Report on Uzbekistan

2022/2195(INI) - 04/10/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 505 votes to 9, with 76 abstentions, a resolution on Uzbekistan.

EU-Uzbekistan relations

Parliament 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.

The resolution underlined the importance of **increased EU-Uzbekistan cooperation**, in particular in the light of recent geopolitical events, such as Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. It called for a swift completion of the necessary legal and technical procedures and for the signing of the EPCA, which would open the way for Parliament to exercise its prerogative regarding the ratification of the agreement.

Regional cooperation, international relations and global challenges

Members considered Central Asia to be a region of **strategic interest** for the EU in terms of security, connectivity, energy diversification, conflict resolution and the defence of the multilateral rules-based international order. They encouraged the EU to intensify its political, economic and security engagements with Central Asia in line with its geostrategic importance and in keeping with the values of democracy, human rights and rule of law that underpin EU external action.

The resolution 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.

Parliament noted the close and long-standing relations between Uzbekistan and **Afghanistan**, which have not been interrupted by the Taliban takeover. It welcomed Uzbekistan's efforts to alleviate the serious humanitarian crisis in the country by providing electricity and humanitarian aid. It called on Uzbekistan to use its contacts with the Taliban constructively to insist on the rights and humanity of women and girls to be respected and more generally to call for respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Afghans.

Members welcomed the increasingly important role played by Uzbekistan in water diplomacy and stressed that the resolution of conflicts, particularly those concerning water distribution, is essential to long-term regional stability.

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

Parliament reiterated the importance of people's right to freedom of assembly, the right to freedom of association and the right to freedom of speech. It called for an independent investigation into all allegations of torture and ill-treatment reported by defendants during the trials linked to the protests in the Republic of Karakalpakstan on 1 and 2 July 2022.

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 resolution called on the Uzbek government to:

- relaunch the reform of the criminal code in line with international human rights standards;

- guarantee the financial sustainability and independence of the media, in order to eliminate any political influence;

- guarantee respect for the rights of journalists, independent bloggers, content producers and human rights defenders;

- effectively implement all laws concerning gender-based violence and continue to take steps to bring Uzbekistan fully into line with its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;

- intensify its efforts to stop child marriages in Uzbekistan;

- guarantee the security, privacy and non-discrimination of LGBTIQ people in Uzbekistan.

Sectoral cooperation

The resolution 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

Parliament welcomed the successful completion of negotiations on the EU-Uzbekistan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. They expect that this agreement will contribute to **Uzbekistan integrating further into the multilateral trading system**, strengthen market economy mechanisms and increase foreign investors' confidence. It will ensure a better regulatory environment for economic operators in areas such as trade in goods and services, state-owned enterprises, procurement and intellectual property rights.

Members recognised the efforts made by Uzbekistan in implementing International Labour Organization (ILO) standards, in particular as regards eliminating child labour and forced labour in the cotton sector. The Commission is called on to support and closely monitor the effective implementation of all 27 core international conventions under the **Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus** (GSP+) on human and labour rights, environmental regulations and good governance principles.