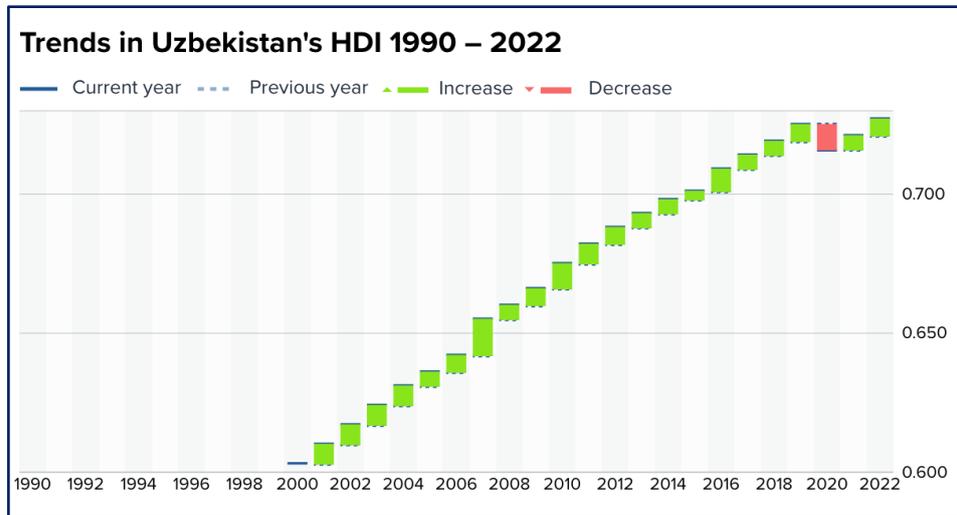


A Rising Star in the Turkic and Islamic World: Uzbekistan

“Uzbekistan celebrates another Independence Day on the path to development.”



Uzbekistan celebrated its Independence Day on August 31st, marking the anniversary of its sovereignty. Over the past few decades, the country has undergone remarkable economic, technological, political, social, and cultural transformations. Particularly under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the nation has implemented a series of transformative reforms that have significantly enhanced its standing in the Turkic-Islamic world as well as on the global stage. As illustrated below, the trajectory of Uzbekistan’s United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) serves as a testament to Uzbekistan’s steady progress and the substantial changes it has experienced.



Source: United Nations, 2024.

A more detailed review of the developments in Uzbekistan is necessary to explain how Uzbekistan is progressing. This study, in this context, provides an overview of Uzbekistan's advancements as a rising star within the Turkic and Islamic world.

In February 2017, Uzbekistan adopted the National Development Strategy for 2017-2021 that identified five priority areas. The key reforms highlighted in this strategy are as follows:

- Reforms in public administration and the judiciary,
- Strengthening the rule of law and parliamentary reform,
- Economic development and liberalization reforms aimed at modernizing Uzbekistan's agriculture and industry, with a focus on enhancing the competitiveness of products and services,
- Social reforms centered on higher incomes, better jobs, and improved access to quality healthcare, education, housing, and other public services,
- Security reforms aimed at maintaining internal stability and ensuring a balanced and constructive foreign policy, with the ultimate goal of strengthening the state's independence and sovereignty. (Institute for Security & Development Policy, 2018).

