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RESEARCH ARTICLE

UZBEKISTAN-SCO: COOPERATION IN STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the formation and development of multilateral cooperation between Uzbekistan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The author adequately analyzes the initiatives, practical proposals, and prospects of Uzbekistan within the organization. The current position of Uzbekistan in the political, economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian spheres within the SCO was emphasized. The strategic partnership between the SCO and Uzbekistan, the harmony of interests was also highlighted. Mutually agreed projects, agreements, and programs for the further development of the SCO, which is a leader in the international arena, were also presented.

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Introduction:-

After gaining independence, Uzbekistan adopted its constitution as a sovereign state, and based on it, Uzbekistan became a full-fledged subject of the system of international relations. We can see this in Uzbekistan's accession to the SCO, which has become an influential organization in the system of international relations. In this regard, the First President of Uzbekistan I.A Karimov said: "Today we have every reason to say that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, established in 2001, has historically become an influential international structure of modern geopolitics in a short period of time"[1].

A brief look at the organization's history reveals that the SCO was originally called the Shanghai Five and that Uzbekistan's membership has expanded its geography.

When thinking about interstate cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, it should be noted that Russia and China, two permanent members of the UN Security Council, play an important role in strengthening the main political, economic and military-technical potential of the SCO. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan has a key role to play in the organization. Today's global problems - the global economic crisis, international tensions, terrorism, drug trafficking, separatism, environmental degradation - on the one hand, and economic integration on the other, cannot be solved by a single state in the region.

During Uzbekistan's chairmanship in the organization in 2015-2016, extensive work was done to increase the effectiveness of the SCO and its international prestige. The documents signed at the summit serve to further strengthen the organization's priorities and address the practical tasks of ensuring peace, stability, and development in the region.

As a result of joint efforts of Uzbekistan and China in 2016, the Kamchik railway tunnel was commissioned. The SCO encourages member states to work together on a bilateral and multilateral basis. For example, during the first

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state visit of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to the People's Republic of China in May 2017, more than 100 documents worth a total of \$ 23 billion were signed. The fruitful talks between the leaders of the two countries opened the door to new strategic opportunities for further enhancing cooperation in trade, investment and technology, transport communications, hydropower, and humanitarian spheres[2].

The Main Part

Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who attended the SCO summit in Nur-Sultan for the first time as head of state in 2017, stressed the importance of strengthening trade and economic ties, improving the transport component of the organization, and called on railway administrations to develop regional transport links, and, had proposed the creation of a mechanism for meetings of leaders. This initiative was successfully implemented, and as a result, two meetings of the heads of railway departments were held in 2018-2019, **the Action Plan of this mechanism for 2020-2022 and the SCO railways**. The concept of cooperation between the two administrations were approved by the Uzbek side[3].

It should be noted that in 2017, the SCO Council of Heads of State adopted an important document - **the Tashkent Declaration**, which reflects the results of 15 years of the SCO and its priorities for further development. In **the Action Strategy** for the five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021, the country's position on further liberalization of the economy, the attraction of foreign investment, as well as the priorities of a well-thought-out, mutually beneficial, and practical foreign policy are talked about. The goals of this strategy are fully consistent with the main directions of the SCO's activities on security and sustainable development. The Action Strategy focuses on further deepening cooperation in the field of transport and communications, which is also in the interest of the SCO member states. The implementation of joint projects in this area will allow the creation of a multifaceted system of international transport corridors connecting Asia and Europe.

The important strategic tasks outlined by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at **the Qingdao Summit** in June 2018[4] are as follows:

1. effective use of transit potential;
2. Implementation of interregional transport projects under the "One Belt, One Road" initiative;
3. Construction of the Mazar-e-Sharif-Herat, China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway lines;
4. Accelerated launch of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project;
5. Holding the first meeting of the heads of railway agencies of the SCO member states in Uzbekistan;
6. Establishment of the SCO International Transport and Logistics Association.

At a time when the SCO is expanding, the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has identified the most important tasks aimed at creating a new environment of good neighborliness and solidarity, both in Central Asia and in the SCO space. Uzbekistan's initiatives play an important role in further developing the SCO, increasing its economic and political potential, and strengthening its international influence. In **the Qingdao Declaration**, the participating states supported the initiative to adopt a special resolution on "**Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance**" put forward by Uzbekistan at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly. The results of the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan "**Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Partnership**" held in March this year were also hailed as a significant contribution to the process of peace and stability in the country[5].

