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I. **Baku Energy Week 2026 showcases Azerbaijan's expanding role in global energy security**

The 31st Baku Energy Week, held in Baku on June 1–3, demonstrated that Azerbaijan has entered a new phase of its energy strategy. More than three decades after the signing of the "Contract of the Century," the country is no longer presenting itself solely as a producer of oil and natural gas. Instead, Azerbaijan is positioning itself as a comprehensive energy partner whose agenda encompasses hydrocarbons, renewable energy, regional connectivity, critical minerals, artificial intelligence, industrial technology, and international investment. President Ilham Aliyev's address at the opening ceremony provided the strategic framework for this vision, while the agreements signed during the forum translated that vision into concrete projects and partnerships.

Opening the forum, President Ilham Aliyev recalled that Baku Energy Week traces its origins to the first Caspian Oil and Gas Exhibition held in 1994 alongside the signing of the "Contract of the Century," an agreement that fundamentally transformed Azerbaijan's economic development and international standing. This year also marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Shah Deniz agreement, another milestone that laid the foundation for Azerbaijan's emergence as a major natural gas exporter. Today, Baku Energy Week has evolved into one of the world's leading energy forums, bringing together 276 companies from 46 countries—the highest international participation in the event's history.

A central message of the President's speech was that recent geopolitical developments have reaffirmed the strategic importance of conventional energy resources. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that for several years producers of oil and natural gas had been unfairly criticized despite their essential contribution to global energy security. Current international realities, President Ilham Aliyev noted, have demonstrated that energy security cannot exist without secure and reliable supplies of hydrocarbons. In this

context, the President welcomed what he described as the return of a more balanced international discussion on energy policy, emphasizing that oil and natural gas will remain indispensable components of the global energy system for decades to come.

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted Azerbaijan's growing contribution to international energy security through concrete results. Last year, Azerbaijan supplied natural gas to 12 countries; by June 2026, that number had reached 16, including 10 EU member states. The President emphasized that this geography will continue to expand as production increases from projects including Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli Deep Gas, Absheron, and other fields under development. Azerbaijan's consistent fulfillment of all contractual obligations has established the country as one of the world's most reliable energy partners at a time when dependable suppliers have become increasingly valuable.

The President also made clear that Azerbaijan's investment in renewable energy complements rather than replaces its hydrocarbon sector. Large-scale solar and wind projects are intended to meet growing domestic electricity demand, thereby releasing additional natural gas volumes for export. This balanced approach enables Azerbaijan simultaneously to contribute to global climate objectives while strengthening the energy security of partner countries. According to President Ilham Aliyev, energy transition should not come at the expense of energy security; instead, both objectives must advance together.

The agreements signed during Baku Energy Week demonstrated how this strategy is being translated into practice. One of the most significant developments was the launch of the first Azerbaijan-United States Economic Dialogue, accompanied by commercial agreements valued at approximately \$7.5–8 billion. Together, these agreements significantly broaden the scope of bilateral cooperation beyond traditional hydrocarbons and into strategic industries expected to shape the future global economy.

Among the most strategically important documents was the Azerbaijan-United States Framework for Securing Supply in the Mining and Processing of Critical Minerals and Rare Earths, signed between Azerbaijan's Ministry of Economy and the U.S. Department of State. As international competition intensifies over minerals essential for semiconductors, batteries, renewable energy technologies, and advanced manufacturing, the framework positions Azerbaijan as an emerging participant in critical mineral supply chains while opening a new chapter in Azerbaijani-American economic cooperation.

The forum also produced one of the most significant commercial agreements in Azerbaijan's gas sector in recent years. SOCAR, TotalEnergies, ADNOC's XRG, and Türkiye's BOTAŞ signed a 15-year natural gas sales and purchase agreement covering gas from the second phase of the Absheron gas-condensate field. Under the agreement, approximately 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas will be supplied to Türkiye over a 15-year period beginning in 2029, following new investments in the field's full-scale development. The project is expected to direct around half of Phase II production to the Turkish market, further strengthening Azerbaijan's role as a reliable supplier of natural gas to the region.

Cooperation with major international energy companies was expanded through a series of new agreements. SOCAR and Chevron signed a Joint Study Agreement to assess the hydrocarbon potential of the Middle Caspian basin, opening opportunities for future exploration. SOCAR also concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with Shell covering cooperation in upstream operations, liquefied natural gas, downstream projects, technological innovation, artificial intelligence, and human capital development. These agreements demonstrate continued confidence among leading global energy companies in Azerbaijan's investment climate and long-term resource potential.

Regional energy cooperation also advanced significantly during the forum. SOCAR and Serbia's

state electricity company, Elektroprivreda Srbije (EPS), signed documents establishing the commercial framework for constructing the Niš gas-fired power plant, expanding Azerbaijan's energy cooperation in Southeast Europe. In another important development, SOCAR Trading signed an agreement to begin natural gas supplies to San Marino from October 2026, further extending the geographical reach of Azerbaijani gas exports.

