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BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. Year in Review: Pragmatism and Power in Azerbaijan's 2025 Foreign Policy

In 2025, the Republic of Azerbaijan maintained a steady and coherent foreign policy course grounded in internal stability, sustainable development, and adherence to the principles of international law. This course, pursued consistently under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, reflected a deliberate choice to prioritize pragmatism, sovereignty, and long-term national interests over short-term geopolitical fluctuations. As global power balances shifted and traditional security mechanisms showed signs of fragmentation, Azerbaijan responded by strengthening both bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks. Through prompt, responsible, and constructive diplomacy, the country enhanced its international standing and expanded its capacity to influence regional and global processes. These efforts formed part of a broader strategic vision aimed at safeguarding national interests while contributing to international stability.

The year also carried symbolic and political weight as it marked the fifth anniversary of Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War and the full restoration of its territorial integrity. This milestone created new historical conditions for addressing one of the most persistent sources of instability in the South Caucasus. In this context, the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, based on mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity, became a central priority of Azerbaijan's regional policy.

A decisive step in this direction was taken during the Washington Summit held on 8 August 2025, with the participation of the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the United States. The signing of a Joint Declaration by the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, witnessed by the President of the United States, alongside the initialing of the draft Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations between the two countries, marked a turning point in regional diplomacy. These developments helped consolidate new geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus and created a framework for sustainable peace and development based on direct interstate engagement rather than external mediation.

An important outcome of the Washington Summit was also the agreement on the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, known as TRIPP, which envisages unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. This project is not only of logistical and economic significance but also represents a broader commitment to regional integration and confidence-building. In parallel, the closure of the OSCE Minsk Process and its related structures completed a long-overdue step in removing the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict from the international agenda, reflecting the reality that the conflict has been resolved on the basis of international law.

Multilateral engagement remained a cornerstone of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Azerbaijan assumed the chairmanship of the Organization of Turkic States following the Summit held in 2025, while successfully maintaining its leadership role within the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia and its Troika membership in the Non-Aligned Movement. Azerbaijan's active participation in the Economic Cooperation Organization was highlighted by the successful Summit held in Khankendi, the organization of ECO Week, and the establishment of the Clean Energy Center.

In 2025, relations with neighboring countries remained at the core of Azerbaijan's foreign policy priorities. High-level visits from Türkiye, Iran, and Georgia, along with regular meetings within intergovernmental and interagency mechanisms involving Türkiye, Iran, Russia, and Georgia, underlined the importance attached to sustained regional dialogue. Allied relations with Türkiye were particularly intensive. Throughout the year, President Ilham Aliyev made three working visits to Türkiye, while President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Azerbaijan four times. These exchanges

anchored in concrete cooperation, including the opening of the Iğdır-Nakhchivan Gas Pipeline in March, participation in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in April, and the inauguration of the "Azerbaijan" quarter rebuilt after the earthquake in Kahramanmaraş in June.

Relations with Georgia also advanced steadily. The first foreign visits of the Georgian President and Foreign Minister to Azerbaijan carried symbolic and political weight, signaling continuity and trust at a time of wider regional flux. At the same time, relations with Russia experienced strain following the downing of an AZAL aircraft. Despite the seriousness of the incident, diplomatic channels remained open. The October meeting between the two presidents in Dushanbe, held on the margins of the CIS summit, alongside the Russian side's acknowledgment of responsibility and formal apology, marked an important step toward normalization and demonstrated Azerbaijan's preference for managed dialogue even under difficult circumstances. Engagement with Iran was equally active, with reciprocal high-level visits throughout the year, including presidential visits in April and July and a foreign ministerial visit in December.

Regional cooperation formats continued to play a visible role. The Trilateral Summit between Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Pakistan in Lachin in May illustrated Baku's commitment to inclusive regional platforms that combine political coordination with connectivity and development goals. Engagement with Central Asia stood out as one of the most dynamic directions of Azerbaijan's diplomacy. Historically friendly relations with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan were pursued with notable intensity, reflected in a high number of reciprocal visits. Over the past three years alone, this exchange has reached an unprecedented level, reinforcing mutual trust and strategic partnership.

