



UZBEKISTAN AS AN EMERGING STRATEGIC HUB IN CENTRAL ASIA: CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION, BUSINESS DIPLOMACY AND REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20525964>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 26th May 2026

Accepted: 28th May 2026

Online: 30th May 2026

KEYWORDS

*strategic hub, business
diplomacy, cross-cultural
communication, regional
connectivity, transport corridors,
foreign investment, trade,
geopolitics*

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes Uzbekistan’s emergence as a strategic hub in Central Asia through the lens of cross-cultural communication, business diplomacy, and regional connectivity. The article highlights that Uzbekistan’s strategic hub status is not only determined by physical infrastructure and trade routes but also by the quality of communication among different cultural, institutional, and business actors.

Central Asia is gaining renewed importance in global politics and economics. The region is located between major geopolitical and economic centers, including Russia, China, Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East. In this changing environment, Uzbekistan is increasingly perceived as an emerging strategic hub due to its central location, demographic potential, economic reforms, transport ambitions, and diplomatic activity. The concept of a “strategic hub” includes more than geographical centrality. It refers to a country’s ability to connect markets, institutions, infrastructures, cultures, and political interests. In this sense, Uzbekistan’s role as a strategic hub depends not only on roads, railways, logistics centers, and trade agreements but also on communication. Business diplomacy and cross-cultural communication help transform geographical location into economic advantage.

The concept of regional connectivity is widely used in international economics and geopolitics. It usually refers to transport infrastructure, trade facilitation, digital networks, energy cooperation, and institutional coordination. However, connectivity also has a communicative dimension. Regional projects require negotiation, trust, cultural understanding, and long-term cooperation among states, companies, investors, and international organizations. Business diplomacy is another important concept for this study. It refers to the use of diplomatic skills and communication strategies in business and economic relations. In the case of Uzbekistan, business diplomacy is visible in investment forums, international summits, bilateral negotiations, trade missions, and cooperation with organizations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Union, WTO, and CAREC.

Cross-cultural communication theory helps explain why business diplomacy is culturally sensitive. Different actors involved in Uzbekistan’s regional projects may represent different communication styles. European partners may emphasize regulatory standards and

institutional transparency; Chinese partners may prioritize long-term strategic cooperation and infrastructure development; Turkish and Gulf partners may combine business with relationship-based communication; Central Asian partners often share historical, linguistic, and cultural similarities but still have distinct national interests.

Uzbekistan occupies a central location in Central Asia and borders Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan. This location gives Uzbekistan an important role in regional connectivity. Unlike coastal economies, Uzbekistan depends heavily on land transport, customs coordination, and regional cooperation. Therefore, transport corridors and logistics systems are essential for the country's economic development.

Uzbekistan's strategic importance has increased because global trade routes are being reconsidered. The search for alternative corridors between Europe and Asia has strengthened interest in Central Asia. The Trans-Caspian and Middle Corridor initiatives, CAREC corridors, and EU–Central Asia connectivity projects have increased the relevance of Uzbekistan as a regional partner.

According to CAREC data, by 2025 more than 14.37 billion US dollars had been invested in 44 CAREC-related projects in Uzbekistan, including 6.67 billion US dollars allocated to transport projects [10]. This indicates that Uzbekistan is one of the key countries in regional infrastructure and connectivity development.

Transport connectivity is one of the foundations of Uzbekistan's strategic hub potential. Roads, railways, border facilities, logistics centers, and digital customs systems help reduce trade costs and improve regional integration. However, infrastructure alone is insufficient. Effective transport diplomacy is needed to coordinate standards, regulations, border procedures, tariffs, and investment priorities.

The European Council stated that one of the goals of EU–Central Asia cooperation is to create a modern and efficient transportation route linking Europe and Asia in 15 days or less [9]. This statement reflects the strategic importance of Central Asia in global connectivity. For Uzbekistan, participation in such projects can increase trade opportunities, attract foreign investment, and strengthen its diplomatic role.

Business communication is essential in this process. International transport projects involve many actors: governments, banks, construction companies, logistics firms, customs authorities, and local communities. Each actor has its own cultural expectations, legal language, and institutional procedures. Therefore, project success depends on clear communication, intercultural negotiation, and trust-building.

The first EU–Central Asia Summit held in Samarkand in April 2025 was a significant diplomatic event for Uzbekistan and the region. It demonstrated that Central Asia is becoming more important in European foreign and economic policy. The summit focused on trade, transport, energy, critical raw materials, digital connectivity, and water management [11].

Uzbekistan's role as host of this summit symbolically strengthened its image as a regional communication platform. Hosting such a high-level event means that the country is not only a participant in regional processes but also a facilitator of dialogue. This function is directly connected with the idea of a strategic hub.

The summit also showed the growing importance of business diplomacy. The EU and Central Asian states need to coordinate economic interests, regulatory standards, investment

priorities, and sustainability goals. In this context, Uzbekistan can act as a mediator between different economic cultures and geopolitical interests.

Foreign investment is another indicator of Uzbekistan's emerging hub status. UNCTAD data show that Uzbekistan's inward FDI reached 2.836 billion US dollars in 2024, compared with 2.156 billion US dollars in 2023 [6]. This increase suggests that the country is becoming more attractive to foreign investors.

Nevertheless, attracting investment requires more than economic reforms. Investors need reliable communication channels, transparent legal information, professional translation and interpretation services, culturally competent managers, and internationally trained negotiators. Business communication therefore becomes part of the investment infrastructure.

For example, when a European investor communicates with an Uzbek government agency or local company, the negotiation process includes legal, linguistic, cultural, and institutional dimensions. Miscommunication may delay projects, create mistrust, or increase transaction costs. Conversely, culturally competent communication can accelerate cooperation and strengthen long-term partnerships.

Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization is another factor strengthening its strategic hub status. WTO membership can improve Uzbekistan's integration into global trade rules and increase predictability for international partners. According to official information, Uzbekistan completed bilateral negotiations with 33 countries by 2025 in the WTO accession process [8].

This process has a communicative dimension. WTO accession requires technical negotiations, legal documentation, policy explanations, trade data presentation, and constant dialogue with member states. It also requires the ability to translate national economic interests into the language of international trade rules.

For Uzbek businesses, WTO accession may increase the need for professional business communication in English and other foreign languages. Companies will need to understand international contracts, certification systems, customs rules, intellectual property norms, and dispute settlement procedures. Therefore, WTO integration will likely increase demand for intercultural and multilingual business competence.

Uzbekistan's role as a strategic hub depends on its ability to communicate across cultures. The country interacts with partners from different civilizational, linguistic, and economic backgrounds. This includes Central Asian neighbors, Russia, China, the European Union, Turkey, South Korea, Japan, Gulf countries, and international organizations.

Cross-cultural communication should therefore be understood as a strategic resource. It helps Uzbekistan perform several functions:

- attracting and retaining foreign investors;
- negotiating regional transport and energy projects;
- promoting national products in foreign markets;
- reducing misunderstandings in international contracts;
- strengthening the country's image as a reliable partner;
- supporting business diplomacy at regional and global levels.

In this context, universities, business schools, ministries, chambers of commerce, and private companies should pay more attention to intercultural training. Business English,

Russian, Chinese, Turkish, Korean, and Arabic communication skills may become increasingly important for Uzbekistan's international economic development.

Uzbekistan is emerging as a strategic hub in Central Asia due to its geographical location, economic reforms, transport connectivity projects, growing foreign investment, and active regional diplomacy. However, hub status is not achieved through infrastructure alone. It also requires effective communication among different cultures, institutions, and business systems.

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