Financial and investment cooperation formed another major pillar of this year's agreements. SOCAR signed memoranda with J.P. Morgan on financing strategic projects and expanding access to long-term capital markets. Additional agreements with Apollo Capital Management and Apollo Global Management established a framework for expanding financing of TANAP and other strategic SOCAR assets, demonstrating sustained international investor confidence in Azerbaijan's energy infrastructure.

Baku Energy Week also reflected Azerbaijan's growing emphasis on technological modernization. SOCAR signed an Artificial Intelligence Cloud Development and Cooperation Agreement with Haimaker.ai to accelerate the integration of AI technologies across the energy sector. A Letter of Intent with George Washington University established the "Washington Hub" platform for academic and research cooperation, while a Strategic Cooperation Agreement with Lummus Technology expanded collaboration in refining, petrochemicals, engineering, and technology licensing. An additional memorandum between Azerbaijan's Ministry of Economy and Oracle established a framework for cooperation in digital technologies. Collectively, these agreements demonstrate Azerbaijan's determination to integrate advanced technologies into every stage of its energy industry.

The broad scope of the agreements signed during Baku Energy Week illustrates the evolution of Azerbaijan's energy diplomacy. This year's agenda encompassed conventional energy, renewable electricity, critical minerals, artificial intelligence,

digital transformation, industrial technologies, infrastructure financing, and higher education.

Baku Energy Week 2026 therefore represented more than an industry exhibition. President Ilham Aliyev's address reaffirmed the principles that have guided Azerbaijan's energy policy for more than thirty years: reliability, long-term partnership, diversification, and strategic foresight. The agreements concluded during the forum demonstrated that these principles continue to attract leading governments, investors, financial institutions, technology companies, and energy corporations. Together, they confirmed that Azerbaijan is not only strengthening its role as a reliable supplier of energy but is also emerging as an increasingly important participant in shaping the future architecture of global energy security.

II. Azerbaijan positions itself as the digital hub of the Middle Corridor

The Middle Corridor's rapid emergence as one of Eurasia's principal transport corridors is shifting attention from the construction of physical infrastructure to the efficiency with which that infrastructure operates. While continued investment in railways, ports, highways and logistics terminals remains essential, the corridor's long-term competitiveness will increasingly depend on faster border crossings, interoperable documentation, transparent cargo tracking and seamless cross-border information exchange. As cargo volumes continue to grow, digitalization is becoming the next stage of the corridor's development.

This transition gathered further momentum at the end of June, when Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan agreed to replace paper-based road transport permits with a fully electronic permit exchange system from 2027 following the successful implementation of the existing e-Permit mechanism. The two countries also expanded the number of electronic permits exchanged during 2026, demonstrating that digital solutions are becoming an operational component of Trans-

Caspian transport rather than a long-term objective.

To meet increasing demand from transport operators, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan agreed to exchange an additional 6,000 electronic permits during 2026, divided equally among bilateral transport, transit operations and transport to or from third countries. The parties also established a preliminary quota of 28,000 permits for 2027—12,000 for bilateral transport and 8,000 each for transit and third-country operations—representing an increase of 12,000 permits over the previous allocation. The expansion is intended to accommodate rising cargo volumes while supporting the continued development of trade, transit and logistics cooperation between the two countries.

The agreement reflects a broader regional shift in which governments are seeking to complement investments in transport infrastructure with digital tools capable of reducing administrative barriers, accelerating customs procedures and improving the transparency and predictability of cross-border trade. Within this broader transformation, the Organization of Turkic States has increasingly placed digitalization at the center of its regional connectivity agenda.

Stretching from China through Central Asia and the Caspian Sea to the South Caucasus, Türkiye and Europe, the Middle Corridor has become one of the principal alternatives for East-West trade amid changing geopolitical and economic conditions. Its attractiveness, however, is determined not only by geography but also by operational efficiency. Lengthy customs procedures, fragmented documentation systems and inconsistent border regulations remain among the principal obstacles limiting transit speed and predictability. Reducing these administrative barriers requires a common digital ecosystem capable of integrating transport, customs and border-management procedures across participating states.

Azerbaijan occupies a central position in this process. Located on the western shore of the

Caspian Sea, the country links maritime transport from Central Asia with railway and road connections extending through the South Caucasus toward Türkiye and European markets. The Port of Baku has become the principal transshipment hub connecting the eastern and western sides of the Caspian. Yet Azerbaijan's strategic importance increasingly derives not simply from its location, but from its capacity to integrate maritime, rail, road, customs and digital infrastructure into a unified transit system.

This broader digital agenda received significant political attention during the informal summit of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), held in Turkistan, Kazakhstan, on 15 May 2026 under the theme "Artificial Intelligence and Digital Development." The summit placed digital transformation, artificial intelligence, innovation and connectivity at the center of cooperation among member and observer states, reflecting a growing recognition that digital infrastructure has become an integral component of regional transport connectivity.

For the Middle Corridor, this emphasis is particularly significant. The route's competitiveness increasingly depends on faster border crossings, harmonized administrative procedures and transparent cargo movement across the Trans-Caspian corridor. The Turkistan Declaration therefore moved beyond general political support and endorsed practical mechanisms designed to digitalize cross-border transport.

