

The Transformative Role of Entrepreneurship and Economic Relations in Public Diplomacy: Analysis of Historical Experience and Contemporary Trends

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Abstract

This article analyzes the interconnection between entrepreneurship and economic relations within the framework of public diplomacy, focusing on historical experiences and modern trends. Drawing on historical case studies and contemporary data, the author demonstrates the significant role of merchants and entrepreneurs in cultural, social, and political interactions across nations. Entrepreneurs are evaluated as key actors in public diplomacy. The study also highlights recent developments in paradiplomacy and sister city partnerships. Using Uzbekistan as a case study, the impact of national entrepreneurship and handicrafts on international cooperation and diplomacy is explored.

Keywords: Public diplomacy, entrepreneurship, economic relations, paradiplomacy, sister cities, trade, cultural diplomacy, investment.

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1. Introduction

In the context of accelerating globalization, interstate relations are no longer conducted exclusively through formal diplomatic channels. An increasingly significant role is being played by non-state actors, including non-governmental organizations, civil society institutions, cultural and educational organizations, business communities, and individual entrepreneurs. Their involvement in cross-border interaction has contributed to the expansion of various forms of public and people-to-people diplomacy, which have become important components of contemporary international relations.

Public diplomacy and people-to-people diplomacy may be understood as complementary mechanisms aimed at strengthening mutual trust, fostering intercultural understanding, and creating sustainable networks of cooperation beyond conventional state-to-state diplomacy. Although such interactions are predominantly non-governmental in nature, they often have a systematic character and may exert a considerable influence on bilateral and multilateral relations. Within this framework, entrepreneurship, trade, investment, and other forms of economic interaction serve not merely commercial purposes but also contribute to the formation

of broader economic, social, and cultural foundations for international cooperation.

The growing importance of economic actors in international affairs has also led to the wider use of such concepts as economic diplomacy, business diplomacy, and paradiplomacy. Economic diplomacy generally refers to the use of diplomatic instruments for advancing trade, investment, and broader national economic interests, while business diplomacy highlights the role of private-sector actors in managing relations with foreign governments, societies, and international stakeholders. Paradiplomacy, in turn, reflects the increasing international engagement of subnational entities, including regions, municipalities, and cities. These interconnected processes demonstrate that contemporary diplomacy is becoming increasingly multidimensional and involves a wide range of governmental and non-governmental actors.

Historical experience indicates that merchants and trading communities frequently acted as intermediaries between different societies and political entities. The Great Silk Road provides one of the most prominent examples of how commercial exchange facilitated not only the movement of goods but also the transmission of knowledge, cultural practices, technologies, and ideas. Similarly, the commercial activities of Venetian, Arab, Central Asian, and Bukharan merchants contributed to the development of sustained intercultural contacts and, in many cases, created favourable conditions for broader political and diplomatic interaction. From this perspective, merchants and entrepreneurs can be regarded as historical agents of informal diplomacy whose activities contributed to strengthening communication and mutual understanding among different peoples.

In the contemporary period, entrepreneurship has acquired significance that extends beyond purely economic activity. Businesses increasingly contribute to the construction of national images, international reputations, and cross-cultural networks through international trade fairs, investment forums, cultural festivals, tourism initiatives, creative industries, and the promotion of national brands. Traditional handicrafts, gastronomic products, tourism services, and locally rooted brands may function as instruments of cultural representation while simultaneously facilitating economic cooperation.

The case of Uzbekistan is particularly relevant in this regard. The country's expanding participation in international exhibitions, investment forums, cultural events, tourism initiatives, and interregional cooperation platforms has created new opportunities for integrating economic activity with the mechanisms of public and people-to-people diplomacy. Uzbek entrepreneurs, artisans, tourism operators, and representatives of the private sector increasingly participate in international platforms that contribute both to economic exchange and to the promotion of Uzbekistan's cultural identity and international image.

A further dimension of this process is associated with paradiplomacy and sister-city cooperation. Partnerships between cities and regions provide institutional frameworks for developing direct economic, cultural, educational, and social relations at the subnational level. Sister-city arrangements may facilitate business-to-business contacts, investment promotion, tourism exchanges, joint exhibitions, entrepreneurial forums, and cooperation between chambers of commerce and local business communities. Consequently, such partnerships can transform symbolic municipal relations into practical mechanisms of economic and people-to-people interaction.

