Parlamento europeo
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Commissione per gli affari esteri

2022/2195(INI)

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PROGETTO DI RELAZIONE

on Uzbekistan
(2022/2195(INI))

Commissione per gli affari esteri

Relatore: Ilhan Kyuchyuk

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Roman Haider, Commissione per il commercio internazionale

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PROPOSTA DI RISOLUZIONE DEL PARLAMENTO EUROPEO

on Uzbekistan
(2022/2195(INI))

Il Parlamento europeo,

– having regard to the joint communication by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 15 May 2019 entitled 'The EU and Central Asia: New opportunities for a stronger partnership' (JOIN(2019)0009),

– having regard to the Council conclusions of 17 June 2019 on the New Strategy on Central Asia,

– having regard to the joint communication by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 19 September 2018 entitled 'Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy' (JOIN(2018)0031),

– having regard to the Joint Communication by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 1 December 2021 entitled 'The Global Gateway' (JOIN(2021)30),

– having regard to the outcomes of the 18th EU-Central Asia Foreign Ministers' meeting held on 17 November 2022 in Samarkand, which focused on finding solutions to common challenges,

– having regard to the joint press communiqué by Heads of State of Central Asia and the President of the CONSIGLIO EUROPEO , issued following the first regional high-level meeting held in Astana on 27 October 2022,

– having regard to the joint press statement on 28 October 2022 by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Charles Michel, President of the CONSIGLIO EUROPEO ,

– having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, of the other part[1],

– having regard to the 18th meeting of the EU-Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement Sub-Committee on Justice and Home Affairs, Human Rights and related issues on 29 March 2022,

– having regard to the concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Uzbekistan of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women of 1 March 2022,

[1] OJ L 229, 31.8.1999, p. 3.

– having regard to the concluding observations of the UN Human Rights Committee on the fifth periodic report of 1 May 2020 of Uzbekistan regarding International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,

– having regard to the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism following an official visit to Uzbekistan from 29 November to 7 December 2021, published on 25 February 2022,

– having regard to the Final Report of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission on the 24 October 2021 presidential election published on 22 April 2022,

– having regard to its recommendation of 26 March 2019 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the new comprehensive agreement between the EU and Uzbekistan[2],

– having regard to its previous resolutions on Uzbekistan,

– having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the opinion of the Committee on International Trade,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0000/2023),

A. whereas Uzbekistan plays a key role in Central Asia, which is a region 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;

B. whereas negotiations on European Union-Uzbekistan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), which modernises the existing Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1999, were formally launched on 23 November 2018 and were successfully concluded on 6 July 2022; whereas the EPCA will require Parliament's consent for it to enter into force;

C. whereas the EU has allocated EUR 76 million for the first four years (2021-2024) of its seven-year Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2021-2027 for Uzbekistan, with an additional EUR 7 million earmarked for supporting human rights and civil society organisations;

D. whereas protests erupted in the Republic of Karakalpakstan on 1 July 2022 following the publication of the proposed amendments to Uzbekistan's constitution, which would have abolished its status as a sovereign republic within Uzbekistan and its right to secede; whereas at least 21 people were killed in the ensuing crackdown by the authorities; whereas 22 people were sentenced on 13 January 2023 for their participation in the unrest and Dauletmurat Tajimuratov, a lawyer accused of leading the unrest, was sentenced to 16 years in prison; whereas on 7 February 2023 the trial started against another 39 people charged with participating in the protests;

[2] OJ C 108, 26.3.2021, p. 126.

