

A New Level of Promising Cooperation between Uzbekistan and the European Union

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Annotation: The article analyzes the processes of development of international cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the European Union in the field of higher education. The author indicates on the basis of factual data.

Keywords: Education, international cooperation, potential, modern personnel, university relations, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink.

In recent years, cooperation between Uzbekistan and the European Union has acquired a multilateral character, having significantly intensified. The establishment of multilateral diplomatic relations between the European Union and its member States and the Republic of Uzbekistan laid the foundation for the development of cooperation between the parties in economic, political, cultural, scientific and other spheres. Close cooperation is maintained at all levels.

The role of the European Union in Uzbekistan's foreign policy is significant. Multilateral and bilateral relations with the EU organization and its member States are one of the main directions of our country's foreign policy.

Cooperation with the European Communities began on April 15, 1992 with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Government of Uzbekistan and the Commission of the European Union. On November 16, 1994, diplomatic relations were established between the parties.

The successful conclusion of negotiations on an agreement on expanded partnership and cooperation has been a huge success in Uzbek-European relations. The reforms carried out in Uzbekistan, as well as the results of the implementation of the relevant directions of the action strategy for the development of the republic for 2017-2021, largely contribute to the development of a fruitful dialogue with the European Union.

Relations between Uzbekistan and the European Union are also developing on an interregional scale. Uzbekistan participates in regional programs of the European Union, such as VOMSA- Border Management in Central Asia (ensuring security in border territories), SADAP- The Central Asia Drug Action Program (Action Program to Combat drugs in Central Asia), TRACECA - Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (program of international cooperation between the European Union the Union and partner countries for the organization of the transport corridor "Europe — Caucasus — Asia". INOGATE - Interstate oil and gas transportation to Europe (International Energy Cooperation Program between the European Union, the coastal States of the Black and Caspian Seas and neighboring countries), TEMPUS - Trans-European Mobility Program for University Studies (Trans-European Mobility Program in the field of university education), Erasmus – EuRoepan Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (European Union Student and Faculty Exchange Program between universities of EU member states) , INTAS - International Association for the promotion of cooperation with scientists from

the independent states of the former Soviet Union (International Association for the Promotion of Cooperation with Scientists from Independent States of the former Soviet Union).

Over the past years, the parties have adopted important strategic documents for the development of bilateral relations with the EU. An important step towards expanding cooperation was granting Uzbekistan the status of a beneficiary of the GSP+ system in April 2021. This event was a confirmation of the recognition by the European Union of Uzbekistan's success in fulfilling its obligations in the field of human rights and sustainable development. Thanks to obtaining this status, the volume of Uzbekistan's exports to the EU countries is significantly increasing.

On June 19, 2019, the European Union adopted a new strategy for Central Asia. The document "The European Union and Central Asia: new opportunities for lasting cooperation" has opened a new page in the history of relations between Brussels and the countries of the region. The EU program for Uzbekistan for 2021-2027 is currently being developed. A multi-year indicative program for expanding cooperation for 2021-2027. Within the framework of this indicative program, 83 million euros will be allocated for 2021-2024, including 76 million euros for jointly developed projects and programs of technical assistance and budget support, as well as 7 million euros to support activities for the development of civil society and human rights. The indicative program will focus on three priority areas in which there is momentum for reforms, compliance with European priorities, including monitoring and implementation of commitments under the GSP+.

It should be noted that the sphere of science and education is the most promising area of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the European Union. Educational and research institutions of our country successfully participate in international grant programs of the European Union, such as "Erasmus", "Horizon", "Tempus". Every year hundreds of Uzbek students get the opportunity to study at European universities.

On December 11, 2013, the European Parliament and the Council adopted the Erasmus+ program in the field of education, training, youth and sports. The implementation period of the program was defined from January 1, 2014 to December 31, 2020. Erasmus+ covered certain areas, taking into account the structure and specific needs of various sectors in the member States. In addition, the program had an international dimension aimed at supporting the external activities of the Union, including its development goals, through cooperation between the Union and partner countries¹.

The Erasmus+ program combined a number of international cooperation programs of the European Union that existed before 2013, including Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the program of cooperation with developed countries. It was aimed at promoting the modernization and sustainable development of the education system, vocational training, youth policy and sports. The program provided financial opportunities for cooperation in these areas, both between European countries and between European countries and partner countries around the world. The main objectives of the Erasmus+ program were to stimulate student mobility and create transnational networks of universities².

