



Kazakhstan- EU Weekly Briefing

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Highlights

Middle Corridor

The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) reached a historic milestone on March 11, 2026, when the Kazakhstan Ministry of Transport reported that annual freight volumes have surged fivefold over the past seven years, now reaching a record 4.5 million tons. To sustain this unprecedented momentum, the European Union formally finalized a €10.4 million grant this week to complement a €35 million loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) for the comprehensive modernization of Aktau Port. This financial package is specifically earmarked for the reconstruction of Berths No. 3 and No. 12 and the acquisition of high-capacity ship-to-shore (STS) cranes. These technical upgrades are designed to 'harden' the port against extreme Caspian weather conditions, reducing container processing time from 4 minutes to 2.5 minutes and ensuring that the corridor remains operational during winter months when wind-related downtime historically stalled trade.

Implications: This infrastructure hardening represents the shift from a speculative geopolitical project to a high-performance commercial artery. By targeting specific bottlenecks like weather-dependent cranes and berth capacity, the EU is providing the physical reliability necessary to lower insurance premiums and transit costs for European logistics giants. This makes the Middle Corridor a permanent, year-round alternative to northern rail routes, capable of delivering goods from China to the EU in a consistent 13-17 day window.

Critical Raw Materials

A fundamental shift in the EU's Critical Raw Materials (CRM) strategy was codified on March 12, 2026, as Brussels signaled a move away from simple extraction toward a model of 'Development-Driven Autonomy.' In a landmark agreement signed on March 13, the European Investment Bank (EIB) provided a €200 million framework loan to the Development Bank of Kazakhstan (DBK) to finance sustainable transport and green energy projects that support the mining value chain. This strategy is specifically aimed at moving Kazakhstan further up the value chain by building domestic refining and processing facilities for materials like lithium and tungsten. By providing the technical assistance and ESG frameworks required for localized processing, the EU is ensuring that Kazakhstan becomes an integrated industrial partner rather than just a raw ore supplier.

Implications: This policy pivot acknowledges that secure supply chains are only sustainable when they are mutually beneficial. For the EU, building refining capacity within a trusted partner like Kazakhstan reduces the 'chokepoint risk' associated

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with third-country processing monopolies. For Kazakhstan, the €200 million injection serves as a catalyst for high-tech industrialization, allowing the country to transform its natural resource wealth into long-term technological capacity and skilled employment.

Trade and Energy

On March 11, 2026, the Mazhilis (lower house of the Kazakh Parliament) officially ratified the Strategic Partnership Agreement for the Caspian Green Energy Corridor, a massive joint venture between Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan. This legislative milestone paves the way for a high-voltage direct current (HVDC) subsea cable along the Caspian Sea floor, which will eventually link Central Asia's renewable energy potential directly to the European Union through the Black Sea. To manage this project, the three nations have established the 'Green Corridor Alliance' joint venture, with each country holding an equal 33.3% stake. This move coincided with the lead-up to the March 15 Constitutional Referendum, where Kazakh citizens voted on a new basic law that proposes a unicameral parliament, which is the Kurultai, to streamline governance and improve legal certainty.

Implications: The ratification of the Green Corridor turns the Gateway into a literal umbilical cord for European energy security. As the EU strives for carbon neutrality, the ability to import green hydrogen and electricity from the Kazakh steppes provides a strategic hedge against energy price volatility. Simultaneously, the constitutional shift toward a 'Kurultai' model is intended to signal to international investors that Kazakhstan is building a predictable, rule-of-law-based environment.

Digitalization

In alignment with the government declaring 2026 the "Year of Digitalization and AI" the selection process for 100,000 participants in Phase II of the AI-Sana initiative concluded on March 15, 2026. This state program is designed to build an 'AI Nation' by training specialists in Python and machine learning to solve real-world challenges in logistics and energy. This week also saw intensified technical focus on the QazTech platform, a new digital government model aimed at migrating 30% of existing state information systems to a unified framework by year-end. This digital infrastructure is critical for the 'Smart Corridor' concept, which intends to digitize 90% of all geological and logistical data, enabling automated customs clearances and reducing border crossing times.

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Implications: Digital interoperability is the 'soft infrastructure' that determines the physical corridor's ultimate speed. By standardizing its data platforms with EU-compatible frameworks, Kazakhstan is removing the 'digital red tape' that often causes longer delays than the physical journey itself. The AI-Sana program ensures that Kazakhstan will have the domestic talent pool necessary to manage these automated systems, creating a seamless, transparent, and data-driven trade route.

EU-Centric Trends: Brussels' Point of View

Kazakhstan and Germany's DRV Agree to Host Destination Forum in Astana

Around 7 March 2026, Kazakhstan and the German Travel Association (DRV) agreed at the ITB Berlin fair that Astana will host the DRV Destination Forum in August 2026. The agreement aims to deepen tourism cooperation between the two countries and raise Kazakhstan's profile among European travellers.