A landmark development was Azerbaijan's accession as a full member of the Consultative Council of the Heads of State of Central Asia at the November meeting in Uzbekistan. This step effectively transformed cooperation from a C5 to a C6 format, symbolizing the emergence of a more integrated geopolitical and geo-economic space. The move also institutionalized Azerbaijan's growing role in Central Asia and opened a new stage of cooperation through regular intergovernmental commission meetings across multiple sectors.

Relations with European countries were developed on the basis of mutual interest and structured political dialogue. President Ilham Aliyev's working visits to Switzerland, Albania, Hungary, Denmark, and Slovakia, along with visits to Azerbaijan by the leaders of Albania, Italy, Germany, and North Macedonia, reflected a dense calendar of engagement. More than twenty meetings with European heads of state and government took place over the year. A particularly notable development was the decision by the United Kingdom to elevate relations with Azerbaijan to the level of Strategic Partnership, announced in October by British ministers in both houses of parliament.

Beyond Europe, Azerbaijan continued to deepen ties in the Asia-Pacific region. Relations with China and Vietnam reached a new qualitative level through the adoption of joint statements establishing comprehensive and strategic partnerships, respectively. Engagement with Pakistan remained consistently positive, supported by multiple high-level visits and close political coordination.

The Middle East and Africa emerged as another area of active diplomacy. Relations with the United Arab Emirates were elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership following the signing of a joint declaration during the UAE President's visit in September. Azerbaijan also intensified engagement with Egypt and a wide range of African states. Developments in relations with Syria were particularly significant. High-level contacts, including meetings between President Ilham Aliyev and the transitional Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa, culminated in the opening of a natural gas pipeline in August under a quadrilateral

framework with Türkiye and Qatar, making Syria the fourteenth destination for Azerbaijani gas exports.

Azerbaijan also maintained diplomatic activity related to the situation in the Middle East and Gaza, participating in high-level discussions and articulating its position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. President Ilham Aliyev's invitation to the Sharm El-Sheikh Summit on Gaza by the Presidents of the United States and Egypt reflected international recognition of Azerbaijan's constructive role and peacebuilding experience.

Relations with the the United States also showed positive momentum. President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Washington in August resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of a Strategic Working Group tasked with preparing a Strategic Partnership Charter within six months. The waiver of Amendment 907 during this visit carried strong symbolic significance and removed a longstanding obstacle in bilateral relations.

Strategic cooperation within the Organization of Turkic States occupied a prominent place in Azerbaijan's foreign policy throughout the year. President Ilham Aliyev participated both in the informal Summit of Heads of State in Budapest in May and in the 12th Summit held in Gabala in October. The latter, convened under the theme of regional peace and security, resulted in the adoption of the Gabala Declaration and the transfer of the organization's chairmanship to Azerbaijan. During the summit, Azerbaijan advanced proposals aimed at deepening practical cooperation, including a joint military exercise of member states to be held in 2026 and commemorative events marking the centenary of the 1926 Baku Turkological Congress. Decisions adopted during the summit, including the establishment of the OTS+ format and measures to strengthen TURKSOY, reflected a broader effort to reinforce institutional capacity across the Turkic world.

Cooperation with the United Nations remained a central pillar of Azerbaijan's multilateral diplomacy. Engagement developed dynamically in line with national development objectives and global challenges. President Ilham Aliyev addressed the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, holding a series of high-level meetings that underscored Azerbaijan's interest in shaping discussions on development, security, and climate policy. A key milestone was the signing, on 24 October, of the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2026–2030 between the United Nations and the Government of Azerbaijan, which set the basis for more targeted cooperation aligned with national priorities.

Azerbaijan's chairmanship of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, which began in late 2024, was actively pursued throughout 2025. Under the theme "Stronger CICA: Connectivity, Digitalization and Sustainable Development in Asia," a number of practical initiatives were launched, including academic, financial, youth, and gender-focused platforms. Azerbaijan hosted several high-profile CICA events during the year and chaired an informal meeting of the Council of Ministers during the UN General Assembly high-level week, reinforcing its role as a facilitator of dialogue across Asia.

Climate diplomacy constituted another major dimension of Azerbaijan's international engagement. As Chair of the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Azerbaijan played an active role in advancing global climate negotiations and in following up on decisions adopted at COP29 in Baku. Azerbaijani mediation proved instrumental in addressing several complex negotiating issues across different international platforms. During COP30, Azerbaijan formally transferred the COP presidency to Brazil, while remaining closely involved in negotiations and jointly preparing the "Baku to Belém Roadmap," which translated the Baku Finance Goal into a forward-looking implementation framework. The

decision to grant Türkiye the hosting right for COP31 was also finalized during this process.

