

**NEW STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION  
ORGANIZATION AND THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF UZBEKISTAN IN IT (2019-2025)**

**Khayrullakhonov Khondamirkhon Isroilkhon ugli**

3rd year student of the Faculty of Economics of the “TIAME” National Research  
University

**Annotation**

This article analyzes the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the international arena in recent years, its areas of activity and development prospects, as well as the strategic role of Uzbekistan in the organization. Also, the main principles of the SCO, the summit held in Samarkand in 2022, integration issues with the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, the activities of the SCO Center for People’s Diplomacy and the Club of People’s Diplomats, as well as the diplomatic and economic initiatives put forward by Uzbekistan are covered in detail.

**Keywords**

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Shanghai Spirit, regional security, diplomatic initiatives, Samarkand Summit, Dushanbe Summit, Bishkek Summit, “Green Belt” program, cybersecurity, strategic partnership.

**Аннотация**

В данной статье анализируется роль Шанхайской организации сотрудничества (ШОС) на международной арене в последние годы, направления ее деятельности и перспективы развития, а также стратегическая роль Узбекистана в организации. Также подробно освещены основные принципы ШОС, саммит в Самарканде в 2022 году, вопросы интеграции с инициативой “Один пояс, один путь,” деятельность Центра народной дипломатии ШОС и Клуба народных дипломатов, а также дипломатические и экономические инициативы, выдвинутые Узбекистаном.

**Ключевые слова**

Шанхайская организация сотрудничества (ШОС), Шанхайский дух, региональная безопасность, дипломатические инициативы, Самаркандский саммит, Душанбинский саммит, Бишкекский саммит, программа “Зеленый пояс,” кибербезопасность, стратегическое сотрудничество.

**INTRODUCTION**

In today’s global political arena, the role of international and regional organizations is steadily increasing. They serve not only as mechanisms for ensuring security, but also as important instruments for promoting economic development, environmental sustainability, and strengthening cultural ties. One such structure is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which began its activities in 2001 and in a short period gained considerable international prestige. In particular, Uzbekistan’s active participation in this organization laid the foundation for a new stage in its development. Originally established in 1996 under the name “Shanghai Five,” the organization was later renamed the “Shanghai Cooperation Organization” after Uzbekistan joined as a member in 2001 [1]. The main objective of this structure is to strengthen mutual friendship, trust, and good-neighborly relations among member states, as well as to develop effective cooperation in political, trade-economic, scientific-technical, and cultural spheres, along with priority areas such as security, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection,

and others. Indeed, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is considered one of the most influential international organizations that contributes significantly to addressing the most pressing challenges of the modern world, ensuring security, and promoting sustainable development. Today, the SCO has become a prominent international structure. It was officially established on June 15, 2001, in Shanghai, based on a declaration signed by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. Strengthening mutual trust, friendship, and good-neighborliness, developing cooperation in political, trade-economic, scientific-technical, cultural and humanitarian, energy, transport, and other fields, as well as ensuring peace, security, and stability in the region covered by the organization, constitute the main goals and tasks of the SCO.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) currently consists of nine member states: China, Pakistan, Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran. At the 2022 Samarkand Summit, a memorandum on the obligations of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a full member of the organization was signed. The countries holding observer status in the SCO are Afghanistan, Belarus, and Mongolia. In 2022, a decision was adopted to begin the procedures for granting the Republic of Belarus full membership status in the organization. The dialogue partner states include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Türkiye, Egypt, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. During the 2022 Samarkand Summit, memorandums were signed granting dialogue partner status to the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Qatar. (Figure 1) At the 22nd SCO Summit held in Samarkand in 2022, a decision was also made to begin procedures for granting dialogue partner status to the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Kuwait, the Republic of Maldives, the United Arab Emirates, and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. [2]

The three most important tasks of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) were defined and adopted in the “Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism” on June 15, 2001:

- Jointly combating terrorism;
- Combating separatism;
- Combating extremism. [3]



Figure 1. Map of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (2025)

Today, multilateral relations at the international level play an important role in the foreign policy of Uzbekistan. This is because modern international relations and global politics increasingly rely on multilateral cooperation. In Uzbekistan, the Action Strategy for 2017–2021 identified the implementation of the country’s multilateral diplomacy within international organizations as one of the key priorities in its fifth chapter. As a result, significant positive changes and achievements were observed in foreign policy, particularly within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

