

A NEW LEVEL IN RELATIONS BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS PROSPECTS

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Abstract: Cooperation between Uzbekistan and the European Union has reached a qualitatively new level in recent years. The political, economic and social reforms implemented in the new Uzbekistan are deepening the constructive dialogue with the EU, strengthening mutual interests in investment, trade and economic relations and security issues. The main factors of strategic cooperation include the introduction of GSP+ preferences, the finalization of negotiations on the Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (CPPA), and Uzbekistan's initiatives aimed at ensuring regional stability. The parties pay great attention to expanding cooperation in the areas of green energy, digital economy, transport transit, labor migration and combating climate change. The new EU Strategy for Central Asia serves as a supporting factor for Uzbekistan's modernization processes. In the future, deepening economic integration, increased export potential, expanded investments in human capital, and an increase in joint projects on security and sustainable transport corridors are expected. Thus, Uzbekistan-EU relations are shaping up as an important strategic direction that will serve not only to strengthen bilateral ties, but also to ensure stability and prosperity in all of Central Asia.

Keywords: EU , CPPA, PCA, Memorandum, connectivity, EPCA, European Commission, “Europe–Caucasus–Asia” (TRACECA), Green economy, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Green Deal.

Uzbekistan’s political, economic, scientific-technical, and cultural-humanitarian relations with the European Union countries are developing and deepening year by year. According to December 2025, the European Union, which unites 27 countries and ranks third in terms of population after China and India and seventh in terms of land area in the world, plays a significant role in Uzbekistan’s foreign policy. Multilateral and bilateral relations with the European Union and its member states are one of the main directions of our country’s foreign policy. This priority is specifically noted in the documents defining the fundamental principles of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy. Relations between Uzbekistan and the European Union (EU) began to take shape in 1992. On April 15, 1992, a Memorandum was signed between the Government of Uzbekistan and the European Commission, and official diplomatic relations were established on November 16, 1994. In 1995, the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Brussels (also authorized to the EU) was opened. These relations were deepened on the basis of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), signed in 1996–1999 and entering into force in 1999. In recent years, especially in the period 2017–2025, relations have intensified in the areas of economy, trade, infrastructure (connectivity), education and legal reforms. This agreement created the main legal framework for EU-Uzbek relations and strengthened relations in political cooperation, trade, legal norms, parliamentary debate, and others. In 2007, the EU adopted a strategy for Central Asia. In 2019, this strategy was updated. New directions - economic cooperation, social development - were further developed. These documents strengthened cooperation with Uzbekistan in a regional context. Since 2011, an EU delegation has been operating in Tashkent, which has allowed for the localization of dialogue and projects.

In 2017, negotiations were held between the EU and Uzbekistan on the development of a new, enhanced partnership agreement (EPCA). Negotiations intensified in 2019 and beyond. In 2022, the initial stage of the text was approved. The EU Delegation in Tashkent conducted local projects, grants, diplomatic dialogue. Political and economic dialogue through the cooperation bodies established in the PCA - the Cooperation Council, committees, interparliamentary cooperation and sub-committees. The PCA text regulates these institutions. Trade and investment — The EU is an important trade and business partner of Uzbekistan, and with the EPCA, legal guarantees for trade and investors will be expanded. Economic infrastructure and connectivity — transport routes, transit, external trade routes and “land links” initiatives are priorities in the EU strategy. The 2019 strategy highlights this. Education, scientific cooperation and culture — scientific and educational exchanges through Erasmus+/Horizon and other programs. (Specific projects are described in detail on the EU Delegation website and program pages.) Agriculture, energy and climate/environment — sustainable development, energy efficiency and environmental projects. Improvement and legal reforms — The EU has been supporting reforms, but human rights and democratic reforms are a constant daily topic. These elements are also envisaged in the PCA. Cooperation with the EU has opened up many economic and infrastructure opportunities, but the EU has generally taken a hard line on human rights, democratic governance, and transparency. Therefore, a balance between economic cooperation and political/legal requirements is required — this is also reflected in the PCA and subsequent documents.

After 2016, the policies of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev — regional integration and external openness — have taken relations with the EU to a new level. Uzbekistan’s regional initiatives and internal reforms have been positively assessed by the EU and have accelerated the EPCA negotiations. (This is evidenced in the official statements of the EU and Uzbekistan) .

EPCA is a document that modernizes the PCA, expanding trade, sustainable development, good governance and sectoral cooperation. Negotiations were conducted in 2019–2022, with an initialing in 2022, and the official signing in October 2025. EPCA brings Uzbekistan into a closer and more structurally integrated partnership with the EU.

In the period of “New Uzbekistan” after 2016, the strengthening of the principles of openness, trust and cooperation in foreign policy has brought relations with the EU to a qualitatively new level. This new stage is determined by the following factors. Since 2019, regular Uzbekistan-EU high-level dialogues have been established. The EU began to see Uzbekistan as a key partner in Central Asia. Dialogue on international security and Afghanistan has intensified. Negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) were completed in 2022. EPCA covers the economy, trade, human rights, energy and digital transformation. This will elevate Uzbekistan’s relations with the EU from “simple partnership” to the level of strategic partnership. The EU has granted customs preferences to Uzbek products for more than 6,200 commodity positions. Exports of textiles, agriculture and the chemical industry have increased sharply. The following areas form the basis of the current stage:

1. Political and security cooperation: Counter-terrorism. Stability issues related to Afghanistan. Human rights dialogue.
2. Trade and economic relations: The EU is one of Uzbekistan's largest investors. Major projects in energy, "green economy", modernization of agriculture. Transport and logistics - new projects on the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia" (TRACECA) line.
3. Energy and green economy: The EU is a leading partner in the construction of solar and wind power plants in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan plans to obtain 40% of its energy from "green sources" by 2030.
4. Education, science and culture: Student exchanges under the Erasmus+ program.

Joint educational programs with European universities are expanding.

5. Migration and labor programs: Legal mechanisms are being created for Uzbek citizens to work in the EU. Negotiations on visa simplification are ongoing.

The EU delegation has expanded its activities in Tashkent. Uzbekistan is taking a leading position within the Central Asia-EU format. Becoming a regional hub for transport and logistics: Uzbekistan's geostrategic location is important for the EU. Therefore, Uzbekistan will be an important link in the development of the "Trans-Caspian International Corridor" (Middle Corridor).

Technological modernization: Joint centers on digital governance, cyberspace security, and IT infrastructure are expected to be established with the EU.

Recognition as a leader in green energy: More than 10 large solar and wind farms are planned by 2030, projects compatible with the "Green Deal" through EU financial mechanisms.

Education and human capital cooperation

The number of branches of European universities in Uzbekistan will increase.

The Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programs will expand further.

A new stage in relations between Uzbekistan and the European Union is not only an intensification of diplomatic ties, but also a strategic path towards closer integration with the EU in the economic, political, and social modernization of Uzbekistan.

In the future, a sharp increase in trade volumes, the development of transport corridors, deep integration in green energy, technology, education and innovation, and the strengthening of Uzbekistan as a reliable strategic partner for the EU are expected.

In 2021-2024, Uzbekistan's exports to the EU increased by more than 50%.

Investment flows from European companies amounting to hundreds of millions of euros.

The Uzbekistan-EU "Green Economy" platform has been launched.

Social and innovative results: The EU is implementing programs to support reforms in the judiciary, parliament, and local government. It is envisaged to implement joint projects on the development of digital governance and e-government.

The entry into force of the EPCA agreement will bring Uzbekistan-EU relations to the following stages: broad access to European markets, approximation of legislation to EU standards, and the creation of strategic consortia in industry, energy, and technology.

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