Cooperation with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation continued to deepen. At the 51st Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Istanbul, member states adopted a resolution on the right of return of Azerbaijanis expelled from present-day Armenia, with corresponding language incorporated into the Istanbul Declaration. This outcome reflected sustained diplomatic engagement within the Islamic world on issues of direct relevance to Azerbaijan.

Regional economic diplomacy was further advanced through Azerbaijan's initiatives within the Economic Cooperation Organization. The first ECO Week, held in the Karabakh and East Zangezur economic regions, combined a summit in Khankendi with thematic forums in several cities, highlighting post-conflict reconstruction and regional integration. The establishment of the ECO Clean Energy Center in Azerbaijan added an institutional dimension to these efforts.

Azerbaijan also remained active within the Non-Aligned Movement, contributing through its role in the Chairmanship Troika, parliamentary cooperation, and youth initiatives. As a new member of the Developing Eight Organization for Economic Cooperation, Azerbaijan hosted a D-8 Week in Baku and advanced proposals for specialized centers on energy, transport, and media cooperation.

Engagement with Euro-Atlantic and European structures developed on a pragmatic basis. Political dialogue with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization continued through established mechanisms, including the Planning and Review Process, while a delegation of NATO permanent representatives visited Azerbaijan in November. Relations with the European Union saw a positive dynamic, marked by structured dialogue on security, energy, and transport. The April visit of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, to Baku symbolized a tentative but meaningful shift away from the confrontational tone that had characterized relations in earlier years. Her statements emphasized the EU's interest in rebuilding trust and exploring pragmatic cooperation, particularly in areas where Azerbaijan's energy resources and transport networks align with European priorities. Azerbaijan also participated in the European Political Community summits in Tirana and Copenhagen, holding high-level meetings with EU leadership and securing agreement to host a future summit in 2028.

Beyond Europe, Azerbaijan maintained active engagement with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, contributing to political dialogue, cultural exchange, and security cooperation. In parallel, Azerbaijan fulfilled its international obligations in the areas of non-proliferation and arms control.

The defining element of Azerbaijan's foreign policy in 2025 has been the breakthrough in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process. After decades of stalled diplomacy and episodic violence, the US-mediated meeting in Washington on 8 August 2025 brought the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia into sustained negotiations that yielded tangible outcomes. The talks resulted in the initialling of a peace treaty and a political understanding that the document would be signed once Armenia removes territorial claims against Azerbaijan from its constitution. Just as significant was the joint decision to dissolve the OSCE Minsk Group, one of the last institutional remnants of the conflict created in the early 1990s. The agreement to open the Zangezur corridor further elevated the importance of the Washington summit, linking the peace process directly to broader geoeconomic dynamics across Eurasia.

The months following the Washington meeting translated diplomatic commitments into concrete measures. On 21 October, Azerbaijan lifted restrictions on the transit of goods to Armenia through its territory, ending limitations that had existed since the early years of the conflict.

Armenia responded by removing restrictions on cargo transit to Azerbaijan, enabling the first grain shipments from Russia and Kazakhstan to Armenia via Azerbaijani territory in nearly three decades. Later in the year, Azerbaijan began exporting oil to Armenia through Georgia, a step that complemented the removal of transit barriers and signaled the beginning of direct interstate trade. These developments did not resolve every outstanding issue between the two countries, but they created a practical foundation for normalization by tying peace to everyday economic interaction.

The Washington summit also carried broader implications for relations between Azerbaijan and the United States. By facilitating the talks, Washington reinforced the international legitimacy of the peace process and acknowledged Azerbaijan's role as a reliable interlocutor in regional diplomacy. Baku's engagement with Washington in 2025 combined a clear articulation of national priorities with cooperation on shared concerns such as energy security, transport infrastructure, and counterterrorism. The decision to begin drafting a charter for a strategic partnership marked a notable moment in bilateral relations, particularly after the strains that emerged during the previous US administration. By the end of the year, US–Azerbaijan ties had moved onto a more stable and forward-looking trajectory.

