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Azerbaijan–ASEAN Relations: A Strategic Vision for Future Cooperation

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Executive Summary

Over the past decade, Azerbaijan’s engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has gradually increased within Baku’s broader framework to position itself as a key connector between Asia and Europe. This emerging partnership is rooted in the shared values and principles of ASEAN and Azerbaijan’s diplomacy—multilateralism, non-interference, and territorial integrity. For Azerbaijan, ASEAN represents both a rapidly developing economic hub and a group of countries sharing common cultural and historical ties that resist great power competition through establishing cooperative security. The recent milestones in Azerbaijan–ASEAN relations include Milli Majlis’ acceptance as an observer to the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) in 2022 and new cooperation with the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC). At the bilateral level, Azerbaijan has strengthened ties with Vietnam through a strategic partnership, while relations with Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore are expanding in various strategic fields.

By analyzing the development of Azerbaijan–ASEAN relations both on bilateral and institutional levels, this report presents four main pillars of future cooperation. First, Azerbaijan’s hydrocarbon and emerging renewables profile allows for cooperation in *energy and an inclusive green transition*, considering ASEAN’s growing energy demand. Second, linking ASEAN supply chains with the Middle Corridor and the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) presents opportunities for partnership in *connectivity and trade logistics*. Third, the experience of leading ASEAN members such as Singapore and Indonesia in *digital governance and*

technological innovation can be helpful in complementing Azerbaijan's e-governance reforms.

Lastly, initiating collaborative projects in *education, culture, and tourism* fields is vital to strengthening people-to-people connections between Azerbaijan and ASEAN. Based on these pillars, the report suggests a set of brief policy recommendations, such as institutionalizing dialogue, prioritizing a small number of key projects, and promoting people-centered cooperation.

Introduction

Although Azerbaijan has long pursued a multi-vector and outward-looking foreign policy, the post-2020 environment has led to significant steps in this direction with the restoration of territorial integrity. With the resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, Azerbaijan can leverage its position as a key transit hub connecting Asia with Europe by investing in logistics infrastructure and pursuing proactive diplomacy in the broader region. Within this context, Baku has prioritized the diversification of its foreign policy partnerships with Asian countries, including ASEAN Member States (AMS).

ASEAN is the world's fastest-growing region, with its extensive history and strategic importance for Southeast Asia's stability and economic development. Through foundational documents such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), and the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (SEANWFZ), ASEAN has promoted the principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and the peaceful settlement of disputes known as the "ASEAN Way." For Azerbaijan, these normative foundations of AMS play a critical role in deepening bilateral and multilateral relations in this region. As a state historically

situated in a complex security environment, Azerbaijan has emphasized similar principles to ASEAN in its diplomatic strategy. During its leadership of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), Baku continued the promotion of foreign policy grounded in multilateralism, South-South cooperation, and regional peace-building. Thus, Azerbaijan approaches ASEAN as a like-minded regional organization offering valuable cooperation opportunities with similar values and practices. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan–ASEAN relations have remained comparatively less developed than Baku’s ties with China and Central Asian countries; the economic cooperation and mutual awareness among policymakers, academia, and business communities are considered limited. Geographical distance and the limited study of potential areas of cooperation are key barriers to deeper engagement between Azerbaijan and ASEAN.

Thus, this report aims to address the existing gaps by providing an analysis of the historical evolution, current state, and future prospects of Azerbaijan–ASEAN relations. First, it examines ASEAN’s normative foundations that also coincide with Azerbaijan’s diplomatic principles, providing a common ground for the development of cooperative relations. It then provides an overview of Azerbaijan’s relations with ASEAN and several individual member states. The report continues with exploring the strategic areas for the future cooperation between ASEAN and Azerbaijan in four key sectors: energy and green transition, connectivity and trade logistics, digital governance and technological innovation, and people-centered links in education, culture, and tourism. It concludes with key practical recommendations for developing more institutionalized and mutually beneficial relations between Azerbaijan and ASEAN that could contribute to enhanced Eurasian connectivity and stability.

Historical Background and Evolution of Azerbaijan–ASEAN Relations

ASEAN was formally established on 8 August 1967, in a politically sensitive environment with intra-regional conflicts, post-colonial transition, and escalation of the Vietnam War. The signing of the ASEAN Declaration by the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand laid the foundation of the organization that aimed to advance regional peace, stability, and cooperation in Southeast Asia through adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter. The Association remained open to all states in the Southeast Asian region that shared its principles and objectives. With the settlement of Cambodia's civil war, the end of the Cold War, and the normalization of U.S.-Vietnam relations, ASEAN membership doubled by the end of the 1990s¹; Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia joined the organization, completing what is today the ten Member States of ASEAN.²

The founding members of ASEAN differed considerably in terms of their geographical size, ethnic composition, cultural orientation, colonial legacies, and political structures; as newly independent post-colonial states, they had limited institutional capacity and experienced domestic insecurity, which spilled over to disrupt the security of the neighboring countries. These disparities and challenges necessitated the creation of a regional identity that is based on interaction and cooperation rather than common history or culture. Therefore, ASEAN's founders created a set of shared norms and principles for intra-regional relations, prioritizing respect for sovereignty,

