



JON LARSEN: “UZBEK-AMERICAN PARTNERSHIP ON EDUCATION IS GETTING BETTER AND BETTER”

This year is so special for Uzbekistan. It is celebrating the 25th anniversary of National Independence and the jubilee of bilateral relations with many countries. In Recognizing the sovereignty of Uzbekistan, many developed states started to collaborate with Uzbekistan from the early times of its independent life. One of those countries was the United States of America, which remains a strategic partner for the Uzbek nation in all spheres of the economy. Today, the whole country — educational establishments, research centers, media and others — can take a moment to look back and analyze what we, Uzbekistanis, have achieved so far, during this quarter century in different fields. We would like to enlighten you about how Uzbekistan, for past 25 years, has been cooperating with the United States on education, reforming foreign languages teaching and learning, implementing information and communication technologies to educational processes. Our talk with Jon Larsen, Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, helped us resume the jointly undertaken projects and have an idea about perspectives of Uzbek-American partnership on education.

— **Mr. Larsen, thank you very much for agreeing and sharing your precious time to talk to us. It is an honor for me to congratulate you on the 25th anniversary of bilateral relations between the US and Uzbekistan on behalf of Foreign Languages in Uzbekistan e-journal team. Let us start our talk exactly about how bilateral cooperation on education sphere is developing.**

— I would say the Uzbek-American partnership on education is getting better and better. If we just look at the last three years that I have been here, we see that the number of English language fellows coming to Uzbekistan increased. Last year we had four fellows placed in higher educational institutions in Urgench, Namangan, Samarkand and Tashkent. We were able to bring Dee Broughton as an

English Language Specialist for a year and then bring her back for a follow-on program. There are wide range of areas we brought several Fulbright specialists. One good example is Mikael Gartner, who is a specialist on earthquakes and emergency preparedness. Last year two Fulbright scholars — Stephen Seegmiller and Zair Ibragimov. We are constantly increasing the areas that we can cooperate. We have collaborated on the 80,000 words Uzbek-English dictionary. When we talk about the results of our bilateral cooperation, we should mention the B2 Ready English language instruction book, developed by Uzbek material designers' team trained by Dee Broughton, manuals for teaching and retraining English language teachers to which Byrne Brewerton, English language fellow (2014-2015 academic year) contributed with his expertise. Additionally, through the Fulbright program, we send at least one specialist from Uzbekistan to the United States for one-year program, because we understand that there is a great need for further development of many subfields in the education sphere. Moving away from the Soviet legacy, that was one-way instruction to entirely new world standards, learning and taking the best of the educational approaches of America, Europe and others, Uzbekistan can enrich and develop its own way of personnel training. These are all areas of education that we really moved forward and we hope for doing more.

— **Further developing the foreign language teaching and learning is one of the active directions of our cooperation.**

Especially, the U.S. embassy supported many projects, symposia, fora and workshops that were directed to contributing to the

teacher training and professional development in this direction. Can you tell us more about that?

— If we only look at what Dee Broughton did, we can see that she partnered with 35 teachers of English. On writing this book – B2 Ready, she also had workshops all over the country. She held one or two-week sessions on retraining teachers. She was able to reach so many people. Over 1,000 teachers of English



participated in our programs during the last year. I think this is a very significant number. With what Kristina Smart and Rebecca Martin did, everything we are doing on cooperation on reforming the foreign languages teaching is set up for that direction.

— **The assistance of the U.S. Embassy and its programs on curricula and textbook development is very valuable. How do the specialists placed in Uzbek higher educational institutions and research centers approach material design?**

— Well, Dee is the best example. She is a curriculum and textbook development specialist. I think this is a very important distinction to make that she was not trying to write the books for the teachers. Her sole focus was giving them the skills necessary to write their own books. That was what the whole project was about. That is a very specific difference. Most English language fellows are not curriculum development specialists. She was definitely in a special situation. When I first got here, we had another English language specialist who worked here for three weeks in the same area. Because there is an old proverb: “If I give you a fish, I feed you for a day, if I teach you how to fish, you can feed yourself forever”. What we are trying to do is to do the more about “teaching how to fish.” Our latest project was on Research and Technical Writing. We are looking at various needs of the institutions to continue this process.

— **The United States of America is one of the countries that has a very innovative education system. Uzbekistan has been working on making education innovative, implementing ICT into educational processes. One of the good examples of undertaken initiatives is the National Research Center for Innovations in Teaching Foreign Languages. What has been done so far within the framework of Uzbek-American cooperation in this direction?**

— Particularly, in the English language field, we have the e-teacher program. Teachers can sign up to do a course from Oregon University and other universities in the near future. The Department of State and the Regional English Language Office have worked on developing courses on MOOC – Massive Open Online Courses. We sent a group of education administrators to America to look at specifically electronic classrooms, how the United States teaches students with using smart boards, with using computers and online courses. They are couple of things that we have done recently.

— **In some ways, language learning, according to specialists, is becoming a communication tool for business and world of work. However, initially languages are the means of cultural exchange. What can you tell us about the role of languages in intercultural communication?**

— In fact, all of us, diplomats, should learn the language of the country where we are going to serve. It indicates how much emphasis we put on that. For many years, the United States did not look at learning foreign languages. In 2005, President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice rolled out this program to fund universities in America to start teaching foreign languages. Because they recognized the fact that, although we are very blessed to speak English natively, because it seems to be the most popular foreign language, there is still benefit to learning other languages. In the US, many specialists learn foreign languages, including Uzbek in some universities. Learning languages is about understanding each other. Specialists say that if you can understand the humor, you can understand the culture and you truly speak the language.

— **What are the plans of the US embassy on continuing and developing partnership with Uzbekistan?**

— We are happy to continue our joint projects and all what we are working on together for Uzbek academia and society. Particularly, in terms of foreign languages teaching, we are going to develop our relations with the Uzbekistan State World Languages University and the National Research Center for Innovations under this university. We are working on finding a specialist, researcher and English language teacher who will be placed in the innovation center to help promote its activity, giving technical expertise. In addition, we hope to develop cooperation between American and Uzbekistan universities in coming years.

— **What are your impressions about Uzbekistan cities you visited and our cultural features?**

— Uzbekistan is made up from a variety of cultures. If we look back at history, you had three khanates here. Each of those had an impact on the culture. I have been to many cities. I have been to all regions and Karakalpakstan. I have visited, probably, very out-of-the-way places. Maybe places you have not been to. Have you been to Uchkuduk?

— **No, I have not.**

— I have been to Shakhrisabz, Boysun, every capital of the regions, even the city of Muynak. And the culture is very rich. There is a lot of history here. You go to Shakhrisabz and you see the palace of Tamerlane, burial place of his son Jakhongir. You go to Samarkand, there are so many places there: Ulugbek Observatory, Tamerlane Mausoleum, etc. All these things are fit into the Uzbek culture. My impressions about Uzbek cities are very good.

— **Thank you very much for an interesting talk. The last question, Mr. Larsen. What could we miss to ask from you? What would you like to tell our followers?**

— I would like to say that I really enjoyed my time here in Uzbekistan. It is coming to an end. I am only going to be here for nine more months. Something that may be of interest is when I leave Uzbekistan, the place that I lived long since I graduated university 32 years ago is Tashkent. I have lived in Tashkent longer than I have anywhere else in the last thirty two years. So, I obviously liked it a lot!

Recorded by Saidaziz Azamov.