



Weekly Briefing

Latvia external relations briefing:

The Latvian delegation's visit to Uzbekistan fosters bilateral relationship between two countries

Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences



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Summary

On July 15-16, 2021, the Latvian delegation led by the Minister of Agriculture Kaspars Gerhard participated in the international conference: "Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities" in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. During the one week visit Latvian representatives have also participated in several bilateral meetings with potential partners in different fields in Uzbekistan, including agriculture, research and innovation. As an outcome of the meetings, new partnerships were established and commitments to foster cooperation between Latvia and Uzbekistan were made.

The Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences is honoured to be part of a high-level delegation from Latvia and to participate in a state visit and a high-level international conference Central and South Asia 2021 organised by the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

Introduction

On 13 July 2021, a high-level delegation from Latvia went from Riga to Tashkent to attend the high-level international conference "Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and opportunities". The delegation included Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Latvia Kaspars Gerhards, Director of the Latvian Institute of Foreign Policy Andris Sprūds, Member of the Board of the Cooperation Council of Farmers' Organizations Guntis Gūtmanis with an advisor, Mayor of Ogre Egils Helmanis, as well as Director of the Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences Dr. Nina Linde and Institute's advisor Gerald Hoppstaedter. The delegation was accompanied at the Riga Airport by the Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Latvia H. E. Kadambay Sultanov. The visit to Uzbekistan lasted since 13 of July till 19 July, and included various bilateral meetings, visits to universities and other activities.

Central and South Asia conference - platform for the development of regional stability, peace and mutually beneficial cooperation

The high-level international conference “Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities” is a political and expert platform for multilateral discussion of the mutually beneficial regional issues in transport and logistics, energy, trade, industry, investment, technological, cultural and humanitarian domains¹. With this large-scale initiative, Uzbekistan draw attention to the challenge of maintaining peace in the region, which is particularly important after the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Currently, Uzbekistan is acting as a peacekeeper and a bridge between Central and South Asia, initiating the construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway line, which would be a new transit route for the country and allow Uzbekistan and other countries to significantly reduce transport costs for goods and products to foreign markets.

The conference opened on 16 July with a speech by the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirzijojev, who emphasized the need for ever greater unity and mutual reconciliation in the region, which will promote a higher level of prosperity. During the conference, the state and prospects for the development of interregional cooperation in Central and South Asia, the possibilities of developing transport and communication interconnection in Central and South Asia, including projects to expand existing and build new transport corridors, were considered.

In total, the conference in Tashkent was attended by more than 250 high-level officials from 40 countries, including United States, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, and international organizations like the United Nations and UNESCO. During the event, the participants were addressed in person by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Joseph Borrell Fontelle, the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Gani and the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan.

Presentations of the Latvian delegation at the conference

Latvia was represented by the largest delegation of such high-level among Baltic states (Estonia didn't participate at all, while Lithuania had fewer delegates). Latvian speakers were invited to give several presentations during the conferences as well. In the plenary session on trade and transport connectivity issues, the Minister of Agriculture Kaspars Gerhards

¹ <https://csaconf2021.mfa.uz/>

emphasized the most important catalysts for change, such as the use of the latest digital technologies and innovations, the use of common international standards, and transparent business environments based on the free flow of goods and services. Given the regional climatic advantages and opportunities, in the opinion of the Latvian minister, these measures would also provide significant support for the further development of agricultural and food export and supply connectivity infrastructure.²

Dr. Nina Linde, Director of the Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, was part of a panel discussion called “Revival of cultural and humanitarian ties as a way to strengthen friendship and mutual trust” and presented data on employability and competitiveness of European and Asian youth in the labour market in the post-Covid time to the audience. In her speech, Dr. Linde outlined the importance of the establishment of close ties between the Republic of Uzbekistan, Latvia and Europe in general, presenting common challenges for promoting youth employment and competitiveness in the post-pandemic period, which plays a crucial role in the future progress of any society³.

During the conference, the Latvian Minister and Latvian experts delivered a series of interviews and comments to the leading Uzbek media “O’zbekiston 24”, “Yoshlar”, UZDAILY, and UZA. Members of the Latvian delegation also have participated in bilateral meetings with representatives of Uzbekistan's leading universities, research centres, including the Jean Monnet Center for Excellence in European Studies and the Tashkent Institute of Finance.