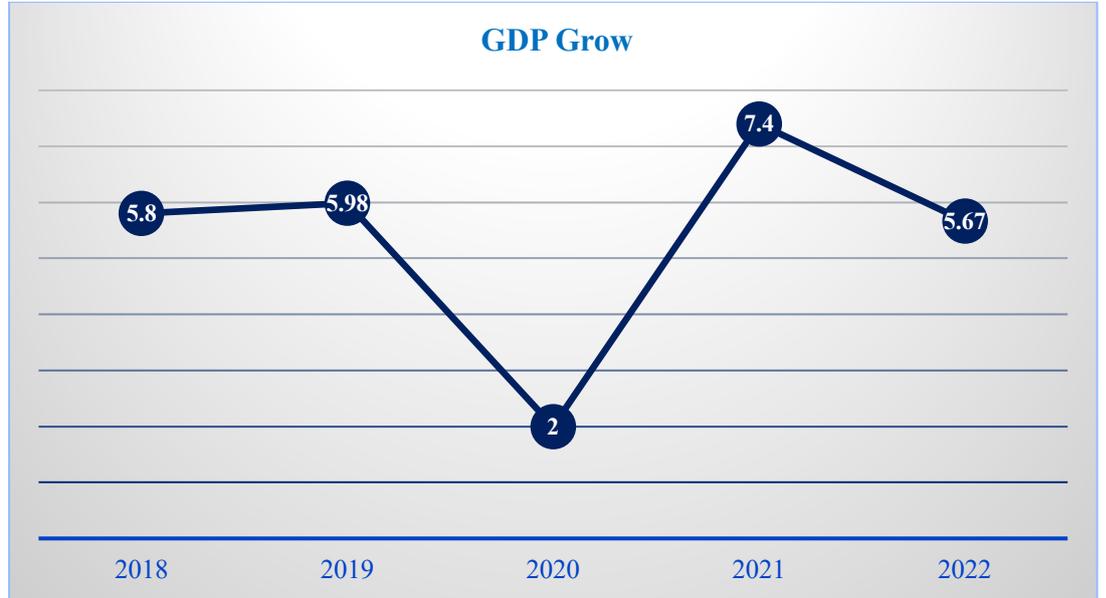


Source: President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2024.

Economic Developments

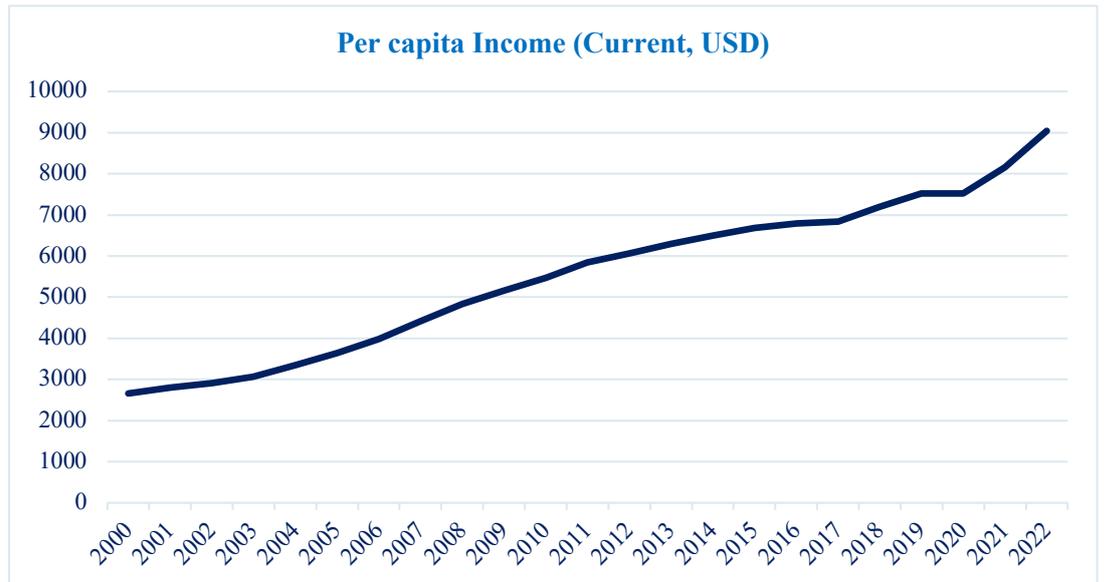
Under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who took office in 2016, Uzbekistan has embarked on significant economic reforms aimed at enhancing the country's economic structure and achieving sustainable economic growth. The implementation of five fundamental principles of transitioning to a market economy has been instrumental in enabling the country to reach its objectives more swiftly, yielding positive outcomes, fostering annual economic growth, and improving the welfare of its citizens. This growth has been particularly driven by advancements in the construction, industrial, and service sectors.

In the initial phase of these reforms, the establishment of market infrastructure and the necessary conditions and regulations for the development of market relations were prioritized. During this stage, entrepreneurs began to rapidly expand their businesses. The widespread growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has been further strengthened by state support, contributing to progress in the privatization processes within the country. Notably, the privatization efforts in agriculture, energy, and industry have accelerated, leading to increased competition and enhanced efficiency (Ranov, 2021).



Source: World Bank, 2024.

The chart above illustrates Uzbekistan's economic growth rates between 2018 and 2022. During the 2018-2019 period, growth rates exhibited a general upward trajectory except for the COVID-19 thrust that affected almost every country globally. In 2018, the growth rate stood at 5.8%, rising to 5.98% in 2019. This increase reflects a positive trend in the country's economic performance. However, in 2020, there was a sharp decline in the growth rate, which dropped to 2%. This downturn can be attributed to the global economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the economy rebounded swiftly, with the growth rate peaking at 7.4%, indicating a rapid recovery following the initial shock of the pandemic. By 2022, the growth rate moderated to 5.67%, reflecting a slight decline from the previous year's peak. Nonetheless, this rate still signifies that the country's growth trend persisted, and that the economy continued to expand in a relatively stable manner in the post-pandemic period. Overall, despite the downturn in 2020, Uzbekistan's economy recovered quickly, achieving significant growth in 2021. While there was a slight decrease in 2022, the growth rate still demonstrated a robust performance.