During 2017–2021, Uzbekistan put forward nearly 50 important and relevant initiatives at SCO summits. [4] The main priority directions of Uzbekistan’s chairmanship in the SCO were logically interconnected and complemented each other. In his Address to the Parliament of Uzbekistan in January 2020, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev also emphasized: “Developing relations with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will remain an important direction of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy.” [5] In particular, during Uzbekistan’s chairmanship of the SCO in 2021–2022, the country clearly demonstrated initiative, openness, a friendly and peace-loving foreign policy, and the spirit of cooperation known as the “Shanghai Spirit,” which was further enriched by the “Samarkand Spirit.” The implementation of these priorities created conditions for developing a promising modern model of the SCO and advancing it to a new stage. At the initiative of the head of state, 14 new draft documents were proposed for SCO practice, which continue to strengthen the organization’s potential and enhance its prestige and attractiveness. [6]

On September 15–16, 2022, the city of Samarkand hosted the 22nd Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). [7] Located at the very heart of the Great Silk Road, this magnificent city has served for thousands of years as a center of interethnic dialogue, cultural and spiritual cooperation, trade, and scientific exchange. The significance of the SCO summit held in Samarkand lies in the fact that, despite the pandemic and the complex global situation, it brought together the leaders of 14 Eurasian countries, including Pakistan, Iran, India,

Russia, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Belarus, and Mongolia. The event turned Samarkand into a center of international politics and economics, which can be regarded as one of the major achievements of Uzbek diplomacy.

SCO Secretary-General Zhang Ming, in an interview given to the media ahead of the 2022 SCO Samarkand Summit, stated:

— “We must always firmly adhere to the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ and the fundamental objectives of the SCO Charter, and strictly follow key principles such as non-alignment with blocs and not acting against any third party. It is essential to preserve the unity of the Organization and strive to develop cooperation. I would also like to emphasize that the SCO is an open organization. We support the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ and welcome the desire of any state that follows the SCO Charter to join and become part of the SCO family,” he emphasized. [8]

Zhang Ming’s words defined the current and future strategic direction of the SCO. At a time when geopolitical fragmentation is increasing in the world, the organization rejects becoming a center of any confrontation and is strengthening its neutral status. In particular, the concept of the "Shanghai Spirit" is not only the core ideology of the organization but also the cornerstone of its practical policy. It embodies the ideas of friendship, mutual benefit, equality, respect for cultural diversity, and serving common development.

Moreover, the adoption of the Charter provided a solid foundation for the international legal basis of the new organization. In turn, at the summit, an agreement on the Regional Anti-Terror Structure (RATS) among SCO member states was signed, and the SCO Heads of State Declaration was announced.

During Uzbekistan's chairmanship of the SCO, efforts were made to intensify practical cooperation within the organization, enhancing its capacity and international prestige. Alongside security issues, priority was given to expanding trade-economic and humanitarian cooperation. Many initiatives were implemented across all areas of the organization's activities. Despite the consequences of the pandemic and the global crisis, more than 80 major events were held. During this period, more than 40 documents were signed— the largest number in the organization’s history— as a result of Uzbekistan's active efforts.

## DISCUSS AND RESULTS

Over the past six years, more than 40 initiatives have been put forward by Uzbekistan within the SCO framework. In particular, Uzbekistan introduced initiatives to launch new cooperation platforms within the SCO, including the SCO Public Diplomacy Center in Tashkent, a mechanism for meetings of railway administration leaders, the Silk Road International Tourism Institute in Samarkand, and others. The railway cooperation concept developed by Uzbekistan, as well as programs on "smart agriculture," the "Green Belt" initiative, and cybersecurity programs, were recognized internationally. [9]

At the 2019 SCO Summit in Bishkek, along with other heads of state, Uzbekistan’s President Shavkat Mirziyoyev also proposed a number of relevant initiatives, some of which involved developing and adopting the following projects:

Strategies for enhancing connectivity, effective economic, and transport corridors among SCO member states;

A concept for mutual cooperation in "smart" agriculture and agro-innovation among SCO member states;

