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UZBEKISTAN–FRANCE RELATIONS IN 2017–2025: A NEW STAGE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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Abstract This study examines the new stage of relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the French Republic during the period 2017–2025, drawing on historical sources, official documents, and scholarly literature. It highlights how Uzbekistan's policy of openness and pragmatic diplomacy contributed to elevating bilateral cooperation with France to a qualitatively new level. The study evaluates the intensification of political dialogue, high-level official visits, intergovernmental meetings, and the evolving dynamics of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Particular attention is paid to the emergence of the Uzbekistan–France strategic partnership, its political and legal foundations, and its significance within the contemporary system of international relations. The research further analyzes bilateral cooperation in key sectors, including energy, industry, transport, geology, agriculture, and innovative technologies, assessing the contribution of these collaborative projects to the economic development of both countries. Investment initiatives involving leading French companies, as well as the growth of trade and economic relations, are examined using statistical evidence.

The study also explores cultural and humanitarian cooperation, with particular emphasis on education, science, archaeology, tourism, and the preservation of cultural heritage. It discusses the development of French language education in Uzbekistan, academic exchange programs between higher education institutions, and the growing importance of joint scientific research projects. Furthermore, the paper evaluates bilateral cooperation within the framework of UNESCO and examines France's contribution to enhancing the international recognition of Uzbekistan's historic cities, particularly Samarkand and Bukhara.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of historical experience and contemporary developments, the study identifies the main achievements, existing challenges, and future priorities of Uzbekistan–France relations. It also presents scholarly conclusions regarding the prospects for further strengthening bilateral cooperation through 2030. Finally, the research argues that the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and France plays an increasingly significant role in reinforcing political, economic, and cultural ties between Central Asia and Europe and contributes to regional stability and international cooperation.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, France, strategic partnership, diplomatic relations, foreign policy, New Uzbekistan, investment, trade and economic cooperation, cultural diplomacy, geopolitics, UNESCO, education, innovation, international relations, Central Asia, European Union, historical experience, future prospects.

Beginning in 2017, the Republic of Uzbekistan entered a fundamentally new phase in its foreign policy. Political and economic reforms implemented within the framework of the **"New Uzbekistan"** development agenda were aimed at enhancing the country's international standing, pursuing an open and pragmatic foreign policy, and expanding mutually beneficial partnerships with developed countries. In this context, bilateral relations with the French Republic advanced to a qualitatively new stage. During this period, the primary objectives of Uzbekistan's foreign policy included strengthening

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its position as a reliable international partner, attracting foreign investment, and promoting regional cooperation. These priorities significantly intensified political, economic, and cultural relations between Uzbekistan and France.[1]

The renewed foreign policy was guided by the principles of openness, pragmatism, constructive dialogue, and mutual benefit. This approach enabled Uzbekistan to broaden the geographical scope of its international cooperation and deepen its engagement with European countries. Among these partnerships, relations with France assumed particular importance within Uzbekistan's European foreign policy. As one of the leading member states of the European Union, France possesses substantial political and economic influence and plays a prominent role in international affairs. Consequently, Uzbekistan has attached strategic importance to developing a long-term and sustainable partnership with France.

Since 2017, political dialogue between Uzbekistan and France has intensified considerably. High-level meetings between heads of state, official bilateral visits, and negotiations conducted within the framework of international forums have elevated bilateral relations to a new level. These engagements resulted in a number of significant agreements aimed at expanding cooperation in the political, economic, investment, and cultural-humanitarian spheres. They also strengthened mutual trust and laid the foundation for the gradual development of a strategic partnership.

