



STRATEG EAST.LIVE

**ONLINE DISCUSSIONS
WITH GLOBAL
THOUGHT LEADERS**

ABOUT STRATEG EAST



StrategEast is a strategic center with the mission to reinforce the values of the rule of law and private property protection in Eurasian and Baltic countries through the transition from natural-resource-based to knowledge-driven economy.

Our work is focused on the 14 countries that proclaimed or restored their independence after the collapse of the USSR: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

StrategEast is a registered 501(c)3 organization based in the United States.

LEARN MORE AT OUR WEBSITE:

www.StrategEast.org

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INTRODUCTION



StrategEast is known for assisting the Eurasian countries with the transformation of their economies to a knowledge-driven model, engaging with government officials, international financial institutions, private entrepreneurs, and think tanks for this goal.

As such, we are acutely aware of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having, especially around the concept of people coming together. While the unprecedented nature of the virus is calling for a temporary increase in physical distance, it does not mean we cannot still come together. Never before has the need to rebuild a global community been greater. That is why StrategEast does what it does.

As we navigate this complex and tumultuous time together, we are focusing on what we do best: building strong networks, bridging partnerships for social impact, and fostering a community to better the world. While it feels at times as if life has been put on hold, at StrategEast we are doing everything we possibly can to develop a new economy in the Eurasian region based on the rule of law and private property protection through innovative educational programs, public advocacy, and new global partnerships.

To keep discussing how technology can lead to an overall transformation in Eurasia, StrategEast has launched a series of online panels called StrategEast Live amid the pandemic. Within this brief report we are delighted to present the results of these beneficial discussions.

Any crisis unlocks opportunities, and our distinguished guests have discussed what the best solutions are when applied to the Eurasian countries. Global thought leaders who took part in our discussions have exposed the potential of the current crisis to benefit the transformation in Eurasia. We hope that the ideas generated within the StrategEast Live sessions will facilitate further development of a knowledge-driven economy in the Eurasian region assisted by Western institutions.

Sincerely,

Anatoly Motkin,

President

StrategEast

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anatoly Motkin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

TECHNOLOGY AS A REMEDY

The speakers on the panel “Technology as a remedy” discussed IT solutions to combat the COVID-19 crisis. The panelists, who represent the global IT industry, government institutions, and the scientific and analytical community, agreed that it is technology that helps fight COVID-19 on a global scale and with the greatest transparency.

MODERATOR:



Dr. Gregory Asmolov, King’s College London

“The general problem of the crisis is not only the problem of information overload, but also innovation overload. And the major challenge is how to support the right solutions, how to connect between the right actors that develop innovative solutions and those that need this innovation.”

SPEAKERS:



Mariam Lashkhi, Deputy Chairperson, Georgia’s Innovation and Technology Agency

“The coronavirus, as it’s called now the Black Swan of 2020, has definitely changed the globe. The world has become an agile structured startup—those who are adapting are succeeding and those who are not are left behind.”



Omri Segev Moyal, CEO, Profero

“The success of the innovative solution depends on the willingness of people to use this solution. How is that achieved? By keeping people’s privacy, making everything visible and transparent, being honest about what is going on, asking the public, being multilingual.”



Heiko Sundermann, Vice President, Head of Digital Engagement Practice, EPAM Systems

“Transparency of the innovative solution and international collaboration is the key to the successful outcome of the crisis.”



Dr. Tomicah Tillemann, Digital Impact and Governance Initiative Director, New America

“Ultimately, we believe that those of us who care about building more effective institutions need to build 80 percent of technology platforms that could be deployed around the world with the hope that governments will be able to customize the last 20 percent to their specific needs.”

“The monumental challenge that we are facing—in many countries around the world people are relying on institutions designed in the 19th century and technology from the 20th century in order to solve the problems of the 21st century.”

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN EURASIA

At the discussion, the experts focused on the digital transformation of businesses operating in an emergency mode during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the preparedness of state structures for this challenge.

MODERATOR:



Anatoly Motkin, President, StrategEast

“To combat corruption it is important not only to chase corrupt officials but also to create a transparent environment where corruption has no power at all. Steps in developing digital services for the population leaves no space for corruption.”

SPEAKERS:



Oleksandr Bornyakov, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine

“The whole concept of ‘government in a smartphone’ would not be possible without two pillars: infrastructure and digital skills. We work on full coverage with broadband internet and on educating people on the potential of their smartphone and convincing them that communication with the government via their smartphone is safe.”



