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PROSPECTS FOR UZBEKISTAN–TAJIKISTAN RELATIONS: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND REGIONAL STABILITY

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Annotation. This article analyzes development trends in political-legal, trade-economic, investment, transport, water-energy and cultural-humanitarian cooperation between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. On the basis of official statistical indicators and bilateral documents, the existing opportunities and constraints are assessed, and forward-looking scenarios up to 2030 are evaluated.
Keywords: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, strategic partnership, allied relations, Central Asia, trade, investment, transport, water-energy.

Abstract. The paper analyses Uzbekistan–Tajikistan relations in political, legal, trade, investment, transport, water-energy and cultural dimensions. Using official data and bilateral documents, it assesses cooperation trends, constraints and indicative scenarios through 2030.
Keywords: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, strategic partnership, allied relations, Central Asia, trade, investment, connectivity.

Sustainable development in Central Asia is closely linked to interstate political trust, economic interdependence and the rational use of transboundary resources. The geographical proximity of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, their shared historical and cultural heritage, border regions and transport networks create an objective basis for cooperation. However, turning these opportunities into practical results requires consistent political dialogue and effective institutions.

The aim of this study is to assess the political-legal and economic state of bilateral relations on the basis of official indicators and to identify priority directions for the future. For this purpose, the interstate treaty-legal foundations and the dynamics of trade and investment are comparatively analyzed, attention is paid to the opportunities in the infrastructure and energy sectors, and existing risks are identified in order to develop practical recommendations.

In examining the processes of interstate relations, historical-institutional, comparative-statistical and systemic methods of analysis were used. When analyzing trade indicators, the unified statistical data published by the Center for Economic Research and Reforms (ITIM) were used, taking into account the discrepancies found in statistical publications. In addition, the authors have endeavored to provide their own analysis.

1. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL-LEGAL RELATIONS

The signing of the Treaty on Strategic Partnership on 17 August 2018 opened an important political-legal stage in the history of relations between the two states. This document served as an important institutional basis for taking mutual cooperation to a new level, strengthening political dialogue and further expanding economic ties. In the following years, cooperation based on trust

and mutual interest developed consistently between the parties, creating the necessary conditions for raising relations to a higher level.

As a logical continuation of this process, the signing of the Treaty on Allied Relations on 18 April 2024 was of particular importance. The entry into force of the Treaty on 31 March 2025 further strengthened the political-legal foundations of the two countries' cooperation and enriched the strategic content of bilateral relations. This event demonstrated the aspiration of the parties not only to preserve existing ties, but also to develop them on the basis of long-term interests, common goals and principles of practical cooperation.

The first meeting of the Supreme Interstate Council held on 26 March 2026 was an important step in bringing bilateral relations to a new practical stage. Within the framework of the meeting, the adoption of new documents on trade and economic relations, industrial cooperation, the transport and logistics system and other priority areas served to enrich cooperation with concrete tasks and practical results. In this regard, the development of relations between the two states can be assessed as a consistent process characterized not merely by a sequence of diplomatic documents and official meetings, but by the strengthening of political trust, the harmonization of economic interests and the deepening of institutional cooperation [1–4].

Date	Event	Significance
17.08.2018	Treaty on Strategic Partnership	Political trust and long-term foundation
18.04.2024	Treaty on Allied Relations signed	Elevation of legal status
31.03.2025	Treaty on Allied Relations entered into force	Implementation of obligations
26.03.2026	Meeting of the Supreme Interstate Council	High-level coordination

The consistent development of this process shows that in relations between the two states political trust was first established, then it was secured by solid legal foundations, and at the next stage attention intensified to implementing specific economic programs and practical projects. In other words, the development of cooperation covers a process that runs from diplomatic dialogue and mutual understanding, through strengthening treaty obligations, to their application in practical activity.

From this point of view, the significance of the status of allied relations is not limited to signed documents or political agreements reached. Its real content is manifested first and foremost in the extent to which the decisions adopted are consistently implemented, the assigned tasks turn into practical results, and what changes occur in trade and economic cooperation, investment, industrial cooperation and transport links. Therefore, in assessing the prospects of bilateral relations, it is important to analyze comprehensively not only the political-legal documents, but also their implementation, economic effectiveness and contribution to mutual interests.

