PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND TOURISM COOPERATION BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND GERMANY: TRENDS, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract. *This article analyzes the development of public diplomacy and tourism cooperation between Uzbekistan and Germany. It reveals the role of public diplomacy in strengthening mutual trust between nations. Tourism sector reforms and their economic effectiveness are examined. The impact of the pandemic on tourism and its recovery stages are discussed. Uzbekistan's position in the global tourism market is justified with statistical data. The paper also proposes перспективные directions for further tourism development.*

Keywords: *public diplomacy, tourism, Uzbekistan, Germany, cooperation, cultural heritage, ecotourism, globalization, economy, travel.*

In the current era of globalization, the issue of developing cooperation between states and peoples is becoming increasingly relevant compared to any previous period. In such conditions, public diplomacy plays a crucial role in ensuring mutual understanding among nations, facilitating the exchange of ideas, and strengthening cooperative ties. Through public diplomacy, it becomes possible to find solutions even to complex political and economic issues[1].

Uzbekistan is paying particular attention to developing active cooperation with leading European countries in the field of public diplomacy. In this regard, relations with Germany have been progressing effectively, demonstrating steady development across various sectors. One of the primary directions of this cooperation is the promotion of culture, where mass media serves as an essential tool[2]. The effective use of media resources contributes significantly to the development of public diplomacy, as it allows the lifestyle, culture, art, and history of a nation to be presented to millions of people worldwide.

For instance, a video titled "Uzbekistan – A Country on the Silk Road", dedicated to the rich history, culture, and tourism potential of Uzbekistan, was published in June 2019 on the YouTube channel of one of Germany's largest broadcasters, Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR). According to the author, Hanna Perthold, the main objective of the film was to introduce German travel enthusiasts to Uzbekistan's unique historical and cultural heritage, particularly the architectural monuments of cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva, and thereby contribute to increasing the flow of tourists from Germany to Uzbekistan[3].

Uzbekistan's tourism potential is also effectively promoted through various cultural events and festivals held in different cities of Germany. Notably, the celebration organized on March 20, 2019, in Frankfurt am Main under the slogan "Navruz in Central Asia" holds particular importance. The event was attended by the Deputy Mayor of Frankfurt for Integration and Education, Sylvia Weber, as well as consular representatives of Central Asian countries[4]. Additionally, a representative of the State Committee for Tourism Development of Uzbekistan, O'tkur Saidov, introduced Uzbek youth in Germany to ongoing reforms in the tourism sector and

encouraged them to actively participate in both public and private tourism projects. The event also featured exhibitions of traditional Uzbek handicrafts and the distribution of brochures and books highlighting Uzbekistan's tourism potential[5].

The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019 led to a significant slowdown in all sectors, including tourism. This also negatively affected relations with Germany, which had been one of the major sources of tourists to Uzbekistan. Prior to the pandemic, the flow of German tourists to Uzbekistan had been well established. Despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic, Uzbekistan continues to remain an attractive destination for German travelers due to its rich cultural heritage[6]. In particular, after the abolition of visa requirements for German citizens in 2019, the number of visitors from Germany increased by 52 percent. It is important to note that with the lifting of quarantine restrictions, tourist flows from Germany are expected to recover. Currently, Germany ranks among the leading European countries in terms of the number of visitors to Uzbekistan. German tourists are primarily interested in visiting world-renowned historical cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva[7].

At the same time, Uzbekistan's natural beauty also attracts European, including German, tourists. A regional approach to tourism development appears to be highly beneficial. For example, the mountain ranges stretching across Central Asia and the region's favorable climate provide excellent opportunities for tourism[8].

An analysis of global tourism development shows that before the pandemic, tourism had become one of the key drivers of national economies worldwide. However, like other sectors, tourism was severely affected by the pandemic[9]. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, prior to the pandemic, one in four new jobs globally was created in the tourism sector, which accounted for 10.6% of total employment (334 million jobs) and 10.4% of global GDP (9.2 trillion USD). According to the World Tourism Organization, in 2020, international tourist arrivals declined by 74% compared to 2019, resulting in losses of approximately 1.3 trillion USD in tourism exports[10].

