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MEDIA DIPLOMACY IN REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS: THE EVOLUTION OF UZBEKISTAN’S COOPERATION WITH CENTRAL ASIAN STATES (2017–2026)

Annotation

The article analyzes media diplomacy as an instrument of regional cooperation and traces Uzbekistan’s media relations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in 2017–2026. Document analysis, comparative institutional analysis and process tracing are applied to bilateral agreements, agency partnerships and regional platforms. The findings show a shift from episodic coverage to regularized cooperation through content exchange, multilingual services, journalist training, press tours and broadcasting links. The study argues that the next stage requires joint fact-checking, cross-border digital projects and measurable criteria for evaluating cooperation.

Key words: Media diplomacy, public diplomacy, Uzbekistan, Central Asia, regional cooperation, news agencies, information exchange, digital diplomacy, strategic communication.

МЕДИАДИПЛОМАТИЯ В РЕГИОНАЛЬНОМ И ГЛОБАЛЬНОМ КОНТЕКСТАХ: ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА УЗБЕКИСТАНА С ГОСУДАРСТВАМИ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ (2017–2026 ГГ.)

Аннотация

В статье анализируется медиадипломатия как инструмент регионального сотрудничества и эволюция медийных связей Узбекистана с Казахстаном, Кыргызстаном, Таджикистаном и Туркменистаном в 2017–2026 гг. На основе документального, сравнительно-институционального анализа и процесс-трейсинга изучены двусторонние соглашения, партнерства информационных агентств и региональные площадки. Выявлен переход от эпизодического освещения к регулярному обмену контентом, многоязычным сервисам, подготовке журналистов, пресс-турам и телерадиосотрудничеству. Обоснована необходимость совместного фактчекинга, цифровых проектов и измеримых критериев оценки.

Ключевые слова: Медиадипломатия, публичная дипломатия, Узбекистан, Центральная Азия, региональное сотрудничество, информационные агентства, обмен информацией, цифровая дипломатия, стратегическая коммуникация.

MINTAQAVIY VA GLOBAL KONTEKSTDA MEDIA DIPLOMATIYA: O‘ZBEKISTONNING MARKAZIY OSIYO DAVLATLARI BILAN HAMKORLIGI EVOLYUTSIYASI (2017–2026-YILLAR)

Annotatsiya

Maqolada media diplomatiya mintaqaviy hamkorlik vositasi sifatida tahlil qilinib, 2017–2026-yillarda O‘zbekistonning Qozog‘iston, Qirg‘iziston, Tojikiston va Turkmaniston bilan media aloqalari evolyutsiyasi o‘rganiladi. Hujjatlar tahlili, qiyosiy-institutsional tahlil va jarayonlarni kuzatish usullari ikki tomonlama bitimlar, axborot agentliklari hamkorligi va mintaqaviy platformalarga tatbiq etildi. Natijalar epizodik yoritishdan muntazam kontent almashinuvi, ko‘p tilli xizmatlar, jurnalistlar tayyorlash, press-turlar va teleradio hamkorligiga o‘tilganini ko‘rsatadi. Keyingi bosqich uchun qo‘shma faktcheking, transchegaraviy raqamli loyihalar va aniq baholash mezonlari taklif qilinadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Media diplomatiya, jamoatchilik diplomatiyasi, O‘zbekiston, Markaziy Osiyo, mintaqaviy hamkorlik, axborot agentliklari, axborot almashinuvi, raqamli diplomatiya, strategik kommunikatsiya.

Introduction. The international communication environment of the twenty-first century has transformed diplomacy from a predominantly closed interaction among state representatives into a multidirectional process involving governments, media institutions, digital platforms and transnational audiences. Foreign-policy effectiveness increasingly depends not only on the substance of decisions but also on the speed, credibility and interpretive frame through which they reach domestic and foreign publics. Media diplomacy therefore operates at the intersection of diplomacy, journalism and strategic communication [2].

Uzbekistan’s regional policy gives this issue particular relevance. At the Third Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized that making regional cooperation stable and irreversible requires the engagement of “people’s diplomacy” and the mass media [1]. This approach places information exchange and professional media interaction within the broader strategy of good-neighborliness and trust. From the perspective of public diplomacy and soft power, communication technologies help states engage foreign publics and transform cultural attractiveness, values and policy narratives into non-coercive resources of influence [3].

