

# EU Digital Market: the Future of Eastern Partnership

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## Abstract

The article analyzes the peculiarities of cooperation in the field of digitization within the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative. The key challenges and threats to the Eastern Partnership countries on the way to the digital market have been identified. The main instruments of cooperation in the field of digitalization within the framework of the Eastern Partnership have been highlighted. The author's typology based on the criterion of the level of digitization and approximation to EU standards in the field of digital technologies of the Eastern Partnership countries has been proposed. The schemes of external and internal factors affecting the future digitalization of the Eastern Partnership countries have been presented. The level of digitalization of the Eastern Partnership countries has been analyzed according to various global indices of digital transformations. Recommendations for improving cooperation between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries in the digital sphere have been presented. A forecast of the prospects of the digital market development of the Eastern Partnership countries has been made.

## Keywords 1

EU digital market, Eastern partnership, digitalization, digital and informed society

## 1. Introduction

Today, digital technologies are becoming an increasingly part of social life and are shaping Europe's digital future in particular. This trend has intensified in connection with globalization processes, scientific and technological progress of mankind and the COVID-19 crisis. Digitization contributes to the reducing bureaucracy, quick access of people to services, expansion of services for the population, reduces the negative impact of the corona crisis in various areas, including the economy, politics, health care, business, ecology, etc. Innovative transformations, the development of cloud technologies, access to digital goods and services, and the elimination of barriers to cross-border electronic commerce create an environment for the economic and social growth of states, as well as for the development of digital networks and services. Digitalization opens up new opportunities for society, contributes to the development of citizens' well-being, and then becomes one of the main directions of state policy in modern conditions. In the era of digital transformations, the European Commission aims to modernize the Internal Market of the European Union and activate the digitalization process in the EU member states and beyond in order to ensure the proper functioning of the Single Digital Market and close cooperation in this field with neighboring countries. Digital transformations contribute to the creation of new development opportunities for EU member states and their partners. The key task of the EU Agenda is to achieve technological autonomy. The EU's approach to digital transformation should ensure the expansion of opportunities for member states and neighboring countries and their citizens, the realization of potential benefits due to the integration of digital services, as well as the solution of global challenges facing the EU and partner countries on the way of digital transformation.

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European Neighborhood Policy is one of the priority areas of foreign policy. One of its priority directions is Eastern policy, which is implemented through such an instrument as the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative. The key goal of EU cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries are the development of democracy, good governance, economic well-being and sustainable society in the target countries. These goals cannot be effectively achieved without the implementation of a digital policy in the countries of the Eastern Partnership. One of the priorities of the EU's Eastern Neighborhood Policy is the digitization and informatization of neighboring countries. To date, the countries of the Eastern Partnership have faced significant threats from the COVID-19 pandemic. There are other challenges and threats to the countries of the region, such as cyber security, personal data protection and electronic privacy, geo-blocking, and insufficient digital competence of citizens. The use of digital technologies, intensification of digital transformations, adaptation of states to rapid changes and new realities of the digital era by EU standards will help to resist all these threats. That is why it is necessary to analyze in more detail the need to integrate EU digital technologies in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, as well as to identify the need to promote digitalization in the target countries of the Initiative in accordance with European norms and standards.

**Related Works.** In order to a thorough analysis of the research subject, a number of sources were analyzed, which became the basis for writing the article. The source of information was the works of leading scientists and specialists, which make it possible to deepen and systematize theoretical knowledge of the researched issues, legislative acts and other regulatory documents, methodological developments of EU analytical centers, websites of the European Commission and the Eastern Partnership, global digitalization indices data and the Eastern Partnership Index.

The first group of sources for scientific research were the works of domestic and foreign scientists. The problem of the characteristics of the EU digital market transformation is considered in the works of Mikuláš Dzurinda [6], Meelis Kitsing [2], Marko Buti [14], István P. Székely [14]. The authors I. Yehorov [1], V. Hryha [1] successfully conducted a comparative analysis of the presence of digitalization indicators in Ukraine and other countries of the EU's Eastern Partnership. The main aspects of digitalization in the field of e-government in the Eastern Partnership countries were highlighted in the work of Oleh Tsebenko [8], Nataliia Lukach [8], Yaryna Zavada [8] and Olha Stadnichenko [8].

The study "Adaptation to the era of digital trade", that deserves special attention, was conducted by a group of WTO researchers under the editorship of M. Smiths. The study contains a comprehensive presentation of information about the threats of the digital era, as well as approaches to solving these challenges [28].

G. Gentilini's study "The Evolution of the Digital Single Market" is also important, as the author highlighted the key stages of the digital transformation that took place in the European Union, taking into account the position of the EU in the digital sector at the global level, as well as the challenges faced by the Union within the implementation of the Digital Single Market [29].

The second group of research sources are data from the Eastern Partnership Index and the Digital and Informed Society Subindex [23]. It also includes data from other global digitalization indices [16;18;19].

The third group of sources, which helped us to analyze the researched issues, are regulatory legal acts, which contain provisions on the establishment and functioning of the EU Single Digital Market and the cooperation features of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative [12; 15; 17; 24].

The fourth group of sources includes research by the European Commission – "Shaping the Digital Transformation in Europe" [25], the European Parliament – "Digital Transformation in the EU – 2035"[15], as well as the European Association of Telecommunications Network Operators – "Achieving a Strong Digital Union" [26].

The fifth group of research sources includes analytical materials on the EU's Single Digital Market and the integration of Eastern Partnership countries into it. In particular, the analytical notes of the Institute for Security Studies, Civil Society Forum were used [4; 5; 9; 10; 11].