Source: World Bank, 2024.

The chart above illustrates the changes in per capita Gross National Income (GNI) in Uzbekistan, measured in US dollars, from 2000 to 2022. Per capita GNI is one of the key

indicators of a nation's economic prosperity. Between 2000 and 2010, there was a steady increase in per capita income. In 2000, per capita income was approximately 2,000 USD, and, by 2010, it had exceeded 4,000 USD. This reflects sustained income during this period.

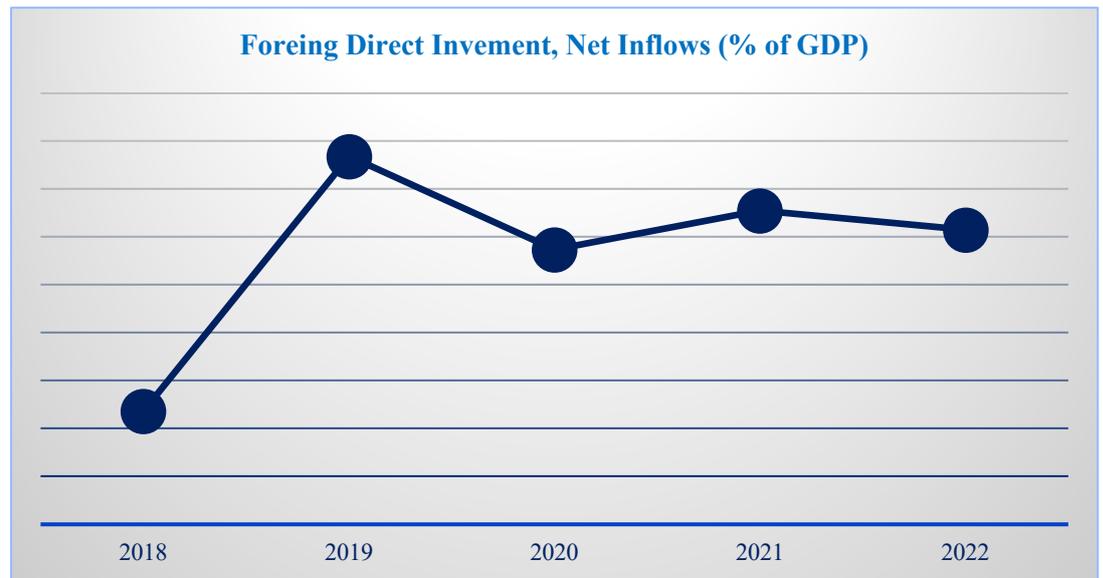
From 2010 to 2020, the growth in per capita income continued, albeit at a slightly slower pace. While there was a noticeable slowdown around 2015, the overall trend remained upward. By 2020, per capita income had reached approximately 6,000 USD.

From 2020 onwards, a marked increase in per capita income is observed. Despite the global economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Uzbekistan's per capita income continued to rise, reaching around 9,000 USD by 2022. This indicates that the country maintained strong economic performance and experienced an increase in prosperity despite the pandemic.

Overall, the data highlights a consistent increase in economic prosperity in Uzbekistan since 2000, with particularly significant growth in recent years. By 2022, per capita income had more than tripled compared to the year 2000, underscoring the country's impressive economic progress.

The second phase of Uzbekistan's reforms focused entirely on strengthening and stabilizing the financial sector of the economy. The Foreign Investors Law, enacted in 2020, offers various incentives to attract foreign investments to the country. This law safeguards the rights of investors and reduces bureaucratic hurdles. Specifically, it ensures that foreign investments and the properties of foreign investors are not subject to expropriation. These investments and assets are protected against seizure, except in cases of natural disasters, accidents, or epidemics. Furthermore, foreign investors are granted the right to open, use, and liquidate accounts in any currency both within the country and abroad. They are also authorized to obtain and repay loans in foreign currency. Additionally, the amount of tax payable to the Republic of Uzbekistan has been reduced by threefold.