Central Asia is an especially important setting for studying these processes. The countries of the region share geographic proximity, historical interdependence, multilingual audiences and intensive political, economic and cultural contacts, while simultaneously being exposed to competing external information flows and rapidly changing digital consumption patterns. Since the late 2010s, Uzbekistan has expanded multilingual content, agreements with neighboring media institutions, journalist exchanges, press tours and

participation in regional forums. In 2025, official sources reported more than 22,000 foreign-policy materials, over 6,000 articles about Uzbekistan in foreign media and accreditation of more than 3,400 foreign journalists [7].

Despite growing practical cooperation, less academic attention has been paid to the institutional architecture of media cooperation inside Central Asia. The purpose of this article is to identify the principal bilateral and multilateral mechanisms through which Uzbekistan develops media cooperation with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, assess their regional significance, distinguish symbolic activity from institutionalized cooperation, and propose practical evaluation criteria.

Literature review. Gilboa interprets public diplomacy through changing media and communication environments [2], while Cull systematizes its major practices and historical forms [3]. Nye’s soft-power concept explains how attraction, values and narratives can influence preferences without coercion [4]. Melissen’s “new public diplomacy” emphasizes relationship-building rather than one-way messaging [5], and Pamment highlights networked communication, collaboration and engagement [6]. Together, these approaches provide a theoretical basis for viewing media diplomacy as a specialized dimension of public diplomacy.

For the Central Asian case, three functions are analytically important: representational, when media explain national policies and social change to neighboring publics; relational, when long-term links among agencies, broadcasters and journalists create durable professional networks; and coordinative, when institutional contacts help align coverage of high-level visits, regional initiatives and common challenges. This framework also distinguishes media diplomacy from propaganda because long-term effectiveness depends on credibility, reciprocity and professional standards rather than unilateral promotion.

The regional context adds two specific factors. National news agencies and state broadcasters remain important producers of authoritative interstate information, yet digital platforms have fragmented audiences and increased exposure to misinformation, synthetic media and algorithmic amplification. Effective regional media diplomacy therefore requires both institutional agreements and verification standards, as well as the capacity to communicate in languages accessible to neighboring societies.

Research Methodology. The study uses a qualitative design combining document analysis, comparative institutional analysis and process tracing. The empirical base consists of official documents and reports issued in 2018–2026 by UzA, Kabar, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, official Turkmenistan resources, the Central Asian Media Forum and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. The sources record formal agreements, participants, stated objectives and concrete mechanisms of cooperation.

The comparison uses four indicators: (1) the existence of a formal bilateral media mechanism; (2) regularity and reciprocity of information exchange; (3) professional-capacity measures such as training, internships or press tours; and (4) participation in multilateral regional platforms. Reliability was strengthened by comparing official sources where possible and separating descriptive evidence from interpretation. The study does not claim that institutional cooperation automatically produces favorable public opinion; it evaluates the development, regularity, reciprocity and professional structuring of communication infrastructure.

Analysis and results. Uzbekistan’s information diplomacy as a regional platform. The recent expansion of foreign-policy communication provides the institutional background for bilateral media cooperation. UzA’s multilingual dissemination, including Kazakh-language content, reduces dependence on intermediary translations and enables neighboring audiences to access information closer to the original source [7].

Cooperation with Kazakhstan. This relationship is the most diversified in the region. In 2019, UzA launched a Kazakh-language version while Kazinform introduced an Uzbek-language service, expanding direct access to national narratives. On 1 March 2023, UzA and the Television and Radio Complex of the President of Kazakhstan signed a memorandum covering content exchange, staff internships and technical media resources [8]. In February 2025, Uzbek and Kazakh media representatives also agreed to support joint projects, content exchange, press tours and international promotion of historical and cultural heritage [9]. The trajectory therefore moves from linguistic accessibility to institutional and cross-platform cooperation.

Cooperation with Kyrgyzstan. UzA and the Kyrgyz National News Agency Kabar have developed an agency-to-agency model centered on regular information exchange and professional capacity. Their updated October 2024 memorandum identified expansion of information exchange and systematic improvement of staff experience and qualifications as priorities [10]. The emphasis on impartial and reliable information is important because sustainable media diplomacy requires editorial professionalism as well as positive bilateral coverage.

