CONCEPT PAPER

Ninth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council and Eleventh Business Forum Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)

Date: 30 September 2026, TBC
Venue: Baku, Azerbaijan

Background

The Eighth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council and the Tenth CICA Business Forum, held in Baku in May 2025, provided an important platform for discussions on SME competitiveness, women's entrepreneurship, digitalization, green transition, cross-border trade, participation in global value chains, and national support mechanisms for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The 2025 meetings in Baku also generated practical follow-up outputs, including the presentation of the SME Landscape in Asia: Interactive Guidebook. This publication, designed as a practical reference tool for SME owners, policymakers and other stakeholders, will serve as a useful knowledge base for further discussions on entrepreneurship support, market access and institutional best practices among CICA Member States.

Building on the outcomes of last year's discussions, the proposed 2026 meeting will provide an opportunity to address a new set of priorities that are becoming increasingly relevant to the sustainable growth of SMEs across the CICA region. In particular, integrated entrepreneurial ecosystems are gaining growing importance in supporting business creation, early-stage development, market entry and expansion.

In this context, the proposed Ninth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council and the Eleventh CICA Business Forum will focus on the relationship between urban development and business opportunities, the challenges faced by young

entrepreneurs, the role of business incubators and university-linked support mechanisms, the development of viable business models, and practical measures to support entrepreneurs at different stages of business activity.

The proposed discussions will also take into account broader institutional developments within CICA, including initiatives related to training, the exchange of best practices, cooperation with universities, access to markets and financial dialogue.

Proposed Theme

Entrepreneurial Ecosystems for Competitive and Inclusive SME Growth in the CICA Region

Aims and Objectives

The proposed event aims to:

- exchange views on current challenges affecting SME development in the CICA region, with particular attention to business support infrastructure, youth entrepreneurship, market access, and finance;
- discuss how urban development and local economic planning may create new opportunities for SMEs in such areas as services, tourism, trade, creative industries, food systems, and supplier networks;
- consider national approaches to supporting young entrepreneurs, including training, mentoring, incubation, and market-readiness mechanisms;
- review the role of business incubators, accelerators, and university-linked entrepreneurship platforms in supporting innovation and business growth;
- discuss practical business models that may strengthen SME resilience, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability;
- exchange best practices on measures to support entrepreneurs, including advisory services, access to finance, business development support, market linkages, and institutional coordination;
- identify possible areas for continued cooperation among CICA Member States within the framework of the CICA Business Council and related mechanisms.

Proposed Thematic Areas

1. Urban Development and Business Opportunities for SMEs

This thematic area will examine how urban development, city planning, local economic infrastructure, and territorial development policies may contribute to SME growth. The discussion will focus on how cities and urban projects generate demand for small businesses, create supplier opportunities, and support the emergence of new services and business activities.

Particular attention will be given to the role of SMEs in areas linked to urban services, public markets, tourism, food services, creative industries, light production, and other sectors shaped by urban expansion and transformation.

2. Youth Entrepreneurship and Its Challenges

This thematic area will focus on the main barriers faced by young entrepreneurs, including limited access to mentoring, startup support, finance, business networks, and practical market knowledge. It will also address the need to strengthen the link between education, skills development, entrepreneurship training, and real business opportunities.

The discussion will consider how Member States can support youth entrepreneurship not only at the level of training, but also through more complete pathways that include incubation, coaching, market exposure, and follow-up support.

3. Business Incubators and Entrepreneurship Support Infrastructure

This thematic area will address the role of business incubators, accelerators, innovation centers, and other support institutions in promoting entrepreneurship and SME development. It will provide an opportunity to exchange views on effective models of incubation, service delivery, mentoring, startup support, and regional outreach. The discussion will also recognize the role of business support organizations (BSOs) and national SME development agencies as integral actors within entrepreneurial ecosystems, translating policies and strategies into practical support for SMEs — including technical assistance, capacity-building programmes, market

access initiatives, and facilitation of access to finance — and serving as a bridge between governments, the private sector, and development partners.

The discussion will also consider the role of universities and training institutions in entrepreneurship support, including through practical cooperation, applied learning, and participation in partnership networks.

4. Business Models for SME Growth and Adaptation

This thematic area will focus on business models that enable SMEs to adapt to changing economic conditions and to identify new pathways for growth. It will cover business approaches linked to local production, urban services, tourism, supplier relations, creative sectors, knowledge-based activities, and digitally enabled market access.