Among the most important decisions was the endorsement of the full-scale implementation of the e-Permit system together with deeper integration of National Single Window platforms incorporating e-Permit, e-CMR and national e-government systems. These initiatives target the most time-consuming stages of international freight transport.

The e-Permit system enables transport permits to be issued, verified and exchanged electronically, eliminating many paper-based procedures that

traditionally slow cross-border freight movement. The e-CMR introduces digital consignment notes to replace conventional paper documentation, allowing transport operators and customs authorities to exchange shipment information electronically throughout the journey. Integration of National Single Window systems further allows customs administrations, transport agencies and border authorities to exchange information through interoperable digital platforms rather than through separate national systems.

Taken together, these mechanisms have the potential to simplify customs documentation, reduce administrative costs, shorten waiting times at border crossings, improve cargo traceability and increase transparency throughout the transport chain. For a multimodal corridor that relies on seamless coordination between maritime shipping, railways and road transport across several countries, such improvements can substantially increase reliability and reduce transit times.

The digitalization agenda also extends beyond customs modernization to broader data infrastructure. While the Middle Corridor is commonly understood as a network of railways, ports and shipping routes connecting East and West, its long-term competitiveness will increasingly depend on digital connectivity that allows information to move as efficiently as cargo itself. Cross-border data exchange, interoperable digital platforms and high-capacity telecommunications networks are becoming strategic infrastructure alongside physical transport assets.

The Digital Silk Way project adds an additional dimension to Eurasian connectivity. Whereas the Middle Corridor facilitates the physical movement of goods, the Digital Silk Way seeks to establish the digital infrastructure necessary to support those logistics networks. Central to the project is the construction of a Trans-Caspian fiber-optic cable connecting Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan across the Caspian Sea. Subsequent phases envisage extending similar digital infrastructure between

Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, creating an integrated digital communications network spanning the Caspian basin.

Rather than functioning as a separate initiative, the Digital Silk Way complements the Middle Corridor by providing secure, high-speed data transmission that can support customs systems, logistics platforms, cargo tracking technologies and digital trade services. In effect, the Trans-Caspian route would carry not only freight but also the data required to manage increasingly sophisticated transport operations.

The growing emphasis on digital connectivity coincides with a broader acceleration in the physical and institutional development of the Middle Corridor. Throughout 2026, regional governments, railway operators and international partners have expanded cooperation to strengthen the Trans-Caspian route through infrastructure modernization, multimodal transport integration and closer cross-border coordination. These parallel developments demonstrate that digitalization is not occurring in isolation but alongside the rapid expansion of the corridor itself.

Azerbaijan has remained central to this transformation. Speaking at the XII Global Baku Forum in March, President Ilham Aliyev reaffirmed that expanding the Middle Corridor remains one of Azerbaijan's strategic priorities, highlighting continued investment in railway modernization, the Port of Baku, Caspian shipping capacity and regional transport infrastructure. These investments are intended to increase the corridor's capacity and strengthen Azerbaijan's role as a logistics hub linking Central Asia with the South Caucasus, Türkiye and Europe.

Commercial activity along the corridor likewise continues to expand. On 8 May, Kazakhstan's KTZ Express and Türkiye's Pasifik Eurasia organized the first backhaul container train from İzmir to Chengxiang in China via the Middle Corridor, crossing the Caspian through the ports of Baku and Aktau. Carrying fifty forty-foot containers loaded with household refrigerators, the shipment

demonstrated not only the growing commercial viability of the Trans-Caspian route but also its increasingly multidirectional character, supporting both westbound and eastbound freight flows. As transport volumes continue to increase, digital tools capable of reducing administrative bottlenecks and facilitating real-time information exchange become increasingly important for maintaining the corridor's efficiency and competitiveness.

President Ilham Aliyev emphasized this linkage during his address at the OTS summit in Turkistan. He presented the Digital Silk Way, the Trans-Caspian fiber-optic cable, the Middle Corridor and the e-Permit system as interconnected components of a broader strategy to strengthen both transport and digital connectivity across the Turkic region. He also announced that the Trans-Caspian fiber-optic cable between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan was expected to become operational in the near future, marking an important milestone in the project's implementation.

The digital transformation of the Middle Corridor therefore represents more than the introduction of new technologies. It reflects a broader shift in Eurasian connectivity in which physical transport infrastructure is increasingly supported by integrated digital systems including e-Permit, e-CMR, e-TIR, cargo-tracking platforms and cross-border data networks. Together, these technologies improve efficiency, increase transparency and reduce many of the administrative obstacles that have traditionally constrained multimodal transport.

For Azerbaijan, this evolution strengthens its position not only as a transit country but also as a digital gateway linking Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Türkiye and Europe. The country's role increasingly encompasses coordination of physical infrastructure, digital connectivity and customs modernization, allowing it to serve as both a transport hub and a facilitator of regional digital integration.

The Organization of Turkic States provides an increasingly important institutional framework for this process. By promoting common digital standards, harmonizing customs procedures and encouraging interoperability between national digital platforms, the organization can help create the integrated digital environment necessary for the Middle Corridor to realize its full potential. Ultimately, the corridor's future competitiveness is likely to depend not only on investments in ports, railways and logistics terminals, but also on the participating states' ability to build a shared digital architecture that makes trade and transit faster, more transparent and more predictable across Eurasia.

III. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan deepen allied partnership as the C6 Framework takes shape

Relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have entered their most intensive period since the two countries established diplomatic ties. Speaking on June 1, Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Bahrom Ashrafkhanov, described bilateral relations as experiencing an "unprecedented" and "highest stage of development" across virtually every sector. His remarks reflect more than diplomatic rhetoric. Over the past two years, Tashkent and Baku have concluded a series of political, economic, energy, and transport agreements that have transformed their relationship into one of the principal strategic partnerships linking Central Asia with the South Caucasus.

This transformation has unfolded alongside the emergence of a broader regional framework. Azerbaijan's admission as a full participant in the Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of Central Asia in November 2025 effectively expanded the grouping into what increasingly functions as a C6 format. Rather than treating the South Caucasus and Central Asia as separate geopolitical spaces, the new arrangement institutionalizes growing political coordination and

connectivity across the Caspian. While Kazakhstan remains Azerbaijan's principal partner in Caspian logistics and transport, Uzbekistan has emerged as one of Baku's closest political partners in shaping the strategic rationale behind the new framework.

The significance of Azerbaijan's inclusion was emphasized by all participating leaders during the seventh Consultative Meeting in Tashkent. The President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev described the decision as "historic," arguing that it would establish a "solid bridge" between Central Asia and the South Caucasus. President Ilham Aliyev similarly argued that sustained regional interaction had already transformed Central Asia and Azerbaijan into "a single geopolitical and geo-economic region." The President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev likewise endorsed Azerbaijan's participation as a landmark decision, illustrating the broad regional consensus behind the initiative.

For Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan provides the essential western dimension of its regional strategy. As the largest double-landlocked country in Central Asia, Uzbekistan depends on reliable external transport corridors to diversify access to international markets. Azerbaijan's ports on the Caspian Sea, expanding railway network, and position along the Middle Corridor offer Tashkent direct access to Türkiye and European markets while reducing dependence on traditional transit routes through Russia. Consequently, the Azerbaijan-Uzbekistan relationship has become one of the principal political pillars supporting the emerging C6 framework.

The rapid deepening of political ties has been accompanied by a progressive institutionalization of bilateral relations. The legal framework now rests on three major documents: the 2004 Declaration on Further Strengthening Strategic Partnership, the 2022 Declaration on Deepening Strategic Partnership and Expanding Comprehensive Cooperation, and the 2024 Treaty on Allied Relations. The allied treaty, signed in Tashkent on August 23, 2024, represented the most important milestone by elevating bilateral

relations to the level of formal alliance. Uzbekistan completed ratification of the treaty in May 2025, ensuring that the political rapprochement acquired a durable institutional foundation.

Frequent high-level diplomacy has reinforced this process. Mirziyoyev visited Azerbaijan five times within approximately eighteen months while both presidents maintained regular consultations during international summits. This sustained political engagement has produced an unusually dense agenda of bilateral cooperation.

Economic cooperation has expanded in parallel. During Mirziyoyev's visit to Azerbaijan on July 2, 2025, the two governments signed an extensive package of agreements covering industrial cooperation, customs administration, education, environmental protection, social policy, and interregional cooperation. Particularly significant were the adoption of a bilateral industrial cooperation program for 2025-2027 and a joint action plan designed to increase bilateral trade to \$1 billion by 2030. Together, these initiatives illustrate a deliberate effort to provide substantial economic content to the newly established allied relationship.

Trade statistics demonstrate that this strategy has already begun producing tangible results. Bilateral trade increased from only \$32.4 million in 2017 to \$253.5 million in 2024. During the first five months of 2025, trade expanded by a further 25.2 percent to reach \$90.5 million. According to President Ilham Aliyev, trade during the first nine months of 2025 reached \$319 million, representing annual growth of nearly 88 percent. Although these figures remain modest compared to either country's trade with larger external partners, the rate of expansion illustrates the speed with which economic integration is accelerating.

Energy cooperation has become another defining feature of the partnership. In July 2025, SOCAR, Uzbekneftegaz, and Uzbekistan's Ministry of Energy signed a Production Sharing Agreement covering hydrocarbon exploration in Uzbekistan's Ustyurt region. Estimated investment exceeds \$2

billion, making it one of the largest bilateral economic projects undertaken by the two countries. SOCAR assumed operational responsibility and initiated seismic surveys covering more than 3,000 kilometers. The project's strategic significance increased further when BP acquired a 40 percent participating interest in May, creating a consortium in which BP holds 40 percent while SOCAR and Uzbekneftegaz each retain 30 percent. The agreement also marked BP's first upstream investment in Uzbekistan.

Energy cooperation increasingly extends beyond hydrocarbons. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan jointly established the Green Corridor Alliance in July 2025 to facilitate exports of renewable electricity from Central Asia to Europe through high-voltage transmission infrastructure across the Caspian and Black Sea. The initiative reflects the growing integration of regional energy systems while positioning Azerbaijan as the principal transit hub connecting Central Asian renewable generation with European markets.

