

## CENTRAL ASIA IN REGIONAL AND GLOBAL TRADE: DEVELOPMENT TRENDS IN 2000-2025.

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**Abstract:** *The main problem of the foreign trade of the countries of Central Asia today is the low share of the region's exports in world exports. In this regard, a comparative analysis of the share of exports of Central Asian countries in world exports with other countries, the disclosure of these new opportunities for the region and the analysis of the potential for increasing mutual trade in the region and exports in the world is an important area of our research. It is also important to demonstrate the need to develop Uzbekistan's foreign trade with the Central Asian states, as well as to increase mutual exports and trade among the countries of the region, thereby strengthening ties with global markets. The research problem lies in the discrepancy between the dynamic growth of Central Asian trade and the still limited share of the region in global exports. The article examines whether regional trade cooperation and Uzbekistan's economic diplomacy have contributed to improving the region's position in global trade. The scientific novelty of the study is its attempt to combine statistical comparison of trade dynamics with an analysis of regional economic cooperation mechanisms.*

**Keywords:** *Central Asia, Uzbekistan, international trade, exports, imports, world exports, export share.*

### Intoduction

The article aims to highlight the issues of the development of foreign trade of the Central Asian (CA) countries and their interaction with Uzbekistan in the context of increasing their share of exports in world exports. The central research question of the article is: why, despite the growth of foreign trade in Central Asia since 2016, does the region still occupy a limited position in global exports, and what mechanisms can strengthen its regional and global trade role?

The scientific novelty of the article lies in identifying the relationship between regional economic diplomacy, growth of mutual trade, and the limited integration of Central Asia into global trade flows. The article substantiates that Uzbekistan's modern foreign trade is a strategic tool for increasing the country's exports to Central Asian countries. The methodological basis of the study was a systematic and statistical comparative analysis, which made it possible to compare the situation in the field of



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export development of Uzbekistan and Central Asian countries, analyze facts and documents, summarize the available information and formulate conclusions.

Today, the study of regional trade in Central Asian countries and its relationship with world trade is an important aspect due to the great interest shown in the region by other countries and the fact that international trade is increasingly becoming one of the key and indisputable factors influencing the development of economic growth indicators in the countries of this region. At the Seventh Consultative Meeting of the Central Asian Heads of State, held on November 16, 2025 in Tashkent, President of Uzbekistan Sh.M.Mirziyoyev, noting that "today Central Asia is a space of dynamic development and fruitful cooperation", which is "rapidly integrating into the global economy", stressed that the volume of mutual trade between the countries of the region in 2024 reached 10.7 billion dollars [1].

On the eve of this Seventh Consultative Meeting, President of Uzbekistan Sh.Mirziyoyev, in his article "Central Asia on the verge of a new era", stressing that "a new economic reality of the region is being formed through the efforts of the states", noted: «in the past eight years the volume of external trade of the Central Asian countries increased more than two times – up to \$253 billion; the mutual trade between the countries of the region doubled, reaching about \$11 billion, the trade turnover of Uzbekistan with the region's states increased by three times – from \$2,4 billion in 2016 to \$7,2 billion in 2024» [2]. In his Address to the Oliy Majlis and the people of Uzbekistan, President Sh.M.Mirziyoyev stressed the importance of "further developing cooperation with the states of the Central Asian region in trade and economic spheres" [3].

Most of our scientific research [4, 5] also confirms this strong relationship between economic growth and trade, which in our material we take as an axiom, not delving into academic paradigms, but focusing on analyzing the current state and dynamics of trade statistics and foreign economic decisions of the Central Asian states.

The state of the international trading system in recent years, as follows from the reports of many international organizations, including the WTO and UNCTAD, has been influenced by many uncertainty factors, such as numerous geo-economic risks, escalation of geopolitical tensions, etc. All this led to the fact that global trade in goods and services showed a restrained growth of

1% in 2023 [6]. However, in 2024, according to UNCTAD estimates, the volume of world trade reached a record \$33 trillion, an increase of 3.7 percent compared to 2023 [7], and in 2025, world trade in goods and services continued to grow [8,9].

In this regard, the analysis of the foreign trade indicators of the Central Asian countries is even more relevant and interesting.

The dynamics of the development of foreign trade in Central Asian countries for the period 2000-2022. (Table 1) is based on the World Bank database [10]. This database was used for the purposes of an equivalent comparative analysis. This was due to the fact that when compiling table 1, it was taken into account that the World Bank's export statistics often do not match the national statistics of the Central Asian States. Therefore, the data for 2023-2025 shown in this Table 1 are taken from the national statistics of the Central Asian States and are presented below.

