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# CONTENTS

MECHANISMS FOR FORMING AND IMPLEMENTING INVESTMENT POLICY OF COMMERCIAL BANKS... 8 Abduvaliyev Sanjar Abdurahmanovich	8
EVALUATION OF MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY BASED ON BUDGETING IN ENERGY ENTERPRISES (A FACTOR ANALYSIS CASE OF "HUDUDGAZTA'MINOT" JSC)..... 17 Sobirov Shoyadbek Kurbonaliyevich	17
PORTFOLIO OF POSTAL SERVICES AND THE ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY OF ITS DIGITALIZATION .....23 Mamatkulov Gulom Rustamovich	23
OPTIMIZING THE BALANCE BETWEEN LIQUIDITY AND CREDIT RISKS IN ENSURING BANKING STABILITY ..... 30 Anvarov Asliddin Nabijon ugli	30
ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY OF RENEWABLE ENERGY DEPLOYMENT IN UZBEKISTAN.....34 Hamroyeva Sabina Ismoil qizi, Dilshod Anvarjonovich Ismailov	34
MODERN TRENDS AND EFFICIENCY OF LENDING TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS IN UZBEKISTAN..39 Shamshetova Gulraushan Sarsenovna	39
ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND CRIME (CASE OF UZBEKISTAN) ..... 42 Khusniddinova Gulnoza	42
PRIORITY DIRECTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF UZBEKISTAN'S FINANCIAL SYSTEM ..... 47 Qobilova Nodira Qayumjon qizi, Normurodov Kh.E.	47
FOREIGN EXPERIENCE OF INCREASING THE EXPORT CAPACITY OF THE REGION AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF ITS APPLICATION IN UZBEKISTAN ..... 52 Mamadzhanova Tuygunoy Akhmadzhanovna	52
INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO WASTE MANAGEMENT AND ITS ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY ..... 56 Otbosarov Abrorbek Adhamjon o'g'li	56
LOSS MANAGEMENT MATRIX (LOSS MANAGEMENT MATRIX) MODEL IN POWER GRID ENTERPRISES.. ..... 61 Khojimurodov Zukhriddin Shukurullo ogli	61
MICROPROJECTS AS A MEANS OF INCREASING THE FINANCIAL ACTIVITY AND LITERACY OF THE POPULATION ..... 67 Irgashev Anvar Farxodovich	67
INSTITUTIONAL VA TEXNOLOGIK O'ZGARISHLAR SHAROITIDA INNOVATION BANK XIZMATLARINI JORIY ETISH METODOLOGIYASINI TAKOMILLASHTIRISH..... 74 Azlarova Aziza Axrorovna	74
PROBLEMS OF FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL CLUSTERS IN THE LIGHT INDUSTRY OF UZBEKISTAN ..... 80 Umarkulov Kodirjon Maxamadaminovich	80
DIGITAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION AS A DRIVER OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: EVIDENCE FROM GLOBAL TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EMERGING ECONOMIES..... 84 Sabitov Oybek Abduganievich, Sattoriy Fayzullokh Abdijabbor ugli	84
PROPERTIES OF HEAVY CONCRETE DISPERSEDLY REINFORCED WITH NON-METALLIC FIBERS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF CALCULATING CONCRETE STRUCTURES BASED ON THEM ..... 90 Usmonova Durdona, Gulomova Dilnura	90
THE EFFECT OF STABLE AND DYNAMIC PRICING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR ..... 98 Anvar DEBERDIYEV	98
ECONOMIC MECHANISMS FOR IMPROVING PRODUCTION EFFICIENCY IN INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES.. ..... 102 M.O. Yo'ldoshova	102

