

Opportunities and challenges discussed over the second Italy-Central Asia Conference.

Edoardo Bonatti

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The pandemic does not stop Italy diplomatic efforts to build a stronger network of economic partners. On 8 December, Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio attended the second Italy-Central Asia Conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

The conference saw the participation of the Foreign Ministers of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan while the Turkmenistan Minister, unable to reach Uzbekistan's capital, sent a video message. The Conference focused on breaking down current challenges and exploring future opportunities for Italy and the other countries, emphasizing a comprehensive regional approach and, at the same time, respecting the specificities of each one.

Central Asia represents an exceptionally interesting market for Italy and vice versa. The five countries still have a lot of untapped potentials as they are relatively out of the usual trade routes and just opening up to foreign investments. Italian trade figures for the area as a whole, amount to more than one billion euros, with Kazakhstan representing the lion's share of it. All of their economies share a significant slant towards commodities, but they are looking for international partners to diversify their activities and thus offer major margins of improvement for Italian investments. Their strategic position, long-period growth forecast and integration in the Eurasian Economic Union are also a point of interest.

On the Italian side, participants included the President of the National Institute of Public Health, Silvio Brusaferrò; the President of ICE-Agenzia, Carlo Maria Ferro; the CEO of SIMEST, Mauro Alfonso, as well as senior officials from SACE, Confindustria and The European House Ambrosetti, who gave a presentation on "Italy is back on track: recovery, resilience and attractiveness".

The segment on economic cooperation was co-moderated by Uzbek Deputy Minister for Investment and Foreign Trade, Obidov, and Italian Deputy Minister Di Stefano. Over its course, the speakers stressed the significance of economic cooperation between each other in the present and, even more so, in the following years as everyone will have to deal with the pandemic's fallout. For this reason, training and research in the field of public health and healthcare were considered one of the main topics to discuss.

Considering that the Conference was held on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with each country, Minister Di Maio met separately with his counterparts to discuss the political aspects of these bilateral relations.

Another integral part of the conference was the round table, opened by Deputy Minister Manlio Di Stefano, dedicated to scientific and academic cooperation between Italy and Central Asia. Academics hailing from the most prestigious universities attended the event organised by the

Marco Polo Research Centre - Centre for Global Europe-Asia Connections - of Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the International Institute Center for Global Europe-Asia Connections in Tashkent. The discussion focused on the issues of regional governance models, cooperation in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage, inclusive and sustainable development, and prospects for further development of academic cooperation.

Source: Ministero degli esteri