REPORT

ON THE WORK DONE BY THE "CIVIL INITIATIVE OF INTERNET POLICY" PUBLIC FOUNDATION ON THE CENTRAL ASIA INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORM IN ASTANA, REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

BISHKEK, KYRGYZSTAN
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Table of content

Introduction

The sixth Central Asia Internet Governance Forum (hereinafter CAIGF) was held on 28-29 September, 2022 at the EXPO IEC, Astana, Kazakhstan.

 The event was organized by the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan, jointly with the "Civil Initiative of Internet Policy" Public Foundation (hereinafter - PF CIIP) and "Astana Hub" innovative projects development center, with support of committed partners, including non-governmental organization Legal Policy Research Center (LPRC), which is based in Almaty (Kazakhstan) and is functioning in the Central Asian region; Electronic Governance Academy (eGA), a Canadian non-governmental organization SecDev.Foundation, which operates worldwide for sustainability of digital technologies, Meta, IGFSA, Kaspersky and others. CIIP PF has been performing its activities since 2003, and is a leader in regulation of information technologies and communications in the Kyrgyz Republic and CIS, and also actively participates in the processes of digital transformation of public and community life, promoting equal, free and fair Internet access and strengthening the role of public instructions and citizens in the government bodies making decisions on application of information and communication technologies.

The main goal of Central Asia Internet Governance Forum - 2022 is to strengthen open multi-stakeholder discussion on digital resilience, continuity and readiness in times of crisis and the implications of major disruption for the entire digital ecosystem in Central Asia. Participation in the forum of key actors from business, society and governments of the region served the joint search for a balance between security and digital development in the crisis era, discussing the conditions for Internet accessibility, digital empowerment, digital inclusion of all countries in the region.

The event was attended by more than 200 offline and 350 online participants - representatives of state bodies of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, as well as experts and business communities of more than 10 countries (Canada, China, Estonia, USA, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan).

Jambakin Askar Serikovich, Vice-Minister of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan, officially opened the Forum this year, and warmly welcomed the participants of the Forum, wished them fruitful work, and interesting discussions. Representatives of the ministries of digital development of Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan also welcomed the Forum participants.

The CAIGF-2022 made it possible to formulate recommendations and identify further measures and actions for digital development at both the national and regional levels.

1. Main themes of digital resilience addressed in CAIGF 2022

At CAIGF-2022, for the sixth time, the Central Asian region discussed shared issues of sustainability of Internet access. As ever, the Internet in Central Asia remains a crucial element of social development and economic opportunities for all. Across the region, as countries recover and adapt to the still ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, they are seeking to expand access, robust connectivity, and renewed Internet infrastructure. The very goals of sustainable development continue to be re-evaluated through the priority lens of the digital economy, innovation, and digital transformation.

Global and national regulatory initiatives for cyberspace, from rules governing data to ensuring inclusive and equitable Internet access, are shaping the new regulatory landscape in Central Asia. All these changes would not have been possible without the fundamental prerequisites of equality, privacy, freedom of expression, digital security, and digital participation.

In the context of global instability and political uncertainty, digital readiness and digital resilience, as well as access to the Internet, are critical themes for the region. Global economic challenges could negatively affect the pace of technology-led development by limiting investment in the digital future, with the greatest impact on vulnerable and marginalized communities. Global risk factors may disrupt access to communications, for example, due to increased cyber threats. Overall, strong Internet connectivity remains an element of the region's competitiveness, not only in terms of economic impact, but also because of its role as a space for regional dialogue and open communication.

Central Asia faces a number of these and other unprecedented challenges. No country can adequately anticipate and manage all of them on its own. They demand both shared country-level and regional responses and long-term adaptations. Successful enhancement of digital resilience of Internet access depends, inter alia, on the participation of all stakeholders - the State, business and citizens of the region - in the discussion of legal and technological measures, their strategic partnership and the establishment of coordinated policies.

1.1. Digital governance resilience: the «road map» to achieve digital resilience in an era of global changes.

The Central Asian countries, like the rest of the world, are facing the consequences of the pandemic that has posed a serious challenge to the sustainable development in our region. Sustainability is a complex problem, according to international experts. The factors for creating a sustainable digital ecosystem capable of responding to crises, the tools available to governments to ensure the sustainability of national networks and digital assets, and other important issues were discussed at the first panel session of the Forum.

Key speakers Toomas Tirs - Extraordinary Ambassador of Estonia to Kazakhstan, and Bakhtiyor Ryazaev - Head of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory of Uzbekistan, shared new solutions and opportunities on the road to digital resilience, application of advanced technologies in countries such as Estonia and Uzbekistan. The speakers noted that the current pace of digital development was prompting governments around the world to rethink how they deliver services to their citizens and use advanced methods to address national and regional challenges.

During the discussions, the participants identified the challenges they could face and how they could be addressed. Experts discussed these issues by examining how well the Central Asian countries develop policies, encourage innovation and create the necessary infrastructure for the digital economy and society at the national level. The main issues and how various factors, both internal and external, influence these processes and other related issues were also discussed.