The analysis demonstrates that the period following 2017 represents one of the most dynamic and productive stages in the history of Uzbekistan–France relations. A defining characteristic of this phase has been that cooperation has extended well beyond political dialogue. Bilateral relations have expanded substantially in the fields of investment, trade, education, science, and culture. French companies have become increasingly involved in various sectors of Uzbekistan's economy, particularly in energy, transport, infrastructure, public utilities, and tourism. At the same time, cooperation in higher education and scientific research has intensified through academic partnerships between universities and research institutions of both countries. These developments demonstrate the comprehensive and systematic nature of Uzbekistan's contemporary foreign policy and reflect the growing strategic significance of Uzbekistan–France relations in the broader context of cooperation between Central Asia and Europe.[2]

France is regarded as one of Uzbekistan's most important partners in Europe. In particular, bilateral cooperation has become a priority in attracting foreign investment, facilitating the transfer of advanced technologies, developing transport and logistics infrastructure, and strengthening cultural and humanitarian ties. At the same time, Uzbekistan has emerged as one of France's most stable and promising partners in Central Asia. The country's geostrategic location, abundant natural resources, and growing economic potential have significantly increased France's interest in expanding cooperation with Uzbekistan. From this perspective, bilateral relations contribute not only to the national interests of both countries but also to regional stability and the broader development of international cooperation.

Within the framework of the **New Uzbekistan** foreign policy, particular emphasis has been placed on strengthening cooperation with the member states of the European Union. In this process, France has become one of Uzbekistan's key European partners, making a substantial contribution to the deepening of political, economic, and humanitarian relations. This partnership has reinforced

[1] Mirziyoyev, S. M. (2021). *The Strategy of New Uzbekistan*. Tashkent: Uzbekistan Publishing House, p. 46.

[2] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2024). *Official Materials on Uzbekistan–France Economic and Investment Cooperation*. Tashkent, p. 45.

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Uzbekistan's integration into European cooperation mechanisms and has enhanced the country's international standing.

The analysis indicates that, since 2017, high-level political dialogue between Uzbekistan and France has intensified considerably. Investment cooperation has expanded, cultural and educational exchanges have entered a new stage of development, and collaboration within international organizations has become increasingly institutionalized. The balanced advancement of these areas demonstrates that Uzbekistan–France relations have acquired a comprehensive and multidimensional character.

Another important feature of the foreign policy of the **New Uzbekistan** has been the strengthening of its multi-vector approach. This strategy enables the country to expand equal and mutually beneficial relations with a wide range of international partners simultaneously. Cooperation with France has become an integral component of this policy and reached a qualitatively new level during the period 2017–2025. From an academic perspective, this period may be characterized as a **transformational stage**, since bilateral relations have evolved not only in quantitative terms but also in terms of their substance, institutional framework, and overall effectiveness.

Particularly noteworthy has been the increasing frequency of official visits by heads of state, bilateral meetings held within international summits, and intergovernmental negotiations, all of which demonstrate the growing intensity of diplomatic engagement between the two countries. At the same time, the expansion of economic diplomacy has elevated economic interests to a central position within Uzbekistan's foreign policy agenda, creating a solid foundation for the further development of investment and trade cooperation with France.

To illustrate these developments, the dynamics of Uzbekistan–France relations during the period after 2017 may be summarized through the indicators presented in the following table.[3]

The available evidence demonstrates significant progress across all major areas of bilateral cooperation after 2017. The most notable feature of this period has been the rapid expansion of political dialogue and investment cooperation, indicating that mutual political trust and converging economic interests have become the principal driving forces behind bilateral relations. Furthermore, cooperation within international organizations has intensified considerably during the period 2017–2025. Uzbekistan and France have increasingly coordinated their positions on global security, sustainable development, environmental challenges, and other pressing international issues while supporting each other's initiatives in multilateral forums. These developments demonstrate that bilateral relations have become increasingly consolidated not only at the diplomatic level but also within the broader framework of global governance and international cooperation.

One of the defining features of the **New Uzbekistan** foreign policy has been the active promotion of cultural diplomacy alongside economic diplomacy. This approach demonstrates that bilateral relations have expanded beyond intergovernmental cooperation to encompass broader interaction between the societies and peoples of the two countries. The analysis suggests that the rapid development of Uzbekistan–France relations during the period 2017–2025 was driven by an open and pragmatic foreign policy, improvements in the investment climate, a stronger commitment to international partnerships, and intensified diplomatic engagement. These factors significantly enhanced Uzbekistan's international standing and elevated its relations with France to a qualitatively new level.

