



ALMATY, NOVEMBER 7-8, 2023



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Table of contents

Partners	2
Introduction	4
Policy Recommendations Based on the StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum 2023	5
Key Speakers	6
Global IT Trends 2023	8
Inclusive Digitalization of Central Asia	9
EBRD Star Venture Startups Investor Pitch	10
Knowledge as a New Energy	10
New Education for the New Economy	11
IT Investment Funds in Eurasia	12
Smart Fintech Solutions	13
Public service digitalization and e-governance	14
Enterprise Trends in Cloud 2023	15
Participants	16
Highlights	18



We were happy to host the Forum in Almaty, Kazakhstan's IT hub and one of the leading IT cities in the Eurasian region. We truly believe that Central Asia's young population, which numbers 70 million, holds the potential to make this region a global center for digital excellence. We

also truly believe that the entire region will benefit from the economic transformation from a traditional natural resource-based and heavy industry-based to a knowledge-driven economy.

The title of this year's Forum is «Knowledge as a new energy», with knowledge based on five educational pillars. We educate people, we educate companies, we educate money, so that old money becomes smart money. We also educate governments, and we work with them to assist them in adjusting their local legislation in accordance with global and regional best practices. We also educate markets, with the aim of explaining to people in the US, Europe, and most recently the Gulf, that Central Asia can be a center of digital expertise at the highest global levels, and that not only would these markets benefit from receiving digital services from Central Asia, it is also an excellent investment opportunity, offering incredible returns.

Six months ago, we released our report "The Billion in the Distance", which was supported by USAID and the EBRD in Central Asia. The report describes how to scale up IT exports from Central Asia to the tune of billions of dollars for each country in the region. This is a very realistic goal, and the report generated policy recommendations for international financial institutions, development agencies, and governments, while serving as a useful tool for StrategEast to promote Central Asia as a desirable IT destination in the outer markets.

We educate people, we educate companies, we educate money, how the old money becomes smart money. We also educate governments, we work with the governments to assist to adjust the local legislation in accordance with the global best and regional best practices. We also educate markets, with the aim of explaining to people in the US, Europe, and most recently the Gulf, that Central Asia can be a center of digital expertise at the highest global levels.

Together with Google, we have launched training for 2,050 students in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. We work with local universities, who I always tell people are our best partners in each country of the region. They are the key to talent, our biggest supporters, and they assist us by working in concert to maximize our results. One year ago, we launched a donors coordination committee for IT development in Kyrgyzstan. It began as a joint endeavor with UNDP, and we now run the committee with the Kyrgyzstan Software Developers Association. At the next quarterly meeting, we will share a project to be co-funded by a number of donors.

If local capital has not been invested in the local workforce, there is no future for IT or a knowledge-driven economy anywhere. That is why we are striving to educate and attract local investors to invest in the local startups pipeline development. It is also important to bring global expertise to attract local accelerators, along with a global experience and practice from beyond Silicon Valley.

Over the next year, we should devote our efforts to developing a digital bridge between Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Gulf states. Those in the Gulf understand that they can get Silicon Valley levels of service delivery from global companies in Central Asia, for one-tenth the price. Central Asia has a lot to offer when it comes to knowledge development in countries like Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Qatar, and smaller countries like Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait.

We came to Kazakhstan to share that we are going to develop the digital economy to deliver real change to the region, promote gender equality, generate greater opportunities for rural areas and regional centers, and above all, build the entire region into a global center of digital excellence.

**Anatoly Motkin,
President, StrategEast**

Anatoly Motkin

Policy Recommendations Based on the StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum 2023

It is in the collective interest of Central Asian countries to collaborate as a region in nurturing their own IT industry and promoting it on the global stage.

A notable illustration of successful regional cooperation is the Silk Road Innovation HUB, a community space in Silicon Valley dedicated to founders and startups from Central Eurasia, located in Palo Alto, California.

Acknowledging the imperative for a regional venture capital fund overseen by reputable figures from Silicon Valley, the forum participants highlighted the advanced state of the startup ecosystem in Central Asian and Caucasus countries.

Local startups have demonstrated maturity, drawing serious interest from investors in the Valley. Simultaneously, there is a recognized need to enhance the entry point into the ecosystem, fostering a more accessible path for early-stage startups. This critical aspect was extensively deliberated during panel discussions, startup pitches under the EBRD for Ventures program, and an angel investor workshop in Kazakhstan.

For the continued growth of the IT industry in Eurasia, expanding into the markets of Gulf countries is deemed crucial.

Instead of exclusively focusing on traditional markets like the US and EU, Eurasian countries are urged to seize opportunities in the Gulf, where digital transformation is underway, transitioning from resource-based economies to knowledge-based economies—a theme explored in the panel titled “Knowledge as a New Energy.”

Recognizing the pivotal role of state representatives in the effective development of the IT industry in Eurasian countries, especially when forging connections with new regions, underscores the necessity for a conducive business environment.

Besides establishing new relations, there is a recognized need for a business-enabling atmosphere with incentives for both local and international IT companies to invest and expand. The favorable outcomes of government visits organized by StrategEast to Gulf countries emphasize the imperative to strengthen interstate contacts for coordinated digital cooperation.

To elevate the IT expertise of Eurasian universities, collaboration with leading technology companies is recommended.

Recognizing the pivotal role of universities in knowledge-based economic ecosystems, the suggestion is to enhance expertise across curricula, faculty, and students through partnerships with leading tech companies. StrategEast has initiated joint programs with Google, Oracle Academy, and Microsoft, aiming to train students, upskill professors, and align technology curricula with global industry standards. StrategEast is proud to launch a joint program with Google for training over 2,000 students in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Another joint program with Oracle Academy will upskill professors from dozens of universities in Eurasia, as well as help these universities bring their technology curriculum in line with the standards of the global technology industry. In 2024, StrategEast is launching a joint program with Microsoft. A notable example is the collaboration between EPAM and IT Park University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, creating a successful partnership between a technology giant and an IT academy. Encouraging further such collaborations, this approach positions the Eurasian region as an emerging global technology hub.