Transport and logistics remain central to the broader strategic rationale behind Azerbaijan-Uzbekistan cooperation. Azerbaijan's rapidly expanding transport infrastructure has become an increasingly important western gateway for Central Asian exports. Between January and November 2025, container throughput at the Port of Alat increased by more than 40 percent, reaching nearly 97,000 TEU, while Azerbaijan Railways handled 350 China-Europe block trains through the Middle Corridor, representing annual growth of 34 percent. Completion of the modernization of the Georgian section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the inauguration of a new multimodal terminal in Poti further increased corridor capacity during 2025.

The Middle Corridor as a whole continued its rapid expansion. Container traffic reached approximately 76,900 TEU during 2025, increasing by 36 percent compared to the previous year. Growth has been supported by several external factors, including disruptions to Red Sea shipping and the European Union's restrictions on cargo

transit through Russia. Both Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan have consistently supported connecting the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway—whose construction began in late 2024—to the Middle Corridor. Once operational, the CKU railway will strengthen Uzbekistan's position as a major transit hub linking western China to the Caspian basin, while Azerbaijan's transport infrastructure at Alat naturally forms the corridor's western maritime gateway.

Future transport projects could further strengthen this emerging connectivity architecture. The proposed Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), known also as the Zangezur Corridor, would connect mainland Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan through Armenia before continuing toward Türkiye. If implemented, the route would provide an additional western outlet for Central Asian trade while increasing the flexibility and resilience of the broader Middle Corridor network. External investment is also reinforcing these trends. At the first EU-Central Asia Summit in Samarkand, the European Union committed €12 billion under the Global Gateway initiative for regional infrastructure, including approximately €3 billion specifically designated for Middle Corridor transport projects.

The Azerbaijan-Uzbekistan partnership also operates within broader frameworks of regional cooperation. Both countries have actively promoted collaboration within the Organization of Turkic States across energy, transport, digitalization, trade, and cultural exchanges. The emerging C6 framework, however, reflects a different institutional logic. Unlike the Organization of Turkic States, it incorporates all five Central Asian republics while integrating Azerbaijan through shared geopolitical, economic, and connectivity interests rather than linguistic or cultural identity.

The evolution of Azerbaijan-Uzbekistan relations therefore offers an indication of the strategic direction of the emerging C6 framework. Bilateral cooperation increasingly integrates multiple regional agendas, including Central Asian

institutionalization, Turkic cooperation, Eurasian transport diversification, and new energy partnerships. For Azerbaijan, closer ties with Uzbekistan reinforce its role as the South Caucasus anchor of Central Asia's westward connectivity strategy. For Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan provides access to the Caspian Sea, Türkiye, and European markets while simultaneously offering opportunities for large-scale investment, industrial cooperation, and international energy partnerships. As the C6 framework continues to develop, the Azerbaijan-Uzbekistan partnership is likely to remain one of its principal political and economic foundations.

IV. Pashinyan's victory sustains peace momentum but constitutional obstacles remain

Armenia's parliamentary elections on June 7 were more than a contest over domestic governance. They represented a strategic choice between two competing visions of Armenia's future: one centered on peace with Azerbaijan, normalization with Türkiye, and deeper engagement with Western partners, and another advocating a renewed strategic partnership with Russia while opposing the concessions required to finalize a regional settlement. The results delivered a clear mandate for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's course but left unresolved the constitutional issue that remains the principal obstacle to a formal peace treaty with Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan's Civil Contract party won 49.81 percent of the vote, well ahead of Samvel Karapetyan's Strong Armenia Alliance, which received 23.29 percent, and former president Robert Kocharyan's Armenia Alliance, which secured 9.94 percent. Voter turnout reached 58.94 percent, the highest since 2017, underscoring the importance voters attached to the country's strategic direction. The election demonstrated that Armenia's post-2023 political realignment has consolidated. Despite criticism directed at Pashinyan following the the defeat in the war, Armenian voters again endorsed

the government that has prioritized normalization with Azerbaijan over attempts to revive the previous status quo. Parties campaigning against the peace process failed to persuade a majority of the electorate.

The election also highlighted the extent to which the peace process has reshaped Armenia's domestic politics. Rather than focusing on reversing the military outcome of recent years, the campaign largely revolved around how Armenia should position itself within the new regional order. In that sense, Azerbaijan's post-conflict strategy of combining military success with negotiations for regional normalization has contributed to redefining the political agenda inside Armenia. Had the peace process failed to produce tangible prospects for regional stabilization, it is difficult to imagine peace and normalization becoming the central issue of Armenia's parliamentary elections.

That political environment was reinforced by developments in the months preceding the vote. Following the Washington agreements of August 2025, relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan entered a comparatively stable phase. The interstate border remained calm, bilateral contacts resumed, confidence-building measures expanded, and practical cooperation gradually replaced the confrontational rhetoric that had dominated earlier periods. These developments did not resolve the underlying disputes, but they demonstrated to the Armenian public that negotiations were producing tangible political and economic opportunities. As a result, Pashinyan entered the election able to campaign not only on promises but also on visible evidence that dialogue with Azerbaijan was generating practical results.