¹ Maizland, L., Albert, E., Hong, L., & Galina, C. (2023). *What Is ASEAN?* Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-asean>

² Hwang, K. (2019). International Journal of African and Asian Studies. *International Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 58. <https://doi.org/10.7176/jaas>

territorial integrity, and non-interference in internal affairs, the principles that united the interests of countries that newly gained independence.³

Since its founding, ASEAN has significantly contributed to the regional stability and the prevention of large-scale conflicts among its member states.⁴ The signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 1976 institutionalized the principles of mutual respect, non-interference, settlement of disputes by peaceful means, and abandonment of the use of force.⁵ Moreover, in 1971, the member states adopted the ZOPFAN, which aimed to preserve regional autonomy and limit interventions by foreign powers by providing 'regional solutions to regional problems'.⁶ This was further reinforced through the SEANWFZ signed in 1995, which is committed to preserving the region free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.⁷

The defining feature of ASEAN's approach to regional cooperation was the development of shared values and norms known as the 'ASEAN Way'. It referred to a unique mode of interaction among members characterized by 'informality, consensus, non-adversarial bargaining, and a preference for non-legalistic and non-binding approaches to problem solving'.⁸ Based on musyawarah (consultation) and

³ ASEAN. (2025). *The Founding of ASEAN*. ASEAN. <https://asean.org/the-founding-of-asean/>

⁴ Acharya, A. (2001). Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia. *International Journal*, 56(3), 536. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40203586>

⁵ ASEAN. (n.d.-a). *Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ)*. Asean.org. <https://asean.org/our-communities/asean-political-security-community/peaceful-secure-and-stable-region/southeast-asia-nuclear-weapon-free-zone-seanwzf/>

⁶ Hwang, K. (2019). International Journal of African and Asian Studies. *International Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 58. <https://doi.org/10.7176/jaas>

⁷ ASEAN. (n.d.-a). *Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ)*. Asean.org. <https://asean.org/our-communities/asean-political-security-community/peaceful-secure-and-stable-region/southeast-asia-nuclear-weapon-free-zone-seanwzf/>

⁸ Acharya 1997, as mentioned in Acharya 2018.

mufakat (consensus), the 'ASEAN Way' differs from the Western model of regionalism in its emphasis on informality and organizational minimalism⁹, creating a sense of regional identity, and promoting personal obligation and familiarity between the national leaders.¹⁰ One of the major turning points in ASEAN's evolution was the Cambodia conflict that challenged its norms and identity, compelling it to rely on the intervention of the U.S. and China. However, this conflict reinforced ASEAN's capacity to manage regional security challenges and strengthened the unity of member states.¹¹ Over the years, the ASEAN Way has evolved into a concept that represents pluralistic and inclusive regional cooperation without the hegemonic interferences in Southeast Asia.

Growing Engagement of Azerbaijan with ASEAN

In recent years, Azerbaijan has shown increasing interest in engaging with ASEAN and its member states, which aligns with its foreign policy objectives emphasizing multilateralism and connectivity across Eurasia. Meanwhile, the ASEAN Charter also invites its members to establish mutually beneficial relations with external countries and organizations through formal partnership arrangements such as Dialogue Partner, Sectoral Dialogue Partner, and Development Partner.¹² Although outside of the Southeast Asian region, Azerbaijan has actively pursued the expansion of cooperation with ASEAN, recognizing the region's dynamic growth. For instance, in December 2022, Azerbaijan's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs met with the ASEAN Secretary General during his visit to Indonesia, where the discussions were organized around the enhancement of practical cooperation in various fields.¹³ In the same

⁹ Acharya, 2001

¹⁰ Narine 2002 as mentioned in in Hwang 2019.

¹¹ Hwang, 2019

¹² ASEAN, 2021

¹³ MFA, 2022

year, Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan was admitted as an observer member of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) with the potential to contribute to the organization's work.¹⁴ During the 46th AIPA General Assembly, Speaker Sahiba Gafarova reaffirmed Azerbaijan's commitment to developing inter-parliamentary cooperation with ASEAN and highlighted the Memorandum of Cooperation signed between NAM and ASEAN under Azerbaijan's chairmanship.¹⁵ In parallel, Azerbaijan's collaboration with ASEAN has extended to the post-conflict recovery area; during his visit to Cambodia in July of 2025, Azerbaijan's Deputy Foreign Minister met with the officials of ARMAC to discuss the exchange of best practices in mine clearance operations as a follow-up to ANAMA's previous research visit to ARMAC.¹⁶

As a result of its multi-vector policy, Azerbaijan has established bilateral diplomatic relations with the majority of ASEAN member states since restoring its independence in the early 1990s. Over the past three decades, these relations have evolved from diplomatic exchanges to strategic partnerships in various fields such as energy, defense, science, trade, and culture. Beyond bilateral relations, Azerbaijan has also engaged with ASEAN member states through multilateral organizations, such as the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). These platforms have provided opportunities for expanding South-South cooperation, showing the convergence between Azerbaijan's foreign policy priorities and ASEAN's diplomacy of inclusivity and regional stability. Particularly during its chairmanship of NAM from 2019 to 2023, Azerbaijan deepened its relations with ASEAN member states. The officials of the several ASEAN member states visited the 18th NAM Summit held in Baku, showing their commitment to strengthening

