Europe Is Strengthening Its Position in Central Asia Not Through Statements but Through Infrastructure – Alona Lebedieva

KYIV, UKRAINE, June 25, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The opening of the European Investment Bank's regional office in Tashkent clearly shows how the EU's approach to Central Asia is changing. Europe is increasingly moving beyond political statements about partnership and shifting toward a real institutional presence in the region.


Alona Lebedieva

Alona Lebedieva, owner of Aurum Group, a diversified Ukrainian industrial and investment group of companies, notes that this is no longer the stage of the EU getting acquainted with Central Asia, but rather a transition to a more practical presence – through financial institutions, infrastructure projects and long-term work in the region.

For Uzbekistan, this is an important signal. Tashkent is becoming not only a platform for investment forums and reform presentations, but also a place where European financial institutions want to work closer to projects, governments, businesses and regional partners. This is especially important against the backdrop of plans to create the Tashkent International Financial Center, which is expected to operate under the logic of a separate financial regime, with an emphasis on the free movement of capital, green finance, fintech and digital assets.

The European Investment Bank is already speaking not simply about separate initiatives, but about a pipeline of projects in Central Asia approaching €3 billion. These include transport, climate projects, energy, water infrastructure, digital connectivity and critical materials. For Uzbekistan specifically, potential operations of up to €1 billion are being considered in areas directly linked to the country's 2030 strategy and the priorities of Global Gateway.

According to Alona Lebedieva, it is important that Europe is entering the region not only with a political agenda, but with instruments that can influence the real economy: transport corridors, energy, water, digital infrastructure and critical materials.

For Central Asia, such a presence of the EU is important for several reasons, Lebedieva believes. First, the region needs long-term capital for infrastructure. Not only grants for short-term projects, but financing that makes it possible to build roads, railways, energy facilities, water systems, digital networks and logistics hubs. These are precisely the kinds of projects that do not produce a quick political effect, but change the economy for decades.

Second, the EIB's participation raises the requirements for project quality. European financial institutions look not only at political feasibility, but also at the economics of the project, transparency, environmental standards, risk management and the ability to repay invested funds. For the region, this can serve as a useful filter. In fact, this is not only about money, but about a different standard for preparing infrastructure solutions.

Third, this strengthens Uzbekistan's role. In recent years, the country has been actively working on the image of an open economy: investment forums, privatization, the UzNIF IPO, simplification of public services and discussions about a financial center in Tashkent. The EIB office fits well into this trajectory. It shows that not only private investors are coming to Uzbekistan, but also major European institutions, which usually enter markets where they see not a one-time opportunity, but a long-term framework for cooperation.

At the same time, this is also beneficial for Kazakhstan. A significant part of the regional infrastructure logic is connected with the Trans-Caspian route, transport corridors, ports, railways and links between Central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe. If the EIB strengthens its work in the region, this may add practical substance to Europe's plans for the Middle Corridor. In other words, this is not only about Uzbekistan, but about a broader architecture of connections between Europe and Asia, bypassing overloaded or politically risky routes.

The EIB's emphasis on advisory support is also particularly indicative. The bank is considering not only financing, but also assistance in preparing complex projects for the market. One of the first examples is cooperation with Uzsuvtaminot on the project for wastewater treatment facilities in Tashkent with a capacity of 300,000 cubic meters per day. This is an important detail because it shows that the EU is entering not only the "major corridors", but also basic urban infrastructure, without which economic growth quickly runs into limitations.

Alona Lebedieva also considers it important that such a presence of the EU may encourage the countries of the region to coordinate more closely with one another. Central Asia's infrastructure cannot develop in isolation: transport routes, energy, water, ports and digital networks must function as a connected system, not as a set of separate national projects.

Today, Central Asia has a chance to move beyond the role of a territory located between major centers of influence. But for this, it needs infrastructure that works, not only routes on a map. It needs financial institutions capable of supporting complex projects for years ahead. And it needs governments capable not only of announcing reforms, but of bringing infrastructure initiatives to the stage of implementation.

In this sense, the EU is entering the region with an offer that is not the fastest, but is long-term: financing, standards, institutional presence, and support for transport, energy, water and digital projects. This is less loud than political summits, but very often it is precisely such steps that change economic geography. Because ultimately, influence in the region will be determined not by the number of statements, but by who helps build roads, energy systems, water infrastructure, digital networks and industrial chains.

Alona Lebedieva emphasizes that the main question for Central Asia now is whether the countries of the region will be able to turn European interest into real projects. The EIB office in Tashkent is not the final point, but an instrument. It can help the region attract more quality capital, but by itself it will not replace project preparation, transparent rules, coordination between countries and the ability to bring infrastructure initiatives to implementation.

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