Key speakers



Kanysh Tuleushin, First Vice Minister of Digital Development, Innovations and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan:

“Our strategy implies the development of a mechanism to support promising companies up to the level of national technological leaders, while also incentivizing businesses to purchase and implement technologies and IT solutions. Kazakhstan is working on legislative initiatives to create special preferences for investors and establish a special economic zone with jurisdiction based on English law. We invite international partners on this exciting journey to create a regional digital hub.”



Alma Kassymova, EBRD Advice for Small Businesses programme, national manager in Kazakhstan:

“At the EBRD we believe in the power of networking and the development of a venture capital ecosystem. Since last year, we have been working in the Eurasian region contributing to our star venture program in Kazakhstan, which we are now expanding to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Globally, we have a Venture Capital Investment Program, which enables us to co-invest directly in ambitious companies that use new technologies to grow in their local markets. Additionally, the EBRD invests in venture capital funds through another program called the Early Stage Innovation Facility. We hope to bring both programs to our region as well.”



Monique Mosolf, USAID Central Asia Deputy Mission Director:

“People with creativity, resilience, passion are the cornerstone of any successful business venture. So while we champion digitalization and IT sector development, we place equal emphasis on nurturing local talent, a sentiment accord in startup culture, expanding throughout Central Eurasia. StrategEast State and the IT Eurasian Forum is more than an event. It is an embodiment of our shared vision for the region’s future. It is a manifestation of our collective effort – government, and private sector, think tanks, entrepreneurs, development agencies, and many others to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem for ideas to flourish and transformative innovations to take place.”



Indu John-Abraham, Operations Manager for Central Asia, the World Bank:

“Today, we find ourselves confronting an intricate lexis of challenges brought about by profound global forces and rapid transformations. Our commitment is to ensure no nation, and no child among them is left behind in this transformational journey. Recognizing this, the World Bank has embarked on a new vision of creating a world free of poverty on a livable planet. This renewed vision recognizes digital transformation as critical to reducing poverty and inequality and addressing global challenges such as climate change.”



Marvin Liao, Investor and Partner at Diaspora Ventures:

"This event is significant for technology ecosystems and it's great to bring together outside expertise and outside experience with the local communities and stakeholders. Most people at this event are local investors and startups. We are building a bridge between the local ecosystem and other tech ecosystems. If we bridge different ecosystems together, we can develop them together. No matter how long it takes. It takes time to build a thriving and healthy technology ecosystem and we are here for the long term."



Franco Spicciariello, Director of Public Policy for ITA & ECSEED (East Central and South-East Europe Division) at Amazon Web Services, featured speaker in a fireside chat on the topic "How is the Cloud Empowering Innovation?":

"We need to innovate; we need to be able to sustain competition. We need to go global, so we need cloud technology. It cannot be like, 'If you are an oil company, you can build a fantastic data center. After six months, it will be old. You are spending millions to maintain something that is not your core business.' So necessity comes from technical people, but the decision is up there. And if you don't have a sense of mission, a country, an enterprise won't move in that direction. You won't have innovation anymore. Because through the cloud, any company, any government will have access to technology that wouldn't be available. That's part of our mission. I believe that democratizing technology, that's also what AWS has done in the past 15 years—making technology available at the level for developers, for startups, and anybody else. Otherwise, it wouldn't be available because it would be too expensive. That's the approach."



Jibrán Jamshad, Microsoft Education Lead in CIS, featured speaker in a fireside chat on the topic "How AI Transforms Learning Experience?":

"Artificial Intelligence is revolutionizing the learning experience in unprecedented ways. It has the potential to transform education systems, making them more equitable, personalized, and inclusive. By tailoring learning experiences to individual needs, interests, and pace, AI offers adaptive content, interactive experiences, and data analysis to optimize learning outcomes. The partnership between Microsoft and OpenAI exemplifies how collaborations can accelerate these transformations, ensuring that the benefits of AI are broadly shared with the world. This multi-year, multi-billion dollar investment allows OpenAI to continue its independent research and develop AI that is increasingly safe, useful, and powerful. The technology is used for meaningful innovation, which can help to solve a multitude of global problems, including fighting cyber crime, addressing global climate change, promoting accessibility, and others. We are fostering partnerships with universities and other commercial organizations, with an emphasis on responsible use of AI. We have published extensive guidelines for all parties involved."



Meshari Alrajah, Faculty Member, Institute of Entrepreneurship, King Saud University

"We believe that knowledge the key driver of the economy. Academic institutions and research centers could play a key role in reaching ambitious goals in commercializing that knowledge."

We should harness knowledge to build an ecosystem to bridge the gap between academic research and industry challenges."

Global IT Trends 2023



Panelists: **Kanysh Tuleushin**, First Vice Minister of Digital Development, Innovations and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan | **Maxim Verenich**, Head of Learning & Development, Exadel | **Yury Antaniuk**, Vice President, Head of Central and Eastern Europe, EPAM | **Olga Skorokhodova**, Head of Caucasus, Central Asia, and Russia, Government Affairs and Public Policy, Emerging Markets, Google | **Marvin Liao**, Global Macro Investor specialized in startups, Partner at Diaspora Ventures | **Svetlana Vyrypaeva**, Managing Director for Central Asia, HP

Kanysh Tuleushin, First Vice Minister of Digital Development, Innovations and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan

"Kazakhstan, like Uzbekistan and other countries of Central Asia, has a very fast-growing population, we have to think about what we are going to do with the younger generations. While focusing on education, including increasing English proficiency, we need to find a balance developing both sides: the innovation ecosystem in terms of growing the number of startups and product development, and at the same time advancing outsourcing and the service industry in the country."