¹⁴ APA, 2022

¹⁵ APA, 2025

¹⁶ Asgerli, A. (2025, July 23). *Azerbaijan strengthens cooperation with ASEAN in mine action*. Report.az. <https://report.az/en/foreign-politics/azerbaijan-strengthens-cooperation-with-asean-in-mine-action>

multilateralism, adhering to the UN Charter, and promoting mutual cooperation.¹⁷ During the ministerial meeting organized within the Summit's framework, Vietnam's Deputy Foreign Minister reaffirmed the dedication of ASEAN member states to building a peaceful and prosperous Southeast Asia and called NAM members to support ASEAN's initiatives in the region.¹⁸

Strategically, ASEAN and Azerbaijan maintain common normative principles in their foreign policy approach. Both emphasize the protection of territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, and peaceful settlement of conflicts. In this context, strengthening relations with ASEAN aligns with Azerbaijan's promotion of multilateralism and regional development. Moreover, Azerbaijan's focus on advancing Eurasian connectivity aligns with ASEAN's commitment to achieving regional integration under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC 2025).¹⁹ Thus, through the development of sustained cooperation, both could benefit from enhanced inter-regional connectivity, diversified trade routes, and shared experience in regional development.

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand. (2019). [https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/110937-vice-minister-for-foreign-affairs-of-the-kingdom-of-thailand-attended-the-xviii-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-the-non-aligned-movement-\(18th-nam-summit\)-in-baku,-republic-of-azerbaijan?cate=5d5bcb4e15e39c306000683e](https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/110937-vice-minister-for-foreign-affairs-of-the-kingdom-of-thailand-attended-the-xviii-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-the-non-aligned-movement-(18th-nam-summit)-in-baku,-republic-of-azerbaijan?cate=5d5bcb4e15e39c306000683e)

¹⁸ Vietnam+ (Vietnam Plus). (2019, October 24). *Vietnam attends Non-Aligned Movement ministerial meeting*. Vietnam+ (Vietnam Plus). <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/vietnam-attends-non-aligned-movement-ministerial-meeting-post162557.vnp>

¹⁹ ASEAN Secretariat . (2016). *MASTER PLAN ON ASEAN CONNECTIVITY 2025*. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/8_compressed.pdf

Azerbaijan's Bilateral Cooperation with ASEAN Member States

Since restoring its independence, Azerbaijan has established formal diplomatic relations with ASEAN member countries, developing bilateral cooperation particularly with Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Azerbaijan's relations with these countries have become an important part of its broader strategy to strengthen its presence and engagement in Asia.

Azerbaijan – Indonesia: The bilateral relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan are characterized by growing economic links and cultural-educational partnerships. The official diplomatic ties were established in 1992, and Azerbaijan opened its first Southeast Asian embassy in Jakarta in 2006.²⁰ Since then, the countries have maintained regular high-level exchanges through official visits and inter-parliamentary relations.²¹ On the economic side, the trade turnover between the two countries has witnessed an upward trend; last year, it amounted to a total of 255.6 million USD, significantly larger than with other ASEAN countries. Moreover, in recent years, the bilateral relations have expanded to cooperation at the institutional and governance level. Notably, Indonesia's Citizen Service Center has adopted the ASAN service model after several years of training for Indonesian officials provided by ASAN.²² This collaboration demonstrates that Azerbaijan's innovative public service provides an opportunity for knowledge and technology transfer to ASEAN countries. This opportunity is further expanded through the increasing number of Indonesian students who can study in Azerbaijan with the support of the Heydar Aliyev International Education Grant Program.²³

²⁰ MFA. (2020). *The Republic of Indonesia*. Mfa.gov.az; Xarici işlər Nazirliyi | XİN. <https://www.mfa.gov.az/index.php/en/category/asia-and-oceania/indonesia>

²¹ MFA. (2020)

²² <https://asan.gov.az/en/media/press-releases/asan-xidmet-modeli-en-boeyuek-mueselman-oelkesine-ixrac-edilib>

²³ <https://studyinazerbaijan.edu.az/financial-support>

Azerbaijan – Malaysia: Established in 1993²⁴, diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Azerbaijan have evolved into a partnership based on mutual respect, Islamic values, active inter-parliamentary dialogue, and cooperation through multilateral organizations such as NAM and OIC. The Joint Declaration on Friendship and Partnership, signed between the two countries in 2014, serves as a foundation for expanding inter-state collaboration in new areas such as investment, trade, and humanitarian fields.²⁵ During the Second Karabakh War, Malaysia consistently supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.²⁶ Most recently, in April 2025, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Datuk Mohamad Alamin visited Baku within the framework of the Second Malaysia–Azerbaijan Bilateral Political Consultations, symbolizing a significant step for the development of mutual cooperation.²⁷ During his visit, the Deputy Minister met with several Azerbaijani government officials, discussing the development of a roadmap to guide the implementation of future initiatives.²⁸ The future prospects for economic engagement between the two countries are also steadily growing. In fact, in 2024, trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Malaysia has increased by 60% compared to the previous year,²⁹ showing the potential for future collaboration in green technology, renewables, and digital transformation. In parallel, both sides have agreed to strengthen people-to-people connectivity, with Malaysia's introduction of