The discussion will also provide an opportunity to exchange views on how small businesses can move from early-stage activity to more stable and scalable operations.

5. Measures to Support Entrepreneurs

This thematic area will focus on practical support measures available to entrepreneurs at different stages of business development. These will include business registration and formalization support, advisory services, one-stop support mechanisms, training programmes, mentoring, incubation, financial instruments, access to procurement, export support, and referral mechanisms between institutions.

Special attention will be given to how support measures can be made more coherent, accessible, and results-oriented, and how cooperation may be strengthened among SME agencies, universities, incubators, financial institutions, and business associations.

Expected Outcomes

The proposed event will contribute to:

- a focused exchange of views on new and emerging priorities for SME development in the CICA region;
- the identification of practical approaches to strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems in CICA Member States;
- the collection and sharing of best practices related to youth entrepreneurship, incubation, support measures, and business development in urban settings;
- the promotion of dialogue among public institutions, business communities, universities, incubators, and financial actors;
- the identification of possible follow-up initiatives, including thematic seminars, international research webinars involving SME development institutions and researchers, expert exchanges, training activities, and partnership-oriented cooperation under the framework of the CICA Business Council;
- the exploration of potential collaboration with relevant regional and international organizations to provide technical assistance for SME development in the region;
- the identification of challenges and barriers to SME development in the region, and the development of follow-up solutions in collaboration with relevant institutions among Member States;
- the promotion of entrepreneurial cooperation among Member States, including through existing regional and sub-regional partnership frameworks.

Proposed Format

The Ninth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council (half-day event) will be held in a roundtable format with the participation of Business Council members and invited representatives of relevant institutions from CICA Member States. The session will focus on policy dialogue, exchange of institutional experience, and discussion of possible future initiatives.

The Eleventh CICA Business Forum (half-day event) will be organized as a broader platform bringing together business representatives, SME institutions, universities, incubators, financial actors, and other relevant stakeholders. It will include:

- an opening session;
- thematic panel discussions;

- presentations of national practices and institutional initiatives;
- networking opportunities among participants;
- possible side events or showcase elements related to entrepreneurship support and SME development.

Possible Participants

The following participants will be considered for invitation:

- members of the CICA Business Council;
- representatives of ministries and public institutions responsible for economy, entrepreneurship, youth, education, and urban development;
- SME development agencies and business support institutions;
- chambers of commerce, business associations, and export promotion bodies;
- universities, business incubators, accelerators, and innovation centers;
- financial institutions and other relevant organizations;
- entrepreneurs, including youth-led businesses and startup representatives.

Organizational Matters

The event will be organized in coordination with the CICA Secretariat and relevant national institutions. Further details regarding the programme, format, participation, and logistical arrangements will be agreed in due course through consultations with Member States and partners.

For additional details, modifications, or registration inquiries, please contact:

Contacts at CICA Secretariat:

H.E. Amb. Raushan Yesbulatova, Expert in the Economic Dimension, via email at r.yesbulatova@s-cica.org

Ms. Aiym Galymzhankyzy, Team Assistant in Economic Dimension, CICA Secretariat, via email at aiym@s-cica.org

Contacts at Small and Medium Business Development Agency of Azerbaijan (KOBİA):

Mr. Amir Shirinbayli, Deputy Head of Secretariat, KOBİA, via email at amir.shirinbayli@smb.gov.az

Mr. Ali Shamchiyev, Leading specialist, International Cooperation Division of Secretariat, KOBİA, via email at ali.shamchiyev@smb.gov.az

AGENDA

Ninth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council

and Eleventh CICA Business Forum

Theme: Entrepreneurial Ecosystems for Competitive and Inclusive SME Growth in the CICA Region

