

Alumni Conference

**Economic Development of
Central Asia: Anti-Corruption,
Green Economy and Digital Economy**

20-21 September 2024, Bishkek
Conference Rapporteur: Dr. A. Javeed Ahwar

Academy Papers #13

OSCE Academy in Bishkek

Alumni Conference

**Economic Development of Central Asia: Anti-Corruption,
Green Economy and Digital Economy**

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Introduction

On 20-21 September 2024, the OSCE Academy in Bishkek organized and hosted the Annual Alumni Conference on “Economic Development of Central Asia: Anti-Corruption, Green Economy and Digital Economy”. Economic development in Central Asia has seen significant transformations in recent decades, driven by efforts to modernize economies and attract investment in an increasingly interconnected global economy. While the region holds substantial economic potential, it also faces critical challenges that shape its development trajectory. Among the key focal points for sustainable growth are anti-corruption measures, the expansion of a green economy, and the advancement of a digital economy.

Through organizing a series of panel discussions, the Alumni Conference aimed at critical discussion of discourses surrounding green economy, anti-corruption laws and practices, and digitalization of economy, in conjunction with the Central Asian economies and sustainable development. The discussions covered a wide range of topics including the impact of digitalization on the local economy, gender disparity, and future investments.

Dr. Indira Satarkulova, Deputy Director of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, welcomed conference participants. In her opening remarks, she emphasized that the Annual Alumni Conference as a platform brings researchers and public officials back to the OSCE Academy to share their findings with the institution. On the theme of this Conference, she put an emphasis on the centrality of anti-corruption policies and practices in the Kyrgyz government’s stance on economic development. Dr. Satarkulova provided an overview of the conference’s agenda, including the panels and the book launch associated with it. She also extended a warm welcome to OSCE Alumni Network, Kyrgyz attendees, and online participants of the conference. At the end, Dr. Satarkulova cordially introduced Ms. Ekaterine Nakashidze and keynote speaker Dr. Maximilian Burger-Scheidlin.

In her turn, Ms. Ekaterine Nakashidze, Deputy Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, expressed deep gratitude to the OSCE Alumni Network and the dedicated international and local staff of the OSCE Academy for their efforts in organizing this conference. She highlighted the Academy’s steadfast commitment to preparing future leaders with the expertise and skills necessary to serve as effective experts and public servants in Central Asia. She noted that the conference goes beyond academic discussions to address critical and urgent issues surrounding sustainable economic development. She emphasized that corruption stands as a major obstacle to economic growth. Furthermore, she underscored the need for development programmes and policies to consider environmental challenges in their design. Moreover, she pointed out that the conference agenda includes key topics such as energy inefficiency, economic inequality, and the importance of the digital economy as innovative approaches to traditional problems. Additionally, she shared her eagerness about the launch of a new book that examines the European Union’s evolving role in Central Asia, which will add valuable perspectives to the conference discussions. She affirmed that the OSCE Academy is not simply hosting an event but actively laying the foundations for a sustainable and prosperous future in Central Asia.

Keynote Speech by Dr. Maximilian Burger-Scheidlin, Senior Director at the International Chamber of Commerce of Austria

In his opening remarks, Dr. Burger-Scheidlin emphasized that despite their distinctions from each other, anti-corruption, green economy and digitalization are interlinked. He added that when combined, they hold the power to transform economies, empower communities, and pave the way for a future that prioritizes long-term growth over immediate gains.

Regarding corruption, he tried to challenge the dominant perception about corruption as a “victimless crime,” and emphasized that this perception is far from the truth. Corruption is not just about bending the rules; it is about creating a system where laws are no longer laws, but tools to serve individual interests. This “hit-and-run” mentality might benefit a few in power temporarily, but it leaves lasting harm for everyone else. He gave the example of investment in a vital water supply system for Bishkek. He added that a corrupt individual with a short-term view would disregard such an investment because it does not yield immediate profit. He might instead be tempted to violate labor rights, neglect environmental impacts, or use bribery to maintain his position. He continued stating, “What does this lead to? A society where essential resources are ignored, human rights are trampled upon, and sustainability is compromised—all for the benefit of a few.”