Natalija Gelvanovska-Garcia, Senior ICT Policy Specialist, World Bank

“The government should consider the fact that the digital services sector is mostly driven by private companies. For the successful development of digital services and building this sector, we should understand that private companies contribute a lot and plan future collaboration.”

“The priority of the World Bank with the digitalization project in Eurasia is not only to create opportunities but also to make them available to everybody living there.”



Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of Estonia (2006—2016), Stanford University

“Legal infrastructure has to be absolutely vital for the digitalization process; the government has to make sure that the legal grounding is there to prevent problems in the future. ”

“The pandemic crisis is the chance to hasten digital public services implementation and meet less opposition compared to usual times.”

EU PROGRAMS TO COMBAT THE PANDEMIC IN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU countries help not only each other, but also manage to take care of their Eastern partners. The cooperation between the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries during the COVID-19 pandemic was discussed at the panel.

MODERATOR:



Anatoly Motkin, President, StrategEast

“As a result of this pandemic, some of the European producers started thinking about not being dependent on a single supplier like China and how they could relocate the production closer to their borders—to EU countries or to Eastern Partnership countries. The question is whether this plan could be implemented.”

SPEAKERS:



Genadi Arveladze, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia

“Connectivity was and will be very important in these challenging times in the field of transport and logistics. All the Eastern Partnership countries need to take advantage of their location as this becomes one of the priorities to decrease the costs and increase the efficiency of the countries in the production lines.”



Stefan Schleuning, Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine

“The situation remains fragile and it will be essential to find the right balance between monitoring and containing the pandemic, and allowing economic activity to resume”



Natela Turnava, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia

“The epidemic interrupted economic growth in the country. The Georgian economy is deeply integrated into the European economy—free trade agreements have been signed with most EU countries. But for Georgia, the main loss is tourism, which accounts for 11.5 percent of GDP. The Georgian government has already decided that from July 1 it opens its borders for tourists. Ecotourism and agritourism will be the new products that Georgia will offer after the pandemic.”



Jeroen Willems, Deputy Head of Unit, European Commission

“We need to find a way to support all six Eastern Partnership countries as much as we are finding a way to support EU member states, coping not only with the short-term health crisis but with the medium- and long-term socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, which is massive.”

HOW THE COVID-19 CRISIS IS RESHAPING THE GLOBAL ECONOMY AND LABOR MARKET

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic destroyed millions of jobs, broke many traditional supply chains, put some sectors of the economy on the brink of destruction, and gave another unexpected impetus to others. Invited experts discussed this at the panel.

MODERATOR:



Anatoly Motkin, President, StrategEast

“Today there is a huge opportunity to assist the Eurasian countries to take the supply chains closer to the EU borders. It means that even in terms of salary in Ukraine, it is not much higher, if not the same as the average salary in production compared with China. Then maybe it is worth thinking of encouraging European and U.S. producers to relocate their production from China to those post-Soviet countries. For example, textile to Georgia, machinery to Ukraine, etc.”

SPEAKERS:



Torbjorn Becker, Director, Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics

“Belarus and Ukraine are examples of transformation from a natural-resource-based economy to a knowledge-driven economy in terms of their strong IT sectors. Swedish companies are going to Ukraine to outsource some of their IT services. We definitely see it happening in the region, but now it cannot completely replace the hydrocarbons. The former Soviet countries are still interconnected in terms of their economies and Russia is still a dominant force.”



Margot Ellis, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator, USAID

“Speaking about the prospects of the labor market, it is worth recalling that the labor markets in our region faced many challenges prior to COVID-19. These included high informal employment particularly in Eurasia, as well as a large percentage of short-term, fixed-term and self-employment. In Eurasia, the informal economy makes up an estimated 40 percent of GDP. And this is exacerbated by very high unemployment rates across the region. After the pandemic began, hundreds of thousands of citizens who worked abroad returned to their home countries, further complicating the government response to economic recovery. High unemployment and job contraction have created fertile territory for the entry of malign actors, such as the Chinese Communist Party, who may use predatory lending practices that may not be in the countries' long-term interest”.



Artur Radziwill, Director for Country Economics and Policy, EBRD

“According to the May forecasts of the Bank, the GDP growth will be reduced by 6 percentage points due to the pandemic. But the crisis demonstrated the most obvious latent growth points—first of all, the digital economy. Starting with such a simple thing as just having a device at home, one can be able to connect and contribute to the global labor and services market. The EBRD, which is the largest equity investor in Eurasia, will surely focus more on digital opportunities in the aftermath of the crisis.”