As can be seen from Table 1, indeed, the exports of the countries of the region in 2000-2012 had a certain growth, but in the period 2012-2016 their exports decreased. Thus, in the period 2010-2016, Kazakhstan's trade surplus fell from \$29 billion to \$11.6 billion, Kyrgyzstan's trade deficit increased from \$1.5 billion to \$2.4 billion, Tajikistan's trade deficit increased from \$1.5 billion to \$2.1 billion, and Turkmenistan's trade surplus of \$0.8 billion turned into a surplus of \$2.0 billion. The low trade of the countries of the region was also noted in a study by economist Yu.Yusupov [11]. The theoretical basis of the study is formed by several approaches in international political economy. First, the concept of regional economic integration explains how neighboring states can increase trade through the reduction of barriers, development of transport corridors and coordination of economic policies. Second, the theory of economic interdependence shows that growing trade links may strengthen political cooperation and reduce transaction costs. Third, the export-led growth approach emphasizes the role of exports as a driver of modernization, diversification and economic competitiveness. Finally, the concept of global value chains is important for understanding why Central Asian countries remain weakly integrated into global production networks despite the growth of trade volumes.

Table 1.

| Years | Kazakhstan |        | Kyrgyzstan |        | Tadjikistan |        | Turkmenistan |        | Uzbekistan |        |
|-------|------------|--------|------------|--------|-------------|--------|--------------|--------|------------|--------|
|       | Export     | Import | Export     | Import | Export      | Import | Export       | Import | Export     | Import |
| 2000  | 8812       | 5040   | 511        | 558    | 785         | 675    | 2506         | 1786   | 2817       | 2697   |
| 2010  | 59971      | 31107  | 1756       | 3223   | 1195        | 2657   | 6500         | 5700   | 11695      | 8689   |
| 2011  | 84336      | 36906  | 1979       | 4261   | 1257        | 3206   | 13000        | 7600   | 13254      | 10472  |
| 2012  | 86449      | 46358  | 1894       | 5374   | 1360        | 3778   | 16500        | 9900   | 11210      | 12034  |
| 2013  | 84700      | 48806  | 2058       | 6070   | 1162        | 4151   | 16800        | 10000  | 12000      | 13138  |
| 2014  | 79460      | 41296  | 1897       | 5732   | 977         | 4297   | 17500        | 10000  | 11500      | 13925  |
| 2015  | 45956      | 30568  | 1441       | 4070   | 891         | 3436   | 10000        | 7000   | 9443       | 11461  |
| 2016  | 36685      | 24995  | 1573       | 4000   | 899         | 3031   | 6964         | 4994   | 8974       | 11328  |
| 2017  | 48304      | 29266  | 1764       | 4495   | 1198        | 2775   | 7458         | 4571   | 10079      | 12035  |
| 2018  | 60956      | 32534  | 1837       | 5292   | 1073        | 3151   | 9760         | 2390   | 10921      | 17312  |
| 2019  | 57309      | 37757  | 1986       | 4989   | 1174        | 3349   | 10545        | 2994   | 14024      | 21866  |
| 2020  | 46447      | 37222  | 1973       | 3719   | 1407        | 3151   | 6544         | 3242   | 13097      | 19932  |
| 2021  | 60625      | 41171  | 2752       | 5580   | 2150        | 4210   | 9349         | 4037   | 14081      | 23740  |
| 2022  | 84663      | 49586  | 2187       | 9629   | 2142        | 5167   | 11703        | 2912   | 15350      | 28173  |
| 2023  | 78675      | 61159  | 3309       | 12352  | 2449        | 5880   | 11400        | 9300   | 24426      | 38141  |
| 2024  | 81618      | 59787  | 3828       | 12214  | 1950        | 7010   | 12369        | 3849   | 26948      | 38986  |

Only since 2016, the exports of the Central Asian countries have been gradually gaining positive growth dynamics, increasing more since 2020. At the same time, it should be noted that while exports in Kazakhstan [12, 13] decreased slightly in 2023 and increased again in 2024, exports in Tajikistan [14, 15] increased in 2023 and decreased in 2024. Exports in Kyrgyzstan [16, 17], Turkmenistan [18, 19], and especially in Uzbekistan [20, 21] increased significantly over the same period (Table 1). There were several reasons for this.