PEDAGOGICAL EFFECTIVENESS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNOLOGIES IN TEACHING POLITICAL SCIENCE AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS .....	106
<b>Rasulev Bobirjon Atkhamovich</b>	
IMPROVING THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND ECONOMIC MECHANISM FOR REGULATING NON-STANDARD EMPLOYMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL BUSINESSES .....	110
<b>Fayzullayev Nurulla Bakhromovich</b>	
PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING THE HEALTHCARE FINANCING SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN .....	117
<b>Gulira'no Atabekovna Ruzmetova</b>	
FACTORS AFFECTING TAX PAYMENT SYSTEMS, EXISTING PROBLEMS, AND THEIR CAUSES .....	124
<b>Tangirqulov Gulom Baxtiyorovich</b>	
EFFECTIVENESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL TAXES IN REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS IN UZBEKISTAN: AN ECONOMETRIC APPROACH.....	129
<b>Kuziboev Bekhzod Hamidovich</b>	
WAYS TO DEVELOP QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN THE SILK INDUSTRY OF UZBEKISTAN'S ECONOMY	134
<b>Bahriddinov Asror Rakhmatovich, Boltaev Nazarbek Narzullaevich</b>	
STATE OF LENDING TO SMALL BUSINESS PROJECTS IN COMMERCIAL BANKS AND ITS ECONOMIC-STATISTICAL ANALYSIS.....	138
<b>Nargiza Norqobilova Abdiqodirovna</b>	
CONCEPTUAL DIRECTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE MECHANISMS OF ENSURING FINANCIAL STABILITY IN ENTERPRISES.....	143
<b>Asomidinova Mohigulbonu Oybek kizi</b>	
ORGANIZATION OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING IN NON-STATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS .	148
<b>Xojiboyev Muxiddin Shodimuxamedovich</b>	
THE NATURE AND ESSENCE OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES IN MASS MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS.....	151
<b>Sharipova Shahlo Istamovna</b>	
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION OF ALGORITHMS FOR RECOVERING MISSING (NAN) VALUES IN INFORMATION SYSTEM DATA .....	156
<b>Yarmatov Sherzodjon Shokir oglu, Orifov Oxunjon Fazliddinzoda</b>	
ANALYSIS OF THE STATE OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT IN MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES .....	167
<b>Musayeva Shoirazimovna</b>	
IMPROVING LOAN PORTFOLIO QUALITY AND CREDIT RISK MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS .....	173
<b>Turgunov Nodirbek Muminjanovich</b>	
INNOVATION CAPABILITIES AND EXPORT PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLES OF SUPPLY CHAIN INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION — EVIDENCE FROM UZBEKISTAN .....	177
<b>Mukhammadyaminova Shakhzoda</b>	
URBAN PLANNING OF TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE HUBS NEAR TUBERCULOSIS CARE FACILITIES IN UZBEKISTAN .....	183
<b>Gabibova Irina Vagifovna, Abdumuminova Diyora Gayratovna</b>	
ADAPTING INTERNAL AUDIT STANDARDS IN BUDGET ORGANIZATIONS TO PUBLIC PROCUREMENT PRACTICES.....	192
<b>Meliboyev Askar Eshmuratovich</b>	
ECONOMETRIC EVALUATION OF INVESTMENT EFFICIENCY IN KHOREZM REGION .....	197
<b>Otajanov Umid Abdullayevich</b>	
SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MODERN RECLAMATION AND GIS TECHNOLOGIES ON SALINE SOILS IN KARAKALPAKSTAN.....	205
<b>Tajibaev Berdakh</b>	
ISSUES REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “TOLLING OPERATIONS” MODULE IN THE GOODS MOVEMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM UNDER THE CUSTOMS TERRITORY PROCESSING REGIME .....	212
<b>Lutpullaev Shukrullo Kudratullaevich</b>	