Ninth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council Date: 30 September 2026, Wednesday Venue: Baku, Azerbaijan (TBC) Language: English (with simultaneous translation to Azerbaijani and Russian languages)	
09:00–10:00	Registration and coffee break Moderator: Rufat Atakishiyev, Deputy Chairman of KOBİA (TBC)
10:00–10:30	**Opening Session** Welcome remarks by: • Secretary General of CICA (TBC) • Mr. Orkhan Mammadov, Chairman of KOBİA, Chair of the CICA Business Council • Deputy Minister of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan (TBC) • [Additional speaker – TBC]
10:30–11:30	**Presentations by Business Council Members on Key Topics (each up to 5 minutes)** • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] — Urban development and business opportunities for SMEs • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] — Youth entrepreneurship and market-readiness mechanisms • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] — Business incubators and entrepreneurship support infrastructure • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] — Viable business models for SME growth and adaptation • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] — Measures to support entrepreneurs (advisory services, access to finance, market access) • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] *Topics are aligned with the thematic areas of the Concept Paper. Online participation is possible where indicated.*
11:30–11:40	Discussion on Future Events & Initiatives (Rufat Atakishiyev, TBC)
11:40–11:50	**Planning for the Tenth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council in 2027** Determining the agenda, location, and timeframe.
11:50–12:00	Closing Remarks (Mr. Orkhan Mammadov)
12:00–12:10	Group Photo
12:30–14:00	Lunch

Eleventh CICA Business Forum Date: 30 September 2026, Wednesday Venue: Baku, Azerbaijan (TBC)	
14:00–15:00	Registration and coffee break
15:00–15:30	**Opening Ceremony (each speech up to 5 minutes)** Welcome remarks by: • Secretary General of CICA (TBC)

	• Mr. Orkhan Mammadov, Chairman of KOBİA, Chair of the CICA Business Council • Representative of the Export and Investment Promotion Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan – AZPROMO (TBC) • Representative of the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs (Employers) Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (TBC)
15:30–15:40	Memorandum Signing Ceremony (TBC, if applicable)
15:40–15:50	Presentation by the CICA Secretariat — e.g., update to the "SME Landscape in Asia: Interactive Guidebook" (TBC)
15:50–16:35	**Panel Session 1: Urban Development and Business Opportunities for SMEs** Moderator: [TBC] · Panelists (Moderator + up to 4): • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] Q&A Session and Open Discussion
16:35–16:50	Coffee Break
16:50–17:35	**Panel Session 2: Youth Entrepreneurship and Business Incubators / Support Infrastructure** Moderator: [TBC] · Panelists (Moderator + up to 4): • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] Q&A Session and Open Discussion
17:35–18:20	**Panel Session 3: Business Models and Measures to Support Entrepreneurs** Moderator: [TBC] · Panelists (Moderator + up to 4): • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] • [Member State] – [Speaker, TBC] Q&A Session and Open Discussion
18:20–18:30	Closing Remarks and Networking

Technical Guidelines

Ninth Plenary Session of the CICA Business Council and Eleventh CICA Business Forum

Date: 30 September 2026, Wednesday

Venue: Baku, Azerbaijan (TBC)

Session Timings

- CICA Business Council (Members Only): 09:00–13:00 (Baku Time, GMT+4)
- CICA Business Forum (CICA BC Members & Business Community): 14:00–18:30 (Baku Time, GMT+4)

General Guidelines

- Primary working languages of the event will be English and Russian, with Azerbaijani interpretation provided.
- All participants must arrive at the venue at least 30 minutes before the scheduled start time.
- Name badges must be worn at all times during the sessions.

Guidelines for Virtual (online) Participation

- Participants must log on to the Zoom platform at least 10 minutes before the scheduled start time.
- When joining Zoom, participants must use the following name format: [Country] – [First Name Last Name] (e.g., Kazakhstan – Aigerim Nurzhan).
- Microphones should remain muted unless speaking; use the “Raise Hand” function to request the floor.
- Zoom meeting details: [To be provided].

On-Site Participation Guidelines

- CICA Business Council members will be seated at designated country tables.
- Participants will be provided with simultaneous English–Russian–Azerbaijani interpretation.

REGISTRATION FORM

for the 11th CICA Business Forum
on 30 September 2026 (Hybrid)

Member State:	
Prefix (Mr./Mrs./Ms.):	
First Name:	
Last Name:	
Title/Position (incl. organization):	
Country	
Phone number:	
E-mail:	
Please specify the topic of your presentation:	
Preferred Language for Interpretation (English or Russian)	

Kindly **type in** your information and return this registration form **by 1 September 2026** to the following email addresses:

1. **Mr. Ali Shamchiyev**, Leading Specialist, International Cooperation Division of Secretariat, KOBİA, email: ali.shamchiyev@smb.gov.az;
2. **Ms. Aiym Galymzhankyzy, Team Assistant in Economic Dimension, CICA Secretariat, via email at** aiym@s-cica.org

Platform: Zoom (link will be shared with registered participants)