

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH JAPAN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA

Author

Azamjon Yuldashev

Final-year Student, Jizzakh State Pedagogical University.

Scientific Supervisor

Axror Eshmuhamatov

Professor at Jizzakh State Pedagogical University, PhD in History

Abstract: This article provides a comparative analysis of the strategic approaches of Japan and the European Union in the context of the geopolitical processes taking place in the Central Asian region today. The study examines the similarities and differences between Japan's infrastructure projects within the framework of the "Central Asia plus Japan" (CA+JAD) dialogue and the institutional reforms of the European Union under the "Global Gateway" initiative. In particular, the results of the high-level summit held in 2025 and the role of the "Middle Corridor" logistics project in regional stability are highlighted. At the end of the article, scientific conclusions are put forward on the importance of deepening relations with these two partners in maintaining a multi-vector balance in foreign policy for countries such as Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Central Asia, Japan, European Union, CA + JAD, Global Gateway, Strategic Partnership.

Introduction

Today, Central Asia is becoming the center of global geopolitical changes. Located in the heart of the Eurasian continent, this region meets the strategic interests of major global powers. Countries in the region, such as Uzbekistan, are adopting a multi-vector approach in their foreign policy and trying to maintain a balance with various international partners.

This article will provide a comparative analysis of the strategies of two important partners of Central Asia, Japan and the European Union, in the region. Japan's technological and infrastructural approach within the framework of the **Central Asia + Japan dialogue**, as well as the similarities and differences between the democratic reforms and **Global Gateway** initiatives based on the European Union's strategy adopted in 2019, are examined.

In recent years, the diplomatic activity of major countries in the Central Asian region has increased significantly. The role of Japan and the European Union in this process is particularly noteworthy, as they demonstrate strategic models based on long-term and sustainable development in cooperation with the region. While Japan, relying on its many years of diplomatic experience and technological capabilities, is promoting the model of "true commitment", the European Union is a key support for the region's integration into global standards and institutional development.

The first Summit of the Central Asia plus Japan Dialogue, held in December 2025, and the high-level strategic dialogue established with the European Union can be cited as a new stage in this cooperation. The **CA+JAD** format introduced by Japan and the European

Union's Global Gateway initiative are not just economic projects, but also concrete steps towards deepening strategic stability in the region. These processes will allow countries like Uzbekistan to ensure balanced and beneficial cooperation in foreign policy.

Historical Background and International Experience Section:

To understand Japan's strategy in Central Asia, it is worth looking at its historical roots. Japanese researcher Saito Ryota noted that Japan became a pioneer in regional diplomacy by launching the Central Asia plus Japan dialogue in 2004. It is noteworthy that later this format (C5+1) was also adopted as a model by major powers such as South Korea, the United States, and the European Union.

However, global economic changes and disruptions in supply chains in recent years have required enriching the foundation of this cooperation with new content. In the context of the region's geographical opportunities and the growing need for sustainable transport corridors, the established relations with Japan and the European Union have risen to a new strategic level. If earlier cooperation was limited mainly to humanitarian assistance, now it covers priority areas such as the development of the Middle Corridor project, high-tech investments, and support for regional economic independence. In this process, the experience of Japan and Europe has become an important guarantee of economic stability for the countries of the region.

In such a competitive environment, Japan's CA+JAD format is unique. As Professor Saito Ryota said, Japan, unlike other major powers, is not just fighting for resources. Perhaps, through the 3 trillion yen investment plan announced at the 2025 summit, it is promoting long-term directions such as **green energy**, **digital transformation**, and **human capital development**. This model will bring not only economic benefits to Uzbekistan, but also allow it to conduct an independent and balanced foreign policy in the international arena.

New economic parameters of regional cooperation.

Today, the countries of Central Asia are experiencing a new stage of integration into the world economy. The geographical location of the region and its transport and logistics potential are gaining strategic importance in diversifying international trade routes. In particular, the development of the Middle Corridor project will allow the countries of the region to expand their export routes and ensure sustainable economic growth. In such circumstances, deepening ties with long-term partners such as Japan and the European Union is a key factor in maintaining Uzbekistan's external economic balance.

European Union: Standards and Institutional Cooperation

The European Union (EU) is one of Uzbekistan's most reliable strategic partners, and its activities in the region are based on sustainable development and the rule of law. The Global Gateway initiative promoted by the EU is aimed at modernizing the region's infrastructure and ensuring energy independence. In particular, Uzbekistan's GSP+ status was an important turning point in increasing its industrial potential. The EU's strategy in Central Asia is reflected in the following areas:

- **Digital connectivity:** Europe is building a "Digital Silk Road" by improving satellite communications and internet infrastructure in the region.
- **Green energy:** The emphasis is on the development of renewable energy sources based on the "Green Deal" standards.
- **Human Capital and Education:** Strengthening the higher education

system through programs such as Erasmus+. This will accelerate socio-economic transformation as Europe's soft power in the region.

Japan: "CA+JAD" and new investment horizons

In such a fiercely competitive environment, Japan's position is unique. Through the CA+JAD format, Japan is not just looking for raw materials, but for sustainable development. At the 2025 summit, Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae announced a goal of investing 3 trillion yen (about \$20 billion) in the region over the next five years. Japan is focusing on three areas - Green Energy, Digital Transformation, and Human Capital Development. This is fundamentally different from the US's interest in minerals or China's only logistics projects. Japan's new strategy in the region - CA+JAD (Central Asia + Japan Action for Development) is based on three priority areas:

- **Modernization of industry:** Japan will not just build factories, but will introduce the Kaizen (continuous improvement) philosophy into production. Thanks to this, the quality of Uzbek products will adapt to the world market.

- **Climate Stability and Resilience:** Japan has the world's most advanced experience in "disaster resilience. Japan is introducing its water-saving technologies (drip irrigation, etc.) to solve the problems of water scarcity and desertification in our region.

- **Human Resource Development:** The Japanese government aims to train thousands of young people from Central Asia in its prestigious universities (through MEXT grants) and IT companies in the coming years. For Japan, this means solving the labor problem, and for us, having world-class personnel.

Japan and the European Union: Two different directions, one goal "When comparing the strategies of Japan and the European Union in the region, we can see that they do not contradict each other, but rather complement each other. While Japan relies more on practical-technical and infrastructural assistance (through the CA+JAD format), the European Union exchanges experience on systemic reforms and regulatory standards. For Uzbekistan, maintaining a balance between these two models is the most important condition for the successful implementation of the principle of multi-vector in foreign policy.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that the established diplomatic relations with Japan and the European Union are a mutually beneficial and strategic prospect for the countries of Central Asia. Japan's practical-technical approach and the institutional standards of the European Union complement each other and accelerate the modernization processes of Uzbekistan.

Cooperation in these two directions is crucial not only for improving economic indicators, but also for ensuring stability and transition to a green economy in the region plays a role. In the future, further deepening the established partnership formats with Japan and Europe will serve as an important guarantee of increasing Uzbekistan's influence in the international arena and ensuring the stability of its multi-vector foreign policy.

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