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Emerging Role of Azerbaijan amid the Rise of the Korea–Central Asia–Caucasus–Europe Connectivity Network

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The inaugural Korea–Central Asia Summit, [held](#) in Seoul on September 16, 2026, ushered in a new stage in South Korea’s engagement with the wider Caspian–Central Asian space. The summit brought together President Lee Jae-myung and the leaders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. It established a regular leaders-level framework and adopted the Seoul Declaration, which [sets out](#) a longer-term agenda covering supply chains, critical minerals, energy, artificial intelligence, science and technology, climate cooperation, and connectivity.

Yet the significance of the summit extends beyond the institutionalization of Korea–Central Asia relations. It also points toward the [emergence](#) of a broader Korea–Central Asia–Caucasus–Europe connectivity network, in which the economic and geographical links between East Asia, Central Asia, the Caspian region, the South Caucasus, Türkiye, and Europe could become increasingly integrated. Within this emerging network, Azerbaijan is positioned to play an important role as a Caspian and South Caucasus link connecting Central Asian economies with European markets.

This development is significant for both Baku and Seoul. Stronger connectivity with Central Asia is becoming increasingly important for South Korea as it [seeks to diversify](#) supply chains and secure access to critical minerals and energy resources. It also creates opportunities for Korean companies in infrastructure, manufacturing, logistics, digital technologies, and green energy. Deeper engagement with South Korea could support Baku’s [efforts to expand](#) its role beyond transit and develop into a broader platform for logistics, energy, digital connectivity, investment, and industrial cooperation.

Azerbaijan at the Center of the Trans-Eurasian Connectivity Chain

During the Seoul Summit, Kazakhstan’s President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev [outlined](#) a broader vision for linking South Korea, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Europe through an integrated transport and logistics network. He [pointed](#) to the possibility of connecting the Middle Corridor with the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), which could facilitate the movement of Korean cargo into Central Asia through the Kazakhstan–China logistics terminal at the Port of Lianyungang. Tokayev also [noted](#) that freight volumes along the Middle Corridor have increased fivefold over the past six years, while Kazakhstan plans to raise the corridor’s capacity to 20 million tons.

The Middle Corridor provides the physical foundation for connecting Central Asia with the South Caucasus and Europe. Stretching roughly 6,500 kilometers from China and Central Asia across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan and Georgia, and then onward through Türkiye or the Black Sea toward European markets, the multimodal route [is increasingly being viewed](#) as more than an alternative transportation artery. It is gradually [developing into](#) a wider platform for regional economic integration and supply-chain connectivity.

A Korea–Central Asia–Europe network built around the Middle Corridor would necessarily involve the South Caucasus as a key link between Central Asian economies and European markets. Goods moving westward from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan would cross the Caspian Sea and reach Azerbaijan’s [Port of Baku](#) before continuing through Georgia and Türkiye toward European destinations. This geography gives Azerbaijan a potentially important bridging role within any future Korea-linked connectivity network.

Baku [has sought to strengthen](#) this position through sustained investment in railway infrastructure, port and logistics facilities, Caspian shipping capacity, digital transport systems, and connectivity with Central Asian partners, as well as with Georgia and Türkiye. The Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, the Port of Baku, and Azerbaijan’s broader railway and road network have strengthened the country’s role within the Trans-Caspian transport system. At the same time, Azerbaijan’s expanding engagement with Central Asian states through the [Organization of Turkic States \(OTS\)](#) and the [C6 format](#), which brings together Azerbaijan and the five Central Asian republics, is contributing to closer economic, transport, and trade links across the Caspian.

The corridor’s economic potential is also becoming increasingly evident. A September 2026 World Bank assessment [estimates](#) that strategic investments and reforms could more than triple trade volumes along the Trans-Caspian route, significantly reduce travel times, increase GDP across participating economies, and create millions of additional jobs by 2040. Such projections [underline](#) the possibility that the Middle Corridor could evolve from a transportation route into a wider economic network connecting production, logistics, energy, and markets across Eurasia.

The digital dimension represents another key pillar of the emerging connectivity network. This creates a natural space for greater South Korean involvement. Seoul’s [strengths in](#) information technology, telecommunications, artificial intelligence, smart infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, and logistics management could complement Azerbaijan’s [efforts to modernize](#) the Middle Corridor. This could contribute to the development of a more sophisticated ecosystem encompassing

smart ports and railways, AI-based supply-chain management, automated customs systems, real-time cargo tracking, and integrated logistics platforms.

The connectivity architecture could also be reinforced by emerging east–west initiatives that extend beyond transport. The TRIPP framework, for example, [could provide](#) an additional route linking mainland Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan through southern Armenia. The proposed 43-kilometer connection [could complement](#) existing Middle Corridor infrastructure by facilitating the movement of goods, energy, and critical minerals, while creating an additional link connecting East and Central Asia through the Caspian and South Caucasus to Türkiye and European markets. Its potential significance also extends to energy and technology cooperation, as the corridor [is being planned](#) to integrate with regional electricity networks, digital infrastructure, and modern logistics systems.

