

Vladimir Norov: Cooperation in Central Asia is intensified with new power

Between The States of Central Asia new dynamics are being observed in the development of regional relationships, positively affecting the development of the entire transport and communication industry. However, the countries still have to agree on common approaches to the effective use of the region's potential. Vladimir Norov, Director of the Institute for Strategic and Interregional studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, explains what needs to be done in an interview with LTT.

—Central Asia has a unique, but at the same time vulnerable geographical position as the region is literally cut off from the sea. Are there preconditions today for a more efficient development of its transport and transit potential?

—The Central Asian states realize that one of the decisive conditions for their full integration into the structure of the world economy is the creation of a reliable transport and communication system that provides access to the most important international seaports.

For this purpose, action has been undertaken to overcome disproportions in traditional transport systems previously oriented to inland routes. The increase in the number of new roads and railways and the improvement of the quality of existing roads and railways, as well as aviation communications, aim to turn the region into an integral part of the continental and world transport system.

The exclusion from maritime transport contributes to the development gap of 20% when compared to maritime states

In this context, I would like to emphasize that the new political atmosphere in the region has already had a positive impact on boosting interaction in fields of the transport and communication. In a short period of time, a number of projects were realized.

Particularly noteworthy is the high-speed rail service between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, established in the beginning of this year. The air service between Tashkent and Dushanbe has been reintroduced and for the first time an air connection has been established between the capitals of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. This list can be continued.

Nobody will deny that regional cooperation in Central Asia has been intensified with new power, and the political determination of the heads of state will allow solving the most acute and pressing issues on a mutually beneficial basis. I can cite data that speaks for itself: since the early 2007 Uzbekistan's trade with the countries of the region has grown by an average of 20%, and with other states — by almost 70%.

—What losses do the Countries bear because of its inaccessibility to the sea? Are there any calculations? After all, long terms of delivery, ultimately increase the prizes of goods and reduce competitiveness.

Countries without access to sea transport corridors are highly dependent on transit traffic. This imposes an additional cost on the initial price of exported and imported goods. In order to compete in foreign markets, countries are forced to reduce their prices, impairing their own interest, to go for rather expensive import deals.

According to the estimates of the Institute of Central Asia and the Caucasus of the University of J. Hopkins, the exclusion from maritime transport seriously impedes the economic growth of the countries of our region. This contributes to the development gap of 20% compared to maritime states. At the same time, the purchasing power parity based GDP has decreased to 57%. The main losses are endured by Uzbekistan, which must cross the borders of two states in order to enter the world markets.