



INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN CENTRAL ASIA: A QUALITATIVELY NEW STAGE IN UZBEKISTAN– TAJIKISTAN RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolutionary process of bilateral relations between two leading states of the Central Asian region — the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Tajikistan. It analyses the period of tension in the early years of independence, the positive transformation following 2016, and in particular the legal-political significance of the Alliance Relations Treaty signed in 2024. The study employs statistical and comparative methods to examine the dynamics of mutual trade, cross-border management of water and energy resources, and cultural-humanitarian cooperation.

Introduction. Ensuring stability and sustained economic growth in the Central Asian geopolitical space is directly linked to the character of cross-border neighbourly relations. The peoples of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan share a common historical-cultural foundation, as well as a shared culture and religion spanning centuries. However, during the post-Soviet transformation period, disputes over border delimitation, the construction of hydropower facilities, and security issues led to a prolonged period of stagnation in relations between the two countries.

In 2016, the renewal of Uzbekistan's foreign policy strategy and the promotion of the principle "The most important priority — good neighbourliness" brought relations between Dushanbe and Tashkent to an entirely new stage. Today, bilateral relations have risen from the level of ordinary neighbourliness to that of strategic alliance.

Methodology. The research employed systemic analysis, comparative-historical approach, chronological sequencing, and methods of economic-statistical data analysis. Official inter-state treaties, normative-legal documents, and statistical indicators from the two countries' statistical agencies constituted the empirical basis of the study.

Main Analysis and Results. Institutional Foundation of Political-Diplomatic Relations. The sharp turning point in bilateral relations began with the historic state visit of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Tajikistan in 2018. Within the framework of this visit, a long-standing visa-free regime was introduced and the operation of 16 border crossing points was restored. As the legal foundation of the relationship, the following two important documents should be noted:

- September 2018: "Treaty on Strategic Partnership" (Dushanbe).
- April 2024: "Treaty on Alliance Relations" (Tashkent).

Within this framework, Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev characterised the mutual integration processes and high-level exchanges as follows [1]:

"Our peoples have lived side by side for centuries, sharing both joys and hardships together. Today we have laid a solid foundation for long-term and multifaceted cooperation. Our goal is to transform borders into bridges of friendship and cooperation."

President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon also noted the role of this alliance in regional security and economic development [2]:

"Expanding cooperation with Uzbekistan is one of the priority directions of Tajikistan's foreign policy. We possess enormous potential in economics, energy, and transport. Our joint efforts serve not only both states, but the stability of the entire Central Asia."

Political scientist F. Tolipov assesses this transformation process from a scholarly perspective as follows: "The resolution of misunderstandings between Tashkent and Dushanbe serves as a locomotive driving not only both states, but the entire Central Asian regionalism forward." [3]

Trade-Economic Cooperation and the Cluster Approach

While annual trade turnover during the period of stagnation barely reached 100–150 million US dollars, in subsequent years this indicator grew manifold [4]:

Year	Trade Turnover (million USD)	Key Trend
2016	~170	Minimal trade, closed borders
2020	~500	Free trade regime, cluster formation
2023	~750	Industrial cooperation and joint ventures
2026 (Forecast)	1,000+	Full economic integration and diversification

The "Artel Avesto Electronics" joint venture, established and successfully operating in the city of Dushanbe, is a practical confirmation of industrial cooperation.

Constructive Resolution of Water-Energy Issues

While the use of water in cross-border rivers (notably the Rogun HPP project) was previously a contentious point, today a cooperative strategy has taken precedence. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have launched joint projects to construct two hydroelectric power stations (Yavan HPP and Farkhad HPP) on the Zarafshan River with a combined capacity of 320 MW. This represents a uniquely successful model of water diplomacy in the region [5].

Discussion. Research shows that the Uzbekistan–Tajikistan alliance serves as a stabilising factor in reducing the pressure of third geopolitical powers. Particularly against the backdrop of the unstable situation in Afghanistan, the coordinated actions of Tashkent and Dushanbe in the military-technical, logistical, and security domains have become the primary guarantee for preserving regional integrity. However, the further diversification of export-import routes remains a pressing challenge.

The contemporary model of Uzbekistan–Tajikistan relations is a classic example of how neighbourly conflicts in Central Asia can be resolved through constructive dialogue. The elevation of bilateral relations to the level of strategic alliance serves not only to deepen economic integration, but also to strengthen the regional security architecture.

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