2. Literature Review

The interrelationship between public diplomacy, entrepreneurship, and economic interaction has increasingly emerged as an important interdisciplinary research area within international relations, political economy, communication studies, and diplomacy studies. A review of the existing scholarship demonstrates that, while earlier studies of public diplomacy predominantly emphasized its ideological, cultural, communicative, and informational dimensions, growing scholarly attention has recently been devoted to the role of entrepreneurship, private-sector actors, trade, and economic cooperation as practical mechanisms of transnational engagement.

One of the principal theoretical foundations for understanding these processes is Joseph S. Nye Jr.'s concept of soft power. In *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004), Nye argues that a state's international influence is determined not exclusively by military or economic coercion but also by its capacity to attract others through culture, political values, institutions, and the perceived legitimacy of its

policies. From this perspective, diplomatic influence may be exercised through a broader range of state and non-state actors whose activities contribute to shaping international perceptions and preferences. Although entrepreneurship itself is not conceptualized by Nye as a separate form of diplomacy, private companies, universities, foundations, civil society organizations, and other non-state institutions may contribute to the generation and projection of a country's soft-power resources.

The conceptual foundations of contemporary public diplomacy are further developed in the Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy, edited by Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (2009). The volume examines the evolution, instruments, actors, and institutional dimensions of public diplomacy and emphasizes the increasing importance of engagement with foreign societies beyond conventional government-to-government communication. Of particular relevance is the growing role of non-state actors and strategic communication in shaping international relations. This approach allows the private sector and business communities to be considered not merely as participants in economic exchange but also as actors capable of influencing perceptions, developing transnational networks, and contributing to long-term relations between societies.

The practical dimension of this transformation is also reflected in studies of contemporary public diplomacy published in the early 2010s. William A. Rugh's edited volume *The Practice of Public Diplomacy: Confronting Challenges Abroad* (2011), for example, addresses the operational dimensions of public diplomacy and includes discussion of the relationship between governmental and private actors. Such scholarship indicates that the boundaries between official diplomacy, public diplomacy, civil-society engagement, and private-sector participation have become increasingly fluid under conditions of globalization. Consequently, business networks, professional communities, educational institutions, and other non-governmental actors may complement formal diplomatic mechanisms by establishing sustainable channels of international communication.

The relationship between economic interests and diplomacy can also be examined through the conceptual framework of economic diplomacy. Within this framework, foreign trade, investment promotion, market

access, tourism, innovation, and business networking are understood as integral components of contemporary external relations. At the same time, the concept of business diplomacy draws attention to the capacity of companies and entrepreneurs to establish relations with governments, communities, international organizations, and foreign partners. These approaches broaden the conventional understanding of diplomacy by demonstrating that economic actors can simultaneously pursue commercial interests and contribute to trust-building, reputation formation, and cross-cultural communication.

In the context of Uzbekistan, the relationship between economic development and external engagement has acquired particular importance in the framework of the country's recent reform agenda. In *The Strategy of New Uzbekistan* (Yangi O'zbekiston strategiyasi, 2021), Shavkat Mirziyoyev addresses the priorities of economic modernization, the expansion of mutually beneficial international cooperation, support for entrepreneurship, attraction of foreign investment, and the strengthening of Uzbekistan's position in international relations. These priorities provide an important policy context for examining the participation of the private sector in the country's expanding international economic and societal relations.

3. Methodology

The present study aims to examine the role of entrepreneurship and economic relations in public and people-to-people diplomacy through the analysis of both historical experience and contemporary trends. To achieve this objective, the study employs a combination of methodological approaches and analytical methods designed to reveal the evolution, interrelationship, and transformative potential of economic interaction within diplomatic processes.

1. Historical-comparative analysis. The historical relationship between public diplomacy and entrepreneurship is examined through selected examples, including the Great Silk Road, Venetian merchants, Arab trading communities, and Bukharan merchants. This method makes it possible to compare the diplomatic and sociocultural effects of economic interaction across different historical periods and geographical contexts. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which merchants and commercial networks functioned as intermediaries between societies, facilitating not only the

exchange of goods but also the circulation of information, cultural values, knowledge, and political perceptions. The comparative dimension of the analysis allows historical forms of merchant-mediated interaction to be assessed alongside contemporary mechanisms of business and people-to-people diplomacy.

