

# Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the People's Republic of China in a New Era



On January 23-25 of this year, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev will pay a state visit to the People's Republic of China, which, will undoubtedly be of high significance and will give a new impetus to the expansion and deepening of Uzbek-Chinese cooperation.

At present, despite geopolitical tensions and growing instability centers in the world, the relations between Uzbekistan and China are experiencing the best stage in their development, demonstrating an excellent model of bilateral interaction.

## **Promotion of Comprehensive Political Dialogue**

For more than 30 years, Uzbekistan and China have been continuously strengthening political mutual trust and developing bilateral relations based on the principles of equality, friendship, good-neighborliness, mutual support, mutual benefit, respect and consideration of each other's interests.

With the election of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as President of Uzbekistan, Uzbek-Chinese interaction has entered a trajectory of more dynamic development. This is facilitated by both regular political dialogue at the highest level and the existing friendly and trusting relations between the leaders of the two countries.

Thanks to the political will and efforts of the heads of state, in September 2022, bilateral relations were raised to the level of «comprehensive strategic partnership in a new era», which reflects the similarity of their views and geopolitical priorities, the mutual desire to take cooperation to a higher level and fill it with new content.

Since 2017, 3 telephone conversations and 8 meetings have taken place. Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Uzbekistan in 2022. In turn, the leader of Uzbekistan visited China 5 times (in 2017, 2019, 2022, 2023).

As a result of mutual state visits over the past two years, about 60 documents have been signed, agreements have been reached on the implementation of trade contracts and investment agreements worth more than 40 billion dollars.

Active dialogue supported at the intergovernmental, interparliamentary, and interdepartmental levels also plays a key role in deepening multifaceted interaction.

Since 2011, meetings of the Uzbek-Chinese Intergovernmental Cooperation Committee, which includes 7 specialized subcommittees, have been held. An agreement has been reached in 2022 on the creation of a subcommittee on poverty reduction.

Since 2017, the Inter-Parliamentary Group on Cooperation between the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the National People's Congress has been operating, which helps to intensify mutual visits of parliamentary delegations and conduct joint events to exchange experience in the field of rule-making. In addition, political consultations are held on a regular basis at the level of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries.

In November 2023, the first Strategic Dialogue between the foreign ministers of the two countries was launched in Beijing, which became a new mechanism for the implementation of agreements reached at the highest level.

At the same time, interregional exchanges have been noticeably intensified. Last year, delegations from Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Shaanxi, Shandong, Jiangsu and Jiangxi provinces visited Uzbekistan. As a result of the visits, more than 100 investment contracts and agreements worth a total of 3.5 billion dollars were signed. A number of agreements on establishing partnership relations between cities and regions of Uzbekistan and China have also been signed.

Over the years of cooperation, a solid legal framework of over 285 documents has been created, covering virtually all areas of interstate relations.

To date, the Program for the Development of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in a New Era for 2023-2027, as well as the Program for the Development of Trade, Economic and Investment Cooperation between China and Uzbekistan for 2022-2026 are being implemented.

In addition to the bilateral agenda, China and Uzbekistan have significantly enhanced coordination within regional and international organizations such as the UN, SCO, CICA, BRICS Plus and others. The two sides provide each other with mutual support, demonstrating proximity and similarity of positions on the most pressing global and regional issues.

Beijing has supported a number of resolutions initiated by Uzbekistan at the UN in recent years. Tashkent, in turn, highly appreciates and supports the initiatives promoted by China on global development, global security and global civilization, which are of key importance for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring peace and security, and strengthening inter-civilizational dialogue.

To date, the «Central Asia-China» format at the level of heads of state has become a new platform for China's interaction with Central Asian countries. As a result of the first face-to-face summit of the heads of state of Central Asia and China, held in May 2023, the Xi'an Declaration was signed, which established the institutional basis for deepening cooperation in the new format.

The interaction of the parties within the framework of China's flagship project «Belt and Road» is of no small importance for the intensification of bilateral cooperation. The leader of our state has already participated three times in the work of the international «Belt and Road» forums held in 2017, 2019 and 2023.

