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## **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE COUNTRIES OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION: THE PATH TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION?**

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**Annotation.** The practice of integrated application of digital technologies and platform solutions is most clearly reflected in the digital transformation of economic and political spheres in the country. The study of the issue of digital transformation in the Central Asian Region (CAR) countries allows us to assess the effect of changes and prospects for further transformations. In this regard, the article aims to assess the development of such a phenomenon as digital transformation in international relations.

The scientific significance of this article is to determine the impact of digital technologies on various international political and economic processes in the region. Finally, the article analyzes the process of transformation of the integration idea of the CAR countries under the influence of digitalization. In this study, an attempt is made to retrospectively assess the prerequisites for the use of electronic network tools.

The practical significance of the work is to analyze the degree of penetration of digital transformation in the CAR countries. Special emphasis is placed on foreign experience in regulating and using the political dimension of digital technologies. The research team of authors seeks to contribute to the literature on comparative regionalism. Since modern authors have little studied the issue of the practice of using digital technologies, especially in the political discourse of the CAR countries. Theoretical and methodological analysis of scientific literature provided an opportunity for scientific understanding of digital transformation.

The methodological basis of the study allowed us to determine the features of the digital environment and formulate its main prospects. The emergence of new hotbeds of instability and tension in different parts of the post-Soviet space increases interest in the topics of crisis resolution. We believe that the search for answers to the questions posed in the framework of the study leads to an increase in the relevance of the topic of digital transformation of the region.

**Keywords:** regional relations, CAR countries, digital transformation, digital platform, digital diplomacy, digital democracy, comparative regionalism, digital technologies

**Basic provisions.** It is indisputable that modern technical means are needed to deepen cooperation. In almost all meetings of the heads of state of the CAR countries, as well as their governments, the importance of the use of global digital technologies is noted. The analysis of international relations in the field of digital interaction shows that all countries of the world agree that digital transformation is a decisive factor in solving many socio-economic problems.

Already today, an attempt at regional cooperation, including in the field of digital development of Central Asian countries, is systematically turning them (at least Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) into developed centers of Eurasia. However, at the same time, competition for influence in the region is also intensifying. Russia,

China, European countries, the USA, Turkey, and a number of countries of the Islamic world, with varying degrees of success, do not give up trying to influence Central Asia. In this series, the republics of Central Asia occupy an important place as a zone of special interests of world political actors.

Taking into account the above facts, firstly, we consider it necessary to verify the positive impact of technological initiatives and projects of countries on the digital transformation of the Central Asian region. Secondly, to put forward the assumption of deep regional cooperation of the CAR countries under the influence of digital transformation.

**Introduction.** After the collapse of the USSR on the territory of the former «Central Asia and Kazakhstan», the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan began the process of building their national states. In the post-Soviet period, in most countries, the now newly formed independent «states of Central Asia» built their own narrative. There was a noticeable rise in the national consciousness of peoples and their desire for self-realization in the course of democratic transformations of public relations.

At the same time, in the foreign policy of the CAR countries, a strategy for entering world markets was being formed. It is known that the countries of Central Asia are isolated from world markets due to their special territorial location far from the World Ocean. Therefore, the countries of the region were interested in deepening political and economic cooperation within the region. For example, a «historic» agreement on the delimitation of state borders between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan was signed. After a 25-year break, Tashkent and Dushanbe were able to find an opportunity to open air communication. Relations between Bishkek and Tashkent have rebooted, border negotiations have resumed, and the Dostyk checkpoint has been opened. In early August 2021, Turkmenistan held a summit of Central Asian countries. The third consultative meeting of the leaders of the Central Asian countries in Turkmenistan was historically important. In this regard, the works of experts and scientists who raise the issue of possible regional integration of Central Asia are increasingly appearing.

The countries of the region are striving for cooperation in the field of regional security, cybersecurity, especially now, when problems at the borders are intensifying. It should be noted that since the collapse of the USSR, the countries of the region have been trying to overcome the consequences of the collapse of the centralized system. For the CAR countries, it turned out to be more difficult due to the low level of technological development. Although relative economic growth was observed in the Central Asian countries during Soviet rule, the countries of the region remained essentially raw materials appendages of the huge economic system of the USSR.

Although more than 30 years have passed since the collapse of the USSR, the interests of Russia, which, as is known, is the legal successor of the USSR, still remain in the region. Threats of international terrorism, religious extremism, and the drug industry continue to dominate the territory of Central Asia, which makes the Central Asian direction an integral part of Russia's foreign policy [1]. At the

same time, problematic points are being expressed regarding the future development of integration ties with Russia in the Eurasian space. In particular, in a recent speech, the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon at the CIS summit focused on the problem of old approaches in building cooperation with the countries of the CAR and Russia [2].

As for relations with China, the CAR countries have legitimate concerns about creating conditions for equal status and close partnership. As it is known from official speeches, China gives the Central Asian countries a sense of equality. It is obvious that for China, along with its integral role in transport, communications and trade, the comprehensive role of digital infrastructure is increasing. All this testifies to the attempts of «the Celestial Empir»e to increase its technological influence within the framework of the «One Belt, One Road» initiative [3].