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN ENHANCING TOURISM-RELATED BUSINESSES IN UZBEKISTAN .....	218
<b>Akmaljon Odilov</b>	
INTERNATIONAL TRENDS OF DIGITALIZATION IN CUSTOMS MANAGEMENT .....	222
<b>Radjapova Latofat Sardarovna</b>	
THE ROLE OF TAX POLICY IN THE TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY .....	230
<b>Dexkanova Shodiyona Kaxramon qizi</b>	
PRACTICES IN ENTERPRISE COST STRUCTURE MANAGEMENT AND DIRECTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT .....	236
<b>Aymukhammedova Amina Kakajanovna</b>	
IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY OF CLOTHING MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN UZBEKISTAN THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION .....	242
<b>Axmedova Gaziza Azim kizi</b>	
RECONCEPTUALIZING BUSINESS INCUBATORS IN STARTUP ECOSYSTEMS: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS .....	246
<b>Gafujon Usmanov</b>	
DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN MARKETING APPROACHES TO CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN RETAIL ENTERPRISES .....	257
<b>Safarov Bakhtiyor Djurakulovich</b>	
MECHANISMS FOR EVALUATING AND IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARKETING STRATEGIES IN THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT SECTOR .....	263
<b>Berdiyorov Temur Azamatovich</b>	
THE INFLUENCE OF HYDRODYNAMIC ASPECTS OF GROUNDWATER LEVEL RISE ON URBAN WATERLOGGING .....	268
<b>B.D. Abdullaev, B.R. Nasibov, Sh.T. Irgashev, D. Abdullaev</b>	
BASIC INFORMATION MODEL OF A DIGITAL OBJECT .....	277
<b>Gulyamov Shukhrat Mannapovich, Karakhanova Alsu Muratalievna, Keldiyorov Sirojiddin Tura ugli, Zayniddinova Zebiniso Akmalovna</b>	
COMPARATIVE LIFE CYCLE AND TECHNO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF SOLAR PANEL MATERIALS FOR SUSTAINABLE PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEMS .....	281
<b>Urishev Omadjon, Kushakova Sarvinoz, Kamolboyev Sirojbek</b>	
PRIORITY DIRECTIONS FOR FORMING ECOLOGICALLY ORIENTED MANAGEMENT IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ENTERPRISES .....	294
<b>Kholov Hamza Tajiddinovich</b>	
INVESTIGATION OF GERMANIUM EXTRACTION TECHNOLOGY FROM TECHNOGENIC METALLURGICAL WASTE .....	301
<b>Yormatov Dostonbek, Shodiyev Abbos, Muhammadiyev Elbek</b>	
MECHANISMS FOR IMPROVING RESOURCE EFFICIENCY AND OPTIMIZING PRODUCTION COSTS IN THE CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS INDUSTRY .....	309
<b>Utbasarov Doniyorjon Bakhtiyorovich</b>	
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF AUDITING THE ACTIVITIES OF ECONOMIC ENTITIES ON THE BASIS OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS .....	318
<b>Mirzaeva Sabina Khushnudovna, Khaydarova Dildora Djakhongirovna</b>	
THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL AND INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES ON WOMEN'S LABOR IN INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES OF UZBEKISTAN UNDER INDUSTRY 4.0 .....	322
<b>Doniyorova Zukhrabonu Alisher qizi</b>	
LEVEL OF ENSURING FOOD SECURITY: IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS AND INSTRUMENTS .....	328
<b>Sodiqjon Qodirovich Mattiyev</b>	
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY, AND LOCALIZATION POLICY OF THE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT SYSTEM .....	334
<b>Turabov Sarvar Abdumalikovich</b>	
TA'LIM XIZMATLARI BOZORIDAGI INNOVATSIYALAR IQTISODIY XAVFSIZLIKNI TA'MINLASH VOSITASIDA .....	339
<b>Bozorova Madina Raxmat qizi</b>	

