

# The Caspian Region in the COVID-19 Era



A virtual conference has taken place on “The Caspian Region in the COVID-19 Era: Implications for Security Policy and Regional Cooperation” with participation of heads and experts from think tanks of Uzbekistan and the United States, American diplomats and military specialists, high-ranking officials of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan for foreign policy.

Views were exchanged on the epidemiological and socio-economic situation emerging during the pandemic in the Caspian and Central Asian regions, promising areas of cooperation between the countries and implementation of joint trade, economic and transport-communication projects.

First Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Akramjon Nematov noted that Uzbekistan considers cooperation with the Caspian states, based on centuries-old friendship and cultural-ethnic proximity, as one of the priority areas of its foreign policy strategy and is interested in giving new dynamics to multilateral relations.

It is necessary to strengthen cooperation between Caspian and Central Asian regions, since cultural and historical roots, common interests, the economy and transport-communications are complementary. In addition, the Caspian and Central Asia are located close to hotbeds of tension in the Middle East, from which permanent threats of terrorism and cross-border crime emanate. All this makes it necessary to build a “structure of mutual support” that allow a collective response to modern challenges.

According to Akromjon Nematov, the coronavirus pandemic is rapidly moving beyond the epidemiological crisis, as it is accompanied by socio-economic consequences. As a result, the states of Central Asia and the South Caucasus are facing one of the worst crises of our time, which can only be confronted by working together. In these conditions, it is relevant to increase the intensity of trade turnover, which can stimulate internal economic activity in the Caspian and Central Asian countries and reduce the negative impact of the pandemic. It is necessary to accelerate the process of connecting transport and logistics hubs between the Caspian region and Central Asia, which, in addition to developing regional trade, will contribute to entering new markets and socio-economic progress.

The development of interregional cooperation is also important for ensuring long-term stability in Afghanistan and involving the Afghan side in regional economic, transport and infrastructure projects.

Advisor to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Hikmat Hajiyev drew attention to the activity of Uzbekistan within the framework of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States. The entry of Tashkent into the organization marked the beginning of a new stage of multilateral cooperation between the countries of the Council. It is noteworthy that the member states of the Council were one of the first among the various integration associations in the world to realize the impossibility of achieving success in the fight against the pandemic without consolidating joint efforts.

Iskander Akylbayev, Executive Director of Kazakhstan Council on International Relations, noted the growing foreign policy activity of Uzbekistan in the Afghan direction, aimed at creating and maintaining stability around Central Asia. He noted the need for developing constructive interaction between the business communities of the states of Central Asia and the South Caucasus by establishing direct contacts. This can be a factor that stimulates business activity in these countries.

In general, strengthening regional cooperation was assessed by the participants of the event as an important factor that can bring the countries of the Caspian and Central Asia to a qualitatively new level of economic development and consolidate the reputation of a prosperous and peaceful territory for the vast region of Eurasia.

**Source**