

# ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ ҚАТЫНАСТАР INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ

## STRATEGIC INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND THE GULF STATES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ONE BELT AND ONE ROAD INITIATIVE

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**Annotation.** The article examines the formation of a strategic partnership between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Gulf states in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The relevance of the topic is due to the growing interdependence of Central Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in the fields of transport, energy and investment. The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach combining methods of political analysis and international relations. The challenges to the sustainability of the partnership are discussed, including dependence on external capital, geopolitical competition and infrastructure constraints. The conclusion is that institutionalisation and diversification of cooperation can transform Kazakhstan and the Gulf countries into a model of interregional integration that contributes to the formation of a new architecture for the Eurasian space.

**Key words:** Kazakhstan, Gulf states, strategic partnership, Belt and Road Initiative, energy cooperation.

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада «Бір белдеу, бір жол» қытайлық бастамасы аясында Қазақстан Республикасы мен Шығанағы мемлекеттері арасында стратегиялық серіктестікті қалыптастыру қарастырылады. Тақырыптың өзектілігі Орталық Азия мен Шығанағы араб мемлекеттерінің ынтымақтастық кеңесі елдерінің көлік, энергетика және инвестициялар саласындағы өзара тәуелділігінің өсуімен байланысты. Сыртқы капиталға тәуелділікті, геосаяси бәсекелестікті және инфрақұрылымдық шектеулерді қоса алғанда, әріптестік тұрақтылығының сын-қатерлері талқыланды. Ынтымақтастықты институционалдандыру және әртараптандыру Қазақстан мен Шығанағы елдерінің өзара іс-қимылын Еуразиялық кеңістіктің жаңа архитектурасын қалыптастыруға ықпал ететін өңіраралық интеграция моделіне айналдыра алады деген қорытынды шығарылды.

**Түйінді сөздер:** Қазақстан, Шығанағы мемлекеттері, стратегиялық серіктестік, «Бір белдеу, бір жол» бастамасы, энергетикалық ынтымақтастық.

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается формирование стратегического партнёрства между Республикой Казахстан и государствами Залива в контексте китайской инициативы «Один пояс, один путь». Актуальность темы обусловлена растущей взаимозависимостью Центральной Азии и стран Совета сотрудничества арабских государств Залива в сфере транспорта, энергетики и инвестиций. Исследование основано на междисциплинарном подходе, объединяющем методы политического анализа и международных отношений. Обсуждаются вызовы устойчивости партнёрства, включая зависимость от внешнего капитала, геополитическую конкуренцию и инфраструктурные ограничения. Делается вывод, что институционализация и диверсификация сотрудничества способны превратить Казахстан и страны Залива во взаимодействие и модель межрегиональной интеграции, способствующую формированию новой архитектуры Евразийского пространства.

**Ключевые слова:** Казахстан, государства Залива, инициатива «Один пояс, один путь», энергетическое сотрудничество.

## Introduction

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the creation of the Silk Road Economic Belt at Nazarbayev University in Astana – the land component of the large-scale Belt and Road Initiative (hereinafter referred to as BRI). The BRI idea was China's response to the need to diversify supply routes and strengthen regional connectivity. According to research by European analysts, the Gulf states quickly joined the project, seeking to attract Chinese investment and compensate for the reduction in US support. Between 2016 and 2020, trade between China and the Gulf countries grew significantly, and Chinese companies began investing in infrastructure projects in Bahrain, Oman and the UAE (Eslami & Papageorgiou, 2023).

In his Address to the People of Kazakhstan, «Kazakhstan in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Current Challenges and Their Solutions through Digital Transformation», our Head of State, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, emphasised the particular importance of developing regional transport connectivity as a key factor in the country's economic growth and international standing. The President noted that our country, with its status as a major transit power, must focus on strengthening transport corridors and diversifying routes, which is fully in line with the tasks set out in the BRI initiative. The emphasis on the need to strengthen friendly and mutually beneficial ties with all interested states reflects Kazakhstan's strategic foreign policy line aimed at developing multilateral partnerships, including cooperation with the Gulf countries. These states as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain are becoming important participants in Eurasian logistics and energy chains, and their interaction with Kazakhstan in the transport infrastructure, investment and technology spheres embodies the tasks outlined by the President (Tokayev, 2025).