All these circumstances in general force the countries of the region to continue to look for alternative ways of cooperation, including in the field of digital technologies. The countries of the region are forced to look for new formats of cooperation with each other and within the framework of the formats: the «Central Asian Five» with external players according to the formula EU +5, USA +5, Japan +5 and others [4]. In addition, since gaining independence, the countries of the region have officially declared the creation of political systems like Western democracies as their key task. Presidential elections were held in each of the countries, a parliament was elected, and a judicial system was formed. In general, the attempt to build an integration association leads to a Eurocentric narrative.

Nevertheless, geographical remoteness, different historical retrospect of development probably lead to the fact that the CAR countries still cannot have deep ties with other centers of economic, political and technological development. In this case, we are talking about the developed countries of the West and, above all, the United States. Of course, to help overcome regional difficulties, the World Bank has proposed an intersectoral approach to regional cooperation, initiating a program known today as the «Central Asian Knowledge Exchange Network». However, it does not cover the level of government interaction. The Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program has prepared a strategy to promote digitalization in the member countries. As a result, in 2021, the ministers of the CAREC member countries approved the Digital Strategy of CAREC 2030, which identifies areas of possible cooperation to expand digitalization in the region [5].

It is obvious that the CAR countries receive comprehensive assistance, but it is provided within the framework of narrow projects and not on a permanent basis. Western countries are clearly aware of the limits and boundaries of their immediate geopolitical interests [6]. The presence of countries in close geopolitical proximity with two powers like Russia and China is precisely this factor. In this regard, a number of basic questions arise, the answers to which must be found within the framework of this study. What is the role of democratic institutions in the development of the digital transformation of the CAR countries? Will the countries of the region be able to establish their own technological chain of digital

transformation independent of geopolitical factors? And finally, in this regard, we consider it important to determine the degree of digital transformation both within the countries themselves and at the level of relations between the republics of the CAR.

**Description of materials and methods.** The methods of comparative, statistical and SWOT analysis are used as the main methods in the work. The analysis of texts of various media sources covering the attitude of the leaders of the countries to the topic of digital development of the countries of the region is also used. We believe that thanks to this combination of methods, it is possible to analyze and compare various cases of implementing digital strategies in Central Asian countries. The model of interaction between the parties both within the countries of the region and between them was chosen as a working one in the framework of the analysis. For a comparative analysis of different types of digital transformation, regions that are ahead of the development of the Central Asian region were selected. In order to verify the main provisions put forward, data was taken from the Internet resources of such international organizations as the UN and the World Bank. The resource of the democratic research website and electronic platforms of the governments of the CAR countries were used as auxiliary bases for the methodology of data analysis.

**Results.** In the course of the conducted research, we came to the following result. As our analysis has shown, the world community is divided into digital democratic and transitional systems. Thus, the first model serves to solve social problems associated with digitalization. This model optimizes the development of the digital space in practice. The second one is aimed at turning the digital space into a tool for promoting the socio-economic policy of the state.

As the analysis carried out in the framework of the study on the developed regions of the world has shown, at this stage of digital development, it is extremely important for the CAR countries to move to the following forms of digital transformation. This conclusion follows from the fact that, based on the results of a quantitative analysis of the research, we have recorded the stagnation of the dynamics of digital transformation in the Central Asia region. Also, according to the conducted research, the CAR countries at this stage of development have limited themselves only to technological transformation (automation and digitalization). The implemented projects do not demonstrate a complete transition to digital transformation. Thus, the main provisions put forward by us at the beginning of the article were confirmed.

**Discussions.** By the beginning of the new millennium, access to the Internet in the world has become not just a necessity, but a human right [7]. Although the availability of digital technologies by that time did not solve all the issues, but tens of millions of Central Asians missed many opportunities due to the poor quality of the Internet connection. While the prospects for work, education, civic participation, international cooperation and innovation have shown growth in the developed countries of the world.

In the early 2000s, development strategies and almost all policy documents of the CAR countries began to note [8] that the future belongs to digitalization. At the

same time, the Governments of the Central Asian countries began to develop their national digital strategies, simultaneously establishing a digital agenda with an appropriate ICT infrastructure. And over the years of active implementation of ICT in the CAR countries, the level of implementation of these digital services, ICT infrastructure, including coverage, speed and power of the Internet connection has really increased. In general, it is impossible not to note the widespread use of information and communication technologies. Thus, according to open data, as of 2022, Kazakhstan has the highest Internet coverage in the region – 85.9% (the country has the highest Telecommunications Infrastructure Index (0.7520) among all countries in the region). In Uzbekistan, more than 70% of the population has access to an Internet connection, in Kyrgyzstan, Internet penetration is lower (51.1%). Among the countries of the region, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have similarly low levels of Internet penetration (40.1% and 38.1, respectively) [9].

Taking into account the available facts, international organizations (the World Bank, the UN) nevertheless identified problematic aspects of regional digital transformation [10]. Moreover, such reviews noted the weak positions of the development of the digital transformation of the CAR countries. These conclusions are largely explained by the fact that there is a huge number of studies in which digital technologies are positioned as powerful political tools that empower the broad masses of citizens [11]. The opposition of democracy and autocracy has long been laid down in the Western political science tradition. In this sense, the CAR countries were among those countries where there was no political pluralism and competitiveness, gender equality in political rights. In addition, the authors deduce an indirect link between the influence of democracy on economic growth [12]. Consequently, according to the recommendations of international structures, the CAR countries needed to move to the next stage on the way to digital transformation. It was supposed to be the creation of a digital platform for collecting information in the assistance of citizens. Digital systems were supposed to act as platforms for the formulation of political issues, acceptance of citizens' wishes, their analysis and application in work.