Managing relations with Russia remained one of the most delicate aspects of Azerbaijan's foreign policy in 2025. From the outset of the war in Ukraine, Baku maintained its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, providing humanitarian assistance and, in 2025, concluding an agreement to supply natural gas to Ukraine. At the same time, relations with Moscow were deteriorated after the downing in December 2024 of an Azerbaijani Airlines aircraft over Russian territory, which killed 38 people. The incident triggered diplomatic tensions, cyber incidents, and public recriminations that underscores the fragility of the bilateral relationship.

Azerbaijan's diplomatic reach in 2025 also extended into the Middle East. Its participation in the Middle East Peace Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh in October reflected its growing credibility as a constructive external actor. Discussions following the US-, Egyptian-, Qatari-, and Turkish-facilitated ceasefire in Gaza included the possibility of an international stabilization force, with Azerbaijan mentioned alongside Indonesia and Pakistan as a potential contributor. Although no commitments were finalized, Azerbaijan's inclusion in these conversations highlighted the degree of trust it has accumulated among key international stakeholders.

Beyond bilateral diplomacy, Azerbaijan invested heavily in multilateral regional formats. The expansion of Central Asian cooperation into the C6 format in November 2025, now including Azerbaijan, reflected Baku's emergence as a bridge between the South Caucasus and Central Asia. President Ilham Aliyev described this configuration as the formation of a single geopolitical and geo-economic space, while President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev called Azerbaijan's inclusion historic and advocated for institutionalizing the platform. These developments strengthened dialogue on trade, infrastructure, and security across a region increasingly defined by connectivity rather than isolation.

The 12th summit of the Organisation of Turkic States, held on 7 October 2025 in Gabala, further underscored this trend. The summit marked progress toward transforming the organization from a primarily cultural forum into a more coordinated political and economic actor. The Gabala Declaration reaffirmed commitments to integration and cooperation, while Azerbaijan proposed holding the first joint military exercises of Turkic states in 2026. Framed as a confidence-building and preparedness measure rather than a signal to external actors, the initiative reflected a growing emphasis on collective capacity. Economic and environmental initiatives, including the Central Asia–Azerbaijan Green Energy Corridor and new

financial instruments, reinforced the practical dimension of Turkic cooperation.

These diplomatic and institutional efforts were closely linked to Azerbaijan's role as a logistical and energy hub. The Middle Corridor, connecting Europe and China through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Central Asia, continued to gain relevance in 2025 as supply chains diversified away from traditional routes. Investments in infrastructure and transport capacity strengthened Azerbaijan's position as an indispensable node in Eurasian connectivity. Importantly, progress in the peace process with Armenia reinforced this role by reducing political risk along key transit routes.

II. Azerbaijan's methodical conversion of military victory into peace agenda with Armenia

Throughout 2025, the Republic of Azerbaijan consistently pursued the normalization of relations with Armenia on the basis of mutual sovereignty and territorial integrity, treating this agenda not as a tactical maneuver but as a long-term strategic objective grounded in international law and national interests. The process was driven by Azerbaijan's initiative and sustained through a deliberate, methodical diplomatic approach that sought to move the relationship away from the legacy of conflict and toward a structured framework for interstate relations. By the end of the year, this approach had yielded tangible and internationally recognized results.

A defining moment in this process was the Washington Peace Summit held on 8 August in Washington, D.C. The meeting, hosted and attended by U.S. President Donald Trump, brought together the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan. The summit marked the point at which the normalization agenda advanced by Azerbaijan from the very outset of the post-conflict period was formally accepted not only by Armenia but also by the broader international community. The outcomes of the meeting reflected the cumulative effect of sustained diplomatic engagement rather than a sudden breakthrough, underscoring the degree to which Azerbaijan had succeeded in shaping the parameters and direction of the peace process.

The Joint Declaration signed at the conclusion of the summit, with the U.S. President acting as a witness, carried particular political and legal significance. In this document, Azerbaijan and Armenia jointly affirmed that the conflict between them belonged to the past and that the necessary conditions had been created for the establishment of neighborly relations based on the inviolability of international borders and the rejection of force as a means of territorial acquisition. This acknowledgment represented a clear departure from earlier ambiguities and placed the bilateral relationship firmly within the framework of established international norms.