²⁴ MFA. (2021). *BILATERAL RELATIONS*. Mfa.gov.az. <https://kualalumpur.mfa.gov.az/en/content/3/bilateral-relations>

²⁵ DOST. (2024). *The ties between Azerbaijan and Malaysia are constantly growing | DOST Agentliyi*. Dost.gov.az. <https://dost.gov.az/en/news/1089>

²⁶ Rogers, 2023

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia . (2025). *Outcomes of the working visit of the deputy minister of foreign affairs to the republic of Azerbaijan*

²⁸ Rogers, 2023

²⁹ DOST, 2024

visa-free travel for Azerbaijanis³⁰ and a 36% increase in Malaysian visitors to Azerbaijan in 2025.³¹

Azerbaijan – Singapore: The diplomatic relations between these two countries were established in 1994, and the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, visited the Republic of Singapore in 2012.³² More recently, during the 77th UN General Assembly in New York, a meeting between the ministers of foreign affairs of Azerbaijan and Singapore was organized, where they discussed the potential to develop the Azerbaijan-Singapore Economic Cooperation Commission to advance mutual business relations.³³ Singapore–Azerbaijan relations have the potential to develop into a promising partnership, especially in the fields of digital governance and technological innovation. In 2021, a significant step was taken in the sphere of technological cooperation as Azerbaijan’s space agency, Azercosmos, and Singapore’s Infinite Orbits PTE Ltd formalized a Strategic Partnership Agreement. It focused on the development of space industry infrastructure in Azerbaijan.³⁴ Moreover, Singapore could be a valuable partner for Azerbaijan in further developing the e-governance and public delivery systems, such as ASAN, particularly considering Singapore’s experience with the Smart Nation Initiative.³⁵ Two countries also share

³⁰ DOST, 2024

³¹Hasanly, S. (2025, October 21). *Minister: Malaysia-Azerbaijan relations developing on upward trend*. Report.az. <https://report.az/en/foreign-politics/minister-malaysia-azerbaijan-relations-developing-on-upward-trend>

³² MFA. (2020)

³³ APA. (2022a). *Ceyhun Bayramov Sinqapurun xarici işlər naziri ilə görüşüb*. Apa.az. <https://apa.az/az/foreign-policy/ceyhun-bayramov-sinqapurun-xarici-isler-naziri-ile-gorusub-723890>

³⁴ Azərbaycan Respublikasının Kosmik Agentliyi - Azercosmos. (2021). *Azercosmos İLLİK HESABAT*. https://api.azercosmos.az/files/annual_report_2021.pdf

³⁵ Gülümcanlı, Ə. (2023). Sinqapur-Azərbaycan münasibətlərinin inkişaf dinamikası və perspektivləri. *Tarix, Etnoqrafiya və Siyasi Elmlər*. <https://dergipark.anas.az/index.php/es/article/view/972/955>

a significant role in Eurasian connectivity, with Singapore remaining the key financial and digital hub for the Belt and Road Initiative, while Azerbaijan serves as a key transit hub for the Middle Corridor; in this context, they could become valuable partners in promoting sustainable and innovative regional development.

Azerbaijan – Vietnam: Azerbaijan and Vietnam relations exemplify the evolution of historical friendship into a multidimensional partnership bridging the South Caucasus with the ASEAN region. While formal diplomatic relations with Vietnam were established in 1992,³⁶ the visit of Vietnamese party leader Tô Lâm to Azerbaijan in May 2025 elevated the relations to a strategic partnership.³⁷ The two sides signed a joint declaration to form a strategic alliance across various sectors such as energy, defense, and culture, described as a ‘very serious political document’ by President Aliyev.³⁸ Particularly in the energy sector, the State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) and PetroVietNam signed an agreement for joint exploration and service provision; although both governments emphasized the importance of diversifying trade portfolio beyond crude oil in the future. One of such areas could be the development of renewable energy partnerships, with Vietnamese companies investing in wind or solar energy projects in Azerbaijan.³⁹ The recently signed renewable energy partnership with ROX Group exemplifies the growing interest in this field.⁴⁰

³⁶ MFA. (n.d.). *Azerbaijan – Vietnam relations*. Mfa.gov.az. Retrieved November 19, 2025, from <https://hanoi.mfa.gov.az/en/content/48/azerbaijan-vietnam-relations>

³⁷ Guliyev, V. (2025). *Azerbaijan and Vietnam Forge Strategic Ties*. Jamestown.org. <https://jamestown.org/azerbaijan-and-vietnam-forge-strategic-ties/>