Dr. Burger-Scheidlin introduced a new concept called “green investment,” which according to him demands a long-term vision. Explaining it further, he added: Imagine planting a tree that will take a century to mature. The profit is not immediate, but the returns are invaluable. When we invest in green initiatives, we are building a foundation for future generations—a sustainable economy where the benefits are shared widely. By focusing on green investments, we guarantee something beyond just profit: a legacy of mature, robust economic growth that will withstand the tests of time. Sustainability, then, is about more than financial gain. It is about ensuring that workers are treated fairly, paid well, and work under safe, regulated conditions. It is about producing high-quality goods that reflect the value of the labor that went into them. When we talk about sustainable development, we are talking about a system where everyone, from the worker to the consumer, benefits. This approach, however, requires us to operate within the law and resist the temptation to cut corners through corruption. He added that, in his own experiences, he has seen the damaging effects of corruption firsthand. In one instance, while facing prolonged customs processing in Korea, he refused to pay bribes to expedite the process. It required patience, yes, but by not succumbing to this quick-fix mentality, he contributed to creating a precedent, showing that honest business is possible, even if it requires waiting an extra three days. The point here is that when we reject corruption, we are standing for a system where people are treated fairly, rather than manipulated for short-term gains.

Highlighting other costs of corruption, he gave the example of the devastating earthquake in Turkey. In the 1990s, buildings were constructed with substandard materials due to corrupt practices. When the earthquake struck, these structures crumbled, resulting in the tragic loss of 50,000 lives. Beyond the human cost, the financial damages were estimated at around 150 billion USD. These figures remind us that corruption is not a victimless crime; it has a toll on human lives and entire economies. Similarly, Nobel Prize winner Joseph E. Stiglitz estimated that the loss of a single American soldier in Iraq costs the national economy 13 million USD—another example of the deep-seated impact conflict have on economic stability.

Furthermore, he gave the example of Nigeria, a nation rich in resources. He asserted that we see how systemic corruption undermines prosperity. Villagers, often traveling hours to find work, are frequently met with demands for bribes from officials. This corruption, according to him, feeds instability. Groups like Boko Haram capitalize on these injustices, drawing followers by presenting themselves as a voice against the oppression. This is a powerful reminder of how corruption sows the seeds of poverty, violence, and radicalization. Furthermore, a similar situation unfolded in Syria, where economic liberalization was intended to provide hope for the country's youth. But dark forces, driven by corrupt agendas, undermine these efforts. When corruption is left unchecked, it breeds poverty and despair, cutting off opportunities and allowing extremism to thrive. If we want to ensure stability, we must create economies that offer opportunities, not exploitation.

Corruption also operates with a particular mathematical burden. The bribe-taker must redistribute a significant portion of the earnings to others in the system, from colleagues to superiors. This "trickle-up" dynamic drains resources while creating a precarious cycle of secrecy and mutual blackmail. In the end, both the bribe-giver and the bribe-taker are trapped in a system that ultimately benefits no one. As the Chinese proverb goes, "The best government is one that the people do not fear." Addressing the audience, he asserted: "This is what we should aspire to—a government and a system where individuals feel safe, respected, and empowered to participate honestly in the economy." He added that a business owner, instead of supplying lower quality products bribing quality controllers, should invest that money in the bonuses of employees, which will ultimately ensure quality. He went on giving the example of Mauritius, which according to him, offers an example of this principle in action. Facing a worker shortage, they brought in labor from Madagascar. The absence of corruption created a stable system where every worker contributed fairly and honestly, benefiting the whole economy.

In conclusion, he emphasized that the main point is the practical approach of managing risk. By extending the timeline and emphasizing long-term benefits, we encourage people to think beyond the immediate payoff. Yes, corruption may be profitable in the short run, but over a 40-year span, it is an unsustainable, high-risk strategy. The unexplained wealth order, if you cannot explain where they come from, will be subject to confiscation. Global watchdogs on money laundering, are now stricter than years ago. Those involved in corruption have ended up in prisons, faced economic ruin, or worse. Meanwhile, those who chose to do the right thing often enjoyed a long, stable, and profitable career, without carrying the burden of secrecy and risk. At last, doing the right thing—whether it is resisting corruption, investing in green initiatives, or building a digital economy—has proven to be not only ethically sound but economically wise. Corruption is a shortsighted game that fosters civil unrest, feeds extremism, and undermines economic progress. In essence, a high-risk business benefits few while harming many. He added that our path forward is clear. By rejecting corruption, embracing sustainability, and focusing on long-term investment, we can build an economy that serves everyone. He reminded everyone that no culture supports corruption, it is a bad habit. Together, let us work toward a future where prosperity is shared, opportunity is abundant, and success is built on the foundations of integrity and respect for all. At the very last, he warned audiences, stating: "Do not fire the corrupt, and instead opt for a horizontal monitoring system in which employees watch each other. Condemning corruption does not work, we have to use economic rationality in reducing corruption, in demonstrating that corruption is in the long-term not beneficial."

