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# RELATIONS BETWEEN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES AND AZERBAIJAN

*Semanur Öncü*

## Abstract

In 1991, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the period of independence began for the Central Asian republics. However, this period was full of political, economic and social difficulties, especially for the Central Asian countries. After independence, these countries, which were primarily struggling with national problems, began to adapt to the international system and develop mutual relations. Azerbaijan became one of the leading players in the Caucasus and shaped its foreign policy on the basis of cooperation and friendship with the Central Asian republics. The aim of this study is to examine the history, current state and future potential of relations between Azerbaijan and Central Asia, to analyze the economic, political, cultural and strategic dimensions of these relations and thus to identify ways to improve regional cooperation.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan, Central Asia, Relations

## Introduction

The late 20th century witnessed significant changes in the world, of which the collapse of the Soviet Union was one of the most important. At the beginning of the 1990s, serious political and economic problems arose within the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). In 1990, the country faced major economic difficulties as well as ethnic and national unrest in the Soviet republics. From 1985, when Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, the policy of "glasnost" (openness) and "perestroika" (restructuring), which was supposed to solve the problems, initiated a six-year reform period. As a result of these reforms, however, the Soviet Union officially collapsed on December 26, 1991 with the Supreme Soviet's decision to dissolve it and 15 new republics declared their [independence](#).

The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics led to the emergence of independent states in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan) and the Caucasus (Azerbaijan). However, with their independence, these countries faced complex problems such as border issues artificially created by the Soviet regime, economic difficulties, ethnic sensitivities, management of water resources, terrorism and drug trafficking.

Relations between Central Asia and Azerbaijan have the potential for cooperation in areas such as access to energy resources, trade opportunities and security



cooperation. In the energy sector in particular, Azerbaijan's energy resources and Central Asia's energy needs offer many opportunities for regional energy projects and cooperation.

In recent years, further steps have been taken towards dialog and cooperation between the parties. At the regional and global level, the cooperation potential of Central Asia and Azerbaijan is of great importance for stability and development. In this context, the parties are expected to overcome various challenges and develop a broader understanding of cooperation.

## **Post-independence era: Central Asia and Azerbaijan**

The 1990s are the period in which Azerbaijan takes its first diplomatic steps after gaining independence, develops the concept of an independent foreign policy and establishes equal relations with the states of the world. This period is considered an important milestone not only for Azerbaijan, but also for the Turkish world. Previously, the Turkish world had mostly been represented on the international stage only by the Republic of Turkey. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, five new states emerged, giving the Turkish world a significant boost.

Azerbaijan recognized its mutual independence with the Central Asian countries in 1991 and established diplomatic relations in 1992. However, it took until the mid-1990s for relations to fully develop. The main reasons for this delay were the foreign policy mistakes of the newly established states and external pressure. Despite all these difficulties, relations between these states were seen as an important part of foreign policy activities. These relations are based on mutually beneficial cooperation in accordance with international law and are not used against a third state.

## **Azerbaijan's political relations with Central Asia**

After gaining independence, Azerbaijan pursued a policy of balance between the West and Russia and, with the exception of the years of political, economic and social crisis, attached great importance to developing relations with the Central Asian states. Since the second half of the 1990s, Azerbaijan has begun to develop more active relations with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, countries with which it has historical and cultural ties.

Azerbaijan's policy towards the Central Asian states is based on important factors such as shared history, culture and religion. However, not only these factors, but also factors such as regional integration, ensuring international peace and stability, sustainable economic and political cooperation, the development of joint investment projects in the energy and transportation sectors have played an important role. Azerbaijan in particular, which borders Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan across the Caspian Sea, attaches great importance to cooperation with these countries on energy and energy transportation issues. In this context, Azerbaijan's political and economic cooperation with the Central Asian Turkic

states has opened the doors of the East to Azerbaijan and given the Central Asian states access to the West.

