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UZBEKISTAN AND TURKMENISTAN - CLOSE NEIGHBORS, BLOOD BROTHERS, RELIABLE PARTNERS

Adiljon Tokhtamurodov
Student of Karshi State University

Abstract

This article provides information on the close neighborliness between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the history and current state of economic, educational, and cultural relations between them through historical sources and literature.

Keywords: Uzbekistan - Turkmenistan relations, strategic partnership, friendship and cooperation, diplomatic relations, cultural and humanitarian relations, common historical values.

Introduction

The formation of interethnic relations in Uzbekistan, after gaining independence, along with ensuring the real equality of each nation and people before the law, created broad opportunities for their full satisfaction of material, especially national and spiritual needs, free labor, and education. This is legally justified in Article 18 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan[1]. This article states: "In the Republic of Uzbekistan, all citizens have the same rights and freedoms and are equal before the law, regardless of gender, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, beliefs, personal and social status."

As the Head of our state noted: "For many centuries, representatives of different nationalities and ethnic groups, cultures and religions have lived in peace and harmony on our ancient and generous land. Hospitality, kindness, generosity of heart and true tolerance have always been inherent in our people and form the



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basis of their mentality," and one of the priority areas of the Action Strategy is significant in that it is aimed at ensuring security, interethnic harmony and religious tolerance.

Indeed, the Uzbek and Turkmen peoples, who have been drinking from the same river for centuries, are connected by a common history. Today, more than 200,000 Turkmen live in our country, where more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups live. In particular, in recent years, good-neighborly and friendly relations between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have been further strengthened. We are pleased to note that the first foreign visit of our President Shavkat Mirziyoyev as head of state was to Turkmenistan on March 6-7, 2017. This is not accidental, of course. This visit was a vivid example of the special importance attached to good-neighborly relations in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. As a result of those negotiations, relations between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have been raised to a qualitatively new level - to the level of strategic partnership.

One of the main results of the high-level negotiations was the signing of the Strategic Partnership Agreement, which predetermines the consistent implementation of the huge potential in all areas of cooperation in the political, trade-economic, transport and communication, cultural-humanitarian spheres. During the visit of our President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on March 6-7, 2017, he expressed gratitude to the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Maliggulevich for the construction of a beautiful memorial complex in the city of Turkmenabat dedicated to the bright memory of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Abduganievich Karimov. "I think I speak for many when I say that the specific features of our bilateral relations, clearly manifested during this visit, are an expression of high respect for the memory of Islam Abduganievich and a confirmation of the fulfillment of the dreams and aspirations of our great ancestors[2]".



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The visit of our President further strengthened the long-standing friendly relations between the two countries. During the visit, the President participated in the opening ceremony of the Turkmenabad-Forab bridges, which are unique in terms of engineering, transport and communication, and geostrategic importance, and sincerely congratulated the leader of the Turkmen people and the Turkmen people on the opening of this facility. Later, the Presidents met several times within the framework of mutual visits and international conferences. Discussion of urgent issues on the bilateral and international agenda by telephone has become a permanent tradition.

Despite the difficult conditions associated with the pandemic, the countries confirmed their readiness to strengthen ties in practice, continuing active dialogue. In September 2021, the next meeting of the Uzbek-Turkmen Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, the first meeting of the Joint Commission on Water Management, and visits of delegations from Tashkhovuz and Lebap regions to Khorezm and Bukhara regions were held. Trade, economic and investment relations occupy a central place in interstate relations. Despite the negative trends associated with the consequences of the pandemic, the volume of trade between our countries increased by 3 times. In particular, the volume of trade turnover increased by 25% in the first eight months of 2021[3].

After the pandemic, trade, economic, and cultural ties between the two countries have further strengthened, and all-round relations have been strengthened. The growth rates in relations between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan confirm the countries' firm position on further expanding constructive political dialogue, strengthening mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation, and deepening cultural and humanitarian ties. In recent years, the number of joint ventures has increased from 11 to 161.



