

KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN ALLIED RELATIONS: UZBEK EXPERT DISCOURSE

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Abstract. The article analyzes the assessments of Uzbek experts on the state and prospects for the development of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the context of the Declaration on Allied Relations, signed by the leaders of the two states on December 6, 2021.

This study was carried out by analyzing the discourse of the expert community of Uzbekistan regarding the characteristics of bilateral Kazakh-Uzbek relations in the new historical conditions.

It was revealed that at the moment meaningful allied relations have already been established between the two states with the potential for further development, which in the future will only be improved and expanded due to the high degree of coincidence of mutual interests and in accordance with the realities of the international situation.

Key words: *Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Allied Relations, Central Asia, Regional Policy, Security, Expert Opinion.*

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ҚАЗАҚСТАН МЕН ӨЗБЕКСТАННЫҢ ОДАҚТАСТЫҚ ҚАТЫНАСТАРЫ: ӨЗБЕК САРАПТАМАЛЫҚ ДИСКУРСЫ

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада 2021 жылғы 6 желтоқсанда мемлекет басшылары қол қойған Одақтастық қатынастар туралы Декларация контекстіндегі Қазақстан мен Өзбекстан арасындағы ынтымақтастықтың жай-күйі мен даму перспективалары туралы өзбек сарапшыларының бағалаулары талданады.

Зерттеу жаңа тарихи жағдайларда екіжақты қазақ-өзбек қатынастарының ерекшеліктеріне қатысты Өзбекстанның сарапшылар қауымдастығының пікірін талдау арқылы жүзеге асырылды.

Қазіргі уақытта екі мемлекет арасында одан әрі даму әлеуеті бар елеулі одақтастық байланыстар орнатылғаны анықталды. Бұл қарым-қатынастар болашақта өзара мүдделердің жоғары деңгейде сәйкес келуі және халықаралық жағдайдың шынайылығына сәйкес жақсарады және кеңейеді.

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан, Өзбекстан, одақтастық қатынастар, Орталық Азия, аймақтық саясат, қауіпсіздік, сараптамалық қорытынды.

СОЮЗНИЧЕСКИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ КАЗАХСТАНА И УЗБЕКИСТАНА: УЗБЕКСКИЙ ЭКСПЕРТНЫЙ ДИСКУРС

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Аннотация. В статье анализируются оценки узбекистанских экспертов о состоянии и перспективах развития сотрудничества между Казахстаном и Узбекистаном в контексте Декларации о союзнических отношениях, подписанной главами государств 6 декабря 2021 года.

Исследование осуществлено с помощью анализа дискурса экспертного сообщества Узбекистана относительно характеристики двусторонних казахстанско-узбекистанских отношений в новых исторических условиях.

Выявлено, что на текущий момент между двумя государствами уже налажены содержательные союзнические отношения с потенциалом дальнейшего развития, которые в будущем будут только совершенствоваться и расширяться в связи с высокой степенью совпадения взаимных интересов и в соответствии с реалиями международной обстановки.

Ключевые слова: Казахстан, Узбекистан, союзнические отношения, Центральная Азия, региональная политика, безопасность, экспертное мнение.

Introduction

On November 23, 2022, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan will mark 30 years of diplomatic relations.

Over the years and past stages of interaction, the parties have demonstrated a meaningful pattern of cooperation. The documents on bilateral relations that have laid the foundation for new ties include the treaties on eternal friendship (1998), strategic partnership (2013) and the joint declaration on further deepening strategic partnership and strengthening the good neighborhood (2017).

It should be noted that the development of “strategic relations with the states of Central Asia” is listed among the priorities of Kazakhstan's foreign policy (Chapter 5, Line 4.2) [1]. In this context, the last five years have been marked by an even greater intensification of Kazakh-Uzbek contacts.

A landmark event in 2021 designed to strengthen and give new impetus to friendly relations between the two countries was the first state visit by Uzbekistan's President Sh.M. Mirziyoyev to Kazakhstan since his re-election as President, which took place between December 5-6.

As a result of the talks, on December 6, 2021, Heads of State K.K. Tokayev and Sh.M. Mirziyoyev affixed their signatures to a Declaration on allied relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

This topic has become one of the most discussed among the expert community. This is indicated by an increase in the number of media articles and social media comments on the topic. So far, the attention of the expert circles of the two countries has been focused on the

prospects for a new level of alliance relations in priority areas.

In this context, the aim of the study is to examine the assessments and discussions of Uzbek experts on the potential and possibilities for bilateral interaction in the context of the Declaration on Allied Relations. The relevance of this analysis consists in objectively conveying to the Kazakh sociopolitical and academic circles the Uzbek expert community's understanding of the processes taking place in the relationship between the two countries and in identifying necessary measures that will contribute to strengthening cooperation.

However, to begin with, it seems reasonable to define the very notion of “allied relations”. As a rule, the formation of interstate alliances is one of the debated definitions in international relations theory.