³⁸ Guliyev, 2025

³⁹ Guliyev, 2025

⁴⁰ Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan . (2025, July 17). *The third session of the Azerbaijan-Vietnam Intergovernmental Commission was held in Hanoi* [Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan. Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan. <https://minenergy.gov.az/en/xeberler-arxivi/00583>

Another important area for joint cooperation is in the trade and logistics sector, where Azerbaijan's strategic location enables it to facilitate Vietnamese exports to the European market, while also using Vietnam to export its own goods to the ASEAN region.⁴¹ During the third session of the Azerbaijan-Vietnam Intergovernmental Commission held in July of 2025, these commitments were operationalized through the adoption of an Action Plan for 2025-2027 encompassing 58 measures across 17 priority areas.⁴² The relations have also extended to cultural and humanitarian spheres with the organization of the 3rd "Vietnam Days" in Baku in July 2025.⁴³

The future trajectory of Azerbaijan and Vietnam relations promises the transformation of a newly established strategic partnership into a long-term and multidimensional framework. Based on the 2025 joint declaration and the Action Plan for 2025-2027, both sides are expected to move to concrete implementation of the joint and sector-specific initiatives in key sectors such as trade, energy, and digital transformation. Moreover, the tourism and people-to-people relations are expected to increase with plans to commence direct cargo and passenger flights to Vietnam.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Guliyev, 2025

⁴² Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan . (2025, July 17).

⁴³ MFA. (2025). *The official opening ceremony of "Vietnam Days" was held in Baku.* Mfa.gov.az. <https://hanoi.mfa.gov.az/en/news/3461/the-official-opening-ceremony-of-vietnam-days-was-held-in-baku>

⁴⁴ Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan . (2025, July 17).

Strategic Rationale and Prospective Areas for Future Relations

Energy Cooperation: Energy cooperation is one of the most promising areas for strengthening future relations between Azerbaijan and ASEAN. According to the estimates by the International Energy Agency, the demand for energy in Southeast Asian countries is expected to rapidly increase as it transforms into one of the world's fastest-growing regions.⁴⁵ However, the oil production is decreasing, with a net deficit in energy trade expected to be around US\$300 billion, and oil import dependency increasing to 78% by 2040.⁴⁶ Consequently, the diversification of energy import sources and efficient transition to renewables are important steps for sustaining the development of Southeast Asia. The ASEAN Plan for Action for Energy Security 2021-2025 aims to enhance energy security in the region, which includes expanding LNG connectivity, developing carbon capture technologies, achieving renewable energy targets, and establishing new energy partnerships.⁴⁷

Notably, Azerbaijan's current energy profile aligns with ASEAN's recent energy strategy priorities. With its long history and expertise in hydrocarbon exploration, pipeline management, and energy governance, Azerbaijan can become a valuable partner for Southeast Asian countries in maintaining the region's energy security. Azerbaijan's current energy strategy is centered around expanding energy capacity, increasing the share of renewables, and diversifying export markets.⁴⁸ It remains

⁴⁵ ASEAN Energy Database System. (n.d.). *ASEAN's insatiable demand for energy*. ASEAN Centre for Energy. Retrieved April 2, 2024, from <https://aseanenergy.org/news-clipping/aseans-insatiable-demand-for-energy/>

⁴⁶ ASEAN Energy Database System. (n.d.).

⁴⁷ ASEAN Centre for Energy. (2025). *ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) 2016-2025 Phase II: 2021-2025*. Asean.org. <https://asean.org/book/asean-plan-of-action-for-energy-cooperation-apaec-2016-2025-phase-ii-2021-2025/>

⁴⁸ Hajiyev, S. (2025). *Azerbaijan strengthens energy diplomacy and green transition at Baku Energy Week 2025*. Aircenter.az. <https://aircenter.az/en/single/azerbaijan-strengthens-energy-diplomacy-and-green-transition-at-baku-energy-week-2025-1822>

an important gas supplier for the Southern Gas Corridor and contributes to the EU's energy diversification plans as outlined in REPowerEU. During the recent Baku Energy Week 2025, several strategic partnership agreements were signed with leading international energy companies, reflecting Azerbaijan's commitment to expand hydrocarbon cooperation.⁴⁹ In parallel, it aims to become a regional green energy hub, particularly considering the favorable conditions for generating solar, wind, and hydropower. As a COP29 president, Azerbaijan has positioned itself as a global advocate for sustainable energy transition, promoting climate finance and cross-regional energy connectivity. One of the key pillars of its renewables agenda is the Black Sea Submarine Cable that will facilitate the transition of renewable energy from the Caspian region to Europe.⁵⁰

In this context, Azerbaijan and ASEAN have multiple avenues for energy cooperation. First, the knowledge and policy exchange can be practiced between the ASEAN Centre for Energy and the Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan regarding the energy transition policies and institutional cooperation mechanisms. Second, ASEAN's experience in integrating regional energy markets can inform Azerbaijan in its efforts to develop energy trade within the Caspian and Central Asian regions. In the meantime, Baku's experience in pipeline and transit management could contribute to ASEAN's ambition to advance LNG connectivity and diversification. Third, Azerbaijan's growing role as an energy transit hub could foster the trilateral initiative linking Southeast Asia to the South Caucasus and Europe, contributing to ASEAN's energy security strategy. As hydrocarbon producers aiming to achieve an inclusive green energy transition, Azerbaijan and Southeast Asian countries can elevate their bilateral relations through the practice of climate diplomacy, developing joint initiatives in clean energy research, technology exchange, and climate finance.