In the policy documents of the governments of the CAR countries of the early 2010s, an optimistic view prevailed on how information technologies would affect the development of democratic principles of governance. The result of all this was the decision of the governments of most of the CAR countries to create structures for the use of information technologies and the development of electronic platforms. The concept of «electronic portal of the state» has come into use in the CAR countries. But the application of the comparative analysis method helped to detect some discrepancies, the specifics and uniqueness of the development of electronic portals of the state in the CAR countries.

According to the study, Kazakhstan was the first among the countries of the region in initiating the launch of e-government services. By the time it was launched in 2008, the country had already adopted laws on public services and new technologies to legalize electronic status. So, in the recently published review of the E-Government Development Index (EGDI) UN, Kazakhstan is on the 28th place, having significantly risen in the ranking [13]. Uzbekistan ranks 69th in the

EGDI ranking with average indicators of electronic participation and open government data. In this regard, the decree of President Sh. Mirziyoyev of 2020 provides for the integration of most services into the electronic system.

Table 1. Comparison of the dynamics of the development of the Central Asian countries by the e-Government Development Index (EGDI)

LINK TO THE WEBSITE	A COUNTRY	INDEX FOR 2022	2012	DYNAMICS OVER 10 YEARS, IN %	PLACE IN THE RATING	RANK CHANGES
<a href="http://www.government.kz/">HTTP://WWW.GOVERNMENT.KZ/</a>	Kazakhstan	0.8628	0.6844	26,1	28	+10
<a href="https://my.gov.uz/ru">HTTPS://MY.GOV.UZ/RU</a>	Uzbekistan	0.7265	0.5099	42,4	69	+22
<a href="https://www.gov.kg/ky">HTTPS://WWW.GOV.KG/KY</a>	Kyrgyzstan	0.6977	0.4879	11,2	81	+18
<a href="http://president.tj/">HTTP://PRESIDENT.TJ/</a>	Tadjikistan	0.5039	0.4069	6,2	129	-7
<a href="https://turkmenistan.gov.tm/ru">HTTPS://TURKMENISTAN.GOV.TM/RU</a>	Turkmenistan	0.4808	0.3813	2,9	137	-11

Note: the table is compiled by the authors according to the source [13]

Kyrgyzstan is in the third position in the ranking of the Central Asian countries developing this direction of digital transformation. It is worth noting that, unlike Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan has problems with providing basic Internet connections due to limited coverage and high prices. At the moment, in the EGDI rating, Kyrgyzstan ranks 81st with a high EGDI [13] and a high e-participation index, while the open government data index is rated as average.

Although Tajikistan presented its «Concept of e-Government Formation» back in 2011, the country is still significantly behind schedule in providing e-government services. There is still low Internet access in the country due to the inability to own electronic devices and the high cost of connection. Accordingly, Tajikistan is ranked 129 in the EGDI ranking with a low EGDI index [13] and electronic participation, as well as a low index of open government data.

Turkmenistan is among the countries of the world with a low level of ICT infrastructure and problems in providing connectivity. As the data show, Internet penetration in the country remains significantly low. It is worth noting that the country's authorities announced their «Concept of Digital Economy Development» and the relevant laws on electronic document management and digital services only in 2019. As a result, among the 193 UN member states included in the EGDI, Turkmenistan ranks 137th [13] with a low level of electronic participation and open government data. As a result, the average indicators of the region, due to

individual country indicators, still have average positions, or below average (on average at the level of 0.4).

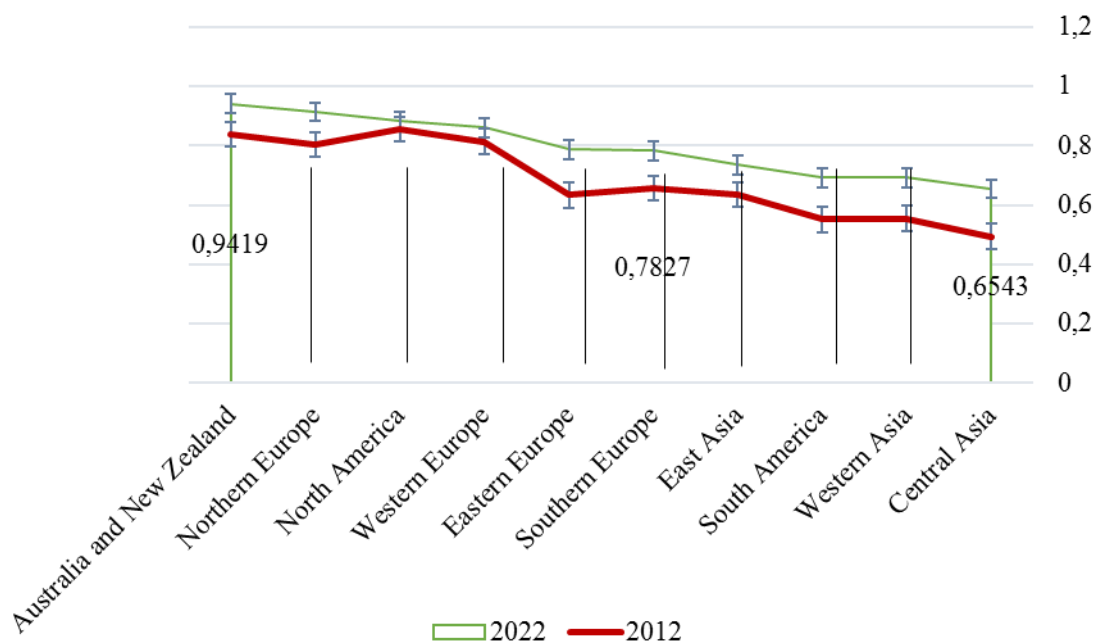


Figure 1 - Rating of regions of the world by EGDI

Note - the figure is compiled by the authors according to the source [13]