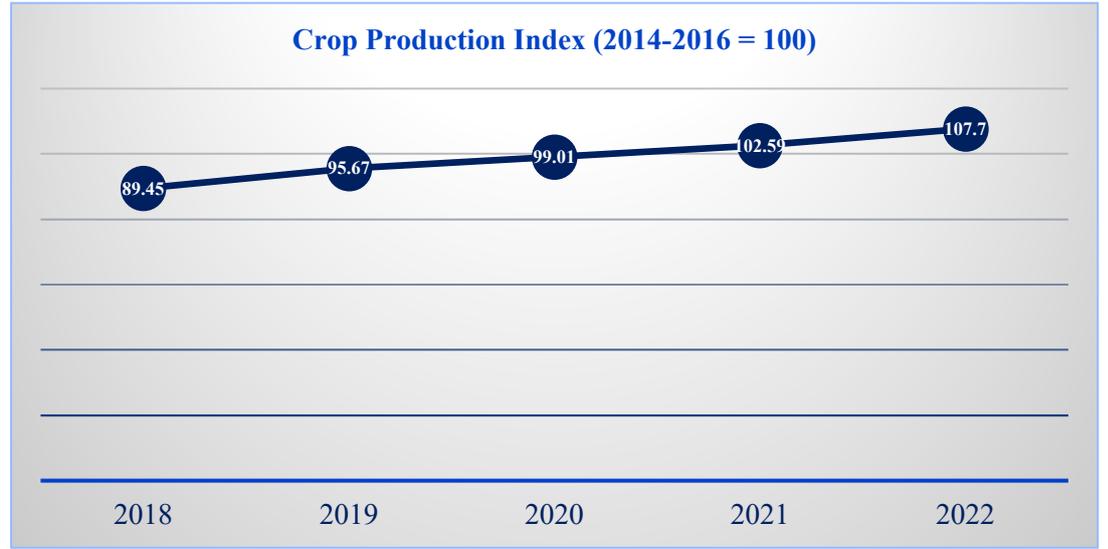
The law guarantees the uninterrupted transfer of foreign currency funds into and out of the Republic of Uzbekistan after all taxes and mandatory payments have been settled. Moreover, the mandatory share of foreign investments in the charter capital of enterprises has been reduced from 30% to 15%. As a result of these and other incentives, direct foreign investments in Uzbekistan have seen a significant increase (Turkish Embassy Office of the Commercial Counsellor in Tashkent, 2020).



Source: World Bank, 2024.

The chart above depicts the changes in foreign direct investments (FDI) in Uzbekistan between 2018 and 2022. Despite fluctuations during this period, there is an overall upward trend. The

lowest level of FDI was observed in 2018, followed by a sharp increase in 2019, reaching a peak in foreign direct investments. In 2020, there was a decline, and in the subsequent years, FDI remained close to the 2020 level.



Source: World Bank, 2024.

During the period food security has been a global concern, Uzbekistan has initiated modernization efforts in its agricultural sector, with a focus on adopting sustainable methods in cotton production and enhancing agricultural diversity. In the industrial sector, investments are being made to boost domestic production and to produce high value-added goods. Within this framework, the crop production index shown above shows a linear increase from 2018 to 2022.



Source: Anadolu Agency, 2017.

Political Developments

Uzbekistan is undergoing significant changes in the political sphere. Under the leadership of President Mirziyoyev, the country is transitioning from mostly centralized policies of previous administrations toward a more democratic governance model.

In the realm of human rights, Uzbekistan has made notable strides. Strengthening laws against torture and ill-treatment and the release of imprisoned journalists have been positively received by international human rights organizations. The government has also established a

commission, headed by the Uzbek Ombudswoman, to investigate human rights violations (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The expansion of political parties' activities and the improvement of the electoral system are also key objectives. However, election laws and the framework are applied in a manner that restricts independent political actors or parties from participating in elections at any level. Election management bodies remain closely controlled by the government. Constitutional amendments in 2019 have enabled political parties to operate more effectively (Freedom House, 2023).