As rightly characterized by our President, speaking at the jubilee third forum dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the initiative: «over the years, the ambitious idea to revitalize the Great Silk Road has

gained many supporters and turned into a sought-after, inclusive and open platform of interaction».

At the same time, Uzbekistan's priority areas of cooperation within the framework of this initiative are:

- 1) implementation of transport and logistics projects that increase the transit potential of our republic and can provide the shortest access to world markets;
- 2) building supply chains with high added value by creating capacities for the production of high-tech products;
- 3) adaptation to climate change and intensification of interaction within the framework of the «Green Silk Road», providing for the development of «green» energy, «green» technologies, «smart» agriculture, etc.;
- 4) development of cultural and humanitarian ties through the use of the existing huge tourism potential of our country, as well as strengthening cooperation in the fields of education, science, culture and health care.

### **Expansion of mutually beneficial economic and investment cooperation**

The central place in bilateral relations is given to trade, economic and investment cooperation, which in recent years has demonstrated positive dynamics and stable growth.

China has become a leading trading partner and major investor into the economy of Uzbekistan. At the end of 2023, bilateral trade turnover amounted to 13.7 billion dollars. In the total foreign trade turnover of our country, the share of China reached 21.9%. At the same time, there is every reason to increase trade turnover to 20 billion dollars in the next five years.

The basis of Uzbek exports to China are mineral fuels, petroleum products, copper and copper products, cotton yarn and silk, and plastics. The basis of Uzbek imports from China are machinery and equipment, vehicles, plastics, rubber, and metals. At the same time, most of the imports account for the purchase of high-tech equipment, machine tools and machines necessary to modernize the industrial sector of our country's economy.

It is gratifying to note that with the signing of a package of protocols on phytosanitary requirements in 2018, the range and volumes of agricultural and food products exported by Uzbekistan to the PRC have increased significantly.

Today, Uzbekistan has received permission to export 21 types of such products (mash, dried grapes, cherries, melons, peanuts, pomegranates, sesame seeds, dried apricots, honey, dried prunes, lemon, beans, dried melon, chicken feet, etc.).

For example, exports of mash and dried grapes have increased significantly in recent years. Uzbekistan's share in the total volume of Chinese imports of mash has reached 37%, and in the import of dried grapes - 50%.

Since the beginning of large-scale reforms and an open foreign economic policy, Chinese investors have shown a steady interest in Uzbekistan, investing heavily in the oil and gas, chemical, telecommunications industries, hydropower, agriculture, light industry, pharmaceuticals, automotive, and production of building materials.

The total volume of Chinese investments in Uzbekistan for 2017-2022 increased 5 times and reached almost 11 billion dollars. Today, there are 2,125 enterprises in our republic with the participation of Chinese capital, which is 15% of the total number of enterprises created with the participation of capital from foreign countries.

A number of large projects have already been implemented with Chinese partners, such as the Kungrad soda plant, the Dehkanabad Plant on Production of Potash Fertilizers, the Huaxin Cement Jizzakh and

Farg'ona Yasin Qurilish Mollari cement plants, the Navoiyazot joint-stock company complex for the production of polyvinyl chloride, caustic soda and methanol. In 2023, the largest cement plant with a capacity of 3 million tonnes per year was opened in the Samarkand region in partnership with Energy China, and a truck production plant was established in the Andijan region in partnership with the Chinese automobile company FAW.

At the same time, it is important to especially emphasize that Chinese investors are actively participating in the creation of joint high-tech industrial parks in our country. A successful example in this direction is the «Peng Sheng» park, created in 2009 in the «Jizzakh» free economic zone.

In this park, together with the Chinese company «ZTE», a line for the production of smartphones was built, factories were opened for the production of valves and mixers, ceramic tiles, sanitary ware, and footwear products based on domestic raw materials. Today it provides work for about 2 thousand local residents.

In the near future, it is planned to build an Uzbek-Chinese agro-industrial park, an Agroinnovation Park, and an Uzbek-Chinese biotechnology cluster, which will also help deepen bilateral cooperation in the production of high-tech products and the creation of new jobs.