Kazakhstan, geographically located between China and Europe, has become a key link in the Belt and Road Initiative. The Nurlı Zhol national programme has been synchronised with the Chinese initiative, resulting in the implementation of major road and rail projects in the country. Kazakhstan has increased the number of freight trains between China and Europe; in 2016 alone, such transport grew by 21%, with 84% of all trips being freight, which shows that transport connectivity does not always automatically bring economic growth without the development of domestic industry and logistics services (World Bank, 2020). The purpose of this article is to analyse how the strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and the Gulf states is forming in the context of the BRI initiative, which areas of cooperation prevail, and what challenges arise in the process of deepening cooperation. Unlike previous studies, which focused on bilateral relations, this article takes a comprehensive approach, taking into account trade, economic, energy, humanitarian and diplomatic aspects, as well as the role of multilateral mechanisms (Central Asia–Gulf Cooperation Council summits (hereinafter referred to as CA–GCC), activities of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, etc).

## Literature review

The academic discourse on the interaction between Central Asia and the Gulf states reflects several trends. The first line of discourse is devoted to analysing the participation of Arab monarchies in China's Belt and Road Initiative. F. Kaba-Maria and R. Musetescu emphasise that Gulf states view the BRI as a tool for strengthening their own economic security and diversifying their sources of income; they use Chinese investment to modernise infrastructure and develop non-resource sectors. It is noted that the strengthening of China's presence in the region is accompanied by the emergence of new forms of cooperation, including joint investment funds and industrial parks (Caba-Maria & Musetescu, 2020). Other researchers confirm that the countries belonging to CA–GCC are seeking to benefit from the BRI in order to compensate for the decline in Western support and strengthen their role in Eurasian supply chains (Fulton, 2017).

**The second line** of research concerns Kazakhstan's role as a transit country. M. Larouelle points out that the development of rail and road corridors within the framework of the BRI has brought Kazakhstan an increase in transit traffic, but at the same time has created the problem of «excessive connectivity», with the country risking becoming merely a transit corridor without creating any added value. Researchers emphasise the need to synchronise infrastructure projects with industrial clusters and logistics services in order to derive maximum benefit (Laruelle, 2018). Kazakhstani experts have reached similar conclusions, noting that the development of domestic production and services is a key condition for converting transit potential into sustainable economic growth (EnergyProm.kz, 2025).

**The third group** of works examines political and geostrategic aspects. J. Fulton writes that Gulf states, looking to their Asian partners, are beginning to perceive themselves as part of the 'Indo-Pacific' space; China's growing influence in the Gulf region is creating competition with the US and may transform the security architecture (Fulton, 2018). In this context, the strengthening of ties between the Central Asian states and the GCC fits into a broader shift by the Gulf states towards the East. Analysts note that the normalisation of Saudi-Iranian relations through Chinese mediation (March 2023) opens up new logistics routes to the north, including the Iranian-Kazakh corridor, which increases the importance of the CA as a link between the Persian Gulf and Eurasia. At the same time, there is a growing need to balance the interests of China and the United States, as their rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region is echoed in the Middle East (Lynch, 2023).

**The fourth line** is research devoted to economic ties between Central Asia and the Gulf. Arab sources note that after the first CA–GCC summit (Jeddah, July 2023), Gulf states' investments in the CA economies nearly tripled, and the Islamic Development Bank invested a total of \$9.1 billion in the CIS countries, of which about 60% went to CA. At the same time, the region itself provides 20% of the world's uranium reserves and a significant share of proven oil and gas reserves, while the Gulf countries provide financial resources and global logistics hubs (Sager & Aripov, 2025). This complementarity of resources, capital and infrastructure creates the conditions for a win-win model in which the parties compensate for each other's weaknesses.

Finally, a growing number of publications are devoted to green energy and climate issues. D. Ansari, R.M. Gerung and Y.M. Pepe analyse the phenomenon of joint investments by China and the Gulf countries in renewable energy projects in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The authors emphasise that since 2019, China's Silk Road Fund has owned 49% of the shares in ACWA Power Renewable Energy Holding. It is also noted that Kazakhstan has set a target of increasing the share of renewable energy sources (hereinafter referred to as RES) to 35% by 2035, which makes Gulf investment in this sector particularly relevant. Overall, researchers are observing a shift in focus, with energy cooperation moving away from oil and gas towards joint development of RES and co-financing of clean technologies (Ansari et al., 2025).