International reactions to the election further illustrated its geopolitical significance. U.S. President Donald Trump congratulated Pashinyan on what he described as a decisive victory and reaffirmed Washington's support for Armenia's current course. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also congratulated Pashinyan, expressing confidence that his efforts to establish lasting

peace and regional stability would succeed. The message carried particular significance because it marked the first time Ankara had congratulated Pashinyan following an electoral victory, reflecting Türkiye's growing investment in a normalization process that would ultimately enable the restoration of Armenian-Turkish relations.

The first concrete indication that negotiations with Azerbaijan would continue under the new government came only a week after the election. On June 14, Hikmet Hacıyev, Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan and Head of the Foreign Policy Affairs Department of the Presidential Administration, met in Dilijan with Armen Grigoryan, Secretary of Armenia's Security Council. The discussions covered the full peace agenda, confidence-building measures, and future bilateral contacts, with both sides agreeing that their next meeting would take place in Azerbaijan. The timing of the meeting was significant. Despite a contentious election campaign and continued criticism from the opposition, senior officials from both countries resumed direct dialogue almost immediately, demonstrating that the negotiating process remained insulated from short-term domestic political competition.

The implementation of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) has added further momentum to this process. Armenia's Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, Davit Khudatyan, announced on June 12 that preparatory work had largely been completed and that construction was expected to begin during the fall or winter of 2026. Earlier statements by Pashinyan indicated that electricity transmission infrastructure would likely constitute the first phase of implementation. The planned 43-kilometer multimodal corridor through southern Armenia, connecting mainland Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and forming a key segment of the Middle Corridor, has become one of the most consequential practical components of the emerging regional settlement. The approaching construction timeline creates

growing incentives to resolve the remaining political issues before implementation accelerates.

Those political obstacles, however, remain substantial. Although Civil Contract retained a comfortable parliamentary majority, it fell well short of the two-thirds supermajority required to initiate constitutional amendments through parliament. Azerbaijan has consistently maintained that Armenia must amend its constitution to remove references derived from the 1990 Declaration of Independence that are interpreted as supporting the reunification of Karabakh with Armenia before a final peace treaty can be signed. Because these provisions form part of Armenia's constitutional framework, any amendment must ultimately be approved through a nationwide referendum.

This constitutional question remains the binding constraint on the entire normalization process. Progress in political dialogue, confidence-building measures, economic cooperation, and regional connectivity cannot culminate in a formal peace treaty until the constitutional issue is resolved. Azerbaijan argues that the supremacy of an international treaty cannot override constitutional provisions that define the state's foundational legal identity. Armenian officials' argument that the draft peace agreement establishes the primacy of treaty obligations over domestic legislation has not altered Baku's position.

Winning a referendum will likely prove considerably more difficult than winning the parliamentary election. Constitutional amendments require not only majority approval among participating voters but also turnout exceeding one-quarter of all registered voters. While Pashinyan secured a clear electoral mandate, the combined support for Strong Armenia and the Armenia Alliance demonstrates that a substantial segment of Armenian society remains skeptical of the current normalization agenda. These parties have consistently opposed constitutional concessions and have indicated that they would seek to reverse elements of the peace process should they return to power.

Time therefore becomes an important political variable rather than a neutral factor. A prolonged constitutional process provides greater opportunities for domestic opponents of normalization and for external actors interested in preserving regional tensions to mobilize against the agreement. The longer the peace treaty remains unsigned, the greater the possibility that shifting political conditions inside Armenia could complicate or even reverse the current momentum. Conversely, successful constitutional reform would transform the peace process from an ongoing political contest into a new institutional reality that would be considerably more difficult to challenge.

The June 7 elections therefore established a clear strategic direction but did not complete the process of regional normalization. The rapid resumption of negotiations through the Dilijan meeting, preparations for implementing the TRIPP corridor, and the international reactions to the election all indicate that the peace process continues to enjoy substantial momentum. At the same time, the constitutional issue remains the decisive hurdle separating working-level cooperation from a legally binding peace settlement.

Pashinyan has emerged from the elections with a renewed mandate to pursue normalization with Azerbaijan. Whether that mandate can be translated into the constitutional changes necessary to conclude a peace treaty will determine not only the future of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations but also the long-term geopolitical configuration of the South Caucasus.

V. President Serdar Berdimuhamedov's state visit opens a new chapter in Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan relations

The state visit of President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedov to Azerbaijan on June 22–23 marked one of the most significant developments in bilateral relations in recent years. Beyond reaffirming the traditionally close ties between the

two brotherly nations, the visit produced a comprehensive package of political and sectoral agreements while demonstrating the expanding strategic importance of Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan cooperation in transport, energy, trade, and regional connectivity. The visit also reflected the growing institutionalization of bilateral relations, with both countries seeking to translate political goodwill into long-term mechanisms of cooperation.

