

New Uzbekistan – A New Model of Foreign Policy



On 29 December 2020, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev addressed the Oliy Majlis and the people of Uzbekistan. In his Address, the Head of the state defined further goals and set the most important tasks aimed at ensuring a consistent increase in the level of welfare and wellbeing of the country's population.

In his Address, the President mainly focused on the issues of conducting an effective foreign policy capable of providing the necessary conditions for the implementation of a large-scale program of reforming and modernizing all spheres of life of society and the state.

For this purpose, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted the need for improving the foreign policy strategy of the country and adopting an updated concept of activities in this area. At the same time, the importance of ensuring the consistency of Uzbekistan's open, proactive and constructive foreign policy was emphasized.

The demand for conceptualizing foreign policy is due to the high dynamics of transformation of Uzbekistan, the transition to a new stage in the formation of a democratic rule of law with a developed market economy. Without exaggeration it is worth noting that the foundation of a new era of the Renaissance is being laid in the country, requiring qualitatively new approaches in foreign policy.

In these conditions, the adoption of this Concept of Foreign Policy is intended to accelerate the consistent formation of a favorable external environment for the sustainable internal development of the country, the effective promotion of national interests in the international arena and the progressive increase of the competitiveness of the country's economy in the world market.

In this regard, today the primary tasks are the consolidation and mobilization of all internal and external resources for the unconditional achievement of national development goals. The formation of a new version of the foreign policy concept also indicates the country's adherence to the previously chosen foreign policy course, thanks to which Uzbekistan has achieved significant success.

In general, a systematic analysis of the basic principles and characteristic features of the modern foreign policy strategy of Uzbekistan demonstrates a deep thoughtfulness of its foreign policy, which today could serve as an exemplary model for many countries, especially in conditions when international relations are

experiencing a crisis of trust, a lack of dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation.

These distinctive features of the new external course of the country, the leading role in the construction of which belongs to the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, include the following basic principles.

First, a characteristic feature of the modern foreign policy of Uzbekistan is pragmatism in building relationships with all traditional partners, as well as the countries near and far abroad.

In this context, Uzbekistan proceeds from the tasks of internal development. Among them are maintaining high growth rates, modernizing and sustainable development of the economy, raising the standard of living of the population and ensuring full integration into the structure of world economic relations.

Achieving these goals is impossible without accompanying the launched large-scale internal reforms with an appropriate regional strategy, establishing close relations with closest neighbors, coordinating plans within international organizations such as the UN, SCO, CIS, Turkic Council, WTO, EAEU, EBRD and other structures.

In a word, Uzbekistan's foreign policy interests are based primarily on the priorities of internal development, which actually means an obvious shift towards the economization of the country's international cooperation and the strengthening of economic pragmatism in external relations.

Thanks to the active use of this approach, the efficiency of work on attracting foreign investment and new technologies, expanding the tourist flow, as well as increasing the export of national products to world markets has significantly increased.

In particular, one of the drivers of economic growth in recent years has been a sharp increase in investment activity. Over the past 4 years, the average annual investment growth rate was 22 percent. The total volume of attracted foreign investments reached \$26.6 billion, including direct investments of \$17.5 billion. For comparison, such a volume of investments was attracted to the country's economy between 2007 and 2017.

In general, the total volume of investments over the past 4 years has grown by more than 2.1 times, including foreign investments by 2.7 times. The share of investment in GDP in 2019 exceeded 38 percent for the first time, which creates a solid foundation for ensuring economic growth in the coming years.

At the same time, the GDP of Uzbekistan in 2019 grew by 5.6 percent. Despite the difficult conditions that have arisen due to the consequences of the pandemic, the World Bank experts predict the country's GDP growth in 2021 by 4.8 percent, which is one of the best indicators among developing countries.

Thus, Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover is growing much faster than GDP and in 2019 increased by 26.2 percent, amounting to \$42.2 billion. While in just 9 months of 2020, despite the pandemic, the country's foreign trade reached \$27.5 billion.

Uzbekistan's plans to strengthen its role in the establishment of international transport corridors and joint implementation of other infrastructure projects with foreign partners also received a new impetus.

For instance, the wide involvement of Uzbekistan in the implementation of the Trans-Afghan corridor and joining various international transport corridors («North-South», «Trans-Caspian corridor», «China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan») create favorable prerequisites not only for the country's exit from the state of transport isolation but also for increasing its importance as a transport and transit hub and providing access to promising markets.

The implementation of these plans will also contribute to strengthening the role of the country in the process of drawing up a new transport map of the world and strengthening its position in the emerging modern model of global supply chains.

Second, Uzbekistan today constantly promotes the principle of multilateralism in the country's foreign policy. Uzbekistan stands for the development of creative processes of globalization, the establishment of mutually beneficial and equal international cooperation based on dialogue, mutual trust and respect for each other's interests.

