

## SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV: REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND A MULTI-VECTOR STRATEGY

**SODYQ SAFOEV**

Rector, University of World Economy and Diplomacy

**Abstract:** *This article examines the transformation of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, emphasizing the development of an open, pragmatic, and multi-vector diplomatic strategy. It analyzes the key principles of this policy—national interests, sovereignty, and territorial integrity—and highlights Uzbekistan’s growing role as a regional leader in Central Asia. Particular attention is given to regional integration initiatives, infrastructure and connectivity projects, and the institutionalization of cooperation mechanisms. The article also explores the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan’s engagement within the Organization of Turkic States, and the humanitarian dimension of foreign policy, including cultural and educational initiatives. Additionally, it assesses high-level diplomatic interaction with the United States within the broader multi-vector framework. The study concludes that these policies have strengthened Uzbekistan’s international standing and regional influence.*

**Keywords** *Uzbekistan; Shavkat Mirziyoyev; foreign policy; multi-vector diplomacy; Central Asia; regional integration; strategic partnership; Azerbaijan; Organization of Turkic States; humanitarian diplomacy; Islamic civilization; soft power; geopolitics*

### Introduction

Uzbekistan’s foreign policy under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, employing an open, pragmatic, and multi-vector diplomatic approach, is based on the principles of national interests, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Its objective is to expand international cooperation, ensure sustainable economic growth, and intensify foreign economic activity amid global instability, the need to ensure security, and the pursuit of the country’s sustainable development. Acting simultaneously along several vectors, Tashkent builds balanced relations with the world’s leading centers of power. At the same time, all agreements translate into practical outcomes: specific accords are concluded, joint projects are launched, and new transport and logistics corridors are established.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to this approach, the country has emerged from its former foreign-policy isolation, its international authority has grown significantly, and it now plays a far from insignificant role within various international organizations.



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### **A Multi-Vector Strategy: Balancing Interests with Global Centers of Power**

The multi-vector approach has become one of the defining features of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's foreign policy: Uzbekistan builds partnerships with various global centers of power while maintaining balance and avoiding dependence on any single actor. Accordingly, relations with different countries and international organizations emphasize different priorities, including strategic dialogue, advanced standards, "green" projects, high technologies, legal convergence, investment attraction, trade development, energy cooperation, logistics, humanitarian initiatives, and others; at the same time, Uzbekistan avoids involvement in any military blocs. This strategy provides Tashkent with flexibility, economic benefits, and political autonomy.

### **Leadership in Central Asia: Integration, Initiatives and Security**

One of the main directions of President Mirziyoyev's foreign policy has been the strengthening of good-neighborly relations and integration processes in Central Asia. Since 2016, Tashkent has fundamentally revised its approach toward relations with its closest neighbors, moving from former caution to open dialogue and cooperation. Within a short period, long-standing disputes with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan over borders and water resources were resolved, and trust was restored in relations with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Proceeding from the understanding that the countries of Central Asia share a common destiny and must resolve their own problems without external diktat, President Mirziyoyev advanced a number of initiatives that once again underscored Uzbekistan's role as a regional leader.

In 2018, at Uzbekistan's initiative, the tradition of regular meetings of Central Asian heads of state was revived. Whereas such summits had previously been held only sporadically, they have now become annual Consultative Meetings of the leaders of the five republics. <sup>2</sup>At these summits (held in rotation among the region's capitals), heads of state discuss a broad range of issues, from trade facilitation and the development of transport corridors to environmental challenges and joint efforts to counter extremism.