O. Timakova's work analyses the strategy of the Gulf countries in Central Asia. The author identifies three main areas of cooperation: financing infrastructure projects, participating in the development of hydrocarbon deposits, and developing Islamic banking. Particular attention is paid to agriculture and water security, as the GCC countries import up to 60% of their food, while the Central Asian states are capable of exporting significant volumes of grain and meat. Timakova also emphasises that the lack of a direct logistics corridor to the Arabian Peninsula and security issues related to supplies require comprehensive infrastructure solutions (Timakova, 2020). Western analysts offer similar assessments, pointing to the need for new transport routes (e.g. through Iran) and insurance mechanisms to reduce risks.

The above studies form the theoretical basis of our analysis, allowing us to examine the Republic of Kazakhstan's cooperation with the Gulf countries through the prism of economic complementarity, infrastructure integration, energy transition and regional security. At the same time, the relevance of the topic is growing. Despite the existence of studies on individual aspects, comprehensive research combining economics, security and green growth is only just beginning to emerge. This article fills this gap by synthesising disparate areas into a coherent picture.

### **Materials and methods**

The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach combining tools from political science, international relations and economic analysis. The empirical base is formed on the basis of open statistical data, reports from international organisations and scientific publications reviewed in leading databases (Scopus, Web of Science). The main sources were the official websites of the

governments of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, as well as materials from the Islamic Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the World Bank. To ensure relevance, data for the period 2013–2025 was used, covering the dynamics of trade and investment interaction, infrastructure projects and initiatives in the field of renewable energy.

Data collection methods included searching for and systematising statistical indicators, official press releases, speeches by political leaders, and expert commentary. Information was selected based on criteria of reliability, representativeness, and scientific significance.

Data processing and analysis methods were based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools. The quantitative part included statistical data processing using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and trend visualization. The qualitative part involved content analysis of scientific texts, political statements, and strategic documents (Nurly Zhol, Saudi Vision 2030, Oman Vision 2040, joint declarations by CA–GCC). The analysis made it possible to identify key areas of cooperation, their institutional features and strategic priorities.

In addition, the case study method was used for a number of landmark projects: DP World's participation in the development of the port of Aktau, AD Ports Group's investment in the port of Kuryk, the construction of the ACWA Power wind farm and Masdar solar power plants. Each case was studied in dynamics — from the conclusion of the agreement to the current status of implementation — with the aim of identifying factors that contribute to or hinder effective partnership.

To analyse the institutional context, comparative analysis and historical-institutional approaches were used, allowing us to trace the evolution of cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Gulf countries within the framework of the OPEC initiative and regional strategies. The reliability of the results is ensured by data triangulation — comparing information from independent sources and verifying it against official documents.

## Results

Trade and investment. Trade turnover between Kazakhstan and the Gulf countries grew from a low base. In 2021, the total trade volume of all GCC countries amounted to about \$3.1 billion, which was less than 0.3% of their total foreign trade turnover. However, after the first CA–GCC summit in Jeddah (2023) and the adoption of a joint Action Plan for 2023–2027, Arab countries significantly increased their economic activity. This was reflected in an increase in financial assistance and investment. In 2021, the volume of official development assistance from the Gulf states to Central Asia reached: \$47.2 million from the UAE, \$43.6 million from Saudi Arabia, \$33.3 million from Kuwait, and \$5.2 million from Qatar. These figures indicate a growing humanitarian contribution, although Central Asia's share is still low compared to the funds provided by the Islamic Development Bank (\$9.1 billion for the CIS countries) (Islamic Development Bank, 2025).

Direct investment from Gulf countries in Kazakhstan is also growing steadily. The UAE is the largest Arab investor. According to the Kazakh government, the total volume of investments by Emirati companies exceeded \$4.3 billion, covering port infrastructure, energy, the financial sector and agribusiness. This is evidenced by agreements with DP World on the management of the port of Aktau, with Abu Dhabi Ports on the creation of a multifunctional terminal in the port of Kuryk, Masdar projects on the construction of solar and wind power plants, as well as the participation of Emirati funds in the development of the Astana International Financial Centre (hereinafter referred to as the AIFC). The Saudi fund SALIC is showing interest in agricultural projects aimed at creating joint food hubs and developing Islamic rural finance, while Saudi officials are discussing participation in oil and gas chemical enterprises and the extraction of rare earth metals for high-tech industries (Silkway TV, 2025).