The sixth group of sources consists of official websites: the website of the European Commission, the EU Single Digital Market, the website of the EU4digital Initiative, the website of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative [17; 21; 22].

In general, there is a lack of comprehensive studies in the direction of the integration of the Eastern Partnership countries into the EU Single Digital Market.

**Proposed methodology.** In order to achieve the goals of the study, a number of methods and techniques of scientific research were applied. We used the method of scientific abstraction for the construction of structural and logical schemes for: 1. reflecting internal and external factors that can change the digitalization environment of the Eastern Partnership countries in the future; 2. reflecting the potential path from the moment of creation of the EU digital market to the creation of a single digital market of the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries. In order to thoroughly analyze the degree of integration into EU standards of Eastern Partnership countries, the Eastern Partnership Index analysis method was used. We used a number of scientific methods to analyze the state of digital transformations in the Eastern Partnership region: systemic – to determine the features and goals of the EU Single Digital Market; comparative – to determine the differences between the digital markets of EU member states and Eastern Partnership countries; the index method – for analyzing the positions of the Eastern Partnership member states in global digitalization indices; document analysis method – for the purpose of studying regulatory documents governing the EU Single Digital Market, as well as the regulatory framework of the Eastern Partnership in the field of digitalization; prognostic method – in order to identify prospects, threats and potential scenarios for the development of cooperation between the EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership in the field of digitalization; method of analysis and synthesis – for formulating generalizations and conclusions.

In March 2021, the European Commission proposed a “2030 Digital Compass”, that highlights four main areas around which the EU’s digital transformation goals will be focused, namely: skills, infrastructure, business and management. Within the first direction, the goal is the acquisition of digital skills by European society, which are a necessary condition for active participation in the Digital Decade. The second direction involves the achievement of a safe and efficient sustainable digital infrastructure thanks to network and quantum technologies, cloud infrastructures. The third is applied to five key business ecosystems, including manufacturing, healthcare, construction, agriculture and mobility, where 5G devices, AI, process automation, online interactions, etc. find importance in implementation. The goals within the last direction are to make public services on the Internet fully accessible to all, inclusive, easy to use, services to be efficient and personalized, and tools with high security and privacy standards [27].

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study is the transformative, normative and regulatory power of the EU in the countries participating in the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative. Resorting to the interpretation of these concepts, we find that the «transformative power» of the EU, according to Dutch political scientists A. Dimitrova and others, is a power that affects numerous areas in candidate countries and neighboring states. The power of transformation implicitly or explicitly exists in the integration model, with the help of which the EU influences states that want to become EU members or develop closer ties with it – this is the key motivational driver of reforms and the movement of the member states of the Eastern Partnership to the EU Digital Single Market / approximations in the digital sphere [31].

M.A. Vakhudova distinguishes between passive and active levers of influence of the European Union. “By passive levers, I understand the attractiveness of EU membership, and by active ones, I mean the deliberate conditions that the EU puts forward during the accession process.” In other words, passive levers are the “thrust” that the EU exerts on the internal politics of likely accession candidates, just by taking into account the fact of its existence and its habitual behavior, and active levers are political and economic demands that arise by providing the EU countries a clear perspective membership [32].

The “normative power of Europe” is one of the key aspects of the EU’s identity and its international and regional activities and boils down to the promotion of European values and norms abroad, according to British researcher Ian Manners (2006). Introducing this notion of “normative” power, I. Manners claims that the EU is determined to shape or regulate the international environment around it through rules and values, and not with military means (coercion). I. Manners (2006) noted that the desire of the European Union to create an acceptable similar international environment around itself is a key goal of the Union’s foreign policy [33].

In particular, “regulatory power” is interpreted by A. Bradford, a researcher at Columbia (University), as the ability of the European Union to create and promote its norms and rules beyond its own borders. She also emphasizes that the EU issues normative acts that eventually become part of the

legal framework of those states that are not its members, and thanks to this, she calls the EU a “regulatory force” [34].