As a result of the panel session, the participants agreed that the strengthening of cooperation among the Central Asian countries will not only improve resilience of the region's countries, but also in the future will form a strong economic architecture of the region as a whole, so that the Central Asian countries can cope with the various crises in the future at a much lower cost.

1.2. Digital economy resilience: digital business development and digital cooperation under pressure of crisis

The digitalization of the national economy is welcomed by all the countries of Central Asia, as all regional actors strive to use «breakthrough» digital technologies to ensure sustainability of business under the crisis, adaptive response through the use of big data analytics, to the development and interregional promotion of digital business. Experts noted that over the past two years, they have seen an unprecedented acceleration in digital innovation, which drives productivity, growth, and rethink how business interacts with key stakeholders. Sustainable business organizations use integrated technology strategies to respond quickly to disruptive events while maintaining a strong focus on competitiveness. Digital resilience creates economic advantages through flexibility, allowing the enterprise to change quickly, adapt to changing conditions, ensure business continuity, and benefit from the market opportunities. International experts have identified cyber-risk as a major digital issue, in which Central Asian countries need to share their experiences, increase cyber-resilience and increase cooperation between the public and private sectors.

Presentations were made by: Director of Public Policy in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mongolia, Meta Platforms Inc. - George Chen, and digitalization consultant in Uzbekistan and Central Asia and the Caucasus Ruta Makareviciute. They talked about business opportunities in the digital transformation, and highlighted the importance of building a common digital ecosystem for business, which will cover all countries in the region.

As a result, it was noted that coordination at the regional and subregional levels is necessary for success. A small country cannot stand the pressure of big trans-corporations. Only joint action can counter risks. For successful implementation of these tasks, it is necessary to communicate more with representatives of different business sectors, to talk directly, in-person.

1.3. Digital society resilience: creating the conditions for digital citizenship as a factor of continuous digital development

The forum concluded with a session on the digital society resilience, where participants and experts discussed the role of digital citizens in a resilient digital ecosystem, and how to raise a new generation of digital citizens, etc.

Presentations were made by Eric Johnson, an international expert in the field of freedom of access to information and technology, and Asomudin Atoev, CyberSTAR Regional Project Coordinator.

It was noted in the speeches that digital citizenship concerns all without exception. The formation of digital citizenship stages include: the availability of technologies (and digital gadgets), creation of maximum coverage of Internet access. Digital citizenship implies high level of preparedness of the population for the responsible, efficient and safe use of digital communications. Studies show that in many countries, the level of population preparedness is not yet sufficient. Internet coverage is uneven across countries. In Central Asia, only about half (49.7 per cent) of the population uses Internet, which negatively affects opportunities for development and access to education, especially for the younger generation. Digital citizenship issues are directly related to social processes. Ultimately, the active introduction of digital technologies and the provision of inclusive access to the Internet allows digital citizens to receive «digital dividends», create conditions that allow improving their lives, influencing the development of the region.

As a result of the session, the experts concluded that digital citizenship, availability of active digital citizens who influence the formation of public policy, creation of digital business services, and the public agenda in the region's countries, are of key importance for the Central Asian countries. Efforts should be coordinated to create the digital citizenship culture among the population and to strengthen digital rights and opportunities.

2. Financial statement

#	Activity	Cost Component	A. BUDGET (USD)	B. ACTUAL EXPENDITURE (USD)	C. VARIANCE (USD)	D. EXPLANATION OF VARIANCE
1	Coffee breaks and lunches, Air tickets local and international participants	Contractual Services	3 600	3 628	-28	Bank commission paid
3	Interpretation	Contractual Services	1 600	1 572	28	
4	Rental and/or installation of technical equipment	Equipment, Vehicles and Furniture	800	800	0	
	Total		**6,000**	**6000**	**0**	

3. Achievements of the activities

Summarizing all the panel discussions, speakers and conference participants shared the opinion that the main opportunities for the region's digital development and its digital resilience, as well as the sustainability of Internet access, consist in strengthening of sub-regional cooperation at all levels - between government agencies, business, experts, and civil society. According to international experts, the new challenges posed by digital opportunities require greater coordination and harmonization of approaches. The Central Asian countries, being economically and geographically connected, need to cooperate more, ensure resilience together, and respond to digital challenges in a coordinated manner.

One of the Forum's achievements was not only the joint discussions of government representatives, business, and civil society of the region on the main points of its agenda, but also the search for joint solutions to resist new challenges and threats, joint digital development, and implementation of joint projects. On the forum sidelines, representatives of the governments of neighboring countries, together with experts, discussed the possibilities of creating new sub-regional projects, agreed on specific practical steps that will accelerate digital development in each of the Central Asian countries participating in the CAIGF-2022 Forum. During the discussion, the forum participants also noted that it is very important for neighboring countries to take joint measures to address emerging risks, including increasing the influence of large trans-corporations.

Video broadcasts and photos from events:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCY-dbf1PAZ07HT_dPBLbiBA

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16Gf4RYN03EFPN9o6riXyNiY_yx4PZUPP?usp=sharing

For detailed information on the speakers and the program of events, visit:

https://caigf.org/en/

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