

COOPERATION BETWEEN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES IS A GUARANTEE OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Ikramov Ravshan Aktamovich,
Professor, Chirchik State Pedagogical University

Normatov Otabek Maxamatjonovich,
Associate Professor, Chirchik State Pedagogical University

Abstract

This article, using statistical analysis and examples, demonstrates the importance of cooperation between Central Asian countries. In particular, it examines the importance of further strengthening ties with the independent states of Central Asia, which is one of the main directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Central Asia, foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, independent states, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, regional integration.

Introduction

Central Asia is geographically located at the crossroads of major civilizations and has served for centuries as a mediator between Eastern and Western cultures. History reveals the existence of numerous states in the region. It is worth noting that Central Asia is one of the few regions in the world where related peoples have lived in peace and harmony for centuries. History and culture, spiritual and moral values and traditions, and unbreakable friendship are closely intertwined. Following the crisis of the former Soviet Union in 1991, newly independent states emerged in Central Asia. Mutual cooperation between these newly formed states plays a special role in the Central Asian region.

One of the main directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the further strengthening of ties with the independent states of Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. This serious policy, stemming from the unity of history, language, and religion of the five states and the



close ties between their cultures, serves as a path to economic and social development. In the first years of independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan established equal and mutually beneficial cooperation between the states and peoples of the region and gradually implemented measures to strengthen and develop it. We see that this policy has now strengthened and acquired a distinctive character. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan has identified the development and strengthening of friendly, close neighborly, and mutually beneficial relations with the countries of Central Asia as a key foreign policy priority. As a result of support for Shavkat Mirziyoyev's initiatives by the leaders of neighboring states, political dialogue and mutual trust in Central Asia have strengthened. Consultative meetings between heads of state have been organized.

The validity of Uzbekistan's open and constructive policy toward the countries of Central Asia was also confirmed by the joint measures taken by the region's leaders to provide mutual assistance and mitigate the impact of the spread of the coronavirus during the global pandemic.

Despite the threat of a global pandemic, ongoing dialogue between the leaders of Central Asian states was maintained, and active cooperation between the countries continued. The countries of the region began providing social assistance to each other from the very first days of the spread of the coronavirus. Uzbekistan repeatedly sent humanitarian aid to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In return, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan provided humanitarian assistance for the restoration of the Sardoba Reservoir. Also in December 2020, with the support of Uzbekistan, a 200-bed infectious diseases hospital, fully equipped with the necessary medical equipment and furniture, was commissioned in Kyrgyzstan. In his address "Together We Will Build a Free, Prosperous, and Democratic Uzbekistan," President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev also noted that during the pandemic, information and expertise in medicine were exchanged, humanitarian aid was provided, and uninterrupted cross-border movement of goods was established in the fight against the coronavirus. This has helped ensure a low number of coronavirus infections and deaths in the region compared to other countries.

Central Asia's growing importance and role in the global community, in organizing various formats of multilateral cooperation between the region and leading countries, can also be observed.

It is worth noting that the stability and unity of the Central Asian states, firstly, contribute to improved well-being of the population, and secondly, to the region's investment attractiveness, creating broad opportunities for cooperation with foreign partner countries and investors. The new environment that has emerged and is strengthening between Uzbekistan and the countries of the region facilitates the achievement of these goals and the strengthening of mutual political, trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation. This is a period of intensifying political competition and complex internal social processes. Factors justifying the assessment of this period as the "threshold of a new era" include the deepening of historical processes, signs of integration with the outside world, and a revival of spiritual life.

If we focus on economic cooperation, we can note that trade volume between Central Asian states in 2019 increased by 56 percent compared to 2016. Specifically, from 2017 to 2019, trade turnover with Central Asian countries increased by an average of more than 50 percent annually, reaching \$5.2 billion. Despite the global pandemic, Uzbekistan's total trade turnover with Central Asian countries reached \$5 billion in 2020.

Specifically, the share of Central Asian countries in Uzbekistan's total foreign trade turnover increased from 12.4% in 2019 to 13.6% in 2020. Kazakhstan accounted for 61% of Uzbekistan's total foreign trade turnover in the region, Kyrgyzstan for 18.2%, Turkmenistan for 10.6%, and Tajikistan for 10.2%.

Over the past eight years, the gross domestic product of Central Asian countries has grown almost two and a half times, reaching \$520 billion, while foreign trade volume has more than doubled, reaching \$253 billion. At the same time, mutual trade between the region's countries doubled, reaching nearly \$11 billion, while mutual investment increased 5.6-fold. Looking at Uzbekistan alone, its trade with the region increased from \$2.4 billion in 2016 to \$7.2 billion in 2024, and the number of joint ventures exceeded 1,800. In the 21st century, globalization, economic integration, and increasing transnational security threats require new forms of cooperation between states. Particularly at the regional level, the importance of institutional processes in ensuring mutual trust, stable economic



relations, and security is growing. Therefore, deepening regional cooperation, strengthening its mechanisms, and managing it through stable institutions is one of the pressing challenges of our time.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has been effectively cooperating with Central Asian countries on the rational use of transboundary water resources. A special commission has been established with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Currently, all existing issues related to the use of transboundary water resources in water management are being resolved through mutually beneficial solutions.

Currently, mutual trade turnover among Central Asian countries accounts for 10 percent of their total foreign trade. However, in the European Union, this figure is 60 percent, and in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) countries, 68 percent.

In conclusion, deepening and institutionalizing regional cooperation is an important condition for achieving sustainable development in today's global environment. Strengthening the mechanism of consultative meetings, systematically implementing adopted decisions, and creating stable institutions will increase mutual trust between states, consistently continue cooperation, and contribute to the socioeconomic development of the region.

Cooperation among Central Asian countries based on equal partnership and solidarity in all areas has a positive impact on the region's development. Thanks to the initiatives of our country's leader, active and pragmatic diplomacy, and foreign policy, a completely new, constructive political environment has emerged in Central Asia today, creating favorable conditions for addressing the most pressing issues, such as the rational use of transboundary water resources, border delimitation and demarcation, border crossing points, and the development of cross-border trade. All of this can be considered the result of our country's leadership's consistent foreign policy aimed at developing close and mutually beneficial neighborly relations between Uzbekistan and the countries of Central Asia, as well as a major achievement of independent Uzbek diplomacy.

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