

**LEGAL FOUNDATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES OF RELATIONS
BETWEEN THE REPUBLICS OF UZBEKISTAN AND TURKEY (1991–2016)**

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the formation of bilateral cooperation between Uzbekistan and Turkey in the 1990s, the origins of political disagreements and mutual conflicts, as well as the efforts undertaken to restore these relations, based on new evidence. In particular, the study highlights the historical development of cooperation across all sectors, which was facilitated by high-level official meetings of the heads of state and the state visits conducted by both countries.

Keywords

foreign policy, cooperation, relations, integration, democracy, science, culture, diplomacy, state visit, security.

Relevance

Since the early days of its independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan, as a full member of the international community, has attached great importance to foreign policy issues and the establishment of bilateral and multilateral relations with other countries. The Uzbek government developed strategies, concepts, and principles for the country's foreign policy. In the early days of independence, numerous laws were adopted, primarily the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which laid down the legal foundations for the implementation of foreign policy and international cooperation.

The system of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan was thoroughly reorganized. Uzbek embassies and consular offices were opened in many countries around the world. These processes were crucial for forming the normative and legal framework of Uzbekistan's foreign policy and for adopting laws governing foreign relations. From the very beginning of independence, Uzbekistan pursued a comprehensive foreign policy that corresponded to its national statehood interests and was based on long-term strategic considerations.

In this context, the Republic of Turkey, which enjoyed significant international prestige, was among the first countries to recognize Uzbekistan's independence and establish diplomatic relations, becoming one of the initial partners in bilateral cooperation.

Degree of Study (Literature Review / Previous Research)

The article mainly draws on the works of state leaders and several researchers. These include: Q. Rajabov and X. Bekmuratov's co-authored monograph on the history of economic and cultural cooperation between Uzbekistan and Turkey (Ражабов, Қ., Bekmuratov X. 2017). B. Imamov's monograph on political, economic, and cultural relations between Uzbekistan and Turkey (1991–2018) (Imamov B. 2023). Said-Abdulaziz Yusupov's popular treatise "Modern Turkey: Ancient History and Great Future" (Юсупов, С.А. 2018). Qahramon Rajabov and Bahodir Qandov's book "World Countries and International Organizations" on the history, geography, and political governance of countries worldwide (Ражабов, Қ., Қандов, Б. 2015). President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's book "New Uzbekistan Strategy" (Мирзиёев, Ш.М. 2021). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's book "The World Can Be More Just" (Erdoğan, R.T.

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Key Findings

Uzbekistan's integration into the international community and Turkey's aspiration to secure a significant position in Central Asia provided a foundation for establishing bilateral relations between the two countries. The rapid development of Uzbekistan–Turkey relations and their expansion into a broad spectrum of cooperation was not accidental. Historically, the Uzbek and Turkish peoples have been bound by strong fraternal ties through centuries of political, economic, and cultural relations. Establishing cooperation with historically related Turkey, and the mutual goodwill between the two states, represented a significant step toward strengthening Uzbekistan's position in the global community and consolidating its independence.

The official intergovernmental visits of the Presidents of Uzbekistan and Turkey began with the state visit of Uzbekistan's First President, I. Karimov (1991–2016), to Turkey on December 16–19, 1991[1]. During this visit, several agreements were signed, including the "Treaty on the Foundations and Objectives of Relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Turkey," the "Agreement on Economic and Trade Cooperation," and a "Protocol of Understanding." [2] These documents marked a crucial step in bilateral cooperation. Consequently, the development of legal documents regulating Uzbekistan's foreign policy, as well as normative and legal instruments governing cooperation with Turkey, became a central aspect of diplomatic activity. In establishing these diplomatic relations, agreements, treaties, memoranda, and the institutional processes of ministries and intergovernmental commissions played a key role in regulating and implementing foreign policy measures.