Maxim Verenich, Head of Learning & Development, Exadel

"I would suggest that Kazakhstan should prioritize the improvement of English proficiency and also consider moving towards full-stack development, as this aligns with the current market demand. To foster the growth of a young generation of local talent, it is essential for universities to establish partnerships with IT companies that can offer tailored educational programs that align with the current market requirements."

Yury Antaniuk, Vice President, Head of Central and Eastern Europe, EPAM

"The Central Asian region has all the necessary opportunities to develop its reputation of an attractive IT Hub for global clients and tech companies. Local industries and governments should focus on implementing cutting-edge technologies, especially cloud-based solutions that concentrate on AI and data, and investing in growing future specialists and unique young talent markets. One of the region's key competitive advantages is its young and hard-working population. With the right policies and education, we can see impressive results in the IT industry within a few years."

Olga Skorokhodova, Head of Caucasus, Central Asia, and Russia, Government Affairs and Public Policy, Emerging Markets, Google

"Digital transformation has been a profound engine of progress for emerging economies. AI is the new frontier of digital transformation and of economic growth. It has real potential to change the world as we know it. To unlock the economic potential of AI-powered digital transformation in the emerging markets, Google offers a holistic approach focusing on four pillars: physical capital, human capital, technology, and competitiveness. Our approach is reflected in the Future Readiness Economic Index (<https://portulans-2022.web.app/2022/>) that revealed that Central Asia and the Caucasus as a whole has a strength in talent, with a comparatively high level of skills supported by the ability to grow and retain human capital."

Marvin Liao, Global Macro Investor specialized in Startups, Partner at Diaspora Ventures

"This is the best time to be in technology. The region of Central Asia is well-positioned to take advantage of major trends like SaaS/Cloud, Defensetech/Aerospace, and Fintech. Tech is an important part of every country's and investor's portfolio."

Svetlana Vyrypaeva, Managing Director for Central Asia, HP

"The topic of educated and skillful IT resources in Kazakhstan correlates with one of the key pillars of HP's Sustainability Strategy. We focus on digital literacy, skills, and digital equity in our society. I'm proud to share some results of HP's activity in Central Asia:

1. We have presented our HP IDEA Digital Academy and implemented it with the Ministry of Education in Kazakhstan. HP IDEA is an educational platform that allows us to improve the digital literacy and skills in educational sector. By now over 250 public schools and university instructors will have graduated from this digital education program.
2. Our HP Life platform, which is focused on digital equity, is being implemented with a number of public institutions, including:
 - Astana International Financial Center,
 - Jointly with USAID and the Government of Turkmenistan under the DigiWomen Project,
 - Ministry of Digital Development of Uzbekistan
 HP is also participating in various social & educational projects:
 - 40 Days of Doing Good with iTeachMe, Kazakhstan,
 - Imagine Grants with JSC Shyrak, Kazakhstan,
 - Knowledge week with UNDP (Digital Reloading for People & Planet), Kazakhstan

We are open and ready to support any initiatives focusing on sustainable development of our society!"

Inclusive Digitalization of Central Asia



Panelists: **Ainur Medeubayeva**, Business Development Director at Mastercard | **Tanat Uskempaev**, Managing Director at Astana Hub | **Azis Abakirov**, CEO of HighTech Park of the Kyrgyz Republic | **Mikhail Bunchuk**, Senior Digital Development Specialist at the World Bank | **Jakhongir Radjabov**, Deputy Director of IT Park Uzbekistan on Innovations | **Ivan Rodionov**, Partner at EY, Head of Tax Technology, and Transformation Services for the CCA Region.

Ainur Medeubayeva, Business Development Director at Mastercard

"Grateful to StrategEast for providing such a platform for professional discussion of "Inclusive digitalization in Central Asia". I believe, together with our respected international and local experts, we were able to shed light on the topic both from global and local angles, while providing valuable findings and recommendations."

Tanat Uskempaev, Managing Director at Astana Hub

"Discussions revealed interesting points about international practices that could be applied to Eurasia during the process of transitioning from a traditional to a digital economy. Ideas for uniting efforts between Central Asian countries to build a single digital market were especially relevant!"

Azis Abakirov, CEO of HighTech Park of the Kyrgyz Republic

"Living in Central Asia and working with the whole world has become the motto of many young and talented Central Asians. All this became possible thanks to the successful and admirable work of the Parks of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and other Central Asian states!"

Mikhail Bunchuk, Senior Digital Development Specialist at the World Bank

"Inclusive digitalization of Central Asia primarily means improvements in digital connectivity, digital skills, and strong data governance."

Jakhongir Radjabov, Deputy Director of IT Park Uzbekistan on Innovations

"I believe that the discussion allowed us to better understand the current state of the IT industry in Central Asia and outline paths for its further development. We also received valuable information about global best practices and how they can be applied in our region."

Ivan Rodionov, Partner at EY, Head of Tax Technology and Transformation Services for the CCA Region

"IT parks of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan serve as gateways for attracting IT business and talent to the Central Asia region, offering substantial tax incentives to companies and IT specialists. Introducing additional tax, financial, and migration incentives according to best international practices will allow us to further improve the region's attractiveness and motivate IT and technology giants to relocate their R&D and engineering hubs to the region."



EBRD Star Venture Startups Investor Pitch



Sayan Birimzhan, EBRD analyst

“The EBRD Star Venture program for high-growth potential innovative startups has been operating in Kazakhstan since last year with support from the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Currently, we are providing post-acceleration support to seven startups, which includes diagnostic sessions, mentoring, and consulting assistance from international experts. The program also facilitates access to investors and international markets. This is our fifth Star Venture pitching session, organized in partnership with StrategEast with the goal of showcasing our startups to the world leaders in the venture capital market. Today, Star Venture Kazakhstani startups are present in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan.”