In parallel with the Joint Declaration, another substantive step was taken at the Washington summit. In the presence of the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the United States, the foreign ministers of the two South Caucasus states initialed the text of the Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia. While the agreement was not yet signed or ratified, the initialing of the text confirmed that the parties had reached a shared understanding on its core provisions. The declaration accompanying this step also emphasized the need for additional measures to ensure the agreement's finalization. From Azerbaijan's perspective, this includes the expectation that Armenia amend its constitution to remove any remaining territorial claims against Azerbaijan, a step viewed in Baku as a necessary legal prerequisite for a durable peace settlement.

Another major development in 2025 concerned the formal closure of mechanisms associated with the former conflict. Following a joint appeal by the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in

Europe decided to terminate the OSCE Minsk Process and its related structures. The decision was adopted by the OSCE Ministerial Council on 1 September 2025, and by 1 December all organizational and technical measures related to the closure had been completed. With this step, the Minsk Process, which had long been a fixture of the international conflict-management architecture, was conclusively brought to an end. Its abolition removed a lingering institutional reminder of the conflict from the international agenda and marked an important stage in consolidating the post-conflict reality.

The Washington Peace Summit also produced an outcome with broader regional and international implications through the launch of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, known as TRIPP. This multimodal initiative envisages the development of railway and highway infrastructure, energy pipelines, and communication lines that will ensure uninterrupted connectivity between the main territory of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. At the same time, the route is designed to function as an additional segment of wider international transport and transit corridors passing through Azerbaijan, reinforcing the country's role as a regional connectivity hub.

Taken together, these developments meant that in 2025 Azerbaijan effectively consolidated a de facto peace with Armenia following the end of nearly three decades of military occupation of its territories. The restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereign control, achieved earlier through force of law and fact, was acknowledged openly and unequivocally by Armenia and accepted by the international community without reservation. This reality, as emphasized by Azerbaijani officials, is not subject to revision and forms the foundation upon which further normalization efforts are built.

On this basis, dialogue and confidence-building measures between the two states intensified over the course of the year. Practical steps included the easing of restrictions on cargo transit, the facilitation of grain deliveries from Kazakhstan and Russia to Armenia through Azerbaijani and Georgian territory, and Armenia's purchase of Azerbaijani oil products. Alongside these economic and logistical measures, contacts between Azerbaijani and Armenian think tanks were organized in both countries, reflecting an effort to encourage expert-level engagement and reduce mistrust beyond official channels.

Work also continued on the technical but politically sensitive issue of border delimitation. The State Commission on the Delimitation of the State Border between Azerbaijan and Armenia, together with its Armenian counterpart, held multiple meetings during the year. The eleventh meeting took place on 16 January on the Azerbaijani-Armenian border, followed by a videoconference working meeting on 14 February and a twelfth meeting on 28 November in Gabala. These discussions contributed to the gradual clarification of the interstate boundary and supported broader efforts to enhance border security and stability.

Azerbaijan has signaled its intention to remain committed to a purposeful and principled course centered on direct bilateral dialogue. As the initiator of the peace agenda, Baku emphasizes the importance of the full and timely implementation of all agreements reached and commitments undertaken. In particular, the Azerbaijani side continues to stress that the signing and ratification of the already initialed peace agreement depend on Armenia's fulfillment of its obligations, including constitutional amendments to remove residual territorial claims and the assurance of unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan within the framework of the TRIPP project. In this sense, 2025 is presented not as an endpoint but as a decisive phase in a longer process aimed at bringing normalization to its logical and legally sound conclusion.

III. The evolution of C5 to C6 marks the emergence of a single Trans-Caspian region

In the past few years, Eurasia has been quietly but decisively reshaped by a series of overlapping pressures. Geopolitical shocks, sanctions regimes, and repeated supply chain disruptions have exposed the fragility of older trade routes and forced both regional states and external partners to reconsider how east–west connectivity should function in practice. In this environment, the Trans-Caspian space has moved from the margins of strategic planning to its center. What was once treated as a peripheral alternative is now increasingly seen as a core artery linking Central Asia to Europe through the South Caucasus.

