to the start of the peace process.

On January 24 of this year, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in his Address to the Oliy Majlis brought to the fore the issues of implementing large-scale democratic transformations and structural reforms aimed at solving strategic tasks for modernizing the country in the coming years.

The Address outlines the main priority areas of foreign economic policy. The announcement of the "Year of Development of Science, Education and the Digital Economy" emphasizes the need to create a society and infrastructure in Uzbekistan that can compete in all areas.

For this, firstly, it is necessary to educate highly qualified specialists, including in the field of foreign policy and foreign economic activity, based on the use of advanced foreign experience, modern innovative, pedagogical technologies and scientific developments, effective coordination of the activities of educational and research institutions of the country.

The President also paid great attention to the development of science using foreign experience and the establishment of cooperation with foreign universities and research centers.

#### Updated priorities

An important priority of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is the formation of a balanced system of strategic partnership and cooperation with the world's leading states and international organizations. This approach is designed to provide an effective solution to the tasks of modernizing the economy, maintaining stability and security, and creating favorable conditions for cooperation in Central Asia.

Thanks to contacts at the highest level, Tashkent has brought relations with the leading countries of the world to a fundamentally new level. A multifaceted strategic partnership and allied relations with the Russian Federation are consistently developing. The previously concluded agreements on strategic partnership, on allied relations, as well as the Declaration on the deepening of strategic partnership between the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan are filled with new content and are being implemented in practice.

The strategic partnership of Uzbekistan with the United States of America has reached a qualitatively new level, developing today steadily and predictably on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual respect, trust and consideration of each other's interests. Further efforts of the parties should be aimed at finding mutually beneficial areas of strategic partnership.

Relations with the Republic of Turkey have been brought to a strategic level. The comprehensive strengthening and development of Uzbek-Turkish relations is fully consistent with the new foreign policy of Uzbekistan. At the same time, the common language, religion, traditions and customs with the Turkish

people form a solid foundation for a comprehensive deepening and expansion of cooperation based on mutual respect and consideration of each other's interests. The official visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Turkey on February 19-20 at the invitation of Turkish leader Recep Erdogan became a vivid evidence of the intensification of the strategic dialogue.

Uzbekistan consolidates its strategic partnership with the People's Republic of China as a close regional neighbor and a friendly state playing a key role in world politics and economy.

Similar achievements in strengthening the strategic partnership with the Republic of Korea are observed across the entire range of issues in bilateral relations. The country is interested in actively attraction of direct Korean investment and advanced technologies, soft loans and financial and technical assistance for the implementation of high-tech projects in the fields of industry, energy, infrastructure development, automotive, science and innovation, healthcare and tourism.

Relations of Uzbekistan with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Jordan, Algeria and other Middle Eastern countries are reaching a fundamentally new level . It should be noted that the development and strengthening of mutually beneficial and comprehensive relations with the states of the Middle East remains one of the priorities of Uzbekistan's foreign policy.

Using the potential of international platforms

The new foreign policy course is manifested in the intensification of interaction and strengthening of Uzbekistan's positions in regional and international organizations.

Our country traditionally attaches great importance to the development of dialogue and cooperation with the United Nations. In recent years, the level of interaction with the UN and its institutions has been increased, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council.

Uzbekistan pays special attention to strengthening friendly ties and mutually beneficial cooperation with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

In his Address to the Oliy Majlis, speaking about the strategy of the country's first chairmanship in the CIS in 2020, the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted: "We will use all opportunities to expand economic cooperation in the Commonwealth, increase the effectiveness of the decisions made by the organization and further strengthen humanitarian ties between the participating countries." As of today, Uzbekistan has raised the level of its national coordinator in the CIS from deputy foreign minister to deputy prime minister, and resumed its participation in the CIS Economic Council.

The priority of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is the development and strengthening of ties with the Turkic countries. In September 2019, the country joined the Turkic Council (Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States). In the long term, the Turkic Council should become a sub-regional association, a kind of mechanism for regional cooperation in the vast space between Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The intensification of cooperation with the organization opens up new opportunities for our country to develop multifaceted relations with both neighboring states and non-regional close partners (Turkey, Azerbaijan). Participation in the work of the organization as a permanent member will give Tashkent additional political and diplomatic resources for the wide promotion of its initiatives in the international arena, as well as strengthen the international authority and status of the country as one of the centers of the Turkish-Islamic civilization.

In a relatively short period by historical standards, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has emerged as an influential, authoritative international structure. Uzbekistan views the SCO as an instrument for cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism, illegal drug and arms trafficking, and organized crime.

For Uzbekistan, the priority also remains to intensify the activities of the SCO in the economic field, including the construction and reconstruction of transport communications, the development of contacts with other states and international structures interested in cooperation with the Organization.

Uzbekistan is developing consistent interaction with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and views it as an effective forum aimed at preserving and promoting sacred Islamic values, strengthening solidarity between Muslim peoples, promoting their progress and prosperity. Uzbekistan stands for active interaction of the OIC countries in the field of education and enlightenment, the development of science and technology, the introduction of innovative ideas and technologies.

The republic is also interested in active cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is an important international forum for dialogue between states on issues of security, economic development and protection of human rights and freedoms. Priority areas of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the OSCE are the implementation of joint projects in the areas of reforming public administration institutions, improving the judicial, legal and electoral system, enhancing the role and significance of the media and civil society institutions, as well as developing constructive interaction in countering transnational challenges and threats.

The parliamentary elections held in our country in December 2019 were attended by 825 observers from 50 countries and 10 international organizations. For the first time, Uzbekistan received a full-scale mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, consisting of 316 people.

