

## New Vision in Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy

Having won the elections held in December 2016 after the death of Islam Kerimov in Uzbekistan, Sevkhet Mirziyoyev succeeded several changes in the country. While taking rapid and radical steps in domestic politics, Mirziyoyev tried to restore the broken ties of the former regime with its neighbors and international society. Under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan is opening up to ensure its economic development and political stability.

The improvement of relations and resolution of problems between them were set as main targets. Mirziyoyev dealt with opportunities of investment and trading in negotiations with both Uzbekistan's neighbors and other countries in an effort to improve Uzbek economics.

In March 2017, Mirziyoyev made his first trip to abroad to Turkmenistan which had good ties with the former regime in Uzbekistan. Mirziyoyev went to Kazakhstan in the same month, building an intimate relationship with Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev. During the trip, a number of deals were struck between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

In April 2017, Mirziyoyev took on a trip to Russia striking about 60 deals most of which are finance-related. In May of the same year, in his visit to Beijing, Mirziyoyev conducted significant negotiations. Assigning big value to Uzbekistan, one of the most important sides to 'One Belt One Road' project, China made deals with Uzbekistan's new power in excess of 20 billion dollars. Mirziyoyev paid a second visit to Turkmenistan in May and, after that, went to Saudi Arabia to join USA-Arab and Islamic summit conference. During this intense program of visits, he took every occasion to attract investors to Uzbekistan by holding the official talks.

Mirziyoyev made further trips to Kazakhstan to join the Summit of Organization of Shanghai Cooperation in June 2017, and the Summit of Science and Technology of Organization of Islamic Cooperation in September 2017. In this process, he hosted Nazarbayev in Uzbekistan. It increased expectation that cooperation of Tashkent – Astana in the future perspective of Central Asia would stand out as it was made great progress in bilateral relations.

The new administration made important progress also in the relations with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with which Uzbekistan had trouble in the realms of transportation, communication, and border issues. Mirziyoyev paid a formal visit to Kyrgyzstan in September 2017 and the border gate which has been blocked unilaterally by Uzbekistan since 2010 was opened. In addition, important steps were taken with regards to resolution of border problems, which led to a serious problem between two countries. In his historic trip to Tajikistan in March 2018, he reached an agreement on the long-debated border regions. Patar-Andarhan border gate, located on the border of Uzbekistan-Tajikistan, was reopened. Moreover, visa exemption was introduced mutually to citizens of both countries.

Turkey has historical and cultural ties with the Turkic republics of Central Asia. It has developed excellent political and economic relations with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan since their independence in the early 1990's. The missing link was Uzbekistan for various reasons. Although Turkey was the first country to recognize the independence of Uzbekistan, Ankara, having problematic relations with the administration of Kerimov for years, was not indifferent to this occasion of change. As early as November 2016 – the period Mirziyoyev serving as deputy chairman- Turkey President Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid a historic visit together with a great number of delegations to Uzbekistan. After the long negotiations with Mirziyoyev, Erdogan took initiative to deepen the bilateral relations. The posture of Erdogan during his visit to Imam Maturidi Tomb with the chief of defense staff Hulusi Akar and undersecretary of National Intelligence Service Hakan Fidan in front of this place of symbolic value drew great attention. This was interpreted as a sign of Turkey's enthusiasm for reasserting itself in Uzbekistan, which can be described, in a sense, the heart of Central Asia.

In fact, after this meeting, Erdogan and Mirziyoyev met through international meetings in Beijing, Astana and New York and agreed on improving bilateral relations in a rapid way. It was arranged to upgrade trade volume of 1.3 billion dollars between two countries to 5 billion dollars in 5 years, and to 10 billion dollars in 10 years. The visit of Sevkhet Mirziyoyev to Turkey in October 2017 was recorded as the first visit at

presidential level after 20 years of interval. 24 deals were struck in several different realms including economics, defense industry, healthcare, agriculture, education, and culture. These developments signal that the relationship between Turkey and Uzbekistan might get better further in the upcoming process.

Indeed President Erdogan held a three-day official visit to Uzbekistan from 29 April to 1 May 2018. During Erdoğan's visit, 25 agreements were signed in the fields of economy, trade, energy, education, infrastructure and others. Turkish citizens are now able to visit Uzbekistan without a visa for up to 30 days. Turkish businessmen are looking for investment opportunities there as well. Furthermore, Uzbekistan will join the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, thus, aiming to strengthen its relations with other countries in the larger Turkic world.