Panel 1: Anti-Corruption

Chaired by Dr. Maximilian Burger-Scheidlin, the panel examined the performances of Central Asian states, particularly Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, in their war against corruption.

The first speaker, Kodir Kuliev, Adjunct Professor at Webster University in Tashkent and ICCP Expert and ICCP Representative in Uzbekistan, emphasized that corruption is both an issue of morality and an issue of the system. He pointed out that Uzbekistan set a goal of achieving a per capita income of USD 4000 by 2023 but might fall short of this target. Even though he sounded optimistic towards the ongoing reform initiatives, he had his reservation regarding whether Uzbekistan will reach this goal by 2030. Presenting the problems identified on the basis of international surveys, he stated that international surveys are not reflecting satisfaction with the progress made by anti-corruption entities because they overlook the fact that corruption is also an individual (moral) issue. We need commitment, trust, practical wisdom, understanding, learning, and awareness. According to him, we are stuck at the awareness level of how to be honest and devoted. However, it is still a matter of people fighting against it. Introducing the 16-hour theory, he elaborated that most, if not all, public officials work long hours quite frequently. They must give up their personal and family lives to meet the employer's demands, especially in state organizations, without being compensated or incentivized for such a sacrifice. Elaborating further, she stated: "Typically, any work done beyond regular working hours should be voluntary and compensated. This is important because, within a 24-hour period, an employer takes away half of an individual's daily personal time. If we subtract the recommended average sleep time of 8 hours from 24 hours, we are left with only 16 hours. According to global labor standards, half of that time—8 hours—is allocated to the employer. Working more than 8 hours is considered illegal, and the remaining time should be dedicated entirely to personal life. Consequently, the risk of corruption significantly increases when such basic human rights are compromised."

Shedding light on side effects of corruption on individuals, he explained that it is both psychologically and economically justified for victims of unethical practices to begin "rationalizing" their dishonesty. As a result, they may engage in unethical actions that reduce their sense of guilt. Human dignity is invaluable; once it is compromised, no compensation can restore it. This rationalization process significantly contributes to the increase of corruption. This issue is systemic and persistent across all levels of state organizations. If anti-corruption measures do not take into account the quality of life of public service professionals—especially law enforcement personnel—corruption will not only continue to grow but will also waste time and resources while further degrading the system.

Furthermore, he highlighted the problem of "Re-corruption," stating that corruption will kick in again if you have weak instructions and trust issues. To the question of why he focuses on individual issues, he added that we ignore individual approaches as we ignore the rationale – the absence of morality behind it. According to him, the moral approach is self-regulating, while the system approach is a compliance mechanism. Anti-corruption organizations should act like hospitals when dealing with disease.

The second speaker, Rasheed Qutbzadah, alumnus of the OSCE Academy, experienced in both public and private sectors, in Afghanistan. As a programme manager at Smart City, currently based in Kabul, he discussed anti-corruption measures taken in Afghanistan. In his presentation, he highlighted that the capitalist order, and its emphasis on profit maximization feeds greed and normalizes corruption.