2. Systems analysis. Entrepreneurship, economic cooperation, and public diplomacy are examined as interconnected components of a broader system of international interaction. The systems approach is used to identify the internal relationships between these components, the factors influencing their development, and the processes through which economic activity may acquire diplomatic, social, and cultural significance. This approach also enables the study to analyze the transformation of entrepreneurship from a predominantly commercial activity into a mechanism capable of contributing to international communication, trust-building, cultural representation, and the development of sustainable cross-border networks.

4. Analysis and Results

Public diplomacy is assuming an increasingly important role in contemporary international relations. Within its framework, representatives of civil society, non-governmental organizations, artists, religious figures, and especially entrepreneurs are actively involved. Through public diplomacy, states strengthen mutual trust, promote cultural exchange, and expand economic cooperation. Trade relations constitute one of the principal channels of this process and have deep historical roots.

Entrepreneurship and diplomacy are two closely interconnected phenomena. As trade and entrepreneurial activity develop, interregional ties are strengthened, cultures interact with one another, languages are learned, and customs and traditions are exchanged. From this

perspective, entrepreneurs have often served as key agents of public diplomacy.

In the contemporary system of international relations, such terms as economic diplomacy and business diplomacy are frequently used in describing relations between states.

Economic diplomacy is a system through which a state implements its foreign policy by means of economic instruments. It promotes national interests through international trade, investment, capital flows, financial institutions, and cooperation with international economic organizations.

Business diplomacy is an effective instrument for conducting international business and managing interactions among representatives of different countries and cultures. It is based on the use of diplomatic methods and strategies to achieve business objectives and establish long-term partnerships. The principles of business diplomacy include trust, mutual openness, the accuracy of information, the ability to reach compromise, and coordination with government institutions. This approach contributes to the establishment of mutually beneficial relations and successful activity in international markets [1].

Historical evidence shows that extensive trade relations developed along the Great Silk Road among China, Central Asia, Iran, Arabia, Europe, and India. This route served not only the trade in silk, porcelain, and spices, but also facilitated the exchange of philosophy, religion, art, and languages. Entrepreneurs and merchants contributed to the dissemination of Islam, Buddhism, and Indian culture across different regions.

The following table presents several historical examples illustrating the role of merchants in public diplomacy.

No.	Trade Networks	Regions	Role
1.	Merchants along the Great Silk Road (BCE and CE periods)	China, Central Asia, Iran, the Arab world, Europe	Merchants travelling along the Silk Road, particularly Chinese, Sogdian, Arab, and Persian traders, played an important role in disseminating culture, religions (Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity), languages, and customs among different peoples.
2.	Venetian merchants (Middle Ages,	Italy, Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt	For example, after returning to Italy, Marco Polo aroused considerable interest in China in Europe through his written account of his travels, which

	Europe–Asia relations)		in turn stimulated diplomatic and cultural contacts.
3.	Arab merchants and the spread of Islam (7th–10th centuries)	East Africa, India, Southeast Asia	Islam spread to Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula largely through merchants. This contributed to the expansion of the Muslim world and facilitated the development of trade and diplomatic relations among Muslim states.
4.	Bukharan and Khivan merchants (19th–early 20th centuries)	Russian Empire, Iran, Afghanistan, India	Merchants served as important sources of information and intermediaries amid the rivalry between the Russian and British Empires. In some cases, they also carried out diplomatic assignments, thereby acting as direct agents of public diplomacy.
5.	Jewish merchants (Middle Ages and early modern period)	Europe, the Mediterranean, Asia	Owing to their multilingual abilities and extensive international networks, Jewish merchants were also regarded as diplomatic intermediaries between different states, since in many cases hostile states communicated with one another through Jewish merchants.

As can be seen from the table above, merchants served as informal yet effective actors of public diplomacy. They actively contributed to building trust among peoples, promoting cultural exchange, facilitating religious influence, and even performing political mediation. Contemporary concepts such as “cultural diplomacy” and “economic diplomacy” may, in this sense, be regarded as continuations of these historical processes.