Uzbekistan is also enhancing its regional cooperation and strengthening relations with neighboring countries. Bilateral agreements with Central Asian countries, in particular, are bolstering economic and political cooperation, with Uzbekistan taking on significant responsibilities in regional partnerships, such as those involving Afghanistan. Additionally, on October 14, 2019, Uzbekistan joined the Turkic Council, further solidifying its commitment to international cooperation (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

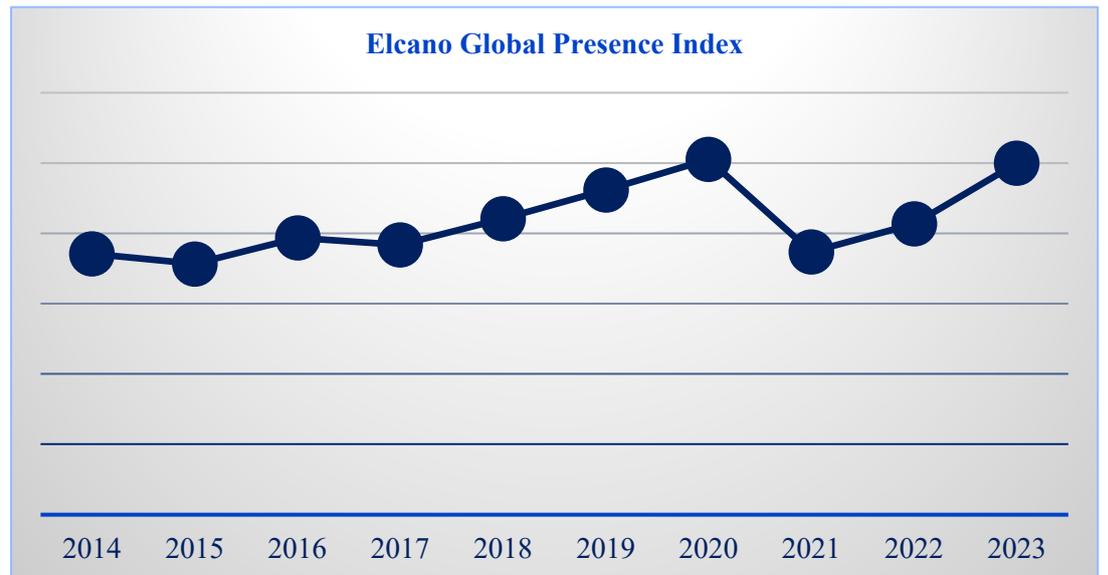
Technological Developments

Uzbekistan is making significant strides in the realm of technology, particularly in digitalization and innovation. The country has accelerated its digitalization efforts, with notable growth observed in areas such as e-commerce, digital banking, and fintech solutions. The Digital Economy Agency, established in 2020, plays a key role in supporting these advancements.

In the fields of technology and engineering, Uzbekistan is strengthening its educational programs and expanding collaborations with universities. The number of institutions offering education in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields is notably increasing. The country aims to support domestic technology companies and promote research and development (R&D) activities. Additionally, Uzbekistan is fostering entrepreneurship by establishing technology parks and innovation centers.

Soft Power

The reforms, policy implementations, and greater involvement of Uzbekistan in regional and global affairs have been increasing Uzbekistan's sympathy and attractiveness on the global scale.



Source: Real Instituto Elcano Royal Institute, 2024. The chart was created from the Elcano Global Presence Index data set.

The chart above illustrates the changes in Uzbekistan's ranking on the Elcano Global Presence Index over the years. This index is a measure of a country's presence and influence on the global stage. The chart tracks the annual fluctuations in this index from 2014 to 2023. Generally, a stable trend is observed between 2014 and 2017, followed by a slight increase from 2018 to 2020, and a subsequent decline in 2021. However, a resurgence is noted in 2022 and 2023.

This trend indicates a recovery in the country's global presence in recent years and a renewed increase in its influence on the international stage. This growth can be attributed to various factors, such as improvements in diplomatic relations, increased participation in international projects, or greater cultural and economic engagement. In the context of soft power, the rise in the index may also reflect a more effective use of soft power strategies. In summary, the chart reveals that Uzbekistan's global presence has strengthened in recent years, with a notable recovery occurring after 2021.

Organization of Turkic States and Uzbekistan

The Organization of Turkic States was established in 2009 as an international organization aimed at promoting comprehensive cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries. The founding members of the organization are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Türkiye. Uzbekistan joined as a full member in 2019, while Hungary, Turkmenistan, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus hold observer status. The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) also participates as an observer organization.

Uzbekistan officially became a full member of the Organization of Turkic States during the 7th Summit held in Baku in October 2019. This membership is recognized as a testament to Uzbekistan's commitment to fostering cooperation among Turkic states. Uzbekistan's full membership is considered a significant step in the expansion and strengthening of the organization (Organization of Turkic States, 2024).