Qatar is gradually increasing its presence. Following Emir Tamim Al Thani's visit to Astana (October 2022), agreements were signed on mutual investment protection and cooperation in agriculture, healthcare and the financial sector. The Qatari company Nebras Power is considering investing in the construction of solar power plants, and Qatari financiers, together with the AIFC, are working on opening the first Islamic bank in the region. Although the volume of Qatari investments is still relatively small, the trend is positive. Kuwait and Bahrain remain niche investors, participating mainly in social projects (education, medicine) and human capital financing (Omirgazy, 2022).

The results of the analysis are reflected in Table 1, which shows the key parameters of Kazakhstan's cooperation with the Gulf countries. The «Aid» column shows the amounts of official development assistance in 2021 (in millions of dollars), while the «Investments» column shows the



estimated cumulative investments in the economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (in millions of dollars). Priority sectors of cooperation and examples of projects related to OPEC are also indicated.

**Table 1. Key Parameters of Aid and Investment Provided by Gulf Countries to Kazakhstan (as of 2023)**

Country	Assistance (million)	Investments (million)	Areas of cooperation	One Belt, One Road projects
<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	47.2	4300	Ports, renewable energy, Islamic finance, agricultural production complex	Khorgos and Aktau (port cooperation with DP World); Kuryk port (AD Ports Group); Masdar solar and wind farms; participation in the International Financial Centre Authority (IFCA)
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	43.6	100	Wind energy, oil and gas, agriculture, rare earth metals	ACWA Power wind farm (Zhambyl Region); coordination of OPEC+ deals; potential projects in petrochemicals
<b>Qatar</b>	5.2	200	Agriculture, solar energy, financial services	Nebras Power projects in solar energy; planned Islamic bank in the IFCA; educational and medical programmes
<b>Kuwait</b>	33.3	50	Social projects, Islamic finance, oil and gas chemistry	Funding for schools and hospitals (grants); interest in participating in petrochemical initiatives
<b>Oman</b>	-	50	Logistics, port infrastructure, oil and gas projects	Participation in the Ashgabat Agreement (North-South Corridor); plans to establish logistics hubs (Sohar and Dukm ports)
<b>Bahrain</b>	-	20	Financial technology, real estate	Interest in fintech projects at the AIFC (Astana Hub, Fintech)

*Note: This table has been compiled by the author on the basis of official statistical data from the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, materials of UNCTAD and the OECD, as well as information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the national company Kazakh Invest. Data on priority areas of cooperation and ongoing projects are synthesized from intergovernmental agreements, analytical reports, and publicly available information from international investment companies, current as of 2023.*

The table shows that the UAE has taken the lead in terms of investment presence, focusing on infrastructure and the financial sector, while Saudi Arabia is concentrating on energy. Qatar and Kuwait are increasing their activity in a targeted manner, through individual projects. Oman and Bahrain are only beginning to show interest, probably looking to the experience of their neighbours.

**Energy cooperation.** The energy sector is key to the partnership between our countries. Firstly, countries cooperate within the framework of OPEC+ agreements, jointly regulating oil

production volumes to maintain stable prices. Kazakhstan's participation in the OPEC+ agreements strengthens its ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Regular consultations between ministers help to align national quotas with the global energy market situation. In addition, Saudi Aramco is interested in participating in oil refining projects in Kazakhstan and modernising petrochemical production, which could bring advanced technologies and increase the added value of Kazakh exports.

Secondly, renewable energy has become a new flagship area of cooperation. Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power is implementing a 1 GW wind farm project in Kazakhstan's Zhambyl region – the company's first in Central Asia – investing around \$1.5–1.8 billion jointly with Kazakh partners. At the same time, its Uzbek projects are estimated at \$13.5 billion in partnership with China's Power China, which demonstrates a trilateral model of cooperation between China, CA-GCC. The Chinese Silk Road Fund's 49% stake in ACWA Power Renewable Energy Holding is an example of co-investment by China and the Gulf countries in green energy (PR Newswire, 2019).