⁴⁹ Hajiyev, S. (2025)

⁵⁰ Hajiyev, S. (2025)

Connectivity and Trade Logistics: The evolving Eurasian logistics network positions connectivity and trade as central areas for future cooperation between Azerbaijan and ASEAN. Azerbaijan’s strategic location combined with its political security has played a vital role in the realization of the Middle Corridor , a key transit route connecting Asia with Europe. It has advanced the Middle Corridor through the substantial investments in port and shipyard facilities, improved the railway system, and modernized logistics infrastructure across the country. The development of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, Baku International Sea Trade Port, and the Caspian cargo fleet all indicate Azerbaijan’s commitment to advancing its position in Eurasian connectivity. Thus, as of 2025, the cargo shipments along the Middle Corridor have increased by 90 percent, and the transit time has substantially reduced.⁵¹

Moreover, the transformation of the Zangezur corridor into the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) after the Washington Summit provides significant opportunities for enhancing the regional interconnectivity. Expected to open by end-2028, the TRIPP will handle around 15 million tons of freight flows and significantly decrease transit time between Asia and Europe. Consequently, Azerbaijan will act as a central Caspian gateway where traffic flow from Asia and the Persian Gulf converges before continuing westward.⁵² Therefore, closer cooperation with Azerbaijan on connectivity and logistics fields offers ASEAN access to diversified trade routes and strengthened supply chain resilience.

In the meantime, the trade and connectivity cooperation with ASEAN provides Azerbaijan access to the world’s fastest-growing regions; with its GDP reaching

⁵¹ President.az. (2025). *To the participants of the 6th Caspian Business Forum: “Connectivity, Finance, and Energy along the Middle Corridor”» Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic.* President.az. <https://president.az/en/articles/view/70168>

⁵² AIR Center. (2025). *OCTOBER-2025.* https://aircenter.az/uploads/RUKv8Vf_Sqz6.pdf

US\$3.8 trillion in 2023, it has become the fifth-largest economy in the world.⁵³ Similar to Azerbaijan, ASEAN is dedicated to enhancing regional integration and economic growth through the five strategic areas as outlined in MPAC 2025. These include the development of sustainable infrastructure, digital innovation, seamless logistics, regulatory excellence, and people mobility.⁵⁴ Within these efforts, one notable initiative is the ASEAN Single Window, which offers an innovative model for improving trade efficiency in the region through enabling the electronic exchange of trade-related documents among ASEAN member states.⁵⁵ Such an initiative could be adapted for the development of TRIPP as well, particularly given the corridor's emphasis on digitalizing trade processes and ensuring seamless cross-border movement.

Building on these shared ambitions, Azerbaijan and ASEAN can develop a more structured partnership in the field of connectivity and trade logistics. They can exchange best practices in modernization of transport systems, digital trade, and customs integration that can be applied to strengthen the cross-border connectivity systems in Eurasia. Within this broader framework, bilateral partnerships with leading Southeast Asian countries can play a vital role. For instance, as a global leader in smart logistics, Singapore could offer Azerbaijan its experience in port digitalization to support the modernization of Baku International Sea Trade Port. Likewise, the experience of Singapore and Malaysia in the operation of Johor–Singapore Special Economic Zone can inform the governance, customs facilitation, and efficient supply-

⁵³ ASEAN Secretariat. (2024). *ASEAN Key Figures 2024*. https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/AKF2024.v1.pdf?utm_source

⁵⁴ Banomyong, R. (n.d.). *Post-2025 ASEAN Connectivity: Challenges and Opportunities*. https://eria-old.stagingserver.id/uploads/16_Chapter_16.pdf

⁵⁵ ASEAN. (n.d.-a). *ASEAN single window*. Asean.org. <https://asean.org/our-communities/economic-community/asean-single-window/>

chain management of Alat Free Economic Zone.⁵⁶ By establishing expert working groups and promoting the dialogue between relevant ministries, Azerbaijan and ASEAN member states can develop a mutually beneficial connectivity partnership that reinforces Eurasian connectivity.