The SCO Green Belt program aimed at widespread implementation of modern resource-saving and environmentally friendly technologies in member states;

Programs for mutual cooperation among SCO member states on ensuring cybersecurity. [10]

The initiative put forward by our President to develop a cooperation strategy for the expansion of transport and economic corridors aims to simplify logistics and trade connections between the countries in the region and to harmonize infrastructure. In particular, Uzbekistan's geostrategic location plays a crucial role in implementing this initiative. Through the cooperation initiative in the field of smart agriculture and agro-innovations, innovative approaches such as integrating digital technologies into agriculture, rational use of water and land resources, and crop monitoring are being promoted in the SCO space. These efforts are of great importance, primarily in ensuring food security and ecological sustainability. The "Green Belt" program, meanwhile, is extremely significant in today's era of growing global environmental issues. Furthermore, as our head of state stated, "we are in favor of uniting efforts to overcome the consequences of the Aral Sea crisis, which negatively impact the ecological well-being and economic development of the countries in Central Asia." In general, these initiatives put forward by our President once again demonstrate Uzbekistan's active and responsible participation in the SCO and contribute practically to the organization's promising development.

Through these initiatives, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized at the summit that the first criterion for developing mutually beneficial cooperation within the SCO is the economy, the second is ecology, the third is the information sector, the fourth is humanitarian cooperation, and finally, the fifth is security.

At the next summit of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO, which took place in October 2020 under the chairmanship of the Russian Federation, the leader of our country paid great attention to the importance of strengthening the "Shanghai Spirit" during the pandemic. He emphasized that global risks and threats can be overcome through good-neighborliness, equality, mutual trust, and consideration of mutual interests. "Only if each of us is strong, will the SCO also be strong," the President noted. "For this, it is especially important that we support each other and jointly seek compromises on the key issues on our agenda." [1]

At the anniversary summit of the SCO held in Dushanbe on September 16–17, 2021, the main results of the 20-year activity of the SCO, the state of multilateral cooperation within the organization, and its prospects were thoroughly discussed. During the summit, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev put forward the following promising initiatives:

Continuing efforts to further strengthen the potential and prestige of the SCO. Within this initiative, a comprehensive program for implementing the long-term agreement on good-neighborliness, friendship, and cooperation for the next five years will be developed.

Developing a Joint Action Plan to promote interregional trade within the SCO.

Adoption of the SCO industrial cooperation program. This initiative will establish Industrial Cooperation Centers in the countries, becoming a practical mechanism for its implementation.

Next year, holding the Economic Forum in Uzbekistan and the Industrial Innovations Week of the SCO member states. [11]

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's initiatives are serving to develop the SCO into a flexible and modern regional organization that adapts to global changes, while also strengthening Uzbekistan's leadership in regional integration.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important summits in the SCO's activities was the 22nd Summit held in Samarkand on September 15–16, 2022 (Figure 3). According to the press service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, a total of 44 documents—agreements, concepts, programs, and other decisions—were adopted at the summit. This is a record figure in the history of the organization. [12]

The documents signed at the end of the Samarkand summit include:

- A comprehensive action plan for implementing the provisions of the agreement on long-term good-neighborliness, friendship, and cooperation among SCO member states for the years 2023–2027;
- A memorandum on Iran’s obligations to obtain SCO member state status;
- An agreement on cooperation in the field of tourism between the governments of SCO member states;
- A program for infrastructure development in SCO countries;
- An SCO program for developing digital literacy;
- A declaration of Varanasi (India) as the SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital for 2022–2023;
- A memorandum between the secretariats of the SCO and the League of Arab States;
- A memorandum of understanding between the SCO Secretariat and UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) on education, science, and culture, as well as other documents.