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING DIGITAL INITIATIVES IN EURASIA

During the pandemic financial institutions switched to remote services and we took a fresh look at the issues of financial system stability in the face of fraud and money laundering attempts. How can a client be reliably identified from a distance to fight fraud? What technological solutions have proven to be the most useful? These issues were discussed at the panel.

MODERATOR:



Matthew Murray, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce

“Banks must do much more remote banking and must rely on remote technological services to detect customer risk and other types of risks. The financial sector is much more dependent than it has been in the past on online services to perform its day-to-day routines. This period was a challenge for regulatory institutions, governments, banks, and institutions responsible for financial services. They were challenged to update and modify regulations to both facilitate and permit this type of compliance, checking anti-corruption and anti-fraud work, and while that has been taking place, the other trend we have witnessed is that certain technologies that have been out there in the market are being accelerated in their use and have become more prevalent. This has posed an opportunity for companies and individuals who are tech-pioneers to test out their new devices and mechanisms.”

SPEAKERS:



Olesya Danylchenko, Deputy Director, Head of Payment Instruments and Credits Security Forum, Ukrainian Interbank Payment Systems Members Association EMA; Member of Advisory Group on Financial Services, European Cyber Crime Center (EC3) Europol

“The National Bank of Ukraine has been stimulating the development of a cashless economy for many years. Therefore, Ukrainian banks and financial companies were now ready to provide such services. But only during the pandemic, residents of Ukraine, accustomed to living in a cash economy, were able to appreciate all the benefits of cashless savings, and began to use these services. The new reality of the Ukrainian banking system is formulated as ‘everything that can be done remotely—will be done remotely.’”



Natia Gvazava, Legal Counsel, Raizomat LLC

“While technology companies are required to make every effort to create high-quality and well-protected technologies, one of the regulator’s responsibilities is to maintain trust in the technology. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that the Georgian financial and banking systems turned out to be cutting-edge in terms of FinTech.”



Samar Pratt, Managing Director, Exiger London office; Leader in the firm’s financial crime compliance advisory practice

“Since 2016, regulators in the world’s largest financial markets—from Singapore and Hong Kong to London and New York—have created sandboxes where FinTech companies can test their new financial products and services. When it comes to verifying regulatory compliance with technological solutions, this is where RegTech comes in.”

REMOTE EDUCATION IN THE WAKE OF THE PANDEMIC

Most educational institutions switched to distance learning during the pandemic. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the remote system? What legacy in the field of distance education will the pandemic leave? These issues were discussed with education experts at the StrategEast Live session.

MODERATOR:



Horton Beebe-Center, President Emeritus, Eurasia Foundation

“The move to online classes has revealed and amplified the digital divide among young people as some students simply don't have access to the internet.”

SPEAKERS:



Nicola Doherty, Head of Higher Education EMEA & LATAM, LinkedIn

“Multiple countries are reporting studies where inequality gaps are widening between students. It is important to take into account nearly every aspect of the spectrum: whether students have a quiet room for studying, is there access to the learning technology, do they have broadband internet. To make valuable and effective education online, it requires relatively significant investment by institutions and by governments themselves.”



Irakli Kashibadze, CEO, GoAndGrow.ge and Future Laboratory Georgia;
Former Head, Georgian Innovation and Technology Agency

“The period of the pandemic has demonstrated that besides knowledge, soft skills are becoming increasingly important. It is soft skills, and not theoretical knowledge that allow both people and organizations to become more adaptive, which is absolutely necessary during the pandemic, when the situation changes very quickly.”



Vadim Zelenkov, Director, Training and Development, EPAM Systems

“The most important soft skill is the ability to learn effectively. We need to teach our students the principle of lifelong learning. In projects such as our joint initiative with StrategEast—IT HUB Tbilisi, we urge our students to start a completely new professional life. At the same time, the transition to online learning faces certain difficulties due to human nature peculiarities. Our task is to create a good learning experience, introduce it in online education. We cannot replace analog learning with technology, even while using artificial intelligence. We still need considerable human efforts.”

OPEN DATA IN EURASIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

How can Eurasian countries take a historic chance and make open data a significant component of economic growth and social development? These issues were discussed at the StrategEast Live session “Open Data in Eurasia during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

MODERATOR:



Anatoly Motkin, President, StrategEast

“There are always some obstacles for government and other institutions to share information. Sometimes it’s a concern because of authoritarian reasons, and sometimes it’s just lack of interest.”