Trend Analysis:

The agreement reflects Kazakhstan's broader strategy of expanding its European engagement beyond energy and trade into people-to-people connectivity. ITB Berlin is Europe's largest travel trade fair, making it a high-visibility venue for positioning Kazakhstan as an emerging destination for European visitors. Hosting the DRV Destination Forum in Astana in August 2026 gives Kazakhstan a concrete platform to present its tourism offer directly to German travel industry decision-makers.

Why it Matters:

While tourism sits outside the core CRM, energy, and connectivity focus of EU-Kazakhstan cooperation, people-to-people ties are explicitly recognised in the EU's Central Asia strategy as a tool for deepening bilateral engagement.



Credit: Kazakh Tourism

EU-Centric Trends: Brussels' Point of View

Germany is Kazakhstan's largest EU trading partner and one of its most important diplomatic interlocutors, making the DRV agreement a useful supplementary channel for broadening the bilateral relationship and sustaining visibility in the German market ahead of potential visa facilitation developments.

What to Watch:

The DRV Destination Forum in Astana in August 2026 and whether it generates tangible commitments from German tour operators on Kazakhstan route development. Progress on EU-Kazakhstan visa facilitation talks would be the key structural enabler for any meaningful growth in European tourist arrivals.

Kazakhstan-Centric Trends: Developments on the Ground

This week, **Kazakhstan ratified the Caspian green energy corridor and launched the Exporter Showcase**, shifting clean-power links and verified exports into execution. On March 11, the Mazhilis ratified a strategic partnership with Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to develop a trans-Caspian green energy corridor involving a deep-sea HVDC cable for transmitting renewable electricity and green hydrogen. This project is moving forward with grant support from the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank while Italy's CESI defines the technical and financial parameters. Simultaneously, the Export Credit Agency of Kazakhstan launched the Exporter Showcase, a digital catalog of verified domestic suppliers across sectors like metallurgy, agri-food, and machinery.

Trend Analysis:

Kazakhstan is executing a strategy of multi-vector decarbonization and export de-risking by pairing physical infrastructure with digital market tools. The proposed green corridor could convert regional cooperation into investable assets backed by international engineering standards, while the verified supplier marketplace might reduce the information asymmetry and compliance friction that often hinder non-resource exports. Together, these moves suggest a state-enabled but market-oriented model that aims to channel renewable capacity into monetizable clean energy.



Credit: Aze.Media

Kazakhstan-Centric Trends: Developments on the Ground

By using digital trade facilitation to broaden export resilience, the country may eventually decrease its dependence on commodity cycles and single-route logistics.

Why it Matters:

EU-Kazakhstan cooperation could benefit from this corridor as a pathway for future low-carbon electricity and derivative flows that complement European decarbonization and supply resilience objectives. Simultaneously, the Exporter Showcase may help EU buyers meet tighter due diligence and carbon-related compliance by improving provenance verification and supplier onboarding. If successfully financed and standardized, these instruments could translate high-level memoranda into formal contracts and create bankable offtake aligned with guarantees of origin. Ultimately, these moves have the potential to embed Kazakhstan as a reliable partner for cleaner energy and compliant goods entering European value chains.

What to Watch:

Key indicators will include the publication of the CESI feasibility study to fix the preferred HVDC route, converter station locations, and capital costs. Success may be signaled as the ADB and AIIB move from grant preparation to formal board approvals for debt, alongside the signing of host government agreements and environmental permits. Regarding trade, the growth of verified suppliers on the Exporter Showcase and the first concluded purchase orders via the platform will be critical metrics, particularly if integrated with digital certificates that measurably shorten export timelines.

News Sources

- 1) Freight Volumes on Middle Corridor Through Kazakhstan Rise Fivefold in Seven Years ([The Times of Central Asia](#))
- 2) Kazakhstan and the EU strengthen investment cooperation with new agreements ([News Central Asia](#))
- 3) Kazakhstan Ratifies Green Energy Corridor Deal with Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan ([Astana Times](#))
- 4) Information Session with Students on the AI-Sana Program at the Faculty of Geography and Environmental Sciences ([Farabi University](#))
- 5) New Old Kazakhstan: Assessing Kazakhstan's Proposed Constitutional Changes ([Verfassungsblog](#))
- 6) Astana to host major European travel forum amid rising tourist arrivals ([Euronews](#))
- 7) Kazakhstan and DRV Agree to New Host DRV Destination Forum at August 2026 in Astana, Boosting their Bilateral Tourism Cooperation and Global Appeal ([Travel and Tour World](#))
- 8) Kazakhstan Launches Digital Platform to Promote Domestic Goods Abroad ([Astana Times](#))



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