

The strengthening of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Serbia is in the spotlight of the Turkish media



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The leading Turkish publication The Asia Today published an article by Shakhnoza Kodirova, Head of Department at the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, entitled "Strengthening Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Serbia: Current Trends and Prospects."

The European vector of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is aimed at expanding the geography of its partnerships and deepening cooperation across all mutually beneficial areas. In this context, relations with Serbia stand out for their consistency, mutual respect, and the sustained interest of both sides in strengthening collaboration.

The history of diplomatic relations between Uzbekistan and Serbia spans three decades. Over this period, the two states have steadily reinforced political dialogue, expanded economic contacts, and intensified cultural and humanitarian exchanges. While Belgrade views Uzbekistan as a key partner in Central Asia, Tashkent regards Serbia as an important bridge to European markets.

It is noteworthy that political cooperation between the two countries is developing on the basis of equality, mutual trust, and respect.

During the first visit of Serbia's Political Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zoran Vujić, to Tashkent in 2017, meetings were held at Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense. As a result, the two sides launched a mechanism for inter-ministerial political consultations and agreed to cooperate within international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, and the Non-Aligned Movement.

In 2021, the first round of inter-ministerial consultations took place in Tashkent. A year later, during the session of the UN General Assembly, the foreign ministers signed a protocol on the further development of interagency cooperation. This document served as a catalyst for expanding bilateral partnership and promoting humanitarian exchange.

Thanks to the political will of both sides, during the visit of Serbia's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic in April 2023, an agreement was reached to strengthen diplomatic

presence through the appointment of ambassadors in both countries. This step clearly underscored Tashkent's and Belgrade's shared commitment to deepening their multifaceted relations.

In 2025, political dialogue advanced even further. In February, the parties discussed prospects for cooperation in the field of migration and the preparation of an intergovernmental agreement on mobility, as well as the strengthening of cultural and humanitarian ties. In July of the same year, Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Serbia, Oybek Shakhavdinov, held talks with the Serbian State Secretary for Foreign Trade, Nikola Stojanovic. The discussions focused on improving the legal framework, promoting B2B initiatives, and enhancing people-to-people contacts.

Notably, Serbia's political and business circles have shown growing interest in Uzbekistan, spurred by the sweeping reforms initiated under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, aimed at liberalizing the economy and advancing state modernization. Serbia also highly values Uzbekistan's proactive regional policy, which prioritizes confidence-building and good-neighborly relations among Central Asian nations.

In this regard, Uzbekistan's approach to fostering constructive regional dialogue fully resonates with Serbia's foreign policy principles, as articulated in its "Four Pillars" strategy. The document emphasizes that "regional integration and multilateralism are the environments in which Serbia can become a prosperous country."

Both countries pursue multi-vector foreign policies, seeking to strengthen ties with different regions and maintain a balance of interests on the international stage. It is worth noting that Tashkent and Belgrade hold similar positions on key global and regional issues—from combating terrorism and transnational crime to promoting sustainable development and climate security.

Undoubtedly, economic cooperation serves as one of the main engines of Uzbek-Serbian relations. Work is currently underway to expand the legal framework, including the drafting of an Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation. Both nations—implementing large-scale reforms and focusing on modernization—view partnership as a tool for diversifying their economies and enhancing competitiveness.

Uzbekistan's favorable investment climate has become a key driver of mutual trade. Bilateral trade has increased nearly tenfold—from USD 1.9 million in 2017 to USD 18.6 million in 2024. During the same period, Uzbekistan's exports have tripled, clearly reflecting the growing interest of both countries' business communities in long-term cooperation.

Promising areas for collaboration include pharmaceuticals, agriculture, energy, healthcare, high technology, and digital transformation. In August of this year, the two sides discussed ways to further boost trade by launching joint industrial and agricultural projects, opening new horizons for investment.