At the same time, cooperation between countries is deepening in the production of new generation cars equipped with electric and hybrid engines. In 2023, corresponding agreements were signed with the Chinese companies «EXEED» and «BYD Auto Industry».

In addition, agreements were signed on the joint development of technologies and installation of chargers for electric vehicles. According to plans, by 2033, 70 centralized and 50 thousand decentralized electric filling stations will be built in all regions of our republic.

In the context of the global trend towards the transition to «green» development, the implementation of joint projects for the widespread introduction of renewable energy sources (solar, wind, hydroelectric power stations) is a relevant area of Uzbek-Chinese cooperation.

China is the undisputed global leader in the deployment of renewable energy sources (RES). By the end of 2023, the total installed capacity of «green» energy in the country's energy balance reached 49.6%. Chinese manufacturers of solar panels, wind turbines, and batteries account for about 70% of the global market.

Strengthening Uzbek-Chinese cooperation in the field of implementation of renewable energy sources will undoubtedly help improve energy security and environmental sustainability of our country. This will also contribute to more effective implementation of the «Green Economy Transition Program» and ensuring «green» growth in the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030», according to which it is planned to increase renewable energy capacity in the country's overall energy balance up to 30%.

Chinese companies are already implementing a number of projects for the construction of solar and wind power plants in Kashkadarya, Bukhara and Andijan regions. Moreover, in May 2023, new agreements were reached on the construction of 11 solar and wind power plants with a total capacity of 4.8 GW worth 4.4 billion dollars. In addition, the Chinese side is actively involved in the preparation of feasibility studies for hydroelectric power station construction projects in the Namangan and Tashkent regions.

Another promising area of the Uzbek-Chinese partnership is digital development. In the last decade, China has made a big leap in the field of digital innovation, taking the lead in the development of 5G technologies, blockchain, Internet of Things, big data, artificial intelligence, and e-commerce.

Thanks to the development of electronic trading platforms such as Alibaba, Taobao, AliExpress, China has become the world leader in e-commerce with a total transaction volume of 2 trillion dollars.

Considering the rich experience and achievements of the PRC in this direction, Uzbekistan is interested in technology transfer and attracting Chinese investment in the development of e-commerce,

telecommunications, artificial intelligence, the creation of centers for processing and storing big data.

In recent years, interaction between the two countries in the development of electronic commerce has reached a new stage of development. So, in September 2022, a permanent national pavilion of Uzbekistan was launched on the Alibaba platform, where more than 100 products from the textile, agricultural and food industries are displayed. In the future, it is planned to open new industry sections and increase product names to 300.

### **Strengthening cultural and humanitarian ties**

Uzbekistan and China pay special attention to the expansion of cultural and humanitarian ties, which contribute to all possible rapprochement, deepening mutual understanding and mutual enrichment of the cultures of the two peoples.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, in his signed article on the eve of his state visit to Uzbekistan in September 2022, focused on the fact that the Great Silk Road testifies to friendly contacts between our peoples for more than 2000 years. Countries still keep good memories of such pioneers and envoys of Chinese-Uzbek friendship as Zhang Qian, Xuan Zang, Wu Zhu, Seyid Ajal Shamsuddin and others. Such centuries-old Chinese-Uzbek friendship, passed down from generation to generation, continues to serve as a strong foundation to this day for further strengthening of multifaceted cooperation.

A worthy contribution to strengthening mutual understanding between the two peoples is being made by the «Uzbekistan-China» Friendship Society, the «China-Central Asia» Friendship Society, as well as the Chinese National Cultural Center in Tashkent.

Every year, cooperation in the fields of education, science, tourism, healthcare, sports, archeology is actively developing, and exchanges between educational and academic institutions, youth organizations and the media are being strengthened. This is facilitated by regularly held joint conferences, symposia, exhibitions, tourism fairs, culture and cinema days, concerts and festivals.

The year 2023 was busy in terms of holding various joint cultural events. For example, in October, an exhibition of Uzbek historical heritage was organized at the Archaeological Cooperation Exhibition within the framework of the «Belt and Road» Initiative at the «Gugun» Palace Museum in Beijing. In addition, Chinese Culture Days were held in Uzbekistan.