E. whereas Uzbekistan is ranked as ‘not free’ in 2022 Freedom House’s Freedom in the World and Freedom on the Net rankings and is ranked 133rd out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders’ 2022 World Freedom of the Press Index, which is an improvement from 157th position in 2021, though the country’s overall score decreased;

F. whereas Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs visited Uzbekistan on 23 and 24 February 2022; whereas its Delegation to the EU-Kazakhstan, EU-Kyrgyzstan, EU-Uzbekistan and EU-Tajikistan Parliamentary Cooperation Committees and for relations with Turkmenistan and Mongolia has regularly visited Uzbekistan;

EU-Uzbekistan relations

1. Welcomes the completion of negotiations on the EU-Uzbekistan EPCA agreement, which creates a new, modern and ambitious framework for deepening bilateral relations; reiterates that the agreement puts a strong emphasis on shared values, democracy and the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and sustainable development; notes that it also lays the groundwork for enhanced cooperation in foreign and security policy, including on issues such as regional stability, international cooperation and conflict prevention;

2. Notes the ambitious reforms planned under the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026, which aims to achieve genuine change in the country in socioeconomic development, efficient administration and respect for human rights; stresses that the constitutional reform is an opportunity to strengthen the rule of law and to give the reforms a solid legal foundation; calls on the authorities of Uzbekistan to continue this process in consultation with citizens and stakeholders, including the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe , based on international norms and best practices;

Regional cooperation, international relations and global challenges

3. Notes that Uzbekistan is uniquely positioned to be the driving force for regional cooperation that would help Central Asia become a more resilient, prosperous and more closely interconnected economic and political space; encourages the EU to intensify its political engagement with Central Asia in line with its geostrategic importance; underlines the great potential of mutually beneficial cooperation on sustainable connectivity, in particular through its Global Gateway on initiative, energy and security;

4. Recognises that Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and its implications present both challenges and opportunities for Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states, which have traditionally maintained close relations with Russia; notes that Uzbekistan abstained in the votes on the United Nations General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine, in particular those of 2 March 2022, 24 March 2022 and 23 February 2023 demanding an end to the Russian offensive and immediate withdrawal from Ukraine; notes that Uzbekistan opposed the expulsion of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council on 7 April 2022; notes the commitment of the political leadership of Uzbekistan not to allow the circumvention of sanctions imposed on Russia;

5. Notes Uzbekistan’s long-standing and close relations with Afghanistan, which have continued after the takeover by Taliban; commends its efforts to mitigate the severe

humanitarian crisis in the country through the provision of humanitarian aid and electricity; invites Uzbekistan to use its contacts with the Taliban to call for respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Afghans, in particular women, girls and minorities, which are essential conditions for greater international engagement with Afghanistan; reiterates its strong condemnation of the Taliban's decisions to ban women and girls from attending secondary and university education and to prohibit the employment of women with non-governmental organisations;

6. Welcomes the agreement of 27 January 2023 between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on the delimitation of the border between the two countries, which settles the outstanding issues between the two sides and completes a process that lasted three decades;

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

7. Regrets the loss of life during protests in the Republic of Karakalpakstan on 1 and 2 July 2022; calls on the authorities to investigate the actions of the security services that led to deaths and injuries among the protesters and calls on the authorities to bring those responsible to justice; calls for the independence and transparency of the judicial process to be ensured in the cases linked to the protests; welcomes the Uzbek authorities' commitment to maintaining the current constitutional status of Karakalpakstan;

8. Underlines the important role that civil society can play in supporting effective and inclusive reforms and good governance; regrets the barriers to NGO registration and the obligations imposed on NGOs receiving foreign funding by the Regulation on Coordination Between Non-Governmental Non-Commercial Organisations and Public Authorities in the Implementation of International Grant Projects approved by Decree No 328 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan on 13 June 2022, which shrink the space for civil society activities and impede the exercise of the freedom of association;

9. Stresses the need to ensure respect for the rights of journalists, independent bloggers and human rights defenders and their protection against harassment, pressure and threats and to investigate any attacks against them;

10. Notes that despite the adoption of a number of laws, including the Law on Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence of 2019, gender-based violence against women remains widespread; regrets that domestic violence is not defined or specifically criminalised in Uzbekistan's legislation; calls on the authorities to take measures to bring Uzbekistan into line with its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, as indicated in the concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Uzbekistan by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; calls on Uzbek authorities to work with civil society organisations and international partners to address these issues;

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11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign

Affairs and Security Policy and to the President, Government and Parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan.