

Internationalizing the Uzbekistan Automotive Industry:

Overcoming Cultural Differences and Misunderstandings for the Future Growth

This case is about the internationalisation process of Uzbek automobile industry that aimed at modernising UzAuto's light commercial vehicle fleet. After signing a joint venture agreement, Uzbek and French partners discovered significant misunderstandings regarding the terms of the partnership. These challenges resulted in the need of additional investment of 50 million euro, which UzAuto struggled to get. UzAuto leaders had to decide whether to continue the joint venture or terminate the partnership. An overview of the case is based on insights gathered through interviews with the top management of the joint venture company UzPCA, offering a detailed account of the complexities and decision-making processes of an international agreement.

■ PROFILE OF UZBEKISTAN

Along the historic Silk Road, Uzbekistan is strategically situated at the crossroad of Europe and Asia. It borders Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan (Attachment No.1). The area is 448,900 km². There are 14 administrative units in Uzbekistan: the Republic of Karakalpakstan, 12 viloyats (provinces) and the capital city of Tashkent. The largest cities are Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. The population is 37 million people. Uzbekistan is a constitutional presidential republic in which the President serves as the head of state and the Prime Minister leads the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan is one of the two doubly landlocked countries in the world (another is Liechtenstein). This means that crossing two neighbouring countries is necessary to reach the coastline. 20% of its territory is mountains and 50% is desert. Several land routes connect Uzbekistan to international markets. The East route, which connects Uzbekistan with the seaports of China and Far East Russia via Kazakhstan is the most extensive route in terms of cargo volume. The North and West routes cross the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea to link Uzbekistan with Russia (Moscow) and Europe. The South route offers seaport access to Iran via Turkmenistan, and to Pakistan via Afghanistan.

■ CULTURE

Soviet heritage. Recent economic situations and business practices in Uzbekistan was deeply influenced by its Soviet heritage. This could be seen in the way its leaders think, behave and interact with each other in organizations. The Soviet Union government emphasized centralized, tightly controlled and planned economy. As a result, organizational communication was unidirectional and hierarchical, with leadership adopting a 'disclose only selective information' approach towards employees. For example, the head of a textile factory may receive an instruction from the central government that sets out specific quotas (production volume), delivery deadlines and possible penalties for non-fulfilment. When the manager communicate this to his employees, he will inform only the production goals and deadlines to the workers, withholding important information such as the rationale for the quota, the broader economic goals, or raw material shortages.

The centrally planned economy also caused serious environmental problems. As the economy's

focus was on cotton production, from 1960s onward the Aral Sea dried up due to over-reliance on cotton. As a result, in the 1990s, it reached its most critical levels of desiccation which is still the region's most urgent problem.

After gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan began transitioning towards a market-oriented economy. Consequently, international practices began to be adopted in organizations when international companies like Coca-Cola, Nestlé, British American Tobacco, and General Motors entered the market. They introduced modern organizational structures to the Uzbekistan business environment in contrast to the Soviet-era hierarchical structure that was characterized by rigid centralization.

Nowadays, Uzbekistan is implementing a series of market-oriented reforms aimed at opening up the economy, attracting foreign investment, and reducing dependence on a single crop economy. The country's approach to internationalization, industrial diversification, and economic reform reflects an effort to move beyond the Soviet legacy while leveraging its foundational assets and historical ties in the region. Some of the reforms include the public-private partnership law, the revised currency controls legislation, and the adoption of a globally recognized legal framework.

Language. Since 1989, Uzbek has been a state language in Uzbekistan. Complex cultural and ethnic features shaped by centuries of history, as well as the country's geographic location, all had an impact on its linguistic diversity. Karakalpak, together with Uzbek, is the official language of the autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan in western Uzbekistan. Karakalpak is closely connected to Kazakh yet has its own unique cultural and linguistic legacy. Tajik is widely spoken along the Tajikistan border, as well as among the ethnic Tajik minority in the country. Samarkand and Bukhara, in particular, have sizable Tajik populations. Various ethnic minorities, including Kazakhs, Tatars, Koreans, and Ukrainians, speak their own languages in addition to Uzbek and Russian. Some regions along the borders also speak less common languages such as Kyrgyz and Turkmen.