Our country aims to the qualitative expansion and deepening of cooperation with international financial institutions and trade organizations - the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, World Trade Organization and others. A significant event was the restoration of cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, as a result of which the institution resumed financing socially significant projects in the regions of Uzbekistan.

The agenda of Uzbekistan's cooperation with international financial institutions includes improving the investment and business climate, increasing the country's credit rating, improving monetary policy, qualifications of national specialists in the banking and financial sector.

The ultimate goal is to increase the volume of attracted foreign investments and financial resources to accelerate modernization and enhance the competitiveness of the national economy, develop the country's export potential and improve infrastructure, improve living standards and ensure the well-being of the population.

Uzbekistan is a key state and plays a special role in Central Asia. Representatives of foreign expert and political circles also recognize the importance of the country in the region. Tashkent has signed agreements on strategic partnership with all neighboring states of the region, which allows building a regional policy at a high level. The work carried out for this purpose is also important in strengthening the place and role of the country in the system of international relations.

By proposing initiatives to develop cooperation, Tashkent is not aiming at any dominance in the region. Uzbekistan's initiatives take into account the interests of all countries and are based on the principle of consensus.

The new political reality in the region that was formed owing to the proactive, proactive and constructive diplomacy of Tashkent had a positive impact on building up interaction on a wide range of issues between the countries of Central Asia.

A striking example was the meeting of the consultative meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia, held in November 2019 in Tashkent. During the meetings, the parties discussed the solution of many problematic issues of the Central Asian agenda, the settlement of which would be impossible either in a unilateral or in a bilateral format. Moreover, an agreement was reached to hold such meetings on a regular

basis.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the holding of the Consultative Meeting of the Heads of Central Asian States does not imply the creation of a new international organization in the region or any integration structure with its own charter and supranational bodies. This activity will be aimed exclusively at the “reconciliation of watches” on key issues of regional development.

An active policy in the Central Asian direction, the priority of the region for Uzbekistan was clearly manifested during the coronavirus pandemic.

Against the background of a difficult epidemiological situation, the countries of the region, through systematic contacts, worked out joint measures to combat the spread of infection, as well as increased cooperation in trade, economic and transport and transit spheres. Uzbekistan provided humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Aid to Tajikistan accounted for a third of the aid received by the country from all donors.

The activation of the regional course of Uzbekistan has become a timely and effective response to a long-overdue request for regional rapprochement, restoration of trust and mutual understanding, as well as prompt resolution of accumulated problematic issues on the basis of reasonable compromises. The established open and trusting dialogue at the highest level has laid a solid foundation for the intensification of all areas of cooperation.

Firstly, the political dialogue at the highest and high levels has intensified significantly, inter-parliamentary, inter-agency and inter-regional ties have intensified. In turn, during the specified period, the heads of all states of the region visited Uzbekistan. As the analysis shows, the results of these meetings have become unprecedented in their effectiveness.

Secondly, agreements were reached on jointly countering the activities of extremist and terrorist structures. The corresponding Plans of comprehensive measures of Uzbekistan for 2019-2020 were signed with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. From July to September 2018, Uzbekistan held joint anti-terrorist exercises with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Third, the solution of the issues of delimitation and demarcation of the state borders of Uzbekistan with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has advanced significantly.

All of the aforementioned is not just a resolution of bilateral controversial issues, it is the removal of an acute conflict potential from the agenda of the entire region and an increase in the level of political trust.

Along with the intensification of interaction between Uzbekistan and the Central Asian countries in the political sphere, the trade and economic, transport and communication, energy, cultural and humanitarian spheres received a new impetus.

The improvement of trade and economic relations between the countries of Central Asia contributed to the increase in the investment attractiveness of the region as a whole. In particular, from the beginning of 2017 to the present, more than 300 agreements have been signed between Uzbekistan and the countries of the region, as well as contracts and agreements worth about \$ 75 billion.

The region is witnessing progress in addressing environmental issues, in particular, water and energy issues. Tashkent is ready to consider the possibility of its participation in the construction projects of the Kambar-Ata and Rogun hydroelectric power stations. The implementation of the important section of the transport corridor "Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman" has been launched - the Turkmenabad-Farab railway and road bridges across the Amudarya river have been opened. Their launch made it possible to implement the idea of creating an end-to-end transport and communication highway along the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Caspian Sea-South Caucasus route with access to Baku-Tbilisi-Kars and the Black Sea ports of Georgia, Turkey, Romania and other states.

In addition, after 20 years of negotiations, significant progress has been made on the construction of a railway linking China and Central Asia via Kyrgyzstan. According to preliminary estimates, with the implementation of this project, the delivery time of goods will be reduced by 7-8 days, the length of the route from East Asia to the countries of the Middle East and Southern Europe will be reduced by 900 km.

Special attention is paid to strengthening and expanding close cooperation in the cultural and humanitarian sphere, friendship and good-neighborly relations between the states of Central Asia.

Concurrently, there is an awareness that the process is only at the beginning of the path. There is a set of unresolved issues that hinder full cooperation between the countries of the region. To summarize, it can be noted that ensuring peace and stability in Central Asia meets not only the interests of the countries of the region, but will also contribute to the sustainable development of the entire Eurasian continent in terms of its impact on security in adjacent regions.

The message of the President of Uzbekistan to the Senate and the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis once again fixed the development priorities of Uzbekistan for the foreseeable period, where, along with fundamental reforms in the political, economic and social spheres, the implementation of a proactive foreign policy is envisaged. The renewed Uzbekistan sends a clear signal to foreign partners about the country's readiness for mutually beneficial cooperation.

***Alisher Kadyrov,***

***Head of Department, Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies***

***under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan***

**Source**