

NEW HORIZONS FOR BRITISH-UZBEK RELATIONS

By the Chairman of the British-Uzbekistan

All-Party Parliamentary Group, **Lord Waverley**

CENTRAL ASIA'S ECONOMIC, civil and political well-being as an emergent region of strategic significance is an imperative. Uzbekistan plays a leadership role both internally within the region but also in the near-region, which includes notably its border with Afghanistan. As we in the West increasingly come to appreciate the ascendancy of the East, Uzbekistan plays a pivotal role as a land-bridge – a modern-day Silk Road and critical intermediary between powerful regions.

I am pleased that recent endeavours by both the UK and Uzbekistan have recognised and prioritised the need for renewed impetus to deepen our bilateral relationship. My recent visit as Chairman of the first British-Uzbekistan All-Party Parliamentary Group and longer-term engagement with Uzbekistan amply confirms this. While in the trade and economic sphere many opportunities have long been identified and are being successfully implemented, more needs to be done to maximise this essential relationship.

One missing link to the bilateral relationship has been the interaction of parliamentary discourse; this is now being remedied through better understanding of each other's perspectives and the ability to engage decision-making processes on the basis of first-hand knowledge. The subsequent launch of a formal high-level inter-parliamentary initiative

on Central Asia – involving each country of the region individually – is also strengthening the framework for dialogue and action.

Recent achievements and developments in Uzbekistan bode well: the abolition of the death penalty and the introduction of *habeas corpus* in 2008, a decade of positive legal reforms, the improved multi-party parliamentary elections of 2009 and a well-rounded ombudsman service, are all examples of the nation's achievements since independence.

I look forward to building on the bilateral dynamics through the parliamentary process, and expect a new era to result from the forthcoming British delegation to Uzbekistan this autumn, where guiding principles of dialogue will be discussed on the basis of commitment to Political, Economic and Social understanding; this recognising the desire on both sides to strengthen cooperation.



Lord Waverley (left) with HE Mr Ilgizar Sobirov, Chairman of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan