

The Development of Uzbekistan–Turkey Relations at the Level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

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Abstract: This article highlights the development of bilateral cooperation between the two states, emphasizing the role of high-level official meetings and state visits conducted by the heads of state in shaping these relations. Based on historical evidence, it examines the progress achieved across all spheres of interaction between Uzbekistan and Turkey. Furthermore, the study reveals, with new supporting facts, that the relations between the two countries have now advanced to the stage of a “Strategic Partnership.”

Keywords: foreign policy, cooperation, relations, integration, democracy, science, culture, interactions, state visit, security.

Introduction

During nearly 34 years of widely recognized independent development, Uzbekistan has pursued a carefully considered foreign policy path grounded in national interests and aimed at strengthening the country’s reputation within the international community. Indeed, Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, built upon the practical experience accumulated over the past decades, has been conducted on the basis of openness, friendship, and pragmatic principles. It seeks effective cooperation with all foreign states and the global community, while also taking into account the rapidly changing geopolitical environment of the 21st century. Within this political process, the mutual relations between Uzbekistan and Turkey can be substantiated by their elevation to a new stage of “Strategic Partnership.” In this context, the Republic of Turkey—holding significant prestige in the international arena—was among the very first to recognize Uzbekistan’s independence and became one of the initial states to establish diplomatic relations. It is worth emphasizing that, as noted, *“Turkey, being a close friend and economic partner for us, was among the first to recognize Uzbekistan’s independence”* [1]. From this perspective, the scholarly study of political relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Turkey represents one of the pressing issues of today.

Degree of Study

The article mainly refers to the works of state leaders as well as several researchers. Among them are: The co-authored monograph by Q. Rajabov and X. Bekmuratov on the history of economic and cultural cooperation between Uzbekistan and Turkey (Rajabov Q., Bekmuratov X., 2017); The monograph by B. Imamov entitled “Political, Economic and Cultural Relations between Uzbekistan and Turkey” (1991–2018) (Imamov B., 2023); Said-Abdulaziz Yusupov’s popular treatise “Modern Turkey: Ancient History and Great Future” (Yusupov S.A., 2018); The book by Qahramon Rajabov and Bahodir Qandov “World Countries and International Organizations, addressing the history, geography, and political governance of world states” (Rajabov Q., Qandov B., 2015); The book “The Strategy of New Uzbekistan” by the President of the Republic of

Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev (Mirziyoyev Sh.M., 2021); The book “A Fairer World Is Possible” by Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Erdoğan R.T., 2021); Yelena Parubochaya’s articles “Summits of Turkic States (1992–2001): A Real Platform for Cooperation?” and “Integration of the Turkic World in the Modern Stage” (Parubochaya E.F., 2011: 113–120); R. Veysel’s “Turkey’s Influence on the Culture and Education Systems of Central Asian Countries” (Veysel R., 2014: 26–32); F. Yusupova’s scholarly article “The History of Development of the Organization of Turkic States and Its Role in International Law” (Yusupova F., 2022: 33–35); M. Mustofayev’s “The Organization of Turkic States: New Global Approaches and Regional Challenges” (Mustofayev M., 2022: 105–121); A. Mirkomilov’s articles “New Opportunities for Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation within the Organization of Turkic States” (Mirkomilov A., 2022, November 11); The commemorative book “Turkic Council: 10 Years of the Nakhchivan Agreement” (Şahverdiyev C., Dr. Veliyev C., 2019).

Main Results

The cooperation relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Turkey in 2016 and the following years, through regular meetings between the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev and the President of Turkey R. Erdoğan, brought bilateral relations to a new level. Indeed, **“There were times of mistrust and coldness between us, but we united, melted this ice, and this coldness will never return again” [2]**, emphasized the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev.

In particular, the two heads of state held negotiations during Recep Erdoğan’s visit to Samarkand in November 2016, at the “One Belt, One Road” forum in Beijing in May 2017, and within the framework of the first summit on Science and Technology of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held in Kazakhstan in September. They also met in September during the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly [3]. At these meetings, it was noted that there were unused opportunities in trade-economic, investment, tourism, textile, transport communications, and many other spheres between Uzbekistan and Turkey, and measures were taken to expand cooperation in these areas.

On November 17–18, 2016, the President of the Republic of Turkey R. Erdoğan visited Samarkand and paid tribute at the grave of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan I. Karimov (1938–2016). At the Forum complex in Samarkand, negotiations were held between the Acting President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev and the President of the Republic of Turkey R. Erdoğan [4]. Agreements were also reached on issues of trade-economic cooperation. By the end of 2015, the volume of mutual trade between the states amounted to 1.2 billion US dollars. This meeting played an important role in raising bilateral relations to a new stage and in establishing cooperation across all spheres. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey M. Çavuşoğlu participated in the 43rd session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization member states held in Tashkent in October 2016. In April 2017, the 8th round of bilateral political consultations was conducted [5].

