

From Turkmenbashy to Baku: The Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan- Uzbekistan Trilateral Format in the Greater Caspian Region

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The interconnectedness of Central Asia and the South Caucasus region is facilitating new regional cooperation opportunities beyond traditional multilateral institutions. This article examines the emerging trilateral format among Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as a practical mechanism for advancing cooperation in transport, energy and trade across the Greater Caspian region. It asserts that the format represents a type of functional minilateralism, emphasizing the implementation of concrete projects rather than the expression of broad political statements. Particular attention is given to recent developments following the 2025 Turkmenbashy summit and the state visit of Turkmenistan's President Serdar Berdimuhamedov to Azerbaijan in June 2026, which have strengthened cooperation in logistics, customs, industrial policy and energy. The article further assesses the trilateral mechanism 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. It concludes that the Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan partnership has the potential to become an important implementation track linking Central Asia, the South Caucasus and Europe through enhanced trans-Caspian connectivity and sectoral cooperation.

Keywords: Greater Caspian Region, C6, Middle Corridor, regional connectivity, transport cooperation, energy cooperation.



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Introduction

The increasing interconnectedness of Central Asia and the South Caucasus is evidenced by the partnership among Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In recent years, the Caspian Sea has doubled in importance as a strategic bridge for trade, energy and transport connectivity, particularly in light of the growing significance of the Middle Corridor¹ and the demand for alternative transit corridors. In this context, the Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan platform can be viewed as an example of minilateralism in the Greater Caspian region,

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where a smaller group of geographically connected states advances practical cooperation within a broader regional agenda.

In August 2025, the leaders of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan convened in the city of Turkmenbashi, Turkmenistan, for a trilateral meeting that significantly advanced this process.² This

signified the emergence of a new, more practical form of cooperation that was dedicated to concrete areas, such as energy, trade, industrial cooperation, logistics and transport, rather than broad political declarations. In this regard, the trilateral format does not replicate the existing regional platforms, such as the Organization of Turkic States or the broader Central Asia+Azerbaijan Format. Rather, it complements them by providing a more operational and adaptable mechanism for the coordination of specific projects.

This trend was further consolidated by the recent state visit of President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedov to Azerbaijan in June 2026. The visit illustrated that the relationship between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan is transitioning from a state of general political proximity to a more structured and practical partnership, particularly in the areas of energy and transport logistics. The Turkmenbashi meeting of 2025 and the Baku visit of 2026, when considered in conjunction, demonstrate that the Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan trilateral

1 The Middle Corridor, formally known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), is a multimodal trade route. Spanning roughly 8,000 to 10,000 km, it connects China and Central Asia to Europe, passing through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye.

2 President.az, “High-level meeting between Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan held in Turkmenbashi”, August 22, 2025. Available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/69935>.

partnership is gradually transitioning into an implementation track within the emerging C6 framework. This process translates the concept of a connected Central Asia and South Caucasus into tangible regional cooperation.

The emergence of this format did not occur in isolation. It came about following Azerbaijan's increasing engagement with Central Asia, which has become even more important in the context of the complicated geopolitical environment in Eurasia and the increasing need for alternative connectivity routes. Azerbaijan's ties with both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan had already entered a more substantive phase at the bilateral level. The 2021 Memorandum of Understanding on joint exploration and development of the Dostlug offshore field along the maritime border between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan was an important step in turning earlier Caspian disagreements into a platform for energy cooperation.³ At the same time, Azerbaijan-Uzbekistan relations gained strategic depth, particularly following the state visit of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev to Uzbekistan on August 22–23, 2024, which brought bilateral cooperation to the level of an alliance with the signing of a treaty on allied relations and strengthened cooperation in the fields of energy, transport and connectivity.⁴

A Practical Trilateral Mechanism

The establishment of the Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan trilateral format reflects the growing demand for more flexible and results-oriented mechanisms within the broader regional architecture. Its practical value stems from the geographic complementarity of the three countries and their shared interest in strengthening connectivity between Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

On August 22, 2025, the Congress Center of the Avaza National Tourist Zone hosted a trilateral high-level meeting in the format of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. The meeting brought together President of

3 Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva, “*Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan sign MoU on joint exploration and development of “Dostlug” field in Caspian Sea*”, January 22, 2021. Available at: <https://geneva.mfa.gov.az/en/news/azerbaijan-and-turkmenistan-sign-mou-on-joint-exploration-and-development-of-dostlug-field-in-caspian-sea>.

4 President.az, “*Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan signed documents*”, August 23, 2024. Available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/66727>.

Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, the National Leader of the Turkmen people and Chairman of the Halk Maslahaty of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, and President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and resulted in the adoption of a Joint Statement.⁵

The meeting's results illustrated the format's practical orientation. Following the trilateral meeting, the parties agreed to improve bidirectional multimodal transport along the Uzbekistan–Turkmenistan–Azerbaijan route, as set out in the Joint Statement. A Joint Working Group was also advocated for in the document, with the objective of streamlining relevant procedures, developing transport and communications infrastructure, and coordinating transport.⁶

A number of subsequent developments have demonstrated that the agenda initiated at the Avaza trilateral meeting has already begun to produce tangible results through sectoral and bilateral channels. Following the meeting of August 22, 2025, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan agreed to reinstate direct air services, as announced by Uzbekistan's Minister of Transport.⁷ Furthermore, the Ministry of Transport of Uzbekistan and the State Service of Maritime and River Transport of Turkmenistan continued to advance cooperation in transport and logistics through more specialized arrangements, such as the Memorandum of Understanding signed in Turkmenbashi on August 22, 2025, to facilitate shipbuilding.⁸ The significance of these measures is that they fortify the Central Asian component of the broader trans-Caspian chain.⁹

5 MFA of Turkmenistan, *“Trilateral meeting in the format “Turkmenistan - Azerbaijan - Uzbekistan”*, August 23, 2025. Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/news/5509>.

6 Interfax.com, *“Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan to boost multimodal transportation on their territories - joint statement”*, August 25, 2025. Available at: <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/113419/>.

7 Uz Daily, *“Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan Agree to Resume Direct Flights”*, August 23, 2025. Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/uzbekistan-and-turkmenistan-agree-to-resume-direct-flights/>.

8 News Central Asia, *“Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan summit led to signing a package of documents on transport, trade and regional cooperation”*, August 22, 2025. Available at: <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2025/08/22/azerbaijan-turkmenistan-uzbekistan-summit-led-to-signing-a-package-of-documents-on-transport-trade-and-regional-cooperation/>.

9 Ibrahimova D. *“Transport integration in Central Asia: the contribution of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan”*, *News Central Asia*, December 8, 2025. Available at: <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2025/12/08/transport-integration-in-central-asia-the-contribution-of-uzbekistan-and-turkmenistan/>.

Since the Turkmenbashy meeting, the bilateral track between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan has also experienced a resurgence in momentum. Mikayil Jabbarov, Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan, convened a meeting with Nokerguly Atagulyyev, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan and Co-Chair of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Economic and Humanitarian Cooperation, on April 1, 2026.¹⁰ The meeting concentrated on the potential for economic collaboration, which encompassed joint projects, investment and trade. It also emphasized the potential for mutually beneficial collaboration in a variety of sectors that are directly relevant to the broader transport, logistics and energy agenda of the trilateral format.

The state visit of President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedov to Azerbaijan in June 2026 further solidified the practical dimension of the broader trilateral agenda and the significance of Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan cooperation. During the visit, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan signed a series of bilateral documents regarding customs information and statistics, industrial cooperation for 2026–2028 and energy cooperation.¹¹ These agreements are particularly relevant because they address the technical and institutional foundations that are indispensable for improved regional connectivity. In this context, the Baku visit of S. Berdimuhamedov should be viewed as a bilateral diplomatic event and a continuation of the practical agenda that was initiated in Avaza on August 22, 2025.

Operational Consolidation of the Caspian Link: Baku 2026

President Serdar Berdimuhamedov's state visit to Azerbaijan in June 2026 further demonstrated the shift towards the implementation of concrete cooperation mechanisms, particularly in areas directly supporting trans-Caspian connectivity, including energy dialogue, industrial cooperation and customs coordination.¹²

¹⁰ Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Turkmenistan, “*Prospects for the development of economic cooperation with Turkmenistan have been assessed*”, April 1, 2026. Available at: <https://ashgabat.mfa.gov.az/en/news/prospects-for-the-development-of-economic-cooperation-with-turkmenistan-have-been-assessed>.

¹¹ President.az, “*Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan documents exchanged*”, June 22, 2026. Available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/72787>.

¹² *Ibid.*

Transport and logistics were among the central themes of the visit, alongside energy, trade and economic cooperation. In his assessment of the transport and transit sector as one of the strategic directions of cooperation, President Serdar Berdimuhamedov underscored the significant opportunities for the development of international transport corridors created by the advantageous geographical locations of Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. In this context, he proposed intensifying the work of the Turkmenistan–Azerbaijan Commission on Transport, Transit and Logistics. He also cited the Afghanistan–Turkmenistan–Azerbaijan–Georgia–Türkiye transport corridor as a successful example of cooperation and emphasized that both countries support the initiative to establish the Caspian Sea–Black Sea transport corridor along the Turkmenistan–Azerbaijan–Georgia–Romania route.¹³ These routes have the potential to enhance the role of the Baku–Turkmenbashi connection as one of the critical maritime links of the Middle Corridor by connecting the Caspian and Black Sea regions, thereby expanding economic, trade and investment cooperation.

