

GITEX Almaty: Central Asia Has a 24-Month Window to Build Sovereign Payment Rails, Industry Leaders Warn

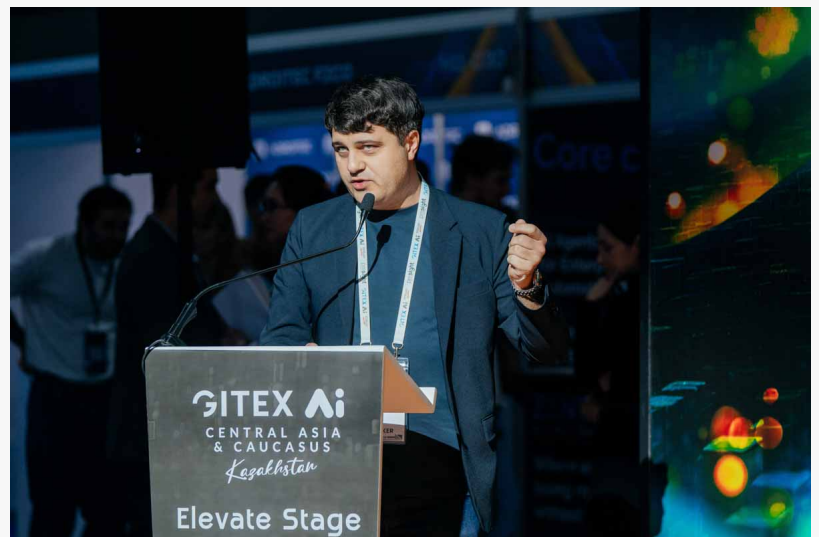
S1LKPAY and 8B leaders, on a Forbes Georgia-moderated panel, set out how interoperability, AI-driven routing will reshape regional commerce

ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN, May 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Payments are no longer a transaction layer. They are strategic infrastructure shaping commerce, sovereignty, and competitiveness - and Central Asia and the Caucasus have a narrow window to define their own. That was the central message of "Global Payments Dialogue: Interoperability, AI & Cross-Border Rails," a panel today at [GITEX AI Central Asia & Caucasus Kazakhstan](#), taking place in Almaty on 4-5 May 2026, hosted by the Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan in partnership with Astana Hub and the Akimat of Almaty.

Moderated by Shota Dighmelashvili, Editor in Chief of Forbes Georgia, the session brought together Gani Uzbekov, Founder & CEO of S1LKPAY, and [Bogdan Zadorozhny](#), Co-Founder and Chief Innovation Officer of [8B](#), in front of a policy and institutional audience that included regional regulators, central bank representatives, and infrastructure operators.



GITEX 2026 Interoperability Panel (provided by Forbes Georgia)



Bogdan Zadorozhny, Co-founder and CIO (provided by digitalbusiness.kz)

The event aligns with President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's emphasis on advanced technologies, notably artificial intelligence, as a driver of sustainable economic growth, and arrives at a defining moment for the region. According to the World Bank, GDP across Central Asia and the Caucasus is expected to grow by nearly 4.7% in 2025–2026, with venture capital investment reaching \$95 million in the past year and the regional IT services market forecast to reach \$5.6 billion by 2029. Kazakhstan has digitised 90% of its public services, hosts Central Asia's largest hyperscale data centre, and ranks #1 in Central Asia for AI readiness, with the Alem.ai hub projected to generate \$5 billion in AI exports by 2029.

Interoperability: many local systems made invisible

Gani Uzbekov of S1LKPAY argued that real interoperability is not a single global system but many national and local systems stitched together so cleanly that complexity disappears for the end user.

"For the user, a payment is two seconds and a tap. For us, those two seconds are the result of dozens of decisions across rails, currencies, compliance layers, and settlement networks. Real interoperability is not one universal system - it is many local systems made invisible to the user. That is the only version that scales across a region as diverse as Central Asia and the Caucasus."

- Gani Uzbekov, Founder & CEO, S1LKPAY

He warned that as AI agents and super-apps begin selecting payment methods on users' behalf, multi-rail readiness will separate platforms that scale from those that get locked out of cross-border commerce.

Sovereignty, stablecoins, and the rails being decided now

Bogdan Zadorozhny of 8B framed national QR and account-to-account systems as a question of jurisdictional control, not just cost reduction.

"When a country builds its own QR and A2A rails, it is not just saving on interchange - it is deciding who sets the rules of its digital economy. Sovereignty in payments is the new sovereignty in trade. Central Asia and the Caucasus have a rare window: the rails being designed in Almaty, Tashkent, Tbilisi, and Baku in the next twenty-four months will shape the next two decades of regional commerce." - Bogdan Zadorozhny, Co-Founder & Chief Innovation Officer, 8B

On stablecoins, Zadorozhny separated genuine utility from market noise. With cross-border B2B settlement in emerging corridors still costing on average 6%+ in fees and 2–4 days in clearing time, he identified stablecoin rails as a real solution for trade settlement, treasury, and intra-regional remittances - while cautioning that consumer-facing use cases remain significantly overhyped.

Looking ahead, he highlighted the design principles that will help national payment systems remain competitive as AI-driven routing matures:

"Regulators across Central Asia and the Caucasus are already moving in the right direction. The next step is making cross-border compatibility a design principle from day one - programmable,

machine-readable, and interoperable by default. Build it that way once, and the region's rails will be ready for whatever comes next: AI-driven routing, tokenised settlement, or commerce models we cannot yet predict. That is how Central Asia becomes a hub for digital trade, not a customer of someone else's infrastructure."

8B's positioning at the intersection of infrastructure, settlement, and cross-border innovation made that perspective particularly resonant for the policy and institutional audience in the room.

Moderator's takeaway

"The future of payments may look effortless for users - but it will require serious work underneath: trust, regulation, settlement, merchant adoption, and cross-border compatibility. For Central Asia, this is particularly timely. The region has an opportunity to build an interoperable, locally relevant payment infrastructure that can connect domestic markets with regional and international commerce." - Shota Dighmelashvili, Editor in Chief, Forbes Georgia

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