Uzbek language is widely spoken in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and the People's Republic of China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Around 40 million individuals globally communicate in Uzbek.

The Russian language continues to play an important role, particularly in the business world and large cities. The majority of official documents are still written in Russian, with some Uzbek translations attached. Nowadays, 53% of schools in Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital, teach in Russian. Even the president of the country makes his official "Happy New Year" speech in two languages: Uzbek and Russian. When working with overseas partners, documentations are typically written in Uzbek, Russian, and English.

Religion. In 649 AD, the third Caliph Uthman crossed the Amu Darya (Oxus River) and began the swift conversion of the Turkic peoples to Islam, establishing Islam in Central Asia. However, the region was controlled by Communist regimes at a later time and maintained strict control over Islam, isolating them from Islamic customs. Consequently, because of the preaching of atheist Communists, they were, until recently, among the most secularized Muslims globally.

The collapse of the Soviet Union inspired optimism that the Uzbek people and other Central Asians, freed from religious restrictions, would reclaim their religious traditions and reintegrate themselves into the wider Muslim community. However, the events of the fall of 2001 in Afghanistan, when alongside the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) fighters engaged in several terroristic acts, played a prominent role in restricting religious practices in

Uzbekistan once again. It confirmed the most serious concerns of President Islom Karimov's regime about the emergence of another political force and a threat to the security of the region. Thus, ongoing campaign of fighting against "religious extremism" since 1998 was validated and strengthened.

As a result of the transition of power in 2016, Uzbekistan has relaxed some of its restrictions in the religious field. Today Islam is the predominant religion in Uzbekistan, with around 88% of the people identified as Muslim. Other religions practiced are Russian Orthodox Christianity (9%) and minor religions (3%) such as Roman Catholicism and several Protestant denominations. As a result, conventional Islamic principles continue to exert influence on everyday life and cultural practices, especially concerning family, hospitality, and communal gatherings.

■ UZBEKISTAN'S GLOBAL INTEGRATION

After long negotiations, Uzbekistan realized that it is difficult to be an active participant in the global economy without joining the World Trade Organization (WTO). In November 2017, President Mirziyoyev publicly announced Uzbekistan's intention to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Joining the WTO will allow the country to be an integral part of the global economy and benefit from its multilateral trading system. Furthermore, WTO membership contributes to improving governance, domestic policies and trade-related institutions in member states.

■ BUSINESS CONTEXT

In the early 1990s, when Uzbekistan had just gained independence from the Soviet Union, the lack of major investors in the country prompted the government to take on the role of investor and establish large state enterprises. Consequently, strategic enterprises in Uzbekistan became state-owned. Such interest in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which hindered compliance with WTO (World Trade Organization) rules, impeded progress and delayed the WTO accession process by almost 26 years.

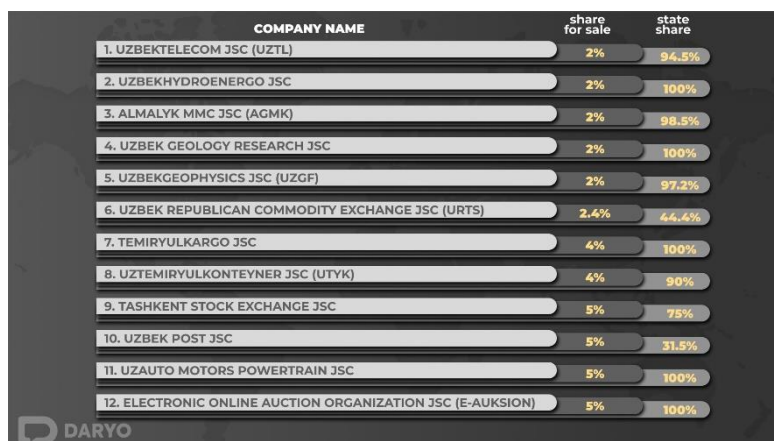
As Uzbekistan seeks WTO membership, it needs to liberalize many economic sectors. The government wants to reduce the number of SOEs by 75% in the nearest future. With the founding of the State Asset Management Agency of Uzbekistan (UzSAMA) in 2019, the government once again energized its privatization initiatives. UzSAMA is the main state agency in charge of implementing a single state policy in the field of effective management of state assets.