Citing John Perkins' reader, *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*, he argued that there are three rationales behind an individual's acts of the corruption: First, there is a social pressure to become corrupt in order to achieve prosperity. Second, if the opportunity arises, one will utilize it, since everyone does it. Third, one's consciousness will suffer seeing the negative consequences of their deeds as a corrupt person. Qutbzadah then went on to problematize anti-corruption indexes using the example of Afghanistan. He added that although these indexes tell us something about the status of corruption in a country, one cannot ignore that anti-corruption auditors can misuse their power to extract resources from corrupt institutions, and commit corruption themselves. He shared a story of him working for the Ministry of Labor as a human resource employee, when he witnessed how government and anti-corruption bodies were partners in corruption. He further highlighted that corruption does lead to instability and it has contributed to the collapse of government in Afghanistan. He further emphasized that when corruption becomes a part of culture, it is hard to eradicate it. He added that the Taliban government reduced corruption in their initial days of taking over in 2021. However, he emphasized that there are strong indications showing that they are heading to become as corrupt as the previous government. For example, favoritism towards the Taliban movement members, outsourcing government services, and selling out governmental positions harm people. On top of that, the trust deficit is also there. At last, he highlighted that corruption hurts the poorest and ordinary classes compared to the wealthier groups. Answering a question on whether the initial reduction of corruption in the Taliban government has to do with the decline of foreign aid, Qutbzadah emphasized that the Taliban's claim to fight against corruption is questionable as there is much less transparency compared to the preceding republican regime. He added that the press was then free and people were aware of corruption in the previous government, despite that they had no political will to tackle the corruption and punish the corrupt. However, we do not know much due to heavy censorship under the Taliban.

The third speaker, an invited guest, Nuripa Mukanova, the Secretary General of the Anticorruption Business Council under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, gave an overview of the anticorruption measures taken recently by the Kyrgyz government. She emphasized that the Anticorruption Business Council works closely with law enforcement bodies to prevent and fight corruption. Regarding the strategies adopted by the Council, she added that they took into consideration challenges such as political instability and trust deficit, shadow economy, corruption at the higher up political offices, and fragility of the national economy. To counter these challenges, the Council has opted for the centralization of power, removal of tax exemption and breaks, and encouragement of legal businesses. In her presentation, she further highlighted the impact of exchange culture on public administration and turning the state into a tool for executing corruption. The speaker added that the Kyrgyz Republic follows the Istanbul action plan, and is the OECD Public Integrity Indicators. Furthermore, she emphasized that they have good strategies but they come short at practices and level of the implementation. For instance, she mentioned that the Presidential decree No.137, approved on June 5, 2024, covers 15 policy areas. Among them, according to her the most important ones are improving anti-corruption legislation, raising anti-corruption expertise, assuring persecution of corruption, preventing corruption at the provincial level, researching corruption, strengthening participation of civil society, promoting intolerance for corruption through media and educational institutions, and establishing a favorable investment climate. Answering a question with regard to the access to information, she stated that OECD has also recommended the Kyrgyz government to facilitate civil society and journalists with access to information. On whether this plan will succeed, she added that it depends on the political will which the government has now. She emphasized that the current government is committed to fighting corruption. The government has promised to punish the corrupt no matter who. Based on this scheme, these individuals will be sanctioned and cannot become politicians in the future, not even their family members will be allowed to participate in politics and cannot form

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any political party in the future. As you can see, the legislation has become intensive. With regard to the anti-corruption mechanisms and awareness, she added that the security department investigates corruption. Furthermore, the Council has 23 compliance officers in all the state agencies. With regard to zero tolerance for corruption, she added that the Ministry of Justice is given the responsibility to raise legal awareness. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Science is instructed to involve educational institutions like universities in the anti-corruption campaigns. However, to do so, the government has to yet create budgetary support for the involvement of universities in this campaign. At last, the Kyrgyz government treats the Singaporean case as a model. Therefore, the state increased salaries of governmental officials twice in the last 3 years. For instance, judges' salaries increased by 100 percent.

Panel 2: Green Economy

Moderated by Dr. Bedelbai Mamadiyev, head of Research and Training Department at the OSCE Academy. The panel covered a wide range of topics related to the green economy.

The first speaker, Aria Rashidi, from the International Rescue Committee's Northern California Office spoke about the impact of climate change on economic inequality. The speaker highlighted that empirical evidence supports that climate change increases economic inequality. Based on her case studies, global warming has a negative impact on GDP per capita. The evidence also shows the reverse impact of economic inequality on global warming. According to her, economic inequality worsens climate change and wealthier states' energy consumption increases economic inequality. In conclusion, she highlighted that increasing global warming hurts agricultural GDP and extreme weather events and drought affects the livelihood of farmers.

