

PROBLEMATISCHE ASPEKTE UND HERAUSFORDERUNGEN IN DER USBKIG-FRANZÖSISCHEN ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Makhmasobirova Yulduz Uktamovna

**Ph.D. Forscher, Universität für Weltwirtschaft und Diplomatie, Taschkent,
Usbekistan**

Abstrakt: Der Artikel widmet sich der Untersuchung von Problemen und Herausforderungen in der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Usbekistan und Frankreich. Die Analyse im Artikel erfolgt in zwei Richtungen. Zunächst werden bereits bestehende, aber positiv gelöste Probleme und Herausforderungen wie natürliche und geografische Faktoren, geringe gegenseitige Koordination der Zusammenarbeit usw. analysiert. Zweitens werden die Probleme in den bilateralen Beziehungen im Zusammenhang mit organisatorischen und institutionellen Fragen und den Hauptbereichen der Zusammenarbeit ausführlich betrachtet.

Schlüsselwörter: Zwischenstaatliche Beziehungen, Herausforderungen, Modernisierung, Usbekistan, Frankreich, gesellschaftspolitische Entwicklung, Institutionalisierung, Außenpolitik

PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS AND CHALLENGES IN UZBEK-FRENCH COOPERATION

Makhmasobirova Yulduz Uktamovna

**PhD researcher, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent,
Uzbekistan**

Abstract: The article is devoted to the study of problems and challenges in cooperation between Uzbekistan and France. The analysis in the article is carried out in two directions. Firstly, previously existing, but positively resolved problems and challenges as natural and geographical factors, low mutual coordination of cooperation, etc are analyzed. Secondly, the problems in bilateral relations are considered in detail in the context of organizational and institutional issues and the main areas of cooperation.

Keywords: Interstate relations, challenges, modernization, Uzbekistan, France, socio-political development, institutionalization, foreign policy.

INTRODUCTION

France was one of the first countries that established official diplomatic relations with all the former Soviet republics in Central Asia since their independence. It is one of the main drivers of European integration, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a country of rich historical and cultural heritage, socio-political traditions and innovations. It is the world's seventh largest economy by GDP per capita and the second largest in the European Union [1].

However, because of France's general activity in world politics and Uzbekistan's active and effective political and economic relations with major actors such as the

Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, the United States, India, the Republic of Korea, Germany, Japan and Turkey, Uzbek-French cooperation may not seem to be a priority for France or Uzbekistan. Therefore, the current state and prospects of Uzbek-French relations, the identification of areas that serve to realize the hidden potential of bilateral cooperation and, most importantly, the study of the problems of progressive and regressive dynamics of relations is relevant for scientists and academia dealing with foreign policy of Uzbekistan. Such a study would help answer the question of whether France is a necessary partner for Uzbekistan, or whether relations between the two countries have symbolic status because of their regional significance.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON THE TOPIC

Problematic aspects of French-Uzbek relations have been studied mainly in the following areas: features, areas, problems and prospects of French cooperation with Central Asian countries, its interests in the region and competition with other external actors in Central Asia, historical and cultural roots of cooperation between Uzbekistan and France, a comparative analysis of the political systems of the two countries.

Such studies include the works of French scholars Jacques Barras, Colin Ferro, Charlotte Wang, Haider Milli, Aymeri de Montesquieu, Julien Thorez, Natalie Vergeron, Muhammad Reza Jalili, Teri Kellner, Olivier Roy, Lucien Kehren, Pierre Shabal, Boris Petrik, Isabel Damiani. The scientific works of Q.Juraev, E.Nuritdinov, S.Saidolimov, S.Usmanov, K.Matkholiqov, N.Rahmatullayeva, H.Muhamedov, D.Rasulova, U.Dustov and others from Uzbekistan can be an example of the field research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

General scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, in particular, systematic and historical approaches, as well as methods of comparative analysis, quantitative analysis, scientific evaluation have been used in the research.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

For a long time, there were two main problems in Uzbek-French relations:

1. Natural barrier - geographical location of countries.

It is known that Uzbekistan does not have direct access to the sea routes, and Central Asia and Western Europe are not neighboring regions. Uzbekistan, is geographically far from France: in order to move from one country across the continent to another, one must pass through at least five countries that differ greatly from each other in socio-political and economic terms. Also, Uzbekistan has no direct access to the region other than access to South Asia via Afghanistan; due to the lack of market integration in Central Asia, Uzbekistan cannot provide foreign partners with access to third country markets. However, the evolution and state of relations between France and Kazakhstan can be cited as an example of the fact that such natural barriers do not hinder cooperation between not neighboring countries. As it is known, there are similar natural and geographical barriers between France and Kazakhstan, but the single trade turnover between the two countries in 2017

exceeded the average Uzbek-French foreign trade turnover by 10 times (\$ 3 billion) [2].