UzSAMA is authorized to organize privatization measures through auctions, competitions, or initial or secondary public offerings ("IPO/SPO") on domestic and international stock exchanges. Additionally, it is authorized to keep an eye on investors' compliance with investment obligations and social commitments.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan has presented a comprehensive package of measures to accelerate the privatization process in the country. For example, newly released Presidential Decree No. 162 outlines strategies to reduce government interference in economic activities, while Decree No. 163 facilitates the privatization of key state-owned enterprises. The decree also outlines plans to organize Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) and Secondary Public Offerings (SPOs) for 12 large enterprises on the local market (Figure 2). Four companies are earmarked for international IPO/SPO, signalling Uzbekistan's intention to attract global investors and expand its economic

reach beyond national borders. In addition to access to foreign financing and state-of-the-art technologies, the process of privatization is being accompanied by the planned adoption of international standards and practices in collaboration with foreign investors and experts.

Figure 2. Plans for IPOs and SPOs for 12 large enterprises announced



Source: www.daryo.uz

■ OVERVIEW OF UZBEK AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

In November 1992, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan released a decree “On the establishment of JV “UzDaewooAuto”. Consequently, to support automobile production, many spare parts production companies were established as joint ventures with Korean partners. Due to the urgency of managing and controlling all these enterprises, in March 1994 the Uzbek Automobile Manufacturing Association “Uzavtosanoat” was founded. In August 2004, the association was restructured into a joint stock company.

Today, JSC “Uzavtosanoat” (UzAuto) is a holding company that controls automotive manufacturing enterprises, auto localization and auto components enterprises. It is the largest company in Central Asia that includes more than 85 enterprises in the engineering industry. UzAuto companies produce passenger cars, light, medium and heavy trucks, automobile engines, spare parts, combine harvesters, tillage and agricultural machinery (Attachment No. 2).

The export markets of the automotive industry serve as a key generator of foreign currency revenue in the country and play an important role in supporting the country’s trade balance. As one of the largest taxpayers UzAuto has become a cornerstone of the economy, contributing significantly with a 1.1% net share in the nation’s GDP. UzAuto also plays a vital role in employment, supporting thousands of jobs and enhancing Uzbekistan’s trade balance. It has a substantial multiplier effect on the economy, where each job directly employed in the sector generates an additional 5-7 jobs in related industries. Furthermore, the number of people employed at UzAuto enterprises stands at 29,200, which represents 0.1% of all those employed in Uzbekistan. The number of people employed in related industries stands between 150,000 and 210,000, which accounts for approximately 1.5% of the total employed population in Uzbekistan.

■ TRANSFORMATION OF UZAUTO

To ensure its sustainable development in conditions of tough competition in foreign markets

and liberalization of foreign exchange policy and to increase the production of competitive products, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued Resolution No. PP-3028 dated June 1, 2017 “On measures for further improvement of management and to accelerate the development of the automotive industry for 2017-2021.” According to the resolution, key tasks for 2017-2021 included attracting foreign investment for new vehicle models, modernizing technical and technological equipment of UzAuto, localizing automotive components, improving corporate governance by introducing international standards, reducing the state share in the company through privatization, enhancing human resource potential through educational partnerships, increasing sales transparency, and fostering research and innovation to connect science with production.

Following the Resolution, UzAuto changed composition of its Supervisory Board (Attachment No. 2) and reorganized its management structure (Attachment No. 3). In addition, the company established a Transformation Office, bringing together its most talented employees with extensive international education and experience.

■ INTERNATIONALISATION of UZAUTO

Internationalization in Uzbekistan’s automotive industry brought significant growth, driven by economic reforms, foreign investments, and strategic partnerships. With the Uzbek government prioritizing automotive sector development as part of its broader economic reform agenda, the industry became more open to foreign investors and international collaborations. This encouraged global automotive players, particularly from South Korea, Turkey, Japan, China, the US, and Europe, to form partnerships and joint ventures with local manufacturers, enhancing production capacity, technology transfer, and workforce skills.