PROJECT-ORIENTED ESP32 IOT CURRICULUM WITH A SHARED-RESOURCE LABORATORY MODEL: DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND LESSONS LEARNED .....	344
<b>Ulugbek Tursunaliyev, Lazizbek Yusupov</b>	
FIVE-CRITERION METHODOLOGY OF INTERNAL CONTROL ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT IN TEXTILE INDUSTRY ENTERPRISES .....	353
<b>Babakulova Matluba Kurbannazarovna</b>	
THE EFFICIENCY OF EDUCATION-INDUSTRY INTEGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY.....	357
<b>Uzaydullayev Sherzod Shukurullayevich</b>	
MECHANISMS AND DIRECTIONS FOR DEEPENING REGIONAL INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN CENTRAL ASIA.....	361
<b>Akbarova Kamola Akmaljonovna</b>	

# MECHANISMS AND DIRECTIONS FOR DEEPENING REGIONAL INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN CENTRAL ASIA

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the mechanisms and priority directions for deepening regional integration processes in Central Asia. The study highlights the importance of trade and economic relations, transport and logistics infrastructure, industrial cooperation, energy collaboration, the digital economy, and investment integration among the countries of the region. In the context of global economic transformations, strengthening mutual cooperation among Central Asian states is considered an important factor in expanding access to external markets, increasing transit potential, and ensuring economic security. The article substantiates the need to simplify customs procedures, modernize multimodal transport corridors, expand joint industrial projects, and introduce digital trade platforms to promote regional integration.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, regional integration, economic cooperation, transport and logistics, trade relations, industrial cooperation, energy security, digital economy.

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqolada Markaziy Osiyoda hududiy integratsiya jarayonlarini chuqurlashtirish mexanizmlari va ustuvor yo'nalishlari tahlil qilingan. Tadqiqotda mintaqa davlatlari o'rtasidagi savdo-iqtisodiy aloqalar, transport-logistika infratuzilmasi, sanoat kooperatsiyasi, energetika hamkorligi, raqamli iqtisodiyot va investitsiyaviy integratsiya jarayonlarining ahamiyati yoritilgan. Global iqtisodiy o'zgarishlar sharoitida Markaziy Osiyo mamlakatlari uchun o'zaro hamkorlikni kuchaytirish tashqi bozorlarga chiqish, tranzit salohiyatini oshirish va iqtisodiy xavfsizlikni ta'minlashning muhim omili sifatida baholangan. Maqolada hududiy integratsiyani rivojlantirishda bojxona tartiblarini soddalashtirish, multimodal transport yo'laklarini modernizatsiya qilish, qo'shma sanoat loyihalarini kengaytirish hamda raqamli savdo platformalarini joriy etish zarurligi asoslab berilgan.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Markaziy Osiyo, hududiy integratsiya, iqtisodiy hamkorlik, transport-logistika, savdo aloqalari, sanoat kooperatsiyasi, energetika xavfsizligi, raqamli iqtisodiyot.

**Аннотация:** В данной статье проанализированы механизмы и приоритетные направления углубления процессов региональной интеграции в Центральной Азии. В исследовании раскрывается значение торгово-экономических связей, транспортно-логистической инфраструктуры, промышленной кооперации, энергетического сотрудничества, цифровой экономики и инвестиционной интеграции между странами региона. В условиях глобальных экономических изменений усиление взаимного сотрудничества между государствами Центральной Азии рассматривается как важный фактор выхода на внешние рынки, повышения транзитного потенциала и обеспечения экономической безопасности. В статье обоснована необходимость упрощения таможенных процедур, модернизации мультимодальных транспортных коридоров, расширения совместных промышленных проектов и внедрения цифровых торговых платформ для развития региональной интеграции.

**Ключевые слова:** Центральная Азия, региональная интеграция, экономическое сотрудничество, транспорт и логистика, торговые связи, промышленная кооперация, энергетическая безопасность, цифровая экономика.

## INTRODUCTION

The profound transformations taking place in global economic relations, the restructuring of international trade routes, disruptions in transport and logistics chains, the intensification of energy security issues, and the growing geoeconomic competition are bringing regional integration processes to a new stage. Under such conditions, deepening regional integration for the countries of Central Asia is becoming not only a means of expanding economic cooperation, but also an important factor for ensuring sustainable regional development, increasing access to external markets, and adapting to global economic risks. In particular, the geographical proximity of the regional states, their historical and economic ties, transport corridors, energy resources, labor markets, and investment potential create a strong foundation for accelerating regional integration.