Alongside economic ties, parliamentary diplomacy also plays an important role in strengthening bilateral relations. Active exchanges of parliamentary delegations contribute to cooperation in sustainable development, democratization, gender equality, and human rights protection. Since 2021, friendship groups have been established in the parliaments of both countries, fostering deeper inter-parliamentary dialogue and the exchange of best practices.

The current stage of Uzbek-Serbian cooperation opens new opportunities in both economic and humanitarian spheres. Against this background, several key areas can be identified that will shape the bilateral agenda in the coming years.

First, strengthening trade and economic relations remains a top priority. There is a shared understanding that the current level of trade does not reflect the full potential of cooperation. Serbian experts highly value Uzbekistan's economic prospects, its human capital, natural resources, and GDP growth rate, which consistently exceeds 5% annually.

At the same time, Serbia has become one of the most dynamic markets in the Balkans. Its economy is

showing steady diversification, gradually shifting from traditional sectors—agriculture and heavy industry—to innovative ones, including IT, automotive manufacturing, agribusiness, and pharmaceuticals.

Looking ahead, intensified investment cooperation opens new horizons for mutually beneficial collaboration—from joint ventures and technology exchange to expanded access to regional markets. The combination of economic advantages and strategic geographical positioning allows both nations to view their partnership as a factor of sustainable growth and regional integration.

Second, agriculture represents one of the most promising areas of cooperation. As Uzbekistan modernizes its agro-industrial complex, priorities include introducing advanced technologies, training personnel, and increasing productivity—areas where Serbia's experience is especially valuable.

Agriculture remains a vital part of Serbia's economy: about 40% of the country's territory is agricultural land, the sector accounts for up to 6% of GDP, and has an export potential of €12 billion. Belgrade consistently supports innovation in this field by offering tax incentives to companies investing in research and development and by developing agro-technological parks.

In recent years, Serbia has seen the emergence of successful agritech startups and fruit processing enterprises—further evidence of the strong potential for cooperation in this area. A notable step in this direction was the agreement reached in July 2025 between Uzbekistan's Minister of Agriculture Ibrokhim Abdurakhmonov and Serbia's Minister of Agriculture Milan Krkic during the Second UN Food Systems Session in Addis Ababa. The parties agreed to exchange agricultural technologies, jointly combat soil degradation, and promote the rational use of water resources. Work is already underway to organize direct deliveries of frozen fruits from Uzbekistan to Serbia.

Third, there is significant potential for cooperation in science, technology, and cultural exchange. Serbia's education system is recognized as one of the most advanced in Europe, creating opportunities for experience sharing and the establishment of joint university programs, particularly in IT and environmental sciences.

The Serbian IT sector is demonstrating steady growth, currently accounting for about 10% of national GDP. Exports of digital services are rising rapidly, and local companies are confidently entering international markets. However, analysts note that Serbia faces an annual shortage of around 5,000 IT specialists.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's IT industry has become a key driver of economic development. Within the framework of the Digital Uzbekistan – 2030 Strategy, the republic has set ambitious goals for large-scale digital transformation, aiming to increase the volume of IT service exports to USD 5 billion annually.

Thus, the development of cooperation in science and technology logically complements the growing economic and investment partnership between Uzbekistan and Serbia. The synergy of both countries' potential and strategic orientations creates opportunities for joint research centers, educational programs, and technology startups—laying the groundwork for sustainable development and stronger bilateral ties.

Overall, Uzbek-Serbian cooperation is developing steadily and increasingly taking on a strategic character. Based on mutual trust, political will, and converging foreign policy priorities, Tashkent and Belgrade are building a solid foundation for long-term partnership.

The strengthening of multifaceted ties will facilitate the inflow of modern technologies and investments, boost tourist flows from the EU, and expand the export of Uzbek products to European markets.

Belgrade increasingly recognizes that a reforming and economically dynamic Uzbekistan can become Serbia's key partner in implementing its strategy of diversifying external economic relations and expanding its presence in the Central Asian market.

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