Cooperation with Tajikistan. The 2018 normalization of relations produced a clear dual framework: a memorandum between the television and radio institutions of the two states and an agreement between Khovar and UzA [11]. By March 2026, UzA continued to describe Khovar as an information partner in analytical coverage of bilateral relations [12]. This continuity shows how media cooperation can evolve from an accompaniment to political normalization into a regular channel for explaining the logic and social meaning of interstate cooperation.

Cooperation with Turkmenistan. During the 2022 state visit, an Action Plan for 2022–2023 was adopted between the relevant television and radio institutions [13]. Agency-level contacts continued in November 2023, when the State News Agency of Turkmenistan and UzA emphasized regular information exchange and staff development [14]. In a relatively state-centered media environment, such formal links provide stable channels for verified bilateral information.

Multilateralization of regional media diplomacy. Bilateral mechanisms are increasingly supplemented by professional platforms. The II Central Asian Media Forum in Astana in April 2025 addressed artificial intelligence, big data, social networks and new forms of regional media cooperation [15]. The 25th OSCE Central Asia Media Conference in Tashkent in November 2025 focused on media viability, trustworthy information, journalist safety and digital resilience [16]. The Alliance of Turkic News Agencies, established in 2023, further connects Uzbekistan to a wider professional information space through agency-level exchange [17].

Comparative assessment. Kazakhstan demonstrates the broadest mix of multilingual access, broadcasting links, agency cooperation and private-media projects; Kyrgyzstan emphasizes agency exchange and professional development; Tajikistan combines broadcasting and national agency mechanisms; and Turkmenistan relies more strongly on official broadcasting and state-agency channels. Despite these differences, all four relationships show movement from event-based coverage toward more regularized communication.

Several challenges remain. Implementation indicators are uneven; state-centered cooperation does not always create sufficient interaction among independent media, researchers and fact-checking communities; multilingual services require

consistent editorial quality; and AI-generated content increases the need for shared verification protocols. The next stage should therefore be assessed by the frequency of reciprocal content exchange, jointly produced materials, journalist exchanges and training, cross-border audience reach, and mechanisms for correction and fact-checking. Regional fellowships, joint thematic projects, shared digital archives and reciprocal press tours could convert institutional goodwill into durable professional networks.

Table 1. Main institutional patterns of Uzbekistan’s bilateral media cooperation in Central Asia

Partner	Key institutional mechanism	Recent practical instruments	Media-diplomacy function
Kazakhstan	UzA–Presidential TV and Radio Complex MoU; multilingual agency services	Content exchange, internships, press tours, private-media projects	Direct language access, professional networking, joint international promotion
Kyrgyzstan	Updated UzA–Kabar Memorandum of Understanding	Regular news exchange, staff experience and qualification development	Reliable cross-border information and professional capacity
Tajikistan	UzA–Khovar agreement plus TV/radio memorandum	Reciprocal analytical coverage and broadcasting cooperation	Institutional continuity and explanation of allied relations
Turkmenistan	Inter-broadcaster Action Plan and agency-level contacts	TV/radio cooperation, regular information exchange, staff development	Stable verified channels in a state-centered media environment

Source: compiled by the author from official bilateral media materials [8–14].

Conclusion. The analysis demonstrates that Uzbekistan’s media diplomacy in Central Asia has evolved from episodic representation into a multilayered system of bilateral and multilateral cooperation based on agency partnerships, multilingual services, broadcasting agreements, content exchange, professional training, press tours and regional platforms. Although the institutional models differ by country, all four bilateral relationships increasingly support regular information flows and direct access to primary sources.

These developments have diplomatic significance because they strengthen professional networks and reduce dependence on external information ecosystems. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of media diplomacy should not be equated with the number of agreements alone; it depends on credibility, reciprocity, professional standards and measurable audience engagement.

It is recommended to institutionalize joint fact-checking, cross-border digital projects, regular journalist exchanges, multilingual editorial standards and transparent performance indicators. Future research should combine official documentary evidence with interviews, audience studies and comparative content analysis in order to measure how regional media cooperation affects trust, representation and public perceptions.

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