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[3] President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2022). Decree No. PF-60 of January 28, 2022, "On the Development Strategy of the New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026." Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

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From an academic perspective, the period under review may be characterized as a stage of **intensive development**, as bilateral relations evolved into a comprehensive and institutionalized partnership within a relatively short period. Regular dialogue between the heads of state, high-level official visits, and close cooperation within international platforms substantially strengthened mutual political trust. As a result, an integrated partnership encompassing political, economic, cultural, and educational cooperation was established, clearly demonstrating that Uzbekistan's foreign policy has become increasingly systematic and oriented toward long-term strategic objectives.[4]

The strengthening of economic diplomacy represents another significant achievement of this period. The expansion of French investment in Uzbekistan, the implementation of joint investment projects, and the continuous growth of bilateral trade indicate that economic cooperation has entered a new stage of development. These processes have contributed to the modernization of Uzbekistan's economy and have supported the country's long-term sustainable development.

Cooperation in the cultural, humanitarian, and educational spheres also intensified considerably between 2017 and 2025. Student exchange programs, joint academic initiatives, collaborative research projects, and cultural events strengthened social and intellectual ties between the peoples of the two countries. These activities have created a solid social and intellectual foundation for long-term cooperation while reinforcing the sustainability of political and economic partnership.

The findings indicate that the evolution of Uzbekistan–France relations during this period has been characterized by the strengthening of high-level political dialogue, the expansion of economic and investment cooperation, the growing importance of cultural and humanitarian exchanges, and deeper collaboration within international organizations. Collectively, these developments demonstrate both the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's contemporary foreign policy and the strategic significance of its partnership with France.

Looking ahead, several areas offer considerable potential for further deepening bilateral cooperation. These include high technologies, innovation, the green economy, environmental protection projects, integration in higher education and scientific research, tourism, and cultural exchange. In particular, the development of joint initiatives in renewable energy, digital technologies, and scientific research is expected to further reinforce the strategic nature of the Uzbekistan–France partnership.

From this perspective, the period between 2017 and 2025 may be described as a **stage of transformational development** in Uzbekistan–France relations. During these years, bilateral cooperation expanded not only in quantitative terms but also in terms of its quality, depth, and institutionalization, gradually approaching the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership. Consequently, cooperation between Uzbekistan and France has emerged as a successful, sustainable, and forward-looking model of bilateral partnership within the contemporary system of international relations.

During the period 2017–2025, economic relations between Uzbekistan and France advanced to a qualitatively new stage, acquiring both practical and strategic significance. Economic cooperation extended well beyond traditional trade relations to include major investment projects, infrastructure modernization, and the introduction of advanced technologies. In particular, French companies significantly expanded their participation in strategic sectors of Uzbekistan's economy. Energy, transport, water resource management, and the service sector emerged as priority areas of bilateral

[4] Borishpolets, K. P. (2025). Central Asia in World Politics. Moscow: MGIMO Publishing House. (In Russian).

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cooperation, reflecting the growing strategic importance of economic partnership between the two countries.

Investment projects implemented in the energy sector have primarily focused on improving energy efficiency, expanding the use of renewable energy sources, and introducing advanced technologies. In the field of transport infrastructure, significant initiatives have been undertaken to develop high-speed railway systems, modernize logistics centers, and enhance the quality and efficiency of transport services. These efforts have played a crucial role in strengthening Uzbekistan's integration into the global economy, increasing its investment attractiveness, and promoting sustainable economic development.[5]

The practical outcomes of the Uzbekistan–France investment partnership are particularly evident in the implementation of large-scale infrastructure and development projects. The active participation of French companies in the water management and public utility sectors has been of special significance. Projects aimed at modernizing water supply systems, addressing environmental challenges, and improving living standards demonstrate the socially oriented nature of bilateral economic cooperation.