Distinguished judges for the EBRD Star Venture Startups Investor Pitch included:

Chris Burry, UC Berkeley SCET Global Ambassador, Co-CEO of US Market Access Center

Jay Onda, Director, Marubeni Ventures, Inc

Marvin Liao, Global Macro Investor, Startup Specialist, Partner at Diaspora Ventures

Steve Adelman, Founder and Managing Director of Nexus Partners

Knowledge as the New Energy



Panelists: **Meshari Alrajah**, Faculty Member, Institute of Entrepreneurship, King Saud University | **Ibrahim Shoukry**, Head of the IsDB Regional Hub, Almaty | **Orkhan Abbasov**, Director of Startup Development at SABAH.HUB | **Alim Khamitov**, Managing Partner and Co-founder MOST Holding, CEO, MOST Ventures | **Baurzhan Kankin**, Chief Executive Officer, Tech Garden | **Anatoly Motkin**, President, StrategEast

Meshari Alrajah, Faculty Member, Institute of Entrepreneurship, King Saud University

“We believe that knowledge is the key driver of the economy. In order to achieve our ambitious goals, we should harness knowledge to build an ecosystem to bridge the gap between academic research and industry challenges.”

Ibrahim Shoukry, Head of the IsDB Regional Hub, Almaty

“Developing a knowledge-driven economy requires the involvement and coordination of multiple stakeholders, such as governments, international financial institutions, and the private sector. Each of these has a different role and responsibility in creating an enabling environment for knowledge-based growth. Governments should provide the legal, institutional, and policy framework that supports knowledge in addition to providing the physical and digital infrastructure and technology that enable the transmission and use of knowledge. International financial institutions have an important role in providing financial and technical assistance in addition to implementing best practices of procurement, project management, monitoring, and evaluation. The private sector has a vital role in providing investments, innovation, and best practices of management, and competitiveness.”

Orkhan Abbasov, Director of Startup Development at SABAH.HUB

“At SABAH.HUB, we firmly believe in the transformative power of human capacity development, considering it a cornerstone in the broader landscape of ecosystem development. By investing in the growth and skills of individuals, we lay a solid foundation for innovation, sustainability, and overall progress.”

Alim Khamitov, Managing Partner and Co-founder MOST Holding, CEO MOST Ventures

“I was glad to participate on the session called “Knowledge as a New Energy”, since the Venture market I have built in Central Eurasia focused on exactly that. More investments should go into talent who can create scalable and competitive products for the world. It is all about the people we can support and motivate.”



Baurzhan Kankin, Chief Executive Officer, Tech Garden

“Kazakhstan is a country rich in raw materials, and here are around 600 different enterprises focusing on producing raw materials. We have great potential for making tech products for these Industry 4.0 manufacturers. This type of B2B cooperation holds the greatest potential for developing the tech industry.”

New Education for the New Economy



Panelists: **Muzaffar Djalalov**, Rector, Inha University in Tashkent | **Gail Gannon**, Founder & CEO of Ensanté, Tech for Good Advisors for Startups, Founding Director of the Neurotech Collider Lab & Faculty, University of California, Berkeley | **Diana Ryan**, Government Affairs & Public Policy Director - Central Asia & Türkiye, HP Inc. | **Dinara Ruslan**, Founder and CEO at CODIFY | **Helen Uvarenko**, Global Education Lead, StrategEast | **Gulnara Kurenkeyeva**, Rector, Almaty Management University & AMBA & BGA the International Accreditation Advisory Board Member

Muzaffar Djalalov, Rector, Inha University in Tashkent

“To achieve a target of \$5 billion in IT exports by 2030, Uzbekistan must develop a human capital pool of 200,000 IT specialists.”

Helen Uvarenko, Global Education Lead, StrategEast

“At StrategEast, we ensure that our educational programs align with local demand and global trends, through close collaboration with government officials and Big Tech. We conduct comprehensive market research and then partner with training providers to align their syllabi, aiming to deliver maximum value to students and future employers within the local ecosystem.”

Gail Gannon, Founder & CEO of Ensanté, Tech for Good Advisors for Startups, Founding Director of the Neurotech Collider Lab & Faculty, University of California, Berkeley

“In the evolving landscape of the new economy, a dynamic blend of professors with real-world entrepreneurial experience in the arts and sciences training the next generation of professionals is critical for success in the 21st century and beyond.”

Diana Ryan, Government Affairs & Public Policy Director - Central Asia & Türkiye, HP Inc.

“HP aims to provide schools, educators, and learners with technology to increase learning access and outcomes.”

Dinara Ruslan, Founder and CEO at CODIFY

“New education is no longer about memorizing. New education is AI-powered and workforce-oriented.”

Gulnara Kurenkeyeva, Rector, Almaty Management University & AMBA & BGA the International Accreditation Advisory Board Member

“At AlmaU, we create knowledge-added professionals with unique experience who will reimagine the future.”



IT Investment Funds in Eurasia



Panelists: **Aitugan Zhaksymbay**, Deputy CEO, Qazaqstan Investment Corporation | **Murat Abdrakhmanov**, Venture investor | **Abdul Sharopov**, CEO, Sarmo Labs, Advisor, Aloqa Ventures | **Dumitru Vlah**, Project Manager of Tekwill Academy, Moldova's leading IT Academy | **Jay Onda**, Director, Marubeni Ventures, Inc. | **Sardor Mukhamedaliyev**, Founder, Biz Network, ICLUB Regional Partner

Aitugan Zhaksymbay, Deputy CEO, Qazaqstan Investment Corporation

"It's noteworthy that the Eurasia region, encompassing various countries, each with its unique characteristics, shares several common features in my perspective. Notably, there is a pronounced emphasis on regional markets. Many investment funds actively focus on Eurasian markets, strategically seeking opportunities within neighboring countries and regional integration projects. In recent years, amidst global geopolitical and economic uncertainties, funds are increasingly adopting a diversified approach. Alongside regional investments, they now venture into international assets. This strategic diversification helps mitigate risks and enhances portfolio stability, particularly in the face of volatility in global markets.