The figure (above the text) shows the degree of digital development of electronic platforms through the indication of the regions that are ahead in the digital development of the electronic platforms of the CAR countries. During the analysis of the UN rating, it was found that in the context of the regions of the CAR, they are in average positions in terms of indicators.

In general, it is important to note that over the years of digital reforms, conditions for direct interaction with the state have been created in the CAR countries. Moreover, national digital strategies, digital implementation of public services and e-government have become prerequisites for responding to unforeseen events. In this regard, the most eloquent period is the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which once again reminded of the importance of digital technologies for the CAR countries. Then most of almost all basic services (education, business or public services) became available only on the Internet. Governments have taken various measures to combat the disease, introducing remote work, distance learning, government online services and automated chatbots.

In a way, the possibilities of the global spread of the virus have made the governments of the CAR countries more open and receptive to the problems of the population. It has become easier for citizens to communicate their demands to the authorities through various Internet portals. Nevertheless, is it possible to talk about a full-fledged digital transformation in the CAR countries based on the formation of state platforms?

The analysis of data obtained also from the websites of government agencies showed that each of the countries in the region has its own parameters for measuring the success of digital transformation. And one of the biggest problems is the difference in understanding success in digital transformation. In this regard, we consider it important to analyze existing examples of solutions to the issue of the introduction of digital democracy and, based on them, determine the reasons for the formation of the specifics of the development of digital transformation.

We believe that the main reason for this is that by now a special management mechanism has been formed in the countries of the region. A model of the informal nature of relations has been formed both within the countries of the region and in the relations of countries in the region. We are talking about the fact that there are many significant political and diplomatic relations in the CAR, which are informal in nature. It is accepted that the existence of at least some form of cooperation requires the presence of bureaucracy and physical buildings. In the case of Central Asia, the process of informal regionalism continues due to the deepening of cooperation. This is an order of relations that does not necessarily reflect the integration dynamics that are inherent in Europe and other parts of the world.

There are certain general norms, rules and principles in Central Asia that are understandable in the region. Their implementation takes place through informal mechanisms, meetings of leaders of countries, as well as among other representatives of the country. Therefore, the question of the relevance of digital platforms that require data analysis, data exchange and their application in management remains open.

The next wave of new technical improvements of the majority of state and collective organizations of the CAR countries forced the introduction of new digital technologies within the framework of regional cooperation. At the same time, each department in the general management mechanism used various systems for analysis, project management, prototyping, as well as other digital tools in its industry. And this caused significant complications. Many systems are layered on top of each other, unwittingly reducing productivity. Monitoring and switching between systems to perform individual functions overload employees.

Digital tools, as a rule, differ in interface, functions and methods of their use. It cannot be assumed that employees will be able to independently use the necessary skills from their previous experience working with similar platforms. Training and ongoing support is an important and integral part of digital implementation. Therefore, as the data show, the learning process is ongoing. Nevertheless, the assessment of the quality of training and the level of professionalism of employees causes some difficulty. Moreover, managers were required not just to enter data into the database, but their in-depth analysis and application in practice.

Table 2. SWOT analysis of internal and external factors influencing the development of digital transformation in the CAR

Strengths	Weaknesses
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the growing level of the culture of lawmaking in society in connection with the accumulating practice of interaction with the authorities;</li> <li>- the increasing level of confidence of citizens in the ability to really influence decisions and ongoing processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the desire of the initiators to ensure the speedy adoption of projects in the right edition without unnecessary questions and suggestions;</li> <li>- the initiators lack a common concept and a common understanding of the tasks of the «open government»;</li> <li>- ignorance of the majority of the population in the possibilities of portals.</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of bureaucratization of voting processes;</li> <li>- the constantly growing level of Internet access among the population of certain regions of countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- formal attitude of developers to the content of electronic platforms;</li> <li>- insufficient elaboration of portals in terms of taking into account the opinions of citizens, and their analysis.</li> </ul>

Note - the table is compiled by the authors

The analysis of reviews, reports and recommendations on the regions of the world (such organizations as the UN, the World Bank) showed that there were deviations from the principles of digital transformation to varying degrees. In particular, it was noted that in the process of active technology adoption, the importance of data collection and analysis through open digital platforms was overlooked. The problem is that the authorities and private businesses view digital transformation as a well-defined change management exercise, and not as a fundamental shift in how the organization as a whole functions. Many organizations mistakenly consider digital transformation primarily as the introduction of IT systems, and not as a new way of working, which is facilitated by advances in technology. Through the definition of interrelations and the unification of various elements into a single whole, it is established that the problem lies in the lack of transformation of models of interaction between the state and society. Namely, in the issue of digital development of electronic platforms, the CAR countries have not yet passed some stages. The analysis of digital portals shows relatively low efficiency in this direction. Although portals are the only legitimate form of public participation that exists today, there is a formal approach to filling the Internet portal (comments are given in the SWOT analysis). So, for example, there is no mechanism for real consideration of comments and suggestions, as well as their quantitative and qualitative analysis. The heads of government of the countries of the region, in particular, noted the existing problems [14].