On April 27–28, 1992, the visit of Turkish Prime Minister S. Demirel (1991–1993) to Uzbekistan became a landmark event in the development of bilateral relations. During his visit, Demirel expressed: "We consider Turkestan our homeland. We are heirs to the priceless legacy and spiritual world of great scholars such as Khoja Ahmad Yasawi and Jalaluddin Rumi. Therefore, our languages and hearts are closely connected. We grew up reading the epics of Gorogly. Figures like Mahmud Kashgari, Yusuf Khwaja, Alisher Navoi, and Fuzuli are the architects of our language. At this stage of our relations, we rely on this spiritual foundation.[3]"

During this visit, a large delegation of over 200 representatives from leading industrial, commercial, and construction companies, major Turkish banks, various ministries, and leading firms was received by President I. Karimov[4]. Discussions involved ministers, industrial, financial, and banking experts from Uzbekistan, and focused on enhancing economic cooperation. A number of agreements were signed, and on April 28, 1992, the Turkish Embassy in Tashkent was inaugurated[5]. The Uzbek Embassy in Ankara began operations in January 1993. The establishment of diplomatic missions played a vital role in accelerating political, economic, and cultural relations.

Uzbekistan's First President I. Karimov also visited Turkey on June 29–July 1[6], 1992, and made subsequent official visits in June 1994 and November 1997. In October 1998, he

attended ceremonies marking the 75th anniversary of the Republic of Turkey[7]. These visits fostered a tradition of holding joint celebrations, festivals, and scientific conferences, with both countries emphasizing the historical and spiritual ties between the Uzbek and Turkish peoples and focusing on practical outcomes serving mutual interests.

In turn, Turkish President Turgut Özal visited Uzbekistan on April 6–7, 1993[8]. During his first visit to the country, he toured the Bukhara complex of Bahauddin Naqshband and donated USD 45,000 for its restoration[9]. This visit represented a significant step in developing cooperation and strengthening investment and intellectual ties between the two countries.

In the early years of cooperation, trade and economic relations had yet to fully materialize, and certain challenges arose. To address these issues, a meeting was held in July 1994 among heads of states belonging to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), during which President I. Karimov and President S. Demirel (1993–2000) discussed improving economic relations, elevating their quality, and resolving challenges, including economic and financial issues[10]. These cooperative efforts produced positive results across multiple sectors.

Official state visits facilitated tangible outcomes. In 1994, Uzbekistan's Foreign Investment Agency and Turkey's "Economic, Cultural, Educational, and Technical Cooperation Organization" collaborated to support industrial enterprise rehabilitation, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in agriculture, and the implementation of foreign trade projects through the exchange of information and analytical materials. Turkish expertise notably contributed to the development of small and medium-sized businesses in Uzbekistan.

In subsequent years, frequent visits by Turkish leaders and government officials to Uzbekistan further strengthened bilateral relations. For instance, Turkish Prime Minister T. Çiller (1993–1995) visited on July 8[11], 1995, and President S. Demirel visited on May 7, 1996[12]. In October of this year, President S. Demirel participated in the IV Summit of the Leaders of Turkic-speaking States held in Uzbekistan and in events dedicated to the 660th anniversary of the great Amir Timur[13].

On July 9, 1995, a memorandum on "Developing and Strengthening Cooperation" was signed, emphasizing the importance of SMEs, agricultural collaboration, and the development of investment and intellectual ties[14]. The document emphasized the important role of the production efficiency of small and medium-sized enterprises in the development of the economy, and provided for strengthening cooperation in the agricultural and livestock sectors, and further developing investment and intellectual ties between companies through the exchange of scientists and industry specialists.

During President S. Demirel's official visit in May 1996, the "Treaty of Eternal Friendship and Cooperation" was signed[15]. Later, during President I. Karimov's November 1997 visit to Turkey, agreements on customs, tourism, scientific and technical cooperation, and the Uzbekistan–Turkey Joint Commission were signed, reflecting both countries' serious commitment to developing bilateral economic cooperation.

By 1996, the legal foundation of Uzbekistan–Turkey relations consisted of the "Treaty of Eternal Friendship and Cooperation" and over 70 documents covering trade, cultural-humanitarian, scientific-technical, counter-terrorism, anti-drug trafficking, health, transport, tourism, and other areas[16]. These agreements, treaties, and resolutions fostered cooperation across all sectors.