Due to its rich energy resources and strategic location, Central Asia has become the focus of interest for global and regional powers such as Russia, China and the United States. For this reason, Azerbaijan has not remained indifferent to the political and economic changes in the region due to its diaspora presence in the countries of the region. The increasing interest of global and regional powers in the region requires Azerbaijan to be sensitive to this issue and to pursue an effective foreign policy. In this context, cooperation between Central Asian states and Azerbaijan's role in Central Asia contribute to regional stability and security.

The connections between Central Asia and the Caucasus, especially the destabilization of the [northern corridor](#) after the Russian-Ukrainian war, have prompted Eurasian countries to seek new transport routes. In this context, the process of rapprochement between the countries to the east and west of the Caspian Sea has accelerated. In addition, it can be said that Azerbaijan's important victory in the [Second Karabakh War](#) (September 27, 2020), its will to pacify the Caucasus and the opening of the [Zangezur corridor](#) have also been effective. Thanks to this victory, the possibility of cooperation and integration between the countries of the Turkic world, which are threatened by geographical disintegration, has [increased](#).

The following section examines Azerbaijan's policy in Central Asia on the basis of bilateral relations:

## Kazakhstan

After Azerbaijan gained its independence, diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan developed rapidly on the basis of historical and cultural ties. Relations between the two countries have deepened due to factors such as language, religion and ancestry, as well as the independence of the two countries after the collapse of the USSR (Soviet Union). The first diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were established on August 30, 1992, and important steps have been taken to develop relations. On January 9, 1993, Kazakhstan opened an embassy in Azerbaijan, and in turn, Azerbaijan opened an embassy in Kazakhstan on March 1, 2004. In 2008, the Azerbaijani Consulate General was [opened](#) in Aktau, Kazakhstan. These diplomatic steps contributed to the strengthening of Kazakhstan. Meetings between heads of state contributed to the deepening of relations. During the terms of office of Heydar and Ilham Aliyev, importance was also attached to relations with Kazakhstan and strategic cooperation was strengthened. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan support a multipolar world system on the international stage and advocate strengthening the role of organizations such as the United Nations ([UN](#)) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe ([OSCE](#)). Both countries also maintain their strategic partnership as members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation ([OIC](#)) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation. The two countries have also supported each other in international organizations,



cooperate in areas such as energy projects and work together in international organizations such as the [Turkic Council](#) (Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking Countries). The two countries' strategic partnership is supported by factors that further strengthen relations, such as regional security, cooperation in international organizations, energy and transportation projects.

## Kyrgyzstan

The foundation of relations between the two countries was laid with the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation, which was signed in [1997](#) during the official visit of Kyrgyz President Asker Akayev to Azerbaijan. While this agreement contained the basic principles of independence, national sovereignty, equality and non-interference in internal affairs, 14 other documents were signed during the same visit in various areas such as tourism, justice and economic cooperation. Official diplomatic relations were established in the early 2000s with the opening of the Azerbaijani embassy in Kyrgyzstan in 2007 and the Kyrgyz diplomatic mission in Baku in [2012](#). These official relations have also enabled reciprocal visits by heads of state. Relations between Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan are generally maintained within the framework of international organizations such as the UN, the [CIS](#) (Commonwealth of Independent States), the [TURKSOY](#) (International Turkic Cultural Organization), the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States and the [TURKPA](#) (Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic States). The fact that Kyrgyzstan continues to be a member of the Turkic Council despite other political crises shows its willingness to expand its relations with the Turkic states through these platforms. In addition, Kyrgyzstan maintains a neutral stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and supports the peaceful resolution of the conflict. The country takes into account regional stability and security concerns and encourages the international community to help resolve this issue.

## Uzbekistan

Full diplomatic relations were established between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan in [1995](#). These relations were further strengthened by the official visit of the Uzbek President to Azerbaijan in 1996. Numerous agreements were signed between the two countries and embassies were established. Relations included cooperation in the fields of energy, trade, transportation and culture. A similar policy was pursued in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Uzbekistan supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Relations were further strengthened when Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev took office. Relations were further strengthened by the visits in [2010](#) and focused on the interests of both countries. In addition, relations between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan continued to develop within the framework of friendship and strategic partnership after Shavkat Mirzoyev took office. Relations between Tashkent and Baku were further strengthened as the heads of state and government pursued similar policies in international forums. Therefore, it is clear that the strengthened relations between the two countries will continue through the increasing mutual benefits between the parties.