The second speaker, Akmal Abdullayev, from the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED), Uzbekistan, discussed the relationship of green economy and fruit production in Central Asia. In his presentation, Akmal Abdullayev highlighted the challenges facing Central Asia's agricultural sector, particularly in aligning fruit production with green economy principles. Using the Fergana Valley as an example, Abdullayev shared insights into grape farming. While Uzbekistan exports grapes to the Russian Federation, the region increasingly imports Chinese grapes. He noted that the corruption in import practices had an impact in obtaining accurate data on the agricultural exchanges between the Central Asian countries and China. Abdullayev emphasized on the competitiveness gap between local producers and Chinese exporters. For instance, advanced Chinese agricultural practices meet year-round demand, whereas Uzbek producers struggle with seasonal supply fluctuations—oversupply in summer and shortages in winter. To address these challenges, Abdullayev stressed the need for further research into sustainable practices, improved resource use, and policy initiatives supporting local production. He concluded by advocating for a balanced approach to growth that ensures food security, economic stability, and environmental sustainability.

The third speaker, Aliaskar Adylov, from the German consulting company GOPA AFC, presenting on "Energy Efficiency of Livestock Production in the Kyrgyz Republic" began his discussion by asking "How can we increase profits from livestock production while simultaneously causing least negative environmental impact as possible?" The issue of energy efficiency was approached from analysis of the country's fodder production which concluded

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that currently up to 62 percent of arable lands in Kyrgyzstan are used to produce fodder for animals. Consequently, large water resources are also used to irrigate fodder fields, while land and water could produce food for humans instead of animals directly. In this situation, the CO₂eq emissions indirectly fostered by livestock production are 85 percent of the total agricultural emissions of Kyrgyzstan (and agriculture is generally responsible for a third of Kyrgyzstan's total CO₂eq emissions). Therefore, livestock production is less efficient for the economy with little return. To be precise, he argued that to produce one kilogram of meat, a Kyrgyz farmer has to spend 6 kilograms of wheat, while one kilogram of wheat produces 3340 kcal and one kilogram of meat yields only 1500 kcal, less than half of the earlier. Of the 2250 kcal per day that an individual needs, only 32 percent (730 kcal) comes from animal products such as meat and milk, and the rest (1520 kcal) comes from vegetarian origins. Furthermore, he argued that livestock breeding causes environmental damage. Pasture degradation in Kyrgyzstan is mainly caused by overgrazing as degraded pastures release carbon. He concluded by asking, "Is it worth it?" and added that fewer animals means less emissions and less pressure on pastures, while better feed could keep total profits and productivity on the same levels.

The fourth speaker, Shoira Olimova, from the International Accountability Project (IAP), presented on "The Environmental Footprint of Foreign Investments & Climate Change". In her presentation, she highlighted the complex environmental and social impacts of development projects funded by foreign investments, especially in Central Asia (CA) and the South Caucasus (SC). The main issue, according to her, is how multilateral development banks (MDBs) and private investors influence infrastructure projects. She quoted statistics provided by the IAP's Early Warning System speaking about the environmental and social impacts of foreign investments. According to the Early Warning System, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan receive substantial portions of these investments and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan combined receive less investment than Kazakhstan. The same source also shows that the energy sector remains the top priority for foreign investors. Furthermore, hydropower and other infrastructure projects face frequent issues such as community displacement, environmental harm, and labor rights violations, particularly in the Caucasus. Other examples include projects such as the Kambar-ata hydropower plant (Kyrgyzstan), Sarimay-Muruntau transmission line (Uzbekistan/Tajikistan), and infrastructure in Kazakhstan and Turkey. Each case illustrates the environmental toll and risks of the large-scale development projects. The overall message urges MDBs, private investors, and governments to adopt a people-first approach to development, ensuring that projects not only advance economic goals but also protect environmental and human rights. The presenter also emphasized on the need for transparency, accountability, and community involvement to mitigate the adverse effects of development projects.

