

Uzbekistan – Turkmenistan: Time-tested cooperation

Since ancient times people of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan lived nearby in friendship and consent, mutually enriching the culture of each other. People of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have friendly roots, many families have become related. Two fraternal people throughout many centuries used water from one river.

Uzbeks have a proverb "A friend in need is a friend indeed". Friendship of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan is tested by time. At difficult moments, people of the two countries constantly supported each other, in particular, pain and sufferings of Turkmens were perceived by Uzbeks as own. By the way, Uzbekistan one of the first had provided all support to people of Turkmenistan on elimination of consequences of Ashgabat earthquake of 1948. As it is noted in the chronicle of this accident, Tashkent was the first to accept data on earthquake. Uzbekistan physicians had left for Ashgabat immediately. Thousands of wounded and orphan children were evacuated to Uzbekistan.

Today, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan pay special importance to deepening relations of good-neighborliness and friendship, raising the level of strategic cooperation. A vivid embodiment of this was the opening in Tashkent in a solemn atmosphere of the street named after Makhtumkuli and the monument with his bas-relief image, as well as the "Ashgabat" park with symbols of friendly Turkmenistan. In turn, in order to perpetuate the memory of the First President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, a memorial complex was opened in Turkmenistan, and a street was named in his honor.

It should be noted that cultural heritage occupies a special place in relations between the two countries. It is difficult to find a Turkmen family where Navoi would not have been read, or an Uzbek who would not be familiar with verses of Makhtumkuli. Creativity of Makhtumkuli is widely studied in schools of Uzbekistan, is studied by Uzbek scientists.

During 2017, a number of high-level meetings took place in bilateral and multilateral formats. Interaction between our countries is filled with new qualitative content. A clear illustration of this is the following moments, including those stipulated by the Strategic Partnership Treaty in March 2017.

Firstly, trade and economic cooperation is expanding. A new impetus to this was given by signing in March 2017 in Ashgabat of the Agreement between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on economic cooperation for 2018-2020. A vivid example of practical implementation of this document is holding in March this year of a meeting of the joint Uzbekistan – Turkmenistan Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation.

In 2017, delegations of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan business circles exchanged visits to participate in exhibitions, fairs and business forums. It is encouraging to note that the manufacturer of large household appliances in Uzbekistan under "Artel" trademark organized a joint production in Turkmenistan of assembling water heaters and aluminum profiles. It is symbolic that for the first time at the end of March this year, the National Industrial Exhibition was organized in Ashgabat, which clearly reflects the significant potential of Turkmenistan – Uzbekistan partnership.

Secondly, there is intense interaction between the border regions of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. An agreement has been reached on development of cross-border cooperation between Bukhara and Khorezm regions of Uzbekistan with Lebap and Dashoguz regions of Turkmenistan.

Thirdly, targeted projects in the field of transport are being implemented. Integrated roads and railways of the two countries fulfill the transit function for the third countries. As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated, "Uzbekistan aims to exit via the ports of Turkmenistan to the Caspian Sea, international transport corridors". In this regard, it is natural to note the transport-transit corridor "Uzbekistan – Turkmenistan – Iran – Oman", successful implementation of which will increase transit cargo flows and provide the project participants with the shortest and most effective access to foreign markets.

Close attention is also paid to implementation of joint large-scale projects – the construction of road and railway bridges across Amudarya "Turkmenabad – Farab". Erection of these facilities will create favorable conditions for increase in the volume of transportation of goods through Turkmenistan to the countries of Southern and Central Europe, the Middle East, and South-East Asia.

Fourthly, interaction in implementation of large-scale projects in the oil and gas sector is increasing. As the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated, "this is a new sphere of activity for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The joint experience acquired here will allow our oil producers to enter the broader regional and international markets in the future". Operation of Turkmenistan – Uzbekistan – Kazakhstan – China gas pipeline with a capacity of up to 25 billion cubic meters of gas per year is indicative in this context.

At the same time, today Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have an agreement on joint development of hydrocarbon deposits on the Caspian coast. President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov welcomed participation of Uzbekistan in implementation of such major joint projects.

Fifthly, cooperation in cultural and humanitarian sphere is deepening. Over the past two years, the "Days of Culture of Uzbekistan" and "Days of Culture of Turkmenistan" took place in the capitals of the two countries. At the same time, the Program of Cooperation in the cultural and humanitarian sphere for 2017-2019 was signed.

In order to preserve traditions, language and culture of the Turkmen from the first years of independence, the Republican Turkmen Cultural Center was established in our country. In 2017 in Nukus State Pedagogical Institute named after Ajiniyaz, a faculty was opened to train teachers for primary classes for teaching in Turkmen language.

In general, Uzbekistan – Turkmenistan relations are enjoying the most favorable period for further development of full-scale cooperation and enrichment with a qualitatively new content. Undoubtedly, the upcoming visit of the President of Turkmenistan to Uzbekistan will contribute to building up a multifaceted, multilevel and mutually beneficial partnership between our countries.

Nigora Shokhimardonova,

**Chief Researcher of the Institute of Strategic and Interregional Studies
under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.**