**First** of all. Each Central Asian State gives priority to the Central Asian region and the development of economic diplomacy in the field of trade in its foreign policy. Thus, in the document "On the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030" dated March 6, 2020, it was noted that the State "implements a multi-vector, pragmatic and proactive foreign policy", where in paragraph 2. priorities in the field of economic diplomacy are noted. The "Foreign Policy Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic" dated March 11, 2019 notes that the Republic "pursues

a pragmatic, balanced, open, multi-vector and consistent foreign policy", attaching great importance to economic diplomacy on its official website. In the "Foreign Policy Concept of the Republic of Tajikistan" dated January 27, 2015, paragraph 2.5 states that the country "will implement a multi-vector foreign policy that meets the highest state and national interests", and paragraph 3.3 draws attention to "the effective use of methods and tools of economic diplomacy to achieve national and state goals of Tajikistan". The Strategy "Uzbekistan-2030" pays great attention to the further development of international trade and economic cooperation, including the liberalization of export activities, diversification of the structure and geography of exports, expansion and mobilization of the export potential of economic sectors and territories.

**Secondly.** Promoting Uzbekistan's foreign policy course and his ideas about the Central Asian region in practice, President of Uzbekistan Sh.M.Mirziyoyev put forward a number of constructive initiatives to strengthen sustainable socio-economic development in Central Asia at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly in September 2017. He proposed "holding regular consultative meetings of the heads of State of Central Asia" and expressed his intention to "discuss the fundamental problems of the region at the High-level International Conference "Central Asia: one Past and a Common Future, cooperation for Sustainable Development and Prosperity" in November 2017 in Samarkand. These initiatives of Sh.M.Mirziyoyev laid the foundation for new cardinal development shifts in the Central Asian region.

**Third.** The first consultative meeting of the Central Asian heads of state, held in Astana on March 15, 2018, gave a fundamentally new impetus to coordinating efforts not only in the field of political dialogue, but also regional economic cooperation. Speaking in Astana about his initiative to hold regular meetings of Central Asian heads of state, Sh.M.Mirziyoyev noted that he "proceeded from the fact that completely new opportunities for the development of regional cooperation are currently being formed". At this first meeting, the President of Uzbekistan, in his pragmatic approaches, announced specific mechanisms for implementing the priorities of regional cooperation, in particular: "further deepening of regional trade and economic ties, involving ensuring the full functioning of the free trade regime between the countries of the region, intensive development of cross-border trade and industrial cooperation".

Table 2.

**Uzbekistan's exports and imports with Central Asian countries**

| Years | Kazakhstan |        | Kyrgyzstan |        | Tadjikistan |        | Turkmenistan |        |
|-------|------------|--------|------------|--------|-------------|--------|--------------|--------|
|       | Export     | Import | Export     | Import | Export      | Import | Export       | Import |
| 2020  | 903,0      | 2115,5 | 756,6      | 146,5  | 404,6       | 97,3   | 128,0        | 399,1  |
| 2021  | 1172,1     | 2738,4 | 791,1      | 161,5  | 500,9       | 103,6  | 191,3        | 690,6  |
| 2022  | 1379,7     | 3241,2 | 979,3      | 280,7  | 519,9       | 154,5  | 194,8        | 731,5  |
| 2023  | 1372,5     | 3026,4 | 631,5      | 321,9  | 605,0       | 151,8  | 171,2        | 923,2  |
| 2024  | 1452,3     | 2825,5 | 513,3      | 333,1  | 552,2       | 150,5  | 128,2        | 1020,0 |
| 2025  | 1545,8     | 3423,8 | 771,1      | 428,1  | 638,1       | 229,3  | 151,5        | 1052,2 |

**Fourth.** The development strategy of the New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026 outlined the importance of "raising close cooperation in the trade and economic sphere in Central Asia to a high level" (Goal 94), the need to "strengthen economic diplomacy" (Goal 95), "further increasing the export potential of the republic and bringing the volume of exports of the Republic in 2026 to 30 billion US dollars". And the Strategy "Uzbekistan-2030" outlined the need to: "strengthen the export potential of the national economy"; "increase exports by 2 times and bring them to \$ 45 billion" (Goal 55); raise practical cooperation in the Central Asian region to a qualitatively new level (Goal 91); "increase efficiency and enhance economic diplomacy in promoting and protecting national interests" (Goal 92). These decisions contributed to the development of Uzbekistan's trade with Central Asian countries (Table 2 and Table 3) [22, 23, 24].

