

BRIEFING

Global Gateway Railway Working Group (GGRWG) on Central Asia

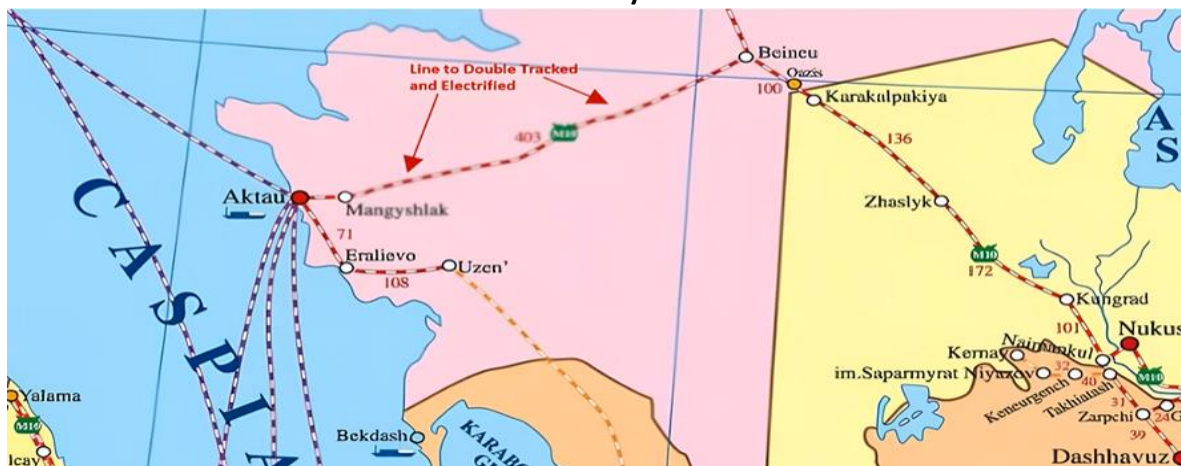
On 6 May, CLECAT attended a meeting part of the [Global Gateway](#) strategy, where CLECAT was invited by the Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission (COM) with the aim to fostering engagement and collaboration among key EU stakeholders in the railway sector who are active or interested in expanding their activities in Central Asia.

Introduction

COM noted the importance for EU policymakers and stakeholders to take advantage of the political momentum, as recently EU high level visits took place in last month such as the first [EU-Central Asia summit](#).

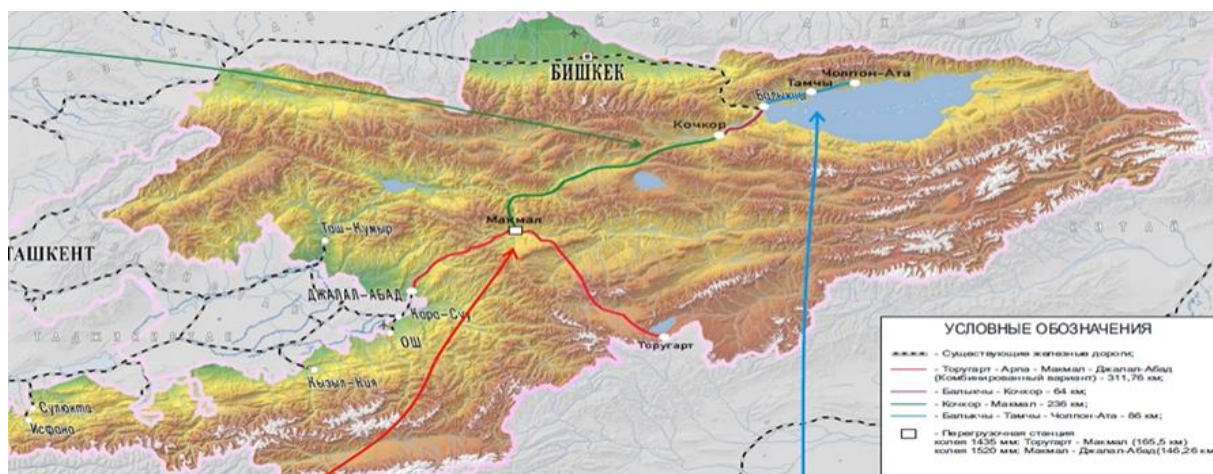
It was recalled that during the summit, in terms of **sustainable transport connectivity**, the EU and Central Asian leaders underlined that the mobilisation of €10 billion from the Global Gateway Investors Forum in January 2024 is key to establishing transport corridors, logistics networks, and value chains. The Commission also reported that they agreed to support the coordination platform for critical infrastructure projects along the Middle Corridor, such as the [Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor](#). This initiative aims to create a modern and efficient **route linking Europe and Asia in 15 days or less**, while enhancing connectivity, fostering cooperation, and promoting economic growth among Central Asian nations.

Kazakhstan: Aktau – Beyneu Modernisation



COM reported that the project aims to upgrade 368 km of rail tracks, enhancing capacity, speed, and reliability for freight services. It is considered strategically important by the national government, which regards it as a key transport link. Preliminary works have already begun, with full construction expected to start in the medium term, in line with ongoing upgrades at the Aktau port.

Kyrgyzstan: Ivanovka Logistics Centre



The aim of this project is to connect build the infrastructure connecting two already existing branches not connected (see green line in the map). A southern branch is also under construction and will link the region to China. COM reported that the EU is supporting the national government in its decision-making process.

Turkmenistan: Turkmenbashi – Turkmenabad Project



COM reported that the project involves the modernisation of the 1,147 km rail corridor to enhance connectivity across the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. It is considered strategically important as it plays a vital role in facilitating regional trade, supporting both transit and exports. The Asian Development Bank is providing a loan and ongoing technical assistance to support the project.

Uzbekistan: Tashkent – Samarkand Expansion



A new 300 km high-speed railway line, connecting Samarkand and Tashkent, dedicated to passenger trains is planned, which will free up existing tracks for freight traffic.

A feasibility study is expected to be completed by 2026, with operations targeted for the late 2020s. COM indicated that preliminary budget estimated of EUR 1.2 billion is low, with the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) indicating instead that a more realistic expenditure should be in the range of EUR 9 – 12 billion.

COM noted that the current rail gauge in use is the Soviet gauge (1,520 mm). As part of its engagement, COM aims to ensure that the regulatory framework aligns with the European gauge, noting the importance of achieving interoperability.

Conclusion

COM noted that countries in **Central Asia are increasingly interested in engaging with the EU** in view of a shift in regional dynamics. While Russian influence remains, it is diminishing. At the same time, China's presence has expanded significantly, driven by its ambition to increase influence through infrastructure investment and debt-financed initiatives. However, this approach has recently lost momentum due to China's internal economic challenges.

As a result, the EU is now even more welcome, with COM underlying the importance of maintaining and deepening EU engagement. Since Central Asia remains relatively unfamiliar to many EU businesses, which could limit the pace of economic engagement, outreach and coordination will therefore be essential.

In this context, the Global Gateway offers strong potential, especially in the transport sector. Private sector roundtables are planned for May 2025 with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, focusing on multimodal logistics centres, warehouses, and, in the case of Kazakhstan, port development. A more comprehensive and sector-wide engagement with the private sector is expected in the second half of 2025.

More information and opportunities under the Global Gateway on transport related projects can be found [here](#).