Uzbekistan has always taken a principled position in the fight against terrorism, extremism, and radicalism. These threats need to be tackled not only by strong methods but, above all, by education, especially among young people. The statement of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev that the Joint Address of the SCO Youth Council to the Youth and the Action on the Implementation of its Rules can be the main driving force of the program is of practical importance. Uzbekistan intends to be one of the most active participants in organizing its work.

It is gratifying that the Uzbek-Chinese interstate international relations within the SCO are developing in the interests of both sides. But there are also points that blur the situation. The recent uncompromising policy of **the Sunni Muslims** of the People's Republic of China towards the Uyghurs, a national minority very close to the peoples of Central Asia, has drawn strong criticism from around the world. Although the government of the People's Republic of China released a state report on the issue in March 2019, it is only natural that every international legal expert who reads it carefully will have questions. Of course, this is likely to affect the reputation of the organization. First of all, given that this issue is a domestic policy of the state, external interference may not always have a

positive impact on the situation. Special attention should be paid to finding a solution to this issue within the organization and ensuring peace and stability between each member state.

It will serve to further strengthen the capacity of this system of Uzbekistan to address the tasks set in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, strengthen the regulatory framework of the association and increase its prestige in the world arena.

Of particular importance are the talks in July 2019, which put forward initiatives to expand practical cooperation within the SCO, which set out proposals to address a number of pressing issues raised by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev. It is necessary to pay attention to the following important factors in the negotiation process, which was attended by delegations of observer states and international organizations, as well as SCO member states.

1. Intensification of competition in the world market, the emergence of environmental and demographic imbalances, the persistence of the threat of terrorism, extremism, and transnational crime and the fight against them;
2. Forming a coordinated security policy;
3. Adoption of the **“road map”** of the SCO-Afghanistan dialogue group;
4. Development of a concept for the implementation of **“smart” agriculture and agro-innovation**;
5. Wide introduction of resource-saving and environmentally friendly technologies;
6. Adoption of the SCO **“green belt” program**;
7. Annually declare one of the member states’ cities as the SCO’s tourist and cultural capital.
8. Development of economic relations within the SCO;
9. Combating climate change;
10. Introduction of green technologies;
11. Strengthening cooperation in the field of information technology.

“The Uzbek-Kyrgyz-Chinese” railway construction project is one of the most important projects in the practical negotiations in 2019, which will undoubtedly give a strong impetus to trade and investment flows. Also, the implementation of the above-mentioned initiative proposals depends on the joint efforts of the members of the organization. The construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway[6], put forward by the Uzbek side, will become one of the most promising routes connecting China with The Middle East and Europe. It is no exaggeration to say that the launch of the first block train on the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan multimodal transport the corridor from Lanzhou railway station in Gansu Province (China) on June 5, 2020 was an important event.

In this regard, the initiative of Uzbekistan to form **the SCO International Transport and Logistics Association** are also noteworthy. This proposal is very relevant in the context of the agreements on the launch of a new transport corridor **“Tashkent-Andijan-Osh-Irkeshtam-Kashgar”**, where trade and logistics centers are being built, which will contribute to the development of transit potential and trade promotes the development of interregional economic cooperation.

Afghan partners are also interested in transporting goods to the corridor from **Mazar-e-Sharif to Andijan** and then to China by road and rail. In addition, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China plan to launch a new 1,422 km road **Tashkent-Termez-Dushanbe-Kashgar**.

Nowadays, the SCO is at a fundamentally new stage of its development, and at this stage, the SCO will undoubtedly be strong only if each of us is strong[7].

It is known that Uzbekistan has a special position among the SCO member states. In this regard, the speech of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on November 10, 2020, and the proposals made for the development of the organization are of particular importance.

Speaking of practical cooperation and diplomatic relations between the SCO and Uzbekistan, it is important today to pay attention to the following negative effects.

1. A sharp decline in trade and economic relations and, as a result, a decrease in production;
2. The breadth of unemployment caused by the spread of the pandemic around the world;
3. Intolerance resulting from the escalation of the military-political situation in some regions of the world;

4. The emergence of barriers between nations and cultures as inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts increase.

We can overcome these global threats only by preserving and enriching our established traditions of good neighborliness, equality, mutual trust, and consideration of interests. As the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted, the values we share today are the pursuit of common development, respect for the diversity of cultures, strengthening the “Shanghai spirit”, which embodies the unique experience of multilateral cooperation more important than ever”[8].