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The Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the two countries, which regularly ensure the participation of representatives of small and medium-sized businesses in joint events, including business forums, cooperation exchanges, exhibitions and seminars, make a worthy contribution to the development of business relations between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. In this regard, more than 30 representatives of business circles participated in October 2020. The first meeting of the Uzbek-Turkmen Business Council was an important event. During the event, special attention was paid to issues of cooperation and strengthening ties in the field of logistics and fruit and vegetable products.

A set of promising agreements and contracts was signed as a result of the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan Economic Forum held in Tashkent on October 4, 2021. The transport sector plays an important role in bilateral relations. In the first eight months of 2021 alone, the volume of international cargo transportation increased by 14% and amounted to almost 1.2 million tons.

The integration of the transport and communication systems of the two countries will allow not only to transport cargo from Uzbekistan through Turkmenistan, but also to access the trade markets of the Middle East, Europe and Asia via the shortest route.

The long-term cooperation of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in water management, environmental issues, and environmental protection is an example of mutual respect for each other's positions and consideration of legal interests.

In turn, it is worth noting that our countries have positive experience in resolving water management issues. In this regard, the signing of the Agreement on the Establishment of the Joint Water Management Commission in 2021 and the holding of its first meeting in Tashkent in September were of even greater importance.



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At the invitation of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, on October 4-5, 2021, the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov paid an official visit to our country.

The main events of the visit took place on October 5 at the “Koksaroy” residence. At the beginning of the meeting, the Head of State warmly greeted the leader of Turkmenistan, once again congratulated him on the holiday celebrated on September 27 - the 30th anniversary of the independence of this country, and wished the fraternal Turkmen people peace, tranquility and prosperity. At the meeting, the heads of state highly appreciated the current level of bilateral relations based on the principles of centuries-old friendship, good neighborliness, strategic partnership, mutual trust and support.

The leaders discussed all aspects of the current issues in the multifaceted cooperation between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, paying special attention to strengthening constructive political dialogue, expanding trade, economic and investment partnership, and developing cultural and humanitarian ties. Over the past four years, the volume of mutual trade has tripled and exceeded \$400 million. Since the beginning of this year, trade turnover has increased by another 25%. It was noted that the results of the 16th meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Bilateral Cooperation, held on September 14, 2021, and the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan Economic Forum, held in Tashkent on October 4, will serve to further expand mutually beneficial trade and economic relations.

It was noted that the potential for cooperation between the two countries, especially between the border regions, is huge. An example of this is the friendly visits of the heads of the Lebap and Dashoguz regions of Turkmenistan to the Bukhara and Khorezm regions on September 22, 2021. The presidents noted that such regular meetings serve to strengthen mutual understanding between our



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countries and peoples. In general, a total of 23 documents were signed during the visit, covering almost all areas of multifaceted Uzbek-Turkmen cooperation.

The talks in Tashkent were another confirmation of the mutual understanding and solidarity between our countries and peoples - an aspect that is especially important against the backdrop of current events.

Turkmenistan is an important strategic trade partner of Uzbekistan. The Uzbek-Turkmen Joint Intergovernmental Commission (JIC) on Trade and Economic Cooperation has been operating since 1996[4]. With the help of this organization, trade relations between the two countries have further developed. Over the past five years, the volume of trade turnover between the two countries has increased by almost 2.5 times, amounting to \$527 million in 2020. As of January-August 2021, the volume of trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan amounted to \$418.1 million. This figure increased by 23.6 percent compared to the same period in 2020. In the first eight months of 2021, Uzbekistan exported chemical products, machinery and equipment, and food products to Turkmenistan, while electricity, oil and chemical products, food, and services were imported from the neighboring country.

The Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan regularly contribute to the organization of joint events, business forums, cooperation exchanges, exhibitions and fairs between representatives of small and medium-sized businesses in order to develop relations between entrepreneurs of the two countries. In October 2020, the first meeting of the Business Council of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan was held in the form of a video conference with the participation of entrepreneurs of the two countries. The transport and logistics sector is another priority area of Uzbek-Turkmen cooperation. Transit cargo is transported to third countries by road and railways of the two countries.



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In particular, in the first eight months of 2021, the volume of international cargo transportation increased by almost 13.5 percent compared to the same period last year, amounting to 1.2 million tons. Of this, the volume of cargo transportation by road increased by 10.5 percent, and by rail by 34.4 percent. The integration of the communication systems of the two countries allows not only Uzbekistan to Turkmenistan, but also to access the markets of the Near and Middle East via the shortest route. Relations between the two countries are extensive, and along with trade and economic relations, educational and cultural cooperation has also been widely established.

It is known that through the active efforts of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov and the President of Turkmenistan Guebanguli Berdimuhamedov, a solid foundation for friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between our independent states has been created. In this regard, the consistent development of our relations in the humanitarian and cultural spheres is especially noteworthy. Speaking about this, it should be noted that a monument to the great Turkmen poet Makhtumkuli Firugi was erected in the city of Khiva. This magnificent monument today stands as a symbol of the friendship of the two peoples, the common history and cultures of our peoples[5].

Through such cultural ties, the ties between the two countries are further strengthened. The names of such outstanding poets as Ozodiy, Andalib, Kamina, Zaliliy, Mullanafas, and Sayidiy, who are great representatives of Turkmen literature, are known and popular in our country. Among them, the work of the great Turkmen poet and thinker Makhtumkuli Firog'i undoubtedly stands out. Makhtumkuli's poems were first published in Uzbekistan in Uzbek in 1958 under the title "Selected Works" and were very popular with our people. If we count the total number of all the books of the great Turkmen poet published in Uzbek, it will be more than 1 million copies. In the last ten years alone, about ten books by



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Makhtumkuli have been skillfully translated by outstanding Uzbek writers in our country and have taken a worthy place in our spiritual treasury.

During the visit of the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to our country in April 2018, the opening of the Ashgabat recreation park in Tashkent, Makhtumkuli Street, the Uzbek-Turkmen Friendship House and the Ulli Courtyard complex in the Khorezm region became a vivid example of friendship, unity and cultural closeness between our peoples. Today, representatives of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan actively participate in cultural days, various concerts, festivals, sports events, and educational programs held in both countries. In particular, in 2019, the Uzbek delegation participated in the CIS Intellectuals Forum and the Health Forum in Turkmenistan, while representatives of Turkmenistan participated in the Sharq Taronalari and Handicrafts Festivals. Despite the difficult pandemic conditions, representatives of art and culture of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are developing their interaction online and in traditional forms.

In particular, delegations of the two countries actively participated in the 2021 Folk Dance Festival in Turkmenistan and the international conference “Central Asia at the Crossroads of World Civilizations” in our country. Today, there are a total of 61 schools in Uzbekistan that teach in the Turkmen language, where about 8 thousand children study. Of these, 21 schools provide education entirely in the Turkmen language. In the 2019-2020 academic year, a total of 3,800 students from Central Asian countries studied in higher education institutions in our country, 80 percent of whom were citizens of Turkmenistan.

The majority of young men and women from Turkmenistan study at Urgench, Karakalpakstan, Bukhara and Karshi State Universities, at the Bukhara State Medical Institute, and at the Urgench branch of the Tashkent Medical Academy. In general, the growth rates of bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and



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Turkmenistan confirm the firm position on further strengthening constructive dialogue, developing mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation, and deepening cultural and humanitarian ties.

In conclusion, it can be said that the relations between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not just neighborly, but a strategic partnership based on mutual trust. The political will of the leaders of the two states and the blood brotherhood of our peoples will continue to serve as a solid foundation for regional stability and economic development in the future. This cooperation is an important guarantee for the prosperity of not only the two states, but also of the entire Central Asia.

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