



THE METAVERSE AND INTERNATIONAL LAW: THE PROBLEM OF JURISDICTION IN VIRTUAL TERRITORIES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the emerging legal relations in the Metaverse, focusing on issues of international jurisdiction, state sovereignty, and the protection of personal data. It highlights the necessity of harmonizing virtual transactions and digital crimes with international legal norms.

Introduction

The technological development of the 21st century has profoundly influenced all areas of human activity. The Metaverse, emerging on the basis of digital technologies, has introduced new legal and ethical challenges for humanity. The Metaverse is a virtual environment formed through the integration of augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and blockchain technologies, in which users live through their avatars, engage in trade, provide services, and acquire property. However, international legal mechanisms regulating such activities have not yet been established.

Since the territory of the Metaverse does not belong to any state, it remains unclear which national laws should apply to offenses, transactions, or disputes involving personal data occurring within it. Consequently, the Metaverse has ushered in a new era in matters of international jurisdiction and sovereignty.

The Metaverse is not only a technological concept but also a new legal domain. The main issues arising in this domain concern jurisdiction, digital sovereignty, and systems of liability. In traditional international law, jurisdiction is determined by state territory, nationality, or the place where a crime is committed. However, in the Metaverse, such boundaries do not exist. For example, if a citizen of Uzbekistan causes harm to a citizen of France in the virtual world, it is unclear which state's court should have jurisdiction over the case. Therefore, it is essential to develop the concept of "virtual jurisdiction."

The Issue of Digital Sovereignty

The issue of digital sovereignty is also of great importance. Major corporations operating within the Metaverse (such as Meta, Microsoft, Decentraland, and others) manage data through their own servers. In certain cases, this poses a threat to the information security and

independence of states. Therefore, international law must develop universal norms aimed at protecting the digital interests of states.

Moreover, issues related to personal data, intellectual property, digital identification, and the legal validity of transactions within the Metaverse remain unresolved. The Budapest Convention on Cybercrime does not yet fully cover the Metaverse. Consequently, it is proposed that international organizations—particularly within the framework of the United Nations and the Council of Europe—develop a *“Declaration on the Protection of Human Rights in Virtual Environments.”*

Metaverse technologies are raising legal questions that have not previously existed. The first issue concerns **jurisdiction**. If a citizen of one country commits an unlawful act against a citizen of another within the Metaverse, which court should exercise jurisdiction? Current international law provides no clear answer to this question. Some European countries are developing the concept of *“virtual jurisdiction,”* which designates the user’s registration location as the primary legal nexus. In this way, international law must evolve beyond traditional notions of territoriality and adapt to the realities of the digital space.

The second issue is **digital sovereignty**. States and large IT corporations operating in the Metaverse seek to establish control over virtual territories, which may undermine the digital independence of sovereign nations. International law must therefore create new mechanisms to safeguard state sovereignty in the digital sphere. At the same time, it is essential to introduce international standards in areas such as personal data protection, intellectual property, and digital identification.

The third aspect involves **violations and liability**. Instances of fraud, virtual property theft, and the creation of fraudulent contracts within the Metaverse are increasingly common. However, there are no international legal instruments specifically regulating these activities. Consequently, existing international conventions on cybercrime should be amended to include provisions relating to the Metaverse. In particular, the European Union’s **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** model should be adopted globally to strengthen the protection of personal data.

The fourth direction concerns the **need for international cooperation**. As a global network, the Metaverse cannot be regulated by the laws of a single state. Initiatives promoting the harmonization of national legislation with international legal norms will help strengthen mutual trust in the field of human rights protection.

Therefore, it would be appropriate to adopt a universal instrument—such as a *“Declaration on the Protection of Human Rights in Virtual Environments”*—within the framework of the **United Nations, UNESCO, or the Council of Europe**. Such a document would mark a new stage in the development of international cooperation in the digital age.

Proposals

1.Introducing the Concept of “Virtual Jurisdiction” into International Law

A new model of international jurisdiction should be developed to resolve legal disputes arising within the Metaverse. This model should be based not on territoriality, but on users’ digital activity and the physical location of servers.

2.Developing an International Convention on the Metaverse

Within the framework of the United Nations or the Council of Europe, a *“Convention on the Legal Regulation of the Metaverse”* should be drafted. This document should establish unified standards concerning personal data protection, intellectual property, and cybercrime.

3. Legal Recognition of Digital Citizenship

A system should be introduced that allows users to be identified in the Metaverse through a “virtual passport.” Such a mechanism would clarify issues of international identification and legal responsibility.

4. Establishing an International Arbitration Center for the Metaverse

A specialized international arbitration body should be created to resolve disputes related to virtual transactions, NFT trading, and ownership of virtual property, thereby ensuring swift and impartial resolution of conflicts.

5. Developing a Global “Digital Security Code” for the Protection of Personal Data

Based on the GDPR model, a special international code should be established to protect personal data specific to the Metaverse—such as avatars, voice, facial expressions, and VR-related activities.

6. Introducing “Metaverse Law” or “Digital Public International Law” into Uzbekistan’s Higher Education System

The inclusion of such subjects would enhance the knowledge of young professionals in the field of international digital law and contribute to the formation of a new academic discipline.

7. Creating an AI-Based International Legal Monitoring System

Using artificial intelligence, a global monitoring system should be developed to track cybercrimes and virtual transactions within the Metaverse, automatically detecting legal inconsistencies and potential violations.

Conclusion

The Metaverse has ushered humanity into a new digital era, necessitating a reconsideration of traditional legal principles. Economic, social, and personal interactions occurring in virtual environments must now be recognized and regulated by international law. Otherwise, the Metaverse could become a new source of threats to human rights, personal data, and economic security.

The Metaverse serves as a testing ground for international law—where notions of sovereignty, territoriality, and jurisdiction are undergoing transformation. Therefore, the international community must develop new mechanisms to govern this emerging digital domain.

In the future, “Metaverse Law”—or the law of the metaverse—is expected to evolve into an independent legal discipline and an integral component of international law. Uzbekistan should actively participate in this process by developing a national strategy in the field of digital law and contributing to global efforts toward fair and secure digital governance.

Such initiatives will strengthen our country’s digital image on the international stage, open new research directions for young scholars, and promote Uzbekistan’s experience within the global legal system.

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