It should also be noted that Germany ranks ninth among the top ten countries whose citizens most frequently visit Uzbekistan. Statistical data indicate that in 2018 alone, the number of tourists arriving from Germany doubled. Experts predict that this figure could increase fivefold within the next five years. Currently, Germany, Italy, and France are among the leading European countries in terms of tourist arrivals to Uzbekistan[11]. According to estimates by Radio France Internationale experts in 2019, Uzbekistan has the potential to attract over 10 million tourists annually as a promising destination. These projections have materialized, as the number of visitors exceeded 10 million in 2025, reflecting the effectiveness of ongoing reforms.

To further strengthen cooperation in this field, Uzbekistan continues to host various international conferences and cultural events. For example, on July 9–10, 2019, Samarkand hosted a meeting of the CIS Tourism Council and the first tourism fair of Commonwealth countries. During these events, more than 50 agreements were signed with foreign companies to attract tourists. Moreover, in 2019, Samarkand became a member of the World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF). Plans have been proposed to transform the city into a major tourism hub in the near future.These efforts are expected to significantly increase tourist arrivals[12]. While Uzbekistan received around 2 million tourists annually before 2016, by 2024, Samarkand alone welcomed over 2.5 million visitors[13]. These results clearly demonstrate the positive outcomes of reforms implemented in "New Uzbekistan." Within the framework of the Silk Road initiative, the World Tourism Organization considers Uzbekistan one of its key partners. The country is widely

recognized for its rich cultural and historical heritage, including numerous UNESCO World Heritage sites. In 2023, Samarkand successfully hosted the 25th session of the UNWTO General Assembly, marking a historic milestone. This achievement reflects the success of Uzbekistan's openness policy and its efforts to enhance its international image[14].

In recent years, visa-free regimes have been introduced for citizens of nearly 100 countries, while simplified electronic visa procedures have been implemented for 55 others[15]. As a result, Uzbekistan has ranked among the world's top seven countries in terms of growth in attracting international tourists. According to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, tourist arrivals increased by 73% in the first nine months of 2025 compared to 2019.

Based on the above analysis, several recommendations can be proposed for further development of the tourism sector. First, Uzbekistan has more than 7,000 unique architectural monuments located across all regions. Expanding tourism routes would help create jobs in less-developed areas[16]. Second, the country's natural reserves offer strong potential for developing ecotourism. Third, promoting local traditions, crafts, and cultural heritage can enhance both domestic and international tourism. Fourth, developing gastronomic tourism based on regional cuisines presents significant opportunities.

In this direction, Germany-one of the leading countries in Europe-is considered one of Uzbekistan's closest partners. Reforms being implemented in the country are always closely followed with great interest by German political, business, scientific, and cultural circles, as well as country experts[1]. They are eager to obtain more information about Uzbekistan. In this context, in January 2007, a presentation of the book titled "Uzbekistan – 15 Years of Independence" was held in Germany. The publication provides German readers with insights into the fundamental changes taking place in Uzbekistan, the achievements gained during the years of independent development, and the untapped potential for deepening cooperation in various fields.

In recent years, numerous practical efforts have been made to collect and publish Uzbekistan's material and spiritual heritage preserved in world museums. In particular, on May 14, 2017, an international scientific-cultural congress titled "The Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan – A Bridge Between Peoples and States" was held in Tashkent[2]. This, in turn, opens the way for scientific research and provides a significant opportunity to collect and promote the scattered pearls of Uzbek culture across the world. Another important aspect is that this congress was aimed at implementing the tasks defined in the Action Strategy for the five priority development directions of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017–2021, initiated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev[3]. This strategic document emphasizes the importance of deeply studying and preserving the nation's rich history and cultural heritage, strengthening harmony among different nations and ethnic groups living in the country, and consolidating Uzbekistan's position in the international community. The Development Strategy for 2022–2026, adopted later, also includes specific objectives related to the study and promotion of cultural monuments[5].

More than 120 foreign and over 100 local experts specializing in Oriental studies, archaeology, history, numismatics, textile production, and ceramics participated in the event, including scientists and museum and research institute directors from Italy, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Greece, and other countries[4].

One of the multi-volume publications prepared and issued by scholars and experts during 2017–2025 includes works based on collections of Uzbek cultural and spiritual heritage preserved in German museums and centers, such as "Uzbek Carpet Weaving: Traditions Preserved Through the Centuries" and "Collections of German Museums." It is also noteworthy that the book-album

series “The Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan in World Collections,” particularly the volume on “Collections of the Federal Republic of Germany,” includes a foreword written by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in which he stated: “Cooperation in the field of culture is multifaceted, and its potential is limitless[6]. I am confident that this book-album will contribute to strengthening relations between our countries, developing intercultural dialogue, and bringing our nations and peoples closer together.”