## 2. The results

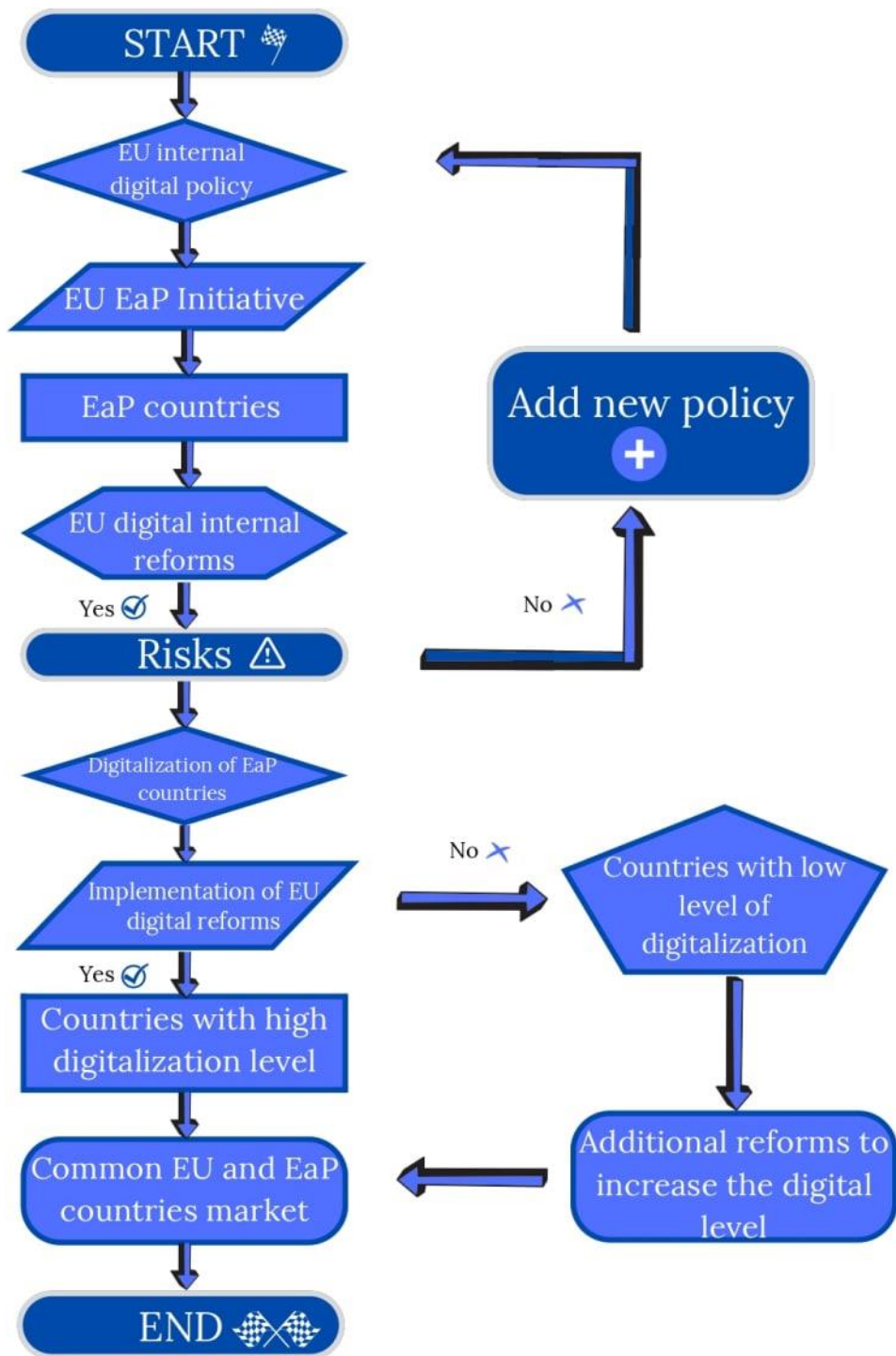
The general availability of digital technologies and the construction of an “information society” are considered by the EU as one of the strategic goals of its policy. In order to implement this strategic objective, in 2015 the European Commission adopted the EU Single Digital Market Strategy [12], which aims to improve consumer access to goods and services via the Internet, create appropriate conditions for the development of digital technologies, and strengthen the digitization of the economy. Today, EU member states are working closely together to build the Single Digital Market, develop the fields of artificial intelligence, blockchain, electronic healthcare and innovation. The EU Digital roadmap is the Digital Compass, which was adopted on March 9, 2021 by the European Commission [4; 5]. This document outlined the key development priorities of the EU in the field of digitalization. The priority areas of the EU Digital Compass were defined as: 1. Digital skills of citizens and professionals; 2. Secure and sustainable digital infrastructure; 3. E-government; 4. E-business [4; 5]. An important objective of EU foreign policy is cooperation and spread of European policies to neighboring countries. Support for EU digital reforms in neighboring countries will help strengthen their democracy and economy. The participating countries of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative, despite the economic, energy, and customs rapprochement with Brussels, have also declared integration into the EU Digital Market. Therefore, it is relevant to analyze the priority areas of cooperation between the EU and the EaP countries in the digital sphere, to identify the legal framework and the main forms of cooperation, to analyze the general state of digitization of the countries of the region through the lens of global indices, to identify the key challenges and prospects for the integration of the digital market of the Eastern Partnership into the EU SDM.

**The priority areas of cooperation between the EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership in the digital sphere are:** 1. E-Economy; 2. Digital infrastructure; 3. E-commerce; 4. Development of the information society; 5. E-health; 6. ICT ecosystems of innovations and startups [11].