Central Asian states have played a central role in this shift. Long constrained by geography and dependent on a narrow set of transit options, they have taken deliberate steps to deepen regional coordination, invest in infrastructure, and diversify their external connections. Rail upgrades, port development, customs digitalization, and new logistics agreements are no longer isolated national projects but parts of a broader regional strategy. As a result, Central Asia is no longer merely seeking access to markets; it is actively shaping the architecture through which those markets are reached.

Within this evolving landscape, Azerbaijan has emerged as the indispensable western anchor of the Trans-Caspian system. Its role is not symbolic but functional. The Port of Alat, integrated rail networks, energy infrastructure, and increasingly digitalized transit procedures have turned Azerbaijan into the point where Central Asian connectivity becomes operationally viable for Europe. Without this link, the Middle Corridor remains fragmented. With it, the corridor becomes competitive.

This reality was formally recognized in November 2025, when Azerbaijan was unanimously welcomed as a full participant in the Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State in Tashkent. The expansion from a C5 to a C6 format marked a clear break with older regional assumptions. The Caspian Sea was no longer treated as a dividing line between two regions but as the central element of a shared geopolitical and geo-economic space. President Ilham Aliyev characterized this moment as the emergence of “a single geopolitical and geo-economic region,”, while President Shavkat Mirziyoyev described Azerbaijan’s inclusion as historic and argued for transforming the consultative process into a more structured regional institution.

The logic behind this institutional evolution is straightforward. Cargo volumes along the Middle Corridor have multiplied since 2022, not because of political declarations but because infrastructure, procedures, and incentives have begun to align. European stakeholders increasingly view the route as a necessary component of long-term economic resilience rather than a contingency option. This perception has been reflected in policy.

The European Union has responded with tangible commitments. Through the Global Gateway initiative, the EU announced €12 billion in financing at the first EU–Central Asia Summit in Samarkand in April 2025, targeting connectivity, energy transition, and digital cooperation. Subsequent forums in Samarkand and Tashkent reinforced the focus on the Middle Corridor and acknowledged, more openly than before, that its success depends on a cohesive Trans-Caspian region rather than on fragmented bilateral links.

Yet a gap has emerged between this strategic recognition and the EU’s institutional engagement. Brussels continues to operate through a C5+1 framework designed for an earlier phase of regional coordination, when Azerbaijan was outside Central Asia’s internal consultative mechanisms. With the region now operating as a C6, this architecture no longer reflects political or economic realities. Effective coordination on standards, financing, and infrastructure planning requires engagement with all actors who shape the corridor in practice. A transition to a C6+1 format

is therefore not an expansion for its own sake but an adjustment to the region as it now exists.

A similar logic applies to the United States. Washington underscored its renewed interest by hosting the first U.S.–C5 Summit in November 2025, emphasizing supply chain resilience, critical minerals, clean energy, and secure transport routes. These priorities directly intersect with the Trans-Caspian corridor. However, as with the EU, the continued reliance on a C5+1 structure risks leaving out the actor that completes the corridor's western half. A U.S.–C6+1 format would better align American engagement with on-the-ground connectivity dynamics.

This is not simply about diplomatic symmetry. Azerbaijan is the only state that connects Central Asia to Türkiye and European markets through an integrated system of ports, railways, pipelines, and digital corridors. Strategies focused on diversification and resilience remain partial if this link is treated as external rather than integral. Including Azerbaijan fully within regional cooperation formats would allow external partners to coordinate investment, regulatory standards, and long-term planning more coherently.

Beyond transport, the convergence of interests across the Caspian is widening. Energy transition projects, digital transformation, environmental management, water security, and youth mobility increasingly require regional solutions rather than isolated national approaches. The C6 format offers a platform that reflects this interdependence. External partners now face the task of adapting their own frameworks accordingly.

Azerbaijan's incorporation into the C6 represents a structural shift in Eurasia's regional geometry. The Caspian is no longer a boundary but the connective core of a broader system linking Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Europe. As the EU and the United States intensify their engagement, transforming C5+1 into C6+1 is the logical next step. It would anchor political dialogue in economic reality and ensure that both sides of the Caspian move forward together with coherence and shared purpose.