At the 7th Consultative Meeting, held in Tashkent in November 2025, President Mirziyoyev proposed transforming this format from a consultative one into a full-fledged strategic cooperation platform. In particular, proposals were put forward to develop founding documents for regular summits, establish a permanent secretariat (on a rotational basis), and even create a Council of Elders, an advisory body composed of respected figures from the participating countries. These measures are intended to institutionalize Central Asian integration, ensuring that leaders' agreements receive organizational support and oversight. <sup>3</sup>

At the same Tashkent summit in 2025, a breakthrough occurred: Azerbaijan joined the existing format. President Ilham Aliyev was invited as an honorary guest but ultimately participated in the negotiations on equal footing. The previous five-party dialogue thus became six-party. Regional leaders welcomed Azerbaijan as a fraternal country historically and culturally linked to Central Asia. Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized the special significance of this step, stating: "We are building a bridge between Central Asia and the South Caucasus." Indeed, involving Baku in this format opens new horizons: the geography of joint projects now stretches from the shores of the Caspian Sea to the borders with China.

The Presidents of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan expressed clear enthusiasm, noting that "expanding the format through Azerbaijan opens new opportunities"-for example, linking the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project with the Zangezur Corridor. Thus, at Uzbekistan's initiative, a new model of integration is emerging: Central Asia, together with Azerbaijan, acts as a unified economic and transport spatial platform capable of accelerating the region's access to global markets.

Beyond political coordination, Tashkent actively promotes concrete integration projects in Central Asia. President Mirziyoyev has repeatedly noted that the overall potential of regional trade remains far from fully realized - by his assessment, mutual trade turnover could be increased severalfold. To this end, Uzbekistan proposes removing administrative barriers, harmonizing customs procedures, and creating joint free economic zones along borders. Work has been initiated on a Regional Program for Trade and Economic Cooperation in Central Asia through 2035, including a roadmap to increase mutual trade and investment volumes.

The idea has also been advanced to adopt in the future a Declaration on a Single Investment Space, a document that would enshrine investor protection principles and harmonized business rules across six countries. If these initiatives are implemented, the region will gain the opportunity to attract more capital and technology by acting as a consolidated market with unified rules.

Seeking to connect regional economies, Uzbekistan pays particular attention to the development of cross-border infrastructure and joint energy projects.

At the aforementioned leaders' meeting, Shavkat Mirziyoyev called for pooling efforts to construct new power plants and electricity grids, coordinate plans for building highways and railways, modernize border crossings, and digitalize logistics. Strategically important projects are already underway: for example, construction is beginning on the long-awaited China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, which will open a shorter route from Western China to the Fergana Valley and beyond to Kazakh and Turkmen transport arteries. In parallel, Tashkent is advancing the Trans-Afghan Corridor, a railway line through Afghanistan to Pakistani ports, providing access to the Arabian Sea.

Combined with the Caspian route (the Middle Corridor), these corridors will significantly reduce the region's dependence on traditional routes. To coordinate infrastructure plans, President Mirziyoyev proposed establishing a special Council for Regional Infrastructure Development at the deputy prime minister level, ensuring that energy and transport projects are implemented synchronously and for the benefit of the entire region.

Naturally, security and stability are integral to Uzbekistan's regional agenda. President Mirziyoyev consistently advocates close coordination of efforts to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, and transnational crime. Notably, at the 7th Consultative Meeting, heads of state adopted a Concept of Regional Security and Stability and a Joint Catalogue of Potential Threats, evidence of serious intent to jointly confront existing and potential challenges. Uzbekistan, which shares a border with Afghanistan, is particularly interested in developing a unified regional position on the Afghan issue. Tashkent regularly organizes international conferences on Afghanistan, promoting the idea of integrating the country into economic projects as a guarantee of peaceful development.

Overall, Shavkat Mirziyoyev's efforts to consolidate Central Asia are already yielding results: the region is increasingly perceived by the international community as a unified center of power rather than a fragmented "rear area" of major powers. This new solidarity significantly enhances the negotiating weight of Uzbekistan and its neighbors on the global stage.