As a result, as international practice shows, there is an open clash of the interests of the conditional two parties. In this case, the analysis of the simulated conflict situation is of particular scientific interest. So, we have a model of a conflict situation between two parties (the government and the active part of the population or country No. 1 and country No. 2). Classically, the situation remains the same: the authorities prefer the already created «electronic portals of citizens' appeals», the active part of the population conditionally requires «digital voting and data processing systems». If they have different desires, then the situation

remains the same in political terms. It is obvious that officials who have implemented existing platforms are pessimistic about complicated versions of platforms and, in general, innovations. Research by other authors confirms that digital innovations in the state context are fraught with ambiguity and disagreements between various stakeholders [15]. Thus, an official in his argumentation can focus on the negative consequences of further «excessive digitalization»: cybercrime, dehumanization of society, alienation of a person. Often, the "digitalization of interaction" (built on the principles of maximum transparency, accessibility and mass participation, as well as direct contact between society and the authorities) is considered premature by officials. Nevertheless, it is much more important for both sides to come to a common decision than their own methods of communication (although preferred). After all, the adoption of digital tools and the intensity of communication will result in the establishment of close cooperation between citizens and the government.

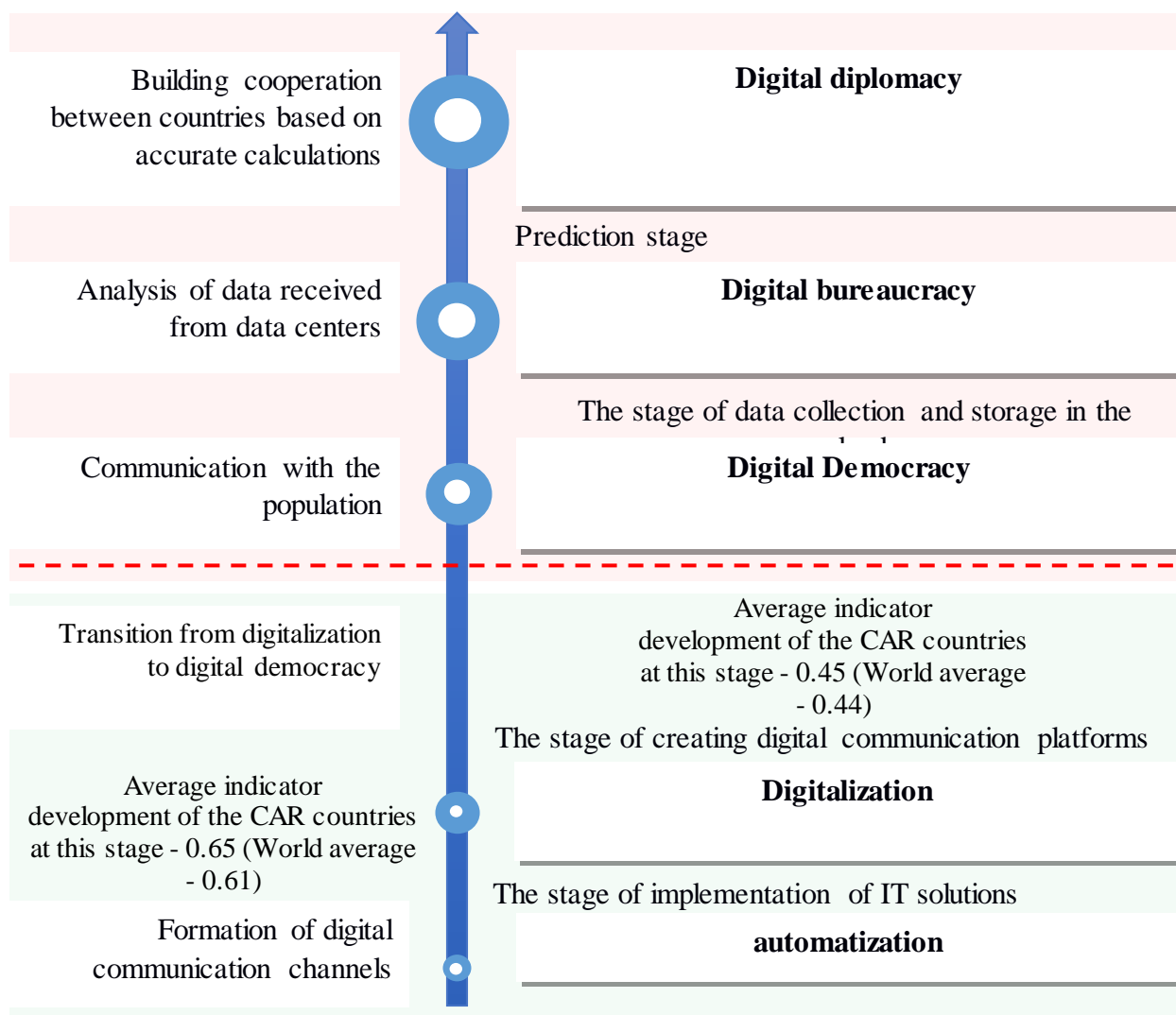


Figure 2 - Stages of digital transformation of the CAR countries

Note – the drawing is compiled by the authors

Thus, the result of using the synthesis method, by generalizing the individual parts, was the conclusion that the CAR countries have formed their own «digital climate» (Figure above the text). Based on the consideration of the relevant data, we have identified three significant facets (directions) of considering the digitalization of political relations: digital democracy, digital bureaucracy (improving the competencies of the authorities and the formation of technocratic platforms based on new versions of «electronic government»), as well as digital diplomacy (using the possibility of new technologies to solve political problems at the international, supranational level).

The above-mentioned situation in the CAR countries refers us to one of the main stages in the digital transformation - digital democracy. It is worth recalling that O. Toffler wrote about the possible appearance of another form of democracy back in 1970. The essence of digital democracy is that the government, when making political decisions, should listen to the opinion of people regarding the possible consequences of the proposed changes. At the same time, citizens themselves, through interested groups, can proactively apply with proposals and projects for the development of the country or any initial institution to state bodies. Initially, this form of democracy relied on traditional media, but with the advent of new technologies, its capabilities have grown significantly.

The issue of the real development of digital platforms returned to the agenda after criticism from the population or after harsh criticism of the head of state. For example, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has repeatedly criticized the weak development of digital platforms. As a result, it led to the disbandment of the Zerde holding. This topic is of particular relevance in connection with the President's message about a hearing and fair Kazakhstan. After criticism from the public, the heads of the highest state structures, international organizations in the CAR countries, attempts were actively made to introduce digital systems of public control over the alleged decisions of the parliament and the government. Relatively speaking, this practice lasts more than ten years. This is an online discussion of draft laws, electronic voting systems, and voting platforms. Using the example of the Republic of Kazakhstan, it can be noted that ICT demonstrates the accountability of the government and there are proposals for citizens to have an additional opportunity to participate in political processes. These steps were well aligned with the United Nations agenda aimed at promoting the use of digital tools to ensure direct democracy based on data.