There is abundant historical evidence that merchants from the four quarters of the world gathered simultaneously in Samarkand, the capital of the empire of the great Amir Temur. For instance, in a letter addressed to King Charles VI of France in 1402, Amir Temur stated: “Your Majesty, if you send your merchants to our country, we, for our part, shall ensure that they are treated with honour and respect and protected from violence and harm. For the world prospers and flourishes through people engaged in trade” [2]. His well-known statement that “One determined, enterprising, vigilant, courageous, and resolute person is better than a thousand indecisive and indifferent people” remains relevant today, emphasizing the importance of entrepreneurship in both domestic development and external relations. Indeed, entrepreneurship constitutes a solid foundation for the further development of society and the achievement of a prosperous life.

During his official visit to the United States in 2002, the First President of Uzbekistan, I. A. Karimov, encouraged entrepreneurs from the two countries to cooperate, stating to American investors: “We have not come with an outstretched hand asking for assistance; we have come with the intention of cooperation. Our land is rich and generous, and our people are hardworking and open-hearted. Let us work together. Let both you and us benefit” [3].

In his work entitled *The Present Time and New Uzbekistan*, the President of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev, paid particular attention to economic diplomacy as one of the four major outcomes of the country’s foreign policy and identified the key conditions for its further development [4].

The private sector accounts for 90 per cent of the jobs created annually in the country. Today, more than five million people, particularly young people, are employed in this sector, demonstrating the growing role of business not only in the economy but also in the social life of the country [5]. In 2023 alone, more than 4,000 events were held in this area, while Uzbekistan’s embassies abroad organized more than 70 business forums. As a result, investments amounting to USD 13 billion were attracted within the framework of 77 investment projects [6].

Today, all necessary conditions have been created in Uzbekistan for entrepreneurial activity, while national products in the fields of manufacturing, tourism, and traditional handicrafts are being promoted worldwide under the slogan “Made in Uzbekistan.”

The Tashkent International Investment Forum has been held for several consecutive years. The Fourth Tashkent International Investment Forum, held this year, resulted in the signing of agreements worth USD 30.5 billion, compared with a combined total of USD 44 billion at the first three forums. This demonstrates that Uzbekistan is no longer viewed merely as a resource-based territory, but is increasingly becoming a platform for mutually beneficial cooperation and entrepreneurship. The participation of more than 3,000 foreign attendees at the

event also indicates sustained international interest in Uzbekistan as a platform for long-term partnership [7].

Entrepreneurial relations within public diplomacy constitute a distinct area that requires separate scholarly examination. Throughout history, whether in times of peace or periods of war, merchants, entrepreneurs, trade associations, and craft guilds have played a significant role in maintaining relations between different societies. Their international activities have been closely associated with the mechanisms of public diplomacy.

The table below presents practical examples related to public diplomacy and entrepreneurial relations [8]. It includes national handicraft, tourism, gastronomy, and other fairs and exhibitions organized both abroad and in Uzbekistan.

No.	Name of Event	Date and Venue	Content
1.	“Linguafest 37” International Festival of Languages and Cultures [9]	20–27 November 2018, Tours, France	More than 500 examples of national handicrafts and works of fine art were sold.
2.	“The Role of Public Diplomacy in Strengthening Friendly Relations between Uzbekistan and Finland” [10]	18–25 March 2019, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland	The opening ceremony of the “Uzbek Courtyard” was held at Riga Central Market. Representatives of Latvia’s business community, the public, and the mass media attended the event. Participants were informed about the particular attention Uzbekistan was paying to the development of its economy and tourism sector, as well as to attracting investment.
3.	Roundtable on “The Role of Public Diplomacy in Developing Friendly Relations between Uzbekistan and Mongolia” [11]	20–25 March 2019, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia	Uzbekistan’s tourism potential was presented, and opportunities for cooperation in the livestock sector were discussed.
4.	Roundtable devoted to public diplomacy between Uzbekistan and the United States, as well as Uzbekistan’s tourism and investment potential [12]	20–29 March 2019, Chicago, New York, and Atlanta, USA	Participants were informed about the particular attention Uzbekistan was paying to the development of its economy and tourism sector and to attracting investment.
5.	“Tasanno-2019” Traditional International Festival of National Cuisines and Cultures [13]	24 September 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Chefs representing Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Germany, Greece, Israel, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Latvia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, France, and host