Table 3.

| Years       | Kazakhstan |            | Kyrgyzstan |            | Tadjikistan |            | Turkmenistan |            | Total share of Central Asian countries in Uzbekistan's trade turnover (%) |
|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|             | Volume     | Share in % | Volume     | Share in % | Volume      | Share in % | Volume       | Share in % |                                                                           |
| <b>2016</b> | 1898,9     | 76,5       | 167,4      | 7,0        | 197,1       | 8,0        | 209,1        | 8,5        | 10,2                                                                      |
| <b>2017</b> | 2055,7     | 75,0       | 253,7      | 9,0        | 237,9       | 9,0        | 177,9        | 7,0        | 10,3                                                                      |
| <b>2018</b> | 2919,6     | 73,0       | 402,9      | 10,0       | 390,5       | 10,0       | 302,8        | 7,0        | 11,9                                                                      |
| <b>2019</b> | 3335,0     | 64,0       | 820,3      | 16,0       | 480,5       | 9,0        | 554,4        | 11,0       | 12,4                                                                      |
| <b>2020</b> | 3018,5     | 61,0       | 903,2      | 18,0       | 501,9       | 10,0       | 527,1        | 11,0       | 13,6                                                                      |
| <b>2021</b> | 3910,0     | 61,5       | 952,6      | 15,0       | 604,5       | 9,5        | 881,9        | 14,0       | 15,1                                                                      |
| <b>2022</b> | 4621,0     | 62,0       | 1260,0     | 17,0       | 674,4       | 9,0        | 926,3        | 12,0       | 15,0                                                                      |
| <b>2023</b> | 4398,9     | 61,0       | 953,4      | 13,0       | 756,8       | 11,0       | 1094,4       | 15,0       | 11,5                                                                      |
| <b>2024</b> | 4277,8     | 61,0       | 846,4      | 12,0       | 702,7       | 10,0       | 1148,2       | 17,0       | 10,6                                                                      |
| <b>2025</b> | 4969,6     | 60,0       | 1199,2     | 14,0       | 912,3       | 11,0       | 1203,7       | 15,0       | 10,2                                                                      |

In the Table.3. clearly shows the share of each country in regional trade, as well as the total share of the countries of the region in Uzbekistan's trade turnover and their dynamics of changes over the years. In 9 years, Uzbekistan's trade turnover with Central Asian countries has grown 2.8 times, from \$2.5 billion in 2016 to \$7.0 billion in 2024. Uzbekistan's exports to Central Asian countries increased from \$2.2 billion in 2020 to \$2.6 billion in 2024. The share of Central Asian countries in Uzbekistan's total foreign trade turnover increased from 10.2% in 2016 to 15.1% in 2021. For Uzbekistan, 2021 was a record year in terms of trade with Central Asian countries. In the 9 years since 2016, the volume of trade with all Central Asian countries has increased: with Kazakhstan - 2.3 times, Kyrgyzstan - 5.1 times, Tajikistan - 3.7 times, Turkmenistan - 5.5 times.

The data in Tables 2 and 3 show not only the growth of Uzbekistan's trade with Central Asian countries, but also the asymmetric structure of regional trade. Kazakhstan remains Uzbekistan's dominant regional trade partner, while trade with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan has grown from a lower base. This means that regional trade integration is developing unevenly. A deeper assessment should also consider the commodity structure of exports, including the role of industrial goods, agricultural products, energy resources, textiles, machinery and food products. Without such sectoral analysis, it is difficult to determine whether the growth of trade reflects real diversification or only an increase in trade volume.

The analysis and data provided show that all seven consultative meetings of Central Asian heads of state and the foreign policy strategies of these countries have significantly contributed to the

development of not only mutual trade cooperation between the countries of the region, but also to an increase in the countries' foreign trade. It is important to emphasize here that in the 25 years since 2000, the total foreign trade turnover of the region's countries has increased almost tenfold (Table 4). This Table 4 has been calculated and compiled by the author based on the annual reports of the WTO and UNCTAD for the relevant years [25]. The share of Central Asian countries in world trade (in percent), indicated in the third column of Table 4, is calculated according to the OECD methodology, according to which the share of regional trade in world trade is defined as the ratio of the region's domestic exports to world exports.

At the same time, the Central Asian countries should not stop at these achieved rates of trade development, but significantly accelerate them. Why? A comparative analysis of the volume of foreign trade of Central Asian countries with world trade (in value terms) shows that the share of Central Asian countries in world trade (as a percentage) remains relatively insignificant (Table 4). The annual growth of world trade does not allow Central Asian countries to significantly increase their share. This means that the growth rate of trade between the countries of the region and their exports should be an order of magnitude or a multiple higher than global indicators.

Table 4.