### **Strategic Partnership between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan**

Particular attention should be paid to the rapidly developing strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. Historically, the two countries are bound by shared culture, religion, and closely related languages; however, until recently, their bilateral contacts were not as intensive. With President Mirziyoyev's rise to power, the situation changed: Baku and Tashkent reached an unprecedented level of interaction across the political, economic, and humanitarian spheres.

The political dimension of Azerbaijani-Uzbek relations is characterized by full mutual support for each other's sovereignty and key national interests. Uzbekistan unequivocally supported Azerbaijan's territorial integrity regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. Tashkent welcomed the restoration of Baku's control over territories previously occupied by Armenia and offered assistance in post-war reconstruction.

Thus, at President Mirziyoyev's initiative, Uzbekistan built the Mirza Ulugbek School in Fuzuli and launched a joint factory in Khankendi, among other projects. In turn, Azerbaijan highly values this stance of fraternal Uzbekistan and consistently supports Tashkent's initiatives in international forums. The Presidents maintain regular

dialogue, mutual delegation visits, and meetings within the frameworks of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and other events take place. A comprehensive Declaration on Strategic Partnership has been adopted, elevating bilateral relations to a level of close friendship and cooperation; on August 23, 2024, a Treaty on Allied Relations between the two countries was signed.<sup>4</sup>

Economic and logistics cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan is developing rapidly. The two economies complement each other: Uzbekistan possesses a significant raw-material base and industrial potential, while Azerbaijan additionally has strategic access to the sea and developed energy-transport infrastructure. These factors underpin joint projects.

First, a new transit corridor across the Caspian Sea is being formed: Uzbek goods can now reach global markets via Azerbaijani ports and onward by rail to Turkey and Europe (the so-called Middle Corridor). Tariffs and technical transport standards are being aligned, Caspian ferry crossings are being modernized, and joint logistics enterprises are being established.

Second, close cooperation is emerging in the energy sector: Tashkent and Baku are discussing electricity exchanges and joint construction of generation facilities. Azerbaijan, with experience in building modern power plants, has expressed readiness to assist Uzbekistan in modernizing its energy sector. Opportunities are also opening for cooperation in oil and gas, for example, liquefied gas from Central Asia could potentially be transported via Azerbaijan, bypassing traditional routes.

Third, investment projects are actively advancing. The countries have created an Intergovernmental Commission and a Business

Cooperation Council, which has already identified priority areas including pharmaceuticals, textile and apparel production, agricultural processing, and automotive manufacturing. Joint ventures in these sectors target not only domestic markets but also exports to third countries. A joint Investment Fund with a capital of USD 500 million has been established, with plans to increase it to USD 1 billion.

The humanitarian and cultural component of the partnership has also gained new momentum. Cultural Days are held reciprocally in Baku and Tashkent; exhibitions, concerts, and film festivals introduce the wider public to the history and art of both countries. Student exchange programs for youth: simplified diploma recognition and scholarships are increasing the number of Azerbaijani students at Uzbek universities, and vice versa. A notable step was the establishment of cultural centers: in Tashkent, the Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center operates at the Embassy of Azerbaijan, while a cultural-information center of Uzbekistan will be established in Baku<sup>5</sup>.

These venues serve as hubs for promoting the languages, traditions, and spiritual values of the two peoples. Mutual tourism flows are already increasing, as is the number of direct flights between the countries.

An important element of humanitarian partnership is mutual support of diasporas. Uzbekistan hosts a small but influential Azerbaijani community contributing to the country's economy and culture; Azerbaijan is also home to thousands of ethnic Uzbeks. Governments have agreed to create favorable conditions for these diasporas, encourage their participation in public life, and develop national-cultural associations. At the highest level, it is emphasized that Azerbaijanis and Uzbeks are not merely partners but brothers bound by history. This rhetoric is backed by concrete actions: Uzbekistan was among the first to assist Azerbaijan in the reconstruction of Karabakh, while Azerbaijan contributed to the restoration of historic mosques in Tashkent. All this fosters an atmosphere of trust and sincere friendship between the two states.