Panel 3: Digital Economy

Moderated by Dr. Burulcha Sulaimanova, senior lecturer at the OSCE Academy. The panelists discussed different aspects of digital economy and current practices with this regard in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

The first speaker, Daniel Dushmanov, a PhD candidate at the Eurasian National University in Kazakhstan, discussed how digital innovations can help enhance business operations. In his presentation, he emphasized on the importance of DEVREL – Developers Relationships. He gave the

example of the impact the Apple event in 1984 and the Blackberry movie talk in 2023 had on third developers. Discussing further about the significance of developers' influence on our lives, he gave examples of Airbnb, Kaspi Bank, Uber, and Netflix, demonstrating how developers' ideas and businesses go hand in hand. Kaspi, for instance, has an online market, and you can even pay for governmental services through this App. In the previous Devrel event in Astana, the Ministry of Digital Development attended. Furthermore, he added that the World Finals Championship of the Collegiate Programming Contest will be held in Astana in 2024. These examples show how important Devrel has become to Kazakhstan. He also gave the example of the Astana Hub, which has become the international IT Park of IT start-up in Central Asia. In conclusion, he added that Devrel empowers developers; it has an impact on business models and industries, facilitates collaboration and innovation, and therefore plays a crucial role in economic growth and has influenced the whole economy.

The second speaker, Gulzhan Begeyeva, from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva discussed the transformation of the charitable sector in Kazakhstan in the context of digitalization and increase in the use of Internet and social media. Focusing on charity initiatives in Kazakhstan, she described Kazakhstan's performance in the World Giving Index and the public distrust of charitable foundations. According to her, in recent years, the situation has changed and some charitable foundations are doing effective marketing in social media and posting emotional content to encourage people to do charity. The most popular charitable foundations appeal to the Muslim duty of helping the poor through zakat and *sadaqah*. One of the examples she gave was the social media account of the anonymous masked guy who engages in charitable giving without revealing his identity as anonymous giving is considered virtuous in Islam. These charities use social media such as Instagram and Tiktok to reach out to 18 million internet users in Kazakhstan and encourage them to do charity, while appealing to emotions as a marker of effective economy. As most donations are channeled through online payment systems such as Kaspi, it shows how the digital economy and digital platforms have become an inseparable part of social and economic processes. Capitalizing on emotions of compassion and using slogans such as *let's compete in goodness* charity initiatives actively engage in neoliberal rhetoric. By including God in the picture, "*Allah razy bolsyn*," they seek to advance an alternative social moral order that encourages people to think about the afterlife.

The third speaker, Tinatin Osmonova, from the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, spoke about the increasing popularity of the digital economy in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Defining digital economy as an economy driven by internet, artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and digital data, Tinatin highlighted different demonstrations of digital economy such as financial technologies like Crypto currency, E-commerce like Amazon, digital platforms, Gig economy like delivery Apps, and digital marketing of goods like search engines, YouTube advertisements and so forth, which have become popular in Central Asia. With regard to the popularity of the digital economy, she mentioned that during her visit at Osh bazaar, an old woman had a QR code to receive payments. According to her, the data available through the National Bank of Kazakhstan shows the increasing growth of cashless transactions. Similarly, the cashless transaction in Kyrgyzstan also increased by 36 percent from 2023 to 2024. One of the reasons contributing to this transformation is the increase in the number of internet users in Central Asia. Now, the highest number of internet users are in Uzbekistan with 29 million users. As of 2024, the existing data shows that 88 percent of Kazakhs use the internet in comparison to, 81 percent in Uzbekistan, 75 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 40 percent in Tajikistan, and 34 percent in Turkmenistan. She gave the example of MBank and LALAFO, which have digital markets. Furthermore, the increasing popularity of Instagram for marketing, the development of Chat GPT in Kyrgyz language, the popularity of Yandex, and O Denge demonstrate the fast growth of the digital economy in Kyrgyzstan. She added that Kyrgyzstan is now ranked among the top 20 digital initiative projects. In conclusion, to secure wider

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and better usage of digital economy, she emphasized that it is important to have affordable electricity and internet, regulatory frameworks for digital tax payments, and guidelines for e-commerce, and tech-related educative programmes for youth and older generations to keep up with the fast tracking transformations. At last, she highlighted the importance of collaboration with international IT companies and development agencies, and continuous investment in human capital development.