Economic cooperation among the Central Asian states has acquired new significance in recent years.

Interdependence is strengthening in such areas as trade, transport, energy, industrial cooperation, water resource management, agriculture, the digital economy, and investment. As of December 2025, more than USD 57.9 billion had been invested in transport, trade, and energy projects within the framework of the CAREC program, demonstrating the strategic importance of developing regional infrastructure. Studies conducted by the OECD on freight transport connectivity in Central Asia also emphasize that improving infrastructure, regulatory policies, and cross-border coordination is a key prerequisite for increasing transport efficiency in the region.

The relevance of the topic lies in the fact that although the Central Asian states possess individual opportunities for economic development, their sustainable growth under conditions of global competition largely depends on the deepening of regional cooperation, the formation of a unified transport and communication space, the reduction of trade barriers, and the expansion of joint economic projects. In particular, the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor is becoming increasingly important as a strategic route connecting Central Asia with European and global markets. Special attention is being paid to reducing transit time through the modernization of infrastructure, the harmonization of border procedures, and the digitalization of customs systems along this route. This necessitates the study of regional integration not merely as a tool for increasing trade volumes, but also as a strategic mechanism for ensuring economic security, logistics independence, and competitiveness.

From this perspective, the scientific analysis of the mechanisms and directions for deepening regional integration processes in Central Asia has significant theoretical and practical importance. This article examines the contemporary characteristics of regional integration, the factors influencing its acceleration, existing opportunities, and priority directions. Furthermore, it substantiates the role of transport and logistics infrastructure, coordination of trade policy, industrial cooperation, energy collaboration, and digital integration mechanisms in strengthening regional economic cooperation.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT

In the study of regional integration processes in Central Asia, issues related to trade relations, transport and logistics infrastructure, cross-border cooperation, institutional coordination, and regional economic interests are considered important scientific directions. In the studies conducted by B. Kaminski and S. Mitra, cross-border trade, market activities, and informal economic relations in Central Asia are analyzed as significant factors of regional integration. The authors substantiate that economic proximity among the countries of the region is formed not only through large interstate agreements, but also through border regions, local markets, and small-scale trade flows. This approach demonstrates that the practical foundation of Central Asian integration is closely linked with local trade, transport accessibility, and the simplification of customs procedures [1].

The World Bank report entitled “Bazaars and Trade Integration in Central Asia: CAREC Countries” highlights the role of markets, small business entities, and cross-border trade relations in regional trade integration. The report notes that trade relations among Central Asian countries are often developed not only through large export-import agreements, but also through the activities of local producers, consumers, and trade intermediaries. This indicates that deepening regional integration requires not only macroeconomic agreements, but also the promotion of everyday economic interactions between border regions [2].

Studies conducted by the Asian Development Bank emphasize the necessity of coordinating transport, customs transit, and trade policies in order to increase the economic benefits derived from trade in Central Asia. The report identifies road and transport infrastructure, transparency of customs procedures, and the efficiency of transit processes as important factors in increasing trade volume among the countries of the region. This study substantiates that integration processes in Central Asia can be effective not only through political rapprochement, but also through concrete economic mechanisms, particularly the improvement of transport corridors, trade regimes, and border infrastructure [3].

The study entitled “Enhancing Connectivity and Freight in Central Asia,” prepared by the International Transport Forum, evaluates the transport and logistics potential of Central Asia as one of the key drivers of regional integration. The research extensively analyzes freight transportation systems, railway and highway networks, multimodal transport routes, and the improvement of transit policies. The authors emphasize that reducing transportation costs, diversifying routes, and shortening waiting times at borders contribute to strengthening trade relations. From this perspective, transport infrastructure emerges not merely as a technical component, but as a strategic foundation of integration processes [4].