2. Problems in determining the priorities of cooperation, its specific “algorithm”.

For a long time, the main challenge in developing relations between France and Uzbekistan has been to set priorities. France which made republican regime “based on broad democracy, on parliamentarism, political and ideological pluralism, open struggle of ideas and political parties, change of power during the electoral struggle of political parties, and not class organizations”[3] an ideal in international relations; and which is “struggling to portray itself as a multi-faceted actor with a modest and contradictory role in Central Asia and a key player in influencing regional societies” [4], believes that the main issue in relations with Uzbekistan should be the internal organizational, administrative and legislative reforms of Uzbek society and political elite. Due to the lack of internal financial resources in the construction of a new independent state, the main topic of discussion for Uzbekistan was always investment and trade. From the earliest days of Uzbek-French relations, this difference of views in relation to the cooperation agenda has hindered the full coordination of interaction.

However, the positive trend in the development of bilateral relations in recent years, changes in the foreign policy rhetoric of the parties indicate an improvement in relations. On the one hand, Uzbekistan has realized that modernization means not only political and administrative modernization. On the other hand, France realized that it could miss out on many potential business projects by interfering in the internal affairs of states. The growing number of countries such as China, India, Japan and Germany investing in other countries not only in terms of democratization but also in terms of stability, and the fact that such countries dominate the economies and investment markets of many developing countries have become the basis in order for France to understand that it is missing the opportunity to expand the zones to ensure its economic interests. In particular, France is now choosing a neutral partner in relations with Central Asia [5].

The dynamics of relations was also influenced by Uzbekistan’s long-standing policy of “investment” isolation, and the nature of France’s foreign policy in general. As the President of the Fifth Republic Charles de Gaulle wrote in his memoirs, “France that has lost its greatness is not France” [6]. As France’s foreign policy has a glorious past, the notion of a “centre of great power” is firmly ingrained in the minds of French officials, and preserving France’s “greatness” and uniqueness has always been a priority in political decision-making. All this led to “the predominance of stagnation over dynamics” [7] in the country’s foreign policy. This conceptual feature of the foreign policy of the Fifth Republic can also explain the long and debilitating stagnation in Uzbek-French cooperation.

As the above problems began to be addressed, a number of new problems of narrow areas that negatively affected the state of relations come to the fore. These problems have mostly organizational and institutional character rather than Intersectoral: updating the legal framework for cooperation, maintaining information and statistics, and monitoring mechanisms etc.

First of all, France has not yet fully conceptualized its foreign policy towards Central Asia. How the French government plans to implement cooperation in the regional format, what will be the direction of bilateral cooperation, these questions remain open. In the foreign policy of the French Republic, the evolution of the Central Asian vector is based on inconsistent and rather chaotic decisions that contradict each other and certain uncertainties. Therefore, France's current positive rhetoric for Central Asia, free from a "didactic" agenda and based on a neutral partnership without interfering with domestic policy, is may change if it does not become a strategy.

Outdated legal framework for cooperation is another problem. The conceptual and legal basis of cooperation between Uzbekistan and France – “Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation” was signed in 1993, in a political process and conditions significantly different from the current state of international relations. Given the rapid development of relations between the two countries in recent years and the ongoing negotiations between Uzbekistan and the European Union on the signing of a new expanded agreement, it is time to sign the resulting Extended Partnership Agreement, or a new conceptual agreement between Uzbekistan and France.

Problems with information and statistics management, i.e. lack of information, inconsistencies, and limited access to official information are also stocking the further development of Uzbek-French partnership. It is no secret that Uzbekistan's biggest external problem is its image. This is directly related to the lack of accurate, popular and comprehensive information about Uzbekistan. The basic requirement of any partnership is, of course, the exchange of information between the parties. Therefore, it is necessary to increase access to and quality of data, modernize and disclose general statistical activities in Uzbekistan, and establish coverage in accordance with standards that are understandable to the international community. This demonstrates to the international community that Uzbekistan is an open partner, and increases the attitude and respect of foreign partners. It should be noted that updating the mechanisms of data collection, summarization and transmission, continuous monitoring will allow to assess the expected and achieved consequences, identify key areas of cooperation and develop a nostatic strategy for any cooperation.

In particular, it is needed to update accurate statistics on investments, to show their dynamics in terms of “success and failure”. The openness of statistics on which sectors have the most investment and which ones have the least would provide investors with information on which sectors can be invested in and which areas are saturated.

Problem of control and monitoring of joint projects. The main problem of cooperation of any country, which organizes economic cooperation with foreign countries mainly through state-owned enterprises and agencies, depends on the level of organization of the executive mechanism. In Uzbekistan, the number and volume of “entrepreneur-to-entrepreneur” projects in cooperation with France is low, mainly or only state-owned enterprises are involved. Cooperation projects with private French enterprises or control over them are entrusted to state organizations [8]. The five-stage centralized control system in Uzbekistan, aimed at ensuring the

implementation of cooperation projects and agreements with France, is in fact a model of the overall control system in the country [9]. There is no separate control system for projects. According to the 2019 Presidential Decree [10], almost all of the same persons have been appointed in charge of bilateral intergovernmental trade and economic commissions. Only the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the French Republic from the Uzbek side, Deputy Prime Minister E.M. Ganiev is also a member of other 9 bilateral trade chambers and commissions. In addition, Uzbekistan changed the composition of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the French Republic twice in a year and a half (January 2018-May 2019). Given the strong rotation and congestion of officials and state employees in Uzbekistan, it is natural that there will be confusion in the monitoring of bilateral agreements.

