

UNGA Adopts Resolution on Strengthening Cooperation in Central Asia

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At its June 22, 2018, plenary session, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on “Strengthening regional and international cooperation to ensure peace, stability and sustainable development in the Central Asian Region.” According to Uzbekistan’s Foreign Ministry, all UN members unanimously supported the draft document, developed by Uzbekistan along with other Central Asian states.



BACKGROUND: The adoption of the resolution was a historical event, not just for the Central Asian countries. Indeed, it is difficult to overstate its significance in a broader, international context. It marked a new stage in the history of the Central Asian countries and signaled the region’s consolidation. For the first time since their independence in 1991, the Central Asian states confirmed their ability not only to take joint action in order to resolve common regional problems, but also to ensure the wellbeing and prosperity of their citizens.

Uzbekistan’s President Shavkat Mirziyoyev initiated the process of developing the document at the UNGA’s 72nd session in September 2017. Speaking in New York on the organization of an international conference on Central Asia in Samarkand in November 2017, Mirziyoyev proposed to develop a UN resolution after the conference in order to support the Central Asian countries’ efforts to ensure security and strengthen cooperation in the region.

The fact that the resolution is now adopted signifies the implementation of Uzbekistan’s initiative, and confirms international recognition and support of Tashkent’s new regional policy. As Mirziyoyev noted

during the Samarkand Conference, “Our main goal is to turn Central Asia into a stable, economically developed and prosperous region through joint efforts.” Indeed, Uzbekistan’s foreign policy under Mirziyoyev has unlocked regional divisions and opened the way for the development of the entire region.

The other Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan – not only actively supported Uzbekistan’s initiative, but also co-sponsored the UNGA resolution on Central Asia. The document reflects mutual support for the initiatives of the Central Asian states, which have made a significant practical contribution to strengthening regional security and ensuring sustainable development.

The resolution particularly reflected the outcomes of the debate in the Security Council on Afghanistan in January 2018, when Kazakhstan chaired the UN Security Council, as well as the regular arrangement of the World Nomad Games in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, the resolution included the results of the international conference dedicated to combating terrorism and extremism, organized in Tajikistan in May 2018. Central Asian countries welcomed an upcoming summit of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea in Turkmenistan. They also supported Uzbekistan’s initiative to hold annual consultative meetings of the Central Asian countries’ leaders.

In sum, the resolution has become the Central Asian states’ consolidated response to regional problems and threats, and the challenges stemming from globalization. The region’s consolidation has allowed the Central Asian countries to significantly strengthen their role as independent actors in the international system as well as their capacity of taking responsibility for the region’s present and future.

These positive dynamics in Central Asia are unprecedented since the regional states gained independence, and they have now reached a qualitatively new level of regional cooperation.

IMPLICATIONS: There are two main reasons for these recent developments. First, the Central Asian states gained their independence during the disintegration of the bipolar world order, associated with the emergence of new challenges and threats to stability, increased geopolitical rivalry, and escalating armed confrontation in neighboring regions. In addition, the heavy burden of internal political, socio-economic, ideological and other problems that the Central Asian countries faced in the 1990s and the subsequent period exacerbated the security situation in the region. The newly independent Central Asian states were preoccupied with vital issues of state building and the search for identity in a globalized world. All regional states lacked experience both in domestic and foreign affairs and had to focus on their own problems, as well as on the most acute security threats. Yet over time, the Central Asian states have proven able to strengthen their political systems and administrative institutions, and elaborating their own models of national development. Through their integration into the international community, the Central Asian countries have gained experience in devising foreign policies capable of accommodating the strategic prospects and advantages of regional cooperation in a globalized world.

Second, Uzbekistan has over the two years since Mirziyoyev’s ascendance to power pursued a new regional policy in Central Asia, which has served to defuse the country’s conflicts with its neighbors. The Central Asian countries currently express a firm readiness for constructive changes in bilateral and multilateral relations. The states of the region now concentrate on consolidating their efforts to increase their competitiveness in the world and to strengthen the region’s unity.

According to the Uzbek Foreign Ministry, all the Central Asian countries’ leading partners, including Russia, China, the U.S. and the EU, actively participated in the consultations on drafting the document. The adoption of the UN resolution on Central Asia gained unanimous support from countries representing all continents of the world, Australia, North and South America, Asia, Africa and Europe. Thereby, the international community expressed its firm and unconditional support for the Central Asian countries’ efforts to deepen regional cooperation, which is one of the most important preconditions for stability and development of the region.

Indeed, Central Asia’s security is integral to global security. In the current period when other regions of the world undergo political tensions and conflict, the strategic prospect of regional cooperation in Central Asia is particularly important for international security. Growing uncertainty, turbulence and

imbalances in the global economy require Central Asian states to undertake closer, coordinated interaction to implement common regional development projects.

The international community, including the regional states, recognizes that only a stable, dynamically developing and prosperous Central Asia can become an attractive, constructive and long-term partner. If the Central Asian countries prove successful in realizing this vision for their region, Central Asia can become a new geopolitical laboratory of stability and peace in Eurasia.

CONCLUSIONS: The UN resolution on Central Asia marked the entry of the Central Asian countries into a new era of interstate relations. It signaled that the Central Asian states have embarked on a decisive course towards regional cooperation, with the support of the international community. These changes in regional dynamics have encouraged international partners to fundamentally reconsider their approaches to Central Asia, and indeed strengthens the prospect of promoting security, development and prosperity in a strategically important region, located in the heart of Eurasia.

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