The *Dostlug* oil tanker, gifted by Azerbaijan to Turkmenistan as a gesture of friendship, also carries both symbolic and practical significance. It can support Caspian maritime cooperation, energy logistics and transport links between the two countries. Together with the existing

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basis for cooperation around the Dostlug field, this reflects the growing combination of political trust, energy pragmatism and transport connectivity in Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan relations.

The Azerbaijan–Uzbekistan track adds yet another important energy dimension to the trilateral format. In July 2025, Azerbaijan’s State Oil Company (SOCAR) and Uzbekistan’s Uzbekneftegaz and Ministry of Energy signed a Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) for exploration and possible hydrocarbon production in the Ustyurt region, with the project valued at approximately US\$2 billion.¹⁴ In the same year, the Green Corridor Alliance was announced by Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to export renewable energy from Central Asia to Europe via high-voltage transmission

13 President.az, “Ilham Aliyev held expanded meeting with President of Turkmenistan”, June 22, 2026. Available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/72785>.

14 Kun.uz, “\$2 billion in investments, 100 million tons of oil, and 35 billion cubic meters of gas — details of the agreement with SOCAR”, July 29, 2025. Available at: <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2025/07/29/2-milliarda-dollarov-investitsiy-100-millionov-tonn-nefti-i-35-milliardov-kubometrov-gaza-detali-soglasheniya-s-socar>.

infrastructure and a Black Sea interconnector.¹⁵ These developments attest that energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan is becoming increasingly project-oriented, complementing the Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan energy agenda around the Caspian Sea.

The Trilateral Format as a Complementary Track for C6

The wider significance of the Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan trilateral format should be assessed in the context of growing regional cooperation across the Caspian space, particularly in the fields of energy and transport. Azerbaijan–Turkmenistan relations have developed dynamically in recent years and now cover a broader agenda, including energy, transport, logistics and regional integration. In this context, the trilateral format established in 2025 is particularly important, as it aims to develop cooperation in energy, transport and logistics, strengthen regional integration and address practical issues more efficiently. Uzbekistan adds an important economic and energy dimension to this framework, as its growing cooperation with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan strengthens the Central Asian side of the wider trans-Caspian connectivity chain.

The energy dimension is especially relevant. Turkmenistan is interested in diversifying its gas exports and needs new routes, while Europe is seeking alternative energy sources. In this regard, Azerbaijan can play an important role as a transit and energy hub. At the same time, Azerbaijan–Uzbekistan energy cooperation, including in hydrocarbon exploration and renewable energy connectivity, is becoming increasingly project-based. Together, these tracks show that the trilateral format is not limited to transport coordination but can also support a broader energy agenda linking Central Asia, the Caspian Sea and Europe.

On November 16, 2025, Azerbaijan became a fully-fledged participant in the Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia (C5), which was a significant development in acknowledging the increasing interconnection between the South Caucasus and Central Asia. At the same summit in Tashkent, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev suggested that the consultative meetings be transformed into a more

15 The Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Joint venture set up for Azerbaijan-Central Asia Green Energy Corridor project”, July 1, 2025. Available at: <https://minenergy.gov.az/en/xeberler-arxivi/00567>.

formal “Community of Central Asia”.¹⁶ He also suggested that the institutional foundations of the format be strengthened through the implementation of regulations, a rotating secretariat and upgraded national coordinators.

In this context, the trilateral format can contribute to the institutionalization of C6 without imposing an excessive degree of rigidity. Smaller mechanisms, such as the cooperation between Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, can be used to test practical solutions, identify bottlenecks and develop models of coordination that can subsequently be expanded to a broader format.

By bringing together three complementary links of the Central Asia–Caspian–South Caucasus chain, the trilateral format can help translate the broader political vision of C6 into practical sectoral coordination.

Conclusion

The trilateral format of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan illustrates the transition from political dialogue to practical implementation in regional cooperation. Its value is derived from its capacity to establish a connection between the economic, transit and energy potential of Central Asia, and Azerbaijan’s position as the

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western Caspian gateway to the South Caucasus, Türkiye and Europe. Consequently, the format is not a substitute for more extensive platforms; rather, it serves as a mechanism that can enhance their efficacy and accelerate implementation.

In this regard, the significance of the trilateral partnership extends beyond the three countries that are involved. It has the potential to enhance the C6 framework by offering a flexible operational track within the broader regional architecture. Through this cooperation, the idea of Central Asia and Azerbaijan as an interconnected geo-economic space can gradually move from political vision to institutional practice.

16 Raxmonkulova S., “Central Asia and South Caucasus forge stronger ties at Tashkent summit”, *Euronews*, November 18, 2025. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2025/11/18/central-asia-and-south-caucasus-forge-stronger-ties-at-tashkent-summit>.