Figure 2. Heads of State and Organizations Participating in the 2022 Summit

### THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF UZBEKISTAN IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SCO

The new stage of Uzbekistan’s development, which began in 2017, has positively influenced the development of cultural ties within the framework of the SCO, as well as strengthened its organizational role. [13] In particular, at the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO member countries held on June 9, 2017, in Astana, the initiatives and proposals put forward by the Republic of Uzbekistan were supported and measures for their implementation were discussed. This was aimed at successfully implementing the Strategy of Action for the Five Priority Areas of Development of Uzbekistan for 2017–2021, as well as ensuring the execution of the Decree No. PQ-3807 of the President of Uzbekistan dated June 26, 2018, “On Measures for State Support in Establishing the SCO Public Diplomacy Center in Uzbekistan.” In this context, the SCO Public Diplomacy Center in Uzbekistan was established. [14]

The main tasks and areas of activity of the SCO Public Diplomacy Center are defined as follows:

- To promote mutual trust and good-neighborly relations among SCO countries, strengthen interethnic and interfaith harmony, and support the development of dialogue;
- To expand cultural and humanitarian ties with SCO countries and participate in organizing mutual visits of delegations;
- To create conditions for fostering a friendly cooperation environment among civil society institutions, including youth and women's organizations of SCO member states;
- To assist in the development of cooperation in the information sphere among SCO countries, form information resources, cooperate with mass media to widely explain the goals, objectives, priority tasks, and main principles of the SCO, and regularly prepare and publish informational and analytical materials about the achievements of SCO states in the cultural and humanitarian fields;
- To bring the peoples of SCO countries closer together and strengthen the spirit of mutual trust and good-neighborliness through the use of public diplomacy tools. [15]

The aim and task of the SCO Public Diplomacy Center is to create conditions for establishing a friendly and cooperative environment among civil society institutions of SCO member states, including youth and women's organizations. In particular, during the periods when Uzbekistan chaired the SCO (2003–2004, 2009–2010, 2015–2016, and 2021–2022), more than 80 effective initiatives were put forward to strengthen the organization's influence and role on the international stage. [16]

Indeed, under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan's activities within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have entered a new stage, carried out on the principles of constructiveness, pragmatism, and initiative. This approach not only reinforces the country's foreign policy position but also contributes to deepening multilateral cooperation throughout the SCO space.

First, Uzbekistan's approach to the SCO has taken on a significantly constructive character since 2017. While in previous years the country's participation in certain areas of the organization—particularly in security and cultural-educational cooperation initiatives—was limited, today the Republic not only participates fully in these areas but also emerges as an active initiator. This reflects Uzbekistan's political will within the SCO framework and its responsible approach to regional issues.

Second, the practical and goal-oriented directions of Uzbekistan's foreign policy—that is, its pragmatism—are also reflected in its participation in the SCO. The initiatives put forward by the Republic serve national interests while simultaneously promoting stability, development, and mutually beneficial cooperation within the organization. This, in turn, ensures that Uzbekistan's initiatives are positively received by all SCO members.

Third, in recent years, Uzbekistan has become one of the most proactive initiators within the SCO. This development is linked to the country's balanced and substantive foreign policy stance and its consistent positions on regional security, economic development, and cultural exchange. The proposals put forward by the state help introduce new directions in the Organization's activities that respond to contemporary challenges.

According to statistical data, during 2017–2021, the President of Uzbekistan presented nearly 50 relevant initiatives at SCO summits. This clearly demonstrates the country's position, influence, and political activity within the SCO. In particular, while remaining committed to the principles of the "Shanghai Spirit," Uzbekistan continues to contribute to transforming the SCO into a genuine arena of regional security and development.

Overall, Uzbekistan's activities within the SCO are based on a well-considered strategic approach, stable diplomatic principles, and global objectives aligned with national interests, steadily enhancing the country's prestige within the organization.

### **SCO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CENTER**

In the modern system of international relations, public diplomacy, which forms an integral part of the “soft power” policy, plays a strategic role in strengthening interstate trust and cultural-humanitarian cooperation. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, reforms in this area have been systematically implemented, with the activities of the SCO Public Diplomacy Center and the Public Diplomats’ Club occupying a central place.

Established under Decree No. PQ-3807 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated June 26, 2018, the Center serves as a key platform for advancing regional cooperation to a new level. Its founders include organizations such as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Culture, and Sports, the Academy of Sciences, and the Agency for Youth Affairs, reflecting the inclusive and multi-sectoral nature of public diplomacy.