In turn, during the visit of the Government delegation of Uzbekistan to Turkey in February–March 2017, contracts worth 1 billion US dollars were signed in various sectors of the economy. In May of the same year, at the fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation held in Tashkent, the current state and prospects of cooperation in all areas were reviewed, and contracts worth 2 billion US dollars were signed. For reference, the Intergovernmental Commission had last held such a meeting in 2008 [6]. Furthermore, at the meeting, agreements were signed to significantly increase the volume of mutual trade based on domestic market demand, and in the field of investment, joint projects were established with leading Turkish companies in electrical engineering, food production, textiles, pharmaceuticals, modern construction materials, and consumer goods.

In Uzbekistan–Turkey relations, the military-industrial sphere also occupies an important place. In

particular, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev received the Minister of National Defense of the Republic of Turkey Nurettin Canikli, who paid an official visit to our country on July 25–27, 2017 [7]. During his visit to Uzbekistan, N. Canikli signed an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation between the Ministries of Defense of Uzbekistan and Turkey, including the implementation of joint programs in the field of military education. In addition, starting from 2018, an agreement was reached to organize the sending of servicemen of the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan to preparatory courses at Turkish military educational institutions.

These intergovernmental meetings and agreements aimed at developing mutual cooperation paved the way for the state visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev to Turkey on October 25–26, 2017, and demonstrated that bilateral relations between the two countries had risen to a new stage [8]. During the visit, agreements were reached on cooperation in other areas such as economy, trade, industry, banking and finance, investment, tourism, transport and logistics, and healthcare. At the business forum organized among business circles, more than 30 projects and agreements worth 3.5 billion US dollars were signed in the fields of road infrastructure construction, textile products, electrical equipment, construction materials production, food industry, and the agro-industrial sector, including the establishment of modern industrial and logistics centers [9].

The first state visit of Uzbekistan's leader Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Turkey in 2017 became an important step in further developing mutual cooperation. This visit was a major achievement both politically and economically, particularly in attracting investments, technologies, and regaining trust among Turkish entrepreneurs. Above all, it demonstrated the establishment of stable political dialogue with the President of Turkey. In various sectors of the economy—construction, light industry, tourism, and banking—Turkish investments began to enter Uzbekistan, which is beneficial for the country's rapidly developing economy.

Indeed, the past years had seen relations fall from a peak of cooperation to a zero point: from pledges of eternal friendship to open criticism on international platforms, and even to the Turkish parliament placing Uzbekistan on the list of states with which friendship was deemed impossible. Today, however, relations are once again characterized by a rise to the level of strategic partnership, striving toward new heights of cooperation. The recent positive changes in diplomatic relations, and the fact that after 20 years President Mirziyoyev's visit to Turkey strengthened ties and elevated cooperation to a new stage, clearly illustrate this transformation.

On December 19, 2017, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev received the President of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TCCA), Serdar Çam, in Tashkent [10]. For reference, TCCA was established on January 24, 1992 [10], with the aim of providing assistance for the socio-economic development of countries. Operating in Uzbekistan since 1993, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TCCA) has contributed to further strengthening bilateral cooperation. Over the years, the agency has actively participated in projects aimed at modernizing the material and technical base of medical and educational institutions, as well as supporting agriculture, private enterprise, and small and medium-sized businesses, implementing more than 700 projects. Between 1993 and 2016, TCCA allocated 23 million US dollars for these purposes. By 2017, the agency had provided more than 30 million US dollars for numerous projects [11].

At the invitation of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a state visit to Uzbekistan from April 29 to May 1, 2018 [12]. Up to that date, 16 high-level visits had taken place between Uzbekistan and Turkey. During the meeting, the heads of state discussed the current state of strategic relations between the two brotherly countries, prospects for their further development, and the expansion and deepening of bilateral cooperation in trade, economy, culture, and other spheres, reaching concrete agreements on these issues. As emphasized by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev: **“We regard the Republic of Turkey as a major state with great political, economic, and military potential, whose prestige in the international arena is**

steadily increasing” [13].

On April 30, 2018, the speech delivered by the President of the Republic of Turkey before members of parliament created greater opportunities for developing relations between the Oliy Majlis and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on the basis of mutual experience and information exchange [14]. In his address to Parliament, President Recep Erdoğan highly praised the policies being implemented in Uzbekistan. The distinguished guest also expressed his views on the glorious history of the Uzbek people and the invaluable contribution of our great ancestors to human civilization.

On the same day, Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Recep Erdoğan participated in the “Uzbekistan–Turkey” business forum organized at the “Uzexpocenter.” At the forum, agreements were reached to implement more than 50 new joint investment projects with a total value of 3 billion US dollars [15]. In addition, representatives of the business communities of both countries expressed their views on further expanding cooperation and establishing support centers for entrepreneurs operating in both states.