Furthermore, a distinctive characteristic of these funds is their keen interest in applying innovation and technological progress. Investment funds in the region are proactively exploring emerging trends and tools, with a particular focus on investing in startups and technology companies. This inclination contributes to the development of high-tech industries within the region."

Murat Abdrakhmanov, Venture investor

"Critical for the advancement of the venture ecosystem in Central Asia is the engagement of institutional investors in the international market. The development of local venture funds is hindered by the absence of seasoned GPs with significant experience and a commendable track record in the field."

Abdul Sharopov, CEO, Sarmo Labs, Advisor, Aloqa Ventures

"Abdul highlights the common issue of startups in Central Asia failing to reach the seed stage, often due to misguided execution and the struggle to communicate, along with creating indefensible products.

The solution may be a startup studio which acts as a co-founder in the venture building process.

Sarmo Labs's methodology includes brainstorming to select data-driven hypotheses, developing a minimum viable product, focusing on go-to-market strategies and the right metrics to secure a seed round.

Additionally, the pitch showcases projects like NavAI and Speaklish that the studio has developed, demonstrating their capacity to build impactful startups in a short time frame."

Dumitru Vlah, Project Manager of Tekwill Academy, Moldova's leading IT Academy

"It was an honor participating in the 'IT Investment Funds in Eurasia' panel. We discussed the crucial shift from an outsource to a value-added product economy. I'm glad to witness the growing momentum of venture capitalism and startups in the region. It's gratifying to see a collective recognition of the pivotal role human capital plays in attracting long-term investors.

I also found it rewarding to contribute insights that promote knowledge transfer, fostering a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges in our evolving tech landscape. Grateful for the opportunity to contribute to such a forward-thinking discussion"

Jay Onda, Director, Marubeni Ventures Inc.

"Through StrategEast, I had the pleasure of meeting with the entrepreneurs, venture investors, government entities, and academics supporting Kazakhstan's startup ecosystem. In my 12+ years of experience in corporate venture and innovation, I've met with countless government entities and startup ecosystems globally to learn about their efforts, sharing best practices, and ideating on strategies to scale. With my conversation with the First Vice Minister of Digital Development, Mr. Kanysh Tuleushin, I learned about how the government was supporting entrepreneurship and I left impressed with what they've accomplished so far. Not only have they launched a portfolio of efforts, ranging from, but not limited to new learning curricula to improve technology and entrepreneurship literacy, creating opportunities for founders, and resources for investors, but they have also captured KPIs on economic development demonstrating positive outcomes in these early stages. I anticipate there will be steady growth in the startup sector as the government continues to scale their investments and expand their support. In my discussions with the startup founders, investors, and

venture studios, the sentiment was generally positive. Many of the comments around the challenges they faced were similar to other ecosystems around the world. For example, the lack of mentors with entrepreneurial experience, angel investors who don't understand the high risk asset class of startup investing, lack of venture capital and VC firms, and the need for more opportunities for early stage companies to find their product market fit. A startup and venture ecosystem takes many decades to mature and by cross pollinating knowledge from Silicon Valley and other established ecosystems, the Kazakhstan ecosystem can greatly benefit and accelerate its trajectory by learning from others. Lastly, Kazakhstan offers a

few major opportunities. The first is their strength in talent. While IT services may be seen negatively, this is providing real world experience at a global scale. This provides a foundation and opportunity to build new products and services that are identified by local entrepreneurs. Also by working with global partners, the new cohort of founders will also think at a global scale. The other opportunity is the emerging space economy. With its history and experience in the space program, entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan have an opportunity to position themselves as a powerful partner in the global efforts being invested in the space economy."

Smart Fintech Solutions



Panelists: **Renat Tukanov**, Chief Technology Officer, Freedom Holding Corp. | **Daulet Aitmakhanov**, CEO & Co-Founder, Finflow | **Turkan Farzaliyeva**, CEO & Co-Founder, PayRiff | **Irodakhon Oripova**, Shariah officer at Shariah Department of IMAN Group, Ltd. | **Azimbek Sagynbaev**, Co-Founder and CTO, MyDataCoin | **Boris Shlain**, Consultant, AI FUSION

Renat Tukanov, Chief Technology Officer, Freedom Holding Corp.

"I was pleased to lead the discussion on the topics of modern financial services industries, the role of banks, and additional support solutions required in undergoing the digital transformation. The probe of the questions like to what extent regulation in Central Asian countries contributes to the development of the fintech industry, and what governments need to do to create the fintech ecosystem in the region was especially important for the countries to become the new leaders in the markets of Eurasia!"

Daulet Aitmakhanov, CEO & co-founder, Finflow

"The majority of founders and entrepreneurs need help to create financial models when estimating the early-stage startups and SMEs, and there is an opportunity to make financial modeling, forecasts, dashboards, and graphics, using AI-powered financial planning and analysis software, automatically collecting and analyzing historical data. All these will give insights and ground for making the right decisions!"

Azimbek Sagynbaev, Co-Founder and CTO, MyDataCoin

"In the world of fintech and blockchain, every transaction is a step towards a new financial era where technology makes dreams come true!"

Turkan Farzaliyeva, CEO & Co-Founder, PayRiff

"There was an opportunity to exchange experiences on payment services and existing landscapes. The regional expertise in online payment aggregators, banks and their mobile applications, online payment platforms, Google Pay, Apple Pay, Mobile POS, and other channels of payment solutions for accepting payments through cash, cashless, e-wallet and terminals has been shared during discussions. And the positive trends on the participation of governments in all of these processes and realizations of applications by adaptation the legislation for payment service providers!"



Irodakhon Oripova, Shariah officer at Shariah Department of IMAN Group, Ltd.

"Attendance the 'Smart Fintech Solutions' panel discussion as a speaker on November, 8 offered opportunities for networking and collaboration. We also had a chance to discuss fintech growth trends in Eurasia by highlighting obstacles in the sector."

