



IV ASTRAKHAN INTERNATIONAL FORUM

NORTH-SOUTH ITC - NEW HORIZONS AND OPPORTUNITIES
FAST ENTRY INTO PREMIUM MARKETS OF IRAN, IRAQ,
AFGHANISTAN, MIDDLE EAST, EAST AFRICA AND INDIA

NOVEMBER 25-27, 2026

November 25-27, 2026 **Marins Grand Hotel, Astrakhan**

North-South ITC- New Horizons and Opportunities **Fast entry into premium markets of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan,** **the Middle East, East Africa, and India**

The Forum aims to help businesses in Russia and the CIS find new markets in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East, and the Global South along the North-South International Transport Corridor (ITC).

The new concept of development of the North-South ITC is focused on the export and import needs of Russia and the CIS. The Forum aims to find practical logistics solutions, reduce shipping costs, and increase trade turnover without waiting for completion of the corridor infrastructure, for establishment of a single operator, etc.

Main issues and sessions of the Forum:

- New markets: demands and offers of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, the Middle East, South Asia and East Africa
- Post-war Iran: Prospects for business in Russia and the CIS
- Three routes of the North-South ITC: offers of logistics companies of Russia, Iran, the CIS, Asia and Africa
- Special session: exporting grain, legumes, oil, food products, and other products to Iran – how to ensure payment guarantees?
- Tools and opportunities for international financial transactions under sanctions pressure. Cargo insurance and legal issues
- Development of the North-South ITC – political, economic, customs and financial, sanctions and military issues
- Investment opportunities of the North-South ITC – expansion of the network of transport and logistics centers, creation of trading houses in Iran, Oman and in the countries of the Middle East. FEZ and SEZ
- East and Southern Africa in the margins of the North-South ITC as a new market for exports with a population of 700 million. South and Southeast Asia
- B2B meetings and “purchasing sessions” with buyers from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan involving interpreters. Export&Import market
- Round tables on doing business in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan. Export&Import marketing issues
- Seminars and individual consultations on financial payments, insurance, legal and customs issues

Forum participants will get information on:

- The total market capacity for goods from Russia and the CIS in the North-South ITC with a total population of 3.5 bln people. The level of maturity and development of the markets of the Middle East, South Asia, and East Africa, the share and number of middle class representatives;
- Who and by what means supplies food, building materials and consumer goods to residents of Iran (92 mln people), Iraq (48 mln people), Afghanistan (45 mln people), Pakistan (260 mln people), the countries of the Arabian Peninsula (106 mln people);
- The level of prices for goods produced in Russia and the CIS in the markets of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East and East Africa;
- The available market niches in the Middle East, South Asia, and East Africa;
- The opportunities for using the logistics capabilities of the North-South ITC for transit and parallel imports to the UAE, the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, India, China, and Southeast Asia;
- The opportunities and ways of fast delivery of perishable food products to Iran, Iraq, the UAE, Oman, the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East;
- How Turkish companies manage to supply all of Africa with flour from grains from Russia and the CIS;
- What is the reason for the absence of Russian warehouses in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, and etc. What food products fill the shelves of stores and supermarkets in Iraq and the Middle East;
- How to create an effective sales network in Iran, Iraq, and the Middle East and be guaranteed to receive payment for goods and a good profit;
- Why and for whom traders from the UAE, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and India buy Russian oil, petroleum products, LPG, petrochemicals, mineral fertilizers and coal;
- How to organize swap trade with Iran for oil products, propane-butane, ammonia, methanol, mineral fertilizers and other goods;
- How did the UAE become a trade hub for Africa and the Middle East, and what are the prospects for Oman. What is the cost of storing goods in the ports of the UAE, Oman, and Iran;
- Where it is possible and necessary to invest in the North-South ITC in the creation of transport and logistics centers and trading houses;

09:00 - 17:00 — Visiting and acknowledgment with the capabilities of Astrakhan companies.

Welcoming coffee and departure from Marins Grand Hotel in Astrakhan. Travel by bus or minibus to three ports (companies). Lunch in a cafeteria along the route.

Optional programs:

- Container, refrigerated cargo, timber, and general purpose ports + Kutum railway station
- Astrakhan ports for grain, oil, and general purpose cargo
- Dry port, Kutum railway station + general purpose ports

Advance registration for participation in the Forum will be available

on 25th of November, from 9:00 to 18:00 at Marins Grand Hotel, Astrakhan.

- Astrakhan oil ports
- Lotus SEZ, Narimanov shipyard
- Other programs upon commercial request

08:00 - 09:30 — Registration of participants

Welcoming coffee

09:30 - 11:30 — Plenary session 1**New markets: demands and offers of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, the Middle East, South Asia and East Africa.**

Post-war Iran: perspectives for business in Russian and the CIS. The Importance of the North-South ITC for the development of export and import market in Russia and the CIS. Traditionally, Russian and CIS companies have interacted with the Middle East and the Global South through Turkey, the UAE, Europe, and other countries. There is a need and an opportunity for redirecting Russian and CIS companies' exports and imports directly to the premium markets of the Middle East and the Global South.

New market needs: fertilizers, chemicals, metals, lumber, grain, flour, oil, food products, coal, coke, petroleum products, oil, LPG, equipment, technologies, and services. Imports from Iran and other countries. Swap trade with Iran in petroleum products, LPG, methanol, fertilizers, ammonia, coal, etc.

Our goal is to build a new trading system, supporting the creation of trade and logistics centers, trading houses, and trading companies focused on new markets in Asian countries.

Speakers — Representatives of the Russian Export Center (REC), Russian trade representatives in Iran, Afghanistan, the UAE, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and India, representatives of the embassies of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, economic experts on foreign trade with Iran and the Middle East and South, and representatives of business structures from these countries.

Possibility of speaking via videoconferencing with simultaneous translation.

- 11:30 - 11:50 — **Coffee break**

11:50 - 13:00 — Session 2**New tools and opportunities for financial transactions and international payments under sanctions pressure.**

Payment system in the Middle East and the Global South. International payments. Crypto currency. Payment agents. Letters of credit and deferred payment options. Insurance against cargo, payment, and investment risks. Operation of the Iranian Commodity Exchange and offers for Russian exporters. Survey. Trade disputes and arbitration. Legal issues. Protection of brands, patents, and investments.

Special session: Exporting grain, legumes, oil, food products, and other products to Iran – ways of payment guarantee.

Speakers: PSB, VTB, Sberbank, Mir Business Bank, RIFAMS, financial, insurance, legal, consulting and trading companies.

Possibility of speaking via videoconferencing with simultaneous translation.

- Signing agreements for the supply of coking coal and anthracite to Iran, and iron ore pellets and ores to the Russian Federation.
- Signing a memorandum on shipbuilding in India.
- Signing a memorandum on the construction of a small-scale LNG plant in the Astrakhan region and other memorandums.

- 13:00 - 14:00 — **Lunch**

14:00 - 16:40 — **Session 3****Offers of logistics companies of Russia, Iran, the CIS, Asia and Africa**

Capabilities, limitations, and costs of transportation along the three branches of the North-South ITC: the Trans-Caspian, Eastern, and Western. Capacity and available capabilities of railways, border crossings, warehouses, and storage terminals.

Russian, Kazakhstan, Iran, Turkmenistan, etc. ports. Ports on the Volga and river transport. Russia-Iran-Turkmenistan rail and car ferry.

Road and rail transportation through Iran to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Transit through Iran and sea freight to the UAE, Oman, the Arabian Peninsula, India, South Asia, and East Africa. The North-South ITC offers opportunities for parallel imports. Restrictions and costs for sea freight from Novorossiysk and St. Petersburg to the UAE, Oman, the Middle East, India, South Asia, and East Africa. What is a customs "free warehouse"?

Speakers — RZD Logistics, Transit, Smartlog, BelInterTrans, UK Delo, ports on the Caspian and Volga Seas, Just Logistics, logistics companies in Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, India, UAE, Oman, Azerbaijan, Turkey, etc.

Possibility of speaking via videoconferencing with simultaneous translation.

- 16:40 – 17:00 — **Coffee break**

17:00 - 18:30 — **Session 4****Development of North-South ITC – perspectives and political, economic, organizational, sanctions and military issues**

Russian role in stabilizing logistics in the region and Greater Eurasia. What have the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement with Iran and the EAEU-Iran Free Trade Agreement changed? The Trans-Afghan Railway. An imbalance in the freight market in the Caspian Sea. A de facto ban on wheat imports to Iran via the Caspian Sea. Prohibitory railway tariffs for certain cargoes through Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Sanctions bans on transit through Azerbaijan. The absence of a Russia-Iran rail ferry. The absence of a single bill of lading for transit through Iran. Sanctions restrictions on the acceptance of cargo in East African and South Asian countries. A ban on the export of fertilizers and coal through the ports of the Astrakhan region. The European UIC standard for Iranian railways – the "narrow" dimensions of bridges and tunnels are not suitable for rolling stock of the Russian Federation and the CIS. Military risks.