JV UzDaewooAuto: Daewoo - UzAuto

The idea to build an automobile production in Uzbekistan came after the first visit of the President Karimov to South Korean Daewoo Motors in 1992. The joint venture (JV) UzDaewooAuto was established in 1993 and started production of the first car in July 1996. The share of the joint venture was 50% UzAuto and 50% Daewoo Motors with a capacity of 250,000 cars per year.

The company became known for producing affordable passenger vehicles for the local and regional market. By facilitating technology transfer and economic growth, the joint venture had a major impact on the Uzbek automotive industry.

JV GM Uzbekistan: General Motors - UzAuto

Following Daewoo's official bankruptcy with global implication in 2001 and resulting change of ownership, GM Uzbekistan was established in March 2008 as a new replacement joint venture. The share of the joint venture was 75% UzAuto and 25% General Motors with a capacity of 300,000 cars per year. It had three production facilities in different regions of Uzbekistan.

In July 2019, UzAuto acquired the entire share of the company and renamed it “UzAuto Motors”. Uzauto Motors’ share of domestic market in 2023 was 84%.

JV GM Powertrain Uzbekistan: General Motors - UzAuto

Following an agreement in 2008 between GM and UzAuto, JV GM Powertrain Uzbekistan was established for the production of powertrains in Tashkent. The ownership share in this joint

venture was different from that of the JV GM Uzbekistan: UzAuto 48% and General Motors 52%. The production volume was 225 000 engines per year. In July 2011, the very first engine was produced. It produced 1.2 and 1.5 litre engines to be installed in GM small passenger cars of JV GM Uzbekistan and worldwide with around 700 employees. In July 2019, UzAuto acquired the entire share of the company and renamed it UzAuto Motors Powertrain.

JV SamKochAvto: Koch Holding - UzAuto

In 1996, the factory JV SamKochAvto was established for the production of buses and trucks with the participation of automotive components producer AvtoVAZagregat in Samarqand region. The project was implemented with the Turkish company Koch Holding by both Koch Holding and UzAuto holding 50% of the shares. In 1999, production of buses and trucks with chassis and power unit started. Buses of JV SamKochAvto under the brand name UzOtoyol were exported to Russia, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. In September 2006, UzAuto bought the Turkish company's shares and the company was renamed SamAuto.

JV SamAuto: Itochu - Isuzu Motors - UzAuto

In January 2007, SamAuto began mass production of mid-size buses and trucks with Isuzu chassis and powertrains under the Technical Assistance Agreement with Isuzu Motors Ltd.

In April 2007, the founders of SamAuto brought in the first foreign investor - the Japanese Itochu Corporation that acquired 8% of the shares of SamAuto. In July 2015, Japanese Company Isuzu Motors and UzAuto signed an agreement to sell another 8% shares of SamAuto to the company. Nowadays, the SamAuto line-up includes basic models in the small class, low-floor buses trucks and other special vehicles of Isuzu. The production volume is 4,000 trucks and buses per year. In 2021, SamAuto's shares were held by UzAuto Commercial Vehicles Management (51.9%), Itochu Corporation (12.4%), Isuzu Motors (12.4%) and Asakabank (Uzbekistan) (23.3%).

JV MAN Auto: MAN Nutzfahrzeuge AG - UzAuto

The JV MAN Auto Uzbekistan was founded in June 2009 in the Samarkand region between the UzAuto and German MAN Nutzfahrzeuge AG with a share of 51% and 49%, respectively. The company produces MAN trucks with a total weight of 15 to 50 tons: tractor units, dump trucks, vans, and special equipment. The plant is designed to produce over 3,000 trucks per year, with the possibility of increasing the number to 8,000 units.

In December 2020, Sinotruk International Investment joined the company as a new investor. Following that, the company was renamed Uz Truck and Bus Motors. In June 2023, UzAuto sold all its shares. Now the shareholders are MAN Truck & Bus (33%), Sinotruk International Investment (33%) and State Asset Management Agency of Uzbekistan (UzSAMA) (34%).