Boris Shlain, Consultant, AI FUSION

"I believe in the synergy of banks and fintech in Central Asia. To unlock its potential, banks will have to launch special initiatives to interact with startups. This will allow them to overcome the cultural gap, build sandboxes that actually work and provide space for experiments, and simplify the implementation of pilots and following rollouts."

Public service digitalization and e-governance



Panelists: **Ruslan Rakymbay**, Investment Director Kazakhstan, Quest Ventures | **Rashad Khaligov**, Deputy Chairman, Innovation and Digital Development Agency of Azerbaijan | **Olzhas Zhanabek**, Head of Department of Digitalization, Almaty City Hall | **Ekaterine Chelidze**, International Relations Chief Specialist, National Agency of Public Registry | **Yahiya Tuleshov**, Chairman of the Management Board of JSC "E-Finance Center, Kazakhstan | **Chynybai Bakytbek uulu**, Director of State Enterprise AgroSmart under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic

Ruslan Rakymbay, Investment Director Kazakhstan, Quest Ventures

"The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably accelerated the digitalization process. Yet, the most significant challenge remains the need to change the paradigms of those behind its regulation and implementation. We must focus on transforming the mindsets of those who define our digital future."

Ekaterine Chelidze, International Relations Chief Specialist, National Agency of Public Registry

"One of the most successful collaborations between the government and the private sector in Georgia in land administration can be seen through the 'Authorized Persons' initiative by the National Agency of Public Registry. This initiative allows notaries, banks, real estate agencies, microfinance organizations, lawyers, and legal and surveying firms to become authorized users of the NAPR's electronic programs. Each of them is granted individual permission to enter the unified database of the agency. Notaries, banks, and private companies authorized under the project create a fast and even more convenient environment for potential users, offering a one-stop shop for services."

Rashad Khaligov, Deputy Chairman, Innovation and Digital Development Agency of Azerbaijan

"In this era of digitalization, we're building a seamless, citizen-oriented, end-to-end service that minimizes the need for human interaction. Our goal is to create a digital bridge that empowers citizens with the knowledge they need, requiring only minimal input from them to navigate a smarter, more connected future."

Olzhas Zhanabek, Head of Department of Digitalization, Almaty City Hall

"In adopting a data-centric approach to governance, the Almaty City Hall has made impressive strides. Across all sectors, initiatives such as the 'Situational Center' have endowed city officials with a wealth of precise and readily accessible data, empowering them to make informed, data-driven decisions."

Yahiya Tuleshov, Chairman of the Management Board of JSC "E-Finance Center, Kazakhstan

"In a distinctive approach to governance uniquely Kazakhstan's own, every government sector was entrusted with the autonomy to craft its individual systems, yielding over 400 diverse programs. This newfound authority enabled the generation of valuable data and the automation of essential government services, showcasing how knowledge is now the driving force propelling our nation forward."



Chynybai Bakytbek uulu, Director of State enterprise AgroSmart under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic

"As we delve into the realm of knowledge as a new energy, we're pioneering the use of AI and satellite imagery to overcome analytical limitations, setting the stage for data-driven breakthroughs across various domains."



Enterprise Trends in Cloud 2023



Panelists: **Nargiz Suleimenova**, Senior Manager of the Tax and Legal Services Department at EY Kazakhstan | **Rostislav Konyashkin**, Chairman of the Board of National Information Technologies JSC | **Chris Burry**, UC Berkeley SCET Global Ambassador, Co-CEO of US Market Access Center | **Pavel Koktyshev**, Co-founder and Managing Partner of MOST Holding | **Sergey Leschenko**, Country Manager CIS, CE, Microsoft | **Olha Sytnychenko** Regional Director for Gulf States and Latin America, StrategEast

Nargiz Suleimenova, Senior Manager of the Tax and Legal Services Department at EY Kazakhstan

“There seems to be a reluctance among many companies in Kazakhstan to use cloud services. The main reason behind this hesitation is the limitations placed on processing and storing personal data in public clouds without localization requirements, as well as the uncertainty surrounding the existing legislation on other types of data. To address this challenge, it is crucial to amend the existing legislation in alignment with best international practices in the field of data processing. By doing so, Kazakhstan can successfully transition into an IT-centric country and foster the widespread adoption of cloud services among businesses.”

Rostislav Konyashkin, Chairman of the Board of National Information Technologies JSC

“We are not only willing to use global AI components and models, but also to create our own AI services and tools. We need to focus on sharing instruments, knowledge, and data. Such collaboration is the only way to reach our goals.”



Chris Burry, UC Berkeley SCET Global Ambassador, Co-CEO of US Market Access Center

“Cloud is clearly a fundamental technology enabler for many startups today, and in the upcoming years, you’re going to see more and more things related to AI and security. Quantum computing will be the next-level game changer, as an enormous step ahead in speed and processing. Current trends should be taken into account by startups willing to thrive and succeed.”



Pavel Koktyshev, Co-founder and Managing Partner of MOST Holding

“In 2023, venture capitalists in Central Asia are focusing on the growing demand for cloud technologies, which presents unique opportunities for startups in the region. Increasing requirements for data security and localization are driving innovation in cybersecurity and data management. This paves the way for partnerships between local startups and global tech giants seeking to adapt to regional differences and regulations. Collaboration between these parties can lead to the creation of cutting-edge cloud computing solutions while ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements and enhancing user trust.”

Sergey Leschenko, Country Manager CIS, CE, Microsoft

“Cloud technology helps a wide range of people around the world access flexible and scalable resources, reduce the cost of equipment and local infrastructure, and access AI tools. The public cloud has provided infrastructure for data collection, with massive computing power enabling companies round the world to deploy technology solutions. In addition, the public cloud is home to the technologies that countries, businesses and society as a whole need for digital transformation, from productivity improvements and digital economy performance to digital skills development tools.”