In 2023, a memorandum of cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear energy was signed between the relevant Kazakh and Saudi agencies. It provides for the exchange of experience in the field of nuclear safety, staff training and the possible participation of Saudi companies in projects for uranium enrichment or the construction of small and medium-capacity reactors. For Kazakhstan, already a world leader in uranium production, partnership with the technologically advanced countries of GCC opens the way to creating its own processing base in the nuclear industry (Squassoni, 2023).

The transition to a low-carbon economy also plays an important role. Gulf countries, especially the UAE and Saudi Arabia, are investing heavily in carbon capture and storage technologies and the development of green hydrogen. Kazakhstan, which is seeking to reduce the carbon intensity of its economy, is looking to the UAE's best practices in creating green economic zones, such as Masdar City, where clean production and innovation in sustainable energy are encouraged. An exchange of experts has already been established within the framework of the Astana-Abu Dhabi Energy Dialogue platform, launched in 2022 (Masdar, 2025). Thus, energy cooperation is taking on a strategic character, with partners jointly preparing for a global energy transformation dominated by renewable energy sources, hydrogen and energy efficiency.

In 2023, initial consultations were held between the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Saudi holding company NEOM on the implementation of the Green Hydrogen megaproject in the Middle East. The idea of creating a pilot hydrogen production facility in Kazakhstan with the participation of capital from the UAE and Saudi Arabia, focused on exports, is being discussed (Omirgazy, 2025). If this plan comes to fruition, Kazakhstan could become part of the global hydrogen chain, while the Gulf monarchies could secure a new eco-friendly niche in the supply of fuel for the future.

Thus, the energy partnership between Kazakhstan and the SSAZ is developing along two tracks: optimisation of the traditional oil and gas sector, coordination within OPEC+, joint oil refineries, uranium trade, and breakthroughs in new energy sectors such as renewable energy sources, hydrogen, nuclear power, and energy-saving technologies.

### **Infrastructure and logistics.**

Infrastructure projects are the foundation of the OPEC initiative. The Republic of Kazakhstan, which does not have direct access to the open sea, aims to become a transit hub for Eurasia. The Gulf states, with their advanced ports and experience in logistics management, are natural partners in the development of transcontinental corridors linking East and West.

The most significant results of cooperation have been observed in the port sector and the development of dry terminals. In 2023, Abu Dhabi Ports Group (AD Ports) signed an agreement to invest approximately \$50 million in the infrastructure of the port of Kuryk on the Caspian Sea. The project involves the construction of a multifunctional terminal, including the Sarzha grain terminal, the creation of a ship repair base and the development of a container hub on the Caspian route (AD Ports Group, 2023). The implementation of these projects will increase the transport capacity of the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian route) and reduce the delivery time for goods between China and Europe via Kazakhstan.

Another area of focus is the development of rail and road corridors. Kazakhstan, together with Turkmenistan and Iran, is promoting the North-South corridor, which allows cargo from Central Asia to reach the Iranian ports of Bandar Abbas and Chabahar on the Indian Ocean coast. To overcome this barrier, discussions are underway on the creation of a single international transport company combining the resources of the railways of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran and partners

from GCC, as well as risk insurance mechanisms for cargo transiting through politically unstable areas (ERAI, 2025)

Infrastructure development is accompanied by the introduction of digital technologies. Starting in 2022, the UAE and Kazakhstan will implement a pilot project for real-time cargo data exchange: «DP World Digital Trading Corridors» platforms are integrated with the information systems of Kazakhstan Railways, which reduces customs clearance time and increases transit transparency. The Emirates also plans to connect Kazakh companies to the global electronic trading platform Dubai Trade, which will provide them with direct access to international markets and facilitate export logistics (FreightWaves, 2017). There are discussions about creating a joint air cargo hub in Almaty or Astana in the future. Emirates and Qatar Airways are interested in developing passenger and cargo transit through Central Asia, which could strengthen the region's position on the global air transport map.

