

Investors' Forum on Sustainable Transport Connections between Europe and Central Asia
29-30 January, Brussels
Concept Note

Context

The European Union has significantly enhanced its cooperation with Central Asia, given the strategic geographical location and the pivotal role of the region in Europe-Asia connectivity and many other areas of close collaboration. This is reflected in the EU Strategy on Central Asia, which highlights partnering for prosperity and support to regional integration as priorities for EU engagement. The cooperation between the EU and Central Asia has increased substantially, growing in political importance, potential and ambition, and leading to the deepening and widening of our partnership.

Central Asian countries have shown their determination to step up intra-regional cooperation in the field of transport and connectivity, as underscored by the signing of the Agreement on strengthening the connectivity of land transport in Central Asia at the Fifth Consultative Meeting of Heads of State of Central Asia held on 14 and 15 September 2023 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

One of the key findings of the EU Study on Sustainable Transport Corridors between the EU and Central Asia, implemented by the EBRD, is that the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor creates new opportunities and has the potential to handle more land-based trade between Europe and Asia if missing links, bottlenecks, capacity shortages, border-crossings and other issues limiting connectivity are addressed.

Objectives

The Investors Forum takes forward the conclusions of the Study and aims to translate the political commitments of the EU and the five countries in Central Asia to enhance and reinforce connectivity into tangible operational deliverables. The Forum will be contributing to the long-term objective of making the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor a multimodal, modern, competitive, sustainable, predictable, smart and fast route linking Europe and Central Asia in 15 days or less. For this, the Investors Forum aims to:

- i) send a strong and concrete signal to the five Central Asian countries of the EU's political and operational commitment to strengthen connectivity with the region through the Global Gateway initiative,
- ii) kick-start the process for implementing and coordinating investments along the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor by following up on specific actions identified in the Study, notably by mobilising investors on specific projects, with concrete and realistic timelines and financial commitments.
- iii) commit key stakeholders for continued participation in the Forum as the main platform for implementing the projects identified in the Study.

Deliverables

The event will establish the Global Gateway Investors Forum that would convene on a regular basis to take stock of and drive forward the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor and supports its coordinated management.

A pipeline of projects will be established, ranked by level of maturity, contributing to the overall goal of reaching the target transit time of no more than 15 days. For each project, a process leading to firm commitments within realistic timeframes should be put in place, with prospective co-financing formulas where applicable. A deliverable will therefore be the conclusions from each breakout session, identifying the prospective interest of investors in each key action for corridor development identified in the Study.

Another desired outcome would be to support the creation of a Coordination Platform through which public and private investors could interact to maximise their efforts and investments.

The European Commission plans to announce the steps it will take to concretely support priority measures identified in the Study, as a way to accompany actual hard infrastructure investments and soft connectivity measures.

The approach will fully take into account the need for investments for increased connectivity along the whole Corridor between the EU and Asia. This means also the extension of the Trans-European Transport Networks to Caucasus countries and Türkiye.

Format and participation

The Forum will gather high-level government officials from the Corridor countries, EU Member States, EU Institutions, international and bilateral financial institutions, representatives of the private sector and members of civil society.

The event will be opened by a high-ranking representative of the European Commission who will set the scene and frame the overall expectations in relation to the Investors Forum. This will be followed by high-level roundtable discussions among relevant public and private stakeholders.

Breakout sessions on specific areas of cooperation, including priority infrastructure projects and soft connectivity measures identified in the Study will then take place during the Forum.

The event will be concluded with a closing session taking stock of the discussions that took place during the Forum and during the breakout sessions and announcing the next steps.