The share of Central Asian countries in world trade for the period 2000-2024

| Years | The volume of world trade (billions of dollars) | Central Asian countries' trade volume (USD million) | The share of Central Asian countries in world trade (%) |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 2000  | 7500                                            | 26187                                               | 0,35                                                    |
| 2010  | 15100                                           | 132493                                              | 0,88                                                    |
| 2011  | 17900                                           | 176271                                              | 0,98                                                    |
| 2012  | 18300                                           | 194857                                              | 1,06                                                    |
| 2013  | 18000                                           | 198885                                              | 1,10                                                    |
| 2014  | 19100                                           | 186584                                              | 0,98                                                    |
| 2015  | 16600                                           | 124266                                              | 0,75                                                    |
| 2016  | 16700                                           | 103443                                              | 0,62                                                    |
| 2017  | 25000                                           | 121945                                              | 0,49                                                    |
| 2018  | 25000                                           | 145226                                              | 0,58                                                    |
| 2019  | 18500                                           | 155993                                              | 0,84                                                    |
| 2020  | 24900                                           | 136734                                              | 0,55                                                    |
| 2021  | 28500                                           | 167695                                              | 0,59                                                    |
| 2022  | 32000                                           | 211512                                              | 0,66                                                    |
| 2023  | 30000                                           | 247091                                              | 0,82                                                    |
| 2024  | 32300                                           | 248559                                              | 0,77                                                    |

As we can see from this comparative analysis, the Central Asian countries in the field of foreign trade will need to make even greater efforts to increase their national and regional trade potential. And this was once again noted in the "Joint Statement on the results of the Seventh Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia", held on November 16, 2025 in Tashkent under the chairmanship of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.Mirziyoyev. At this meeting, the President of Uzbekistan, noting that "reaching a qualitatively new level of trade and economic cooperation remains a priority" and that "the potential of mutual trade and common foreign trade turnover between the countries of the region allows them to increase their volumes by at least 1.5-2 times in the medium term," proposed to develop and adopt a comprehensive regional trade and economic program. cooperation for the period up to 2035 to significantly increase trade volumes [1].

The limited share of Central Asia in world trade can be explained by several structural constraints. First, the region remains insufficiently integrated into global value chains. Second, export concentration remains high in several countries, especially in energy, metals and raw materials. Third, transport costs and dependence on transit routes reduce competitiveness. Fourth, institutional fragmentation, border procedures, non-tariff barriers and differences in customs regulation continue to limit the growth of regional trade. Fifth, the role of external actors such as China, Russia, the European Union and Türkiye significantly shapes trade routes, investment flows and export opportunities for Central Asian countries.

**As a conclusion.** Based on our analysis, we can conclude that the Central Asian states, especially over the past 9 years, have achieved significant development of their trade potential, which has reliable growth prospects. This was facilitated by the active economic diplomacy of the President of Uzbekistan, Sh.Mirziyoyev, in the field of increasing exports not only in Uzbekistan, but also in the Central Asian region. The analysis also shows how difficult the tasks of multiplying the trade and especially export potential of the region are in the future. But these tasks can be solved by consolidating joint efforts and launching effective mechanisms for regional cooperation.

the main contribution of the article is the demonstration that Central Asia's trade problem is not only quantitative, related to

low export shares, but also structural. The region needs export diversification, better transport connectivity, stronger regional production chains and deeper integration into global value chains. The limitation of the study is that it relies mainly on aggregate trade statistics and does not provide detailed sectoral or econometric analysis. Future research should therefore focus on commodity-level trade structure, trade intensity indices and the role of external actors in shaping regional trade flows.

At the same time, it should also be noted that the trade and economic potential and prospects of Central Asia have not yet been fully realized in the international community. Within this framework, it would be important if the Central Asian countries jointly proposed to the WTO, UNCTAD and other international organizations to start reflecting in their annual reports and publications the trade and economic statistics of the Central Asian region on an equal basis with other regions of the world. That's the first thing. Secondly, it would be desirable for the relevant ministries of the Central Asian countries to agree to issue joint annual reports on mutual trade between the countries of the region and other countries at the end of each year. This would help to increase the awareness of the international community about the trade and economic potential of the Central Asian region. It is probably precisely these issues that the President of Uzbekistan had in mind when, at the Fifth Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State, he proposed "launching a mechanism for regular meetings of ministers responsible for foreign trade activities".

As we can see, in order to resolve these issues, further systematic and deep fundamental and applied scientific research of trade and economic diplomacy is needed, which should result in the development of strategic conceptual approaches and effective mechanisms for regional trade and economic cooperation in Central Asia. After all, a healthy Central Asian trading system is extremely important for the implementation of the 2035 Agenda not only for all countries in the region, but also beyond its borders. As the strategic role of the Central Asian region on the economic map of the world will constantly and certainly increase.

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