IV. Azerbaijan is rewiring energy and transport links across Eurasia

For much of the post-Soviet period, Azerbaijan built its economic model around the extraction and export of oil and natural gas from the Caspian basin. Hydrocarbon revenues underwrote growth, fiscal stability, and international integration, but they also created structural dependence on volatile global energy markets. Over the past decade, and with greater urgency following geopolitical shocks that reshaped Eurasian trade and energy flows, Baku has moved toward a more diversified development strategy. The new approach does not abandon energy as a pillar of national strength, but reframes it within a broader vision centered on connectivity, renewable generation, and regional integration.

This shift is visible in the way Azerbaijan increasingly defines itself as a hub rather than a producer alone. Large-scale initiatives such as the Southern Gas Corridor, emerging green energy corridors linking the Caspian to Europe, the Middle Corridor connecting Asia and Europe, and the proposed Zangezur or TRIPP corridor are treated as parts of a single strategic logic. Together, they reposition the country as a bridge across regions that were long treated as separate geopolitical spaces. In this framework, energy, transport, and digital infrastructure are mutually reinforcing rather than isolated policy domains.

A central element of this strategy is the gradual expansion of domestic renewable energy capacity. According to officials from the Azerbaijan Renewable Energy Agency, the first phase has already materialized with the commissioning of the Garadagh solar power plant. Additional wind and solar facilities are scheduled to come online through the second half of the decade, steadily increasing installed capacity and reducing reliance on fossil fuels for domestic electricity generation. These investments are paired with a broader

ambition to develop green transmission corridors that can move clean electricity across borders, particularly toward European markets seeking diversification and decarbonization.

Azerbaijan's climate commitments are framed in pragmatic terms. The government has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent compared to 1990 levels by 2050, while explicitly linking success to access to international finance, technology, and capacity building. At the same time, there is a concrete interim target to raise the share of renewables in electricity generation to 30 percent by 2030. Hosting COP29 in Baku reinforced this orientation and provided a platform to present postwar reconstruction in the liberated territories as an opportunity for green development. These areas are being planned as Green Energy Zones, combining renewable generation, smart grids, electric mobility, and energy-efficient public infrastructure in a single integrated model.

International partnerships are essential to making this transition credible. Cooperation with companies such as ACWA Power, Masdar, bp, TEPSCO, and others reflects a deliberate effort to anchor domestic projects within global energy and technology networks. At the political level, memoranda of understanding with the European Union and the United States signal external support for Azerbaijan's role in both energy security and connectivity. These arrangements are not limited to power generation but extend to the development of green corridors that link Central Asia, the Caspian, Türkiye, and Europe into a shared infrastructure space.

Connectivity on land and sea forms the second pillar of this strategy. Azerbaijan has invested heavily in railways, ports, highways, and logistics systems to strengthen its position along east–west and north–south routes. The Middle Corridor has gained particular importance as an alternative to disrupted northern routes. Rising volumes of block trains and transit cargo underline how quickly trade flows are adjusting to new geopolitical realities. The modernization of the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, including significant Azerbaijani investment beyond its borders, has increased capacity severalfold and improved the corridor's commercial viability.

The Port of Baku occupies a central role in this system. Its expansion and integration with the national railway network have created a unified management structure that reduces bottlenecks and improves coordination. As the port moves toward its second phase of development, it is increasingly positioned not just as a transit point but as a logistics and value-added hub supporting east–west trade across the Caspian.

Complementing this is Azerbaijan's role in the North–South International Transport Corridor, which links South Asia and the Gulf with Russia and Northern Europe. Azerbaijan's rail connection between its northern and southern borders allows uninterrupted cargo movement and reinforces its relevance across multiple trade axes. The proposed Zangezur or TRIPP corridor adds another layer by shortening transit times between Asia and Europe and linking mainland Azerbaijan directly with Nakhchivan.

Finally, Azerbaijan's inclusion in the Central Asian C5 format, transforming it into a C6 framework, reflects a broader political recognition that the Caspian is no longer a dividing line but a connective center. Through this platform, cooperation in trade, transit, and energy is being institutionalized across the wider Black Sea–Caspian region.

These developments point to a coherent long-term strategy. By aligning energy transition with transport connectivity and regional diplomacy, Azerbaijan is working to reduce economic vulnerability, attract investment, and enhance its geopolitical relevance. The result is a development model that treats sustainability and connectivity not as abstract goals but as practical instruments of national and regional stability.

V. Azerbaijan's role in the consolidation of Eurasian connectivity architecture

For much of the post-Soviet period, Central Asia's place in global supply chains remained constrained by inherited infrastructure and geography. Transit routes were largely oriented northward, channeling trade through Kazakhstan and Russia, while the region itself functioned primarily as a source of raw materials rather than as a transit platform with strategic choice. The emergence of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan corridor points to a gradual departure from that pattern. By tying Uzbekistan directly into an east-west multimodal chain stretching from China to the Caspian Sea, the corridor adds coherence and depth to Central Asia's transport role and reduces reliance on a single dominant transit axis.

The opening of a new multimodal freight corridor in mid-October marked a concrete step in the gradual reconfiguration of Eurasia's transport geography. A pilot shipment departing from Kashgar in western China's Xinjiang region moved through Kyrgyzstan, entered Uzbekistan, and continued onward to Turkmenistan before crossing the Caspian Sea toward Azerbaijan. From there, the cargo was routed further west via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. While modest in scale, the operation carried significance well beyond the shipment itself. It demonstrated that an integrated overland–maritime chain linking western China to the South Caucasus and Europe through Central Asia and the Caspian is not merely a planning concept but an operational reality.

Uzbekistan's participation is especially notable. As a double-landlocked state, Tashkent has long sought to convert geographic constraint into leverage by positioning itself as a regional transit hub. The new corridor advances that objective in practical terms, particularly at a time when the traditional Northern Corridor through Russia has become less attractive for many Western shippers following the war in Ukraine. Diversification is no longer a theoretical preference but a commercial and political necessity, and Uzbekistan's integration into trans-Caspian routes reflects this shift.

The timing also coincides with renewed momentum around the long-delayed China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway. After decades of stalled negotiations and financing debates, the project has finally entered the construction phase. Once completed, it will create a direct rail link from Kashgar to the Fergana Valley, bypassing Kazakhstan and anchoring a second east–west rail axis across Central Asia. In combination with multimodal links through Turkmenistan, this infrastructure substantially alters the region's connectivity options and enhances its bargaining position within Eurasian logistics networks.

Turkmenistan's role adds another layer of significance. The modernization of the Port of Turkmenbashi has quietly transformed it into a key maritime gateway for Central Asia. Already connected by regular ferry services to Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, Turkmenbashi now functions as the hinge between Central Asia's rail systems and the trans-Caspian segment of the Middle Corridor. For Ashgabat, this offers a path toward recalibrating an economy long dominated by hydrocarbons. Transit services, port-based industries, and logistics facilitation provide opportunities for diversification while embedding Turkmenistan more deeply into regional economic structures.

On the western shore of the Caspian, Azerbaijan occupies a pivotal position. The Port of Baku at Alat operates simultaneously as a maritime terminal, a rail junction, and a multimodal integration hub. Cargo arriving from Central Asia can be directed westward via the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway into Türkiye and European markets, or southward along the International North–South Transport Corridor toward Iran, the Persian Gulf, and South Asia. The expansion of Alat, the development of its free economic zone, and sustained investment in rail infrastructure were all designed with this bridging function in mind. As volumes from the east increase, Baku's role as the central node of the Middle Corridor becomes more entrenched.

What is emerging is not a single route but an interdependent corridor ecosystem linking Central Asia, the Caspian, and the South Caucasus. The success of this system depends less on any one country than on collective coordination. Harmonized tariffs, synchronized schedules, standardized customs procedures, and shared digital solutions are increasingly critical. In this context, multilateral frameworks such as the Organization of Turkic States are gaining practical relevance, providing platforms to align standards and institutionalize cooperation. Recent agreements among Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan on coordinated container flows illustrate how political coordination is beginning to match infrastructural ambition.

The launch of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan multimodal route therefore represents more than an incremental logistics development. It reflects a broader shift in how Eurasian connectivity is organized and governed. Central Asia is moving from a landlocked space defined by dependency toward a land-linked crossroads capable of capturing greater value from transit, trade facilitation, and associated industrial spillovers. For the Caspian states, especially Azerbaijan, the corridor reinforces their role as indispensable connectors in a more diversified and geopolitically balanced East–West transport architecture. Over time, as traffic volumes grow and coordination deepens, this evolving network is likely to reshape supply chains and strengthen the strategic relevance of the Middle Corridor within an increasingly multipolar Eurasian system.