In this context, the approaches and positions of the schools of classical realism and neorealism have traditionally prevailed, since some researchers believe that in the context of the international system most states have still been acting on the basis of their own national interests. Consequently, according to these schools of thought, common reasons for the formation of alliances are the collective pursuit of national security.

Thus, for the political realist theorist H. Morgenthau, alliances are “necessary function of the balance of power operating in a multi-state system” [2, p.137].

K.N. Waltz, the founder of the neorealist theory, noted that alliances are a consequence of the anarchy of the international system and the growth of external threats [3]. One of the leading British international studies scholars, M. Wight, also stressed that the function of

the alliance was to “reinforce the security of the allies or to promote their interests in the external world”. [4, p.122].

The author of the balance of threat theory, S.M. Walt, defines an alliance as “a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states”. [5, p.1]. In his theory, as opposed to the balance of power theory, S.M. Walt places the concept of “external threat” as one of the central issues. In his view, states seek allies not to balance forces, but to balance threats [5, p.263].

C.M. Walt sees ideology as another factor influencing the formation of the alliance. From this perspective, an important criterion for forming alliances between states is similar domestic political systems and values [6]. However, ideology is also a weak explanation for the emergence of an alliance, as ideology, following the example of the communist bloc of states, could also be a source of conflict [6, p.6].

Research methods

Qualitative research methods were applied in the preparation of the article. In particular, content and event analyses and the comparative method were used. Primary and secondary data were analysed through interviews with Uzbek political scientists, personal observation method and expert comments in academic articles, reports, media and other open internet sources from December 2021 to February 2022. Part of this research was conducted during the international conference “Problems of Regional Security in Central Asia after August 2021” held on December 14, 2021 at the International Institute for Central Asian Studies in Tashkent.

Results

While noting that relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have been mostly positive in recent years, Uzbek experts draw attention to a number of the following features of the current bilateral interaction.

First. President Mirziyoyev's state visit to Kazakhstan in December 2021 demonstrated once again that the political relations between the two major states in the region are at the highest level and continue to show a further increase in the legal framework, which provides a solid basis for a transition to a more advanced stage of cooperation.

The experts note that there is a great deal of convergence between the parties in terms of political engagement [7]. In particular, the experience of parliamentary diplomacy gained by the parties is expanding and deepening and becoming increasingly important. In this context, the news of February 9, 2022 on the signing of an agreement between the chairmen of the Majilis of Kazakhstan and the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan on the establishment of an Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Council in full compliance with the Declaration on Allied Relations between the two countries has been positively received in the research discourse. This channel for inter-parliamentary relations should serve the exchange of information, law-making experience and other procedures between members of the higher legislative bodies of the states.

Second. Analysts, stating the proximity of positions in the international arena, note that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also have similar positions on major issues of regional development, and on the track of multilateral cooperation. For example, the parties have mutual

foreign policy support in the framework of the chairmanship of Kazakhstan in the CICA and Uzbekistan in the SCO [8].

Third. Economic cooperation is one of the most dynamic areas of the bilateral agenda. The governments are working towards a goal of \$10 billion in mutual trade [9]. Mutual trade in 2021 increased by 33% to \$4.3 billion [10].

The dynamics of mutual trade turnover between the two states have a positive trend due to the sale of fuel, agricultural products, textiles, transport equipment, etc. However, this is not enough to achieve the objectives. The strategic focus of economic integration and industrial cooperation should be on the following sectors: transport, agricultural and construction machinery; manufacture of power equipment, construction materials, household and medical equipment, etc. [11].

In the context of expanding industrial cooperation, Uzbek analysts draw attention to the importance of developing inter-sectoral cooperative links between manufacturers. This will lead to an increase in mutual trade [12].

Fourth. In addition, given the geographical location and the transit potential of both states, transport is an important connecting sector, according to experts [13]. It is significant that there has already been an increase in reciprocal transport by road, rail and air [8].

Experts also note that, against this background, the countries can mutually benefit from working together on an infrastructure project between Central Asia and South Asia, such as the construction of the Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway. [13].

Fifth. For Uzbek observers, current economic development issues are closely inter-

twined with the rational use of transboundary water resources and the state of the region's ecology. Tens of millions of people and regional stability depend on the wise use of water [14]. This has become prominent against the background of reports from several international institutions about the increasing negative effects of climate change on water scarcity in the region in the coming years [15].

In this context, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are actively working on water issues, including the consequences of the drying up of the Aral Sea. In this regard, it is important that the parties reaffirm their common position on the need to revitalize the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea.

Sixth. The researchers believe that a comprehensive strengthening of security cooperation would contribute to the stability and sustainable development of both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as well as the entire region.

Thus, in the past three years, more than 10 bilateral joint legal instruments have been in the area of politico-military cooperation and common security issues [16]. In order to coordinate in this area, a mechanism has been established for regular consultations between the security councils of the countries, a format for cooperation through the defense ministries has been established, and joint military exercises are being conducted [16].