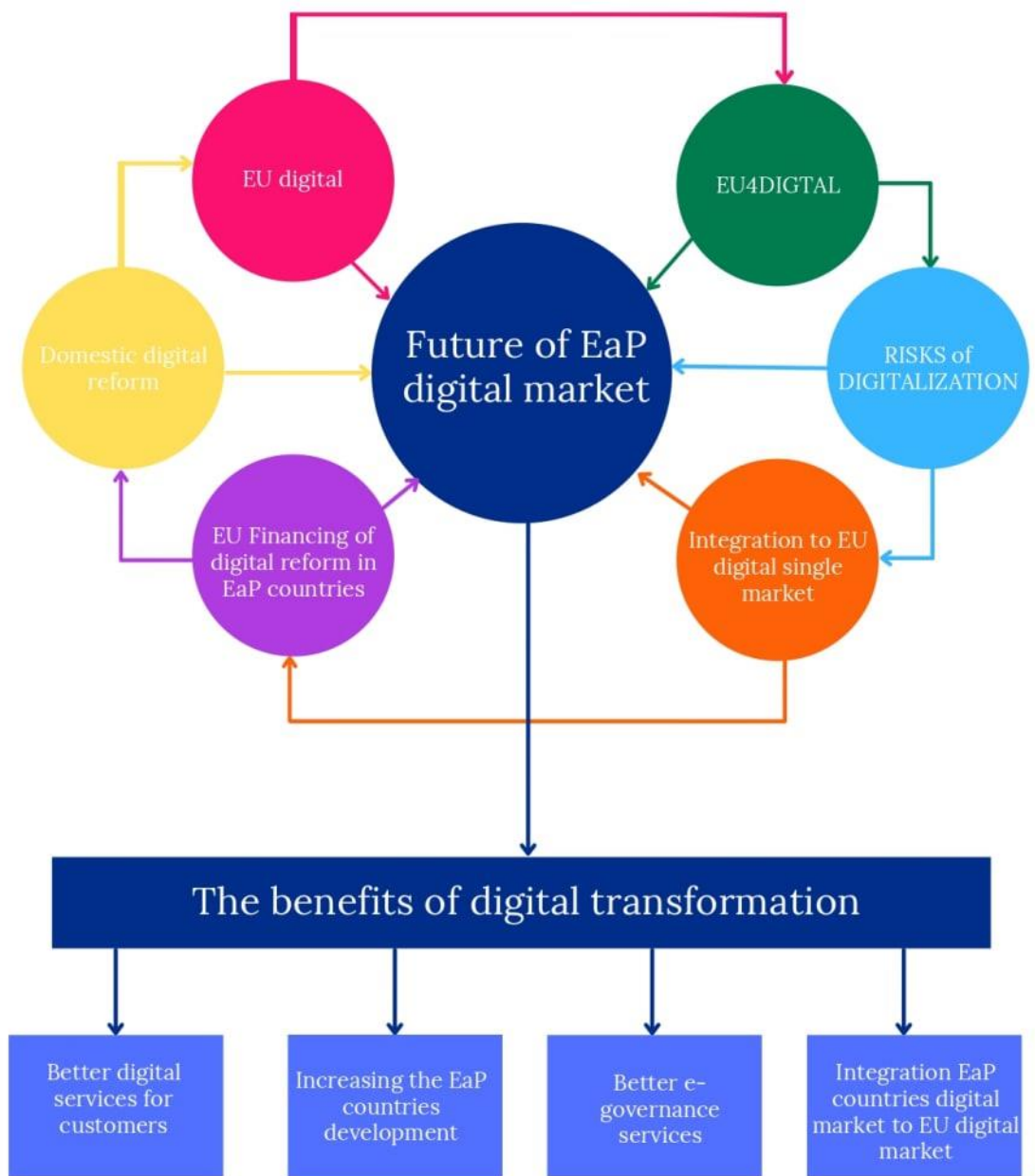
**The key mechanisms for the implementation of the European Digital Policy in the Eastern Partnership countries are:** 1. The EU Eastern Partnership Initiative; 2. EU4Digital Program; 3. Eastern Partnership ICT Innovation Startup Ecosystem Platform; 4. Thematic Panel Harmonization of Digital Markets, HDM within the framework of the activities of Platform No. 2 “Economic integration and rapprochement with EU politicians”; 5. Summits of the Heads of State of the EaP and the EU; 6. Meetings of high and middle level officials; 7. Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum [21; 22].

**Normative regulation of cooperation between the EU and the partner countries of the Eastern Partnership in the field of Digitalization are:** 1. EU Single Digital Market Strategy, 2015; 2. EU Digital Compass 2030: the European way for the Digital Decade; 3. Declaration during the Second Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting on the Digital Economy, Tallinn, 2017; 4. Document of the European Commission “Joint Communication: Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all”; 5. Association Agreements of Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova; 6. National legislation of Eastern Partnership countries in the digital sphere; 7. New Pact for Skills partnership to boost digital skills, 2022 [12; 13; 15; 17; 24; 25; 26].

In order to analyze the future of the EaP Digital Market, we used structural and logical schemes (Figure 1; Figure 2; Figure 3), which allowed us to identify the factors, which have affecting on the future of the Digital Market of EaP countries and their possible development scenarios.