This dictates the transboundary nature of modern challenges and threats. Among them, the epidemiological crisis and its socio-economic consequences, terrorism, cross-border crime, the food crisis, the fight against poverty and the problem of global climate change remain relevant, which can only be countered by joint efforts.

Recognizing this, Uzbekistan today is active in shaping not only a regional but also a global agenda, building collective mechanisms to counter various challenges and threats that directly affect the security, prosperity and sustainable development of the international community.

Clear evidence of this is the productive participation of the President of Uzbekistan in international platforms. So, during the first outbreak of the pandemic, the President of Uzbekistan, speaking at an emergency meeting of the Turkic Council, was one of the first leaders of the world countries to call on the international community to cohesion in the face of a common threat.

This approach also becomes evident in the increasing role of the country in international lawmaking - in the initiation and adoption of conceptual multilateral documents aimed at resolving urgent problems at the center of the global agenda.

In particular, since 2016, at the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, four resolutions have been adopted within the framework of the UN, designed to improve the foundations and mechanisms of international cooperation in tourism, regional interaction, interfaith understanding and sustainable development.

Special attention also deserves the important initiatives put forward by the Head of the state during the meeting of the 75th UN General Assembly, which became a solid contribution of the country to the development of mutually beneficial international cooperation.

Among them are proposals for the development of an International Code on voluntary commitments of world states during pandemics and the adoption of a UN General Assembly resolution on enhancing the role of parliaments in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring human rights.

In this context, the plans to hold several international events in Uzbekistan, voiced by the President of the country during the Address to the Oliy Majlis, are another indicator of strengthening the role of the country in the international arena. One of them is a global forum under the auspices of the United Nations on "Human Rights Education"; an international conference on youth rights; regional conference on freedom of conscience.

Finally, Uzbekistan's strong commitment to multilateralism is evidenced by the President's statement during his Address to the Oliy Majlis about the country's readiness to further develop a constructive cooperation with all international organizations, including the UN.

Third, the country relies on proactivity in foreign policy and distances itself from the role of a passive observer of the ongoing processes in the region and the world.

This is confirmed by the fact that by now Uzbekistan has become a member of more than 100 different international organizations and a party to more than 200 international multilateral treaties.

In this context, particular attention is drawn to the activation of Uzbekistan within the framework of the SCO, the adoption of the chairmanship in the CIS and entry as a permanent member to the Turkic Council.

The growing initiative of the country on these platforms, the mutually beneficial nature of the proposals put forward and their focus on solving problems that meet collective interests also speaks of the intensification of Uzbekistan's foreign policy activities. In particular, in 2017-2020, the Uzbek side at the SCO summits put forward more than 30 initiatives, and during this period, 36 proposals were initiated within the CIS.

In recent years, the participation of Uzbekistan within the framework of the UN has also acquired intensive dynamics. A significant event in this regard was the country's election for the first time in its history as a member of the UN Human Rights Council.

At the same time, the country began an active dialogue on joining the World Trade Organization to gain its worthy place in the world trade system, corresponding to our resource and economic capabilities and human potential.

Another notable event in this regard is the receipt by Uzbekistan of the observer status in the EAEU, which opens up new opportunities for the country in achieving the goals of progressive economic development.

Negotiations are nearing completion on an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union, which will help create more favorable conditions for mutual trade and soften the foreign trade regime.

In this context, it should be noted that the goals outlined by the President of Uzbekistan during the Address to the Oliy Majlis on the development of individual programs and interaction strategies with the main external partners can fill the country's international cooperation with new concrete content.

Fourth, an important distinguishing feature of the newly introduced strategy is openness, one might say, the democratization of foreign policy. Dialogue with the people, which has been declared a key principle of the activities of state power and administration bodies, has in recent years turned into an open dialogue with the outside world.

Wherein, the role of the public in the formation of the foreign policy agenda has significantly increased, and the circle of subjects involved in its implementation is expanding. In particular, the activity of parliamentary and people's diplomacy is growing.

Parliamentarians and the people, today determine the vector and guidelines of foreign policy, take on the role of active conductors of foreign policy priorities and spokesmen for the country's interests in the international arena.

Over the past three years, our country has become a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly. During this period, the total number of formed inter-parliamentary friendship groups reached 48, and last year the legislative body adopted the Concept of Parliamentary Diplomacy.

At the same time, international non-governmental organizations and public associations are actively involved in foreign policy, contacts at the level of twin-cities are increasing, ties between youth and women's organizations are strengthening.

The openness of foreign policy is also confirmed by the expansion of the range of politically sensitive topics discussed and jointly resolved with foreign partners. Thus, the country resumed cooperation with international human rights organizations, unblocked access to various foreign news resources.

Fifth, another significant principle is constructivism. Uzbekistan is convinced that the confrontational defense of national interests in foreign affairs, especially with neighbors, will not give the expected long-term effect.