Another important dimension of investment cooperation is the transfer of advanced technologies. French investments provide not only financial resources but also modern technologies, innovative solutions, managerial expertise, and international best practices. This process contributes to improving industrial productivity, enhancing product quality, and strengthening the competitiveness of Uzbekistan's national economy.[6]

Furthermore, the broad regional distribution of investment projects represents another notable feature of bilateral cooperation. Investments are being implemented not only in major urban centers but also across various regions of Uzbekistan, thereby supporting balanced regional development, infrastructure modernization, and job creation. These developments contribute to improving the effectiveness of economic reforms while reinforcing the country's long-term socio-economic stability.

Overall, contemporary economic projects constitute the practical foundation of the Uzbekistan–France strategic partnership. Beyond stimulating investment activity, they facilitate technological modernization, promote innovation-driven development, and deepen Uzbekistan's integration into the international economy.

Research Novelty The scientific novelty of this research can be summarized as follows: For the first time, the historical development of Uzbekistan–France relations has been periodized based on the requirements of the **Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership**, signed in **March 2025**, together with conceptual approaches developed by leading Western analytical centers.

The study identifies the transition from a traditional export-oriented model of bilateral economic relations to an **Innovation and Industrial Partnership Program** valued at **€6.5 billion**, while also revealing the growing role of **Green Energy Diplomacy** as a new framework for bilateral cooperation.

Based on the establishment of the **Uzbek–French University** and the agreements on **specialist mobility**, the research introduces a new institutional model of cooperation referred to as **"human capital and intellectual diplomacy."**

The study develops prospective scenarios for the evolution of the Uzbekistan–France strategic partnership through **2030** under conditions of global geopolitical uncertainty and proposes practical

[5] President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Official website.

[6] Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the French Republic. (2025, March 12). Paris, France.

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recommendations aimed at minimizing potential risks while strengthening long-term bilateral cooperation. An analysis of economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and France during the period 2017–2025 demonstrates a substantial increase in investment activity. The implementation of large-scale infrastructure and industrial projects confirms the growing depth and strategic character of bilateral economic relations. The assessment of contemporary investment projects indicates that their scale, sectoral orientation, and economic efficiency constitute the principal indicators of the expanding investment partnership between the two countries.[7]

The energy sector has emerged as one of the strategic priorities of Uzbekistan's economic development. French investments in this sector have contributed to improving energy efficiency, promoting renewable energy sources, and introducing advanced technological solutions. At the same time, investments directed toward transport and logistics infrastructure have accelerated regional and international economic integration while facilitating the expansion of trade and commercial exchanges.

The modernization of transport infrastructure and logistics networks has strengthened Uzbekistan's role within international transit corridors and global trade routes. Consequently, the development of modern transport systems has become an essential driver of sustainable economic growth and regional connectivity.

Energy-related projects have played an important role in supporting industrial production, enhancing energy security, and ensuring macroeconomic stability. Likewise, investments in transport infrastructure and water resource management have contributed to greater economic integration, increased trade volumes, and improved public welfare. In this context, the **multiplier effect** of investment deserves particular attention, as financial resources allocated to one strategic sector generate positive spillover effects across other sectors of the national economy.

The findings further indicate that French investment has made a significant contribution to employment generation, industrial expansion, export diversification, and technological modernization in Uzbekistan. Moreover, the geographically diversified implementation of investment projects has stimulated regional economic development rather than concentrating growth exclusively in major urban centers.

Nevertheless, further improvements in bilateral investment cooperation require continued modernization of logistics infrastructure, additional liberalization of the investment environment, and the reduction of administrative and bureaucratic barriers. Such measures would further strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of economic partnership.

Overall, the economic projects implemented between 2017 and 2025 have elevated Uzbekistan–France cooperation to a qualitatively new stage. They have created a solid foundation for the modernization of Uzbekistan's economy, enhanced its international competitiveness, and reinforced the long-term strategic partnership between the two countries.

[7] Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Official statistical data (2020–2025).

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