The priority areas of the Center’s activities are as follows:

- To develop mutual trust, good-neighborly relations, and inter-civilizational dialogue among SCO member states;
- To expand cultural and humanitarian ties and systematically organize reciprocal visits of delegations;
- To create a favorable environment for friendly relations among civil society institutions, particularly youth and women’s organizations;
- To strengthen cooperation in the information sphere, prepare analytical materials, and widely promote the SCO’s goals and principles through mass media;
- To effectively utilize public diplomacy tools to ensure closer relations among peoples.

### **CONCLUSION**

The new prospective stage of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has become a significant historical period for enhancing the organization’s international prestige, ensuring regional stability, and deepening multilateral cooperation. Under the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan’s participation in the SCO has gained new substance and been elevated to a strategic level. The initiatives put forward by Uzbekistan—the “Green Belt” program, the “Smart Agriculture” concept, strategies for cybersecurity, and the development of transport corridors—serve not only national interests but also contribute to sustainable development across the entire SCO region.

The initiatives announced at the SCO summits in Samarkand and Dushanbe confirmed Uzbekistan’s leading role in regional diplomacy and demonstrated that the country has become a key driving force in applying the principles of the “Shanghai Spirit” in practice. In particular, Uzbekistan’s proactive stance, policy of openness, and efforts to resolve regional challenges contribute to developing the SCO as a modern and flexible organization.

In conclusion, Uzbekistan’s strategic role within the SCO is being steadily strengthened through a multifaceted diplomatic approach, forward-looking initiatives, and activities aimed at promoting common interests. This enables the country to emerge not only as a prominent player in the regional arena but also as an influential participant in global foreign policy.

### **REFERENCES**

1. [https://uza.uz/oz/posts/yangi-ozbekiston-taraqqiyotida-yangi-sahifa\\_409525](https://uza.uz/oz/posts/yangi-ozbekiston-taraqqiyotida-yangi-sahifa_409525)



2. Alimardonov O.Q. “O‘zbekiston tashqi siyosatida Shanxay hamkorlik tashkiloti bilan hamkorlik aloqalarining o‘rni” (2023) URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373166381>
3. Mahkamov Ikrom “SHHTga a’zo davlatlar mintaqaviy muammolarni hal qilishda: o‘zaro ta’sir va hamkorlik” Pedagogical sciences and teaching methods / 2024 – part 34 /
4. <https://uzconsulate-aktauz.kz/uz/2022/shht-yangi-ozbekistonning-tashqi-siyosiy-ustuvorliklari-tizimida/>
5. Учиться работать в новых условиях. Интервью министра иностранных дел Республики Узбекистан Абдулазиза Камилова главному редактору газет «Янги Узбекистон» и «Правда Востока». №221. 2020. -С.3.
6. Жўраев С.А. “Минтақавий хавфсизликни таъминлашда ШХТнинг роли” (2023) URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373166381>
7. <https://kun.uz/news/2022/09/16/shht-samarqand-sammiti-asosiy-majlisi-boshlandi>
8. G‘afurov S.M. Markaziy Osiyo: mintaqaviy tahdidlar, integratsiya, zamonaviy siyosiy jarayonlar [Matn] / S.G‘afurov. – Toshkent: “MERIT PRINT”, 2023. – 68-b
9. Feruza Nazarova “O‘zbekistonning Shanxay hamkorlik tashkilotidagi mintaqaviy vositachilik ro‘li va ahamiyati” (E) ISSN: 2181-1784 4 (3), March., 2024
10. <https://uza.uz/oz/posts/bishkek-sammiti-shht-doirasidagi-manfaatli-hamkorlikning-bes-17-06-2019>
11. <https://xs.uz/uz/post/ozbekiston-shht-tinchlik-va-taraqqiyot-jolidagi-samarali-hamkorlik>
12. <https://qalampir.uz/uz/news/samark-anddagi-sammitda-sh%D2%B3t-tarixidagi-rekord-urnatildi-68684>
13. Выступление Президента Республики Узбекистан Шавката Мирзиёева на заседании Совета глав государств-членов Шанхайской организации сотрудничества // Национальное информационное агентство Узбекистана
14. О мерах по государственной поддержке создания Центра народной дипломатии Шанхайской организации сотрудничества в Узбекистане» // <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/3795312>
15. <https://scocenter.uz/about-center>
16. <https://yuz.uz/uz/news/xalq-diplomatiyasi--tashqi-siyosatning-muhim-modeli>