Participants

- Azis Abakirov** Hightech Park of the Kyrgyz Republic
- Orkhan Abbasov** Sabah.Hub
- Murat Abdrakhmanov** Venture Investor
- Alina Abdrakhmanova** Astana Hub
- Assel Abdrakhmanova** Shinhan (South Korean financial institution)
- Abay Absamet** BGlobal Ventures
- Steve Adelman** Nexus Partners
- Alibek Adilbekov** S1lkpay
- Alikhan Aishuakov** GoDays
- Daulet Aitmakhanov** Finflow
- Anuar Akishev** PwC
- Zhanna Aksentiy** Bluescreen.kz
- Raushan Akshatayeva** Nazarbayev University
- Serzhan Alimov** Private Company "Digital Technology Company, Ltd."
- Timur Allamuratov** Inha University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan
- Meshari Alrajah** King Saud University
- Almas Amirbekov** NU, DOS
- Yury Antaniuk** EPAM
- Rustam Assilov** Asia Gas Pipeline
- Yevgeniya Bakirova** LLP ALSI Integration
- Pavel Bakushkin** Toimart
- Chynybai Bakytbek Uulu** Agrosmart Under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic
- Uakhat Bastimiyev** Verigram
- Kuanysh Baytenov** National Information Technologies JSC
- Yermek Beisebayev** S1lkpay
- Kairzhan Bektembayev** BI Group
- Sayan Birimzhan** EBRD
- Dana Bliyeva** Business Angel
- Mikhail Bunchuk** the World Bank
- Chris Burry** US Market Access Center
- Ekaterine Chelidze** National Agency of Public Registry
- Kseniia Cherniaieva** StrategEast
- Aurora Díaz** Soloaga, Almaty Management University (AlmaU)
- Aida Dikhanbayeva** Freelancer
- Muzaffar Djalalov** Inha University in Tashkent
- Sholpan Dosmakhanbet** BGlobal Ventures
- Jacob Ewing** US Department of Commerce
- Turkan Farzaliyeva** Payriff
- Xayala Fatullaeva** 4sim Azerbaijan
- Oksana Fedorova** Mastercard
- Gail Gannon** Ensanté, Neurotech Collider Lab & Faculty, University of California, Berkeley
- Ehtiram Guliyev** Innovation and Digital Development Agency of Azerbaijan
- Vurghun Hajiyev** Innovation and Digital Development Agency of Azerbaijan
- Kalymbet Ibragim** Niksface
- Merey Ibragimova** My Venture
- Dina Iglíkova** CELA
- Anar Isgandarov** Innovation and Digital Development Agency of Azerbaijan
- Dinara Issenova** StrategEast
- Jibrán Jamshad** Microsoft
- Zhanggir Januzakov** Investbanq
- Indu John-Abraham** the World Bank
- Gani Jumagaliyev** Tech Garden
- Ahmat Kabylbekov** Conlybus.com
- Aida Kairmukhanbetova** Tengizchevroil
- Zhandos Kalmuratov** Akhter Studios
- Azamat Kalpebayev** Turan University
- Baurzhan Kankin** CEO, Tech Garden
- Alma Kassymova** EBRD Advice For Small Businesses Programme
- Aidai Kerimkulova** MyDataCoin
- Azamat Khainagaliev**
- Rashad Khaligov** Innovation And Digital Development Agency of Azerbaijan
- Kanat Khalilov** Sapa Digital Finance
- Alim Khamitov** Most Holding
- Azamat Khaydaraliev** Daryo.uz
- Elbek Khodjaev** EU Delegation to Uzbekistan
- Iurii Kilochytskyi** Amazon Web Services
- Yuriy Kim** Cloud Centre
- Oxana Kirichok** Caspian University
- Marta Kokoszka** Amazon Web Services
- Pavel Koktyshov** Most Holding
- Rostislav Konyashkin** National Information Technologies Jsc
- Gulnara Kurenkeyeva** Almaty Management University
- Shukhrat Latypayev** ERG
- Sergey Leschenko** Microsoft