President Ilham Aliyev welcomed President Berdimuhamedov with an official ceremony at the Zagulba Presidential Palace before the two leaders held one-on-one and expanded-format talks. In his opening remarks, President Ilham Aliyev described Turkmenistan as a brotherly country and emphasized that bilateral relations rest on deep historical, cultural, ethnic, and spiritual ties. President Ilham Aliyev noted that regular contacts between the two presidents had created a solid political foundation for expanding cooperation across virtually every sector. Expressing gratitude to the National Leader of the Turkmen people, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President Ilham Aliyev also highlighted Turkmenistan's decision to finance the construction of a mosque in the city of Fuzuli, describing the initiative as another symbol of the close friendship between the two countries.

President Berdimuhamedov likewise characterized Azerbaijan as a close and reliable partner and stressed that bilateral cooperation continues to develop successfully in political, economic, humanitarian, and cultural spheres. He reaffirmed Turkmenistan's commitment to expanding cooperation within international organizations, including the United Nations, the Organization of Turkic States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Economic Cooperation Organization. The Turkmen President also proposed holding a high-level Caspian summit in Avaza in October 2026 to discuss issues related to cooperation in the Caspian Sea.

Transport and connectivity featured prominently during the negotiations. Both presidents

underlined the strategic importance of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan as key transit states linking Asia and Europe. President Berdimuhamedov highlighted the growing role of the Afghanistan–Turkmenistan–Azerbaijan–Georgia–Türkiye transport corridor and reaffirmed Turkmenistan's support for developing the Caspian Sea–Black Sea transport corridor through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Romania. He also proposed strengthening the work of the bilateral Commission on Transport, Transit and Logistics in order to increase cargo flows and improve regional connectivity. These discussions reflected the increasing importance both countries attach to the Middle Corridor and to the Caspian Sea as an essential component of Eurasian transport networks.

Energy remained another major area of discussion. The two presidents reaffirmed their commitment to expanding cooperation in the electricity sector, oil and gas industry, and other areas of industrial cooperation. President Berdimuhamedov confirmed Turkmenistan's readiness to deepen cooperation in electricity generation, noting the country's construction of a new 1,574-megawatt power plant on the Caspian coast. The discussions reflected a broader understanding that Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are increasingly important contributors to regional energy security and possess significant opportunities for expanding cooperation across the wider energy sector.

The principal outcome of the visit was the signing of a Joint Statement by Presidents Ilham Aliyev and Serdar Berdimuhamedov, reaffirming the strategic nature of bilateral relations and setting the political framework for future cooperation. In addition, the two countries exchanged an extensive package of intergovernmental agreements and memoranda designed to strengthen cooperation across numerous sectors.

Among the documents signed were technical specifications governing the initial electronic exchange of customs information on goods and vehicles crossing the Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan border, as well as a protocol on cooperation in

customs statistics. These agreements are expected to simplify customs procedures, improve transparency, and facilitate the movement of goods along the rapidly developing trans-Caspian transport routes. The two countries also signed a Program on Industrial Cooperation for 2026–2028, an Agreement on Economic Cooperation, and memoranda covering agriculture, food safety, healthcare, labor and social protection, sports, cooperation between the Central Bank of Azerbaijan and the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan, and a Cooperation Program between the foreign ministries for 2026–2029. Together, these documents considerably expand the legal and institutional framework governing bilateral relations and illustrate the broadening scope of Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan cooperation beyond its traditional focus on energy.

One of the most symbolic moments of the visit was the joint participation of the two presidents, via video link, in the ceremony marking Azerbaijan's presentation of the oil tanker Dostlug ("Friendship") as a gift to Turkmenistan. Constructed at the Baku Shipyard, the tanker carries the same name as the jointly developed offshore hydrocarbon structure in the Caspian Sea. Its presentation symbolized the strengthening of bilateral relations, while also highlighting Azerbaijan's growing shipbuilding capabilities and its contribution to strengthening Caspian maritime cooperation.

The second day of the visit focused on Azerbaijan's liberated territories. President Ilham Aliyev accompanied President Berdimuhamedov to Fuzuli and Shusha, where the Turkmen leader observed the extensive reconstruction and restoration work underway following the liberation of the region. The leaders visited historical and cultural landmarks, reconstruction projects, and sites illustrating Azerbaijan's efforts to restore the cultural heritage and economic life of Karabagh. Particular attention was given to the construction of the mosque in Fuzuli, financed by Turkmenistan at the initiative of Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, underscoring the humanitarian dimension of

bilateral relations and Turkmenistan's contribution to the reconstruction of the liberated territories.

President Berdimuhamedov's state visit demonstrated that Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan relations have entered a qualitatively new stage. While cooperation in the energy sector remains an important pillar of the partnership, the agreements signed during the visit indicate a broader process of institutionalization encompassing customs administration, industry, agriculture, healthcare, finance, transport, diplomacy, and humanitarian cooperation. Combined with expanding coordination on regional connectivity and Caspian transport routes, the visit confirmed the determination of both countries to develop a comprehensive strategic partnership capable of contributing to the economic integration and stability of the wider Caspian and Eurasian regions.