■ JOINT VENTURE WITH PSA GRPOUP (Peugeot Citroen)

Background and Motivation. Rapidly increasing economic growth in Uzbekistan urgently required expansion and modernization of the light commercial vehicle (LCV) fleet. The country imported 7,000-8,000 LCVs annually, while locally manufactured products were outdated and could not fill the demand for higher loading capacities for both of cargo and passenger vehicles. Therefore, to address this, UzAuto started seeking a foreign partner who could provide advanced LCV models that not only support Uzbekistan's economic expansion but also adhere to stricter international safety and emissions standards.

This initiative led to the formation of a project team involving young specialists from the UzAuto companies. This team actively pursued international cooperation by reaching out to

prominent LCV manufacturers, including Iveco, Fiat, Toyota, PSA Group, Hyundai, Volkswagen, and Mercedes-Benz. German manufacturers Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz declined UzAuto's proposal due to their existing joint ventures in the Russian market, which prevent further regional partnerships, while some companies did not show any interest. However, Italian Iveco and French PSA Group showed interest recognizing the potential for collaboration in Uzbekistan's expanding automotive sector.

Selection of PSA Group. PSA Group was chosen for their advanced technology and expertise in LCV production, as well as its commitment to international safety and emissions standards. It was also the market leader in LCV in European Union. They were willing to share intellectual property, implement modern production processes, and train employees, bringing critical know-how to the Uzbekistan automotive industry.

Joint Venture Agreement - UzPCA. The President of Uzbekistan approved an investment agreement, signed between the Government of Uzbekistan represented by the State Committee of Uzbekistan for Investments, Peugeot Citroen Automobiles S.A. and UzAuto, which outlined the specific obligations of the foreign investor and measures of state support, provided to UzPCA by the Government of Uzbekistan.

As part of the incentives, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev provided a number of tax and customs privileges and preferences for the project participants. The services of official dealers of UzPCA for the maintenance and repair of the manufactured cars, including the prices of spare parts, units, aggregates and materials, as well as their sale through the trading network were to be exempt from VAT.

Consequently, the official contract was signed with PSA Group on 16 May 2017 on establishment of a 50-50 percent joint venture - UzPCA - with a greenfield manufacturing facility. The production capacity of the enterprise was predicted up to 20,000 cars per year. The parties determined the conditions for implementation of the investment project with a total cost of 133.3 million euros. The authorized capital of the joint venture was 29.3 million euros.

Responsibilities. The agreement stipulated that PSA Group would supply two LCV model lines of Peugeot Boxer (10 modifications) and Peugeot Expert (7 modifications) to UzPCA, one as CKD (completely knocked down) and another as SKD (semi-knocked down). The PSA Group was also tasked with providing new technologies, tooling for producing parts for these vehicles, intellectual property, facilitating the implementation of modern production processes and employee training. UzAuto took responsibility for providing 45 hectares of land to build the manufacturing plant, located in the Jizzakh region and for covering the construction costs of the plant.

Top Management. The PSA side nominated a few key personnel as per the charter agreement: First Deputy General Director, First Deputy Finance Director, and Quality Manager. Other personnel were assigned from experienced employees within UzAuto. The key leaders from both sides were competent on start-up experience and aware of international business standards. Such background experience allowed participants to possess a first-hand understanding of the importance of joint venture partner communication during the mergers.

■ THE WAY OF DOING BUSINESS

UzAuto Way of Doing Business. Although UzAuto had some experience in internationalization, it still did not have sufficient depth in navigating the complexities of global partnerships. This limited understanding led to an overreliance on the expertise of foreign partners and positioned UzAuto itself as a junior partner in the arrangement. Such reliance reduced UzAuto's ability to critically assess and negotiate fair partnership terms.

Historically, UzAuto has maintained a successful partnership with Korean, Turkish, American, Japanese and German investors. Such positive experience further strengthened the company's optimism. UzAuto's corporate culture prioritized goodwill over comprehensive due diligence, which could have ultimately led to problems. While this approach is based on trust and previous achievements, it introduces blind spots that could have been mitigated through more robust assessment practices.