The fourth speaker Medet Suleimen, from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Kazakhstan, spoke about the current discourses on "Green Nuclear Energy in Kazakhstan." According to the government data, Kazakhstan has an energy deficit, and importing from Russia is part of the energy sustainability programme supported by Kazakhstani Government. He added that the infrastructure is also outdated, and needs updating. He then added that Kazakhstan wants to brand nuclear energy as green energy and opt for it. The problem in this initiative, according to him, is in how it is branded as the only one available solution. For instance, the Kazakh Minister addressing the press, once said that if you are against nuclear energy you are unpatriotic and have a low level of education. According to his presentation, the government has supported creating a joint initiative from NGOs, parties, and singers to propagate nuclear energy. It had a big propaganda machine to support the claim that Kazakhstan needs nuclear energy. The Kazakh government held a referendum, which approved the construction of a nuclear power plant on October 6, 2024. Mr. Suleimen mentioned that Kazakhstan had a nuclear energy reactor based in Aktau - West Kazakhstan. During the Soviet era, the Soviet government used Kazakhstan for conducting nuclear tests and many people were victims of these tests. People have suffered from it. Now, Kazakhstan's government defines nuclear energy as green or clean one. Geopolitics state that Russia controls a big part of the uranium production, maybe it is Russia pushing Kazakhstan to do it. Officially, Russia has welcomed building a nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan. *Atomic Steppe: How Kazakhstan gave up the Bomb* by Toqzhan Kassenova tells this story of the Semipalatinsk nuclear polygon. If the Kazakh Government opts for nuclear energy, Kazakhstan can be more dependent on Russia as the country does not have the infrastructure needed. At last, it is creating this geopolitical fear about the increasing control of Russia over Kazakhstan.

The fifth speaker, Rashid Gabdulhakov, from the University of Groningen, spoke about Digitalization and Cybersecurity in Central Asia. According to him, digitalization has remained heavily urban and male-centric. The majority of rural people and women remain on the margin. Smart City, for instance, is a great example of how rural communities are excluded by default. He reminded the audience that we need three levels of devices for digitalization. First is access to devices, electricity and the internet. In this regard, 60 percent of women in Uzbekistan have never used the internet, and many rural areas have no access to the internet, while statistics show that 81 percent of people in Uzbeks have internet access. This means that it is predominantly males and urban dwellers who have this access. Second is the skills and education to use the tool to generate wealth. In this regard, families invest in male education by buying laptops and mobiles for them. The same goes to the rural population. Based on World Bank numbers, in Kyrgyzstan 63 percent, in Tajikistan 72 percent, in Kazakhstan 42 percent, and in Uzbekistan 47 percent of the population live in rural areas. There is a problem in defining what is rural. We need to ask who is benefiting from digitalization. That brings us to the third level of the digital divide. State uses digitalization to increase surveilling subjects and businesses and businesses and corporations use digital data to learn more about people and capitalize on them. He gave the example of Zardaly, a remote village that was totally forgotten by the state but with the reach of the internet people and state learned about them. The forgotten village is now connected to the rest of the country, and the whole world online. What is lacking here is the discussion about the outcomes of late access that they are exposed to loads of information, online shaming, theft of identity, surveillance, and misinformation. Is it a blessing or a curse? What does it do to the social fabric, gender disparity, political

Economic Development of Central Asia: Anti-Corruption, Green Economy and Digital Economy participation, and data capitalism? It is obvious that some make money out of it more than others do, and cyber crimes have increased significantly.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Satarkulova reiterated that without the generous funds of the Academy's Norwegian donor NUPI and the hard work put by our international cooperation office, this conference could not happen. She also thanked experts and professionals who paid respect to the OSCE Academy by accepting their invitation and participating in the conference. She repeated that the OSCE Academy is investing in raising professionals in the region. It is great to see graduates of the OSCE Academy achieving success in their career setting the standards higher for the upcoming students. She mentioned that the OSCE Academy has different programmes now, and they like to see alumni around, also to inspire and mentor the bachelor students. She urged them once again to stay connected, help the Academy with promoting their programmes in reaching a wider number of applicants. In conclusion, she mentioned that the OSCE Academy is here, they are going nowhere, and hope that they receive their new cohorts. Addressing the future cohorts, she mentioned that the Academy has now recruited a psychologist to help students. However, we remind them how earlier generations achieved higher success with minimal facilities. They tell students to approach alumni for help and guidance. At last, she assured the audience that the OSCE Academy keeps international teaching, and international students' quota. She expressed her best hope that the bachelor programmes will soon get international accreditation. At the very last, she looked at alumni present in the room saying, dear alumni, "You are part of our success, do not forget that."

