

HISTORICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA AND UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This article analyzes the formation, development, and current stage of historical, diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Official mutual visits, trade and economic relations, technological cooperation, and exchanges in healthcare, education, and culture play an important role in strengthening bilateral cooperation. The article also examines Uzbekistan's foreign policy directions within the framework of strategic partnership with Korea, joint projects, and the role of the Korean diaspora in the socio-political life of the country. This paper highlights the prospects of Uzbekistan–Korea relations and their importance for regional stability.

Keywords: historical relations between Uzbekistan and the Republic of Korea, bilateral cooperation, diplomatic relations, trade and economy, investment projects, technological cooperation, exchanges in education and culture, official visits, strategic partnership, healthcare, Korean diaspora, joint programs, and regional stability.

In Uzbekistan's foreign policy, South Korea occupies an important place. As the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, emphasized: "Uzbekistan's relations with the Southeast Asian countries, which have acquired the status of newly industrialized nations, play a key role in the development and consolidation of the state, as well as in the country's integration into the global economy." [1].

Thanks to independence, our peoples began to establish free relations in the economic and cultural spheres. As a result of the interstate agreements signed in Tashkent in 1994 and in Seoul in February 1995, joint ventures have started and continue to operate in Uzbekistan. These enterprises are making a valuable contribution to the development of our country[2].

After the visits of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, to the Republic of Korea in 1992, 1996, and 1999, the cooperation between Uzbekistan and South Korea significantly expanded and began to cover many sectors.

During his visit to South Korea in June 1992, President I.A. Karimov familiarized himself with the activities of the "Daewoo Public Motors" automobile plant, and a cooperation agreement was signed with the company that same month. A large automobile plant began construction in the city of Asaka in the Andijan region. In March 1996, the first "Damas" vehicle was produced at the plant. From 1996, models like "Tico" and "Nexia" were also tested[3].

In order to further intensify efforts to attract foreign investment, the government of South Korea compiled a list of 222 foreign companies that had expressed interest in exploring investment opportunities in the Republic of Korea. According to available data, 105 of these companies had already been identified, and the South Korean side intended to establish cooperation with them in the near future (as of 1998) [4].

It is noteworthy that by 2005, representative offices of 28 major South Korean firms and companies were operating in Uzbekistan. As a result of the state visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to the Republic of Korea from November 22 to 25, 2017, a Joint Statement on Comprehensive Expansion of Strategic Partnership was adopted.

More than 20 intergovernmental, interstate, and interdepartmental agreements were signed, along with a total of 64 documents in trade-economic, financial-technical, and other spheres, amounting to over 10 billion USD. Of this amount, 4 billion USD consisted of direct Korean investments [5].

Inter-parliamentary exchanges between the two countries are successfully developing. In 1995, the "Korea-Uzbekistan" Friendship Association was established in the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea. In 2005, a special group for cooperation with Korea was created in the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan.

In September 2017, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Korea, Chung Sye-kyun, visited Uzbekistan, and in February 2018, the Speaker of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan, Nurdinjon Ismoilov, paid a visit to the Republic of Korea.

Since 1995, regular political consultations have been held between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries, with the twelfth round held in Tashkent in 2016.

The volume of investments made by South Korea into Uzbekistan's economy has exceeded 7 billion USD.

Korean language, culture, and computer centers operate at the Uzbek State University of World Languages and Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages. In total, Korean is taught at 13 higher education institutions and in 28 schools, lyceums, and colleges across the republic.

Currently, Uzbekistan's higher education institutions cooperate with over 30 South Korean universities and research centers to further develop scientific collaboration, enhance academic exchanges between professors and students, and organize joint scientific conferences, symposia, seminars, and research projects.

On October 1, 2014, a branch of Inha University of South Korea, specializing in training personnel in computer engineering, software, and logistics, was opened in Tashkent.

From November 22 to 25, 2017, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev paid a state visit to the Republic of Korea.

President Mirziyoyev participated in the Uzbekistan-South Korea Business Forum, attended by heads of economic and financial institutions and leading entrepreneurs of both countries. He emphasized the consistent development of trade and economic relations between Uzbekistan and South Korea and highlighted the creation of modern conditions and opportunities for doing business in Uzbekistan. He reiterated Uzbekistan's interest in expanding cooperation with South Korean business representatives.

