

Uzbekistan and France: Mutually beneficial cooperation for the benefit of progress and prosperity



Within the foreign policy framework, Uzbekistan is actively developing partnerships with European states, considering them as important strategic partners for implementing projects in economics, politics, and humanitarian initiatives.

France plays a key role in Europe and has a special place in this process. The interaction between the two states is characterized by an active political and diplomatic dialogue, as well as vast possibilities for developing trade and investment cooperation and strengthening exchange in the educational and scientific fields.

Historical roots of bilateral contacts between Uzbekistan and France date back to the beginning of the XIV century, when the military genius and the founder of the Timurid Empire Amir Temur and King Charles VI laid the foundations of partnership, striving for free trade. The correspondence preserved in both sides' archives indicates the leaders' desire to strengthen political relations. Amir Temur, supporting the eastern policy of Charles VI, emphasized the importance of developing commercial ties and mutual support of merchants, noting: "The world is flourishing thanks to merchants".

This mutual desire for friendship, solidarity, and economic cooperation has survived through the centuries. After gaining independence of Uzbekistan, these relations received a new impulse, which was implemented in establishing multifaceted ties with France.

The historical roots of interaction laid a strong foundation for a modern dialogue, which acquired a special dynamic with the election of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as the Head of state.

Notably, the Leader of Uzbekistan made his first European visit to France. This diplomatic step opened a new page in the history of relations, crowned by signing several important intergovernmental agreements.

Today, both sides show openness and pragmatism, actively collaborate in the development of political dialogue, trade, economic, investment, energy, technological, cultural, and humanitarian areas. Such a comprehensive approach based on a common historical heritage emphasizes the desire for mutually beneficial partnership to address modern challenges.

While six mutual state visits have been held over 34 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries, half of them have occurred within the last 7 years by the current leaders. Two visits by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Paris in 2018 and 2022 and the return visit of President Emmanuel Macron to Tashkent in 2023 marked this period. The dynamics at the highest level indicate a significant strengthening of connections and mutual interest in expanding interaction.

Along with the summits of the heads of state, meetings of the heads of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Parliaments of the two countries are regularly held. A significant instrument for inter-parliamentary cooperation is the “Uzbekistan –France” Friendship Group in the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The Senate of France has an inter-parliamentary group “France – Central Asia”. In the National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament, there is a “France – Central Asia” Friendship Group. Such multifaceted interaction helps to strengthen political dialogue.

The progressive development of relations between Uzbekistan and France reveals broad trade, economic, and investment prospects. In Uzbekistan, there are 50 enterprises with French capital, half of which entirely belong to investors from France. The presence of the French business is especially noticeable in the key sectors of the economy of the country, such as utilities (Veolia, Suez, Eiffage), green energy (EDF, Total Eren, Voltalia, Orange), and the food industry (Lactalis).

The active participation of companies from France in various Uzbek industries emphasizes their growing interest in the local market and forms a reliable base for deepening economic partnerships between countries.

The key mechanisms for developing bilateral contacts are the Uzbekistan – France Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation and the Economic Chamber France – Uzbekistan. A significant contribution is made by the French Development Agency, which implements a Cooperation Program with Uzbekistan for 2023-2025 with a budget of 1.07 billion euros.

An essential role in strengthening interaction is devoted to joint business forums. For instance, one of them was held in November 2023 in Samarkand with the participation of the leaders of 60 French companies, and the second in May 2024 in Tashkent, which was attended by 53 representatives of 20 companies in France, including top managers from SUEZ and Airbus Europe. The business forum held on January 30 this year in the capital of Uzbekistan has delivered many signed agreements on economic cooperation.

The results of these meetings are reinforced by the favorable conditions formed by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and Uzbekistan, according to which the most favored nation regime has been established with France. This has contributed to a five-fold increase in bilateral trade over the past five years, which reached 1.1 billion US dollars in 2024. A portfolio of current and promising projects covering mechanical engineering and production of natural resources exceeds 8 billion euros.

Along with the dynamic development of economic ties, cooperation between Uzbekistan and France is also actively expanding in the cultural and humanitarian sphere, enriching relations between the citizens of the two countries. Over the past 7 years, over 50 agreements and memorandums have been signed in various fields: business management and archeology, design and fashion, linguistics and education, healthcare, tourism, and sports.

In tourism, the results of the agreements are especially noticeable: during the last two years, the number of tourists from France visiting Uzbekistan has approached 20 thousand people annually.

At the same time, the French language is being actively studied in the country, with more than 189,000 students in schools and universities learning it. These facts indicate strengthening cultural ties and mutual interest, creating the basis for further development of bilateral relations.

Cultural centers, headed by the French Alliance, play a key role in developing interaction between countries. The monuments of Abu Ali Ibn Sina and Mirzo Ulugbek installed in France emphasize respect and interest in the historical heritage of the region in this country. Cooperation is also strengthened thanks to joint projects, such as “Uzbek Garden”, opened in the city of Rueil-Malmaison’s central park and Toulouse’s botanical garden.

An essential stage in strengthening bilateral ties was holding significant exhibitions in Paris dedicated to the art and history of the country. In 2022-2023, a series of events was held including the expositions of “The Splendours of Uzbekistan’s Oases” at the Louvre Museum, “The Road to Samarkand. Miracles of Silk and Gold” at the Arab World Institute and “Abu Rayhan Beruni: Geographical and Intellectual Journeys” at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. Not only do they reveal the wealth of historical heritage of Central Asia, but they also contribute to strengthening mutual understanding between the people of Uzbekistan and France.

To sum up, relations between Uzbekistan and France are experiencing a renaissance. The open and pragmatic foreign policy of Tashkent, aimed at the widening involvement of international partners in cooperation in Uzbekistan and the region of Central Asia, creates favorable conditions for elevating relations with France to a qualitatively new level.

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