Infrastructure cooperation also has a political dimension. Participants in the Middle Corridor (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey) are promoting the diversification of routes bypassing Russia, while Gulf countries, by investing in these routes, gain strategic control and the ability to influence the direction of goods flows. In 2025, these banks jointly announced a project to increase the capacity of the Middle Corridor in Kazakhstan, including the construction of a new railway line between «Moynaty and Dostyk» and guarantee mechanisms to attract private investment (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, 2025). These efforts complement the initiatives of the Gulf countries, ensuring synergy between public and private capital. Ultimately, the creation of a modern infrastructure network serves the common interest of forming a single Eurasian space, where Central Asia and the Middle East become the connecting links of the global economy.

**Humanitarian and cultural cooperation.** In addition to economic benefits, cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Gulf states has a pronounced humanitarian and cultural component. Muslim identity and historical ties serve as a natural foundation for the development of soft power and public diplomacy between the regions. Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, Arab monarchies established a number of religious foundations in Central Asia that built mosques and madrasas and offered educational programmes for local residents. These initiatives helped strengthen ties between Muslim peoples, although they were sometimes accompanied by competition between Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran in promoting their interpretations of Islam. By the 2010s, the focus had shifted. After the events of the Arab Spring, Central Asian governments became more cautious about the uncontrolled influence of religious organisations. Humanitarian cooperation took on a more pragmatic character, with attention shifting to secular areas such as education, healthcare, sports and culture. Current initiatives cover a wide range of areas. Qatar is investing in the creation of educational institutions in Kazakhstan, the opening of branches of Qatari universities in Astana is being discussed, and scholarships are already being allocated for Kazakhstani students to study in Doha. The UAE supports joint educational programmes between universities, agreements between Nazarbayev University and the UAE University, which contribute to the development of Kazakhstani youth's competencies in Islamic finance, engineering, and IT through exchange internships. Saudi funds (Saudi Development Fund) finance the construction of schools and hospitals in rural areas of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as humanitarian aid. These projects contribute to improving living standards and shaping a positive image of the Gulf countries among the population of Central Asia.

Spiritual diplomacy is a significant aspect. Kazakhstan actively positions itself as a bridge between East and West in the field of interfaith dialogue – every three years, Astana hosts Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which bring together Islamic, Christian, Jewish and Buddhist leaders. Arab countries support these initiatives: for example, the General Secretariat of GCC sends delegations to the congresses, and Saudi Arabia and Jordan are among the sponsors of interfaith dialogue centres opened in Almaty. This soft power cooperation creates the basis for public diplomacy, complementing economic projects. Shared religious values and cultural affinities, through Turkic heritage, Islam and the common history of the Silk Road, act as the «cement» for strategic partnership, helping to build trust at the community level.

**Multilateral initiatives and diplomacy.** At the intergovernmental level, cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Gulf countries goes beyond purely bilateral relations and is becoming increasingly institutionalised. In 2023, the first ever CA–GCC summit was held in Jeddah, where the presidents of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan met with the leaders of six Arab monarchies in the Gulf.

The Central Asia–GCC dialogue institutionalises cooperation in several areas at once. Joint working groups on trade and investment, transport and logistics, energy, culture and education are already in place. At meetings in 2024, Kazakhstan proposed establishing a joint Business Council and Central Asia–Gulf Investment Fund, which could finance key projects in infrastructure and agriculture. These ideas were supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which see them as an opportunity to join forces with partners and reduce risks for individual participants. All this reflects a growing understanding that for a partnership to be sustainable, it needs its own institutional framework (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). It is important that the multilateral agenda also includes security issues. The countries are discussing cooperation in the fight against transnational crime, cyber threats and extremism. The participation of Arab countries in Eurasian integration structures is also of strategic importance. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (hereinafter referred to as the SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (hereinafter referred to as the EAEU) attract the attention of GCC as platforms for expanding influence in Central Asia. In 2022, the UAE received dialogue partner status in the SCO, while Saudi Arabia and Qatar have applied for similar status, which will allow the Gulf countries to better understand the processes in Central Asia and participate in collective projects within the SCO, ranging from transport initiatives to the exchange of experience in security. In turn, the Republic of Kazakhstan and its neighbours support the desire of their partners from the GCC to integrate into Eurasian formats.