Strategically, rapprochement with Azerbaijan strengthens Uzbekistan's international position. Baku and Tashkent act in unison on key geopolitical issues. Both pursue independent policies, belong to no military blocs, and are committed to multi-vector foreign relations. Their close alliance serves as an additional pillar for each side. It is no coincidence that experts increasingly view the Tashkent–Baku axis as a new factor in broader Eurasian geopolitics.

### **Uzbekistan's Participation in the Development of the Turkic World**

Uzbekistan's return to the circle of active participants in the Turkic community has become a landmark development in recent years. In 2019, after a long hiatus, the republic joined the then Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (later transformed into the Organization of Turkic States, OTS). From that moment, Tashkent began playing a notable role in consolidating the Turkic world, a community uniting countries with predominantly Turkic populations. President Mirziyoyev's foreign policy strategy assigns significant importance to this dimension, viewing it through the lenses of both cultural diplomacy and economic benefits.

Today, the Organization of Turkic States serves as the principal multilateral platform for cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries. Uzbekistan, alongside Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, is one of five full members and contributes to shaping the organization's agenda. In 2022, Samarkand hosted an OTS summit, where President Mirziyoyev advanced a number of initiatives aimed at filling the organization with concrete projects. Under Uzbekistan's chairmanship, an agreement was reached to move "from words to deeds": intensify efforts to establish a Turkic Investment Fund, strengthen transport

cooperation, and simplify the movement of citizens within the Turkic space.<sup>6</sup>

Thanks to Tashkent's efforts, the OTS is increasingly focusing on practical steps, such as unifying customs procedures, mutual recognition of standards and diplomas, and exchange of best practices in public administration.

Special attention is given to developing a transport corridor across Turkic countries. The so-called Middle Corridor links Central Asia with Azerbaijan and Turkey, and onward to Europe. Uzbekistan views this corridor as an opportunity to integrate into global logistics routes while bypassing traditional paths. In cooperation with Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Kazakhstan, work is underway to synchronize rail connections, create unified digital cargo-tracking systems, and even coordinate tariff policies to enhance transport competitiveness. Turkey, for its part, actively lobbies for the construction of a Trans-Caspian gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, a project supported by Uzbekistan, which is interested in diversifying export routes for the region's energy resources.

In 2023, OTS countries established the Turkic Business Council to help businesses capitalize on opportunities along the Middle Corridor. For Uzbekistan, connecting to this route means not only faster delivery of its goods (such as automotive components, cotton yarn, and food products) to Turkish and EU markets, but also increased transit revenues from service sectors (logistics hubs, service stations, hospitality along the routes).

Beyond economics, the OTS provides its members, including Uzbekistan, with a platform to strengthen cultural and humanitarian ties with fraternal peoples. Tashkent actively participates in exchange programs in education, language policy, and youth initiatives. Uzbek experts work at various institutions, including TURKSOY (the International Organization of Turkic Culture)<sup>7</sup>. In 2020, the city of Khiva was declared the "Cultural Capital of the Turkic World," accompanied by international festivals and conferences supported by all OTS countries.

Such events not only boost Uzbekistan's tourism appeal but also reinforce unity among peoples separated by state borders yet close in spirit. Educational institutions in OTS countries introduce courses on each other's history and culture; for example, centers for Azerbaijani and Turkish language studies have opened at Uzbek universities, while departments of Uzbek language are being established in Baku and Ankara. A significant initiative has been the exchange of faculty and students among leading universities of Turkic countries. Uzbekistan has joined this program by sending students abroad and hosting students from partner states.

Security and defense constitute another aspect of cooperation within the OTS that Uzbekistan is gradually engaging in. Although the OTS is not a military bloc, its members consult on regional security

issues. Turkey, possessing NATO's second-largest army, has in recent years expanded military cooperation with Central Asia. Bilaterally, Ankara has already assisted partners: it supplied Bayraktar combat drones to Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan and invited Kazakh and Uzbek officers to study at Turkish military academies. Uzbekistan is interested in such cooperation, as it provides access to modern standards in troop training, command, and communications.