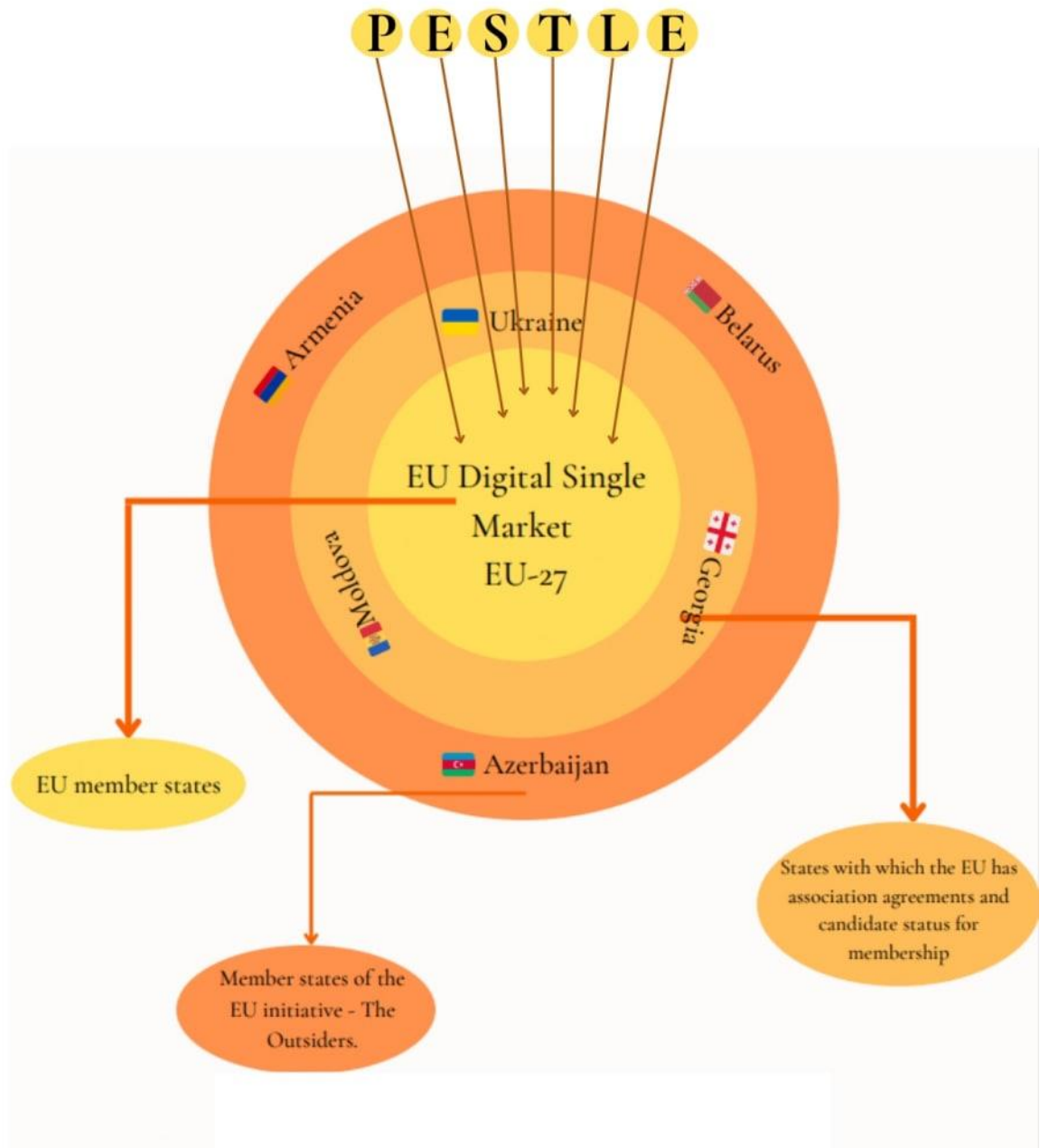


**Figure 1:** Diagram of analysis the level of development and dynamics of the EU-Eastern Partnership countries digital cooperation



**Figure 2:** The influence of external and internal factors on the future of EaP digital market

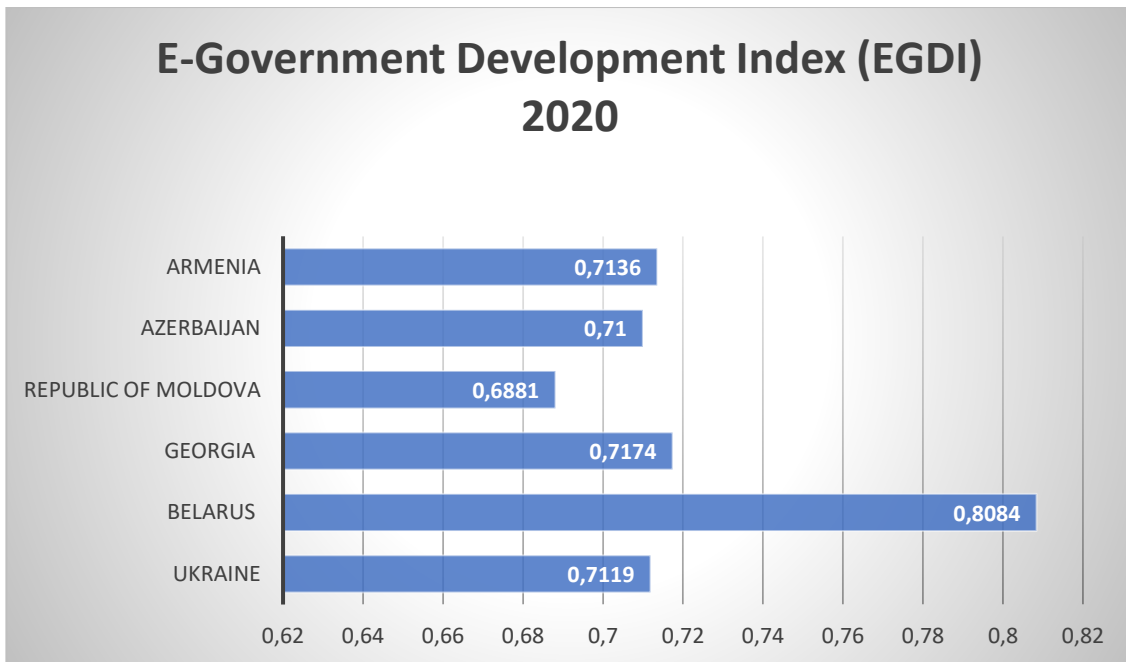
- P** - political factors (conflicts, wars, stability of government, etc.)
- E** - economic factors (globalization, economic crises, etc.)
- S** - sociological factors (Covid-19, demographic influences, etc.)
- T** - technological factors (changes in information technology, take-up rates, etc.)
- L** - legal factors (industry regulation, employment/consumer protection laws, etc.)
- E** - environmental factors (carbon footprint, climate change impacts, etc.)



