

## The first interregional forum between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan will deepen ties between regions in industrial cooperation and investment



On 14 February, Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan together with the Azerbaijani South Caucasus Political Scientists' Club organized a Baku-Tashkent video bridge was held on the topic: "Bilateral trade and economic relations in the light of the upcoming interregional forum" with the support of the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Baku and the international news agency "Sputnik Azerbaijan". It was attended by leading experts from the analytical centers of the two countries, as well as representatives of the diplomatic corps.

The meeting became a kind of expert prologue to the upcoming interregional Forum between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, which will be held on 23-24 February 2023 and allowed for a thorough exchange of views on the current dynamics of bilateral multifaceted cooperation and the deepening of strategic partnership.

The participants of the event stressed that, thanks to the political will of the leaders of Uzbekistan and

Azerbaijan, relations between the countries have entered a qualitatively new stage of development, and are increasingly gaining "strategic depth".

It was noted that following the results of the state visit of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to Uzbekistan in 2022, large-scale agreements were reached, which set new "introductory" points for building up deep points of growth in mutual relations.

It was especially emphasized that Tashkent and Baku have already begun to explore new areas of cooperation, including the expansion of cooperation ties. This is the sphere of energy, transport, communications, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, production of building materials, textile and food industries.

During the event, Azerbaijani experts shared their assessments of the state and prospects of bilateral relations in areas of mutual interest.



According to the director of the Azerbaijani analytical center "STEM" Orkhan Yelchuev, historically close friendly relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan entered a qualitatively new stage of their development under Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Ilham Aliyev and have a huge untapped potential.

This is facilitated by the significantly increased international authority of Uzbekistan in recent years, in particular due to the country's new foreign policy course. "The policy of openness in foreign relations turns this Central Asian country into an important player in the region. In fact, today the republic is experiencing its third renaissance", Orkhan Yelchuev emphasized.

The Azerbaijani political scientist noted the growing interest of foreign countries in Uzbekistan in the light of the ongoing reforms in the country. According to the expert, Azerbaijani large and small businesses are also showing their interest. So, if at the beginning of 2022 there were 178 companies with Azerbaijani participation in Uzbekistan, now their number has increased to 266.

The director of the Azerbaijani analytical center "STEM" believes that during the period of the energy crisis in the world and the shortage of chemical and food raw materials, the issue of using transport and logistics routes, in particular, the Middle Corridor, where Uzbekistan plays one of the main roles, is especially relevant. "This opens up great opportunities for our countries", the expert said.

In this regard, he noted the dynamic development of trade and economic relations. Over the past year alone, thanks to joint efforts, the parties were able to increase trade by 53% - from US\$118.8 million to US\$181.8 million.



Continuing the discussion, Ilgar Velizade, head of the South Caucasus Political Scientists' Club, highlighted a number of promising areas of cooperation for expanding bilateral cooperation.

Noting the success of Uzbekistan in cotton breeding, the Azerbaijani expert stressed Azerbaijan's interest in using the Uzbek experience in growing new varieties of cotton. There was also an increased interest in Uzbek silk, the export of which is now being established to Azerbaijan.



In turn, leading researcher at the Azerbaijan Institute of Economics, Ph.D. in Economics Emin Mammadzade singled out Uzbekistan's assistance in restoring the liberated territories of Azerbaijan as one of the most important areas of cooperation. It was noted that the Uzbek side undertook to help in the construction of a secondary school in the city of Fizuli.

According to the Azerbaijani economist, such examples of interaction most clearly characterize the highest level of relations between the countries. "The horizon for the development of these ties will only increase", the expert concluded.

At the same time, the participants of the video conference focused on the importance of maintaining and further promoting the expert dialogue. In their opinion, it is the joint work of analytical structures that can contribute to the practical implementation of the initiatives put forward by the leaders of the two countries. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to "pick up" new ideas in a timely manner and develop them in the direction necessary to strengthen bilateral ties.

The experts expressed confidence that the upcoming interregional forum between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan would give an additional impetus to the expansion of cooperation ties and contribute to the creation of new joint ideas for the development of interaction based on the wide use of unused reserves and opportunities.