Digital Governance and Technological Innovation: Cooperation in digital governance and technological innovation represents a strategic value as both Azerbaijan and ASEAN have placed digital transportation at the forefront of their national and regional agendas. In Azerbaijan, the establishment of the Innovation and Digital Development Agency in 2021, which is responsible for promoting e-government services and supporting technological innovation, laid the foundation of the country's digital future. This year, President Aliyev signed a decree that aims to strengthen the digitalization of the country to modernize government operations, enhance citizen services, and reinforce the digital economy.⁵⁷ This vision is reflected in the recent achievement of Azerbaijan's advancement to the "Very High EGDI" category in the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI) ranking.⁵⁸ Platforms such as MyGov, SIMA, and ASAN Login that provide access to the essential digital services are a few examples of Azerbaijan's commitment to building a user-friendly e-governance system.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ EDB Singapore . (2025). *What you need to know about the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ)*. Edb.gov.sg. <https://www.edb.gov.sg/en/johor-singapore-special-economic-zone.html?utm>

⁵⁷ IDDA. (2025). *Rəqəmsallaşma*. Idda.az. <https://idda.az/en/digitalization>

⁵⁸ Center for Analysis of Economic Reforms and Communication . (2024). *Azerbaijan has been promoted to the "Very High EGDI" category for the development of electronic government*. Ereforms.gov.az. <https://ereforms.gov.az/en/media/xeberler/azerbaycan-elektron-hokumetin-inkisafi-uzre-cox-yuksek-egdi-kateqoriyasina-yukselib-1148>

⁵⁹ Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan . (2021). *SiMA – new generation digital signature*. Mincom.gov.az. <https://mincom.gov.az/en/projects/sima-new-generation-digital-signature>

Similarly, ASEAN members are committed to establishing an advanced digital-governance ecosystem. At the regional level, the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 guides the development of transformative services and technologies in the region to build a digital community and economic bloc.⁶⁰ It focuses on several aspects of digital transformation, such as promoting digital literacy, enabling e-governance, and developing a regional market driven by innovative services.⁶¹ In addition to this broader agenda, the adoption of the ASEAN Digital Integration Framework in 2019 demonstrates the dedication of AMS to integrate digital technologies in its governance and economic strategies. It focuses on enhancing trade, competitiveness, and inclusiveness in the region through the use of modern digital tools.⁶²

Singapore is one of the ASEAN member states that leads the global rankings in smart governance, AI regulation, and digital innovation. Around 99% of all government services have been digitalized through mechanisms such as e-invoicing, e-payments, and Singpass.⁶³ The latter provides access to over 2700 services across 800 government agencies and businesses, serving as a safe digital identity for Singaporeans. It is also one of the first countries to implement an AI Governance Framework, including guidelines for generative AI, to promote ethical and responsible use of AI in public services.⁶⁴ These experiences are highly relevant for

⁶⁰ ASEAN. (2025a). ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025. In <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ASEAN-Digital-Masterplan-2025.pdf>.

⁶¹ ASEAN. (2025a). ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025. In <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ASEAN-Digital-Masterplan-2025.pdf>.

⁶² ASEAN. (2020). ASEAN Digital Integration Framework. In <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ASEAN-Digital-Integration-Framework.pdf>.

⁶³ Ministry of Digital Development and Information. (2024). *Smart Nation 2.0 A Thriving Digital Future for All*. <https://file.go.gov.sg/smarnation2-report.pdf>

⁶⁴ Ministry of Digital Development and Information. (2024). *Smart Nation 2.0 A Thriving Digital Future for All*. <https://file.go.gov.sg/smarnation2-report.pdf>

Azerbaijan as it digitizes the administrative procedures and develops the national Artificial Intelligence Strategy.⁶⁵ Another notable example is from Indonesia, where all of the business permits and approvals are consolidated under a single digital licensing system named Indonesia's Online Single Submission. This platform significantly reduces the administrative processing times for starting a business.⁶⁶ Azerbaijan can apply a similar unified automatic licensing system to facilitate the business investment procedures. The cooperation between Azerbaijan and ASEAN member states in the field of digital governance and technological innovation could include capacity-building programmes, expert exchanges, and public-private partnerships between relevant institutions. Such joint initiatives offer both sides an opportunity to enhance and accelerate the digital transformation.

Education, Culture and Tourism: Educational cooperation is a gradually expanding dimension of Azerbaijan-ASEAN relations. For students from Southeast Asian countries, the recently launched Heydar Aliyev International Education Grant Program offers the opportunity to apply for higher education in Azerbaijan.⁶⁷ In addition to this scholarship framework, bilateral academic cooperation has also expanded in recent years. This year, an MoU was signed between the representatives of Baku State University and Indonesia's Bina Nusantara University on expanding collaboration in scientific research, academic mobility programs, and cultural

⁶⁵ Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan . (2021a). *Azerbaijan Begins Adopting National Standards for AI Implementation*. Mincom.gov.az. <https://mincom.gov.az/en/media-en/news/azerbaijan-begins-adopting-national-standards-for-ai-implementation>

⁶⁶ Business, C., & Satriyo Untoro. (2024, August 21). *5 Facts of Online Single Submission System in Indonesia (OSS)*. InCorp Indonesia. <https://www.cekindo.com/blog/online-single-submission-system-business-indonesia#0-overview-of-online-single-submission-system-oss-and-nib>

⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, & Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2025). *Call for "Heydar Aliyev International Education Grant Program" 2025-2026 Academic Year*.

exchange.⁶⁸ Another example is Azerbaijan’s long-term partnership with Singapore’s “Alston Publishing House” to provide expert recommendations and training for Azerbaijani specialists to improve curricula and teaching materials on natural sciences for primary education.⁶⁹ Additional opportunities also emerge through the multilateral frameworks, such as CICA. By participating in the CICA Think Tank Forum—which held its 13th session in Baku—ASEAN member states within CICA can engage in joint research programmes, expert exchanges, and other collaborative policy initiatives.