Turkic states are gradually developing coordination skills in the defense sphere as well. Tashkent supports joint exercises in humanitarian operations and information exchange on challenges (for example, the movement of militants and extremist groups). Such cooperation enhances regional security while also demonstrating the region's political independence: former Soviet republics are developing their own security mechanisms, reducing the monopolistic influence of other actors.

### **The Center of Islamic Civilization and the Humanitarian Dimension of Foreign Policy**

An important component of President Mirziyoyev's foreign policy strategy is the promotion of humanitarian and cultural initiatives to strengthen Uzbekistan's soft power and global image. One of the cornerstone projects in this area is the Center of Islamic Civilization in Tashkent, a grand complex whose construction began at the initiative of Shavkat Mirziyoyev. It is not merely a new building, but a symbol of the revival of national spiritual heritage and the country's openness to the Islamic world. In 2023–2025, extensive work was carried out to develop the Center's exhibitions, including the collection of ancient manuscripts and artifacts related to prominent scholars and theologians of Mawarannahr. The Center of Islamic Civilization will become a modern museum and research-educational institution dedicated to studying and popularizing the contributions of medieval Central Asian thinkers (such as Imams Bukhari and Tirmidhi, scholars al-Khwarizmi, Ibn Sina, and Mirza Ulugbek) to global science and culture.

The Center's opening has already attracted attention beyond Uzbekistan. During the aforementioned Consultative Meeting of Central Asian leaders in Tashkent (November 2025), President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev personally visited the Center and highly praised its significance.

He emphasized that the emergence of such a major educational institution in Uzbekistan demonstrates the Uzbek leadership's commitment to the true values of Islam: creation, tolerance, friendship, and brotherhood. Against the backdrop of rising Islamophobia in some parts of the world, Uzbekistan sends the opposite message: Islamic culture is not a source of conflict, but a great civilization worthy of pride. Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence that the Tashkent Center would

become a source of pride for the entire Islamic world and a magnet for Muslim youth seeking to understand their heritage.

Through the prism of the Center of Islamic Civilization, a broader course of humanitarian diplomacy pursued by Tashkent becomes evident. Uzbekistan positions itself as a bridge between East and West, between Muslim civilization and the rest of the world. In recent years, the republic has advanced several important initiatives at international forums related to intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

In 2018, Samarkand hosted the international conference "Islamic Enlightenment Against Extremism," where Shavkat Mirziyoyev called for uniting efforts to educate youth and protect them from radical ideas. At Uzbekistan's initiative, the UN General Assembly adopted a special resolution on enlightenment and religious tolerance, supported by many countries. Tashkent also proposed declaring Bukhara the capital of Islamic culture within ISESCO (the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), an initiative that was realized-Bukhara received the status, drawing attention to its rich history.<sup>8</sup>

Educational and scientific cooperation has become an important direction of humanitarian foreign policy. Uzbekistan, with authoritative theological schools and madrasas, began inviting students from neighboring Muslim countries, primarily Afghanistan, to study there. In Termez, on the Uzbek-Afghan border, a Training Center for Afghan civilian specialists, doctors, engineers, and teachers was opened. This represents Uzbekistan's contribution as a donor of knowledge and development to the stability of neighboring Afghanistan. Tashkent also actively cooperates with UNESCO on cultural heritage preservation: restoration of Islamic monuments in Samarkand and Khiva, and their recognition as World Heritage Sites have earned respect for Uzbekistan's efforts to preserve humanity's shared heritage.