- Marvin Liao** Diaspora Ventures
- Abdul Lyusan** 'KAZAKHTELECOM
- Karla Makatova** Kaz Events
- Makhmud Ali** Tayyab
- Bislam Makhmutov**, Studio nomad
- Jakub Manikowski** Amazon Web Services
- Aizhan Maulen** Investbanq
- Timur Mauleshov** Concierge Service Group
- Ainur Medeubayeva** Mastercard
- Monique Mosolf** USAID Central Asia Deputy Mission Director
- Anatoly Motkin** StrategEast
- Sardor Mukhamedaliyev** Biz Network, Iclub Regional Partner
- Nargiz Belyaeva** Profit Online
- Olejnik Tomasz** Amazon Web Services
- Amirkhan Omarov** Parqour
- Karlygash Omurbayeva** Air Astana
- Maya Omurbekova** CODIFY
- Jay Onda** Marubeni Ventures, Inc.
- Irodakhon Oripova** Iman Group, Ltd.
- Tatyana Panchenko**, Forbes.kz
- Yelena Perekhoda**, U.S. Consulate General in Almaty
- Denis Posselyonnyy** EPAM KZ
- Jakhongir Radjabov** IT Park Uzbekistan
- Rovshan Rahimov** StrategEast
- Ruslan Rakymbay** Quest Ventures
- Ivan Rodionov** EY
- Dinara Ruslan** Codify
- Khumora Ruzimova** Inha University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan
- Diana Ryan** Central Asia & Türkiye, Hp, Inc.
- Yerjan Ryskali** Clockster
- Nurbek Sadykov** qCloudy
- Azimbek Sagynbaev** Mydatacoin
- Nurbakytbek Sayasat** Ministry of Digital Development, Innovations, and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- Valery Semenukov**
- Sanzhar Serik** AO 'Kazteleport'
- Shaikhina Aliya** U.S. Consulate General, Commercial Section Commercial Specialist
- Alisher Sharapov** Baker Tilly Qazaqstan Advisory
- Baglan Sharipov** Polaris Engineering
- Abdul Sharopov** Sarmo Labs
- Michael Sheitelman** StrategEast
- Boris Shlain** Ai Fusion
- Ibrahim Shoukry** Isdb Regional Hub Almaty
- Asher Siddiqui** Sukna Ventures
- Olga Skorokhodova** Google
- Franco Spicciariello** Amazon Web Services
- Filip Stoyanovich** USAID / Future Growth Initiative (FGI)
- Nargiz Suleimenova** E Kazakhstan
- Olha Sytnychenko** StrategEast
- Madiyar Toleugali** UvU
- Olga Tonkonog** Kursiv Media
- Donald Townsend** U.S. Foreign Commercial Service
- Renat Tukanov** Freedom Holding Corp.
- Yahiya Tuleshov** E-Finance Center, Kazakhstan
- Kanysh Tuleushin** First Vice Minister of Digital Development, Innovations and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- Dara Tumenbayeva** Black Swan
- Max Usanov** Amazon Web Services
- Tanat Uskymbaev** Astana Hub
- Helen Uvarenko** StrategEast
- Maksim Verenich** Exadel
- Dumitru Vlah** Tekwill Academy
- Vitaly Volyanuk**, Digitalbusiness.kz
- Nurseit Yerbay** Telemax Unified Services
- Diana Yerdaulet** Mastercard
- Aisha Yerkebulan** EBRD
- Anar Yesdauletova** USAID Central Asia
- Kundyz Yessenkyzy** SAT SPACE
- Alexey Zaitsev** EY
- Olga Zenina** Bluescreen.kz
- Aitugan Zhaksymbay** Qazaqstan Investment Corporation
- Olzhas Zhanabek** Almaty City Hall
- Venera Zhanalina** CFO online LLP
- Mukhtar Zhabgibov** Tayyab
- Ainur Zhanturina** Accion, RISE Research
- Daniyar Zhumabekov** Microsoft
- Erbol Zhumaganbetov** AO Nurbank
- Anton Zinoviyev** USAID/FGI

Highlights

- On November 7-8, 2023, Almaty, Kazakhstan hosted the fifth annual StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum. The event, organized by the StrategEast Center for a New Economy in collaboration with the USAID Future Growth Initiative, aimed to explore shared opportunities and challenges in the IT sector across Eurasian countries. Practical solutions to existing legislative challenges were proposed, and the forum served as a platform for sharing best practices, experiences, and knowledge pertaining to government-IT sector relations.
- The forum comprised two plenary sessions, six panel discussions, an investor pitch special event in partnership with the EBRD, an angel investing workshop in collaboration with BGlobal Investors, and two fireside chats. Featuring 51 high-level speakers, the event drew over 100 participants across the two-day program and engaged 17 global and regional institutional partners.
- This collaborative platform facilitated a dialogue among representatives from international and local technology companies, government agencies in Central Asia, international financial institutions, and development agencies. The discussions centered around strategies for fostering innovation in the regional economy and providing support to governments in their efforts to integrate into the global economy.
- StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum received extensive media coverage, garnering nearly a dozen mentions in prominent Kazakh media outlets such as Forbes Kazakhstan, Digital Business, and others.
- Managing partner Asher Siddiqui of Sukna Ventures and Marvin Liao, a global macro investor specialized in startups and partner at Diaspora Ventures, revealed plans for a venture fund launch during the fifth StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum. The fund's unique strategy will involve sourcing "angel" investors locally, with investments primarily directed back into the regional market and partially into the Western market. The fund targets \$15 million, with investments ranging from half a million to a million dollars, allowing diverse investors to gain valuable experience.

Background

- The IT industry has emerged as a key driver of Eurasia's integration into the global economy, fostering accelerated economic growth, generating employment for the youth, promoting inclusive development, and facilitating the digital transformation of public services.
- The annual StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum, initially hosted in Kyiv, Ukraine, and subsequently in Tbilisi amid the 2020 pandemic outbreak, chose Bishkek as its venue for the third edition in 2021, followed by the historic city of Samarkand in 2022.
- The viability of an IT or knowledge-driven economy in any country hinges on local capital investment in human resources. Hence, our ongoing efforts to persuade and engage local investors in supporting the development of local startup pipelines. Beyond attracting local accelerators, it is crucial to bring global expertise, practices, and experiences—beyond Silicon Valley.
- Looking ahead, StrategEast envisions dedicating the next year to establishing a digital bridge between Central Asia and the Gulf states. This endeavor is mutually beneficial, offering the Gulf states Silicon Valley-level solutions from global companies in Central Asia at a fraction of the cost. Central Asia, in turn, can significantly contribute to knowledge development in countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait. In Kazakhstan and the broader Central Asia region, StrategEast is committed to fostering the digital economy for tangible regional transformation, promoting gender equality, creating equal opportunities for rural areas and regional centers, and positioning the entire region as a global center of digital excellence.
- The StrategEast team firmly believes that with a youthful population of 70 million, Central Asia is poised to become the next global IT hub and a trusted IT destination. The regional IT community demonstrates a robust ability to form coalitions among influential stakeholders, uniting them in the pursuit of substantial and rapid positive change.

StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum

The StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum is held annually in different countries of the Eurasian region.

The Annual StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum is a unique platform that brings together global and local representatives of the private sector, governments, and financial institutions. The Forum provides a unique opportunity to discuss what needs to be done in order to enhance the innovative economy across the region and assist the Eurasian countries with integration into the global economic and security system.

- **Over 70 high-level speakers**
- **Over 200 participants**
- **Over 30 global and regional institutional partners**

About StrategEast

StrategEast is a leading independent institution working to develop the Eurasian digital economy, in collaboration with international financial institutions, development agencies, global tech companies, and Eurasian governments.

StrategEast is a non-profit organization with offices in the United States, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine



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