In addition to educational cooperation, tourism is a complementary channel for people-to-people diplomacy between Azerbaijan and ASEAN. Malaysia, for instance, introduces visa-free travel for Azerbaijani citizens, and Thailand offers an electronic visa application, which facilitates the visa obtaining process. Recently, the representatives of the Azerbaijan Tourism Board participated in the PATA Travel Mart 2025 exhibition held in Bangkok to demonstrate Azerbaijan’s tourism potential and explore potential collaboration opportunities.⁷⁰ With increasing interest in Southeast Asian destinations among Azerbaijanis, both sides could benefit from initiating joint tourism campaigns and opening direct flights to strengthen mobility.

⁶⁸ AZERTAC. (2025). *Baku State University, Indonesia’s Bina Nusantara University sign MoU on cooperation*. https://Azertag.az/En/Xeber/Baku_state_university_indonesias_bina_nusantra_university_sign_mou_on_cooperation-3842635.
https://azertag.az/en/xeber/baku_state_university_indonesias_bina_nusantra_university_sign_mou_on_cooperation-3842635

⁶⁹ Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan . (2015). *Cooperation with a Singaporean company to improve textbooks Ministry of Science and Education Republic of Azerbaijan*. Ministry of Science and Education Republic of Azerbaijan. <https://edu.gov.az/en/news-and-updates/19407>

⁷⁰ State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan . (2025). *Azerbaijan showcases tourism potential in Thailand*. Tourism.gov.az. https://tourism.gov.az/en/news/azerbaijan-showcases-tourism-potential-in-thailand?utm_source

Conclusion & Policy Recommendations

Although at an early stage of their development, Azerbaijan–ASEAN relations are promising in terms of developing collaboration in connectivity, energy security, digital governance, and multilateral diplomacy. The past decade has demonstrated the steady expansion of political dialogue, economic cooperation, and people-to-people exchange with ASEAN member states. Their principles of sovereign equality, non-interference, and consensus-based decision making provide a basis for mutual relations with Azerbaijan, while the region’s rapid economic growth and key position in Asian connectivity offer new strategic opportunities for Baku's eastward diplomacy. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan's increasing importance as a transit hub can complement ASEAN's energy diversification and supply-chain strategies. Both sides will further benefit from deeper knowledge exchange in areas such as digital governance, tourism development, and other emerging sectors.

Moving forward, a key challenge is to transform this broad political goodwill into specific joint initiatives. The following recommendations provide practical steps toward building a mutually beneficial and durable Azerbaijan–ASEAN partnership:

Develop a structured Azerbaijan–ASEAN cooperation framework: Both sides are encouraged to move from ad hoc contacts to a focused engagement framework. This could involve identifying key partners within ASEAN, structuring cooperation around strategic areas as outlined in this report, and establishing measurable objectives and an implementation time-frame.

Strengthen energy and climate cooperation based on existing partnerships: Drawing from Azerbaijan’s COP29 presidency and its energy partnerships with Southeast Asian countries, organizing regular technical dialogues between the Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan and the ASEAN Centre for Energy can foster the

development of joint green projects and facilitate the implementation of existing agreements, such as the renewable energy partnership with Vietnam.

Foster connectivity and cooperation in the Middle Corridor and TRIPP:

Considering Azerbaijan's extensive investments in the logistics infrastructure, as well as ASEAN's experience with the innovative customs mechanisms such as ASEAN Single Window, both sides could launch expert working groups to explore how electronic document exchange and customs digitalization might be incorporated into the future operation of TRIPP.

Expand digital governance and technological innovation partnerships:

Cooperation in this field has already shown tangible results, with Azerbaijan's ASAN service informing Indonesia's Citizen Service Center. Future collaboration can be based on Singapore's Smart Nation tools guiding digital transformation in Azerbaijan. Such an initiative would not only modernize public service delivery but also create new joint opportunities for tech companies, start-ups, and research institutions in Azerbaijan and Southeast Asia.

Promote people-centered cooperation: Azerbaijan and ASEAN can strengthen relations through human development and capacity building. This could include jointly designed programs, including academic training, professional exchanges, and specialized short courses in key areas such as energy, logistics, digital policy, and public administration. The initiatives could build on existing mechanisms like the Heydar Aliyev International Education Grant Program and encourage universities, think tanks, and vocational institutions on both sides to collaborate more closely.

Ultimately, Azerbaijan's growing engagement with ASEAN demonstrates that two geographically distant regions can find meaningful common ground through dialogue, innovation, and shared priorities. With strategic cooperation and sustained political will, this engagement can serve as a bridge for the Caspian and Southeast Asian region in the upcoming years.

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