In general, it should be noted that for many years the governments of the Central Asian countries have been implementing issues with digital transformation quite successfully and without significant problems. And according to the model presented by us, it is clear that a compromise has been worked out both within the CAR countries and at the inter-country level. Being at the crossroads of the interests of international actors, the five countries inevitably fall into various force majeure situations. But so far there has been no open confrontation either within or between countries. Nevertheless, we consider it important to answer a number of questions: which of the equilibrium situations can be accepted as satisfactory to all

parties (the principle of optimality)? What is necessary for the CAR countries in promoting regional cooperation through digital transformation?

Now digitalization is understood as a labor market that liberates professions, replaces people with robots, which, perhaps, also implies its next stage. Digital evolution is fraught with reformatting not only the labor market, but also the political world, including the profession of a politician and even the institution of political parties itself. As one of the sides of the relationship, officials always ask the question, "will the digitalization of society displace the traditional representations of society?" They are known to include political parties and politicians.

The public of the CAR today perceives the state platforms of appeals to the authorities as samples of new digital opportunities being probed by the creators of state programs. Indeed, research shows that open government platforms, while offering many advantages of effective governance, also run the risk of abuse in matters of regulation of these systems. In this regard, the practice of functioning of the portal shows low activity of the population when discussing various kinds of projects. According to the data on public engagement, the CAR countries (with the exception of Kazakhstan) are on average in very low positions.

Table 3. Comparison of the dynamics of the development of the countries of the world and the CAR on the index of electronic participation

PLACE IN THE RATING	A COUNTRY	INDEX FOR 2022	INDEX FOR 2012	DYNAMICS OVER 10 YEARS, IN %	RANK CHANGES SINCE 2012
1	Japan	1.0000	0,7368	35,7	+10
2	Australia	0,9886	0,7632	29,5	+6
3	Estonia	0,9773	0,7632	28,1	+5
4	Singapore	0,9773	0,9474	3,1	
5	Netherlands	0,9659	1.0000	-3,4	-4
6	New Zealand	0,9545	0,5789	64,8	+19
7	Finland	0,9545	0,7368	29,5	+5
8	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	0,9545	0,9211	3,6	-1
9	Republic of Korea	0,9432	1.0000	-5,6	-8
10	United States of America	0,9091	0,9211	-1,3	-5
11	Brazil	0,8977	0,5000	79,5	+20
12	Denmark	0,8864	0,5526	60,4	+16
13	China	0,8636	0,2105	310,2	+53
14	Canada	0,8295	0,6842	21,2	+1
15	Kazakhstan	0,8068	0,9474	-14,8	-12
55	Uzbekistan	0,6136	0,2368	159,1	+5
79	Kyrgyzstan	0,5000	0,2895	72,7	-26
135	Tadjikistan	0,2500	0,0000		+26
180	Turkmenistan	0,1023	0,0000		-19

Note - the table is compiled by the authors according to the source [13]

Thus, according to the UN report, for 2022, the governments of the CAR countries provide their voters with basic information leading to a second, bilateral form, when people are invited to contribute to governments. However, as the data show, at the level of «partnership» during which citizens become the main actors, a low level of involvement in the management of the state policy development process is noticeable. As can be determined by the overall dynamics according to the available UN data, for example, Kazakhstan dropped by 12 positions (in 2012 it was in 3rd place). While the rest of the region's countries continued to occupy lagging positions.

