

# China, Central and South Asian countries further deepen connectivity



**On September 9, the international videoconference “China - Pakistan Economic Corridor and Central Asia: Emerging connectivity opportunities” was held with participation of leaders and experts from analytical and research centers from China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.**

At the event, views were exchanged on the emerging situation in the region of Central and South Asia, implementation of China’s Belt and Road Initiative, China - Pakistan Economic Corridor and other projects designed to strengthen connectivity of the region’s countries.

Addressing the conference, the Head of ISRS department under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sadullo Rasulov noted Tashkent’s interest in the implementation of energy and transport-logistics projects that can ensure the formation of a network of sustainable strategic communications between the regions of Central and South Asia.

In this regard, S. Rasulov recalled that Uzbekistan has forwarded a number of initiatives aimed at increasing connectivity in Central Asia. Among them, an important role is assigned to the construction of Uzbekistan - Kyrgyzstan - China railway, which is designed to unlock the transport potential of the region and form China - Central Asia - Western Asia economic corridor.

The importance of this road lies in the fact that it is the shortest route from China to the European and the Middle East countries. Compared to the existing routes, the distance will be reduced by 900 km, and the delivery time will be reduced by 7-8 days.

Uzbekistan is also promoting a number of projects that will connect Central Asia by the shortest route through Afghanistan with Pakistan and the Middle East, provide an opportunity for the states of South Asia and the Middle East to enter the CIS and Europe markets.

The first is the construction of Mazar-i-Sharif - Kabul - Peshawar railway with access to Pakistan’s Gwadar and Karachi ports. The second is the construction of Mazar-i-Sharif - Herat - Qandahar railway with access to Iran’s Chabahar port.

The ISRS expert pointed to the prospect of a possible conjugation of the corridor to Peshawar with flagship project “Belt and Road” - “China - Pakistan Economic Corridor”. Taking into account the infrastructure developing in Gwadar, this port will have every reason to become a key regional hub.

He emphasized that Uzbekistan supports the implementation of such energy projects as TAPI, CASA-1000 and PTL-500 Surkhon - Puli-Khumri, not limited to laying transport corridors.

According to him, transport communications and a unified energy infrastructure solve not only the problems of connectivity. They also serve to create new jobs, stimulate trade, motivate development, and thereby form the necessary socio-economic basis for the process of political settlement of the crisis in Afghanistan.

In addition, the region’s economic development programs will serve as a key factor in building consensus among regional countries on the need for an early achievement of long-term and sustainable peace in this long-suffering country.

Other participants of the virtual discussion also supported this view. Huseyin Botsali, OIC’s Permanent Representative in Afghanistan, noted that the Afghan crisis is one of the main barriers to strengthening connectivity in Central and South Asia. At the same time, he highly appreciated the efforts of Uzbekistan aimed at involving Afghanistan in trade-economic relations in Central Asia through the implementation of

transport and energy projects.

According to him, the Government of Afghanistan has intensified negotiations with China and Pakistan on development of cooperation within the framework of China - Pakistan Economic Corridor. Kabul also expresses interest in establishing cooperation with Central Asian countries both within the framework of Belt and Road and in a bilateral format.

Huseyin Botsali believes that more active involvement of Afghanistan in the regional process in Central and South Asia will serve to maintain long-term stability in this country.

The videoconference showed the interest of Central and South Asian countries, as well as China in further deepening connectivity.

**Source**