

## Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the Second Central Asia-European Union Summit

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### **Distinguished heads of delegations!**

I am pleased to welcome all participants of the next Central Asia - European Union leaders' meeting.

I would like to echo the words of thanks to the President of Kyrgyz Republic distinguished Sadyr Nurgojoevich Japarov for excellent organization of the summit and traditional warm and cordial hospitality extended to us in Cholpon-Ata – one of the most scenic places in our region.

I express special gratitude to the President of the European Union distinguished Mr. Charles Michel.

Your commitment and full support for the development of a constructive political dialogue and multifaceted cooperation with the countries of Central Asia to large extent determine the efficiency of our contacts.

### **Dear colleagues!**

Less than a year has passed since our first open, trust-based and productive meeting in Astana.

During this short period of time, we have jointly done a lot of work. In November last year, together we held a high-level conference in Uzbekistan on regional connectivity, focusing on the promotion of projects in the following areas:

- Digitalization;
- Transport communications;
- Energy and water management, including those under the framework of Global Gateway Strategy of our European partners.

A number of major regional projects have been launched to establish a sustainable

energy system in Central Asia; and on vocational education.

I would like to emphasize the outcomes of the following events:

- the Civil Society Forum in Tashkent in March;
- the Second Economic Forum in Almaty and the annual meeting of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in Samarkand, held last month.

These events have once again demonstrated positive and qualitative changes in our dialogue with the European partners.

Today, Central Asia is a center of gravity and space for new economic opportunities for leading European companies and banks.

And we here are talking about wider investment and technological partnership aimed at:

- creation of modern industrial facilities,
- introduction of "green" energy,
- development of "smart" agriculture,
- formation of an extensive transport and logistics infrastructure.

My colleagues have shared with us some statistical data that I am not going to repeat.

Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize that there is every reason to expect a doubling of these figures until 2030.

I will briefly dwell on Uzbekistan's cooperation with EU countries.

Following your historic visit to Uzbekistan, Mr. Michel, contacts at all levels have significantly enhanced. We have held meetings with the leaders of France, Germany, Hungary and the Czech Republic. We have opened our embassies in Budapest and Stockholm. I plan to visit Italy next week.

Our trade with the European Union is growing steadily thanks to the GSP+ beneficiary status granted to Uzbekistan.

While the last year the trade turnover increased by 20 percent, since the beginning of this year, we are witnessing almost 70 percent growth.

The portfolio of promising projects to create high-tech production and new jobs with leading European companies and banks exceeds 20 billion euros.

Our strategic partners include the world's leading corporations such as Siemens, Linde Group, CLAAS, Airbus, Basf, EDF, Alstom, Total, Orano, OTP Group and many others. I would like to emphasize that the implementation of joint projects will radically change the industrial map on the Eurasian continent.

In the humanitarian sphere, we have implemented two unique projects in partnership with the Louvre and the New Museum in Berlin.

For the first time, we have extensively presented the richest cultural and historical heritage of our entire region in these world-famous art centers.

### **Dear participants of the summit!**

Despite the complex geopolitical situation and growing negative trends in the global economy, the Central Asian countries are demonstrating steady growth.

According to the latest estimates of EBRD's analysts, economic growth in the region as a whole will stand at 5.2 percent this year and 5.4 percent next year.

European experts estimate that Uzbekistan will record 6.5 percent average annual growth rate.

In addition, by 2030, we intend to double the GDP and incomes of the population, and join the ranks of upper-middle-income countries.

The main factor in achieving this goal will be a policy of rapid industrialization, including the attraction of foreign investment into the manufacturing industries.

I would like to emphasize the importance of further support by our European friends and partners for our national development programs and the irreversible reforms strategy.

### **Distinguished heads of delegations!**

Given the proposed agenda of the summit, I would like to highlight the following areas of mutually beneficial cooperation that, in my opinion, should be given priority.

First is trade. Uzbekistan is interested in drastic expansion of trade relations with the European Union, primarily in establishing sustainable trade and logistics chains and creating effective tools for supporting mutual supplies.

Granting GSP+ beneficiary status to Uzbekistan has become a stimulating factor for the wider involvement of domestic manufacturers in foreign trade activities, while improving the quality of the goods produced.

We are interested in extending these conditions for a new period.

We believe that extending this preferential regime to all countries in the region will increase the industrial potential and competitiveness of our economies.

As an example, I can underscore the readiness of our exporters to export over 500 items of industrial goods worth 4 billion euros to the European market.

At the same time, there are also a number of issues, such as:

- setting up in our region a network of modern laboratories, standardization and certification centers for products in accordance with the EU requirements;
- increasing the knowledge and capacity of our exporters in terms of operating in the European market;
- carrying out activities aimed at raising awareness of the European companies about the trading opportunities with the countries of our region.

Unfortunately, we have not made visible progress on none of these areas yet.

In order to address these matters, we propose to jointly develop a Comprehensive Support Program for the exporting and importing companies of our countries.

In addition, an early finalization of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Uzbekistan and the European Union will contribute to achieving this objective.

Second, the formation of interlinked transport corridors as a key factor for sustainable economic growth.