The OECD publication “Trade Facilitation in Central Asia” examines issues related to trade facilitation, the digitalization of customs procedures, and alignment with international standards in the countries of the region. The source identifies the complexity of trade procedures, excessive documentation stages, and insufficient coordination at border points as factors affecting the efficiency of economic relations. At the same time, electronic customs systems, the single-window principle, and digital information exchange are evaluated as important mechanisms for accelerating regional trade integration [5].

In the study entitled “The Economy of Central Asia: A Fresh Perspective,” prepared by E. Vinokurov and co-authors, the economy of Central Asia is analyzed as a distinct regional system under new geoeconomic conditions. The research identifies demographic growth, natural resources, transport corridors, labor migration, investment flows, and trade relations as the main factors shaping the region’s economic prospects. It is emphasized that the economic development of the Central Asian states is directly connected with increasing interdependence, modernizing infrastructure, and expanding the internal regional market [6].

The CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda 2030 outlines institutional and practical directions for deepening trade integration in Central Asia. The strategy identifies trade liberalization, strengthening customs cooperation, developing trade infrastructure, and expanding private sector participation as key priorities. The significance of this document lies in the fact that regional integration is interpreted not within the framework of individual state interests, but from the perspective of a common economic space, transit potential, and a sustainable trade system [7].

In S. Umarova’s study devoted to trade dynamics in Central Asia, the development trends of regional trade relations are analyzed from the perspective of Uzbekistan. The author highlights the growth in trade volume among regional states, changes in the structure of exports and imports, and new opportunities for economic cooperation. The study substantiates that the expansion of Uzbekistan’s trade relations with neighboring countries is an important factor not only for the national economy, but also for the integration of the entire Central Asian region [8].

R.Sh. Mirzahatamov’s research analyzes issues of regional cooperation in the foreign policies of Central Asian states from a political and economic perspective. The author demonstrates that cooperation processes in the region are developing on the basis of interstate trust, security, trade relations, and the harmonization of common interests. This study reveals that Central Asian integration is connected not only with economic factors, but also with foreign policy and institutional dimensions. In this regard, political dialogue, diplomatic agreements, and long-term strategic partnerships occupy an important place in deepening regional cooperation [9].

The study conducted by M.O. Sarikulov and I.I. Orifjonov scientifically analyzes the development of Uzbekistan’s trade relations with Central Asian countries. The authors demonstrate that Uzbekistan’s economic relations with neighboring states are expanding, while positive changes are being observed in both the volume and structure of trade. The research emphasizes that transport infrastructure, export potential, simplification of customs procedures, and mutually beneficial economic policies play an important role in the development of regional trade relations [10].

In M. Ismoilova’s work on regional integration, integration is interpreted as an important foundation for joint development among the Central Asian states. The author notes that expanding economic cooperation, developing common infrastructure projects, and implementing joint initiatives contribute to the formation of a stable economic environment among the countries of the region. This approach demonstrates that integration is significant not only in terms of economic benefits, but also as a mechanism for regional stability, trust, and long-term cooperation [11].

B.X. Xolmatov’s study on the development trends of “people’s diplomacy” in Central Asia highlights the socio-humanitarian aspects of regional rapprochement. The author emphasizes that people’s diplomacy, cultural relations, public dialogue, and historical proximity serve as factors strengthening interstate integration processes. This research demonstrates that the effectiveness of economic integration depends not only on official agreements or infrastructure projects, but also on trust between peoples, social closeness, and cultural cooperation [12].