2. DYNAMICS OF TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Analysis of data from the Center for Economic Research and Reforms (ITIM) shows that mutual trade between the two states grew markedly over 2017–2025. In particular, trade turnover rose from USD 237.9 million in 2017 to USD 912.4 million in 2025, meaning that bilateral trade volume increased approximately 3.8-fold. This growth shows that economic ties expanded over the period and that mutual trade cooperation began to occupy an important place in relations between the two states.

Turning to the components of trade turnover, Uzbekistan's exports rose from USD 186.1 million in 2017 to USD 683.1 million in 2025. At the same time, the volume of imports increased from USD 51.8 million to USD 229.3 million. These figures show that export and import operations expanded in both directions. However, since the export volume is higher than imports, Uzbekistan has a positive trade balance in these trade relations. According to the results of 2025, the difference between exports and imports amounted to USD 453.8 million.

In general, the statistical indicators presented confirm that mutual trade relations expanded considerably in quantitative terms over 2017–2025. At the same time, to fully assess the growth of trade turnover, attention must be paid not only to the total volume but also to the composition of exports and imports, the value added of products, the geography of supplies and the sustainability of trade links. It is precisely these factors that make it possible to determine how effective the growth of mutual trade is in qualitative terms.[5].

Indicator	2017, USD million	2025, USD million	Growth
Trade turnover	237.9	912.4	3.84-fold
Exports	186.1	683.1	3.67-fold
Imports	51.8	229.3	4.43-fold
Positive balance	134.3	453.8	3.38-fold

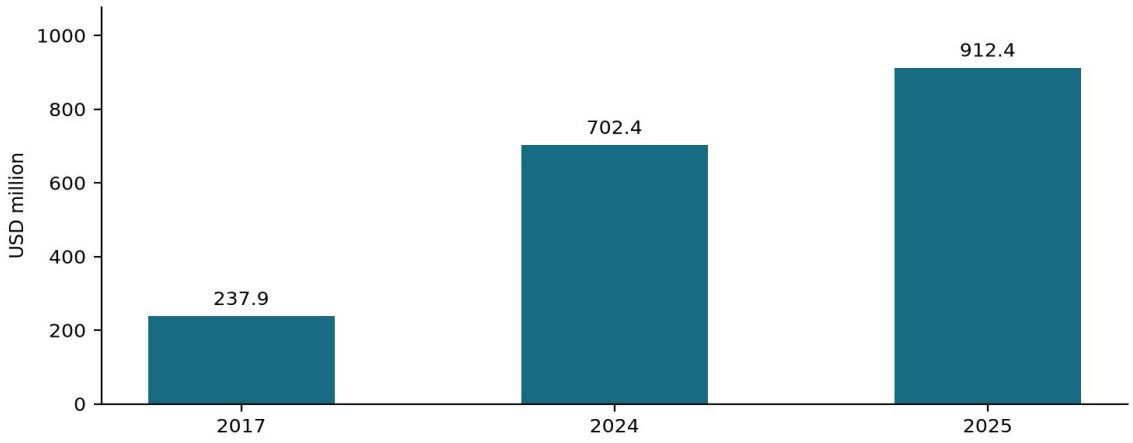


Figure 1. Dynamics of mutual trade turnover (USD million). Source: ITIM [5].

In 2025, trade turnover increased by 29.9% compared with 2024. The faster growth of imports relative to exports means that economic interdependence is expanding, although in absolute terms Uzbekistan's exports remain dominant. Product composition and value added must be assessed together with trade volume.

3. TRADE STRUCTURE AND MUTUAL COMPLEMENTARITY

In 2025, industrial products, railway transport services, machinery and transport equipment, petroleum and chemical products occupied an important place in Uzbekistan's exports to Tajikistan [5].

Export category	2025, USD million	Share
Industrial products	222.7	32.6%
Railway transport services	147.4	21.6%
Other goods	70.1	10.3%
Machinery and transport equipment	58.7	8.6%
Petroleum products	53.1	7.8%
Chemical products	53.0	7.8%
Food	48.2	7.1%
Miscellaneous manufactured goods	21.0	3.1%
Non-food raw materials	8.1	1.2%

In imports from Tajikistan, metal ores, aluminum, coal, electricity and raw cotton occupy the leading places.