Bilateral cooperation in the agriculture field

In terms of the state visit, on July 14-16, 2021, Minister of Agriculture Kaspars Gerhards paid a working visit to the Minister of Agriculture of Uzbekistan Jamshid Khodzhaev, Deputy Head of the State Forestry Committee and other Uzbek partners to discuss topical issues of bilateral cooperation in the agriculture field⁴. The Uzbek representatives listened with great interest to Latvia's positive experience and both ministers noted that Latvia and Uzbekistan could further expand the range of various food exports. Latvians already have access to a

² <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/uzbekistan/aktualitates/68311-latvijas-delegacija-piedalas-centralazijas-un-dienvidazijas-regionalas-savienojamibas-starptautiskaja-konference>

³ <https://eilza.lv/latvijas-zinatnu-akademijas-ekonomikas-instituts-tiek-parstavets-starptautiska-augsta-limena-konference-taskenta/>

⁴ <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/uzbekistan/aktualitates/68310-latvijas-zemkopibas-ministrs-darba-vizite-uzbekistana-ar-vadosajiem-nozares-parstavjiem-parruna-divpusejas-sadarbibas-paplasinasanu>

number of fruits and vegetables from Uzbekistan, which are typical only for southern countries, but the range of products has great prospects for expansion. Currently, a draft memorandum of cooperation has been drawn up between the Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan and Latvian Certification and Testing Centre Ltd (SIA Sertifikācijas un testēšanas centrs), which provides for active cooperation in the certification of agricultural machinery and agricultural technologies, as well as in the evaluation of organic companies. Minister also introduced his Uzbek colleagues to Latvia's experience in agricultural science and the provision of digital remote services.

It is planned to expand further co-operation between the two countries in the fields of food, veterinary and phytosanitary, as well as in the fields of forestry, and agricultural education and science.

Strengthening the scientific ties between Latvia and Uzbekistan

The goal of delegation of the Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences was to establish new international cooperation links between Latvia and Uzbekistan in the field of education and science, as well as to agree on mutually important areas of research cooperation. In terms of the visit, representatives of the Institute visited the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, the Tashkent Institute of Finance, and the Institute of Forecasting and Macroeconomic Research of Uzbekistan.

As a result of the meeting with the Institute of Forecasting and Macroeconomic Research, both parties have established the main directions of work they have in common and agreed to use innovative projects in these areas and conduct research in the framework of international grants⁵. Members of the Latvian delegation expressed hope to find partners from Uzbekistan in the fields of transport, logistics, infrastructure, technological and humanitarian cooperation. The institutes agreed to hold joint master classes and exchange personnel.

Main outcomes of the meeting with the Tashkent Financial Institute focused on the establishment of mutually beneficial research cooperation between the Tashkent Financial Institute and the Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, including training of professors and teachers, joint participation in international scientific grant competitions, and joint scientific research. It was agreed to sign a "Roadmap" for the organization of conferences and the preparation of articles for scientific journals and the targeted implementation of work

⁵ <https://ifmr.uz/archives/news>

in this area⁶. The Latvian delegates also got acquainted with the Innovation Insurance Centre of the Tashkent Financial Institute, the Digital Finance Acceleration and Incubation Centre, the Information Resource Centre of the Institute and the material and technical base of the Institute.

Latvian colleagues noted the rapid development of science in Uzbekistan and the fact that Financial Institute is one of the most prestigious higher education institutions in the country. According to director of the Institute of Economics at the Latvian Academy of Sciences Nina Linde, Latvia is interested in cooperation with Uzbekistan in investment, transport, "green" technologies, information technology, education, innovation, agriculture and other areas.

Conclusions

Uzbekistan hosted such a high level of international representation for the first time, setting a positive precedent in overcoming the challenges of Covid-19, bringing together representatives of countries and organizations from around the world after a year-long break. Many topical discussions took place, including the current tensions in Afghanistan, which were also mentioned in terms of harmony and unity.

It was a great opportunity for Latvia to participate in sharing examples of best practices and build cooperation in the field of science, education, social support, economics, protection of the youth interests, employability and competitiveness especially in the difficult COVID and Post-COVID time.

References:

- [1] <https://csaconf2021.mfa.uz/>
- [2] <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/uzbekistan/aktualitates/68311-latvijas-delegacija-piedalas-centralazijas-un-dienvidazijas-regionalas-savienojamibas-starptautiskaja-konference>
- [3] <https://eilza.lv/latvijas-zinatnu-akademijas-ekonomikas-instituts-tiek-parstavets-starptautiska-augsta-limena-konference-taskenta/>
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- [5] <https://ifmr.uz/archives/news>
- [6] <https://tfi.uz/en/news/Latviyahamkorlik>

⁶ <https://tfi.uz/en/news/Latviyahamkorlik>