Speakers — The Department of Economic Cooperation of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian trade representatives, political and economic experts on foreign trade with Iran, the Middle East, and the Global South, and business representatives from these countries.

Possibility of speaking via videoconferencing with simultaneous translation.

- 19:30 – 24:00 — **Gala dinner**

Exchange of Export&Import Offers and Contacts will operate in Volga Hall on November 26 from 12.00. On November 26, broadcasting of speeches from the City Hall will take place in Volga Hall and VIP ares.

08:30 - 09:30 — **Welcoming coffee**09:30 - 11:30 — **Session 1****East and Southern Africa in the North-South ITC as a new market for Russian goods with a population of 700 mln. South and Southeast Asia.**

Speakers — Afrocom, Russian trade representatives in South Africa, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. Commercial attachés from embassies in East and Southern Africa. Economic experts on foreign trade with countries in Africa, Asia, and the Global South, and representatives of businesses in these countries.

Possibility of speaking via videoconferencing with simultaneous translation.

- 11:30 – 12:00 — **Coffee break**

12:00 - 14:00 — **Session 2****Implementation of new international projects with the participation of regions of Russia, Iran and representatives of friendly countries.**

Presentation of the Lotus Special Economic Port Zone (SEPZ). Investment and business projects. Presentation of the SEZ, TLC, and priority development areas. Projects for new transport and logistics centers. Russia-Iran-Turkmenistan rail ferry. Customs "free warehouse" – what is it and how can it be used to save working capital?

12:00 - 14:00 — **Session 2**

Speakers — North-South Club, Lotos SEPZ, representatives of investment and consulting companies, SEZs and regions of Russia and friendly countries.
Possibility of speaking via videoconferencing with simultaneous translation.

- 14:00 – 15:00 — **Lunch**

15:00 - 17:00 — **Session 3****New concept of North-South ITC, development perspectives.**

Expansion of Russian and CIS export to the premium markets of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Africa.

Increasing freight traffic volumes along the North-South International Transport Corridor from 25 to 100 mln tons per year – how, on the basis of what products, and over what timeframes? Justifying the need to build a new 1520 mm railway to Iranian ports in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean.

Roundtable discussion of Forum follow-up.

Format: brief discussion presentations. Summary and adoption of a resolution.

Speakers — Politicians and economic experts on foreign trade with countries of the East and the Global South.
Possibility of speaking via videoconferencing with simultaneous translation.

On November 27 from 10:00 to 17:00 at the Marins Grand Hotel Astrakhan, round tables and seminars will be held in parallel to the main sessions in the additional halls:

— **Exchange of Export&Import Offers and Contacts** – Volga Hall

— **B2B meetings as part of the interregional Business Mission** – Volga Hall – organized by the Export Support Center of the Astrakhan SME Support Fund (MSF). "Purchasing sessions" mean B2B meetings with buyers from Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan involving the interpreters

— **Roundtable discussion: "Working with the Iranian Business Community.** Proposals and Requests from Iranian Businesses." Discussion with business leaders from Russia, Iran, the CIS, and other countries

— **Roundtable discussion: "Working with the Iraqi Business Community. Iraqi Requests."**

Discussion with business leaders from Russia, Iraq, the CIS, and other countries

— **Roundtable discussion: "Working with the Afghan Business Community. Afghanistan's Requests."**

Discussion with business leaders from Russia, Afghanistan, the CIS, and other countries

— **Roundtable discussion: "Working with the Pakistani Business Community. Pakistan's Requests."**

Discussion with business leaders from Russia, Pakistan, the CIS, and other countries

— **Seminar/consultation on financial payments and cargo insurance issues**

— **Seminar/consultation on customs issues related to export and import**

— **Seminar/consultation on export-import marketing and parallel import issues**

— **Seminar/consultation on legal issues in Iran and the Middle East**

- 17:00 – 19:00 — **Final coffee break**

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