It is also necessary to emphasize the growing interest among young people of the two countries in mutual language learning. For example, departments for studying the Uzbek language have been opened in two Chinese universities, and the Center for Uzbek Language and Culture was created. In Uzbekistan Chinese is taught in six universities.

At the same time, the basic university specializing in training sinologists is the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies (TSUOS), where a separate faculty of «Chinese studies» has been opened in the following three areas: «Chinese language and literature», «Politics, history and international relations of the PRC» and «Economy of China». All teaching staff of the faculty undergo training and regularly improve their skills at prestigious universities in China.

The activities of the Confucius Institutes opened in Tashkent and Samarkand make a great contribution to the study of the Chinese language and the popularization of Chinese culture. It is important to note that the first agreement on the opening of the Confucius Institute in Central Asia was signed by China with Uzbekistan in 2004.

As we know, this year marks the 20th anniversary of the opening of the first Confucius Institutes in the world. In this regard, the academic circles of Uzbekistan and China could consider the possibility of holding a joint scientific and practical conference in Tashkent dedicated to the legacy of Confucius.

Cooperation between the countries in the field of tourism is also developing steadily. Uzbeks and Chinese

are interested in the common history of the two ancient Eastern civilizations, which were connected by Great Silk Road, rich historical and cultural heritage and unique ancient architectural monuments located on the territory of the states, which serves as the basis for the intensification of tourist exchanges.

Since 2010, Uzbekistan has been assigned the status of a tourist country for group travel of Chinese citizens, and since 2021 a 10-day visa-free regime applies to residents of the PRC.

In addition, a lot of work is being done to popularize the Uzbek tourism brand in China. In particular, study tours to Uzbekistan were organized for popular Chinese media and journalists, and videos about Uzbekistan were broadcast on Chinese channels.

Thanks to the measures taken, the flow of Chinese tourists to Uzbekistan has increased significantly in recent years. At the end of last year, their number exceeded 40 thousand people.

In addition, the number of flights between countries is increasing. Currently, three airlines «Uzbekistan Airways», «China Southern Airlines» and «Loong Air» operate 11 flights per week between the cities of Uzbekistan and China (Urumqi, Beijing, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Chengdu).

In general, the high dynamics of development of the entire spectrum of Uzbek-Chinese relations observed today gives clear grounds to assert that this trend will grow and gain new momentum. Countries should not stop there, it is important to continue strengthening bilateral cooperation aimed at:

First, deepening the political dialogue. Against the backdrop of ongoing geopolitical turbulence and growing instability in the world, strengthening strategic mutual trust and dialogue between countries, both at the bilateral level and within regional and global structures, will help promote the common positions and interests of the two countries in the international arena;

Second, the expansion of trade, economic and investment interaction. In particular, by strengthening industrial cooperation, balanced growth of trade turnover, attracting Chinese investment in high-tech sectors of the economy of Uzbekistan for the production of goods with high added value, as well as the creation of joint ventures for the cultivation and processing of agricultural products;

Third, strengthening cooperation in the development of transport and logistics interconnectedness. In the current conditions, countries need to intensify interaction to build a multi-variant system of transport and logistics routes that will contribute to the growth of mutual trade and access to new export markets. In this context, the implementation of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan, Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar and other alternative routes is of particular importance;

Fourth, intensify cooperation on the transition towards «green» development and digitalization. An important role in this direction will be played by further exchange of experience and attraction of Chinese investments in the development of alternative energy, the introduction of modern resource-saving, energy-efficient and environmentally friendly technologies, as well as innovative digital technologies;

Fifth, strengthening cultural and humanitarian ties. This can be achieved through expanding interaction in the fields of culture, science, education and tourism. For example, in order to increase mutual tourist exchanges, countries need to work out issues related to reducing visa restrictions, and to intensify cooperation in the educational field, it is important to accelerate the launch of double degree programs between leading universities in Uzbekistan and China.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the upcoming contacts at the highest level will undoubtedly contribute to bringing bilateral interaction to a higher level, will strengthen the bonds of traditional friendship and good neighborliness, and also identify new promising directions for a multifaceted strategic partnership.

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