Overall, the analyzed literature demonstrates that deepening regional integration processes in Central Asia is a multidimensional, complex, and interconnected process. While international sources mainly emphasize transport and logistics infrastructure, trade policy, simplification of customs procedures, and regional economic interdependence, the studies of local scholars focus more broadly on Uzbekistan’s trade relations with neighboring countries, foreign policy cooperation, regional stability, and people’s diplomacy. Based on this, it can be concluded that deepening integration in Central Asia requires the harmonized development of economic, institutional, infrastructural, and socio-humanitarian factors.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, data from international organizations and national statistical sources were used to analyze regional integration processes among the Central Asian countries. In particular, data related to trade turnover, transport and logistics indicators, transit volume, investment flows, and economic cooperation published by the World Bank, OECD, CAREC, the Eurasian Development Bank, the WTO, and the statistical agencies of the Central Asian states were examined. During the research process, a systematic approach was applied based on scientific articles, analytical reports, and regulatory and legal documents. Comparative analysis, economic-statistical analysis, time-series analysis, and logical generalization methods were used to analyze the collected data. In addition, methods for evaluating transport connectivity, trade coefficients, and the level of economic interdependence were

applied to identify the factors influencing the effectiveness of regional integration.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In recent years, the Central Asian region has become one of the strategic areas located at the center of global economic and geopolitical transformations. The restructuring of transport corridors within the global economic system, disruptions in international logistics chains, the intensification of threats related to energy security, and the growing demand for new trade routes are further strengthening the need to deepen regional integration among the Central Asian states. In particular, the expansion of economic cooperation among Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan is creating important conditions for the formation of an interconnected regional economic space. Regional integration processes contribute not only to the development of trade and economic relations, but also to the integration of transport and logistics systems, the ensuring of energy security, the activation of investment flows, and the enhancement of the region's international competitiveness.

In recent years, the improvement of political relations among the Central Asian states has provided a significant impetus to economic integration processes. Trade volumes, transport connections, industrial cooperation, and the number of investment projects among the countries of the region have been steadily increasing. In particular, the regular organization of consultative meetings among the heads of state has become an important factor in strengthening the institutional foundations of regional cooperation. Within the framework of these meetings, a number of initiatives aimed at developing cooperation in the fields of transport, energy, water resources, ecology, and trade have been put forward. This is contributing to the formation of an atmosphere of mutual trust in the region and creating opportunities for the development of practical mechanisms of economic integration.

One of the main mechanisms for deepening regional integration in Central Asia is the development of transport and logistics infrastructure. Since the region is geographically located within an important transit area between Europe and Asia, the development of international transport corridors is of strategic importance. In particular, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor, the "China – Central Asia – Europe" transport route, and the "North – South" multimodal corridors are playing a significant role in increasing the region's transit potential. The development of these corridors enables the Central Asian states to expand access to external markets, reduce transportation costs, and increase export volumes. At the same time, the simplification of customs procedures, modernization of border checkpoints, and introduction of digital logistics systems are emerging as important factors accelerating regional integration (Table 1).

Table 1. Main Mechanisms for Deepening Regional Integration in Central Asia and Their Economic Significance

Integration Mechanism	Main Direction	Expected Economic Outcome
Development of transport and logistics infrastructure	International transport corridors and multimodal logistics systems	Increase in transit volume and expansion of access to external markets
Simplification of trade procedures	Digitalization of customs procedures and border control	Growth in mutual trade volume and reduction of trade costs
Development of industrial cooperation	Joint production and industrial clusters	Increase in production efficiency and creation of new jobs
Strengthening energy cooperation	Electricity exchange and energy projects	Energy security and efficient use of resources
Digital economic integration	E-commerce and digital logistics platforms	Acceleration of economic processes and reduction of transaction costs
Expansion of investment cooperation	Joint investment funds and infrastructure projects	Growth of foreign investment inflows and strengthening of economic stability

The data presented in the table demonstrate that the deepening of regional integration in Central Asia is being implemented through several interconnected mechanisms. In particular, the development of transport and logistics infrastructure and the simplification of trade procedures play an important role in accelerating economic relations among the countries of the region. At the same time, the expansion of industrial cooperation and energy collaboration creates opportunities for the efficient use of economic resources. Digital economic integration is accelerating customs, logistics, and trade operations while increasing the transparency of economic processes. The development of investment cooperation contributes to the implementation of new infrastructure projects and the expansion of production capacity within the region. As a result, regional integration is emerging as an important factor enhancing the competitiveness of the Central Asian states within the global economic system.