On January 15, 2019, an international scientific-cultural forum titled “Heritage of the Great Silk Road – A Bridge Between Uzbekistan and Germany” was held in Berlin, the capital of Germany. Within the forum, an exhibition of book-albums from the “Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan in World Collections” project was opened at the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Berlin. During the event, German leading scholars, experts, and art historians spoke about rich collections related to Uzbek art preserved in museums of Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, and Stuttgart. Among them are the Bukhara Emirate collection in the Ethnological Museum of Berlin, artifacts from the Bayankuli Khan mausoleum in the Museum of Decorative Arts in Hamburg, manuscripts of Alisher Navoi preserved in the Berlin State Library, samples of Uzbek cultural-historical heritage from the Bumiller collection, as well as a rare collection in the Eastern Department of the Linden Museum in Stuttgart[7].

Outstanding examples of Uzbek art are preserved in museums in Berlin, Dresden, and Leipzig. For example, the Pergamon Museum in Germany, one of the most visited museums, holds world-famous artifacts such as ceramic items from the ancient city of Afrasiab, located at the center of the Great Silk Road[8]. The German National Library preserves rare manuscripts written by our great ancestors who made a significant contribution to world civilization. Therefore, together with our German colleagues, by combining our capacities, we created this book aimed at giving new momentum to the study of our cultural heritage both in Uzbekistan and in Europe,” said Firdavs Abdukhalikov, author and head of the “Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan in World Collections” project.

Another important fact is that astronomical tables of Mirzo Ulugbek, preserved for more than 19 centuries in the Oriental Department of the Berlin State Library, contain information on 1018 stars belonging to 38 constellations, as well as data on the length of the sidereal year[9].

The twinning of Bukhara-one of the seven most noble cities of the East-with Bonn has played an important role in the consistent implementation of joint projects in science, education, culture, medicine, tourism, utilities, and urban development.

The participation of Bonn Mayor Bärbel Dieckmann in the Navruz national celebrations held in Bukhara from March 18–22, 2023, and the signing of a twinning agreement between Bukhara and Bonn during this visit gave a new impetus to truly friendly bilateral cooperation over the past years. Indeed, for 25 years, the ties of friendship between the two cities have ensured the implementation of meaningful and relevant projects.

Cooperation in this field continues to expand year by year. This is evidenced by the opening in June 2024 in Samarkand of a non-governmental educational and scientific-methodological institution named “Uzbekistan–Germany Joint International Higher School of Medical Sciences named after Abu Ali ibn Sina and Heinrich Schipperes.” [10]. This higher school was established by the Center for Public Law Research of Uzbekistan in cooperation with the Ludwigsburg University of Applied Sciences in Germany and the Heimerer Vocational Academy. The main goal of the institution is to train highly qualified medical specialists and managerial personnel for the healthcare sector[11]. This specialized medical institution introduces advanced traditions,

standards, and practices of Uzbek and German medical education. One of its key advantages is the international recognition of diplomas. Graduates of this institution will have the opportunity to work not only in Uzbekistan but also in Germany and other European Union countries, significantly expanding their professional prospects[12].

In conclusion, public diplomacy has become an effective instrument for strengthening bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and Germany, particularly in the field of tourism. Cultural exchanges, international forums, exhibitions, and educational cooperation have significantly enhanced mutual understanding between the two nations. Uzbekistan's visa liberalization policy, tourism reforms, and active international engagement have contributed to the rapid growth of tourist arrivals and the country's global image. Germany remains one of Uzbekistan's key European partners in promoting cultural heritage and sustainable tourism development. The successful implementation of joint projects demonstrates the importance of public diplomacy in fostering long-term cooperation. Further diversification of tourism products, expansion of regional tourism, and preservation of cultural heritage will enhance the competitiveness of Uzbekistan's tourism sector. Continued collaboration between governmental institutions, academic organizations, and civil society will ensure sustainable development of bilateral relations. Overall, the experience of Uzbekistan and Germany confirms that public diplomacy and tourism are complementary tools for promoting international cooperation, economic growth, and intercultural dialogue.

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