			country Uzbekistan presented their national cuisines. Samples of traditional handicrafts, customs, traditions, and cultural values of nearly 30 peoples were showcased, accompanied by national music and songs.
6.	Conference on “Joint Development of Cities Located along the Great Silk Road” [14]	9–10 December 2019, Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province, People’s Republic of China	A business forum devoted to cooperation projects aimed at further developing economic, trade, cultural, educational, and tourism relations between cities of Uzbekistan and China.
7.	Visit of a delegation headed by V. Halachev, Chairman of the United Business Clubs of Bulgaria [15]	15 April 2022, Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Establishment and development of cooperation in tourism, industry, agriculture, small business, research and innovation, artificial intelligence, education, healthcare, and several other sectors.
8.	Roundtable on “The Role of Public Diplomacy in Developing Friendly Relations between Uzbekistan and Lithuania” [16]	18–25 April 2022, Vilnius and Visaginas, Lithuania and Latvia	A presentation of the economic potential of Navoi Region was delivered.
9.	“Days of Uzbek Culture” [17]	15–20 September 2022, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, USA	The programme included concerts and exhibitions of national handicrafts. Nearly 10,000 compatriots, U.S. officials, representatives of academic and business communities, and local media attended the events.
10.	Roundtable on “Further Development of Public Diplomacy and Cultural-Educational Relations between Uzbekistan and Bulgaria” and participation in the opening of the “North Macedonia–Uzbekistan” Friendship Society [18]	5–12 December 2022, Bulgaria and North Macedonia	Cooperation in trade, education, culture, and tourism was discussed, as well as the possibility of establishing an Uzbek trade terminal in the Bulgarian city of Burgas.

The interrelationship between public diplomacy and entrepreneurship is manifested in four important dimensions.

The first dimension is that public diplomacy creates opportunities to present a country’s economy, industry,

manufacturing capacity, infrastructure, and national products to foreign audiences. For example, in order to ensure the implementation of Clauses 16 and 17 of the “Roadmap” for cooperation between research centres and cultural institutions of Uzbekistan and France for 2018–2022, approved by the Prime Minister of the

Republic of Uzbekistan on 1 June 2018 (No. 01-07/1647), and with the aim of broadly promoting the history, art, and culture of Uzbekistan in France, a six-member delegation of the “Uzbekistan–France” Friendship Society visited France from 20 to 27 November. The purpose of the visit was to sign a Memorandum of Cooperation with the “Meros” Association established in Paris and to participate in the International Festival of Languages and Cultures organized by the “Linguafest 37” Association in Tours, France [19]. During the visit, Uzbek artist A. Boybekov sold 500 paintings to the renowned French fragrance company Chanel.

A second example concerns an Uzbek student studying in China. When the student asked a Chinese classmate for directions to a particular address, the latter, surprised by the request, asked why he needed to go there. The Uzbek student explained that his father was an entrepreneur and that he was going to purchase technical equipment required for his father’s business. The Chinese student then explained that his father’s enterprise was located at the same address and assisted his Uzbek friend. As a result, through this form of people-to-people diplomacy, the two parties concluded a contract worth USD 100,000 and established business cooperation [20].

The second dimension is that entrepreneurship can serve as an effective means of promoting public diplomacy. Entrepreneurs are among the most active practitioners of people-to-people diplomacy, as they introduce the history, culture, and arts of their country to foreign audiences. The activities of Maqsud Tojiboev, an Uzbek compatriot residing in the United States, provide a clear example of this [21].

M. Tojiboev has lived in the United States since 1997 and has been engaged in various entrepreneurial activities. During this period, as one of the active organizers of cultural and educational initiatives among Uzbek compatriots in the United States, he founded the “Umum Uzbek Association” in the state of Missouri in 2009. Between 2009 and 2015, the association organized and supported numerous cultural and educational activities for compatriots. In particular, events dedicated to important dates in Uzbekistan were held in 2011, 2012, and 2013. Cultural days, film screenings, and meetings with artists were also organized in order to promote Uzbek culture and art more broadly in the United States. Well-known artists from Uzbekistan were invited to

participate in these events. In 2018, a conference entitled “The Role of Uzbek Scholars in World Civilization” was organized.