It is important to combine the efforts of our countries for the development of transport and communication connectivity between Central Asia and Europe, primarily through the formation of the so-called Middle Corridor - the Trans-Caspian Transit Corridor.

Notably, this project was thoroughly analyzed at the recent meeting of the EBRD's Board of Governors in Samarkand.

Unfortunately, the main problem remains unresolved, which is the lack of coordinated approach to improve the competitiveness of this route.

Today, we need tariffs beneficial for businesses, which generates the main volume of cargo traffic.

According to analysis, the current tariffs and charges on this route are 1.5 times higher than, for example, on the North-South routes.

Not less important are the issues of developing transport, logistics and port infrastructure in line with the estimated growth in cargo traffic, as well as the improvement of the technical condition of the roads.

In this regard, we believe it would be proper to create an effective mechanism for using the potential of the Trans-Caspian Corridor. This means regular meetings of executives from our countries' transport agencies.

I would also like to note the importance of studies conducted by European partners on the formation of sustainable transport corridors between Europe and Central Asia.

Third, innovative and technological partnership.

I have already provided some details about our capacities and common plans.

I believe it is time to consider holding annual industrial-technological exhibitions as part of the "Central Asia-European Union" Economic Forum.

Given the current realities, we are interested in launching, together with the European Investment Bank, special tools of financial support for relocation of capacities of leading European companies to our countries.

We reaffirm our readiness to create all necessary conditions for the operation of the Bank's regional office in Uzbekistan.

Fourth, we count on close partnership with the European Union in digital connectivity.

According to studies by the World Bank, further expansion of high-speed Internet access will lead to a proportional increase in GDP and exports of our countries.

We support the "Team Europe" initiative and propose to develop a joint Digital Agenda for Central Asia.

Fifth, addressing climate-related challenges. This is mainly about improving the sustainability of ecosystems through targeted regional projects using advanced European knowledge and technologies.

In addition, today green energy is an actively developing sector in Uzbekistan.

By 2030, we intend to increase the power generation capacity of renewable energy to 25,000 megawatts, increasing its share from the current 14% to 40%.

Today, my colleagues have elaborated on environmental issues.

Given the urgency of the problem, we invite the European Union to co-host the First International Climate Forum to be held this autumn as a part of the Samarkand Solidarity Initiative for Common Security and Prosperity.

We are also interested in the active involvement of our partners in a project to establish the Central Asian University of Environmental Studies and Climate Change.

Sixth, the development of tourism. It is noteworthy that this industry is recovering rapidly from the pandemic and showing consistently high growth rates.

Nevertheless, Central Asia's enormous tourism potential is far from being fully exploited.

We propose to jointly develop a Program for Promotion of Sustainable Tourism in Central Asia and present it at the anniversary session of the General Assembly of World Tourism Organization, to be held in Uzbekistan in October this year.

This program will cover:

- specific projects for modernization of infrastructure and reconstruction of historical heritage sites,
- expansion of geography and frequency of flights;
- development of joint tourism products, and simplification of visa procedures.

Seventh, investment in youth education.

The branches of seven European universities are successfully operating in Uzbekistan. However, this is not enough.

We are planning to establish partnerships with leading universities of the EU countries in

near future and introduce joint educational programs, primarily in technical specialties.

We are also in favor of resuming regular meetings of education ministers and university rectors in our format.

We propose to consider the possibility of expanding support for research and educational projects for Central Asian region as a part of the Horizon Europe Program.

### **Dear colleagues!**

The key area of our interaction is to strengthen cooperation against new challenges and threats to security.

Today, we are effectively implementing joint programs on border security, countering drug trafficking and terrorism.

In recent years, more than two hundred regional events were held. With the assistance of European partners, thousands of highly qualified specialists have been trained, border checkpoints have been modernized,

We believe it is necessary to develop new partnership programs in combating extremism and radicalism, human trafficking, organized and cybercrime, as well as border security.

To this end, we propose to hold an expert-level conference "Central Asia- European Union: a New Agenda for Security Cooperation".

The Afghan problem is at our focus. Unfortunately, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating rapidly.

According to the United Nations, currently millions of Afghans are on the brink of survival.

In this regard, we urge our partners not to reduce the volume of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. We are ready to continue to provide for these purposes the use of logistics hub in Termez.

We propose to continue regular consultations of our special representatives to develop common approaches to address topical issues of resolving the situation in Afghanistan and its peaceful development.

### **Dear heads of delegations!**

Today, my colleagues have put forward important initiatives aimed at deepening practical cooperation between Central Asia and the European Union.

I believe it is of vital importance that each proposal be carefully studied by our experts. In this regard, I believe it would be expedient to develop and adopt a separate Road Map to capitalize on our meeting.

I also support the proposal to make our contacts regular.

I am grateful for the support of our initiative to hold the first summit in this format in Uzbekistan next year.

I am convinced that the outcomes of this meeting will serve as an additional impetus for strengthening the relations of friendship and partnership between our countries, will contribute to ensuring peace and stability, sustainable development and prosperity in the region.

*Thank you for attention.*

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