At the SCO Summit chaired by the Russian Federation in November 2020, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev made the following proposals, which included the current tasks of the organization.

Further strengthening the scope of cooperation in the economic sphere:

1. Improving trade and economic relations and industrial cooperation;
2. elimination of barriers to mutual trade;
3. simplification and digitization of customs procedures;
4. development of e-commerce;
5. Encouragement of mutual investments
6. implementation of joint anti-crisis programs;
7. development of “non-standard” approaches by mutual consent;
8. development of specific measures in the field of food security;
9. Adoption of a program to stimulate industrial cooperation.

Effective use of information technology in accordance with modern requirements:

1. educating the population on the basis of agreed curricula;
2. Development of the SCO digital literacy development program.

Poverty reduction by supporting the needy:

1. creation of a mechanism for holding meetings of heads of responsible ministries and departments;
2. Development of a cooperation program of the SCO member states;
3. holding an international forum in Uzbekistan on practical results;
4. Use of the experience of the People’s Republic of China.

Expanding the scope of joint fight against new threats and threats to public health:

1. Ensuring the implementation of a comprehensive plan of joint measures to combat the threat of the epidemic;
2. establishing effective exchange of information on the spread of dangerous infectious diseases;
3. Creation of a network of medical institutions to combat epidemic diseases;
4. implementation of mutually beneficial projects on diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of diseases;
5. introduction of new remote technologies in health care;
6. Development of the concept of cooperation in the field of telemedicine;
7. Exchange of experience for mastering telemedicine techniques.

In turn, Uzbekistan is actively working with all countries in the region to effectively coordinate efforts to combat the epidemic and minimize the possible consequences. On its own initiative, Tashkent provided assistance to Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, the SCO observer states - Iran, Belarus and Afghanistan.

On May 13, 2020, a video conference was successfully held at the level of foreign ministers of the SCO member states, during which specific proposals on important areas of cooperation related to the pandemic were made. In particular, the sides discussed the possibility of activating the SCO mechanisms in the field of health, the establishment of the SCO Information Center on Infectious Diseases, the creation of a platform for combining scientific and technical resources for joint research in vaccines and the treatment of the virus.

Uzbekistan has proposed the formation of the SCO “Protection Shield” against transboundary infectious diseases and the provision of the population with the necessary products, medicines, and medical products in the context of the ongoing pandemic.

Further strengthening security cooperation:

1. Adaptation of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure to the solution of fundamentally new tasks;
2. Multiplying the practical dialogue of the competent authorities;
3. development of new cooperation mechanisms;
4. a regular discussion of the situation;
5. combating risks and threats in the information space;
6. Strengthening peace and stability in the SCO region.

Expected initiatives:

International Conference “**Central and South Asia: Regional Interdependence. Threats and Opportunities**” to be held in April 2021 in Tashkent;

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of the organization, an international conference “**The role of the SCO in the modern system of international relations**”.

The proposals developed at the initiative of Uzbekistan and with its active participation will certainly bear fruit. Each of the SCO member states has its own strategic interests, and it is these interests that motivate the countries to work towards a common goal. In turn, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is gaining leadership in modern international relations, has a number of important tasks, in which the position of Uzbekistan has a special place. Because Uzbekistan, which plays a geo-strategically important role, plays a key role in ensuring peace between neighboring countries, and the fact that it has its own historical experience in this area, the member states of the organization. One of its important achievements is the formation of good neighborly relations between the two countries, the strength of cultural harmony and cooperation for development.

Conclusion:-

In conclusion, it can be said that the practical cooperation between Uzbekistan and the SCO, the planned plans, all the proposals put forward for the effectiveness of the current tasks will not fail to bear fruit. While the SCO, which covers a large part of the world's population, today demonstrates its leadership skills, it is worth noting the role of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which contributes to its development. In turn, given the epidemiological situation, it is even more important for Uzbekistan to develop cooperation within the organization. Here are a few factors that can cause this:

First, the problems in the economy caused by the pandemic can be solved through joint cooperation.

Second, it is possible to establish a common mechanism between the member states to make the projects that are expected to be implemented more effectively, and thus direct everyone to a common goal.

Third, in order to strengthen peace and combat security, it is necessary to develop training programs on the exchange of military skills with member states, including Uzbekistan.

Fourth, in order to achieve good results in the field of economy, it is necessary to emphasize the practical importance of the transport project.

Fifth, it would be expedient to develop education among young people and increase the number of programs produced by specialists in the field, taking into account the potential of young people.

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