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+' the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions N 1719/2006/EC, N 1720/2006/EC and N 1298/2008/EC // Official Journal of the European Union 20.12.2013. – <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?amp;qid=1395671967554&uri=CELEX%3A32013R1288>

² Богатырева О.Н. Европейская программа Erasmus: основные этапы и итоги развития (1987–2017) / О.Н. Богатырева, Н.В. Лескина // Научный диалог. 2018. – № 1. – С. 127–128. – DOI: 10.24224/2227-1295-2018-1-124-136

Erasmus+ was designed to help achieve a number of specific goals related to the relevant areas it covers. In particular, they concerned: to increase the level of core competencies; to improve the quality, innovation, best practices and internationalization of education, training and youth organizations; to promote the development of the European Lifelong Learning Area; to strengthen the international dimension of education, training and youth; to promote teaching and research in the EU; to promote good governance in sports, volunteering and combating threats to integrity in sports. In turn, B. Toll notes that through Erasmus+ projects, capacity building in higher education took place, and the relationship between business, research and higher education was established³.

The budget for Central Asia accounts for almost 4% of the total international mobility budget and to date has allowed the creation of more than 1,100 projects for bilateral partnerships that organize mobility for 7,395 students, researchers and staff⁴.

There are two types of capacity building projects in higher education (SERU), which last from two to three years. Joint projects are aimed at modernizing and reforming higher education institutions, developing new curricula, improving management and establishing relations between higher education institutions and enterprises. Structural projects may also address political themes and issues, paving the way for higher education reform in cooperation with national authorities.

Improving the quality of doctoral education in higher educational institutions of Uzbekistan. This structural project accompanies the ongoing reforms of doctoral studies in Uzbekistan, which is moving from a Soviet-style system to a system more in line with the European higher education space. The Ministry of Uzbekistan joins six Uzbek and four European universities in a project that addresses four major reform issues: institutional support, quality assurance, human resources and links with business and industry⁵.

For new projects for the 2022/2023 academic year, a competition was announced within the framework of the Erasmus+ program “increasing the potential of higher education” (Capacity Building in Higher Education-CBHE). Several stages of the evaluation process of the project proposals submitted to the competition were carried out, including academic evaluation by independent experts, as well as consultations with EU delegations for each partner state.

7 projects were selected for financing in the direction of “Increasing the potential of higher education-CBHE” with the participation of higher educational institutions of Uzbekistan. 2 national projects are also listed as standby.

Currently, within the framework of 4 national, 2 territorial and 1 interregional projects with the participation of 9 universities in Tashkent and 10 universities from 5 regions of the republic, 18 universities from 13 member states, 19 universities from Central Asian countries and 3 universities from Ukraine will be involved in the European Union. The total budget of 7 projects is more than 4.5 million euros, including 2.1 million euros allocated for universities in Uzbekistan⁶.

Jean Monnet's (JM) activities are aimed at developing EU research around the world. For more than 25 years, they have been supporting modules, departments and Centers of Excellence to promote excellence in teaching and research on the European integration process at the higher education level. The program also supports policy debates with the academic world and a number of associations in the field of EU studies.

³ Toll B. From Tempus to Erasmus+: a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the cooperation opportunities in Central Asia // Высшая школа Казахстана. 2017. – № 3 (19). – С. 8

⁴ https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/centralasia-regional-erasmusplus-2019_en.pdf

⁵ https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/centralasia-regional-erasmusplus-2019_en.pdf

⁶ <https://edu.uz/uz/news/view/4601>

Of the 1,500 successful applications submitted by Jean Monnet between 2014 and 2019, 11 are Central Asian projects with partner institutes from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan: eight modules and three departments⁷.

Especially in the direction of Erasmus Jean Monnet grant projects, the University of World Economy and Diplomacy is a leading university in the Central Asian region. As part of the grant received by the university team as a result of the 2020 competitions, the Tashkent Center for European Studies, the only one in our region, was created. The main objective of the project is to support education and research in Uzbekistan in the fields of international politics, regional integration processes, EU studies, EU—Central Asia studies and EU-Uzbekistan relations. Participation in the Jean Monnet program also provides an opportunity to develop academic ties⁸.

This year, the coordination of the team should be particularly noted. 3 national projects are coordinated by the team of the Tashkent University of Information Technologies, which has experience in coordinating the Erasmus+ project, the Tashkent Institute of Chemical Technology and the Andijan Engineering Institute.

It is expected that the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education will participate in the project “INMACOM: innovative Master's program in photonics and optical communications to meet the needs of the telecommunications labor market in Uzbekistan”. The projects will begin in January 2023⁹.

Thus, Uzbekistan's relations with the European Union have reached a new qualitative level. Bilateral relations are acquiring a new character. The new stage of relations between Uzbekistan and the European Union exerts its influence not only at the high intergovernmental level, but also in non-governmental structures of society, civil society institutions, manufacturers and business groups, scientific circles.

Literature

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