There are two reasons why agreements reached in France with Uzbekistan and control over projects are not as problematic as in Uzbekistan. First, in the French Republic, the country's Parliament, and in practice the Senate, has more control over foreign affairs. The working body of the Senate on these issues is the Commission on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Armed Forces. The Senate, like the President of the country, may appoint a special representative for a limited period of time to develop or regulate relations with a particular issue, region or state, if necessary. Such an open and transparent control system greatly facilitates the status of interstate projects. Second, most of France's current projects with Uzbekistan (with the exception of the French Development Agency) are being implemented by the private sector, which reduces the burden on French officials to oversee bilateral projects.

In this context, the private sector in Uzbekistan faces the problem of a low share and number of international cooperation projects. State bodies, as a key player in business and entrepreneurship, trade and the economy may increase the level of project assurance. But over time, cooperation can become a "donor-recipient" and lead to a slowdown in diversification. The share of the private sector in Uzbekistan, especially small and medium-sized businesses, in the country's gross domestic product has consistently exceeded 50% since 2015. In 2020 alone, the share of small businesses in GDP was 53.9%. The main sectors in the structure of trade with France falls on agriculture, forestry and fisheries, investment and industry, and the share of the private sector in these areas in Uzbekistan is as follows: in the fish and agricultural sectors - 97.0%, services - 51.4%, investments - 49.7%, industry - 27.5% and imports - 51% [11]. This is a huge potential of Uzbekistan, but it is not fully realized in international cooperation and in cooperation with France in particular.

Tourism. Cooperation between Uzbekistan and France has been based on cultural ties and exchanges for centuries. In the first years of Uzbekistan's independence, this foundation attracted French tourists to Uzbekistan. If for a long time France was the first among European countries in terms of the number of tourists visiting Uzbekistan, in 2008, 2009 and 2010 their number increased from 45 thousand in 2011 to more than 12 thousand in 2011. However, these indexes did not increase in parallel with the number of tourists from other countries, Uzbekistan has not been

able to become a sustainable tourist route for the French people, who in the early days of independence showed great interest in the Uzbek cultural heritage, despite the facts that, nowadays, Uzbekistan has the potential to develop and combine the three conditions necessary for the development of tourism: cultural facilities, natural environment and transport [12], a famous French actor J. Depardieu became a tourist ambassador of Uzbekistan in France and there is a visa-free regime for French citizens.

	2011	2014	2016	2018	2019	2020
Fransiya	12000	6019	4889	14195	20390	1100

Table No1. Dynamics of visits of French tourists to Uzbekistan(1) ⁱ

There are several reasons for this. First, the majority of visitors to Uzbekistan have “sufficient information about the country, motivation to visit, and purposeful aspiration”[13]. Our country is becoming a popular tourist route, mainly for residents of neighboring countries or people associated with Uzbekistan. The second reason is that “tourist attraction is given only to the collective cultural heritage, and as a result, Uzbekistan’s tourism policy is not fully adapted to the evolution and changes of the tourist audience after 1991” [14] - a traditional communication approach to attracting tourists to Uzbekistan can be shown to prevail. Third, the low inflow of tourists to Uzbekistan from France or neighboring countries is due to the inflexibility or non-flexibility of "re-positioning" of tourism due to the characteristics of other countries. In other words, a tourist who did not know about Uzbekistan at first is unlikely to go there. This is especially true for the influx of tourists from far abroad, which is not close to the Uzbek way of life. In this regard, in order to improve the flow of French tourists in terms of quantity or quality, it is necessary to determine whether the country’s tourism will be exclusive or popular for the French audience. Without resolving the issue of determining the nature of touristic positioning, we should not expect a sharp increase in the number of tourists from France to Uzbekistan in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Natural and geographical barriers, problems with coordination of actions in determining the priorities of cooperation, Uzbekistan’s long-standing closed policy in foreign relations, especially on investment, and the predominance of the idea of "stagnation" in the foreign policy of the French Republic had a negative impact on Uzbek-French cooperation. The fact that the main obstacles to cooperation are organizational, institutional and cross-sectoral issues related to the general problems and the internal situation in Uzbekistan proves that the decisive step in Uzbek-French cooperation often depends on Uzbekistan.

France has not always been a clear, comprehensible and "loyal" partner for Uzbekistan. However, the fact that Uzbek-French cooperation is free from the threat of geopolitical, military and geostrategic goals and secret plans ensures that the relations between the two countries are promising in all circumstances. In addition to

external factors and institutional problems, cooperation with France not only brings economic and financial benefits to Uzbekistan, but also attracts cautious and conservative Western investors and entrepreneurs to Uzbekistan, providing a “reputable dividend”.

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