PSA Group Way of Doing Business. The PSA Group was an experienced company with a long history in automotive industry. It was known for its production expertise and innovative strength. Over the years, the company established various international joint ventures and leveraged its rich knowledge of the automotive sector delivering high-quality products. Such background established PSA Group as an aggressive player in the market, proficient in enhancing performance and attaining strategic objectives in competitive environment.

The PSA Group's corporate culture was based on financial outcomes and performance-oriented strategies. It highlighted fast and measurable results. This approach prioritized efficiency, profitability, and rapid returns on investment. PSA's financial orientation left little room for long term development partnership or delayed profitability.

■ UNFORESEEN CHALLENGES ARISING AFTER THE JOINT VENTURE AGREEMENT

In May 2018, construction and installation work at the facility was concluded. The plant was supposed to start production in 2019. However, some unforeseen circumstances hindered further development of the project:

Before reception of LCV production lines by UzAuto, PSA Group contracted Osirius Group for making detailed inventory assessment in France. Osirius Group is an executor that provide deep global technical automotive industry expertise. The company is based in Detroit, USA with offices located around the globe. A team of highly educated manufacturing professionals and engineers enables companies to execute large-scale global automotive programs, including tasks like shifting production lines and process integration to logistics and tooling integration. Osirius Group identified several nonconformities that posed challenges to the continuation of the joint venture.

Challenge No.1: Old production line instead of “know-how”. PSA Group was planning to produce LCV models, Peugeot Boxer and Peugeot Expert, with an old production line that was designed about 15 years ago for its old JV that stopped production in 2015. However, in an agreement it was described as a "know-how" production line.

Challenge No.2: Drawings of production lines. Drawings of the production line were not digitalized, were only on paper, posing further challenges for adapting the layout to the new

facility's requirements. This discrepancy resulted in the need for additional funding for a custom layout design specifically tailored to the needs of the new facility.

Challenge No.3: Ownership of original layout. PSA Group owned only the production line of LCV and not the right of the original layout. The owner of the layout was PSA Group's old JV partner Fiat. The layout, designed 15 years ago for a production capacity of 50,000 units per year, did not align with the requirements of the new joint venture, which aimed for a smaller production scale of 15,000 units annually.

All of these issues and upgrade requirements that emerged required an additional investment of 50 million euros. UzAuto faced challenges to add additional funding to the investment project that was already confirmed by a presidential decision.

■ THE PARTNERSHIP CROSSROADS: UZAUTO'S JOINT VENTURE DILEMMA

UzAuto's leadership faced a serious dilemma regarding the future of its joint venture with PSA Group: Should UzAuto continue the joint venture partnership with PSA Group or give it up?

Adding additional funding for the investment project was a huge challenge for UzAuto because the detail of the investment was already approved by a presidential decree. As a solution, UzAuto proposed to share these unexpected expenses equally with PSA Group. However, PSA Group rejected this proposal, citing that its initial commitment to the joint venture was formulated as a non-cash investment. UzAuto also felt pressure by government as the project was under the direct supervision of the President of Uzbekistan. This dilemma required careful consideration of financial, strategic, and reputational risks as the leadership weighed their next steps. Consequently, in 2020, due to some unforeseen circumstances, UzAuto and PSA Group announced a revision of a project concept.

