



GERMANY AND UZBEKISTAN: ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND EARLY COOPERATION (1991–1995)

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INTRODUCTION

The period from 1991 to 1995 marks the foundational phase of German-Uzbek relations, during which the two states rapidly established diplomatic ties and built the legal and institutional framework that would support their partnership for decades to come. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, both Germany and Uzbekistan found themselves navigating entirely new geopolitical realities.

For Germany, freshly reunified in October 1990, the collapse of the Eastern bloc presented both opportunities and challenges in reshaping its foreign policy toward the newly independent states of Central Asia. For Uzbekistan, emerging as a sovereign state for the first time in its modern history, establishing relations with major Western powers like Germany was an immediate priority.

The remarkable speed with which these two nations—one a newly reunified European powerhouse, the other a fledgling Central Asian republic—built the foundations of their bilateral relationship reflects not only pragmatic geopolitical calculations but also deeper historical connections, including the presence of a German diaspora in Uzbekistan dating back to the Tsarist and Soviet eras.

This thesis examines the key milestones of this formative period, including diplomatic recognition, high-level visits, cultural agreements, military-technical cooperation, and the unique war graves agreement that demonstrated mutual respect for historical memory.

Diplomatic recognition and the establishment of formal relations

Germany was among the first Western nations to recognize Uzbekistan's independence, formally acknowledging the new republic on December 31, 1991—just over two weeks after Uzbekistan declared its sovereignty on December 16, 1991²⁰. This swift recognition signaled Berlin's intention to establish a constructive relationship with the newly independent states of Central Asia. According to Uzbek scholar Doston Ziyodullayev, Germany's recognition was part of a broader strategy to maintain influence in a region of growing geostrategic importance following the Soviet collapse. Official diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Uzbekistan were formally established on March 6, 1992. This date is significant not merely as a procedural milestone

²⁰ Ziyodullayev, D. T. (2023). History of diplomatic relations between Germany and Uzbekistan (1991-2021). Zenodo, 6(4), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7866919>





but as the beginning of what would become one of Uzbekistan's most enduring Western partnerships. Within just over two months of recognition, the two countries had exchanged diplomatic missions and begun negotiating the foundational agreements that would structure their bilateral relationship.

Early high-level visits and political dialogue

The period between 1993 and 1995 witnessed an intensive exchange of high-level visits that laid the political groundwork for future cooperation. The first Uzbek President, Islam Karimov, made his initial visit to Germany in 1993, followed by a second visit in 1995 . These visits were not mere ceremonial gestures; they resulted in concrete agreements and signaled Uzbekistan's strategic orientation toward engaging with Western Europe. On April 28, 1993, in Bonn, the governments of Uzbekistan and Germany signed the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation, which was subsequently ratified by the Supreme Council of Uzbekistan on September 3, 1993 ²¹. This agreement established the legal framework for exchanges in education, science, the arts, and sports, and it remains a cornerstone of bilateral cultural relations to this day. The agreement specifically provided for the establishment of cultural institutions, exchange of specialists, language instruction support, and cooperation between universities and research institutions .

In 1995, the political dialogue reached its highest level yet when German President Roman Herzog paid an official visit to Uzbekistan -the first visit by a German head of state to the independent republic . This visit marked the culmination of the early cooperation period and demonstrated Germany's commitment to developing a substantive relationship with Uzbekistan. During this visit, several important documents were signed, including the Joint Declaration on Relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated April 11, 1995, which outlined the principles and priorities for future bilateral cooperation .

The War Graves Agreement: a unique humanitarian accord

One of the most distinctive and significant agreements signed during this period was the "Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on German War Graves in the Republic of Uzbekistan," signed in Tashkent on April 11, 1995 ²². This agreement represented a remarkable act of historical reconciliation, addressing the fate of German soldiers and civilians who died on Uzbek territory during the two world wars and the subsequent period of deportation.

²¹ Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan concerning cultural cooperation, April 28, 1993, Bonn, Germany. United Nations Treaty Collection, Registration No. 59014. <https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=080000028025f1c8>

²² Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on German war graves in the Republic of Uzbekistan, April 11, 1995, Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge. <https://kriegsgraeberstaetten.volksbund.de/en/military-cemetery/kriegsgraeberabkommen/Uzbekistan>





The agreement defined "German war dead" to include members of the German armed forces, persons equated with them under German law, and other persons of German nationality who died in connection with the events of the 1914/1918 war or the 1939/1945 war or after their deportation . Many of these individuals were Volga Germans who had been forcibly relocated to Central Asia during World War II under Stalin's decrees, and who died in harsh conditions. The Uzbek government committed to ensuring the protection of German war graves and "the permanent right of rest for German war dead" on its territory, while the German government was authorized to restore and maintain these graves at its own expense .

Under the terms of the agreement, Uzbekistan ceded the areas serving as German war cemeteries as "permanent resting places for German war dead free of charge and for an unlimited period of time" . The agreement also designated the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (German War Graves Commission) as the implementing organization for the technical aspects of grave maintenance and restoration . The signing of this agreement in 1995-just four years after Uzbekistan's independence-demonstrated a remarkable willingness on the part of the Uzbek government to acknowledge and honor the memory of those who had suffered on its soil, while for Germany, it represented an important act of fulfilling its ongoing responsibility for war grave maintenance worldwide.