Uzbekistan is considered one of Turkey’s most important partners in Central Asia. Uzbekistan’s vast market, increasingly liberalized economy, favorable investment climate, historic cities, tourist destinations, and sacred religious sites are generating great interest in Turkey. Thus, both sides are equally interested in strengthening cooperation, which indicates that the prospects for bilateral relations are highly promising.

On September 24, 2018, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan received the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Binali Yildirim [16]. At the meeting, it was emphasized that investment programs and projects were being implemented jointly with Turkey’s leading companies and banks in trade, innovation, energy, transport, tourism, textiles, the food industry, and other sectors. In addition, a memorandum and a “Road Map” for the development of cooperation were adopted.

In the annual ranking of the prestigious Turkish publication “Turcomoney”, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev was recognized as the “Foreign Statesman of the Year” in 2018. This was announced at a ceremonial event held in Istanbul with the participation of the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey Binali Yildirim, the Mayor of Istanbul Mevlüt Uysal, members of parliament, representatives of the government, the public, and the business community [17].

On October 14, 2019, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev visited Baku to participate in the seventh summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, where he met with the President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Erdoğan [18]. The President of Turkey congratulated the leader of Uzbekistan on joining the Council, noting that this decision was of great importance for the development of bilateral relations and regional cooperation.

As a result of the regular meetings and dialogues between the leaders of the two states, cooperation was intensified through inter-parliamentary relations, new opportunities were opened for trade and investment partnerships, and views were exchanged on pressing issues on the international agenda. In particular, Turkey became one of Uzbekistan’s five major trade and economic partners. Between 2017 and 2019, 750 enterprises with the participation of Turkish capital were registered in Uzbekistan, bringing the total number to more than 1,140. While the trade turnover between the two countries exceeded 1.5 billion US dollars in 2017, it rose to more than 2.2 billion US dollars in 2018, and in 2019 surpassed 2.5 billion US dollars [19]. This, in turn, had a positive impact on the growth of mutual trade turnover.

On February 19, 2020, at the invitation of the President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Erdoğan, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev paid a visit to Turkey [20]. During the visit, the head of state paid tribute at the tomb of the first President of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in Ankara. The main events of the visit began with an official welcoming ceremony at the Presidential Palace of Turkey, followed by a private meeting between the two

leaders. At this meeting, issues of developing political, trade-economic, and cultural-humanitarian cooperation between Uzbekistan and Turkey were thoroughly discussed.

Within the framework of the visit, on the same day in Ankara, the first meeting of the High-Level Uzbekistan–Turkey Strategic Cooperation Council was held. This council represents a new format of dialogue in the history of bilateral relations. It was established in 2018 in accordance with the Joint Statement of the heads of state. The Council operates under the co-chairmanship of the Presidents of Uzbekistan and Turkey and defines strategies for cooperation in areas such as politics, security and defense, trade and economy, investment, tourism, energy, transport, culture, education, science and technology, and healthcare. At the conclusion of the negotiations, the heads of state signed a Joint Statement on the results of the first meeting.

For reference, up to the present day, the legal and contractual basis of Uzbek–Turkish cooperation consists of the Treaty “On Permanent Friendship and Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Turkey” as well as 123 documents in the fields of trade, economy, transport, tourism, culture, and also in combating terrorism and drug trafficking. Of these, 12 are interstate, 56 are intergovernmental, 21 are interdepartmental, and 34 concern other areas [21].

Analyzing the past seven years of relations between Uzbekistan and Turkey, there have been 7 high-level reciprocal visits, as well as a number of meetings between the leaders of the two countries within the framework of international events. These meetings demonstrate that the heads of state are personally striving to develop mutually beneficial relations and to enrich the cooperation agenda with new directions. This, in turn, creates favorable conditions for business circles, improves the investment climate, promotes the implementation of joint projects, and gives strong impetus to cultural and humanitarian exchanges. In particular, the two countries are realizing significant potential not only in a bilateral format but also within multilateral regional platforms. Among these, the United Nations, the Organization of Turkic States, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Economic Cooperation Organization, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation can be especially highlighted.

Conclusions

In conclusion, after Sh. Mirziyoyev became the President of Uzbekistan, foreign policy first of all strengthened political and economic relations with the countries of the region. At the same time, mutually beneficial and equal cooperation with the Republic of Turkey, along with the developed states of Asia and Europe, was raised to a qualitatively new stage. Moreover, Uzbekistan’s active participation in international structures and its growing prestige in global institutions confirm this statement. During the meetings between the leaders of Uzbekistan and Turkey, the most pressing issues of state and social life were discussed, and agreements and treaties based on clear strategic goals were signed and put into practice. In particular, Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation is playing an important role in ensuring political and economic stability in Central Asia.

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