



Opinions


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## 25 Years of Korea-Central Asia Diplomatic Relations: The Direction of Future Cooperation



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This year marks the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and Central Asian countries. During the 25 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, Korea and Central Asian countries have maintained friendly relations on the basis of mutual trust in various spheres, including politics, economy, society and culture.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the Korean government has paid great attention to expanding friendly contacts and strengthening bilateral cooperation with Central Asian countries to actively promote the policy of resource diplomacy towards this region. In the second half of the 2000s, demonstrating its interest in multilateral cooperation, Korea became a member of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in July 2006. Within this context, the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum has been held every year since November 2007. Last year, large-scale events were held in Seoul within the framework of the Cooperation Forum to celebrate its tenth anniversary.

Recently the strategic value of Central Asia in the Eurasian continent is gradually increasing. The reason is that Central Asia is geopolitically a

key region in China's "One Belt and One Road" initiative and within the "Great Eurasian Partnership" of Russia. In this regard, Central Asia can become a key partner of Korea in cooperation with Eurasia. Therefore, it is necessary to search for new ways to strengthen mutual economic cooperation and realize the growth potential of this region.

First of all, Korea has to create the basis for cooperation with Central Asian countries to promote a mutually beneficial economic partnership. Here I would like to present some ways to promote future cooperation.

First, regular meetings between the heads of state and high-ranking officials are necessary. In other words, we need to regularize summits between heads of state, contacts between high-ranking officials and consultative bodies on diplomacy and economy. As many experts point out, the role of state institutions and the public sector is the most important factor to determine policy directions in Central Asian countries. This will serve as a useful base to strengthen cooperation between Korea and Central Asia. In this context, we should upgrade the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum, which has been held at the vice-ministerial level, to a summit-level meeting. Using this strategically, we can open the "3.0 era of cooperation between Korea and Central Asia" by strengthening the responsibilities and performances of economic cooperation. In addition, a Korea-Central Asia economic cooperation committee should be run efficiently under the Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum to coordinate Korea's economic cooperation with Central Asian countries. In principle, the committee should be operated on a regular basis as a track 1.5 mechanism in which all public organizations and representatives of private enterprises can participate.

Secondly, it is important to maintain active cooperation and contacts in the private sector. Mutual understanding and confidence building are the basis for strengthening partnership between Korea and Central Asia. Therefore, measures to develop partnerships should be developed not only at the government level, but also in the private sector in the near future. First of all, we need to promote mutual cooperation in the spheres of culture, art, education, tourism and sports. This is because the starting point for building mutual trust is to reach common understanding in the areas of culture and art.

Thirdly, it is necessary to prepare new measures to strengthen cooperation in the field of industry. Amidst the uncertainty in the global economic environment, Central Asian countries are devoting all their energies to prepare plans for sustainable economic growth. Their aim is to reform their economic structure centered on exports of resources and pursue industrial

diversification. It is no exaggeration to note that the success of such a policy depends not only on maintaining the political course of the government and stable financial support, but also on the training of specialized personnel in the industrial sphere. Therefore, it is time to take cooperative measures for the training of specialized personnel in industry, which will become the driving force in the development of economic cooperation between Korea and Central Asia. Such measures would include, for example, the development of training programs for specialized technical personnel, support for the creation of an educational institution for specialized technologies or the inclusion of industrial trainees among technical specialists.

Fourthly, we need to intensify the channels for mutual cooperation between regional governments of Korea and Central Asia aimed at the development of small and medium-sized businesses and cooperation in the field of agriculture. To this end, the regional governments need to create an official web site that will facilitate contact between small and medium-sized enterprises, which generally lack economic information, professional expertise and business channels. We should recognize the opportunities offered in the field of agriculture for contacts and economic cooperation between regional governments.

Finally, the development of partnerships between the Republic of Korea and Central Asian countries will significantly contribute to expanding the horizons of the new Eurasian diplomacy of the Korean government in the new era of Eurasia. [KIEP](#)