Military-technical cooperation and training assistance

On June 10, 1995, another landmark agreement was signed in Tashkent: the "Arrangement between the Federal Ministry of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the training of members of the armed forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the Bundeswehr facilities as part of military training assistance" . This agreement established a framework for Uzbekistan's military personnel to receive training at German Bundeswehr facilities, covering various aspects of military education and professional development. The agreement entered into force immediately upon signature on October 6, 1995, reflecting both parties' desire to implement it without delay .

The training arrangement was comprehensive in scope. Under Article 1, the German Federal Ministry of Defence agreed to train members of the Uzbek armed forces in Bundeswehr facilities, with the specific details of each training program to be separately agreed upon between the parties . Article 2 provided that training personnel could receive barracks accommodation, meals, and appropriate training materials free of charge. The agreement also addressed medical care, stipulating that in case of illness or injury, Uzbek trainees would receive free outpatient and inpatient treatment in Bundeswehr medical facilities . However, dental treatment was limited to urgent general, conservative, and surgical measures. Notably, Article 3 required that Uzbek personnel be proficient enough in





German to participate in the planned training, underscoring the importance of language skills for effective military cooperation . Article 5 established security clearance requirements, with Uzbekistan obligated to vet all personnel sent for training and provide security certificates at least one month before training commenced .

This military training agreement proved highly significant for the long-term relationship. According to official Uzbek Ministry of Defence sources, from 1995 to the present day, more than 200 military personnel from the Uzbek Ministry of Defence have undergone training and professional development at Bundeswehr higher military educational institutions in various specializations . This ongoing exchange has built lasting professional networks and mutual understanding between the two countries' armed forces. It also laid the groundwork for later, more strategic forms of military cooperation, including Uzbekistan's provision of the Termez airbase for German and coalition forces during the Afghanistan mission after 2001.

Early Economic and Cultural Cooperation

While 1995 was a particularly productive year for formal agreements, the foundations for broader cooperation were being laid throughout the 1991-1995 period. Germany began providing technical and financial assistance to Uzbekistan soon after independence, with development cooperation focused on supporting Uzbekistan's economic transition. However, as noted by Ziyodullayev, despite these early initiatives, large-scale German investment developed cautiously due to perceived risks in the Uzbek market, with German companies approaching the Central Asian republic with measured enthusiasm .

Culturally, the 1993 agreement provided a framework for expanding German language instruction and academic exchange in Uzbekistan. By 1995, the Goethe-Institut and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) had begun establishing a presence in Uzbekistan, while Uzbek cultural events were being organized in Germany . These early cultural exchanges, though modest in scale, created the human connections and institutional relationships that would expand dramatically in subsequent decades.

Analysis: Why was this period so productive?

Several factors explain the remarkable density of agreements and exchanges during 1991-1995. First, there was mutual strategic interest. For Germany, newly reunified and seeking to define its post-Cold War foreign policy, establishing relations with Central Asian states offered opportunities for economic access, influence in a strategically located region, and partnership on issues like migration and security . For Uzbekistan, engaging with Germany-Europe's largest economy and a leading voice in the European Union-provided a counterbalance to Russian influence and opened doors to Western technology, investment, and political support.





Second, historical memory played a role. The presence of a significant German diaspora in Uzbekistan, dating back to the late Tsarist period and reinforced by wartime deportations, meant that German language and culture were not entirely foreign to Uzbekistan. This made cultural cooperation more natural and created constituencies in both countries interested in maintaining ties.

Third, the personal diplomacy of leaders mattered. President Islam Karimov's visits to Germany in 1993 and 1995, and President Roman Herzog's reciprocal visit in 1995, signaled that both governments viewed the relationship as a priority. The fact that four bilateral agreements were signed in 1995 alone-the Joint Declaration, the War Graves Agreement, the Military Training Arrangement, and a second cultural agreement-indicates that 1995 was a particularly intense and productive year in the relationship's development.

Conclusion

The period 1991-1995 witnessed the rapid and successful establishment of German-Uzbek diplomatic relations, moving from mutual recognition in late 1991 and early 1992 to a dense network of agreements covering cultural exchange, military training, and historical commemoration by 1995. The signing of the Cultural Cooperation Agreement in 1993 (ratified by Uzbekistan in September of that year), the Joint Declaration and War Graves Agreement in April 1995, and the Military Training Arrangement in June/October 1995 created a robust legal and institutional foundation for the bilateral relationship. While economic cooperation remained limited in scale during these early years, with German investment proceeding cautiously, the political and cultural frameworks established during this period proved durable. The military training arrangement, in particular, has produced over 200 trained Uzbek military personnel as of 2021, demonstrating the long-term impact of early cooperation. The War Graves Agreement stands as a unique testament to the ability of two former adversaries to address difficult historical legacies with dignity and mutual respect. In sum, the 1991-1995 period was not merely a prologue to later cooperation but a critically productive phase in which the essential architecture of German-Uzbek relations was constructed-architecture that would support the expansion of trade, development assistance, and strategic partnership in the decades to come.

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