**Figure 3:** Concentric circles of digital trends

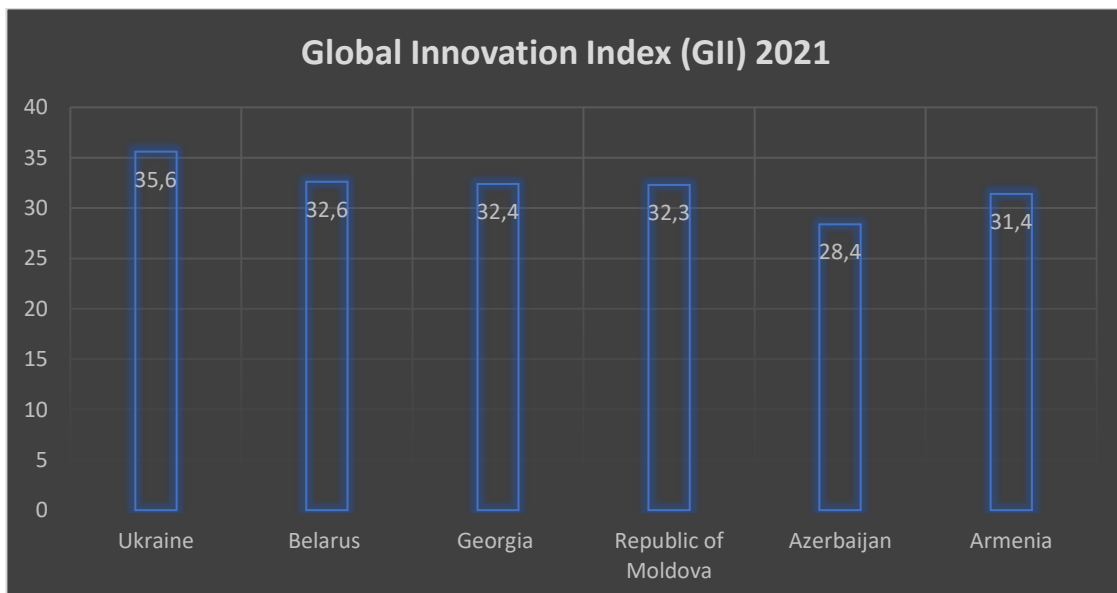
In order to analyze the degree of digitalization of the Eastern Partnership countries, we studied global development indices, in particular the E-Government Development Index, Global Innovation Index and Network Readiness Index.





**Graph 1:** E-Government Development Index 2020 [16]

The data analysis of the E-Government Development Index (Graph 1) indicates the degree of development of the e-government system in the country. According to the analysis of the data in Graph 1, we can conclude that the most developed E-Government system is in Belarus. The indicators are approximately the same in all other countries of the Eastern Partnership – Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. In general, the degree of development of the E-Government sphere is observed at approximately the same level among all countries of the Eastern Partnership, which have quite high indicators compared to other countries of the world (max. 1) [8; 16].

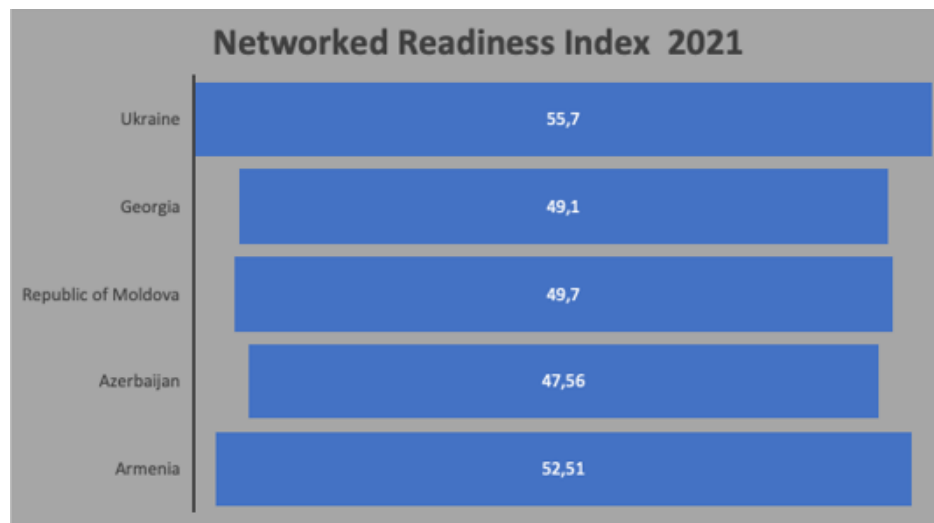


**Graph 2:** Global Innovation Index 2021[18]

The analysis of the Global Innovation Index indicates the degree of implementation of innovative technologies in the national economy. The data analysis of Graph 2 indicates that Ukraine was the leader in the introduction of the innovations in 2021. The positions are approximately the same in Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia. The situation in Azerbaijan is somewhat



worse. In the overall rating, the countries of the Eastern Partnership occupy positions from 49th (Ukraine) to 80th (Azerbaijan), which indicates an average level of innovation development in the countries of the region [18].



**Graph 3:** Networked Readiness Index 2021 [19]

The goal of the Networked Readiness Index is to measure the readiness of countries to use opportunities to satisfy all information and communication services. According to the analysis of Graph 3 data, Ukraine is the leader in this indicator, and Azerbaijan is in last place. In general, all countries of the Eastern Partnership have approximately the same indicator of readiness to use the capabilities of national Internet networks to satisfy digital services. In the overall ranking of the countries of the world, the members of the Eastern Partnership occupy average positions – the first is Ukraine (53rd place), the last is Azerbaijan (69th place) [19].



**Graph 4.** Correlation of the EaP Index (Linkage) and the Subindex of the EaP Digital and Information Society 2020-2021 [23]

\*Green – EaP Index (Linkage)

\*\*Blue – EaP Digital and Information Society Subindex

According to the analysis of figure 1, we have analyzed the current state of approximation of the Eastern Partnership countries to the digital policy of the EU, we have analyzed the correlation of the general Index of the Eastern Partnership (Linkage) and the Eastern Partnership Subindex Digital and Information Society.