Humanitarian actions and assistance have become another facet of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The country does not remain indifferent when disasters strike in the region: it sends food and medical supplies to Afghanistan, provides assistance to Pakistan after devastating floods, and dispatches mobile hospitals to affected areas. Such humanitarian activity strengthens Tashkent's authority as a reliable and responsible partner. Moreover, as a predominantly Muslim country, Uzbekistan demonstrates solidarity with the ummah not only through statements but through concrete assistance to fellow believers.

Overall, the humanitarian-civilizational dimension of President Mirziyoyev's foreign policy complements the pragmatic economic and political steps discussed above. It shapes a positive image of "New Uzbekistan" -a country confidently moving forward while remembering its roots and taking responsibility for the region's future. Through culture, education, and spiritual values, Tashkent strengthens ties with people worldwide, creating a sustainable foundation for long-term cooperation. It is no coincidence that foreign media increasingly describe Uzbekistan as a center of enlightened Islamic thought in

Central Asia, and that the peace-building and humanitarian initiatives of its leader receive positive expert assessments.

### **High-Level Visits to the United States: Diplomatic Outcomes and Geopolitical Significance**

One of the most vivid manifestations of Uzbekistan's new foreign-policy strategy has been President Mirziyoyev's visits to the United States and the intensification of relations with Washington. In May 2018, Shavkat Mirziyoyev paid a historic official visit to Washington, the first by an Uzbek leader in 16 years. This visit largely marked a "new era" in U.S.–Uzbek relations. Then-U.S. President Donald Trump highly praised reforms in Uzbekistan, calling progress in economic and social liberalization "irreversible." The parties signed a Joint Statement on Strategic Partnership, in which the United States confirmed its support for Uzbekistan's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

The economic outcomes of the 2018 visit were also substantial. In the presence of the two heads of state, a major business forum was held at which the Uzbek delegation concluded more than 20 commercial agreements with U.S. companies totaling approximately USD 5 billion. Contracts covered energy, the chemical industry, agriculture, banking, and aviation.

A symbolic step was an agreement for Uzbekistan Airways to purchase Boeing passenger aircraft worth USD 1.3 billion to renew its fleet. American oil and gas corporations announced intentions to return to Uzbekistan; in particular, ExxonMobil agreed to invest in modernizing the Fergana oil refinery, becoming the first U.S. company to be involved in Uzbekistan's energy sector in many years. Shavkat Mirziyoyev also reaffirmed Uzbekistan's interest in joining the World Trade Organization with U.S. expert assistance and receiving advisory support from the IMF and World Bank. All these steps sent a clear signal to investors: Uzbekistan is opening to the world and ready to create a favorable business environment in line with international standards.

A separate focus of President Mirziyoyev's White House talks was regional security, especially the situation in Afghanistan. Tashkent traditionally plays a key role in Afghan settlement, acting as a mediator between Kabul and external actors. During the visit, Washington acknowledged Uzbekistan's contribution to the peace process: President Trump publicly thanked Uzbekistan for organizing the March 2018 international conference on Afghanistan in Tashkent, which gave new impetus to dialogue. A shared commitment was noted to promote Afghanistan's economic recovery, for example, through railway construction projects from Uzbekistan to Afghan cities such as Mazar-i-Sharif and onward to Herat. Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized that stability along Central Asia's southern borders serves the common interests of the region.

Subsequent years demonstrated the steady development of the Uzbek–American dialogue. Regular bilateral consultations (including annual foreign minister meetings) advanced initiatives ranging from educational exchanges to renewable energy cooperation. The culmination of these efforts was the U.S.–Central Asia (C5+1) summit, held for the first time in autumn 2025. At the invitation of the U.S. President, leaders of all five Central Asian republics arrived in Washington simultaneously. This collective visit was unprecedented and testified to the region’s growing geopolitical significance. For Uzbekistan, participation in the C5+1 summit confirmed its role as a coordinator of regional positions: President Mirziyoyev presented consolidated proposals from Central Asian countries, including the idea of establishing a permanent C5+1 secretariat and a special investment fund to support regional projects. The U.S. side supported these initiatives, viewing them as mechanisms to strengthen Central Asia’s independence from external pressure.