Import category	2025, USD million	Share
Metal ores and concentrates	108.9	47.5%
Aluminum	25.4	11.0%
Coal	22.3	9.7%
Electricity	17.9	7.8%
Raw cotton	17.6	7.8%
Fruits	7.4	3.2%
Railway services	6.6	2.9%
Iron and steel products	5.1	2.2%

This structure reflects a complementarity based on Uzbekistan's exports of finished industrial products and services and on Tajikistan's supplies of certain raw material and energy resources. The priority task for the future is to transform the trade in raw materials into joint processing and the production of goods with high added value.

4. INVESTMENT COOPERATION AND INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION

As of 1 March 2026, a total of 420 enterprises with Tajik capital were operating in Uzbekistan, of which 110 were joint ventures and 310 were enterprises wholly owned by Tajik capital. These indicators show that economic cooperation between the two countries is developing not only through the exchange of goods, but also through entrepreneurial and investment activity. In particular, the volume of investments and loans attracted from Tajikistan into Uzbekistan's economy reached USD 196 million in 2025, approximately 3.1 times the USD 64 million recorded in 2024. The total volume of investments and loans attracted over 2017–2025 amounted to USD 373 million.

Although these figures indicate that investment cooperation is becoming more active, in assessing its long-term economic effectiveness it is also necessary to take into account the distribution of funds across sectors, job creation, the expansion of production capacities and the impact on export potential. In particular, directing investments into the industrial, energy, transport-logistics and processing sectors makes it possible to deepen economic ties between the two countries. In this sense, although an increase in investment volume is an important positive indicator, the real result of cooperation is determined by the contribution of the attracted capital to production efficiency and to mutual economic interests.

Indicator	Value	Period
Enterprises with Tajik capital	420 enterprises	1 March 2026
Of which joint ventures	110 enterprises	1 March 2026
Wholly Tajik-owned enterprises	310 enterprises	1 March 2026
Investments and loans	USD 64 million	2024
Investments and loans	USD 196 million	2025
Total investments and loans	USD 373 million	2017–2025

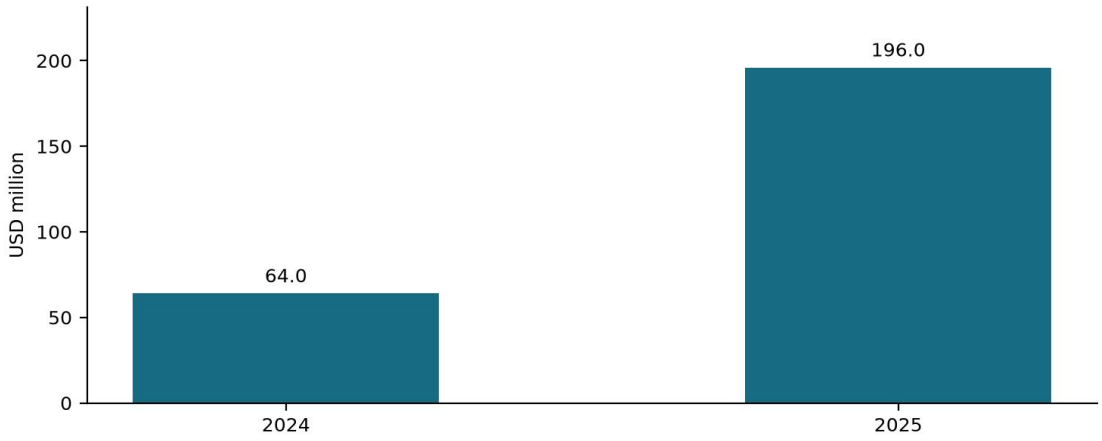


Figure 2. Investments and loans attracted from Tajikistan (USD million). Source: ITIM [5].

Because investments and loans are provided jointly, it is incorrect to interpret these amounts as purely direct investment. The promising directions of industrial cooperation are electrical engineering, food processing, textiles, construction materials and the mining industry. The effectiveness of projects should be measured by the capacity commissioned, the number of new jobs created and export revenue.

5. TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS AND BORDER REGIONS

The growth of trade volume also increases the demand for transport and logistics infrastructure between the two states. In particular, the throughput capacity of border crossing points, the speed of cargo clearance and transportation costs are factors that directly affect the sustainable development of mutual trade. From this point of view, the issues discussed in the agreements reached in 2026, namely the use of electronic systems for issuing certificates of origin of goods and the development of the E-Permit electronic permit system, are of major importance for digitalizing transport processes and reducing administrative barriers [4].

In addition, the establishment and development of cross-border trade centers and the improvement of railway and road transport links may expand the opportunities of small and medium-sized businesses to enter foreign markets. Such infrastructure measures serve to shorten delivery times, reduce logistics costs and increase the competitiveness of entrepreneurs. To assess the effectiveness of cooperation objectively, it is expedient to use specific criteria such as the average time of border control, the cost of transporting one ton of cargo and the delivery time of products. Periodic analysis of these indicators makes it possible to determine the practical results of the measures being implemented and to develop well-founded recommendations for eliminating existing problems in the transport-logistics sphere.

6. WATER-ENERGY COOPERATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Tajikistan's hydropower potential and the industrial and agricultural needs of Uzbekistan create the basis for mutually beneficial cooperation. At the same time, the seasonal requirements for water use for energy and irrigation purposes may differ. The main tasks are the exchange of hydrological data, technical coordination of reservoir regimes, environmental assessment and taking climate risks into account [9–11].

An effective model of cooperation should be based on managing water not as an object of competition, but as a resource of regional economic and environmental sustainability.

7. CULTURAL AND HUMANITARIAN COOPERATION

Historical and cultural proximity complements political dialogue with trust between societies. Joint scientific research, student exchanges, culture days and tourism projects strengthen long-term ties. Among the documents of 2026 there are also cooperation programs in the fields of science, culture and tourism [4].

8. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COOPERATION DIRECTIONS

Direction	Opportunity	Constraint		Priority measure
Policy	Legal basis of allied relations	Consistency of implementation		Annual monitoring
Trade	Market proximity	Structural imbalance		Diversification
Investment	Joint projects	Financial risk		Project portfolio
Transport	Existing links	Logistics costs		Digitalization
Energy	Complementary resources	Seasonal and environmental risks		Technical dialogue
Education	Cultural proximity	Irregularity of projects		Permanent programs

The analysis shows that there is great potential in almost all directions of cooperation, but its translation into practical results depends on implementation discipline, measurable indicators and sustainable financing.

9. TRADE DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS UP TO 2030

Based on the trade base of USD 912.4 million in 2025, conditional scenarios for 2030 were calculated using the formula Tn = T0 × (1 + g)^n, where T0 is the volume in 2025, g is the average annual growth rate, and n is the number of years.

Scenario	Annual growth	2030 volume
Conservative	8%	USD 1.34 billion
Baseline	15%	USD 1.83 billion
Accelerated	20%	USD 2.27 billion

Reaching USD 2 billion by 2030 from the 2025 base would require average annual growth of approximately 17%. These results are not official forecasts but conditional scenarios. Since the target period for reaching USD 2 billion is indicated differently in the official information in different language versions, it is advisable to refrain from treating any single year as a confirmed deadline [3].

10. KEY RISKS AND THEIR MITIGATION

In developing economic cooperation between the two states, a number of systemic risks exist that may affect the sustainability of mutual trade and investment ties. In particular, insufficient diversification of the trade structure may strengthen dependence on certain product groups and markets, while high logistics costs may limit the competitiveness of products. At the same time, the financial sustainability of joint projects, changes in seasonal demand for water and energy resources, and instability in the external economic environment are important factors affecting the results of cooperation. Coordinating interests and the rational use of resources in the water-energy sphere are important from the standpoint of ecological sustainability as well as economic efficiency.

To reduce these risks, it is first necessary to improve the statistical monitoring system based on regular tracking of trade, investment and transport indicators. Simplifying border and transport procedures, digitalizing logistics processes and assessing joint projects on the basis of clear economic criteria are also important. Furthermore, phased financing of investment projects makes it possible to control the financial burden, use funds effectively and limit possible losses. In addition, it is expedient to assess environmental and climate-related risks before implementing projects and to plan the long-term needs for water and energy resources.