Frequent visits by Turkish leaders continued to expand cooperation. For example, a delegation led by Turkish Prime Minister M. Yılmaz (1997–1999) visited Uzbekistan on April 14, 1998, to discuss promising joint projects[17]. The delegation included representatives of Entis JSC, specialists from the Foreign Trade Council in Ankara, Karadengiz Medical Products

Manufacturing Enterprise, Eti Holding Company, TSA Company, and Erbakir JSC. During the meetings, they discussed new promising projects for mutual cooperation.

President S. Demirel also visited on March 15–16, 1999, attending the opening of the SamKochavto joint enterprise in Samarkand, enhancing Uzbekistan's economic potential and its status as a producer of buses and trucks in Central Asia[18]. While these years were marked by growing trust and active engagement by both leaders, certain errors and challenges began to emerge, posing negative effects on bilateral relations. These emerging problematic issues have begun to have a significant negative impact on relations between the two countries.

Though official visits occurred, many meetings took place at international forums. For example, in September 2000, Presidents I. Karimov and A. Sezer met at the UN Millennium Summit, and in October 16–17, 2000, President A. Sezer visited Uzbekistan officially[19]. Agreements were signed covering bilateral relations, consular exchanges, economic and trade cooperation, culture, education, science, health, and tourism.

In October 2003, Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister A. Komilov visited Turkey and met with Prime Minister R. Erdoğan to discuss cooperation, focusing on security and stability[20]. On December 19, 2003, Turkish Prime Minister R. Erdoğan's visit to Uzbekistan further strengthened bilateral cooperation[21]. Agreements were reached on counter-terrorism, visa facilitation for diplomatic passport holders, investment protection, and the avoidance of double taxation.

During this period, Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation primarily focused on economic and political dialogue, with cultural cooperation experiencing slight stagnation. In 2012, at the UN General Assembly, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Komilov prepared a cooperation plan for 2013–2015, paving the way for high-level meetings[22].

A high-level meeting aimed at restoring relations took place on February 7, 2014, when President I. Karimov met President R. Erdoğan in Sochi during the XXII Winter Olympics opening ceremony[23]. They agreed to hold annual meetings at both ministerial and presidential levels, marking an important step in revitalizing bilateral relations. In July 2014, Ahmet Davutoğlu visited Tashkent to discuss further cooperation, signaling a renewal of Uzbekistan–Turkey relations after a period of stagnation, with Turkey taking the initiative in revitalizing the partnership. It can be said that after a long period of weak relations, these negotiations marked a revival in Uzbek-Turkish relations, and the Turkish government was the initiator of the restoration of relations.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Turkey, as one of the first countries to recognize Uzbekistan's independence, established practical and constructive dialogue with the newly independent state. In establishing bilateral relations, priority was given to forming the legal foundations of cooperation. During state visits, official intergovernmental meetings, and high-level political dialogues between the Presidents of Uzbekistan and Turkey, numerous agreements were signed, which in turn laid the legal groundwork for various sectors. Over the years, economic cooperation with Turkey has proven mutually beneficial for Uzbekistan.

Firstly, in the challenging early years of independence, Turkey provided economic assistance to Uzbekistan, facilitating the country's faster integration into global processes.

Secondly, Turkey's support contributed to the further development of Uzbekistan's economy, particularly in the light industry sector. It enabled the construction of new industrial enterprises producing locally manufactured products, numerous modern buildings, and communication infrastructure. Notably, with Turkey's assistance, Uzbekistan became a state

capable of producing buses and trucks, highlighting the tangible industrial impact of bilateral cooperation.

Thirdly, Turkish and foreign investments, implemented jointly in Uzbekistan, led to the establishment of modern enterprises and joint ventures equipped with advanced technologies. Importantly, these enterprises produced competitive products that were not only sold domestically but also exported, generating foreign currency revenue for the national treasury.

Throughout this period, Uzbekistan pursued a well-considered, nationally oriented foreign policy aimed at strengthening the country's reputation and prestige in the international community, ensuring that its foreign policy initiatives aligned with national interests and promoted sustainable development.

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