The summit discussed major infrastructure plans, including the U.S. readiness to support the development of the Trans-Caspian trade route (the Middle Corridor) from Central Asia to Europe via Azerbaijan. New agreements were also concluded, including access for U.S. companies to the extraction of critical resources (uranium, rare earth elements) in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

In parallel, rapprochement between the United States and Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan’s key partner, was underway. In August 2025, President Ilham Aliyev also visited Washington on a working visit at the invitation of the U.S. leader. The visit coincided with a historic moment: the United States served as a mediator in the final phase of peace negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. A trilateral meeting was held at the White House, under Donald Trump’s auspices, with the participation of the Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders, to address the final settlement of the conflict<sup>9</sup>.

The Presidents of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan synchronized their diplomatic efforts—both demonstrate readiness for constructive cooperation with other states. This parallel movement creates a mutual reinforcement effect: Central Asia and Azerbaijan are increasingly perceived by global capitals as a cohesive spatial segment in which new partnership formats are possible.

### **Perception of Uzbekistan by Global Powers and the Expert Community**

The intensification of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy under President Mirziyoyev has not gone unnoticed. Today, the international community perceives Uzbekistan as an important regional and international actor, autonomous in alliance choices and deserving respect for successfully implemented reforms. Key geopolitical centers recognize Uzbekistan’s enhanced role in Central Asia and beyond.

For the United States and Europe, Uzbekistan has transformed from a closed post-Soviet state into a valuable partner. Washington positively assesses Tashkent's reform drive. American officials and experts note that Uzbekistan contributes to regional stability by improving relations with neighbors, promoting market reforms, combating corruption, and improving human-rights conditions, aligning with Western interests in seeing stable, independent Central Asian states. At the 2025 C5+1 summit, the U.S. named support for Central Asia's sovereignty and prosperity among its priorities. Europe has likewise acknowledged changes: in 2021, the EU granted Uzbekistan GSP+ beneficiary status (trade preferences in exchange for compliance with international conventions on human rights and labor standards), and in 2022–2023 signed cooperation agreements on "green" energy and critical raw materials. European think tanks (such as CEPA) emphasize that "all five Central Asian states have concluded agreements with the EU on strategic raw materials and transport routes, demonstrating their determination to diversify external ties."

### **Conclusion**

In 2020, Uzbekistan chaired the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), hosting a dynamic session in Tashkent devoted to enlightenment and mutual understanding. Many Muslim states were impressed by new initiatives, from launching the Center of Islamic Civilization to proposing an international group of imam-scholars to counter radicalism. UNESCO noted Uzbekistan's extensive efforts to preserve historical monuments: Samarkand, Bukhara, and Shakhrisabz have become exemplary cases of heritage conservation. All this strengthens Uzbekistan's reputation as a responsible member of the international community promoting constructive, unifying ideas.<sup>10</sup>

Analysts worldwide closely study Uzbekistan's recent foreign-policy experience. It is noted that Shavkat Mirziyoyev achieved what once seemed impossible, resetting both domestic policy and international positioning in a short time. The concept of the multi-vector approach he follows has effectively become the norm for the entire Central Asian region. Central Asia is no longer a passive object of others' games; rather, regional states now actively shape the agenda, maneuvering among power centers. Uzbekistan has been a pioneer in this transformation.

Under the leadership of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan's foreign policy has undergone profound changes and received high praise domestically and internationally. The country is no longer viewed as isolated or as a satellite of any power; instead, it is perceived as a self-sufficient and constructive actor capable of serving as a bridge between different worlds.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's course, combining pragmatism with principled positions, openness to all while firmly defending national interests, has become a defining feature of "New Uzbekistan." This diplomatic style serves as an example for neighbors and distinguishes Uzbekistan on the global stage, opening new opportunities for the country's development and for the region as a whole.

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