

Navigating the Nexus: New Horizons for Peace & Trade in the South Caucasus

United States Energy Association (USEA)

Washington, D.C. | October 7, 2025

USEA's Navigating the Nexus: New Horizons for Peace and Trade in the South Caucasus convened senior experts on October 7, 2025, to examine how the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace agreements can be anchored through energy connectivity, diversification, and market integration. Moderated by USEA Senior Director William L. Polen, the discussion featured Dr. Eric Rudenshiold, Research Director and Senior Fellow at the Caspian Policy Center, and Dr. Steven S. Burns, Vice President for Energy and National Security at the Institute for Security and Technology, both former U.S. National Security Council officials, who emphasized that the new Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) offers a "once-in-a-century opportunity" to convert political commitments into tangible regional cooperation.

"TRIPP is not just a rail line, it's an electric line, a gas pipeline, and a digital line. It will link Türkiye across the Caucasus to Central Asia and transform energy sovereignty in Armenia and Azerbaijan." – Dr. Eric Rudenshiold

Dr. Rudenshiold stressed that credibility will depend on speed and substance, without early, visible benefits for Armenia, the momentum toward peace could quickly fade. Panelists agreed that Armenia's future energy security, long constrained by reliance on Russia and Iran, could now be reframed through new interconnections with Azerbaijan and Türkiye.

Dr. Burns underscored that USEA has long worked to promote "east-west electricity trade and east-west gas supply through the Caucasus." Unlocking those borders expands pathways to Europe and could "remove energy supply as one of Moscow's major levers in the region," highlighting the role of U.S. technical engagement to consolidate peace. "You see among these countries the development of economic sovereignty as they develop trade, and as they develop energy; this connectivity we are talking about is so key to this region's forward progress," stated Dr. Rudenshiold.

While Armenia and Azerbaijan have taken visible steps toward reconciliation, Georgia remains the region's indispensable transit hub. Its strategic equity lies in the credibility and connectivity it brings to cross-Caspian and Black Sea initiatives, from energy and digital links to port modernization and power-trade integration. Protecting that equity requires sustained Western engagement. Without it, Georgia risks further gravitational pull into Moscow's orbit, eroding both the integrity of TRIPP and the long-term vision of a unified, market-driven South Caucasus.



Robert Cekuta
United States Ambassador to the
Republic of Azerbaijan (2015 – 2018)



Dr. Eric Rudenshiold
Research Director and Senior Fellow
Caspian Policy Center



Dr. Steven S. Burns, P.E.
Vice President for Energy and
National Security
Institute for Security and Technology



William L. Polen
Senior Director
United States Energy Association

"The most critical point for Georgia is the need for ongoing engagement with Washington, to provide a needed hook for a pro-Western aspect to its foreign policy, and to prevent the feeling that there is no alternative to Russia and China."
– Ambassador Robert Cekuta, former U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan

The discussion directly echoed the priorities in USEA's Powering Peace proposal: advancing electricity interconnections, grid synchronization, and natural-gas linkages as confidence-building measures that yield visible "peace dividends." Dr. Burns pointed to early implementation steps such as technical feasibility studies, regulatory cooperation, and capacity building, all areas where USEA can deliver impact through its neutral convening authority.

"We're in a historic moment in time where things that once seemed impossible are happening," said Rudenshiold. Shared infrastructure creates mutual dependencies, reduces the risk of renewed conflict, and enables Armenia and Azerbaijan to look to the future, not the past.

Polen concluded that American technology and project finance can help operationalize these opportunities, from smart-grid visibility and AI-based reliability tools to supply-chain participation in power and pipeline infrastructure. "USEA's mission," he noted, "is to translate policy into progress by bringing engineers, regulators, and investors together to make these systems work."

The panel reaffirmed that small, concrete steps: joint studies, cross-border tie-lines, and shared technical standards can lock in peace more effectively than declarations alone. As articulated in the Powering Peace framework, USEA stands ready to convene stakeholders, deliver technical assistance, and promote U.S. commercial leadership in implementing TRIPP and its related initiatives that bind Armenia and Azerbaijan through energy, trade, and trust.