A good example of practical cooperation in the field of emergencies is the joint rescue work to eliminate the consequences of flooding of some settlements in Maktaaral district of the Turkestan region in May-July 2020, which involved 205 rescue workers and 123 units of rescue equipment of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Uzbekistan [16].

Seventh. Experts note that close cultural and humanitarian ties are an important factor in the allied and friendly relations of the countries. One of the indications of the intensified cooperation in this area is the direct contacts maintained between scientific and educational institutions in the two countries. Today, about 10,000 Uzbek citizens study at universities of Kazakhstan [8].

Another point to which observers draw attention is the measures taken by the parties to establish contacts in the field of tourism and to increase the bilateral tourist flow. The Silk Road Visa, a single Central Asian visa project being worked on by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, will play an important role in this regard.

Discussion of results

An analysis of the Uzbek experts' assessments reveals the following.

First, the allied multifaceted cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan should be seen not only as a bilateral relationship between two independent states, but also in the context of an important factor for regional integration, stability and sustainable development in Central Asia.

As for the impact of the tragic events of January 2022 in Kazakhstan on Kazakh-Uzbek interaction and on regional co-operation, bilateral relations between the allied states should strengthen further, said Farhod Toli-pov, director of the non-governmental scientific institution BilimKarvoni. According to the expert, the January events in Kazakhstan provided yet another argument in favor of further unification of the Central Asian countries [17].

Bakhtiyor Ergashev, director of the Ma'No Center of Research Initiatives, while noting that Kazakhstan is a self-sufficient state, capable of quickly overcoming these crisis phenomena, believes that the events will not have a perceptible negative effect on the regional architecture of relations [18].

Second, the urgent tasks and challenges of the new stage: the acceleration of region-building; maintaining the momentum of consultative meetings between the presidents; and the need to coordinate the foreign policies of the two states, including responding to geopolitical challenges.

Third, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have a great deal of untapped potential and untapped reserves, both in sectors of bilateral economic cooperation and in the context of interaction with other countries in the region, which also have enormous opportunities [19].

In addition, Tashkent's acquisition of observer status with the EAEU creates additional directions for bilateral cooperation [7].

Forth, the parties attach great importance to joint projects in the transport and logistics sector, which contributes to an increase in mutual trade turnover and opens up new opportunities for realizing the transit potential of the two countries. With this in mind, it is necessary to move towards a harmonized policy on transport, as well as on customs between the parties.

Fifth, further strengthening cooperation for the rational use of water resources is an important area, according to Uzbek observers. To this end, it is necessary to continue the efforts of the working group to develop proposals on water relations and to accelerate the introduction of the latest water-saving technologies.

At the same time, despite the emerging positive trend in environmental cooperation, experts are aware of the potential for the countries to address a number of challenges jointly in this area. This was evident against the backdrop of the dust storm that engulfed Tashkent and the Tashkent region, southern regions of Kazakhstan in early November 2021. According to Uzbek forecasters, such a natural disaster was observed in Uzbekistan for the first time in the last 150 years [15].

Sixth, a special place in Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan relations is occupied by close cooperation in the politico-military sphere and in regional security issues. In addition, there are a variety of tools available in this important area in the region.

Experts believe that stability and security in Central Asia are inextricably linked to the situation in Afghanistan. One of the key areas here is the need for parties to engage practically with the UN World Food Programme and other international actors for humanitarian and other assistance to Afghanistan.

Seventh, it is necessary to strive for increased ties in education and science, which have great potential for mutual exchange of experience. Thus, opening branches of Kazakh universities in Uzbekistan and branches of Uzbek universities in Kazakhstan and promoting cooperation through joint educational projects and scientific research would be a breakthrough in relations between the two states. For example, it is relevant in the context of post-pandemic development to promote cooperation in the fields of health, pharmaceuticals, technology exchange, epidemiological safety based on the experience of countries in the fight against the COVID-19

pandemic, and Kazakhstan's own vaccine QazVac.

Kazakhstan's experience of public administration reform is of particular interest to Uzbek experts. In particular, the implementation of the Concept of Development of Public Administration in Kazakhstan until 2030, the implementation of the principles of the "Hearing State" and a number of others. There is therefore a practical need for countries to regularly exchange experiences in this area.

Conclusion

Thus, there is now a consensus in Uzbek expert circles about the state and prospects of allied Kazakh-Uzbek relations. Most experts believe that in the current circumstances the relations between the states are developing in a complex way on the basis of a high degree of convergence between the interests of the two countries and are at a critical stage.

In today's increasingly competitive and tense international environment, it is therefore crucial to exploit the huge potential for complementarity between the countries by joining forces and identifying new practically oriented points of growth.

Certainly, the conclusions of the selected experts may constitute incomplete objective assessments, which would make the discussion more acute. Nevertheless, this study is an impetus for further research in the context of identifying specific problematic factors hindering the progressive development of cooperation between the countries. Such a comprehensive study would provide practical help in finding ways to elevate the allied relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to an appropriate level.

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