## Turkmenistan

Diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan were established in 1992. The embassy of Turkmenistan was opened in Azerbaijan on June 8, 1999, but on June 4, 2001, Turkmenistan had to temporarily close its embassy in Azerbaijan due to financial problems. However, the embassy resumed its activities in 2008. In addition, the Azerbaijani embassy in Ashgabat was opened in August [2002](#). Meetings and international events between the leaders of the two countries played an important role in the development of relations. The two countries cooperated at the meetings of the Council of Heads of State of the CIS. The visit of Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev contributed to the strengthening of relations. Relations later improved with the new President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. Relations between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan developed positively in 2018 and 2019. In 2018, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev paid an [official visit](#) to Turkmenistan. During this visit, cooperation agreements were signed between the two countries. In 2019, cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan was further intensified. In 2022, the "[Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation](#)" was signed between Azerbaijan, Turkey and Turkmenistan. In general, relations between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have developed with a positive dynamic in recent years. Mutual understanding and cooperation have been achieved between the two countries and they have contributed to the protection of regional security.

## Tajikistan

Diplomatic relations between Tajikistan and Azerbaijan were established in 1992. Embassies were opened in 2007 and relations developed to develop. Cooperation increased after Ilham Aliyev became President of Azerbaijan. Many agreements were signed in bilateral relations, especially cooperation in the economic, trade and military fields.

During the official visit of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to the Republic of Tajikistan in 2007, 11 intergovernmental agreements in many areas were signed between the two countries. In August 2007, the President of Tajikistan paid an official visit to Azerbaijan. During this visit, 9 documents were signed in many areas between the two countries. These agreements and documents include mutual visa-free regime for citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Tajikistan, promotion and mutual protection of investments, trade and economy, cooperation and mutual assistance in the fields of international automotive relations, culture and art, customs issues, tourism, standardization, metrology, [railroads](#). It should be emphasized that relations between the two countries have developed at a high level to date. Relations between Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, which have always been at a high level at various levels both in the economic and political spheres, are maintained under the conditions of close friendship within the framework of [national interests](#).

## Economic and energy Relations

Azerbaijan has established a broad economic network with Central Asian countries, covering many areas such as trade, energy cooperation, transportation and infrastructure links, and regional cooperation platforms. The main purpose of these economic relations is to assess the potential of the region and develop mutually beneficial cooperation opportunities, thus helping to increase regional stability and support economic development.

## Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are strengthening their economic ties through the mutual import of mineral resources, chemical raw materials, grain, barley, electrical equipment and other products. Azerbaijan imports petroleum products, ethylene polymers for machinery and mechanisms, civil structures, agricultural products and more from Kazakhstan. In addition, joint ventures such as the Modern Baku Grain Company buy grain products from Kazakhstan and sell them in Azerbaijan. Economic-commercial relations between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are growing and developing every year. The Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, which was established between the two countries in 1999, also supports this cooperation. Energy projects are also part of the cooperation between these countries. Major projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline play an important role in the transportation of energy resources. At the same time, the agreements on the legal status of the Caspian Sea also contribute to the stability of the region. Transport corridors such as the [TRACECA](#) (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) project between the two countries offer opportunities for close cooperation in areas such as the Asia-Caucasus-Europe Transport Corridor and the revitalization of the Great Silk Road. This will help both countries to strengthen their international trade and economic relations.

**Table 1:** Export and import transactions between the two countries (in millions of dollars)

Years	Exports	Imports
2017	34272.5	107827.4
2018	46599.7	174145.0
2019	24022.7	205579.1
2020	25919.7	116107.8
2021	38835.3	95905.0
2022	104031.3	494437.2

Source: <https://www.azstat.org/portal/tblInfo/TblInfoList.do#>

## Kyrgyzstan

Economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan began with the founding protocol of the Joint Commission on Intergovernmental Cooperation, which came into force in 1997. [Trade](#) between these countries includes products such as potatoes, starch, apricots, alfalfa seeds, pharmaceutical materials and light

bulbs. Azerbaijan exports products such as sugar, sucrose, chocolate and chocolate products, polyethylene, liquid meters and plastic products to Kyrgyzstan.

Cooperation between Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, which is carried out by the [Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation](#), focuses on efforts to strengthen bilateral economic relations. This commission works on the evaluation and adoption of proposed projects.

In addition, Kyrgyzstan's participation in the [Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad](#) line contributes to relations between Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan at regional and international levels.

Finally, cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan in the energy sector is characterized by the attempt of the Azerbaijani energy company [SOCAR](#) (Azerbaijan State Oil Company) to enter the Kyrgyz market. However, this project was abandoned as it was concluded that the Kyrgyz oil market was not suitable for processing Azerbaijani oil for structural and economic reasons. The Kyrgyz oil market is largely dominated by Russia.

**Table 2:** Export and import transactions between the two countries (in millions of dollars)

Years	Exports	Imports
2017	603.4	1156.8
2018	4033.6	2049.2
2019	2750.7	3050.6
2020	1832.9	3584.3
2021	6023.1	2995.0
2022	4736.7	6073.5

Source: <https://www.azstat.org/portal/tblInfo/TblInfoList.do#>

## Uzbekistan

The intergovernmental commission established in 1997 is an important factor in the development of economic relations between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. This commission deals with issues such as increasing bilateral trade, exploring investment opportunities and promoting strategic cooperation. In addition, the Declaration on Strategic Partnership signed in 2004 created a solid legal basis for cooperation between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. Azerbaijan imports products such as raisins, color television receivers, cotton fibers and dried fruits from Uzbekistan. The products it exports include polyethylene, paints and varnishes, kerosene and chocolate. These trade relations promote economic cooperation.

The first [Uzbek-Azerbaijani Economic Forum](#), which took place in Tashkent in 2018, has further strengthened cooperation between the two countries. Azerbaijan's geographical location, its position at the intersection of international transport corridors and its great transit potential increase the opportunities for cooperation with Uzbekistan in the field of transport and transit. This is seen as part of major

projects such as the revitalization of the Silk Road. In addition, the two countries are strengthening their relations through cooperation on international projects. Projects such as the TRACECA project contribute to the economic development of Silk Road countries that have gained independence with the help of the European Union. Such projects are an important factor in increasing the volume of trade between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Finally, there are [cooperation projects](#) between companies such as SOCAR and [Uzbekneftegaz](#) in the energy sector. These projects cover areas such as oil and gas exploration, production and development of the energy sector. This cooperation aims to reduce the dependence of Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan on Russia for the supply of energy resources to international markets. Azerbaijan's strategic location plays an important role in efforts to reduce this dependence.

**Table 3:** Export and import transactions between the two countries (million dollars)

Years	Exports	Imports
2017	3959.3	26041.3
2018	9351.1	34597.3
2019	28870.5	53092.3
2020	23104.7	59187.7
2021	33490.0	78413.5
2022	46451.0	136856.9

Source: <https://www.azstat.org/portal/tblInfo/TblInfoList.do#>

## Turkmenistan

Economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan has developed through the activities of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation established in 2008. This commission deals with issues of cooperation in the fields of trade, communications, industry, agriculture, tourism, humanitarian aid and many other areas.

[Imports from Azerbaijan to Turkmenistan include products](#) such as soft wheat, wheat flour, kerosene, liquid fuel, polypropylene, soil and parts for tunnel boring machines. Azerbaijan exports products such as chocolate, medicines, electrical cables and sugar to Turkmenistan.

The opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad line in 2017 is an important step for the development of trade and transportation between these two countries. This railroad line is a strategic project that connects the Eurasian continent and also benefits Central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan.

An important aspect of the relations between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan is the transport and trade relations in the Caspian Sea. This situation facilitates the transportation and import of goods from the regional countries to the world markets.

Another important component of relations between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan is the energy sector. The Azerbaijani oil and gas strategy has contributed to energy cooperation between these countries.

The failure to define the legal status of the Caspian Sea is one of the [biggest disputes](#) between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. While Turkmenistan advocates the division of the Caspian Sea along the central line, Azerbaijan demands the inclusion of the Absheron Peninsula in this division.

Finally, the Southern Gas Corridor and other energy projects are important developments that strengthen energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

**Table 3:** Export and import transactions between the two countries (million dollars)

Years	Exports	Imports
2017	54111.6	110024.1
2018	23690.4	109352.3
2019	23066.5	202585.6
2020	18786.3	89865.2
2021	34276.0	70747.6
2022	25691.1	509706.0

Source:

<https://www.azstat.org/portal/tblInfo/TblInfoList.do#>

## Tajikistan

Trade and economic relations between Azerbaijan and Tajikistan are based on import-export and transit goods traffic. Tajikistan imports clay and petroleum coke from Azerbaijan for aluminum production. It also imports pomegranate juice, butter, sugar and other agricultural products from Azerbaijan.

**Table 4:**  
import

Years	Exports	Imports
2017	1998.4	47.4
2018	6533.8	53.4
2019	3150.5	10.3
2020	5171.3	66.4
2021	7331.4	185.2
2022	5811.8	138.0

Export and

transactions between the two countries (million dollars)

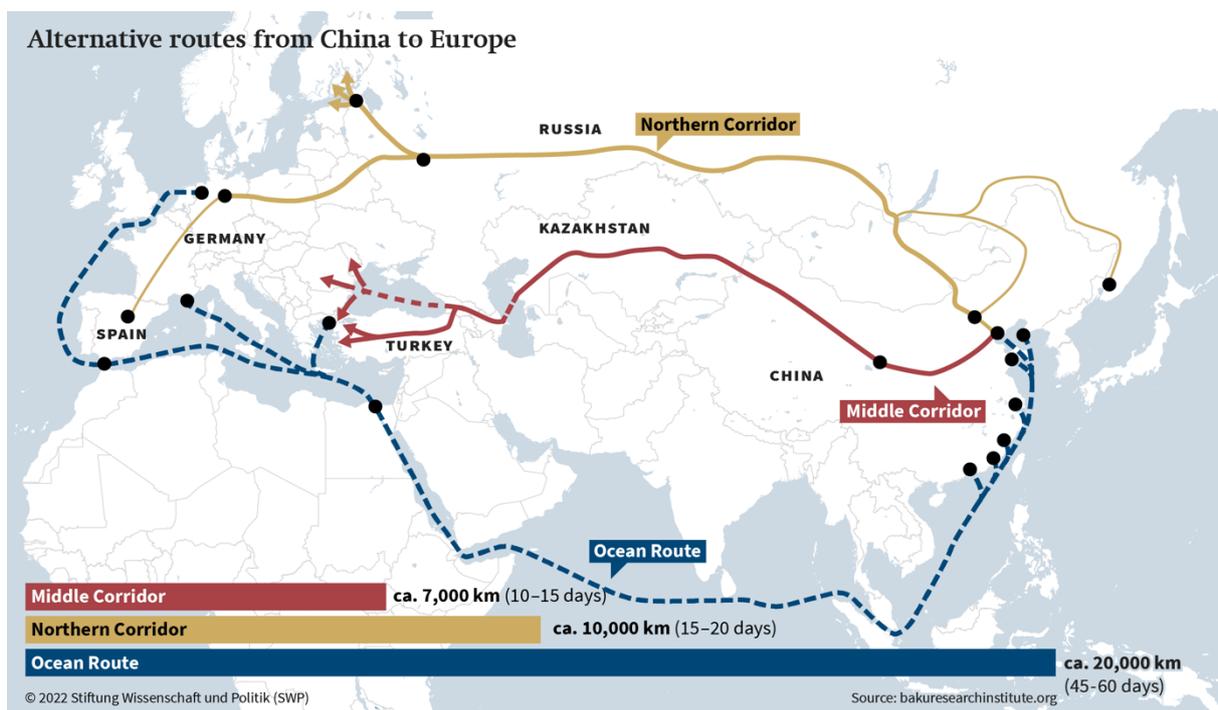
Source: <https://www.azstat.org/portal/tblInfo/TblInfoList.do#>

## The role of the Middle Corridor in relations between Azerbaijan and Central Asia

The Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor is a multimodal transportation route connecting countries from Asia to Europe by land, including countries such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. This corridor includes various modes of transport such as road, rail and sea transport between these countries and aims to facilitate trade and transportation between these [regions](#).

The [Middle Corridor](#) is an important initiative that aims to improve trade and economic relations between Turkey, the Caucasus and Central Asian countries by developing transportation infrastructure at the regional level. In this way, cooperation between these regions will be strengthened in various areas. On a global level, the Middle Corridor is a natural part of the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) and plays a crucial role in the trade and economic relations between Europe and China, which exceed 600 billion dollars annually. There are also other routes in the region, such as the KYG and the Northern Corridor, which stretches to Europe via Russia, which can be seen as a complement or alternative to the Middle Corridor. These developments contribute to the further diversification and increase of regional and global [trade](#).

**Map 1:** The Middle Corridor



Source: <https://www.swp-berlin.org>

The Middle Corridor is not only a transportation route between the Caucasus and Central Asian countries, but also an important initiative in line with initiatives with similar objectives such as the Belt and Road Initiative<sup>1</sup> and the Europe Caucasus Asia Transport Corridor (TRACECA).<sup>2</sup> In this context, these initiatives share the common goal of improving transport infrastructure and increasing independence by facilitating regional and global trade.



Among other things, the Middle Corridor offers the possibility of transporting freight from China via Kazakhstan to the Caspian Sea and then to Europe via Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. Thanks to this route, it is possible for cargo to reach its final destination in Europe within 10-15 days. This fast delivery time is one of the biggest advantages of the Middle Corridor. While the transportation time for goods transported via the Northern Corridor is usually 15-20 days, sea transport can extend this period to 45-60 days. In this respect, the Middle Corridor is a very important advantage in the transportation [sector](#). It offers a longer delivery time than the sea route and the Northern Corridor. This is a great advantage when it comes to speeding up trade, reducing costs and increasing logistical efficiency.

## Kazakhstan

Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are united in the Middle Corridor in accordance with the common interests. Both countries cooperate within the framework of the international East-West Transcaspian Transport Route. the "[Aktau Production and Logistics Center](#)", which was built with Azerbaijani investments in the special area of the [Aktau seaport](#), plays an important role in the development of trade and economic relations between the two countries. At the same time, Azerbaijan has succeeded in building the largest port on the Caspian coast in Alat. Goods coming from Central Asia via the Caspian Sea are picked up at the port of Alat and routed along routes that are integrated into the Middle Corridor with the modern infrastructure on Azerbaijani territory. Due to the increase demand, Azerbaijan is currently continuing the implementation of the project to expand the transmission capacity of the port of Alat.

Azerbaijan is a country where all the transportation arteries of Eurasia intersect. Therefore, cooperation with Azerbaijan on the Middle Corridor is of strategic importance for Kazakhstan. At the events held during [Ilham Aliyev's official visit to Kazakhstan](#) on April 10, the heads of state emphasized the importance of developing the Middle Corridor. Specific figures and a concrete timetable for the development of freight transportation on the East-West route were discussed, and the heads of the relevant structures were instructed to examine all these issues as soon as possible. In addition, this visit covered issues such as the start of transit of Kazakh oil through Azerbaijan and the start of serious work on connecting Azerbaijani transportation and logistics infrastructures in order to fully exploit the potential of the Middle Corridor.

## Kyrgyzstan

Due to its geographical location, Kyrgyzstan is at the center of the Central Corridor. Kyrgyzstan is an important part of the Central Corridor and forms part of the land route of this corridor. The country's transit routes contribute to the functioning of the Central Corridor. As part of the Central Corridor, Kyrgyzstan plays an important role, especially in rail transport.

Various cooperation agreements for transportation and trade have been signed between the partner countries of the Central Corridor, such as Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan. These agreements cover issues such as facilitating trade, improving border crossings and improving transport infrastructure.

At the meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Economic and Humanitarian Cooperation between Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, the importance of the Middle Corridor was emphasized. The parties also agreed to carry out a coordinated digitalization of the Middle Corridor and increase its attractiveness in order to attract additional cargo to this transport [direction](#).

## Uzbekistan

Relations between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan have developed rapidly recently thanks to mutual visits and regular contacts. Cooperation between these two countries is of great importance, especially in the fields of logistics and transportation. Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan attach great importance to the diversification of economic and trade relations and the development of alternative transportation and logistics routes, which has always been a priority for Uzbekistan after gaining independence.

Uzbekistan's goal of expanding freight transportation along the Central Corridor is an important step towards increasing this country's influence in regional and global trade. By supporting key projects such as Uzbekistan, the "[Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran Corridor](#)" and the "[Trans-Caspian Route](#)", the aim is for these transport corridors to make a positive contribution to the regional economy. These developments show that cooperation between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan will continue to grow both economically and logistically.

## Conclusion

Azerbaijan's bilateral and multilateral relations with the Central Asian republics are developing considerably due to the country's geographical location, energy resources and strategic importance. As a country on the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan plays an important role in energy production and is an important transit point to world markets due to its geographical location. In addition, Azerbaijan's projects related to the revitalization of the Silk Road, the development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridors and the exploitation of energy resources allow Azerbaijan to increase its influence on the international stage.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and independence in the early 1990s led to a severe crisis in the Azerbaijani energy sector at a time of economic crisis and instability. However, the "Contract of the Century" on oil production in the Caspian Sea and Heydar Aliyev's oil strategy laid the foundation for Azerbaijan's international cooperation. This agreement was of strategic importance not only for Azerbaijan, but also for the Western countries, the South Caucasus and the Central Asian republics.

With the signing of the Aktau Agreement in 2018 after lengthy discussions on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the economic and strategic importance of the region's energy resources has increased further. Azerbaijan's energy resources have a positive impact on the region's economies and accelerate international cooperation. Turkey contributes to these relations as an important player and offers more trade and investment opportunities with Central Asian countries. Therefore, Azerbaijan's foreign policy continues to play an important role in the region thanks to its geographical location and energy wealth.

There are some difficulties in the relations between Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics. Among these challenges, the lack of economic diversification plays an important role. Since the economic structures of these countries are generally based on energy resources, a lack of economic diversification can limit trade and investment opportunities. Therefore, promoting economic diversification is an important step towards further improving relations between these countries.

To summarize, Azerbaijan's relations with the Central Asian republics are of great importance given its geographical location, energy resources and strategic importance. Azerbaijan's cooperation with the Central Asian republics continues to develop in a balanced manner due to its geographical location and continues to be a strategic player in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an initiative of the People's Republic of China, is a major global infrastructure and economic project that aims to revitalize the ancient Silk Road with the demands and opportunities of the modern age. This initiative aims to connect Asia, Africa and Europe through six major economic corridors. These corridors connect many countries via land and sea routes and promote cooperation in various areas such as trade, infrastructure development, energy projects and people-to-people relations.

<sup>2</sup> TRACECA is an important global initiative that was launched in 1993 when the transport and trade ministries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan met in Brussels. This initiative aims to increase the efficiency of transport routes between the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus and Europe.