Analyzing the current state of approximation of the Eastern Partnership countries to EU policies in the field of digitalization, we can note that Georgia and Azerbaijan have experienced the greatest progress within the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative in this field (0.82 and 0.83). The indicators are slightly lower in Belarus and Armenia (0.8 and 0.75). The Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are slightly worse in the implementation of EU digital reforms (0.63 and 0.59). Overall, we observe general progress in the direction of digitalization of society in the target countries of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative [23].

We have also analyzed the degree of correlation between the general index of the Eastern Partnership (Linkage) and the Subindex of Digital and Information Society (figure 1). Two groups of countries should be highlighted: 1) countries with approximately the same correlation indicators (Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova) are states that do not have a large gap between the general level of integration into EU policies and the digitalization and information society indicator; 2) countries with significant gap between these indicators (Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia) is a group of states with a fairly high level of digitalization and information society, but the indicator of the overall degree of integration and implementation of reforms under the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative is quite low.

Regarding Ukraine, it should be noted that in early September 2022, the European Commission concluded an agreement on the accession of Ukraine to the Digital Europe Programme. The agreement stipulates that Ukrainian enterprises, organizations and state administrations will be able to access opportunities within the framework of the “Digital Europe” program, the total budget of which for 2021-2027 is 7.5 billion euros [30].

It has been studied that the EU seeks to achieve the set goals in the field of digitalization by launching multinational and large-scale projects that will attract investment and consolidate the efforts of EU member states around common gaps in the digital sector. The European Union also plans to fulfill the goals by 2030 thanks to the strengthening of international cooperation and the search for reliable partners, the development of digital economy packages, which will be financed through relevant initiatives. Therefore, by 2030, the international digital partnership should lead to greater opportunities for European companies, the expansion of digital trade through secure networks, respect for European standards and values, as well as a more favorable international environment for digital transformation.

According to the data analysis of figure 1, we have divided the countries into a clusters according to the degree of integration of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative target countries into EU Digital Policy:

1. Countries that are as close as possible to the Digital Course of the EU (0.9 -1) – unfortunately, there are no states among the EaP countries with this indicator;
2. Countries actively implementing the European Digital Course (0.75-0.89) – Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus;
3. Transition countries (0.5-0.74) – Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova;
4. Countries with a low level of support for the European Course of digitization (0-0.49) – among the countries of the Eastern Partnership, there are no states in which European reforms of the course of digitization are being sabotaged.

**Threats to the implementation of the European Digital Course in the Eastern Partnership countries are:** lack of clear coordination between the EU and the authorities of the Eastern Partnership countries of digital technologies and reforms implementation; low level of implementation of the internal digital market in the countries; low level of digital economy; a significant gap between the actually adopted government policy and the practical implementation of the digitization course in these countries; low level of digital literacy of the population; a large number of cyberattacks by Russia; outdated digital technologies in a significant number of spheres of social life; high level of corruption in the countries of the region; a large gap between urban and the peripheral digitalization; not all settlements in the countries of the region have Internet coverage; inhibition in the adoption of national legislation in the digital sphere; reluctance of some Eastern Partnership countries to integrate into the EU; low level of economic development of the countries of the region; geopolitical influence of the Russian Federation on the region, which inhibits the implementation of European reforms; the presence of such threats as COVID-19, cyber-attacks, the problem of personal data protection and electronic

privacy, geo-blocking, as well as insufficient digital competence of citizens; low level of development of the digital economy; EU regulatory barriers in relation to countries the Eastern Partnership region; low level of development of innovative technologies and low level of financing of scientific developments in the field of digitization; low level of involvement of investments in the digital industry; internal barriers of digital communications regulation; lack of joint services of the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries that would coordinate digital integration; low level of digitization of various industries [1; 2; 6; 7; 9; 11; 14; 20].

**The effects of the EU Eastern Partnership digital initiatives.** Digital innovations are fundamentally changing the world economy. Reduction of search and information costs, rapid growth of new products and markets are projected to increase global trade flows, including exports from developing countries. At the same time, digital technologies threaten privacy and security around the world, but developing countries that lack the tools to compete in the new digital environment risk being left behind. Therefore, one of the motivational factors of reforms in the digital sector of the Eastern Partnership countries is the need to adapt to the digital decade in a global dimension.

The level of development of the digital economy is closely correlated with the competitiveness of countries, which requires special attention of the state and business to its development. Today, the electronic economy is already going beyond economic processes. Digitization is taking root in social processes and there is a large-scale implementation of digital technologies into the work of state organizations and structures. On the other hand, for individual target countries of the Eastern Partnership, such as the newly created format of the “Associated Trio” consisting of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, there is a second dimension of motivation – regional, the essence of which is reduced to joining the EU, and the task is the integration of these countries into The EU Digital Single Market.

The consequences of the digital approximation of the Eastern Partnership countries to EU Digital Trends can be both positive and negative. Positive: policies and measures promoting digital transformation are a driver of recovery, growth and global competitiveness: although in all cases the social and economic consequences of the crisis will need to be mitigated, regions that act faster will be able to recover faster by taking the lead in digital chains.