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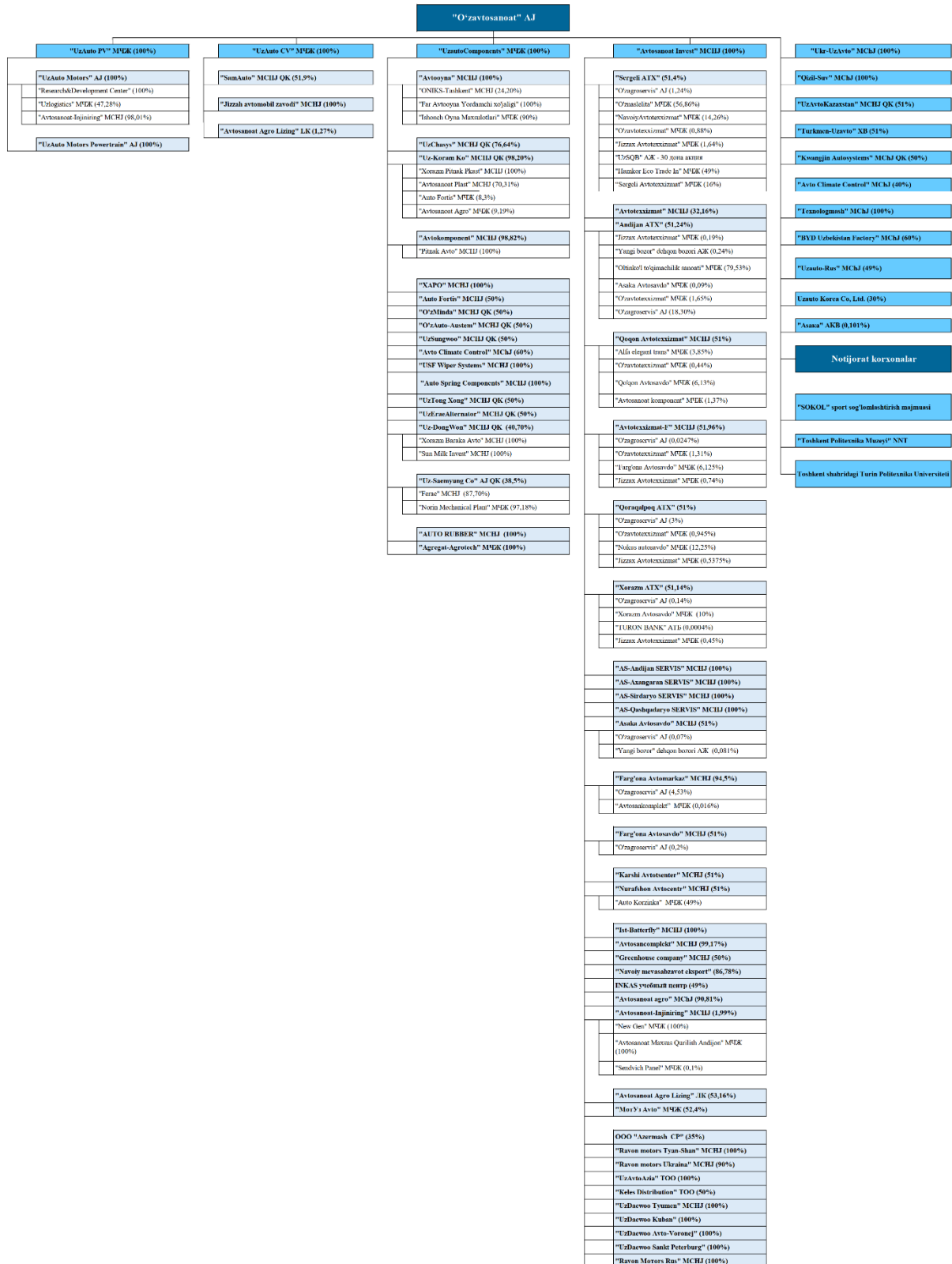
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MAP OF UZBEKISTAN



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ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF UZAUTO



COMPOSITION
of the Supervisory Board of UzAuto

Bekenov S.Kh. - First Deputy Minister of Economy, Chairman of the Supervisory Board;

Rafikov A.V. - Head of the Department of Machine Engineering, Automotive, and Electrical Engineering Development, and Product Standardization of the Cabinet of Ministers;

by position - First Deputy Chairman of the State Competition Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan;

