Report on Uzbekistan

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Ilhan KYUCHYUK (Renew, BG) on Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan plays a key role in Central Asia, which is of strategic interest to the EU in terms of security, connectivity, energy diversification, conflict resolution and the defence of the multilateral rules-based international order.

The report welcomed the conclusion of negotiations on the **EU-Uzbekistan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement** (EPCA), which creates a new framework for deepening bilateral relations. The agreement focuses on shared values, democracy and the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and sustainable development. It also lays the foundations for enhanced cooperation on foreign and security policy, including issues such as regional stability, digital connectivity, international cooperation and conflict prevention.

Members took note of the ambitious reforms planned under the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026, which is aimed at achieving genuine change in the country in terms of socioeconomic development, efficient administration, a more independent judicial system and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

They welcomed measures to improve the anti-corruption system and called on the authorities to continue and reinforce their efforts in this regard. They recommended that the reform programme include guarantees of freedom of religion and freedom of the press, including access to free and open media and internet.

Regional cooperation, international relations and global challenges

Members noted that Uzbekistan is uniquely positioned to be the driving force of regional cooperation that would help Central Asia become a more resilient, prosperous and closely interconnected economic and political area. They encouraged the European Union to deepen political, economic and security exchanges with Central Asia.

The report highlighted the great potential for mutually beneficial cooperation on sustainable and digital connectivity, in particular through its ‘Global Gateway’ initiative on energy, water and security, but also through a multi-dimensional approach aimed at diversifying trade routes, encouraging more private investment, improving cooperation in science and technology, healthcare, industrial production and capacity building, providing vocational training and education, and fostering people-to-people contacts.

Members regretted that Uzbekistan has not strongly condemned Russia's military invasion of Ukraine and encouraged the authorities to do so clearly. They noted the commitment made by Uzbekistan's political leaders not to allow the sanctions imposed on Russia and Belarus to be circumvented and hoped that they would honour this commitment. They welcomed the fact that the Uzbek government and people had made greater efforts to provide food and medical aid to Ukraine. The report welcomed Uzbekistan's National Strategy for Combating Extremism and

Terrorism for the period 2021-2026 and called on the EU and Member States to consider closer cooperation in the fight against terrorism, including ensuring that terrorism from Afghanistan does not spread to the wider region. Uzbekistan is invited to use its contacts with the Taliban constructively to

stress the need to respect the rights and humanity of women and girls and to called generally for respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Afghans.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms, rule of law and civil society

The report condemned the repression and violence against the people of Karakalpakstan and deplored the loss of life during the demonstrations that took place in the Republic of Karakalpakstan on 1 and 2 July 2022. Members called on the Uzbek authorities not to use disproportionate force against peaceful demonstrators and asked for an independent investigation into all allegations of torture and ill-treatment reported by defendants during trials related to the demonstrations.

Members expressed deep concern about the poor record of international human rights organisations regarding democracy, media freedom, human rights and the rule of law in Uzbekistan. They called on the Uzbek government to respect freedom of association, both for NGOs and political parties. They deplored the fact that, despite some progress in the fight against corruption, bribery, nepotism and extortion remain widespread practices throughout the public administration.

The report called on the Uzbekistan government to restart the reform of the criminal code in line with international human rights standards and the recommendations of UN treaty monitoring bodies. It deplored the lack of media pluralism in Uzbekistan and called on the authorities to guarantee respect for the rights of journalists, independent bloggers, content producers and human rights defenders.

Members encouraged the authorities to step up their efforts to stop child marriages in Uzbekistan. They expressed concern at the frequent acts of intimidation, harassment, violence and stigmatisation directed against LGBTIQ people in the country.

Sectoral cooperation

The report called on Uzbekistan to continue and strengthen its green transition programmes in line with the Paris Climate Agreement, to which Uzbekistan is a party. It called on the Commission and the EEAS to step up their efforts to contribute to the development of renewable energy sources in Uzbekistan, in line with the SDGs and to avoid future crises resulting from a shortage of fossil fuels. The Commission is asked to finalise the study on sustainable transport corridors connecting Europe to Central Asia.

Members regretted the advantages given to Russian state companies and Russian political insiders benefiting from the gas sector in Uzbekistan and Russian attempts to gain political advantages through the provision of gas.

Trade relations

Members welcomed the successful completion of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and Uzbekistan. They hope that this agreement will help to further integrate Uzbekistan into the multilateral trading system, strengthen the market economy mechanisms and increase foreign investors' confidence. They stressed the need to continue efforts to implement the standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO),

The report stressed that the EU and Uzbekistan should use their economic and trade cooperation to actively diversify Uzbekistan's industries in order to support an accelerated transition to renewable energy and increase efforts to ensure energy efficiency in line with the Paris Agreement, and to enhance the integration of Central Asian energy markets with those of neighbouring countries and the EU.