Throughout its activities, the association also organized numerous campaigns and charitable events. In particular, in 2011, it actively participated in sending nearly one ton of medical supplies and clothing to Uzbekistan. M. Tojiboev also maintained close cooperation with compatriot associations in the United States, including “Yurtdosh” in Philadelphia, “Vatandosh” in New York, and “Uzbek-American” in Chicago.

Another noteworthy example is an article published by CNN on 19 December 2024 under the title “Young Uzbeks are finding new markets for traditional handicrafts online” [22]. The article, devoted to Aziza Tojjeva, highlighted the digital transformation of Uzbek traditional handicrafts and their position in international markets. According to the article, 24-year-old Aziza Tojjeva, a resident of Bukhara Region, sold her handmade suzani embroidery and other handicraft products through online platforms such as Etsy, Instagram, and eBay. Her products were delivered primarily to customers in the United States. This activity not only generated economic benefits but also contributed to promoting Uzbek handicrafts internationally.

The third dimension is that both public diplomacy and entrepreneurship ultimately serve the objectives of promoting the prosperity of the country and its people, as well as establishing friendly and mutually beneficial relations.

In 2019, an international business forum entitled “Prospects for Cooperation between Samarkand Region and Representatives of Bukharan Jews” was held jointly by the Congress of Bukharan Jews of the United States and Canada and the Samarkand Regional Administration [23]. Nearly 300 representatives of the Bukharan Jewish diaspora from the United States, Canada, Israel, Russia, Austria, Germany, and Australia participated in the event. Proposals were put forward regarding cooperation and the exchange of experience with Bukharan Jewish communities in tourism, medicine, construction, cosmetology, jewellery, and other fields.

“We feel at home in Uzbekistan,” said B. Kandov, President of the Congress of Bukharan Jews of the United States and Canada. “We are not indifferent to the reforms being implemented in every sphere of this

country. We are equally pleased with the achievements being made and regard them as our own. We support entrepreneurs who wish to contribute to the development of Uzbekistan and are ready to assist them.”

The fourth dimension is that cooperation between public diplomacy and entrepreneurship contributes to the establishment and strengthening of relations at the non-governmental and subnational levels.

Paradiplomacy represents a point of intersection between public diplomacy and economic cooperation. In recent years, active efforts have also been undertaken to strengthen horizontal relations between the regions of Uzbekistan and subnational entities of other countries. In particular, special councils have been established to coordinate interregional cooperation with China, Russia, and Kazakhstan. These bodies have been operating for several years, and interregional cooperation forums have been regularly organized [24].

In April 2022, sister-city relations were established between Visaginas, Lithuania, and Navoi, Uzbekistan. This cooperation is particularly significant because it was initiated through public diplomacy mechanisms, with the participation of the Committee on Interethnic Relations of Uzbekistan, the “Uzbekistan–Lithuania” Friendship Society, and, on the Lithuanian side, the Uzbek Cultural Centre in the Republic of Lithuania. From 3 to 7 October 2022, a three-member delegation headed by the Mayor of Visaginas, E. Galaguz, visited Uzbekistan [25].

During the visit, the delegation travelled to Navoi and became closely acquainted with the activities of the city administration, the education system, approaches to working with youth and mahallas, industrial and manufacturing enterprises in the region, as well as the activities of national cultural centres.

A meeting held at the Navoi City Administration was attended by the city mayor, more than 40 local entrepreneurs, and representatives of the public. It was emphasized that the establishment of sister-city relations between Navoi and Visaginas would have a positive impact on the socio-economic, cultural, and educational development of both cities, and areas of future cooperation were agreed upon. E. Galaguz also addressed the prospects for tourism between the two countries and proposed the launch of a Tashkent–Vilnius–Tashkent air route, noting that this could contribute to an increase in the number of Lithuanian

tourists. As a result, positive agreements were reached in the fields of export and import.

The guests also familiarized themselves with the activities of the private “Thomson” School and “Profi” private university in the city, noting that the modern conditions created there met international standards.

The delegation also visited the city’s manufacturing and industrial zones. In particular, it became closely acquainted with the activities of the private enterprises “Grand Group Gidro,” which processes metal and manufactures spare parts for industrial machinery, and “Universal Filtres,” which produces filtration equipment for motor vehicles.