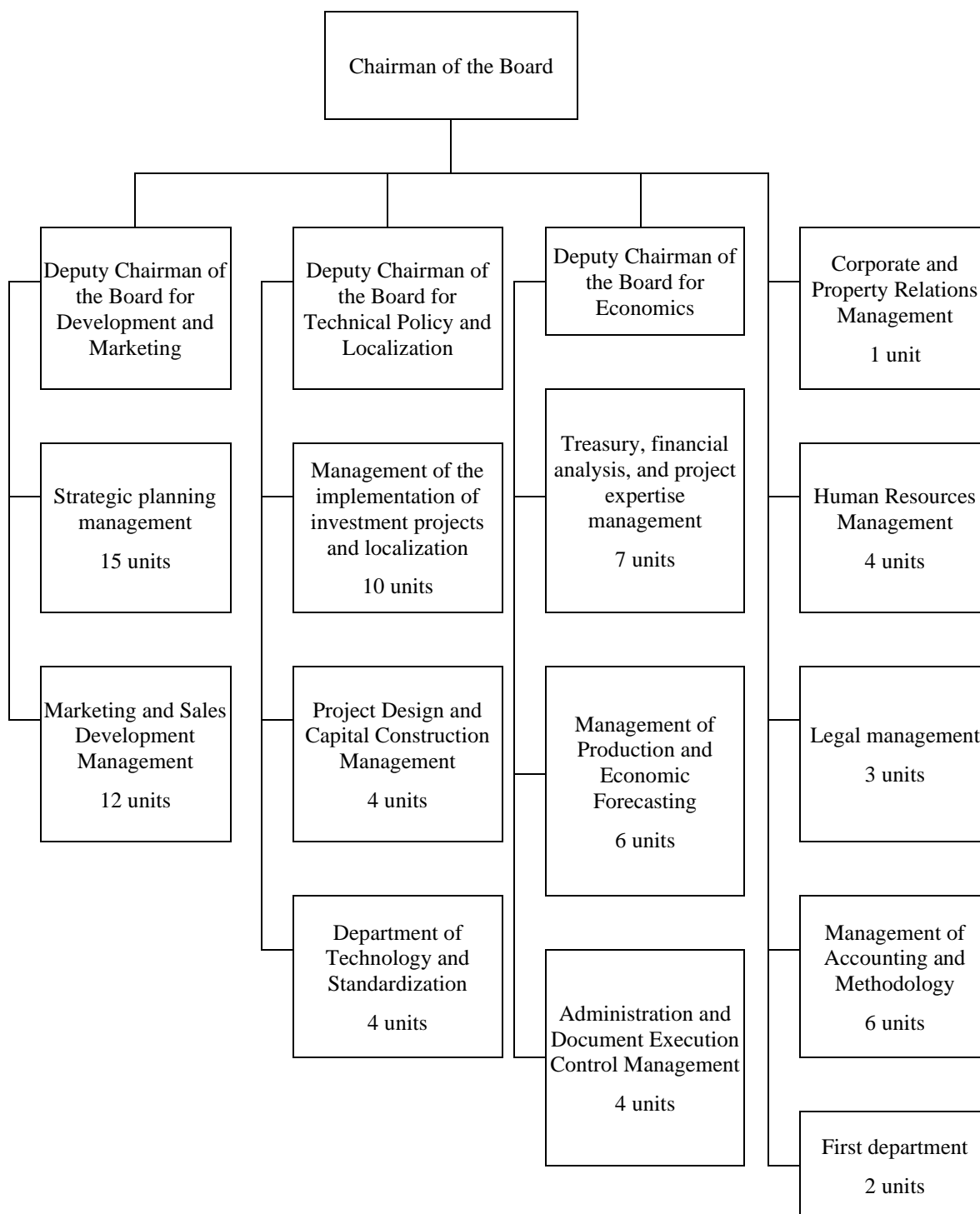
Mullazhanov K.K. - Chairman of the Board of JSC "Asaka";

Azimov T.R. - Chief Specialist on Automotive Industry Issues of the Department of Machine Engineering, Automotive and Electrical Engineering Industries, and Product Standardization of the Cabinet of Ministers;

Abdullaev A.B. - Head of the Department of Basic Industries and Fuel and Energy Complex of the Ministry of Finance.

Note: *When members of the Supervisory Board transition to another job, individuals newly appointed to these positions or assigned to perform these functions are included as the member of Supervisory Board of UzAuto.*

STRUCTURE of the executive apparatus of UzAuto



The total number of executive staff - 90 units, including:
managerial staff - 86 units support staff - 4 units