Conference Programme

September 20, 2024 (Friday)

9:00 – 9:30 **Arrival and Registration**

09:30 – 09:40 **OPENING REMARKS**

Dr. Indira Satarkulova, Deputy Director, OSCE Academy in Bishkek

Ms. Ekaterine Nakashidze, Deputy Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek

09:40 – 11:00 **KEYNOTE SPEECH**

"The Commercial Approach to Anti-Corruption" Sub-Heading: "Increase Your Income, Reduce Risks – by Avoiding Corruption", **Dr. Maximilian Burger-Scheidlin**, Senior Director, International Chamber of Commerce Austria

11:00 – 11:10 **Group Photo**

11:10 – 11:30 **Coffee Break**

11:40 – 13:00 **PANEL I: ANTI-CORRUPTION**

Moderator: Dr. Maximilian Burger-Scheidlin

1. *Kyrgyzstan's Anti-Corruption Policy for 2025-2030*, **Nuripa Mukanova (Kyrgyzstan)**, Secretary General of the Anticorruption Business Council under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic
2. *Anti-Corruption Initiatives and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Uzbekistan*, **Kodir Kuliev (Uzbekistan)**, Adjunct Professor, Global Studies, Business, and Philosophy at Webster University in Tashkent
3. *The Inevitable Link Between Corruption and Capitalism (online)*, **Rasheed Qutbzadah (Afghanistan)**

12:30 – 13:00 **Q&A Session**

13:00 – 14:00 **Lunch**

14:05 – 15:25 **PANEL II: GREEN ECONOMY**

Moderator: Dr. Bedelbai Mamadiev, Head of the Research and Training Department, OSCE Academy

1. *Impact of Climate Change on Economic Inequality (online)*, **Aria Rashidi (Afghanistan)**, Microenterprise Business Counselor, International Rescue Committee
2. *Balancing Growth and Sustainability: Can Central Asian Fruit Production Meet Green Economy Goals?* **Akmaljon Abdullayev (Uzbekistan)**, PhD Candidate, University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED)
3. *Energy Efficiency of Livestock Production in the Kyrgyz Republic* **Aliaskar Adylov (Kyrgyzstan)**, Project Coordinator / Expert on Green Economy, GOPA AFC GmbH

4. *The Environmental Footprint of Foreign Investments & Climate Change (online)*, **Shoira Alimova (Tajikistan)**, Community Organizer, International Accountability Project (IAP)

15:30 **Q&A Session**

16:00 **Coffee Break**

17:30 **BOOK LAUNCH**

"The EU as an Actor in Central Asia: External Impacts, Regional Responses"

by Co-Editors **Prof. Sebastian Mayer**, DAAD Associate Professor at the OSCE Academy and **Prof. Jakob Lempp**, Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences in Kleve, Germany

18:00 **Reception Dinner at Navat Restaurant.**

21 September, 2024 (Saturday)

09:25 **Arrival and Welcome Coffee Break**

10:00 **PANEL III: DIGITAL ECONOMY**

Moderator: Dr. Burulcha Sulaimanova, Senior Lecturer, OSCE Academy

1. *Empowering Developers: Key Role in Digital Transformation (online)*, **Daniel Dushmanov (Kazakhstan)**, Senior Community Specialist, EPAM, Kazakhstan
2. *Social Justice Going Viral: Charity and Digital Activism in Kazakhstan*, **Gulzhan Begeyeva (Kazakhstan)**, Research Assistant at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva
3. *Defining and Advancing the Digital Economy in Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan*, **Tinatin Osmonova (Kyrgyzstan)**, International Expert, OSCE Mission to Montenegro
4. *The Attempt to "Green" Nuclear Energy in Kazakhstan*, **Medet Suleimen (Kazakhstan)**, Programme Officer, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Almaty, Kazakhstan
5. *Understanding Media Landscapes and Practices Beyond Big Cities in Central Asia*, **Rashid Gabdulhakov (Uzbekistan)**, Assistant Professor, University of Groningen, the Netherlands

11:15 – 12:00 **Q&A Session**

12:00 **CLOSING REMARKS**

Dr. Indira Satarkulova, Deputy Director, OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic