

Editor's Note

The current issue of the Caucasus Strategic Perspectives (CSP) journal entitled *“The South Caucasus between Regions: Security in a Connected World”* is dedicated to the emerging new reality in the South Caucasus, characterized by deepening interconnectedness with neighbouring regions and increasingly shaped by efforts to promote stability and sustainable peace.

The CSP's new issue includes 6 articles and 1 commentary. The CSP's current authors examine the growing indispensability of the South Caucasus to the rapidly developing Middle Corridor, emerging cooperation between the Black Sea and Caspian regions, the increasing significance of the C6 platform amid deepening cooperation between the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, the evolving military dimension of the Organization of Turkic States, recent developments in the European Union's complex role in the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan's consolidation of its middle power status in the context of its partnerships in the Western Balkans, etc.

The new issue's **Highlight** is **Yunis Gurbanov's** article titled *“The South Caucasus as a Digital-Transport Hub: The Middle Corridor, Data Flows, and Emerging Security Risks”*. The article discusses the nature of the Middle Corridor, which is changing from a mere transport corridor via a new strategy that integrates connectivity, digitization, cybersecurity and geoeconomics. The author examines how the South Caucasus, and particularly Azerbaijan, is emerging as not only a transit hub connecting Europe and Asia but also potentially as a digital security node that connects Central Asia, the Caspian Sea basin, Türkiye and European markets.

The new issue's **Articles section** begins with the joint article of **Yuriy Husyev** and **Emir Rustamov** titled *“Black Sea–Caspian Region Cooperation: Security Challenges and Economic Developments”*. This article examines the evolving security architecture and economic prospects of the Black Sea–Caspian macro-region, with particular emphasis on the prospects for multilateral cooperation among Ukraine and its strategic partners in this region – Azerbaijan, Türkiye and Romania. The analysis demonstrates that, although security dilemmas persist, expanding economic interdependence, infrastructure integration and normative convergence offer a pathway towards a more cohesive

macro-regional order. The article concludes that the Black Sea–Caspian region is gradually transitioning from a fragmented geopolitical frontier into a dynamic, though still contested, centre of Eurasian connectivity.

Hazel Çağan Elbir’s article titled “*Structural Transformation in Eurasian Integration: The C6 Platform*” examines, from an academic perspective, a profound structural transformation in Eurasian geopolitics: the evolution of the Central Asia Five (C5) format into the ‘C6’ platform, with Azerbaijan’s fully fledged participation, and the impact of this process on the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor, TITR). It analyses the institutionalisation process of the C6 structure, inter-state allied relations in the region, energy security parameters and Türkiye’s catalytic role in this integration process.

Nina Miholjic Ivkovic’s article titled “*Azerbaijan’s Niche Diplomacy in the Western Balkans*” examines how Azerbaijan, as an emerging middle power, uses niche diplomacy to build stronger ties with the states of the Western Balkans and increase regional and international influence. The analysis identifies energy security, infrastructure development and soft power diplomacy as the main niche assets of Azerbaijan’s diplomatic outreach in the Western Balkans.

Jordi Xuclà’s article titled “*The South Caucasus, Connectivity and the European Union’s Strategic Turn*” examines the South Caucasus as an emerging geoeconomic hub and analyses the European Union’s strategic turn towards the region since 2022. The author argues that although the EU has become more dependent on a stable and connected South Caucasus, its institutions have not moved in the same direction. Hence, the EU’s influence in the region will depend on its capacity to align strategic language, institutional discipline and investment decisions.

Alper Volkan Ertem’s article titled “*From Cultural Cooperation to Military Integration: The Significance of the OTS’s Planned 2026 Joint Military Exercise*” analyses the potential benefits President Ilham Aliyev’s proposal to hold a joint military exercise in Azerbaijan would bring to OTS member states and the organization’s international weight as a regional security actor. The study also explores the positive effects that would result from extending the successful military alliance model between Türkiye and Azerbaijan to the other OTS members.

The summer issue also features **Roza Bayramli’s** commentary titled “*From Turkmenbashi to Baku: The Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan Trilateral Format in the Greater Caspian Region*”. The

author examines the emerging trilateral format between Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan as a practical mechanism for advancing cooperation in transport, energy, and trade across the Greater Caspian region. The trilateral mechanism is assessed within the broader process of institutionalizing the C6 framework, suggesting that smaller, project-oriented formats can serve as effective platforms for testing practical solutions before their wider regional application.

Finally, on behalf of the CSP team, we hope this issue provides food for thought and contributes to and enriches the discussion on subject-matter issues.

Sincerely
Farid Shafiyev
Editor-in-Chief of CSP Journal