SPEAKERS:



Pavel Koktyshev, Deputy Chairman of the Board,
Zerde National Infocommunication Holding

“Since 2016, more than 3,500 databases have been published on the state portal in the country. And the last two years have demonstrated a sharp increase in interest in using this data. And today, new data are often no longer provided by the state, but by private companies, primarily cellular communication companies. The open data approach gives many countries in our region a chance to completely upgrade their infrastructure, and in many countries, the government has seen it and is trying to get the most out of its data.”



Dr. Juliet McMurren, Specialist on Open Government, SecDev Group

“Although some of the data-driven responses we have looked at are exciting and they're innovative, we won't know definitely what made the difference in terms of COVID-19 responses until the crisis is resolved. But there is a broader body of use cases on open data for crisis response worldwide that demonstrates its value.”



Kateryna Onyiliogwu, Open Data Team Lead, USAID / UK Aid Transparency
and Accountability in Public Administration and Services

“During the COVID-19 crisis, we see that a lot of governments have created special foundations for medical equipment purchases. Transparency and accountability of the data are important and let citizens see how limited resources are being distributed. The great example of a transparent procurement data system in Ukraine is the ProZorro system.”

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF SMES IN EURASIA

The COVID-19 pandemic has given an additional impetus to the already accelerating process of the digital transformation of business around the world. Large enterprises invest heavily in digital transformation, ordering the development of unique technological solutions. What about small and medium-sized enterprises that cannot afford such expenses? These issues were discussed at the StrategEast Live session “Digital transformation of SMEs in Eurasia.”

MODERATOR:



Sebastian Molineus, Regional Director for the South Caucasus, Europe and Central Asia, World Bank

“Most large enterprises have the resources to invest heavily in digital transformation and can adopt unique technological solutions for their firms. But what about SMEs, which may not have access to such technology or cannot afford the expenses to adapt this kind of technology?”

SPEAKERS:



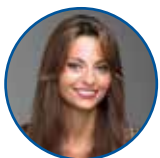
Eric Hontz, Deputy Regional Director for Europe and Eurasia, CIPE

“The COVID-19 pandemic has turned digital transformation from a desirable process for SMEs to a vital one. Only those SMEs that learned to work with clients without meeting him/her face-to-face—and this required a deep digitalization of business processes—were able to successfully survive the lockdown.”



Ihar Kruhlik, SME Digital Development, EPAM Systems

“According to studies conducted back in 2016, 70 percent of SMEs planned to digitalize their business. But time has shown that there is a large gap between the plans and their implementation. At EPAM, our task is to lead enterprises along the right path. We see that there are common patterns in successful cases of digital transformation. Both the management and the shareholders should have a unified vision of what kind of enterprise they want to receive as a result of transformation. They should be ready to formulate this not in their internal corporate language, but in a language understandable to a performer. And most importantly—they should see digital transformation not as expenses, but as investments.”



Ketevan Meparishvili, Regional Manager of Asia, TWINO

“In Georgia, there was a unique situation when state institutions went much further in digital transformation than private enterprises. And today, it is government structures that can become a successful role model of digital transformation for SMEs. At the same time, the state will have to take the leading role in building the framework, create human resources and build capacity for the digital business ecosystem.”

FISCAL MEASURES TO FOSTER THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN EURASIA

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have dealt a serious blow to the global economy. But it is the countries with economies in transition that have suffered the most. What tax and other fiscal measures can the authorities in the Eurasian countries and international financial institutions take to restore the economies of the Eurasian countries as soon as possible to resume the economic growth? These issues were discussed at the StrategEast Live session on “Fiscal measures to foster the economic recovery in Eurasia.”

MODERATOR:



Daniel A. Witt, President, International Tax and Investment Center

“All of our countries have suffered a severe economic downturn and recession due to the COVID-19 crisis and the ongoing debate is how long will it take for the economic recovery. Let’s remember following the 2008—2009 global economic crisis it took from seven to eight years for each country to recover its revenues. It is essential to deliver the services to your people as a government. At some time your tax policy to generate that revenue is a key factor in how competitive your country is in attracting investment, and attracting investments is the key to fueling your economic recovery.”

SPEAKERS:



Arsen Aldanov, Expert of the Strategic Development Department, State Revenue Committee, Ministry of Finance of Kazakhstan

“During the state of emergency in Kazakhstan, the government has provided unprecedented support to SMEs. Kazakhstan entrepreneurs need additional support in terms of reducing the tax burden. Therefore, for SMEs in the most affected sectors of the economy, the accrual and payment of taxes and other payments from the wage fund have been canceled for six months. In current conditions, the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on behalf of the head of the state takes urgent measures to support SMEs and new initiatives including the availability of businesses to finance the implementation of additional tax incentives and limiting businesses from inspections.”