During a meeting held in the “Janubiy” mahalla, delegation members were introduced to the activities of the mahalla institution. E. Galaguz highly praised the cleanliness and tranquillity of Uzbek mahallas, as well as the solidarity of their residents, and expressed an interest in developing cooperation in order to study this experience and acquire relevant practical knowledge.

Paradiplomatic relations have been developing particularly rapidly with China. Owing to the active and pragmatic foreign policies of Uzbekistan and China, as well as the good-neighbourly relations and longstanding friendship between their peoples, trade-economic and cultural-humanitarian cooperation between the two countries has continued to expand from year to year. In particular, over the past five years, bilateral trade turnover between Uzbekistan and China has doubled, reaching USD 13 billion in 2024. Compared with 2017, the volume of foreign direct investment attracted from China to Uzbekistan has increased fivefold, while the number of joint ventures has tripled. Joint projects in the chemical industry, mechanical engineering, construction materials, household appliances, and agricultural production have been successfully implemented. In order to create additional opportunities for Chinese companies, eight Uzbekistan–China industrial parks are currently operating in different regions of Uzbekistan.

In 2024, the heads of more than ten Chinese regions visited Uzbekistan, while the governors of all regions of Uzbekistan travelled to China. At the same time, active efforts have continued to develop bilateral cooperation. The fact that more than 20 cities and regions of the two countries have established sister-city and sister-region relations may be regarded as evidence of the high dynamics of cooperation. In December 2024, the First

Uzbekistan–China Interregional Forum was held in Urumqi, while on 1–2 June 2025, Samarkand hosted the Second Uzbekistan–China Interregional Forum, aimed at strengthening the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and China, developing interregional cooperation, and expanding investment and business relations [26].

The participation in the second forum of nearly one thousand representatives of major Chinese companies and entrepreneurs, as well as more than 1,400 businesspeople and representatives of firms and companies from Uzbekistan, demonstrates the rapid development of interregional cooperation.

Among the goals and objectives of the Alliance of Sister Cities, established on 7 May 2025, are the development of close contacts between businesspeople, traders, and entrepreneurs of sister cities, as well as support for the expansion of cooperation at the local level in interregional tourism, urban development, trade and economic relations, science and technology, and various sectors of the economy [27]. In order to expand practical cooperation between the regions of the two countries, such forums are organized with the participation of representatives of the business community. They provide a platform for discussing the further development of bilateral cooperation in transport and logistics, industry, tourism, and youth affairs. In addition, bilateral meetings include exhibitions of products manufactured in different regions, as well as the signing of trade and investment agreements.

Today, numerous examples can be cited of sister-city relations developing through entrepreneurship and trade. For instance, as a result of cooperation between Bukhara and its sister city Santa Fe in the United States, Uzbek artisan-entrepreneurs have gained access to the U.S. market for national products and earn approximately USD 500,000–600,000 annually [28].

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The conducted research confirms the strategic importance of entrepreneurship and economic relations within public diplomacy in both historical and contemporary processes.

In contemporary international relations, international practice increasingly demonstrates that entrepreneurial activity contributes to promoting a country's external image, investment attractiveness, and cultural values. In

the case of Uzbekistan, public diplomacy is being strengthened through traditional handicrafts, business forums, export-oriented products, tourism, and investment potential.

The integrated implementation of public diplomacy and entrepreneurship contributes to strengthening mutual trust between states, fostering a culture of dialogue, and developing sustainable partnership relations.

Recommendations

- To identify and officially recognize active entrepreneurs within the framework of the “Ambassadors of Public Diplomacy” concept;
- To provide diplomatic and preferential support to representatives of the private sector promoting Uzbekistan at international exhibitions and forums;
- To expand sister-city and paradiplomatic relations from the perspective of entrepreneurship;
- To establish reciprocal visits, business cooperation platforms, and joint investment projects between local entrepreneurs and local authorities;
- To encourage the promotion of national handicrafts and tourism products in global markets through digital platforms;
- To introduce public-private partnership mechanisms for the broader promotion of the “Made in Uzbekistan” brand on platforms such as Etsy, Amazon, Alibaba, and similar marketplaces;
- To establish “Business Diplomacy Centres” within Uzbekistan’s diplomatic missions abroad.

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