Negative: the fragmentation of the European market and its projection into the markets of the target countries of the Eastern Partnership, internal barriers in the regulation of digital communications, in particular in the copyright legislation and data protection, uneven progress in digitalization and, as a result, a disproportionate distribution of economic benefits between target states of the Eastern Partnership, cyber security, data protection and electronic privacy, transparency of online platforms, uneven funding at the national level and a general lack of investment in the field of digital transformation and innovative research, the impact of access to high-speed Internet on the competitiveness of states, geo-blocking, as well as an insufficient level of digital competence citizens

**Recommendations and prospects for improving the dynamics of the transition to the European Digital Course by the EaP countries.** Possible scenarios for the development of the European Digital Course in the Eastern Partnership countries: 1. All the countries of the Eastern Partnership will carry out maximum reforms in the field of digitalization, will be as close as possible to European standards. A single digital market of the EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership will be created (in short and long term, it is unlikely, as there are significant threats of the further cooperation format of some states under the Initiative (Belarus)); 2. The countries of the Eastern Partnership will be divided into two blocks – the first is the countries of the “Associated Trio” (Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova), which will show the greatest desire to join the EU, therefore they will maximally implement the European digital course and achieve significant success. Another group of states – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus (the country has suspended participation in the Initiative format) will not achieve full harmonization with the European course of digitization (in the medium term, this is the most likely option); 3. Due to the complex geopolitical situation in the Eastern Partnership region, European reforms are slowed down in the target countries (in the short term, it is a possible option caused by Russia's war against Ukraine, and in the long term it is unlikely); 4. All countries of the Eastern Partnership will abandon the European course on digitization (unlikely option, with the exception of the termination of the cooperation format in the scope of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative).

**Recommendations for strengthening the digitalization of the Eastern Partnership countries and their integration into the EU Single Digital Market:** 1. Increasing the level of digital literacy

and digital skills of citizens; 2. Strengthening the fight against cybercrime; 3. Strengthening the protection of personal data; 4. Acceleration of reforms in the fields of e-governance, e-economy, e-health, Smart Grid Technology; 5. Comprehensive training of personnel in the digital industry; 6. Internet Expansion on 100% of the territory of the regional countries; 7. Elimination of internal and external barriers that obstacle digitalization of countries; 8. Overcoming political and economic crises in countries; 9. Adoption and active implementation of national legislation in the digital industry; 10. Active implementation of the European digital course and standards; 11. Creation of joint coordination structures that will coordinate efforts between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries in the digitalization process; 12. Implementation of 5G technologies; 13. Attraction of European investments in the digital industry; 14. Reduction of taxes on the implementation and development of digital technologies; 15. State support for enterprises and scientists working on the introduction of digital technologies; 16. Improve public access to goods and services via the Internet; 17. Create appropriate conditions for the development of digital networks; 18. Development of artificial intelligence; 19. Implementation of EU best practices in the digital sphere in Eastern Partnership countries [1; 2; 3; 6; 9; 11; 13; 14; 20].

### 3. Conclusion

Globalization and scientific and technological progress in the 21st century force society to introduce digital technologies into various spheres of social life. The EU is a world leader in digitization. In 2015, the EU introduced the strategy of creating a Single Digital Market, and also adopted the EU Digital Compass 2030, which prioritized the implementation of digital technologies and the creation of a common digital market of 27 member states. Cooperation with neighboring countries is a priority of EU foreign policy. The countries of the Eastern Partnership are ones of the Union's key partners in the field of digitalization. The priority areas of cooperation are: e-economy; digital infrastructure; e-commerce; development of the information society; e-health; ICT ecosystems of innovations and startups. The key mechanisms of cooperation and integration of Eastern Partnership countries into the EU Single Digital Market are: EU Eastern Partnership Initiative; EU4digital program; Thematic Panel Harmonization of Digital Markets; Thematic platform No. 2 "Economic integration and rapprochement with EU politicians" and others. The analysis of structural and logical schemes helped us to assess the degree of integration of the Eastern Partnership countries into the EU SDM, to assess internal and external factors affecting the future integration of the target countries into the EU SDM, and to highlight potential scenarios of the events development of the digital future of the Eastern Partnership countries. By analyzing the Eastern Partnership Digital and Information Society Subindex, it was found that, in general, we observe a general progress in the direction of digitalization of society in the target countries of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative. The data of the E-Government Development Index, Global Innovation Index and Networked Readiness Index were also analyzed. The countries of the Eastern Partnership were found to have above-average indicators among the countries of the world in the field of digitization. The key threats to the implementation of the European Digitalization Course in the countries of the Eastern Partnership are: the low level of implementation of the internal digital market in the target countries; a significant gap between the actually adopted government policy and the practical implementation of the digitization course in these countries; low level of digital literacy of the population; cybercrime, outdated digital technologies in a significant number of spheres of public life, high level of corruption in the countries of the region; a large gap between urban and the peripheral digitalization; the presence of such threats as COVID-19, cyber-attacks, the problem of personal data protection and electronic privacy, geo-blocking, as well as insufficient digital competence of citizens; low level of development of the digital economy and others. Possible scenarios regarding the future integration of the digital market of the EaP into the digital market of the EU: 1. A single digital market of the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries will be created (in the short and long term is unlikely); 2. The countries of the "Associated Trio" will achieve significantly greater progress in digital integration with the EU in the medium term than the other three members; 3. Due to the complex geopolitical situation in the region, the digital integration of EaP countries will be slowed down (in the short term is highly probable); 4. All countries of the Eastern Partnership will abandon the European Digitization Course (unlikely option, with the exception of the termination of the cooperation format in

scope of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative). In order to strengthen the integration of the Eastern Partnership countries into the SDM the EU should take a number of comprehensive measures, which will help to accelerate the development of governance and economic growth of the states. It is important to harmonize national legislation in the field of digital technologies, to introduce digital technologies into all spheres of social life, to carry out a comprehensive fight against cybercrime, to increase the digital literacy of the population, to attract European investments in the digital sphere of the countries of the region, to improve digital networks, to bring national norms up to European standards in digital sphere.

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