Uzbekistan-Türkiye Relations

The inauguration of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as President of Uzbekistan marked the beginning of a transformative period that significantly altered the country's domestic and foreign policies. By implementing the "Action Strategy," Mirziyoyev initiated various reform measures, modernizing the relationship between the state and its citizens. During this period, Uzbekistan focused on strengthening its ties with neighboring countries and major powers, particularly Türkiye. The Erdogan-Mirziyoyev summit in 2016 was a pivotal moment, elevating the bilateral relationship to the level of "strategic partnership." Mirziyoyev's visit to Türkiye in 2017 resulted in historically significant agreements, further deepening bilateral relations.

The introduction of visa exemptions for Turkish citizens and the establishment of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council facilitated the rapid development of economic and trade relations. An increase in Turkish investments in Uzbekistan has been observed, with Turkish companies actively operating in various sectors. In September 2019, Uzbekistan officially became a member of the Organization of Turkic States. Between 2016 and 2019, the bilateral trade volume rose from \$1.242 billion to \$2.211 billion, reaching \$3.645 billion in 2021. By 2023, the trade volume between Türkiye and Uzbekistan was recorded at \$3.12 billion. Additionally, over 1,800 Turkish companies are operating in Uzbekistan, particularly in competitive sectors such as textiles and food. President Erdogan's visit to Uzbekistan on March 29-30, 2022, was a significant step in elevating the strategic partnership between the two countries to the level of "Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation."

The relationship between Uzbekistan and Türkiye is built on shared cultural and historical ties and is developing according to the win-win principle. The ongoing communication between the two presidents and their policies promoting cooperation play a decisive role in strengthening these relations (Bekar, 2024, pp. 368-371).

Collaborations Between Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University and Uzbekistan

In recent years, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University (AYBÜ) has developed strong and multifaceted academic partnerships with Uzbekistan. These relationships began with the visit of the Uzbek Ambassador to Ankara in December 2019 and have since deepened. The cooperation agreements signed in January 2020 are among the initiatives aimed at increasing student and staff mobility and enhancing academic collaboration between AYBÜ and universities in Uzbekistan. Within this framework, numerous international collaborations have been established with Uzbek institutions through programs such as the "Mevlana Exchange Program," "Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)," and "KA107 Erasmus Plus Program." Notably, significant agreements have been signed with Mirza Ulugbek National University of Uzbekistan.

AYBÜ's relations with Uzbekistan have extended beyond student and academic staff exchanges, also deepening through cultural and scientific activities. In February 2020, a conference on "Higher Education and Opportunities in Uzbekistan" was held at the Turkish Writers' Union, with the participation of AYBÜ Rector Prof. Dr. İbrahim Aydın. This conference introduced the potential and opportunities for higher education cooperation in Uzbekistan to the Turkish academic community. Additionally, the panel on "Uzbekistan's Cultural Treasure: Ali Shir Nava'i," held in the same month, further strengthened the cultural ties between the two countries. The "International Symposium on Uzbekistan from Past to Present," organized under AYBÜ's auspices in March 2020, served as a concrete example of academic collaboration.

The academic relations with Uzbekistan have continued to flourish in subsequent years. The cooperation protocols signed in 2021 and 2022 with various universities and research centers in Uzbekistan indicate that this process has accelerated. The Uzbekistan Memorial Forest, established with the planting of saplings at the Esenboğa Campus in October 2021, has become a symbol of this robust partnership. During the same period, collaboration agreements with the Imam Maturidi Research Center and the Imam Bukhari International Research Center further strengthened the academic and cultural ties between the two countries. Furthermore, the "International Symposium on Uzbekistan from Past to Present," organized in November 2021 with the support of TİKA, elevated the international recognition of the academic cooperation between the two nations.

Finally, in March 2023, the establishment of the Turkish-Uzbek Legal Research Center by AYBÜ in Uzbekistan, along with the cooperation protocols signed with various universities in Tashkent, once again underscored the breadth and depth of academic collaboration between the two countries. This center provides a foundation for joint research and educational activities in the field of law, while also aiming to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise between the legal systems of the two nations. Additionally, the cooperation agreements between AYBÜ and the Uzbekistan International Karshi University and Samarkand Mirza Ulugh Beg State University of Architecture in March 2023 contributed to the expansion and deepening of these academic relations. Throughout this process, the partnerships established by AYBÜ with various Uzbek universities and research centers have served as exemplary instances of academic collaboration between Türkiye and Uzbekistan, fostering the construction of enduring bridges of friendship between the two countries (AYBÜ, 2023).

We congratulate the brotherly country of Uzbekistan on the occasion of its Independence Day and wish success to it on the path of development.

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