During the visit, a Korean-language book titled President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev was presented in the Republic of Korea. Published in 50,000 copies, the book contains 8 chapters and 320 pages, covering the President's first year in office[6].

Uzbekistan and the Republic of Korea have been steadily developing their relations on the basis of key documents such as the Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership signed in 2006 and the Joint Declaration on Further Development and Deepening of the Strategic Partnership adopted in 2014. These agreements have elevated bilateral relations to a qualitatively new level across political, trade-economic, investment, and cultural-humanitarian spheres.

"Uzbekistan is one of our closest partners, and we are pleased with the steady development of our cooperation in various fields. Today, the Republic of Korea is moving along the path of promoting peace and prosperity throughout Eurasia. Uzbekistan, which occupies a key position in Central Asia, is at the center of this vision," said the President of the Republic of Korea[7].

The Republic of Korea is one of Uzbekistan's leading trade, economic, and investment partners in the Asia-Pacific region. By the end of 2016, the volume of bilateral trade exceeded 1 billion USD. Uzbekistan accounts for nearly 50 percent of South Korea's trade turnover with Central Asian countries.

Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Korea is broad in scope. South Korean investments in Uzbekistan's economy have surpassed 7 billion USD. Currently, 461 enterprises with South Korean capital are operating in Uzbekistan. Among them, 386 are joint ventures, while 75 are fully funded by Korean investment. These enterprises are successfully operating in sectors such as oil and gas, petrochemicals, machinery, electrical engineering, textiles, information and communication technologies, transport and logistics, and tourism.

The Republic of Korea is actively assisting in the establishment and development of free economic zones in Uzbekistan. In the Navoi Free Economic Zone, 20 enterprises from South Korea, China, Italy, Singapore, India, the UAE, and other countries are operating. Since 2008, Korean Air has been carrying out cargo transportation through Navoi International Airport and has introduced advanced technologies and an efficient monitoring system there.

On October 24, 2017, a delegation from South Korea, led by Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport Kim Hyun-mee, visited Uzbekistan to familiarize themselves with the "Tashkent City" International Business Center project. The delegation included representatives of major companies such as Korea Eximbank, Korea Expressway, Hyundai Engineering Co. Ltd., POSCO Engineering & Construction, and HSNK Architects Group. The investors paid special attention to the favorable conditions created for business in Uzbekistan, particularly the liberalization of the currency policy, and emphasized the importance of modern technologies and "smart city" construction[8].

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the Export-Import Bank of Korea are implementing a number of projects in Uzbekistan. Major corporations such as Samsung and LG are establishing joint ventures in our country. In particular, Samsung has launched the production of household appliances in cooperation with the Artel company.

Cultural and humanitarian ties are further strengthening cooperation between the two countries. Cultural Days of the Republic of Korea have been held in Uzbekistan. A House of Korean Culture and Art is under construction. This project vividly reflects the high attention being given to the Korean diaspora in Uzbekistan.

Cooperation in the field of education is also expanding. Higher education institutions in Uzbekistan are establishing partnerships with more than 30 scientific research centers in South Korea. Korean language and culture centers have been opened in several educational institutions. The opening of Inha University in Tashkent in 2014 marked a new milestone in this collaboration.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and South Korean President Moon Jae-in signed a Joint Statement on the comprehensive deepening of strategic partnership relations. Over 60 important documents were signed in total. At the invitation of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of the Republic of Korea, Moon Jae-in, paid a state visit to our country on April 18–19, 2019¹

¹ "Халқ сўзи" газетаси 2019-йил 19-апрель.

During the talks, the parties also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest. The Republic of Korea expressed its support for Uzbekistan's practical efforts aimed at strengthening a good-neighborly environment in the region, mitigating the consequences of the Aral Sea disaster, and contributing to the peace process in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan, in turn, endorsed the Republic of Korea's peaceful policy aimed at promoting reconciliation and unity on the Korean Peninsula. The broad-ranging negotiations primarily focused on the development of practical cooperation in the areas of trade and economy, investment, finance and technology, culture and humanitarian relations, and other key sectors.

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