As events have shown, as a result of the formation of such contacts in the CAR countries, a stage has come for the formation of new communication links on virtual communication platforms (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram). An active part of the public began to express their opinion more actively on official platforms. There was an addiction to express their opinions more and more actively on social networks. There was another part of social network users (like Chinese online censorship) prefer to forward rather than directly comment on posts.

In social networks, there was an acute discussion about raising the retirement age, raising energy and fuel prices, and as a result, the rise in food prices. During the protest days, the public learned about what was happening in the country not through traditional media – television, newspapers and radio – but through publications in social networks. It should be noted that there have always been users actively distributing data on the problems of their city on the Network. It is obvious that they are doing an important job in principle, since they draw public attention to the shortcomings of the work of the city administration. The problem is different: they transfer local problems to the whole country. In fact, this is not even fake news, but a fake interpretation of real news. As a result, the growth of digital platforms and their active use has posed a number of problems for the authorities.

The amount of misinformation spread over the Internet. Unreliable information at such moments grew so fast that fake news began to displace the real ones. The population hardly distinguished fake news from real news. The public then clearly showed a tendency to believe information from social networks, because they trust friends and relatives who distribute it. It is known from world experience that influential media personalities are able to influence stock prices or prices on commodity exchanges of the world with their messages on Twitter. A lot of works have been devoted to the fact that the level of disinformation and fake news has sharply increased in the world recently.

The analysis used in this study just reveals the situation in the CAR countries when citizens, using electronic communication systems, show their distrust of the decisions of the authorities. As a result of distrust, the heads of departments are immediately removed. As was demonstrated on the basis of the method, such decisions occur only when the situation escalates and reaches an open conflict. When it comes to the boiling point and the authorities make concessions. The analysis of the press suggests that often the state structures of the Central Asian countries strengthen the general sense of legitimate expectations about what is happening in their country and abroad. As a consequence, all of the above factors

have recently led to conflict situations within the CAR countries. Consequently, if the use of digital technologies in the official electronic system was not very successful, then they proved to be effective in the communication of the population for organizing and coordinating protests.

From the point of view of comparative analysis, the experience of the countries at the top of the rankings is of practical interest. The countries of such regions as Western Europe, North America also had experience in regulating the issue of uncontrolled platforms of the will of society. For example, the first significant success of using social networks to consolidate protests was the Occupy movement in the United States during the economic crisis of 2007-2008. But the most famous example, of course, is the series of revolutions in the countries of North Africa, known as the «Arab Spring», when social communications of citizens played a decisive role in the confrontation with political regimes. In France and Hong Kong, where a special application notified protesters about safe places to hide, about where the police are. Social communications then played an important role in organizing protest moods.

But as the analysis shows, digital communications in advanced countries today are already perceived not only as a tool for organizing protest. Social networks and messengers have long been a channel for transmitting information and an effective forecasting tool. In this sense, it is important to explore the possibility of integrating the base of government platforms with social networks. There is a well-known practice when data about Internet users in digital spaces is transferred to companies for analytics, personalization and advertising. In other words, digital platforms act as a data set that includes commercial surveillance of objects on the network.

We believe that the sad experience of other countries has been well learned by China. The country today actively applies advanced foreign experience and a modern approach. So, for example, the Chinese approach combines both big data and algorithm models that create a new form of governance for the Chinese government. The system combines data received from various government departments in order to monitor Chinese citizens. In fact, this is the most ambitious project in the world in the field of using digital technologies to work with the population. It is worth noting that China is making a historic leap forward in modernizing the national management system and management capacity by taking advantage of the historic opportunity provided by digital technologies. Analysis of human behavior in social networks is actively used by businesses in other countries for targeted advertising and for making decisions about lending or hiring. But the Chinese model in this case for the formation of a full-fledged digital transformation is useful from the point of view of data collection and analysis. In this case, we are not talking about changing the behavior of citizens in accordance with the government's agenda. In this regard, the question arises about the readiness of managers at different levels of the CAR countries to manage changes, to carry out a full-fledged digital transformation.

**Conclusion.** Thus, it should be noted that during the years of independence, the heads of the five republics of the CAR have repeatedly made attempts to

deepen regional cooperation, but real integration has not happened. We believe that in the development of regional cooperation, especially in the digital sphere, between the CAR countries, it is important to highlight the specifics of relations between the countries, leaders. Indeed, there have always been individual preferences and decision-making processes in relations between neighboring countries. So, the scenario of problems when choosing a Russian, Chinese, European or other platform is not excluded.

According to the data, after more than 30 years, the mechanism of multilateral cooperation with the participation of all the republics of the region still needs to be developed in the region. The process of rapprochement, including in matters of digital development, in the region is rather declarative. Thus, there is a need for clear plans for the implementation of projects, experts often note the unwillingness of the leaders of the republics to transfer part of their powers to supranational bodies. Differences in economic indicators, weak opportunities for the implementation of regional projects have become the main obstacles to the full development of a unified digital agenda.