Dr. Susana Bokobo, Global Senior Tax Expert, Professor, Author, Creative Entrepreneur

“There is the need to strike a balance between the needs of economic recovery and the ability of citizens to pay taxes which governments need to implement measures for economic recovery. I see the solution of the problem in identifying priority areas of government support and focusing exclusively on key areas that differ from country to country.”



Levan Dgebuadze, Deputy Head, Tax and Customs Methodology Department, Revenue Service, Ministry of Finance of Georgia

“Although the economy needs support during a pandemic, government spending has grown significantly. In order to maintain a balance between the interests of the state and business, priority areas of tax support were selected. In particular, the tourism sector, which is strategically important for Georgia, has received significant tax preferences. In particular, the tourism industry is exempted from property tax for the whole of 2020.”



Illya Sverdlov, Partner, Head of Tax Practice, DLA Piper Ukraine

“Fiscal measures already taken in Ukraine and in other countries of Eurasia are only the beginning of the fight against the consequences of lockdown. In two, three months governments and tax authorities will have to significantly review the tax support of the economy. Since the current pandemic is a unique challenge, to develop measures to support the economy, a new way of thinking and new, simple criteria for assessing the success of certain measures will be needed.”

U.S. INVESTMENT IN THE EURASIAN NEW ECONOMY

Although the IT industry and other sectors of the “new economy” generate a significant share of GDP and billions of dollars of exports from Eurasian countries, the amount of foreign investment in these sectors remains insignificant. This raises the question about how to assist the new economy of the Eurasian countries to discover not only their production capacity but also their investment potential. These issues were discussed in the StrategEast Live session “U.S. Investment in the Eurasian New Economy”.

MODERATOR:



Anatoly Motkin, President, StrategEast

“Different countries are being developed in different modes. Belarus and Ukraine are countries with a strong IT industry, but countries of the Central Asia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan are developing their IT sector at the moment. The question is how key players of the global IT industry will approach these countries and plan their activities accordingly with the local features.”

SPEAKERS:



Arkadiy Dobkin, Founder, CEO, EPAM Systems

“Working in different countries of the former Soviet Union, the company meets completely different laws created by states for the development of the IT industry. For example, in Belarus, unlike Ukraine, laws have been developed that maximize investment in the local IT industry. In other countries of Eurasia—Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the most successful elements of the Belarusian system have recently been copied and this increases the prospect for investments. And for countries that have not done this, the time has come to do it if they are expecting foreign investment.”



Avtandil Kasradze, Chairman, Georgia’s Innovation and Technology Agency

“Georgia was the first Eurasian country to officially acquire all licenses for Microsoft products both for state needs and for the entire Georgian education system.”



Lenna Koszarny, Founding Partner, Chief Executive Officer, Horizon Capital; Chair of the Board of Directors, American Chamber of Commerce (ACC) in Ukraine

“What we see now for the first time is the appointment last year of a Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhaylo Fedorov, his Deputy Minister Alex Borynyakov, who both came from the IT industry and understand this sector. We see a push for digitalization which is extremely important. The industry has united—IT Ukraine together with AmCham, EBA and SUP IT Committees, and is working now with the Ministry to put forward a Digital City concept, which will be long-term, clear in terms of the tax rates, and will address IT education and infrastructure”



Robert Strayer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Cyber and International Communications and Information Policy, Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State

“The basic requirements for the ecosystem, compliance with which can help attract U.S. investment—is an online infrastructure, including one based on 5G technologies and ready to work with the internet of things; also infrastructure well protected by the cybersecurity system. But it is important that the suppliers of this infrastructure originate from a country where the rule of law functions well so that the supply of these services cannot be interrupted one day only because, for example, the Chinese government, where the elements of this infrastructure were supplied from, decided to punish a specific company or country for something; –free flows of data across borders, so that foreign companies can freely sell their products; –democratic institutions that will help protect the property of a foreign company, including confidentiality of data. And for this, the rule of law should work in the country. The U.S. is always ready to consider the possibilities of cooperation with the countries of Eurasia to create such an environment.”

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Arsen Aldanov, Expert of the Strategic Development Department, State Revenue Committee, Ministry of Finance of Kazakhstan

Genadi Arveladze, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia

Dr. Gregory Asmolov, King's College London

Torbjorn Becker, Director, Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics

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