Emerging Energy Dimension of Regional Connectivity

Transport, however, represents only one dimension of the emerging network. Energy is increasingly becoming a significant pillar, linking South Korea’s resource-security interests with the energy potential of Central Asia and Azerbaijan’s expanding role as a regional energy hub. Azerbaijan remains an important supplier of oil and natural gas to European markets through established infrastructure, including the Southern Gas Corridor, while also positioning itself as a platform for renewable-energy development and electricity interconnections.

The February 2026 memorandum of understanding between SOCAR and South Korea’s Samsung E&A [provides](#) a notable example of the deepening energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and South Korea. Beyond traditional energy ties, the agreement focuses on improving the efficiency of energy assets, strengthening local industrial capacity, developing regional supply chains, and advancing decarbonization. This [suggests](#) that bilateral cooperation is gradually moving toward a broader model centered on technology transfer, industrial development, and green-energy transition. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, can leverage engagement with Korean engineering and technology companies to strengthen domestic capabilities while integrating local firms into international value chains. At the same time, deeper cooperation with Azerbaijan provides South Korea with another avenue to diversify its energy partnerships and expand its economic presence across the wider Caspian region.

The strategic importance of this cooperation is reinforced by South Korea’s growing interest in the Caspian Basin as part of its broader energy-security strategy. South

Korea imports nearly all of its crude oil and natural gas, while approximately 70–80 percent of its crude oil imports [pass through](#) the Strait of Hormuz, leaving the country exposed to disruptions along this critical maritime chokepoint. Against this backdrop, Seoul [has increasingly turned toward](#) the Caspian Basin as an alternative energy source. In April 2026, South Korea reached an intergovernmental agreement to import approximately 18 million barrels of crude oil from Kazakhstan, reinforcing its efforts to diversify energy supplies. Azerbaijan [has also become](#) an important partner, with South Korean companies expanding their involvement in the country's upstream energy sector and energy infrastructure. As connectivity across the Caspian improves, the region could become an increasingly important pillar of South Korea's broader strategy to build a more diversified and resilient energy network across Eurasia.

At the same time, the Middle Corridor is acquiring an increasingly important green energy dimension through a range of emerging trans-Caspian and regional initiatives. In September 2026, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Energy [emphasized](#) plans to develop green-energy corridors connecting the energy potential of the Caspian region and Central Asia with Türkiye and Europe. Approximately 8 GW of renewable-energy capacity is planned for development by 2032, alongside growing attention to offshore wind, electricity interconnections, energy storage, and grid modernization. The Caspian Green Energy Corridor, involving Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, [envisages](#) linking their electricity systems through a subsea transmission cable across the Caspian Sea. This could create a pathway for renewable electricity generated in Central Asia to reach European markets while contributing to the development of a broader Black Sea electricity network.

South Korean companies [possess](#) substantial capabilities in renewable energy, batteries, grid technologies, engineering, construction, and advanced industrial systems. Central Asia, meanwhile, offers significant energy and mineral resources, while Azerbaijan provides infrastructure and geographical access connecting the Caspian region with Türkiye and Europe. Their respective strengths could facilitate cooperation not only in the movement of conventional energy and raw materials, but also in renewable-energy generation, electricity transmission, energy storage, green technologies, and industrial decarbonization.

Complementing this initiative, the TRIPP under the broader framework of Azerbaijan–Türkiye–Europe Green Energy Corridor, [could further strengthen](#) regional energy connectivity. Other large-scale initiatives, including the [Black Sea Green Energy Corridor](#) and the [Azerbaijan–Georgia–Türkiye–Bulgaria Green Energy Corridor](#), similarly seek to connect the wider Caspian region with European electricity markets and facilitate the integration of renewable energy through cross-border transmission infrastructure.

Ostensibly, these initiatives point to the emergence of an energy-connectivity architecture developing alongside the Middle Corridor's transport and digital networks. These developments create another potential layer of Korea–Central Asia–Caucasus–Europe cooperation. Greater South Korean participation could connect Seoul's technological and industrial capabilities with this expanding infrastructure, creating opportunities that extend from transport and logistics to electricity transmission, renewable energy, storage, and industrial decarbonization.

Conclusion

An emerging connectivity axis linking South Korea with Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe could expand Seoul's economic engagement across Eurasia and enhance Azerbaijan's importance as a gateway between Asian and European markets. The Middle Corridor provides the physical foundation for this network, while digitalization and emerging energy corridors are adding new layers of connectivity that extend beyond the movement of goods. These developments are bringing transport, energy, technology, and supply-chain interests into an increasingly interconnected framework.

The strategic opportunity for Baku lies in leveraging its geographical position and existing infrastructure to generate broader economic value. Rather than remaining primarily a transit country, Azerbaijan could strengthen its role as a logistics, digital, energy, and industrial platform connecting Central Asia with Türkiye and European markets. Deeper cooperation with South Korea could support this transition by bringing Korean expertise and investment in areas ranging from smart logistics and digital infrastructure to renewable energy, electricity transmission, advanced manufacturing, and industrial decarbonization. Meanwhile, Seoul could leverage Azerbaijan's position to connect its expanding engagement with Central Asia to the wider Caspian–South Caucasus–European space. The convergence of South Korea's interests in supply-chain diversification, energy security, critical minerals, and advanced technologies with Azerbaijan's connectivity and energy ambitions creates a basis for cooperation that extends well beyond traditional bilateral ties.

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