It is important to search for reasonable compromises and a mutually acceptable balance of interests in

resolving acute issues of bilateral and multilateral interaction. At the same time, any controversial issue should be a subject of discussion and not an obstacle to political dialogue.

This approach is based on other principles of our country's foreign policy. This is peacefulness and good neighborliness, which reflect the peculiarities of the mentality of the people of Uzbekistan.

The practical implementation of the above principles in a short period of time led to the settlement of the problems accumulated in Central Asia, which for many years were considered systemic irritants hindering the development of regional cooperation.

The issues of water use, delimitation and demarcation of state borders between Uzbekistan and neighboring countries, the use of transport communications and border crossing have been resolved.

Thanks to this approach, Uzbekistan has significantly intensified its participation in peacebuilding in Afghanistan, contributes to strengthening the international and regional consensus on achieving long-term and sustainable peace in the neighboring country.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's efforts in the Afghan arena are not limited only to the goals of preventing the emergence of new hotbeds of tension or ensuring security in the region. Practical assistance in transferring Afghanistan to the track of socio-economic recovery and ensuring its integration into the system of regional interconnectedness remains a priority.

The President of Uzbekistan paid special attention to this issue in his next Address, stressing the intensification of work on the creation of a trans-Afghan corridor. This demonstrates the country's long-term commitment to helping to rebuild Afghanistan's peaceful economy and ensuring its integration into international trade and economic relations.

As a result, the political climate in Central Asia is radically changing. If earlier the region was seen as a powder keg or a tangle of intractable disagreements, today it is turning into a space of stability, good-neighborliness and peace.

All Central Asian states without exception are becoming beneficiaries of such a transformation in the perception of the region in the world. This is evidenced by the improvement in the aggregate economic indicators of the region's countries.

In particular, in 2019 compared to 2016, the total GDP of the region increased by 19.6 percent, and foreign trade by 56 percent. At the same time, the total volume of attracted investments for the specified period showed an increase of 40 percent. Despite the pandemic, the commitment to the chosen course of regional cooperation will undoubtedly keep the dynamics of growth in the region in the long term.

Another indication of the changing approaches and increasing international attention to the region was the revision of their strategies towards Central Asia by the world's leading states. Thus, the United States, the EU and India have already presented new strategies for the region; the key place of Central Asia is highlighted in China's Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's Great Eurasian Partnership Project. Uzbekistan invariably advocates the conjugation of all these strategies to turn the region into space for mutually beneficial cooperation, and not into a zone of competition.

Most importantly, thanks to the use of this approach, the authority of Uzbekistan in the world arena is significantly strengthened and its international subjectivity is growing. The country has established itself as a regional actor capable of exerting a stabilizing effect on the processes taking place in the region.

In his Address to the Oliy Majlis, the President once again paid special attention to the issues of bringing interregional cooperation to a new level, announcing plans to hold the third Consultative meeting of the heads of Central Asian states.

Sixth, another principle that began to prevail in the foreign policy, reformed under the leadership of the

Head of the state, is the humanization of foreign policy.

This can be seen in the example of the increased concern of the state for the interests of citizens of Uzbekistan abroad, including through the provision of state services to compatriots and involvement in the implementation of socio-economic, cultural and humanitarian projects.

In particular, back in 2018, the President of Uzbekistan signed a resolution on improving the state policy on working with compatriots living abroad. And this year, some practical measures have been implemented to promptly resolve the problems of Uzbekistan citizens living abroad.

Thus, during the pandemic, more than 500,000 labor migrants returned to the country. The assistance of various kinds was provided to about 100,000 compatriots, who found themselves in a difficult situation outside the country. Humanitarian measures continue to return citizens, mainly women and children, who, by the will of fate, found themselves in the zone of armed conflicts.

In this context, the initiative to create the fund “Vatandoshlar” (Compatriots), put forward by the leader of the country during the Address to the Oliy Majlis, deserves special attention. The implementation of this initiative will be another significant step in supporting the citizens abroad and strengthening dialogue with them.

The humanization of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is also manifested in expanding the geography of humanitarian aid provided by the country. Recently recipients of humanitarian support from Uzbekistan have become not only residents of neighboring countries but also the peoples of remote regions, such as the Palestinians and Rohingya, who find themselves in a difficult situation.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has achieved a qualitative shift in the international arena. The country seeks to become a responsible and predictable partner, ready in a constructive and open dialogue to solve the most pressing problems of both regional and global agendas, creating the necessary favorable external conditions for the implementation of a large-scale program of reform and modernization of the country, primarily for the benefit of the people living in Uzbekistan.

In this regard, the approval of the Concept of Foreign Policy Activity in the new edition is an objective necessity and is intended to lay a solid foundation for conducting an effective foreign policy aimed at ensuring the further dynamic growth of Uzbekistan in post-pandemic realities.

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