In this regard, the question of expanding the competencies of the CAR countries in technological niches, the ability to analyze the amount of information received remains open. We believe that in order to develop deep regional cooperation, countries in successful regions of the world did not have to strive for identity or sameness. A similar situation in political science is called «isomorphism». So, for example, within the EU, it is difficult to compare Poland with Germany, and also in East Asia - South Korea with Vietnam. Nevertheless, these countries have a common understanding, common norms or a sense of belonging to the same regional order. Which ultimately helps to avoid conflicts. As practice shows, regional construction is the practice of forming a common and unified approach.

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## ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯ АЙМАҒЫ ЕЛДЕРІНІҢ ЦИФРЛЫҚ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯСЫ: ӨҢІРЛІК ИНТЕГРАЦИЯҒА АПАРАР ЖОЛ МА?

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**Андатпа.** Цифрлық технологиялар мен платформалық шешімдерді кешенді қолдану тәжірибесі елдегі экономикалық және саяси салалардың цифрлық трансформациясында айқын көрінеді. ОАА елдеріндегі цифрлық трансформация мәселесін зерттеу өзгерістердің әсерін және одан әрі қайта құрудың перспективаларын бағалауға мүмкіндік береді. Осыған байланысты мақала аясында халықаралық қатынастардағы цифрлық трансформация сияқты құбылыстың дамуын бағалау мақсаты қойылды. Бұл мақаланың ғылыми маңыздылығы цифрлық технологиялардың аймақтағы әртүрлі халықаралық саяси және экономикалық процестерге әсерін анықтау болып табылады. Соңында, мақалада цифрландырудың әсерінен ОАА елдерінің интеграциялық идеясын трансформациялау процесі талданады. Бұл зерттеу электронды-желілік құралдарды қолданудың алғышарттарын ретроспективті түрде бағалауға тырысады. Жұмыстың практикалық маңыздылығы ОАА елдерінде цифрлық трансформацияның ену дәрежесіне талдау жүргізу болып табылады. Цифрлық технологиялардың саяси өлшемін реттеу мен пайдаланудың шетелдік тәжірибесіне ерекше назар аударылады. Қазіргі авторлар цифрлық технологияларды, әсіресе ОАА елдерінің саяси дискурсында қолдану практикасы мәселесін аз зерттегендіктен бұл мақала авторлары зерттеу салыстырмалы регионализм бойынша әдебиетке үлес қосуға тырысты. Ғылыми әдебиеттерді теориялық және әдіснамалық талдау цифрлық трансформацияны ғылыми тұрғыдан түсінуге мүмкіндік берді. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізі цифрлық ортаның ерекшеліктерін анықтауға және оның негізгі перспективаларын тұжырымдауға мүмкіндік берді. Посткеңестік кеңістіктің әртүрлі бөліктеріндегі тұрақсыздықтың, шиеленістің кезекті ошақтарының пайда болуы дағдарыстарды шешу тақырыптарына қызығушылықты арттырады. Зерттеу аясында қойылған сұрақтарға жауап іздеу аймақтың цифрлық трансформациясы тақырыбының өзектілігін арттыруға әкеледі деп санаймыз.

**Тірек сөздер:** өңірлік қатынастар, ОАА елдері, цифрлық трансформация, цифрлық платформа, цифрлық дипломатия, цифрлық демократия, салыстырмалы регионализм, цифрлық технологиялар

## ЦИФРОВАЯ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ СТРАН ЦЕНТРАЛЬНО-АЗИАТСКОГО РЕГИОНА: ПУТЬ К РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИНТЕГРАЦИИ?

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**Аннотация.** Практика комплексного применения цифровых технологий и платформенных решений наиболее ярко отражается в цифровой трансформации экономических и политических сфер в стране. Исследование вопроса цифровой трансформации в странах ЦАР позволяет оценить эффект изменений и перспектив дальнейших преобразований. В связи с этим в рамках статьи поставлена цель оценить развитие такого явления как цифровая трансформация в международных отношениях. Научная значимость данной статьи заключается в определении влияния цифровых технологий на различные международные политические и экономические процессы в регионе. Наконец, в статье анализируется процесс трансформации интеграционной идеи стран ЦАР под воздействием цифровизации. В данном исследовании делается попытка ретроспективно оценить предпосылки задействования электронно-сетевых инструментов. Практическая значимость работы заключается в проведении анализа степени проникновения цифровой трансформации в странах ЦАР. Особый акцент делается на зарубежном опыте регулирования и использования политического измерения цифровых технологий. Исследование коллектива авторов стремится внести свой вклад в литературу по сравнительному регионализму. Так как современными авторами мало изучен вопрос практики использования цифровых технологий, в особенности в политическом дискурсе стран ЦАР. Теоретико-методологический анализ научной литературы предоставил возможность научного осмысления цифровой трансформации. Методологическая основа исследования позволило определить особенности цифровой среды и сформулировать ее основные перспективы. Появление очередных очагов нестабильности, напряженности в разных частях постсоветского пространства усиливает интерес к темам разрешения кризисов. Считаем, что поиск ответов на поставленные в рамках исследования вопросы приводит к повышению актуальности темы цифровой трансформации региона.

**Ключевые слова:** региональные отношения, страны ЦАР, цифровая трансформация, цифровая платформа, цифровая дипломатия, цифровая демократия, сравнительный регионализм, цифровые технологии

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