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Uzbekistan's Chairmanship of SCO: Opportunities and Benefits under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev



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In September 2021, Uzbekistan took over the chairmanship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The country has wide experience in successfully chairing the organization three times, i.e., 2004, 2010, and 2016. In the 21st SCO meeting, the President



of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, gave a historic speech. The key features highlighted in the address provided a strategic vision Uzbekistan will pursue in 2022. The world has witnessed that Uzbekistan has emerged as a major stakeholder and regional player due to the dynamic policies of the leadership. The grand initiatives and robust reforms introduced by the president have gained him an exceptional place in the political realm. President Shavkat's far-sightedness, prudent strategies, and grand proposal for Central & South Asian connectivity have made him the most popular and dynamic leader in the region. He has settled a precedent of an excellent governance model and successful conduct of statecraft.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a great model of extensive partnership and regionalism. Regional integration via SCO would pave the way for supranational regulatory systems and a flexible model of future alignments. Provided the multifarious nature of integration in implementing different initiatives, the most substantial contours of SCO are harmonizing national interest based on negotiations, political coordination, mutually acceptable solutions to the problems, enhancing people-to-people contacts,

promoting inclusive economic development, and taking solid steps for collective activities. SCO has a comparative advantage that entails its broad mandate. The organization is in a position to address security, economic and human development simultaneously, combining support for political stability, implementation of large-scale economic projects and assistance for social capital building.

Uzbekistan’s Chairmanship, SCO Agenda, and Common Aspirations:

It is expected that Tashkent will expand the SCO agenda by including new prospects, i.e., creating robust mechanisms for technological advancement, regional cooperation, economic expansion, trade & commerce, and academic excellence during



its chairmanship. In addition to that, the reinforcement of cooperation in the health area will remain a pressing goal in this pandemic era. Uzbekistan prioritizes to reinvigorating regional connectivity and strengthening economic and security alliances. Moreover, SCO chairmanship will provide a new impetus to implement the grand idea of ‘*Reviving Central-South Asian Regional Connectivity*’ and the ten-point agenda presented by President Mirziyoyev.

In the 21st Century, the socioeconomic and political dynamics of the regions have been changed. The world has entered into an era of geo-economic transformation, which brings both challenges and new opportunities. The initiative of South and Central Asian regional



cooperation has emerged as a significant factor in reinvigorating centuries-old traditional and cultural linkages between countries. Compared to the Karimov regime, the most noticeable paradigm change with President Mirziyoyev is in his Central Asian regional and neighborhood policy.

“Central Asian Republics are geo-strategically connected with Pakistan, Afghanistan, China (particularly Xinjiang), Iran, and Turkey. Nonetheless, the way for the landlocked region to adopt the policy of openness and integrate more with neighboring states has been paved with the idea of Central-South Asian cooperation”

Under these assertions, a number of significant initiatives can be taken within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization for wider cooperation:

a. Development of Intraregional Trade Program:

Regional integration along with economic development is significant for a shared future and prosperity. Therefore, Uzbek President proposed to initiate a joint program to enhance intraregional trade and cooperation among SCO member countries. Such a program would help eradicate difference, bring peace, and open doors for joint ventures.

b. SCO Strategy in Transport Connectivity:

Transport, communication, information sharing, and inclusive economic development projects contribute to establishing a cohesive global community of states countering common global issues. In this regard, an integrated and comprehensive adaptation of an



SCO strategy can help countries to upgrade logistics-infrastructure development, and transport systems within the organizational framework.

c. Industrial Cooperation Program:

Business-to-Business (B2B) and industrial linkages are crucial for economic cooperation. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has rightly felt this requirement. Therefore, he proposed to create cooperation center in this area so that industrial linkages may establish within SCO member countries that would pave the way for mutual cooperative actions.

d. Strengthening Cooperation for Poverty Reduction and Food Security:

Zero hunger and poverty reduction are common regional challenges. Thereby, it was proposed that all member countries must strengthen cooperation to eradicate poverty and food insecurity within the SCO region.

e. Establishment of the SCO Expert Forum for Information Security:

Information sharing and open access to credible information are significant among SCO member countries. Thus, there must be an SCO expert forum to ensure information and cyber security.

f. Institution of the SCO Goodwill Ambassador:

It was emphasized by President Mirziyoyev to create an institution of SCO goodwill ambassador to enhance people-to-people contacts, coordination, disseminate true information and enhance soft power projection among SCO countries.



g. Intergovernmental Agreement for Enhancing Tourism:

SCO member countries have world-class tourist attractive destinations. Therefore, all SCO countries must reach intergovernmental agreements to provide a conducive environment and visa policies to enhance tourist activities in the region. It will allow people to interact with each other, revitalize cultural linkages, and generate lucrative revenue.

Prospects for Shared-Future:

The future roadmap of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) depends on grand visions and the implementation of policies by Uzbekistan. The 2022 annual summit of the SCO Heads of State Council will be held on September 15-16 in Samarkand. It will provide an opportunity to decipher the SCO's potential in a new way and strengthen its role and significance with relevance to regional cooperation. Thus, SCO member states need to investigate further and devise such plans and strategies most appropriate for practical actions. This should also extend to people-to-people contacts involving academia, the private sector, and civil society, which can influence and assist the direction and effectiveness of intergovernmental cooperation. There is still a long uphill journey for durable peace and common development in the region. Thereby, regional connectivity is a dire need of time. It is anticipated that Uzbekistan, as part of its chairmanship, will successfully take on the challenges facing the organization and provide a plethora of opportunities for regional states to combat common challenges and strive for a shared future.