In general, ensuring the sustainability of economic cooperation is not limited to eliminating existing problems; it also requires forming institutional mechanisms aimed at identifying potential risks in advance and reducing their negative consequences. Therefore, regular monitoring, financial discipline, improvement of transport procedures and harmonization of environmental safety principles should be regarded as important directions that serve to increase the long-term effectiveness of cooperation between the two states.

Based on the analysis of political-legal and economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the following recommendations have been developed to make effective use of available opportunities, reduce the identified risks and increase the practical effectiveness of bilateral relations:

1. Improving the system for assessing the implementation of cooperation programs. It is proposed to establish annual key performance indicators (KPIs) for the agreements and programs adopted within the Supreme Interstate Council, to specify responsible organizations and implementation deadlines, and to introduce an open monitoring system for results.

2. Expanding industrial cooperation and export diversification. It is expedient to develop joint production and processing projects between enterprises of the two countries, increase the share of finished products and direct investment into sectors that create high added value. In this regard, market demand should be assessed separately in areas such as the processing of agricultural products, light industry and the production of construction materials.

3. Increasing the effectiveness of digitalization of transport and customs procedures. It is necessary to expand the use of certificates of origin, customs documents and the E-Permit electronic permit system, and to measure regularly the time and costs spent on border formalities. In assessing results, the average duration of cargo clearance, the cost of transporting one ton of cargo and the delivery time may be defined as the main indicators.

4. Strengthening coordination mechanisms in water-energy cooperation. It is recommended to establish a permanent dialogue platform with the participation of specialists, technical experts and scientific institutions of the two countries, to forecast seasonal water and energy needs, and to assess the economic and environmental impact of joint projects in advance.

5. Stimulating economic activity in border regions. Through the development of cross-border trade centers, warehouses, logistics terminals and small industrial zones, the opportunities of small and medium-sized businesses to enter each other's markets should be expanded. When selecting these projects, the transport capacity of the regions, the local raw material base, the job creation potential and the expected economic effectiveness should be taken into account.

6. Linking scientific and educational cooperation with economic development. It is expedient to expand joint research, academic exchange programs and applied projects between universities and research centers, and to make use of scientific potential particularly in water resources management, energy, transport-logistics and the digital economy.

7. Harmonizing trade statistics and data exchange. It is proposed to establish regular information exchange between the official statistical bodies of the two states, to compare the methodologies for calculating export and import indicators, and to identify the causes of discrepancies. This serves to assess trade dynamics more precisely, to form a reliable information base for economic decisions and to increase the scientific validity of research results.

8. Ensuring the financial sustainability of investment projects. Before implementing joint projects, their financial, market and environmental risks should be assessed, financing should be organized in phases, and clear performance criteria should be set for each project. In doing so, along with the volume of investment attracted, the jobs created, production volume, export revenue and the long-term economic benefit of the project should also be taken into account.

9. Establishing a mechanism for early identification of economic risks. It is recommended to develop a system of indicators that monitors sharp changes in the trade structure, rising logistics costs, delays in investment projects and seasonal changes in water-energy needs. Such an approach makes it possible to identify potential problems at an early stage and to take appropriate measures in a timely manner.

In general, implementing these recommendations may serve to strengthen the institutional foundations of cooperation between the two states, improve the quality of economic ties and make effective use of available opportunities. The practical effectiveness of the proposals should be assessed through the fulfillment of the assigned tasks, the improvement of measurable indicators and the long-term economic benefit of mutual cooperation.

CONCLUSION

The modern stage of Uzbekistan–Tajikistan relations is characterized by the strengthening of political trust, the legal formalization of allied relations and the expansion of economic cooperation. The increase in trade turnover by approximately 3.8 times over 2017–2025 shows that economic ties have become more active. However, this growth cannot be explained by political factors alone: market demand, prices, transport and other conditions also have an effect.

In the future, along with the growth of trade volume, its quality must be ensured: high value-added products, joint investment projects, transport efficiency and environmental sustainability. The most important prospect is to turn political alliance into a mechanism of sustainable economic interdependence and regional integration.

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