VI. AIR Center's June activities highlight Azerbaijan's evolving middle-power diplomacy, the changing international order, and the South Caucasus peace agenda

On June 24, the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) hosted an international conference entitled "Azerbaijan as a Middle Power: Foreign Policy, Regional Influence, and Global Partnerships," bringing together government officials, diplomats, academics, researchers, and foreign experts to examine Azerbaijan's evolving role in regional and international affairs. Discussions focused on the country's growing diplomatic profile, its approach to strategic autonomy, and the implications of an increasingly fragmented international system for middle powers.

Opening the conference, AIR Center Chairman Dr. Farid Shafiyev pointed out that Azerbaijan's foreign policy has reached a stage where it can increasingly be understood through the concept of middle-power diplomacy. He pointed to Azerbaijan's balanced relations with competing international actors, diversified foreign partnerships, expanding

role in international organizations, and leadership in regional transport and energy initiatives as key factors strengthening the country's international position. Rather than relying on fixed alliance structures Azerbaijan has sought to preserve strategic flexibility while positioning itself as a reliable partner capable of contributing to regional stability, connectivity, and multilateral cooperation.

The conference's first panel explored the evolution of middle-power theory and Azerbaijan's foreign policy trajectory, while the second examined the country's regional influence, expanding diplomatic partnerships, and growing international engagement. Participants discussed how shifting geopolitical realities are creating greater space for states pursuing flexible and diversified foreign policies while balancing relations among competing global and regional powers.

Many of the ideas discussed during the conference also featured in AIR Center's international engagements throughout June. Speaking at a seminar in Ankara on June 29, Dr. Shafiyev argued that Azerbaijan's restoration of territorial integrity, independent foreign policy, expanding transport and energy initiatives, and active participation in regional organizations have enabled the country to assume responsibilities increasingly associated with emerging middle powers. Azerbaijan's influence is no longer confined to the South Caucasus but increasingly extends across Eurasia through mediation efforts, regional cooperation, and connectivity initiatives.

The broader international context for these developments formed the focus of AIR Center's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Think Tank Forum held in China on June 7–8. Addressing the plenary session on the future development of the SCO, Dr. Shafiyev argued that the international system is undergoing a profound structural transformation as political and economic influence becomes more widely distributed across regions. In this environment, regional organizations are becoming increasingly important mechanisms for political dialogue,

economic cooperation, and collective security. Rather than interpreting current geopolitical fragmentation as evidence of declining multilateralism, growing strategic competition makes effective multilateral institutions more necessary than ever.

While reaffirming consensus as an important principle reflecting the sovereign equality of member states, Dr. Shafiyev argued that the SCO's continued expansion requires more flexible decision-making mechanisms capable of preventing initiatives supported by an overwhelming majority from being blocked by a single participant. Azerbaijan's efforts to deepen institutional cooperation with the SCO continue to encounter political obstacles from one member state, illustrating how wider geopolitical dynamics could affect the functioning of international organizations.

These themes were further developed during a conference jointly organized by AIR Center and the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law. Azerbaijan's geographic position, balanced diplomacy, and expanding transport infrastructure have transformed the country into a strategic bridge linking Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Türkiye, and Europe. Particular attention was devoted to the emerging C6 format, bringing together Azerbaijan and the five Central Asian republics, which is a platform with growing potential to expand cooperation beyond transport into trade, investment, regional security, and broader strategic coordination.

Regional peace and post-conflict normalization also featured prominently in AIR Center's activities during the month. On June 11, the Center hosted the conference "New Geopolitical Realities in the South Caucasus: Azerbaijan and the Peace Agenda," where policymakers, diplomats, and experts discussed prospects for long-term regional peace. Opening the conference, Dr. Shafiyev argued that Azerbaijan had become "the architect of the current peace agenda," maintaining that the restoration of the country's territorial integrity fundamentally changed the geopolitical landscape

of the South Caucasus and created new conditions for a comprehensive peace settlement. At the same time, lasting normalization requires resolving the remaining legal and constitutional issues between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Participants examined the Washington Peace Declaration, constitutional aspects of the peace negotiations, regional economic integration, confidence-building measures, and the long-term geopolitical consequences of the Second Karabakh War and Azerbaijan's September 2023 anti-terror measures. AIR Center also announced the winners of its analytical article competition devoted to the peace process, with submissions addressing the Washington Declaration, the Zangezur Corridor, post-conflict diplomacy, and the region's changing geopolitical environment.

Regional connectivity remained another recurring subject in AIR Center's research during June. Publications devoted particular attention to the Middle Corridor, arguing that its long-term competitiveness will depend not only on expanding transport infrastructure but also on digital customs systems, electronic transport documentation, cargo-tracking technologies, harmonized border procedures, and wider digital integration among participating countries. Other analyses examined cooperation with Central Asia, the EU, the Organization of Turkic States, regional energy security, and the strategic implications of Eurasian connectivity.

AIR Center also strengthened its international partnerships during a high-level visit to the Republic of Korea. The delegation participated in the Culture and Strategies Forum for the Korean

Peninsula and the North 2026 before holding consultations with the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, the Korean Council on Foreign Relations, Seoul National University Asia Center, and Dongduk Women's University's Institute for Eurasian Turkic Studies. Discussions focused on Azerbaijan's foreign policy, the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process, regional connectivity, and opportunities for expanding cooperation between Azerbaijani and Korean research institutions.