Expanding trade and economic cooperation is of particular importance in deepening regional integration processes. In recent years, the volume of mutual trade among the Central Asian states has increased significantly.

This growth is positively influenced by the reduction of trade barriers, the complementary nature of national economies, and the expansion of regional markets. The reforms implemented by Uzbekistan aimed at liberalizing trade relations with neighboring countries, establishing border trade zones, and simplifying export-import procedures are contributing to the development of regional economic integration. In particular, the increase in mutual trade volumes in agricultural products, industrial goods, energy resources, and services is strengthening economic interdependence.

Industrial cooperation and joint investment projects also play an important role in the development of regional integration. The interconnectedness of industrial sectors and the diversity of resource potential among the Central Asian states create favorable conditions for the development of industrial cooperation. In particular, the implementation of joint production projects in the automotive industry, electrical engineering, chemical industry, agricultural product processing, and textile industry increases economic efficiency for the countries of the region. Such cooperation contributes to reducing production costs, creating new jobs, and forming regional value chains. At the same time, it expands opportunities for attracting foreign investment and accelerates the integration of the Central Asian states into global production systems.

Cooperation in the energy sector is also one of the important directions of regional integration. The Central Asian states are rich in natural gas, oil, hydropower, and renewable energy resources, and their mutual energy cooperation plays a significant role in ensuring the region's energy security. The hydrocarbon resources of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, the hydropower potential of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the industrial and transit opportunities of Uzbekistan create the basis for the formation of a unified energy space. Electricity exchange, the development of cross-border energy infrastructure, and the implementation of green energy projects contribute to further deepening regional integration.

The issue of water resource management in Central Asia is also an important component of regional integration. Since the countries of the region are highly interconnected in terms of water resource use, the development of cooperation in this area is essential for sustainable economic development. The rational use of water and energy resources, joint management of transboundary water bodies, and the implementation of coordinated policies to address environmental problems increase the effectiveness of regional integration. In particular, the strengthening of regional cooperation in addressing the environmental problems of the Aral Sea region demonstrates the existence of common interests among the Central Asian states.

The digital economy and innovative cooperation are also emerging as modern directions of regional integration. The development of e-commerce systems, digital customs services, electronic logistics platforms, and cross-border digital payment systems among the countries of the region is increasing the efficiency of economic relations. Through digitalization, the automation of customs and transport processes contributes to reducing cargo delivery times, lowering costs, and minimizing corruption risks. At the same time, the development of cooperation in the field of information and communication technologies creates opportunities to enhance the innovative potential of the region (Table 2).

**Table 2. Priority Directions for the Development of Regional Integration in Central Asia and Their Regional Impact**

Priority Direction	Implementation Instruments	Regional Economic Impact
Increasing mutual trade volume	Free trade mechanisms and simplification of customs procedures	Growth of domestic market activity and expansion of export potential
Development of transit and logistics potential	Modernization of railway, highway, and multimodal transport corridors	Reduction of transportation costs and increase in transit revenues
Strengthening energy integration	Interconnection of electricity grids and gas infrastructure	Energy security and efficient use of resources
Industrial and production cooperation	Establishment of joint enterprises and industrial clusters	Increase in production volume and strengthening of technological exchange
Accelerating digital transformation	Electronic customs, digital logistics, and e-commerce systems	Improvement of economic process efficiency and reduction of time costs
Environmental and water resource cooperation	Transboundary water management and environmental programs	Strengthening sustainable development and environmental security

The development of regional integration in Central Asia is being shaped through multifaceted and comprehensive directions. In particular, increasing transit and logistics potential and expanding mutual trade volumes are strengthening the ability of the regional states to access global markets. Energy integration and industrial cooperation contribute to the efficient use of resources and ensuring production stability. At the same time, digital transformation processes are increasing the efficiency of customs and logistics systems, thereby

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