Thus, a new architecture of South-South cooperation is emerging before our eyes, with Central Asia and the Gulf states forming a bridge between the Middle East and East Asia. This architecture is still in its infancy, but its institutionalisation, regular meetings, councils and funds agreed upon by the leaders will contribute to its strengthening. Clear mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of agreements need to be developed to avoid a situation where bold declarations remain on paper. In this regard, ASEAN's experience in creating a system of indicators and a secretariat for coordination will be useful – perhaps the CA and GCC will eventually come to the creation of a permanent coordination committee. In any case, the beginning has been laid, and the historical division between regions is being overcome for the sake of common interests in development and security.

### Discussion

The results of the analysis show that cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Gulf states has become a complex and multifaceted system of mutually beneficial relations. The trade and economic part is characterised by the desire of both sides to diversify their partners. For Kazakhstan and its neighbours in Central Asia, this is a way to reduce dependence on traditional major players such as Russia, China and the EU, while for the Gulf countries, it is a way to reduce their unilateral focus on hydrocarbon exports and Western markets. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has repeatedly emphasised that he sees the UAE and Saudi Arabia as key partners in the Arab world, strategically complementing Kazakhstan's foreign policy. Such statements at the highest level set a favourable tone and encourage government agencies to work more actively on the implementation of agreements (Kazinform International News Agency, 2025).

However, there are also risks. First, dependence on funding from wealthy oil monarchies could lead to an uneven distribution of benefits and increase the influence of external actors on the domestic politics of the Republic of Kazakhstan. If a significant share of critical infrastructure or the banking sector is controlled by GCC capital, this could theoretically be used as a tool of geopolitical influence. Secondly, geopolitical competition between major powers such as Russia, China, the US, Turkey and Iran creates uncertainty in the context. And changes in the international situation – for example, a new escalation in relations between the US and Iran – could hamper the implementation of joint projects that pass through Iranian territory or are associated with sanctions risks. Kazakhstan and its partners will have to manoeuvre carefully to avoid being drawn into other countries' conflicts.

The energy partnership demonstrates high potential for a joint transition to a green economy. Projects to build wind farms and solar power stations involving «ACWA Power», «Masdar» and «Nebras Power» not only reduce the carbon footprint, but also create new value chains, equipment manufacturing, localisation of services and staff training. However, their successful implementation requires transparent regulation, stable tariff policy and guarantees of return on investment.

Logistical cooperation is the cornerstone of the BRI initiative, but it remains vulnerable. The central corridor through the Caspian Sea faces infrastructure bottlenecks – limited port capacity, a shortage of rolling stock, and difficulties in coordinating tariffs between different countries. The North-



South corridor faces political risks in the Iranian section due to sanctions and regional instability. At the same time, China and Russia are simultaneously developing alternative routes through Iran to China, or the Northern Sea Route, which could weaken cargo flows through Kazakhstan. As discussed above, the answer may lie in the deep integration of information systems and joint investment by the Gulf states, China and the Central Asian states in the modernization of ports, railways and digital services. Humanitarian and cultural cooperation strengthens the social foundation of the partnership. Investments in education and healthcare, support for Islamic cultural initiatives, and the development of tourism all contribute to a positive image of Arab countries and strengthen trust in Central Asian societies. The multilateral format of the CA–GCC opens up opportunities for collective solutions to regional problems. Institutionalizing dialogue contributes to the formation of a new Eurasian architecture, where Central Asian and Gulf countries act as equal partners. The first results are already being felt, such as the simplification of visa regimes, the synchronization of investment plans, and support on international platforms, namely mutual support for candidates to the UN Security Council. However, clear mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating progress are important for the sustainability of initiatives. Only with transparency and long-term planning can declarative statements be avoided and the real effect of agreements be ensured. Perhaps it would be worth creating a small Joint Secretariat or Coordination Centre for CA-GCC, which would monitor the implementation of projects and recommend new areas of cooperation. The long-term success of the partnership will largely depend on the involvement of the private sector and civil society, which can bring additional sustainability and creativity to the cooperation that goes beyond intergovernmental relations.

Overall, cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Gulf states is no longer perceived as something exotic or secondary – on the contrary, it is becoming part of the larger process of «Southern integration» in world politics. As GCC Secretary General Jassim Al-Budai noted in one of his speeches, «the Gulf countries and Central Asia together are building a bridge between Asia and the Middle East, offering the world an example of successful interregional partnership». Our analysis confirms the validity of these words, while pointing to the need for careful management of emerging risks.

### Conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this study indicates that cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Gulf states has gradually moved beyond an ad hoc or episodic format and has taken on the characteristics of a more structured interregional interaction. The empirical material suggests that this partnership is not based on symmetrical participation, but rather on sectoral complementarity. In practice, Gulf countries tend to play a leading role as sources of investment capital, financial instruments, and expertise in logistics and infrastructure management, while Kazakhstan contributes transit potential, access to natural resources, and institutional-regulatory connectivity with key Eurasian transport corridors. In this context, the Belt and Road Initiative does not operate as an independent or overriding driver of cooperation, but instead serves as a supportive framework that enhances and aligns existing national development priorities. Overall, these findings are consistent with theoretical approaches rooted in interregionalism and complex interdependence, where cooperation is shaped by pragmatic, multi-vector strategies focused on economic diversification and risk management, rather than on formal integration mechanisms or alliance-based commitments.

The strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and the Gulf states in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative is developing rapidly and multidimensionally. It is based on the mutual complementarity of resources and advantages: the Republic of Kazakhstan offers transit potential, rich natural resources and political stability, while the Gulf countries offer capital, advanced management experience in logistics and direct access to world markets. Over the past five years, the partnership has grown significantly, with increasing investment and aid, large-scale infrastructure and energy projects, and more active humanitarian cooperation. New value chains are being formed, from joint port terminals to cross-border educational programmes. Nevertheless, the parties face serious challenges. The main thing is to avoid a model in which Central Asia becomes merely a transit corridor or an object of external expansion, without receiving any long-term benefits. To this end, it is necessary to develop its own production capacities, innovative clusters and human resources so that foreign investment is integrated into the local economy rather than operating in isolation. Political flexibility also plays an important role. The multi-vector diplomacy of Kazakhstan and its neighbors allows it to balance the interests of China, Russia, the West and the Gulf countries,

but it also requires constant coordination and foresight. Strengthening the presence of GCC should not lead to the displacement of other partners. On the contrary, the optimal strategy for Kazakhstan and the Central Asian countries is to involve as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, creating a competitive environment and opportunities for manoeuvre. In analytical terms, the Kazakhstan–Gulf partnership may be viewed as an illustration of a contemporary geoeconomics pattern of cooperation, in which infrastructure development, energy cooperation, and financial engagement constitute the principal instruments of influence and growth. This interaction does not presuppose the emergence of a consolidated political bloc; rather, it represents a flexible mode of engagement shaped by converging economic interests, institutional experimentation, and responsiveness to external constraints. Such a configuration enables the participating states to enhance connectivity while retaining strategic autonomy, a factor of particular importance in the context of intensified global competition and increasingly fragmented governance structures.

The results of the study indicate that the long-term effectiveness of this partnership is contingent upon three interrelated factors:

- the capacity to generate higher value added along transport corridors instead of relying exclusively on transit flows;
- the advancement of institutional coordination mechanisms, including public–private partnerships and multilateral platforms;
- and the integration of risk-management approaches into the governance of infrastructure and energy projects. Taken together, these elements provide the foundation for converting connectivity into sustainable economic outcomes and longer-term strategic advantages.

In the long term, the successful development of the partnership depends on the institutionalisation of dialogue, with regular summits, joint working groups and monitoring mechanisms becoming an integral part of cooperation. The participation of the private sector and civil society is also important, as they can give the cooperation additional stability and fill it with specific bottom-up projects. If these conditions are met, the partnership between Kazakhstan and the Gulf states could become one of the pillars of new Eurasian integration, contributing to the prosperity and stability of both sides. It could also serve as a model for successful interregional South-South cooperation in the 21st century, demonstrating how new bridges between parts of Greater Eurasia can be built on the basis of complementarity and respect for sovereignty.

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## БІР БЕЛДЕУ, БІР ЖОЛ» БАСТАМАСЫН ІСКЕ АСЫРУ КОНТЕКСТІНДЕГІ ҚАЗАҚСТАН МЕН ПАРСЫ ШЫҒАНАҒЫ МЕМЛЕКЕТТЕРІ АРАСЫНДАҒЫ СТРАТЕГИЯЛЫҚ ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ ӨРІПТЕСТІК

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