AVİM Commentary • No: 2023 / 34 •

THE FIFTH CONSULTATIVE MEETING OF HEADS OF STATE OF CENTRAL ASIA

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This is the English translation of a Turkish language article that was originally published by AVİM on 27 September 2023. The translation was made by AVİM Scholar in Residence İrem Akın.

On 14-15 September 2023, the Fifth Consultative Meeting of Heads of State of Central Asia took place in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. The heads of state of the five Central Asian countries, Emomali Rahmon, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Sadyr Japarov, Serdar Berdimuhamedow, and Shavkat Mirziyoyev, as well as the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and the Chairman of the Turkmenistan People's Council Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow attended the meeting as guests of honour.[1]

In 2017, at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, the President of Uzbekistan Mirziyoyev proposed holding consultative meetings at the level of heads of state to strengthen dialogue, constructive interaction, and good neighbourliness in Central Asia.[2] The Fifth Consultative Meeting of Heads of State of Central Asia took place this year, the first of which was held in 2018. At this summit in Dushanbe, issues related to the development of good-neighbourly relations, including security, development of trade and economic relations, cultural and humanitarian cooperation, and transport were discussed. the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan Sirojiddin Muhriddin stated that the decisions taken at the summit were aimed at contributing to the development process of the countries of the region and emphasized the importance of political and diplomatic means in solving regional problems.[3] The main issues discussed at the meeting were the strengthening of regional cooperation on security issues such as combating terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, the situation in Afghanistan, the use of national currencies in the field of trade and economic relations, industrial and industrial cooperation, mitigation of the effects of climate change and adaptation to climate change, and the exchange of experience and cooperation in scientific, technical, and humanitarian fields.[4]

The proposals voiced at the meeting included the development of the Dialogue on Security and Cooperation in Central Asia as a consultative platform to be held under the auspices of the UN, the creation of a regional program for the Aral Sea Basin and -in line

with this- the initiation of consultations with relevant UN agencies, the establishment of a regional centre to ensure the rational use of water and energy resources, and the establishment of the Central Asian Energy Dialogue and the Economic Council of Central Asian States.[5]

It was noted that the share of the costs for transporting goods in the region has reached 50% of the final cost of goods (with the world average being 11%). The importance of creating an integrated digital platform for international transportation (and actively involving Azerbaijan in this endeavour) and the importance of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route in transport and logistics were also emphasized. President of Kazakhstan Tokayev stated that they aim to accelerate the development of the Moyynty-Dostyk, Bakhty-Ayagoz, Darbaza-Maktaaral railway, and Zhanaozen-Turkmenistan highway. Meanwhile, President of Azerbaijan Aliyev indicated that "*All transit and logistics facilities of Azerbaijan are open for the Central Asian countries. We are modernizing the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line to meet the demand on the East-West route. Next year, the transport capacity of this line will increase from 1 million tons to 5 million tons. The capacity of the Baku port will be increased from 15 million tons to 25 million tons per year. Azerbaijan has a commercial fleet of more than 50 ships in the Caspian Sea.*" He additionally drew attention to the cooperation in the transportation sector.[6]

Various side events and meetings were organized within the framework of the Consultative Meeting of Heads of State. At the Meeting of Ministers of Transport of Central Asian States, issues related to the development of multimodal transport services and the solution of problems arising in supply chain management were put forward, and the draft text of the Agreement on Strengthening Land Transport Connectivity in Central Asia was adopted.[7] The Forum of Scientists, the Forum of Young Entrepreneurs, the Dialogue of Central Asian Women Leaders, and the Forum of Rectors of Higher Education Institutions were some of the other events held in this regard. On 15 September 2023, another high-level event in Dushanbe was the Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the "Aral Sea Restoration Fund".

A package of five documents were adopted at the end of the Consultative Meeting of Heads of State that included a Joint Declaration as well the Agreement on Strengthening Land Transport Connectivity in Central Asia, the Youth Policy Agreement, the Regulations on the Council of National Coordinators of Consultative Meetings of Central Asian Heads of State, and the Roadmap for Promoting Health and Welfare in Central Asia. It was agreed that the next consultative meeting will be held in Kazakhstan in 2024.

**Photograph: TRT Avaz*

[1] Пятая Консультативная встреча глав государств Центральной Азии / ТВ Таджикистан Онлайн, *Телевизиони Тоҷикистон*, 14 Сентября 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wjl7skeZSk

[2] Address by H.E. Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the UNGA-72, *UN.int*, 19 September 2017, https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/statements_speeches/address-he-mr-shavkat-mirziyoyev-president-republic-uzbekistan-unga-72

[3] В Душанбе прошла Пятая консультативная встреча глав государств Центральной Азии, *Исполнительный Комитет Содружества Независимых Государств*, 14 Сентября 2023

[4] *Ibid*.

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] Orta Asya Devlet Başkanları Tacikistanda toplandı, *TRT Avaz*, 14 Eylül 2023, https://www.trtavaz.com.tr/haber/tur/avrasyadan/orta-asya-devlet-baskanlari-tacikistan-da-toplandi/65033367bb49ace105b06ecb

[7] Министры транспорта государств Центральной Азии приняли по итогам встречи в Душанбе Совместное коммюнике Одобрен проект Соглашения Об укреплении взаимосвязанности наземного транспорта в Центральной Азии, *News Central Asia*, 13 Сентября 2023, https://www.newscentralasia.net/2023/09/13/ministry-transporta-gosudarstv-tsentralnoy-azii-prinyali-po-itogam-vstrechi-v-dushanbe-sovmestnoye-kommyunike/

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To cite this article: GÜNGÖR, Gülperi. 2026. "THE FIFTH CONSULTATIVE MEETING OF HEADS OF STATE OF CENTRAL ASIA." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Commentary No.2023 / 34. September 29. Accessed October 30, 2026. https://avimbulten.org/public/en/Yorum/THE-FIFTH-CONSULTATIVE-MEETING-OF-HEADS-OF-STATE-OF-CENTRAL-ASIA

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